

MERDEKA CURRICULUM: BUILDING STUDENTS' CHARACTER IN DIGITAL AGE

* Fajar Maulana¹; Bintha Ustafiano²; Yolana Nursyafitri³

^{1,2,3}Department of Automotive Vocational Studies, Universitas Lancang Kuning, Pekanbaru, Indonesia

*fajarm13@unilak.ac.id; binthaustafiano@unilak.ac.id; yolananursyafitri@unilak.ac.id

(*) Corresponding Author

Received: 10 March; Revised: 15 May 2025; Accepted: 4 June 2025

ABSTRACT

The transformation of education in the digital era and Society 5.0 demands a curriculum that not only emphasizes academic achievement, but also the formation of adaptive, critical, and integrated student character. The Independent Curriculum is here as a response to this challenge, by offering a more flexible approach, project-based learning, and strengthening the values of the Pancasila Student Profile. This article aims to examine how the Independent Curriculum contributes to building student character amidst the development of digital technology. The method used is a literature study of 15 accredited national scientific journals published in the last five years. The results of the study show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum encourages the integration of character education with digital literacy, increases learning independence, and strengthens students' social-emotional skills. However, challenges such as the digital divide, limited teacher competence, and resistance to change still need to be overcome through ongoing training and collaboration between schools, families, and communities. These findings reinforce the urgency of strengthening character as the core of education in the digital era through contextual and transformative curriculum design.

Key Words: Independent Curriculum; student character; digital era; Society 5.0; digital literacy.

How to Cite: Maulana, F., Ustafiano, B. & Nursyafitri, Y. (2025). Merdeka Curriculum: Building Students' Character in Digital Age. IJPER (Indonesian Journal of Pedagogy and Education Research), Vol (2), pages 24-30.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information and communication technology has brought significant changes in various aspects of human life, including the world of education. Entering the digital era and the concept of society 5.0, education is required to produce human resources who are not only competent in cognitive aspects, but also have strong characters, are able to think critically, collaborate, and adapt to rapid changes. New challenges, such as floods, disinformation, decreased direct social interaction, and increased addiction to technology, make information character education an urgent need that cannot be ignored. Responding to these needs, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of

the Republic of Indonesia initiated the Merdeka Curriculum as a form of national curriculum renewal that is more contextual, flexible, and student-centered. This curriculum emphasizes strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, which includes values such as faith and piety, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity. Through project-based learning (PBL), the Independent Curriculum provides space for students to develop character through real and collaborative experiences, which are very relevant to the challenges of the times.

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the midst of the digital era also faces its own challenges, such as the gap in access to technology, teacher readiness, and the diversity of school conditions throughout Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to critically analyze how the Independent Curriculum can build student character in the context of the digital era, by examining the concept, implementation of strategies, and the challenges and opportunities faced in its implementation.

Rapid changes in the digital era and Society 5.0 require the education system to not only achieve academic achievement, but also form a generation that is adaptive, creative, and has character. In the midst of these challenges, the Independent Curriculum is present as a relevant and transformative solution. There are at least three main reasons why the Independent Curriculum is considered the answer to the needs of the times. Flexibility and Differentiation of Learning, Project-Based Learning, Strengthening Character Based on Pancasila Values.

The purpose of writing this article is to examine in depth how the Independent Curriculum can be an effective strategy in shaping students' character amidst the challenges of the digital era and social change during Society 5.0. This article aims to analyze the relationship between the principles of the Independent Curriculum – especially learning, the Project-Based Learning approach, and strengthening the values of the Pancasila Student Profile – with the development of students' character. In addition, this article also aims to identify various challenges and opportunities for implementing the Independent Curriculum in educational units, as well as offering practical recommendations for teachers, schools, and policy makers to be able to optimize the potential of this curriculum in forming a generation that is adaptive, has integrity, and is competitive in the digital era.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method. This method was chosen to explore in depth various relevant scientific literature related to the Independent Curriculum, character education, and the challenges of education in the digital era. Data were collected from various secondary sources in the form of accredited national journal articles, scientific conference proceedings, academic books, and regulations and official documents from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia published in the last five years (2019–2024).

