

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM  
IN VOCATIONAL SCHOOL: PROGRESSIVISM  
PERSPECTIVE ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Merdeka's curriculum is expected to motivate students to actively participate in the learning process and make decisions regarding their learning. This research aims to describe the concept of Merdeka curriculum learning with a progressivism view at vocational high schools in Indonesia. This research used qualitative research method with thirty-six students taking fashion design classes at a vocational high school as the respondents of this research. This research used direct observation in class, as well as documentation as data collection techniques. The results showed that in implementing Merdeka Curriculum, the classroom activities conducted by the teacher are in line with progressivism perspective. It can be seen from the core activity in each meeting that implemented five stages of scientific approach such as observing, questioning, implementing, associating, and presenting. In each stage, teacher plays a role as the facilitator who guides the students to become active during teaching and learning process. In addition, the use of media such as PowerPoint and mentimeter can make students become active involved during teaching and learning process.

*Keywords:* Implementation, Merdeka Curriculum, Progressivism, Vocational School

**A. INTRODUCTION**

Merdeka curriculum is a new education curriculum implemented by Minister Nadiem Makarim at the education level. Before using the Merdeka curriculum, education levels in Indonesia used *Kurikulum 2013 (K13)*. According to Wiguna & Tristaningrat (2022), the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes essential materials, character development, and competence in students' interests and talents. As stated by Yamin & Syahrir (2020) that the aims of the Merdeka Curriculum actualize the concept of innovative and creative critical thinking, followed by the ability to collaborate and communicate. Thus, it can be concluded that the Merdeka Curriculum is relevant to the demands of 21st -century skills needs and society, in which students are expected to quickly adapt to a dynamically changing world (Indarta et al., 2022).

Based on description above, Merrdeka curriculum education can be said to refer to the philosophy of progressivism which is with the development of time. Mustaghfiroh (2020) stated that humans continue to follow developments dynamically as long as humans themselves grow and develop in their time, so education must adapt to this. Furthermore, Widiani (2020) explained that this is also in line with the concept of lifelong education which emphasizes that education must adapt to the conditions of the times. In addition, the Merdeka curriculum has a relationship with the scientific approach. Rohman & Muttaqin (2022) mentioned that learning using a scientific approach is learning that adopts scientific steps in building knowledge through scientific methods. The scientific approach consists of learning such as observing, asking, reasoning, associating, and communicating (Hosnan, 2014).

This study applied the Merdeka curriculum in the school. Merdeka curriculum uses the student's principles as objective or student-centered. It means students are asked to be active in learning activities and discover new ideas in learning. Kurniati, et al. (2022) argued that one of the advantages of the Merdeka curriculum is the independence of teachers to teach according to the stage of achievement and development of students and the school's authority to develop and manage the curriculum so that the application of learning in the Merdeka curriculum is student-centered. Therefore, the relationship between the Merdeka curriculum and the scientific approach is students are actively involved in the learning process, develop critical thinking skills, and gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter. In consequence, the Merdeka curriculum can support the implementation of the scientific approach in education in Indonesia.

The Merdeka curriculum is related to technology in the classroom. The use of technology is important in the classroom, especially for students as the object. Rohmah, et al. (2023) explained that the 4.0 era is marked by the era of digitalization, namely the rapid development of science and technology which causes the role of humans to shift. Along with the development of education, including the Merdeka curriculum, it uses various sources such as e-books, teaching media, etc. Moreover, Sari, et al. (2022) mentioned that the use of e-books in learning classrooms makes teachers easier to convey the learning material. Melati et, al., (2023) stated that technology can be used in a variety of learning methods and material development by utilizing the Merdeka curriculum to make learning in class more enjoyable. Examples of learning media are PowerPoint, Mentimeter, etc. Powerpoint is a learning media for students to improve students' critical thinking and also make learning more interactive and interesting for students. By using these learning media teachers can increase student involvement in learning. While, Mentimeter is a learning media that functions for evaluation at the end of learning. Mentimeter can be used to make learning sessions more interactive by stimulating questions about the learning material and also providing direct feedback to the teacher about student understanding of the learning material. Zidan & Qamariah (2023) stated that the Merdeka curriculum utilizes technology to enhance the learning experience in this era of rapid technological change. Therefore, the use of technology in learning not only supports the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, but

also enriches student learning experiences, increases learning effectiveness, and helps prepare students for a future dominated by technology.

