

Analysis of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Developing Early Childhood Character at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan in the 2024/2025 Academic Year

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of the independent curriculum in developing student character and to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors of the independent curriculum in developing student character at TKN Pembina Dewi Kayangan in the 2024/2025 academic year. This research is a descriptive qualitative study. Data collection techniques include observation, interviews, and documentation. The data obtained are analyzed descriptively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity testing or data validity checking uses triangulation, member checking, and peer review. The results of the study indicate that 1) the implementation of the independent curriculum in developing the character of students at TKN Pembina Dewi Kayangan in the five dimensions of the Pancasila student profile, namely being faithful, reverent to God Almighty, and having noble character, being globally diverse, thinking critically, being independent and creative, instills good character such as saying prayers before and after studying, being polite, respecting differences among peers, being willing to cooperate in small groups, helping friends in need, performing simple tasks without assistance, asking questions when something is not understood, and being able to produce simple works through habitual activities. 2) Supporting factors of the independent curriculum in developing the character of students at TKN Pembina Dewi Kayangan a) The availability of facilities that serve as supporting infrastructure for habit formation, such as a prayer room as a place for children to practice worship, play equipment, trash bins, cleaning equipment, and a playground. b) Support from the school principal and parents in student-centered activities. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors are: a) The presence of some students who are less conducive during the activities. b) The limitations of teachers in supervising students in developing habits only within the school environment. c) The limitations of reference books and internet access, which are not yet facilitated. This becomes an obstacle because the internet is an important source of information and learning materials

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is a crucial aspect that must be understood as it involves a teaching and learning process between educators and learners. The teacher is responsible for delivering understanding to their students, while the students are expected to pay attention and comprehend the lessons given. If a student fails to fully grasp the lessons taught by the teacher at school, it indicates that the teacher has

not been successful in delivering the learning effectively. Conversely, students are also expected to be active in paying attention and participating in the learning process (Adzroil Ula Al Etivali & Alaika M. Bagus Kurnia PS, 2019).

Therefore, every individual is obligated to receive education, particularly Indonesian citizens who are known for their friendliness—a characteristic that also exemplifies character education. Effective communication between teachers and students is essential to prevent misunderstandings or miscommunication.

Early childhood is an individual in the initial developmental phase, covering the ages between two and six years. During this period, children experience rapid growth and development in physical, emotional, social, and cognitive aspects. This phase is known as the golden age, as brain development occurs most rapidly from the prenatal stage to the age of six. However, the most critical phase is from the prenatal stage to the age of four. Therefore, giving extra attention to children at this stage is crucial. Such attention can be provided through direct education from parents or through early childhood education institutions. Development during this early period serves as the foundation for later stages, as success in one developmental stage will determine the success in subsequent stages (Fauzidin Moh & Mufarizuddin, 2018).

The Merdeka Curriculum, as explained by Sriandila and Syahid in Lestari (2024), aims not only to deliver academic content but also to develop 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration from an early age. This is in line with the vision of education that emphasizes the holistic development of children's character and potential. However, like other policy implementations, the application of the Merdeka Curriculum comes with its own challenges.

Nadiem Anwar Makarim states that the Merdeka Curriculum is based on students' talents and interests, aiming to develop the Pancasila Student Profile. This profile reflects the nation's character, education, and culture, and is intended to be instilled in young generations of Indonesia. The Pancasila Student Profile consists of six dimensions: noble character, creativity, cooperation, global diversity, critical reasoning, and independence (Hasmi et al., 2023).

Recently, the Merdeka Belajar policy has been widely promoted across educational institutions, from early childhood education to higher education. This policy offers a significant opportunity to improve the quality of education in Indonesia (Prameswari in Hidayah, 2023), especially since it begins during the golden age of child development.

However, in practice, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in character development among early childhood learners requires deep understanding from educators. One of the main challenges faced by teachers is their limited understanding of how to apply the curriculum effectively. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in developing early childhood character (Pratiwi et al., 2023).

Character education for early childhood is a conscious effort to develop children's potential by instilling knowledge and changing attitudes and behaviors so that they become individuals with strong character, traits, and personalities. The character values instilled in early childhood include religiousness, integrity, cooperation, independence, and nationalism (Hasanah & Fajri, 2022).