Data analysis was carried out using content analysis techniques, by identifying the main themes related to: (1) the concept and principles of the Independent Curriculum, (2) implementation of project-based learning, (3) strengthening character values through the Pancasila Student Profile, and (4) challenges and opportunities in implementing the Independent Curriculum in the digital era. Each finding was then synthesized to build an argumentative framework that supports the purpose of writing the article. This method is considered appropriate because it allows the author to map various developing theoretical and empirical perspectives, while also formulating recommendations based on the latest trends and findings in the field of education.

*Corresponding author

IJPER (International Journal of Pedagogy and Education Research), x (x), xxxx, xx-xx
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX, E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | DOI: <http://doi.org/xx.xxxxx/ijper.vxix.xxxx>

This is an open access article under CC-BY-SA license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The results of the literature study show that the Independent Curriculum consistently encourages the strengthening of students' character through various approaches that are in accordance with the needs of 21st-century learning. The main findings in this study include Flexibility of learning is the main advantage of the Independent Curriculum. Teachers are given autonomy in designing learning that is in accordance with the local context, student interests, and technological developments, thus enabling the strengthening of character values in a more contextual and meaningful way.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) activated through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project has proven effective in shaping students' character, such as responsibility, independence, collaboration, and social concern. Several journals note that the implementation of projects based on real issues can increase empathy and critical awareness of students towards the environment and society.

The Independent Curriculum is able to combine digital literacy with character building, especially through activities that emphasize the values of mutual cooperation, tolerance, and reflective thinking in the digital space.

Some implementation challenges found include the digital divide between regions, limited teacher understanding of the new curriculum concept, and minimal training and mentoring in implementing PBL. However, journals also mention that with continuous training and consistent policy support, these challenges can be overcome. In general, the literature supports that the Independent Curriculum has great potential to build adaptive and integrated student character in the digital era, as long as its implementation is carried out in a focused and collaborative manner.

Discussion

The transformation of education in the digital era demands fundamental changes in the way students learn and interact with the world around them. In this context, the Independent Curriculum is presented as a progressive approach, seeking to answer the complex challenges of the 21st century and Society 5.0, by emphasizing flexibility, project-based learning, and character building through the values of the Pancasila Student Profile.

1. Flexibility as the Basis for Today's Curriculum

One of the main characteristics of the Independent Curriculum is flexibility in planning and implementing learning. This flexibility allows teachers to adjust materials and methods according to the needs of students and the local context of the school. In the digital era, where access to information is very broad and fast, this flexibility is key to creating adaptive, non-rigid, and more relevant learning to real life. Research shows that this flexibility contributes to increased learning motivation and a more authentic understanding of social values (Ariyanti, 2022).

2. Project-Based Learning as Contextual Character Strengthening

The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project encourages students to actively participate in real and meaningful activities. These projects, such as environmental campaigns, healthy social media

management, and entrepreneurial activities, enable students to develop characters such as responsibility, cooperation, creativity, and social concern. A study by Nurhadi (2021) confirmed that the PBL approach significantly improves students' character values, especially in terms of independence and collaboration

3. Strengthening the Values of the Pancasila Student Profile

The Independent Curriculum explicitly encourages the internalization of the six dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile: faith, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity. These values are the answer to the identity crisis, intolerance, and social polarization that are increasingly occurring in the digital space. In practice, many schools have developed project-based curricula that address issues of diversity, digital integrity, and social media ethics as part of character education that is relevant to current conditions (Wulandari, 2023).