The concept of the Merdeka curriculum to learn with the philosophy of progressivism is related, which provides freedom in the field of education. Triyatno et al., (2022) argued that the Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum structure prepared to support the implementation of new paradigm learning. Merdeka curriculum is one form of making Indonesian education more progressive to make the educational process much more meaningful because teachers and students can maximize their creativity. Merdeka curriculum has the same aspect as the progressivism view, namely focusing on students or learning subjects, which means they have a relationship or connection with each other. Therefore, to realize educational knowledge, one way is to collaborate with the flow of progressivism philosophy. Merdeka curriculum can develop hidden talents and abilities within themselves. Students are expected to face and solve various problems faced in adjusting to life. Navisa et al., (2022) stated that the Merdeka curriculum makes the student's position no longer the object of learning. As explained in the paragraph above, the principle of progressivism and Merdeka curriculum is that students are the subjects of learning. Merdeka's curriculum policy is influenced by the progressivism education philosophy which emphasizes the importance of progress in the field of education.

The philosophy of progressivism was coined by an American philosopher, namely John Dewey. Retter (2019) stated John Dewey gave the view that schools using a progressivism approach are a form of protest against authoritarian education. Wulandari (2020) stated that progressivism is a future-oriented philosophical school that positions students as educational subjects who have provisions and potential for self-development and can solve various problems faced. Furthermore, Matusov (2020) stated that progressivism in education provides the view that educational practices must be changed in a progressive or progressive direction that better respects students' abilities and potential so that it can encourage students to be more active or involved in the learning process and teachers. Moreover, Anggraini et al., (2022) also argued that the philosophy of progressivism in education prioritizes students, where teachers only act as facilitators, guides, and directors. Ankesa (2021) mentioned that progressivism more on the students and their interests than the subject itself, so the "student-centered curriculum" and "student-centered school" emerged. It indicates that progressivism views students as having different roles in learning activities. Moreover, Florungco & Cabbales (2022) mentioned that in modern education, progressivism aims to focus attention and develop students' skills and abilities. In other words, teachers also play an important role in learning settings because they facilitate learning in the classroom. Thus, progressivism provides benefits for students, especially in dealing with problems in their environment.

Progressivism views on Merdeka curriculum as the teacher's role as a learning facilitator, in this research the teacher only explained the material and steps on how to do the project, which means this activity is included in the principle there. Therefore, this research aims to

describe the concept of Merdeka curriculum learning with a progressivism view at vocational high schools in Indonesia.

## B. METHOD

This research used an observational study, direct observation of learning activities, and interactions between teachers and students. This means this research used qualitative methods. Abdussammad & Sik (2021) mentioned that qualitative methods are the methods used to obtain in-depth or meaningful data. The participants in this research are thirty-six students (all of them are female) at a vocational high school in Yogyakarta. This school indeed used the Merdeka curriculum since the change from the center. The class studied is fashion design classes 11<sup>th</sup> grade level. Among other classes, this class is included in the low motivation class so it should increase the motivation by applying progressivism to learning English. The researchers collected the data by observing or being directly involved in English classes at vocational high schools. Observations were made during two meetings. Observations were carried out using the RPP which had been created as an observation instrument. Then the researcher applied the Merdeka curriculum from the perspective of progressivism philosophy to the RPP that had been created, and then implemented it in classroom activities.

