



## Educational foundations in the implementation of the merdeka curriculum: A philosophical, sociological, and psychological review

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires a strong conceptual understanding to ensure that curriculum reform goes beyond administrative changes and reflects meaningful educational goals. Educational foundations play a crucial role in guiding curriculum policy formulation and implementation. **Purpose:** This article aims to analyze the role of philosophical, sociological, and psychological educational foundations in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. **Method:** This study employed a qualitative approach using a literature review method. Data were collected from books, reputable national and international journal articles, and relevant educational policy documents. The data were analyzed thematically to identify the interconnections among educational foundations. **Results:** The findings indicate that philosophical foundations provide value orientation and educational goals through an emphasis on student-centered learning and character development. Sociological foundations ensure curriculum relevance to social, cultural, and community needs through flexibility and contextual learning. Psychological foundations support learning practices that consider students' development, interests, and individual differences through differentiated instruction and formative assessment. **Conclusion:** The integration of philosophical, sociological, and psychological foundations is a critical prerequisite for ensuring that the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented consistently, contextually, and meaningfully, thereby supporting student-centered learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

The transformation of Indonesia's national education system continues to evolve in response to social change, scientific advancement, and increasing demands for 21st-century competencies. Contemporary education is expected not only to emphasize academic achievement but also to foster character development, creativity, and critical thinking skills. Within this context, the

Merdeka Curriculum was introduced as a strategic policy to provide greater flexibility in learning and to encourage active student participation.

Curriculum reform in the 21st century cannot be separated from global educational dynamics that demand adaptive, humanistic, and competency-oriented learning systems. Modern curricula are designed to accommodate student diversity, strengthen the role of schools as spaces for character formation, and respond to the challenges of globalization and social change (Apple, 2020; Schleicher, 2021; Zhao, 2020). Education is also viewed as a strategic instrument for promoting social justice and sustainable futures through relevant, student-centered curricula (UNESCO, 2021).

Despite these intentions, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in educational institutions still faces significant challenges. One major issue is the tendency to focus on technical and administrative aspects without sufficient conceptual understanding. As a result, the Merdeka Curriculum risks being perceived merely as a structural change rather than a paradigm shift in education. Therefore, strong conceptual foundations are required to ensure meaningful and consistent curriculum implementation.

Previous studies indicate that educational foundations play a significant role in curriculum implementation; however, they tend to examine each foundation in a fragmented manner. Specifically, existing studies rarely explain how philosophical values, sociological contexts, and psychological principles interact simultaneously in shaping curriculum policy and classroom practices. As a result, existing research provides partial insights and lacks an integrated analytical framework that explains how student-centered learning principles are coherently translated from curriculum policy into classroom practices within the Merdeka Curriculum context. Philosophical analyses often focus on value orientation and educational goals without sufficiently connecting these values to classroom practices (Suryadi, 2021). Sociological studies emphasize curriculum relevance to social and cultural contexts but rarely integrate psychological considerations related to students' learning processes (Rahmawati & Hidayat, 2022). Meanwhile, psychological perspectives primarily address individual differences and learning motivation without situating them within broader philosophical and sociological frameworks (Nugroho, 2023).

This fragmentation creates a conceptual gap in understanding curriculum reform as a holistic educational process. The Merdeka Curriculum, which explicitly promotes student-centered learning, requires not only technical implementation guidelines but also an integrated theoretical foundation that aligns educational values, social relevance, and psychological principles. Without such integration, curriculum implementation risks becoming procedural rather than transformative.

Therefore, this article aims to offer a conceptual contribution by addressing this gap. Unlike previous studies that treat educational foundations separately, this article explicitly conceptualizes their interconnection as a unified analytical framework to explain the consistency between curriculum policy intentions and student-centered learning practices in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

This integrative perspective enriches the discourse on student-centered learning-based curriculum policy by demonstrating that effective curriculum reform depends on the coherence among value orientation, social context, and learner characteristics. By positioning educational foundations as interconnected rather than isolated elements, this study contributes to curriculum studies and educational policy analysis, particularly in strengthening the conceptual basis of student-centered learning within Indonesia's educational reform agenda.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative literature review approach to synthesize relevant scholarly sources. This approach is commonly used in educational research to develop conceptual

understanding through systematic analysis of existing literature (Creswell & Poth, 2021; Snyder, 2019; Sugiyono, 2021).

The Merdeka Curriculum policy, which serves as the central focus of this review, was officially developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology as part of an educational transformation toward flexible and student-centered learning (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Research data were obtained from secondary sources, including educational reference books, national and international journal articles, and official policy documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum. Journal articles published within the last five years were prioritized to ensure the currency of the review, while books were used as primary theoretical references. Literature searches were conducted through academic databases and national journal portals using keywords related to educational foundations and the Merdeka Curriculum.

