

Exploration of Students' Potential in The Merdeka Curriculum

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ARTICLE INFORMATION	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received, 25-08-2024 Accepted, 09-10-2024 Published, 07-12-2024	<i>This study explores the potential of students within the context of developing the Merdeka curriculum in madrasas. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes freedom and flexibility in learning to facilitate the development of students' potential according to their individual interests, talents, and characteristics. This paper outlines theories and important steps in exploring potential, such as differentiated learning approaches, project-based learning, the role of teachers as facilitators, and character strengthening through potential exploration. Practical steps include identifying students' interests and talents, differentiated learning, giving students the freedom to choose projects, strengthening feedback, as well as involving parents and the community. The conclusion of this study highlights the important role of educators in optimizing students' potential to shape resilient and virtuous character.</i>
Keywords: <i>Student Potential; Merdeka Curriculum</i>	

INTRODUCTION

Talking about Education certainly cannot be separated from the curriculum, because the curriculum is said to be a written plan that must be owned by students in carrying out the learning process. Without a well-managed curriculum, the goals of Education cannot be expected to be maximized. The curriculum in Indonesia has undergone several updates, because Education is dynamic, always changing with the development of the times and technology and civilization that we have. Currently, Madrasahs in Indonesia, especially Indragiri Hulu, have implemented the Merdeka curriculum. Of course, this is carried out first by providing an understanding to the children of teachers in the madrasah in the form of socialization, conducting training, seminars and after that the implementation is carried out in each Madrasah.

The Independent Curriculum is actually more directed at implementing projects after students understand the material obtained from various media, fields, student experiences, transfer of knowledge through teacher facilitators in carrying out the learning process. In the independent curriculum, as an educator, you must understand the various potentials possessed by students through observation and reflection, and as a teacher you must also understand the learning styles of each student, whether students have audio, visual, audio-visual, kinesthetic, and kinesthetic movement learning styles, by understanding the learning styles and talents that exist in students, then we as educators can continue to explore the talents of students by

providing motivation and implementing a fun learning process. The subjects in this study are madrasah teachers, as well as students and the Education Community using instruments in the form of interviews. And the object of the study is related to the exploration of students' potential in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum.

Students have different types from one another. Some are cheerful, others exhibit leadership qualities, some are systematic, and there are also students who are obedient, meaning they follow whatever their teacher says. On one hand, obedient students are considered good because they follow the instructions of their teachers. However, such characteristics should not continue into adulthood. If unchecked, these students might struggle to make life decisions, become overly dependent on others, lack confidence in their own opinions, and be unable to defend themselves when others try to bring them down. However, self-defense here means maintaining politeness in accordance with religious and social norms. Each type of student has its own advantages and disadvantages. According to Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences, every individual possesses different forms of intelligence, such as linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist, and existential intelligences. This theory suggests that each child has unique potential that can be developed in various fields. It is essential to understand that every student has a different ability, and their intelligence varies. Some excel in language, mathematics, analysis, while others shine in different areas (Bornstein & Gardner, 1986).

Maslow's theory (Arlow, 1955), on the other hand, asserts that students' potential will develop optimally if their basic needs are met first. Maslow's hierarchy of needs starts with physiological needs, safety, social needs, esteem, and self-actualization. At the self-actualization level, a person achieves their highest potential. Teachers must ensure their students feel safe. Why? Because when students feel secure, they are more likely to receive positive reinforcement, creating a conducive learning environment. A good learning atmosphere fosters optimal growth and development.

According to Piaget, (1998), children progress through four stages of cognitive development: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. Each stage reflects a growing cognitive ability that changes with age, influencing how children learn. The sensorimotor stage begins in infancy when babies develop an understanding of the world through sensory experiences, such as seeing, hearing, and touching. This is followed by the preoperational stage, from ages 2 to 7, where children start using logic to combine or separate ideas. Then comes the concrete operational stage (ages 7 to 11), where children develop logical thinking and apply it to physical objects. At this stage, children begin to solve problems logically, but they cannot yet think abstractly or hypothetically. Finally, the formal operational stage starts at around age 12, when children begin to think abstractly, perform mathematical calculations, engage in creative thinking, use abstract reasoning, and imagine possible outcomes of actions.

