

The Role Of Teachers In The Implementation Of The Merdeka Curriculum Through Character Development In Morals, Love, And Ethics For The Learning Of Grade IV Students Of SDN 1 Anyar

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Abstract

This study was motivated by the importance of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which focuses not only on academic achievement but also on the development of students' character. This research aimed to describe the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum through character development in morality, love, and ethics to improve the learning interest of fourth-grade students at SDN 1 Anyar. This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The research subjects included the principal, the fourth-grade teacher, and fourth-grade students of SDN 1 Anyar. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The validity of the data was ensured through source triangulation and technique triangulation. The results of the study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum through character development in morality, love, and ethics plays an important role in improving the learning interest of fourth-grade students at SDN 1 Anyar. Character development integrated into the learning process is able to create a positive and enjoyable learning environment and support the holistic development of students.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum is an education policy developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology as part of the Merdeka Learning program. This curriculum is designed to provide flexibility to educational units and teachers in developing learning that is tailored to the needs, characteristics, and potential of students (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum's primary focus is on developing student competencies and character through in-depth, contextual, and project-based learning.

One of its distinctive features is the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which aims to shape students who are faithful and devoted to God Almighty, possess noble character, are Merdeka, have critical reasoning, are creative, and are capable of working together and embracing global diversity (Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, 2022). Furthermore, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes content simplification so students have more time to deeply understand concepts. Teachers are given the freedom to choose appropriate teaching tools, methods, and learning strategies, making the learning process more meaningful and enjoyable.

However, its implementation in the field still faces various challenges. Not all teachers are equally prepared to understand the concept and application of the Merdeka Curriculum. Limited understanding of innovative learning strategies and minimal training are obstacles to its implementation (Wahyudi et al., 2023). The paradigm shift from conventional learning to a more flexible and student-centered learning model also requires a challenging adaptation. Education is also a conscious and planned effort to create a learning environment and process that allows students to optimally develop their potential. Education is not only oriented towards academic achievement but also plays a crucial role in shaping students' character, enabling them to become individuals with noble character, ethics, responsibility, and concern for their social environment.

Today, the world of education faces various challenges related not only to improving academic achievement but also to the development of student character. Technological advances and the rapid flow of information have both positive and negative impacts on student development. While technology facilitates easy access to information and knowledge, it can also influence student behavior and character if not accompanied by appropriate guidance. The phenomenon of declining moral values, a lack of respect for teachers and parents, low concern for others, and a lack of discipline in learning are common problems in elementary schools.

In the context of basic education, character development is inseparable from the learning process. Schools have a responsibility to instill character values in students through various learning activities and extracurricular activities. One important form of character development is moral character, love, and ethics. According to Lickona (2022), character education is a deliberate effort to shape individuals to understand moral values, feel moral values, and carry out moral actions in everyday life.

Based on the results of initial observations conducted at SDN 1 Anyar, several problems were found related to student character and learning interests. Some students still lack discipline in participating in learning activities, such as arriving late to school, not completing assignments on time, and not complying with applicable school rules. In addition, there are also students who show little respect for teachers and friends, lack a sense of responsibility for assigned tasks, and lack concern for the cleanliness and order of the school environment. During the learning process, some students appear to lack focus when the teacher explains the material, are less active in asking or answering questions, and show a low interest in learning.

Character issues encountered by these students certainly cannot be ignored because they can impact the learning process and outcomes. Interest in learning is a crucial factor influencing student success in the learning process. According to Sardiman (2021), interest in learning can be defined as a person's sense of attraction or inclination toward a learning activity, thus encouraging active involvement. Meanwhile, Muhibbin Syah (2021) explains that students with a strong interest in learning will more easily understand the material because they possess strong motivation.

Previous research conducted by N. P. Sari and N. Supriatna (2022) and D. P. Sari and A. Rahman (2022) examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in character development, but focused more on the phenomenological approach and moral character alone. Another study by N. A. Fitri and S. Hidayat (2023) focused on ethics, while E. Wulandari and B. Suparno (2022) focused on the character of patriotism. This study aims to fill this gap by examining character development more holistically, encompassing moral, patriotic, and ethical aspects simultaneously within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation to increase students' learning interest.

Therefore, in line with the focus of the study, this research is specifically aimed at: (1) describing the process of developing moral, love, and ethical character that is integrated into the intracurricular learning activities, the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), and the daily habituation of fourth-grade students at SDN 1 Anyar within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum; (2) describing the role of the classroom teacher as a role model, motivator, mentor, and facilitator in the character development process; (3) describing the form of change in the

learning interest of fourth-grade students, as seen from their attention during learning, their activeness in asking and answering questions, their involvement in group discussions, and their discipline in completing assignments, after the character development was implemented; and (4) identifying the obstacles faced by teachers in the implementation of the character development and the strategies used to overcome them.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with phenomenological and descriptive research types. According to Sugiyono (2022), qualitative research is used to examine the natural conditions of objects, where the researcher is the key instrument in data collection. The focus of this approach is to understand lived experiences and the meanings individuals attach to those experiences (Creswell, 2021).