The selection of literature sources was guided by explicit criteria to ensure analytical depth and relevance to educational policy analysis. These criteria served as the basis for ensuring that the reviewed literature was both theoretically rigorous and policy-relevant. First, sources were selected based on their substantive relevance to educational foundations and curriculum policy, particularly those addressing philosophical, sociological, or psychological perspectives in curriculum development. Second, priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles published in reputable national and international journals, as well as official policy documents issued by authoritative institutions such as the Ministry of Education, UNESCO, and the OECD. Third, selected sources were required to demonstrate conceptual clarity and theoretical rigor, either by offering well-established theoretical frameworks or by providing critical analyses of curriculum policy implementation. In addition, seminal works were included to strengthen the theoretical grounding of the analysis, while recent publications were prioritized to capture current policy dynamics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the literature analysis indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is grounded in three interconnected educational foundations: philosophical, sociological, and psychological. These foundations collectively form an integrated conceptual framework that guides curriculum policy and educational practice in Indonesia.

From a philosophical perspective, the Merdeka Curriculum is rooted in humanistic and progressive educational philosophies that position students as active subjects of learning. Values such as freedom to learn, individual potential development, and character education are central to this curriculum. This finding suggests that a strong philosophical understanding is essential to prevent curriculum implementation from being reduced to mere administrative procedures. This perspective aligns with (Biesta, 2020) view of education as a process of humanization and with (Noddings, 2021) emphasis on care, empathy, and relational dimensions in educational practice.

From a sociological standpoint, the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to respond to social, cultural, and community dynamics. Curriculum flexibility enables schools to contextualize learning according to local needs and social characteristics. This reinforces the role of education as an agent of socialization and social change. These findings are consistent with studies by (Priestley et al., 2021), which emphasize teacher agency in curriculum reform, as well as reports by the (OECD, 2021) that highlight the importance of adaptive curricula in addressing global challenges while remaining locally relevant.

From a psychological perspective, the implications of educational foundations extend directly to differentiated learning practices and formative assessment. Understanding students' developmental stages, learning preferences, and motivational profiles enables teachers to design differentiated instruction that adapts content, process, and assessment according to individual needs. Formative assessment, within this framework, functions not merely as a tool for measuring

achievement but as an ongoing feedback mechanism that supports self-regulation and intrinsic motivation.

Grounded in self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020), formative assessment practices help fulfill students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby enhancing engagement and learning effectiveness. Consequently, psychological foundations provide a critical rationale for implementing differentiated learning and formative assessment as core elements of student-centered pedagogy within the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, (Kirschner & Hendrick, 2020) stress that effective learning must be grounded in evidence-based principles of educational psychology, while (Hattie, 2023) meta-analysis demonstrates that instructional approaches addressing individual learning needs significantly enhance student engagement and learning outcomes.

The integration of philosophical, sociological, and psychological foundations holds significant implications for ensuring consistency between curriculum policy and classroom learning practices. Philosophical foundations provide normative direction by defining the values and goals of education, sociological foundations ensure policy relevance to social and cultural contexts, and psychological foundations translate these orientations into effective instructional practices.

When these foundations are integrated, curriculum policies are more likely to be interpreted and implemented coherently by schools and teachers, thereby ensuring consistency between curriculum policy intentions and classroom learning practices and reducing the gap between policy intent and pedagogical practice. Conversely, the absence of integration risks producing fragmented implementation, where curriculum reforms are adopted administratively without meaningful changes in teaching and learning processes. Therefore, psychological foundations directly justify the implementation of differentiated learning and formative assessment as pedagogical strategies that respond to students' individual characteristics and support meaningful, student-centered learning within the Merdeka Curriculum.

Overall, the findings confirm that integrating philosophical, sociological, and psychological foundations is a prerequisite for the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. While these results are consistent with previous studies (Nugroho, 2023; Rahmawati & Hidayat, 2022; Suryadi, 2021), this article contributes an integrative perspective by examining these foundations as a unified conceptual framework. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its conceptual nature and reliance on literature review. Therefore, future research is recommended to empirically examine the integration of these educational foundations in school contexts to strengthen the applicability of the findings.

**Table 1.** Educational foundations in the implementation of the merdeka curriculum

Educational foundation	Main focus	Implications for the Merdeka Curriculum
Philosophical	Values, goals, and the nature of education	Student-centered learning, character development, learner autonomy
Sociological	Social needs and community context	Curriculum flexibility, contextual learning, local wisdom
Psychological	Development and individual differences	Differentiated instruction, formative assessment, attention to student interests

Table 1 synthesizes the relationship between philosophical, sociological, and psychological foundations in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. These foundations complement one another by providing value orientation, social relevance, and learner-centered pedagogical practices. This synthesis underscores that successful curriculum implementation requires an integrated and sustained application of all three foundations.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum depends on the integration of philosophical, sociological, and psychological educational foundations. Philosophically, the curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, individual potential development, and character formation. Sociologically, it promotes curriculum flexibility that enables schools to respond to social and cultural contexts. Psychologically, it prioritizes differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and attention to students' developmental stages and intrinsic motivation. Together, these interconnected foundations form a coherent conceptual framework that aligns curriculum policy with classroom practice. This study contributes an integrative perspective by synthesizing these three educational foundations into a unified analytical framework. However, as this research is based on a literature review, its findings remain conceptual. Therefore, future research is recommended to empirically examine how this integrated framework is implemented in school contexts using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches. The findings of this study have important practical implications for education policymakers and curriculum implementers. For policymakers, the integrated framework provides a conceptual basis for designing coherent, context-sensitive, and learner-centered curriculum policies. For school leaders and teachers, it offers guidance for aligning curriculum planning, instructional strategies, and assessment practices—particularly differentiated learning and formative assessment with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

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