The development of students' potential is carried out within the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides educators with the understanding of how we, as educators, can impart knowledge to students by nurturing their thinking abilities. This allows students to become critical, creative, and courageous in expressing their opinions to the general public while still prioritizing good values and behavior in their communication with society. The Merdeka Curriculum can be seen as a program designed to give freedom to educational institutions, teachers, and students to manage learning more flexibly, focusing on the needs of students and encouraging creativity and innovation. The concept aims to facilitate the development of students' potential according to their interests, talents, and abilities.

The characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in madrasahs, include:

1. **Project-Based Learning:** Madrasah students are encouraged to participate in projects that allow them to develop competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. These projects are based on the potential of the students as diagnosed by the educators. The focus is not on concrete results but rather on how educators guide and monitor the collaboration within student groups—whether they respect their peers, work together, and show a strong sense of responsibility in their tasks. This is where attitude cultivation is implemented, alongside fostering critical thinking and good behavior.
2. **Flexibility:** Educators are given the freedom to determine the most suitable teaching methods, with an emphasis on relevant and contextual learning. Of course, this cannot be separated from the learning styles of each student. By understanding these styles, educators can choose the most appropriate teaching methods for their students.
3. **Pancasila Student Profile:** This curriculum aims to shape students' character in line with Pancasila values, such as independence, cooperation, and global diversity. A specific characteristic of madrasahs is the concept of **rahmatan lil alamin**, which emphasizes that students not only excel in worship but also in social goodness. This is a unique feature of madrasahs.
4. **More Comprehensive Assessment:** Assessments are conducted holistically, covering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. The Merdeka Curriculum provides freedom of thought and the expression of different perspectives in observing things. While intellectual intelligence is important, without assessing attitude and the ability to act, students' potential cannot be fully realized.

The Merdeka Curriculum was developed in response to the increasingly dynamic challenges of the times, preparing students to face an uncertain future, and giving educational institutions the freedom to implement curricula that fit the local context and needs.

METHOD

The research method in this study uses a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach, aimed at exploring the existing experiences related to the existence of exploring the potential within students in madrasah institutions. In this case, the author also conducts interviews with educators who implement the Merdeka Curriculum, meaning they serve as mentors for students in applying the curriculum in the madrasah environment. The author continuously seeks information from the students. The subjects of this study are the educators and students who implement the Merdeka Curriculum in the environment. The focus of the study is on the exploration of student potential, and the object of this research is the Merdeka Curriculum in exploring students' potential.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the findings related to the exploration of students' potential within the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasahs, the researcher begins with theories related to the exploration of students' potential in the curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational policy in Indonesia that emphasizes freedom and flexibility in the learning process. Its goal is to facilitate the development of students' potential according to their individual interests, talents, and characteristics. Within the context of potential exploration, the Merdeka Curriculum offers

students a broader opportunity to explore various academic and non-academic fields through a more student-centered learning approach.

In the Merdeka Curriculum, several steps must be implemented by educators to explore students' potential:

1. Differentiated Approach

"Differentiated learning helps students discover their best potential by adapting the learning process to their individual learning styles, pace, and preferences." This means that each student has different potential, and their learning styles also vary. Therefore, the learning process cannot be uniformly applied to every student. Teachers must understand each student's unique abilities, motivating and fostering their potential, not just imparting knowledge.

2. Project-Based Learning

"Project-based learning provides space for students to develop collaborative skills, problem-solving, and creativity, which are essential in an ever-changing world." Students must not only excel academically but also actualize their knowledge in real-world activities. By doing so, they avoid becoming rigid thinkers who solely focus on academic prowess without applying their skills in real life.