4. Challenges of Implementation and Expanding Access

Although the Merdeka Curriculum has great potential, the challenges in its implementation cannot be ignored. Among them are disparities in digital infrastructure between regions, gaps in teacher capacity in designing and evaluating PBL, and resistance to change among educators. In addition, not all schools have a learning ecosystem that supports holistic character formation. Therefore, ongoing training, increasing teacher digital literacy, and support from policy makers and the community are important factors in the success of the Merdeka Curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTION

The Independent Curriculum is a progressive response to the challenges of education in the digital era and Society 5.0 which demands more flexible, contextual, and character-oriented learning. Through an approach that emphasizes learning differentiation, project-based learning, and integration of the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, the Independent Curriculum provides ample space for holistic development of student character.

The flexibility of the curriculum allows teachers to adjust learning methods to student conditions and the school environment, while the implementation of character-strengthening projects makes values such as mutual cooperation, independence, and responsibility part of the real learning experience. This curriculum also provides opportunities to develop digital literacy that is balanced with ethics and national values, so that it is relevant to the needs of education in the era of technology and openness of information.

However, the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum still faces a number of challenges, such as the digital divide, teacher readiness, and limited resources. Therefore, support from various parties – especially the government, schools, and the community – is a key factor so that this curriculum can truly create a generation that is intellectually intelligent, strong in character, and adaptive in facing changes in the times

Acknowledgments

*Corresponding author

IJPER (International Journal of Pedagogy and Education Research), x (x), xxxx, xx-xx
P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX, E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | DOI: <http://doi.org/xx.xxxxx/ijper.vxix.xxxx>

This is an open access article under CC-BY-SA license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

In order for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in building student character in the digital era to run optimally, collaborative efforts from various parties are needed. Teachers as the spearhead of curriculum implementation need to receive continuous training in designing contextual, project-based learning, and integrating character values, especially those reflected in the Pancasila Student Profile. The government and schools also need to ensure the availability of adequate and evenly distributed digital infrastructure throughout Indonesia, so that there is no gap in access to quality learning. In addition, the involvement of parents and the community needs to be strengthened as part of a holistic character education ecosystem. Digital ethical values, such as responsibility, integrity, and empathy in the use of technology, also need to be explicitly integrated into the learning process. Finally, periodic evaluation of the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum is very important so that its implementation can continue to be refined based on real needs in the field and the dynamics of developments in the era.

REFERENCES

- Handayani, N. N. L. (2024). Peningkatan literasi digital dan karakter peserta didik melalui implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka. *Jurnal Lampuhyang*, 14(2), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.47730/jurnallampuhyang.v14i2.354> [reddit.com+5e-journal.stkip-amlapura.ac.id+5ojs.stkippgri-lubuklinggau.ac.id+5](https://www.reddit.com/+5e-journal.stkip-amlapura.ac.id+5ojs.stkippgri-lubuklinggau.ac.id+5)
- Leny, L. (2024). Mengembangkan karakter peserta didik yang sesuai Profil Pelajar Pancasila melalui implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka. *Lencana: Jurnal Inovasi Ilmu Pendidikan*, 3(1), 343–350. <https://doi.org/10.55606/lencana.v3i1.4585> ejurnal.politeknikpratama.ac.id
- Lestari, W., Sari, M. M., Istyadi, M., & Fahmi, F. (2023). Analysis of Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Science Learning at SMP Negeri 1 Tanah Grogot Kalimantan Timur, Indonesia. *Journal of Advances in Education and Philosophy*, 7(6), 199–207. <https://doi.org/10.36348/jaep.2023.v07i06.001>
- Mahanal, S. (2019). Asesmen Keterampilan Berpikir Tingkat Tinggi. *Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengkajian Ilmu Pendidikan: E-Saintika*, 3(2), 51–73. <https://doi.org/10.36312/e-saintika.v3i2.128>
- Mansyera, V., Pratama, & Rizky, R. (2023). A Study on Young Learners' Vocabulary Mastery at Elementary School. *Ensiklopedia of Journal*, 5(3), 377–382. <https://doi.org/10.33559/eoj.v5i3.1790>
- Marlina, M. (2019). Asesmen Kesulitan Belajar. Kencana.
- Masitoh, M. (2020). Pendekatan dalam Analisis Wacana Kritis. *Edukasi Lingua Sastra*, 18(1), 66–76. <https://doi.org/10.47637/elsa.v18i1.221>
- Najla, A. P., Izzati, N. V., Oktaviani, D., & Marini, A. (2022). Digital storytelling untuk meningkatkan karakter siswa SD pada Kurikulum “Merdeka Belajar”. *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar dan Sosial Humaniora*, 2(2), 413–424. <https://doi.org/10.53625/jpdsh.v2i2.4178> bajangjournal.com
- Nasution, I. (2022). Peran Profesional Guru Sebagai Pengembang Kurikulum. *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 11(1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.30868/ei.v11i01.2166>