## C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the data collection process from researchers through observation class with 36 students in fashion design class at vocational high school. The lesson plan consists of preliminary activity, core activity, and closing activity. In the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in schools, there are five stages of scientific approach applied by the teacher in Core Activity. The five stages are divided into two meetings. The activities are adjusted to the lesson plan of Merdeka curriculum. The core activity in the first meeting can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Core Activity in the first meeting

<b>Core Activity</b>	<b>Description of Activity</b>	<b>Time Allocation</b>
Observing Stage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students read several examples of personal letters displayed in PowerPoint and provide direct feedback.</li> <li>2. Students looking for information from personal letters (what letter is it, what is this letter about, etc).</li> </ol>	115 minutes
Questioning Stage	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Students ask questions related to the text listed in the PowerPoint regarding social functions, linguistic elements, and text structure or the teacher asks students questions `related to the text (with teacher guidance).</li> <li>2. Students discuss questions with the teacher.</li> </ol>	
Experimenting Stage	In groups, students collect information related to personal letters from various sources, for example from the internet, then discuss the social function, linguistic elements, and text structure of personal letters	

Table 1 shows the lesson plan of the first activities. Based on observing stage, (1) students read several examples of personal letters displayed in PowerPoint and provide direct feedback. (2) Students looking for information from personal letters on the screen of PowerPoint (what letters is it, what is this letter about, etc). This indicates that students need to be active by searching the information by themselves. It is in line with the statement of Matusov (2020) stated that progressivism in education provides the view that educational practices must be changed in a progressive or progressive direction that better respects students' abilities and potential so that it can encourage students to be more active or involved in the learning process and teachers. Thus, in this case, teacher plays a role as a facilitator as claimed by Anggraini et al., (2022) that the philosophy of progressivism in education prioritizes students, where teachers only act as facilitators, guides, and directors.

Moreover, the data also showed that the second stage of questioning covers two activities. First, the students were required to ask questions related to the text listed in the PowerPoint regarding social functions, linguistic elements, and text structure or the teacher ask students questions related to the text (with teacher guidance). Then, students were involved in discussion session. Thus, in this stage also the teacher acts as a facilitator who focuses on the students. It means that students play an active role as active objects. This indicates that the activities conducted by the teacher is in line with the principle of progressivism. As mentioned by Sopacua & Fadli (2022) that the teacher's role is only as a guide, facilitator, and director. This means the activities carried out by students and teachers show that several learning activities in the teacher's class apply the Merdeka curriculum which applies the principles of progressivism philosophy.

By stimulating students to ask a question, the students' critical thinking were expected to be improved. Question and answer session also can increase students' active participation in class. In other word, when students were initiatively willing to participate in learning activities, the learning environment appeared favorable rather than intimidating. Thus, this activity is crucial to be conducted to improve students critical thinking and students' active participation. As claimed by Indarta et al. (2022) that the competency values of free-thinking way include critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving.

In addition, the data also showed that the use of PowerPoint media helped the teacher to attract students' active participation during teaching and learning process. It can be seen from the data of observation that the most of the students actively involved during questioning stage. It is in line with Hendri's (2020) explained that the concept of the Merdeka curriculum is that teachers and students can be independent in thinking that it can be implemented as teacher innovation when delivering material to students, not only that students are given ease in the Merdeka curriculum because students are given the freedom to innovate and creativity in learning. The use of technology by the teacher in the first meeting showed that technology-based learning systems enable more interactive and realistic practical experiences, through simulation and virtualization. Thus, the use of

technology in teaching can strengthen the quality of vocational education and increases career success opportunities for students (Daga, 2021).

By integrating the use of PowerPoint in the classroom is in line with the aims of the Merdeka Curriculum actualize the concept of innovative and creative critical thinking (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020). This indicates that the use of technology in teaching is crucial because it can improve students interest. It is also in line with the concept of progressivism. As stated by Ankesa (2021) that progressivism more on the students and their interests than the subject itself, so the "student-centered curriculum" and "student-centered school" emerged.

While, in experiment stage, students and teacher were involve in classroom discussion. The students were required to collect information related to personal letters from various sources, for example from the internet, then discuss the social function, linguistic elements, and text structure of personal letters. The activity conducted by the teacher was in line with the characteristic of scientific approach as stated by Hosnan (2014) that the learning conditions that are supposed to be developed are directed to enable students to find out from a variety of sources through observation rather than simply narrating stories. In addition, it is also consistent with the aim of progressivism that modern education, progressivism aims to focus attention and develop students' skills and abilities. In other words, teachers also play an important role in learning settings because they facilitate learning in the classroom (Florungco & Cabbales, 2022).