3. The Teacher's Role as a Facilitator

"In the Merdeka Curriculum, the teacher acts as a facilitator, providing students the freedom to explore their potential independently with sufficient guidance." Teachers guide learning, offering motivation, challenging tasks, and encouraging students to explore their potential.

4. Character Strengthening through Potential Exploration

The exploration of students' potential in the Merdeka Curriculum aims not only to enhance intellectual capacity but also to build strong characters such as responsibility, independence, and empathy. Teachers must continuously challenge students, helping them face obstacles and grow into resilient individuals with strong, virtuous characters.

Steps educators must take to explore students' potential include:

1. Identifying Students' Interests and Talents: Teachers must initially identify students' interests and talents through observation, aptitude tests, and discussions. This step allows the learning process to be directed according to each student's potential (Tomlinson, 1999). Of course, the first step as an educator in a madrasah is to identify the talents within each student by observing and assessing where the potential of each student lies.
2. Differentiated Learning: After identifying students' interests and talents, the next step is to implement differentiated learning. This includes modifying the content, process, and learning outcomes to suit the diverse abilities of students (Miftakhuddin et al., 2022). After identifying the talents within each student, it will become clear that each student has different potentials, and naturally, their learning styles will also vary. Therefore, educators should implement different variations in the learning process regularly, so that learning can be enjoyable. This aligns with the results of the author's interview with one of the teachers in the madrasah, which revealed that each educator uses varied approaches and teaching methods based on the potential of each student. By using such an approach, motivation will grow, fostering a strong enthusiasm for learning in the students.
3. Providing Freedom in Project Selection: The Merdeka Curriculum encourages students to choose projects or topics relevant to their interests. This freedom fosters their academic

and non-academic potential (Larmer & Boss, 2021). In the Merdeka Curriculum, there is an implementation of project development aimed at fostering positive character traits such as tolerance, perseverance, determination, honesty, humility, non-arrogance, respect for every individual, and self-confidence. This is achieved by allowing students to choose projects that they will develop based on their own potential and capacity (Dogara et al., 2020).

4. **Strengthening Feedback:** Teachers must provide continuous constructive feedback to help students recognize their strengths and areas for improvement. This feedback helps students understand their strengths and areas that need improvement, as well as provides motivation to keep progressing (Black & Wiliam, 2010). After that, as educators, transferring knowledge to the students is expected to result in students receiving the stimulus provided by the educators with happiness, enthusiasm, and extraordinary perseverance. This will lead to further actions to correct any mistakes or errors they encountered, based on their experiences from the project implementation that aligns with their potential. When educators conduct assessments related to this, for example, if there are some mistakes that need to be revised, the students' critical thinking and sharp analysis are also needed, along with a calm and non-emotional attitude, which we also teach here (Huang, 2020). This is indeed related to each student's character, but rest assured that with continuous practice, the desired outcomes can be achieved (Nurhasnah et al., 2020).
5. **Involving Parents and the Community:** Parents and the community should be involved in developing students' potential. Parents can offer insights into their children's talents, while the community can provide rich resources for further exploration (Ikhwan et al., 2020). Teachers are educators that students encounter in formal environments, while students also live within informal environments, where the transfer of knowledge comes from the role of parents in providing various sources of knowledge to their children (Alonso-Tapia & Nieto, 2019).

CONCLUSION

As educators, we must be able to explore the potential of our students. Madrasas in Indragiri Hulu have successfully maximized students' potential, shaping them into resilient, honest, and well-mannered individuals who are beneficial to others. This is achieved through various steps implemented by madrasa teachers, including:

1. Differentiated Approach
2. Project-Based Learning
3. Teachers as Facilitators
4. Character Strengthening through Potential Exploration
5. Identifying Students' Interests and Talents
6. Differentiated Learning
7. Providing Freedom in Project Selection
8. Strengthening Feedback
9. Involving Parents in the Community.

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