The phenomenological type was chosen because the focus of this study is the lived experience and the meaning given by the principal, teachers, and students to the process of moral, love, and ethical character development, which cannot be measured by numbers and can only be understood from the perspective of the actors themselves. Through this approach, the researcher explores how teachers interpret their role in instilling character values and how students experience and interpret the learning atmosphere that is built on these values, so that the meaning behind the observed behaviour can be revealed and not merely its frequency. Meanwhile, the descriptive type was chosen because this study does not intend to test hypotheses or measure the influence of one variable on another, but rather to systematically describe the character development process as it naturally occurs in the field, including the roles of the teacher, the changes in students' learning interest, and the obstacles encountered, in the form of a factual and detailed narrative. The combination of these two types is considered appropriate because the research questions are formulated with 'how' rather than 'how much', so that the data needed are descriptions of the process and meanings, not statistical measurements (Creswell, 2021; Sugiyono, 2022).

This research was conducted at SDN 1 Anyar, located in Karang Tunggul Hamlet, Anyar Village, Bayan District, North Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province. This location was chosen based on the consideration that SDN 1 Anyar has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and has a character development program that encompasses morals, love, and ethics in its learning activities. The research took place during the even semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, from January to June 2026.

The primary data in this study were obtained directly from informants, including the Principal, Grade 4 Teachers, and Grade 4 Students. Secondary data were obtained from related documents such as teaching modules, lesson plans, the Pancasila Student Profile document, and school archives (Moleong, 2021).

The data collection techniques used included non-participant observation to observe teacher and student activities during the learning process, in-depth interviews to gather detailed information from informants, and documentation to supplement the observation and interview data. Data collection instruments included interview guidelines, observation sheets, and field notes.

To ensure the transparency of the research process, the observation sheet was developed on the basis of indicators derived from the research focus, namely: (1) moral character, covering students' discipline in arriving on time, honesty in completing assignments, responsibility for classroom duties, and participation in praying together before the lesson begins; (2) the character of love, covering the willingness to help friends who have learning difficulties, cooperation in group activities, tolerance towards differences of opinion, and concern for the cleanliness and order of the classroom; (3) ethical character, covering polite speech towards teachers and peers, the habit of asking permission before doing something, and the manner of greeting and addressing school members; (4) the role of the teacher, covering exemplary behaviour, the provision of motivation and appreciation, the guidance of student behaviour, and the arrangement of the

learning environment and media; and (5) students' learning interest, covering attention during the teacher's explanation, activeness in asking and answering questions, involvement in group discussions, and the punctual completion of assignments. Each indicator was recorded in the form of descriptive field notes accompanied by the time, place, and context of the event, so that the data remained qualitatively rich and traceable during the analysis.

The interview guidelines were arranged in a semi-structured form and grouped into four themes that correspond to the research objectives, namely: (a) the planning and process of character development, which explored how the values of morals, love, and ethics are integrated into teaching modules, intracurricular learning, P5 projects, and school habituation; (b) the role of the teacher, which explored the forms of exemplary behaviour, motivation, guidance, and facilitation provided; (c) the change in students' learning interest, which explored the teacher's and students' perceptions of attention, activeness, and enthusiasm in learning before and after the character development was intensified; and (d) the obstacles and strategies for overcoming them, which explored the difficulties arising from the heterogeneity of students and the efforts made by the school. The emphasis of the questions was adapted to each informant: the principal was asked mainly about school policies and programme support, the fourth-grade teachers about classroom strategies and field constraints, and the students about their feelings, experiences, and responses to the treatment given by the teacher. The guidelines functioned as a framework, while follow-up questions were developed in the field according to the direction of the informants' answers.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three simultaneous activity streams: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. To ensure data validity, researchers used source and technical triangulation techniques, as well as member checking to confirm the data obtained matched the informants' intentions (Creswell, 2021; Sugiyono, 2022).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Character Building Process in Morals, Love, and Ethics

Based on observations, interviews, and documentation conducted at SDN 1 Anyar, the character development process in morals, love, and ethics has been implemented in a planned and sustainable manner throughout the learning process. This character development implementation aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes not only academic achievement but also character development in students. Teachers act as facilitators, mentors, and role models in instilling character values in students through various learning activities and daily habits at school.

Character building begins at the beginning of the learning process. Before class begins, teachers encourage students to pray together, greet students, and check the class for tidiness and cleanliness. These activities aim to instill moral values such as discipline, responsibility, and gratitude in students. Teachers also provide motivation and brief advice on the importance of maintaining good morals in everyday life.

Based on interviews with fourth-grade teachers, moral character is instilled through habituation and role modeling. Teachers teach honesty, discipline, responsibility, and mutual respect for peers. The development of a loving character is carried out through the habituation of caring, compassion, tolerance, and cooperation. Teachers encourage students to help each other when friends experience learning difficulties, cooperate in group activities, and respect differences of opinion. Meanwhile, ethical character is instilled through the habituation of polite behavior in interactions with teachers, friends, and other school members. Students are guided to speak politely and ask permission before doing something.