The core activity in the second meeting can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Core Activity in the Second meeting

<b>Core Activity</b>	<b>Description of Activity</b>	<b>Time Allocation</b>
Associating	The teacher discusses the assignments that have been given.	115 minutes
Presenting	Students sort the text structure based on the text given by the teacher and at the same time provide feedback to each.	

Table 2 shows that in this meeting the students Worked on projects with groups. In addition, based on the presenting stage, the students also were required to provide feedback to each other. It indicates that doing these can encourage students to create creativity, namely sticking paper to the HVS and then placing it on the whiteboard. It is in line with the statement of Pertiwi et. al., (2022) that the project-based learning (PBL) learning method is a method that allows students to explore and deepen the material that has been taught by developing skills or problem-solving. The students feel free to be creative using whatever the teacher has provided, such as (HVS paper, origami, markers, etc). Moreover, a feedback session means groups provide feedback to each other. Efendi et al., (2023) stated that this concept is in line with the flow of progressivism philosophy which encourages better change

in education, with an emphasis on freedom of independent learning and students' rights to participate actively. In this session, students are also free to provide any comments about the work of their group friends so that students are free to express their opinions. It means this activity includes the concept of philosophy progressivism.

Moreover, the teacher presented learning evaluation by using *Mentimeter*. The data showed that the students were enthusiastic joining the evaluation by using this application. It is in line with the statement of Kristanto et. al., (2022) that *Mentimeter* is a platform to engage the audience (students). In this lesson, the meter is used as an evaluation when the lesson is finished with all questions or opinions expressed freely. Students are free to write anything on the platform, such as teachers asking questions about the material they have studied. For example; mention the structure of a personal letter, types of personal letters, what is a personal letter, etc). Sari (2023) mentioned that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum is expected to produce innovative and creative knowledge, supporting specific development. It means, in this context, the activities that occur in the classroom are a teacher's innovation towards his students with the development of modern technology as a learning medium.

The activities in first and second meeting included in the Merdeka curriculum which implemented the progressivism concept. Sopacua & Fadli (2022) argued that the activities in this learning are included in the concept of progressivism philosophy. The concept of progressivism is, 1) building students' social understanding through peer interaction, 2) teachers as facilitators, and 3) encouraging creativity, innovation, and relevance. Freedom to learn at school is in line with the philosophy of progressivism which advocates fundamental transformation in the implementation of education towards improvement, quality, and real benefits for students. Progressivism emphasizes the importance of the basic principles of independence and freedom for students, allowing them to develop hidden talents and potential without being constrained by formal rules that sometimes limit creativity and thinking. The concept of independent learning introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture aims to improve Indonesia with a quality generation starting from basic education. In this concept, students are treated as active subjects with guidance and facilitation from teachers and are directly involved in the learning process to become the main subjects in understanding and transferring knowledge.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

This research aimed to describe the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum which uses the philosophy of progressivism at one of Vocational School. The philosophy of progressivism in teaching and learning activities is to build students' social understanding through peer interaction. As in the activity above, students provide feedback between groups. This means that one student and another student discuss with each other. Then, the teacher acts as a facilitator. In the explanation above, a teacher only provides material and instructions regarding the projects that have been carried out by students. This means that it

is also included in the philosophy of progressivism in teaching and learning activities. Then, develop students' critical thinking. For example, between groups providing comments on the work of other group friends. For example, correcting a friend's work according to goals or not and providing an opinion on the content of the personal text. It can be concluded that 1) teachers already view the world of education in line with the philosophy of progressivism because teachers believe that education is very important for the future, 2) teachers realize their role is only as a facilitator for students because their knowledge should be explored according to students' potential, 3) teachers view students not as objects but as subjects because students must realize the potential they have.

Therefore, even though the new Merdeka curriculum can still be applied to current developments. Teachers must be creative with students' learning methods so that teaching and learning activities can be carried out well. The concept of Merdeka curriculum education presents a natural learning space that allows students to grow and develop according to their interests and talents so that the goal of forming individuals with character can be realized. Merdeka Belajar which prioritizes independence and independence in its learning approach is considered to be in line with the Progressivism Education Philosophy.

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