Character education is a system of instilling values that includes components of knowledge, awareness or willingness, and action to implement these values in relation to God Almighty, oneself, others, the environment, and the nation (Samani, 2012). The development of national character can be carried out through the development of individual character. However, since humans live in a social and cultural environment, individual character development can only occur within that context. This means that cultural and character development must be carried out through an educational process that is closely related to the social, community, and national culture. In Indonesia, this cultural and national identity is rooted in Pancasila, thus character education should aim to develop Pancasila values through the education of heart, mind, and body (Novan, 2023).

Preliminary observations at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan on January 12, 2025, revealed that the students there possessed excellent and prominent character traits. This was evident from their sense of responsibility—children would clean up their toys after playing; discipline—students would arrive at school by 07:00 a.m.; and independence—students were able to complete tasks without assistance from teachers or peers. Independence is a priority at this school, supported by several established routines such as rules on punctuality, appropriate and complete uniforms, and immediate verbal corrections for misconduct, all of which foster responsibility. These routines stem from the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes character education at the early childhood level.

Based on an interview with a teacher at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan on the same date, the previous curriculum (K-13) did not specifically emphasize character education. With the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum, character-based routines began to emerge, such as discipline, a sense of responsibility, and independence, all of which are now highly prioritized (Susilawati, 2020).

Based on the description above, the researcher is interested in analyzing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in developing early childhood character at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan in the 2024/2025 academic year.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research is a qualitative study. Qualitative research is a descriptive method that aims to explore the findings in depth so that readers can understand them in detail before choosing between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Sugiyono defines qualitative research as a type of research used to examine natural conditions, where the researcher serves as the key instrument. Furthermore, Moleong defines qualitative research as an effort to understand phenomena related to events experienced by the subject (Mardawani, 2020).

This research was conducted at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan, located in Kayangan Village, Kayangan Subdistrict. The data collection techniques used in this study include observation, interviews, and documentation. The research design refers to the model proposed by Miles and Huberman (in Sugiyono, 2019), which consists of three stages:

1. Data Condensation

Data condensation is the process of selecting, focusing attention, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data obtained from field notes. The steps involved include sharpening the analysis, categorizing problems through brief explanations, directing, discarding irrelevant information, and organizing data so that it can be drawn into conclusions and verified (Budu, 2022).

2. Data Display

The next step in analyzing data is data display, which is done through brief descriptions, diagrams, and relationships between categories. In qualitative research, data is often presented in the form of narrative texts that describe a sequence of events (Moleong, 2022).

3. Conclusion Drawing / Verification

Conclusion drawing and verification refer to the initial conclusions presented, which are still temporary and subject to change if no strong evidence is found in the next data collection stages. However, if supported by valid and consistent evidence during the researcher's return to the field, the conclusion can be considered credible (Fiantika et al., 2022).

3. RESULTS

1. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Developing Early Childhood Character at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan

Based on observations and interviews conducted at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has successfully contributed to the development of early childhood character through an emphasis on the Pancasila Student Profile. The school applies the five dimensions of this profile—Faith in God, Noble Morality, Global Diversity, Mutual Cooperation, Independence, Critical Thinking, and Creativity—through consistent habituation activities. For instance, religious habituation activities such as collective prayer, memorization of short Qur’anic verses, and practicing congregational prayer are used to instill moral values. In addition, activities such as fire evacuation simulations with firefighters, collective environmental clean-ups, creating artwork (e.g., finger painting), and flag ceremony rehearsals are carried out to enhance the dimensions of diversity, independence, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking.

Overall, the children in group B4 have shown significant character development in line with the targets of the Pancasila Student Profile. Most of the children are capable of behaving politely, respecting differences, working cooperatively in groups, taking responsibility for assigned tasks, and producing creative work. However, a small number of children still require more intensive guidance, as they are not yet consistent in participating in religious activities, interacting with peers from diverse backgrounds, completing collective tasks, acting independently, expressing opinions, or engaging in creative projects. The school’s collaboration with external institutions (such as the fire department) further strengthens the curriculum’s implementation, affirming that the Merdeka Curriculum provides schools with the flexibility to design contextual programs that foster learners who are virtuous, adaptive, collaborative, and ready to face future challenges.

2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of the Merdeka Curriculum in Developing Early Childhood Character at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan

Based on the analysis conducted at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in developing early childhood character is supported by four main factors. First, the strong commitment of school leadership, demonstrated through internal training, regular discussions, and sharing of best practices among teachers regarding Learning Outcomes (CP) and the Pancasila Student Profile, all of which are actively facilitated by the principal. Second, teacher collaboration in designing learning modules tailored to children’s needs through pre-learning discussions that ensure the suitability of methods and coverage of character dimensions. Third, the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure, such as multifunctional classrooms (for verse memorization and prayer practice), indoor and outdoor play areas, and sanitation facilities. Fourth, active parental involvement in community service activities, parenting sessions, and class meetings, which strengthen the synergy between school and home.