The Role of Teachers as Role Models

Teachers are role models for students in their daily lives. Their attitudes, behaviors, and words are observed and imitated by their students. Therefore, to foster student interest in learning through character development, teachers must be able to set a good example. At SDN 1 Anyar,

teachers consistently demonstrate discipline, friendliness, courtesy, and responsibility. Before teaching students' good behavior, teachers first provide concrete examples, such as arriving on time and respecting the opinions of all students without discrimination.

This finding aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's (2021) theory regarding the principle of 'Ing Ngarsa Sung Tuladha', which states that teachers must lead by example. This role model can create a positive learning environment, enabling students to feel comfortable, motivated, and more enthusiastic about learning (Mulyasa, 2021).

The Role of Teachers as Motivators and Guides

As motivators, teachers are tasked with providing encouragement, enthusiasm, and motivation to students to be more active and enthusiastic in participating in the learning process. Meanwhile, as mentors, teachers guide students to behave in accordance with moral values, love, and ethics. Teachers at SDN 1 Anyar consistently provide motivation in the form of encouraging words and appreciation to students who demonstrate positive behavior.

In fostering love, one innovative form of guidance is through a rotating seating program, where students are placed with a different classmate each week. This activity aims to help students get to know their classmates, foster collaboration, and foster a deep sense of community (Wibowo et al., 2024). The teacher's role as a motivator is crucial in creating a fun learning environment, fostering enthusiasm for learning, and addressing student boredom in class (Sardiman, 2021).

The Role of Teachers as Facilitators

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers not only deliver subject matter but also create an active, student-centered learning environment. Teachers at SDN 1 Anyar provide various learning resources and environments that support character development. They organize the classroom environment to be comfortable, provide contextual learning media, and facilitate group discussions (Suryaman, 2022). The facilities and activities provided by teachers enhance students' social interactions and support the development of moral character, love, and ethics, which ultimately leads to increased student interest in learning.

Obstacles and Challenges in Implementation

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum through character development, teachers also face several obstacles. One of the main obstacles is the differences in students' character, background, family background, and academic abilities. Each student has a different level of understanding and emotional development, requiring a differentiated approach (Tomlinson, 2021). Some students respond quickly to teacher direction, while others require intensive and repeated guidance.

Furthermore, differences in digital literacy levels and basic academic abilities present challenges for teachers in designing projects or activities that can accommodate all students equitably (Wahyudi et al., 2023). However, the commitment of schools and teachers to a persuasive approach and collaboration with parents can minimize these obstacles.

Discussion on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

The comprehensive implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in fourth grade at SDN 1 Anyar is not solely focused on academic achievement but also emphasizes strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile holistically. This is evidenced by the integration of moral character development, love, and ethics into every activity, from the development of teaching modules and the implementation of intracurricular learning, P5 projects, and evaluation.

The implemented character education encompasses three components of Lickona's (2022) theory: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. Teachers don't simply impart theory but also bring these values to the affective and psychomotor levels through real-life practices.

The impact of this approach is very positive on students' learning interests. Interest in learning is no longer forced, but rather grows from students' awareness and comfort in an environment that values ethics, is full of love, and upholds strong morals (Safitri et al., 2024; Ismira et al., 2024). Students become more confident in expressing their opinions, active in group discussions, and disciplined in completing assignments.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of the research results and discussion, it can be concluded that the character development process in morals, love, and ethics at SDN 1 Anyar is implemented in an integrated manner in both extracurricular activities and school habits, in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers carry out their strategic roles as role models (providing concrete examples), motivators (providing positive encouragement), mentors (directing student behavior), and facilitators (creating a conducive learning environment).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum through character development in morals, love, and ethics is followed by a positive change in the learning interest of fourth-grade students at SDN 1 Anyar. Because this study is qualitative and descriptive in nature and does not use statistical measurement, this change is not stated as a statistically tested significant effect, but is described through qualitative indicators that were found consistently in the observations, interviews, and documentation, namely: students who pay more attention when the teacher explains the material, are more willing to ask and answer questions, are more actively involved in group discussions, are more confident in expressing their opinions, and are more disciplined in completing assignments on time compared with the condition at the beginning of the observation. A learning environment built on these values makes students feel valued, safe, and comfortable, thus triggering active engagement and high enthusiasm in the educational process. The obstacles encountered are the heterogeneity of students' character, family background, basic academic abilities, and digital literacy levels; these obstacles are addressed by teachers through differentiated learning strategies, repeated personal guidance for students who need more assistance, a persuasive approach, and collaboration with parents. These findings apply within the context of fourth grade at SDN 1 Anyar and are not intended to be generalised to other schools; further quantitative research is needed to measure the magnitude of the relationship between character development and students' learning interest.

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