On the other hand, there are two dominant inhibiting factors. First, inconsistent behavior among some students during habituation activities, such as lack of focus, passivity, or unwillingness to participate—especially when positioned at the back of the group—which necessitates more intensive teacher guidance. Second, limited parental time due to work obligations, which reduces their attention to character reinforcement at home and potentially hinders the continuity of instilling Pancasila Student Profile values. Nevertheless, the presence of holistic supporting factors reflects the school’s capacity to mitigate these challenges through the implementation of well-designed, contextual programs.

4. DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Developing Early Childhood Character at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan

Based on research conducted at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan, the strengthening of students' character in accordance with the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile is implemented through two structured habituation approaches: routine and spontaneous. Routine habituation includes repeated activities such as reciting the Qur'an, memorizing short verses, performing congregational prayers, and classroom literacy activities. These aim to develop characters that are faithful, pious, noble in conduct, and critical in reasoning. Meanwhile, spontaneous habituation is applied through activities such as cleaning the environment together, fire extinguishing simulations with firefighters, role-playing (e.g., doctor-patient), and lining up before entering the classroom to sharpen the dimensions of global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, and creativity. Creative activities like making artwork (finger painting, Ramadan-themed hats), as well as cooking and gardening practices, are also integral parts of this strategy. Pedagogically, habituation is a process of forming relatively permanent and automatic attitudes and behaviors through repeated learning experiences (Aningsih et al., 2022). Ulya (2020) defines it as continuous repetition of activities that eventually form behaviors aligned with the intended goals of those activities. The role of teachers as role models, along with support from the school principal in providing space for educator competency development, are key factors that enhance the effectiveness of this model. As a result, a holistic learning environment is created—one in which students not only master religious rituals and analytical skills but also grow in independence, collaboration, appreciation of diversity, and innovation. This aligns with the vision of the Pancasila Student Profile as the foundation for nurturing an excellent and adaptive generation (Hawa, 2022).

2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors of the Merdeka Curriculum in Developing Early Childhood Character at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan

Based on the analysis of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan, three main supporting factors stand out in strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile. First, the availability of adequate infrastructure, such as multifunctional spaces (for verse memorization and congregational prayers), indoor and outdoor play areas, sanitation facilities, and a spacious environment that supports a variety of habituation activities. Second, a tripartite synergy that includes: (a) the principal's leadership in coordinating the program, (b) the role of teachers as role models who guide and directly exemplify character values, and (c) active parental involvement in student-centered activities. Third, the intrinsic enthusiasm of the students, reflected in their discipline, task independence, and initiative during activities—consistent with Daga's (2021) findings that children's internal motivation acts as a catalyst for the sustainability of habituation.

On the other hand, two critical inhibiting factors were identified: (1) inconsistent participation among some students, such as apathy, passive behavior when placed at the back of the group, or reluctance to engage, which requires specific teacher intervention; and (2) parents' limited time due to work obligations, which potentially reduces the continuity of character reinforcement at home. Nevertheless, the structured habituation activities have successfully internalized the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, as evidenced by significant development in the dimensions of noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity. These results indicate that the model is effective as a foundation for early childhood character formation, although reinforcement is still needed in the area of overcoming implementation barriers (Masfufahb, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis presented above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in developing early childhood character at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan across the five dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile—faith in God, piety, noble character, global diversity, critical thinking, independence, and creativity—has successfully instilled positive traits such as reciting prayers before and after learning, demonstrating polite behavior, respecting peer differences, cooperating in small groups, helping peers in need, completing simple tasks independently, asking questions when something is unclear, and producing simple works through habituation activities. Thus, character development in children at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan has shown considerable progress, although some children are still unable to fully participate in character development habituation activities. Teachers continue to provide guidance for those who are not yet able to engage effectively in the activities, so that eventually, these children can participate well alongside their peers.
2. The supporting and inhibiting factors in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum to develop early childhood character at TK Negeri Pembina Dewi Kayangan are as follows:
 - **Supporting Factors:**
 1. Availability of facilities that support habituation, such as trash bins, cleaning tools, and playgrounds.
 2. Support from the school principal and parents in student-centered activities.
 - **Inhibiting Factors:**
 1. Some students were less conducive during the activities.
 2. Parents' busy work schedules limited their attention to the character development of their children.

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