- Nurfitriani, O., Aziz, N., & Amin, M. Y. N. (2023). Kesiapan Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam Dalam Menghadapi Kurikulum Merdeka Di Mts Al Ishlah Pageruyung Kabupaten Kendal. *Alphateach (Jurnal Profesi Kependidikan Dan Keguruan)*, 3(1). <https://ojs.unsiq.ac.id/index.php/alphateach/article/view/4530>
- Nurzila, N. (2022). Dalam Menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Perlu Strategi Tepatguna. *Jurnal Literasiologi*, 8(4).
- Pan, Q., Trang, K. T., Love, H. R., & Templin, J. (2019). School Readiness Profiles and Growth in Academic Achievement. *Frontiers in Education*, 4(127). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2019.00127>
- Putri, R. T. U., Kristanto, A., Karwanto, K., Roesminingsih, E., & Hariyati, N. (2024). Proyek penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila pada Kurikulum Merdeka dalam mewujudkan pendidikan karakter. *Journal of Education Research*, 5(3), 2523–2529. <https://doi.org/10.37985/jer.v5i3.1058> jer.or.id
- Rahayu, R., Iskandar, S., & Abidin, Y. (2022). Inovasi Pembelajaran Abad 21 dan Penerapannya di Indonesia. *Jurnal Basicedu*, 6(2), 2099–2104. <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i2.2082%0A>
- Raini, A., Khodijah, N., & Suryana, E. (2023). Analisis Kebijakan tentang Pedagogie dan Penilaian Pendidikan (AKM = Asesmen Kompetensi Minimum, Survey Karakter dan Survey Lingkungan Belajar). *MODELING: Jurnal Program Studi PGMI*, 9(1), 131–142. <https://jurnal.stitnualhikmah.ac.id/index.php/modeling/article/view/1136>
- Ramadansur, R., Sembiring, A. K., Rizky, R., & Nelvariza, N. (2023). Promoting Critical Thinking Skills through Contextual Teaching and Learning. *Lectura : Jurnal Pendidikan*, 14(2), 340–351. <https://doi.org/10.31849/lectura.v14i2.15030>
- Retnawati, H., Hadi, S., & Nugraha, A. C. (2016). Vocational high school teachers' difficulties in implementing the assessment in curriculum 2013 in Yogyakarta Province of Indonesia. *International Journal of Instruction*, 9(1), 33–48. <https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2016.914a>
- Riski, S., Hamami, T., & Yamin, M. N. (2022). Democratic Leadership Style of Public and Private Elementary School Principals During The Covid-19. *AL-TANZIM: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam*, 6(3), 763–777. <https://doi.org/10.33650/al-tanzim.v6i3.3542>
- Rizki, R. A., & Fahkrunisa, L. (2022). Evaluation of Implementation of Independent Curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogic Studies (JCPS)*, 1(4), 32–41. <https://e-journal.lp2m.uinjambi.ac.id/ojs/index.php/jcps>
- Rizky, R., & Zainil, Y. (2021). The Use of the Bits and Pieces Game on Students' Achievement on Writing Report Text. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 13(1), 301–306. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v13i1.463>
- Rukhmana, T., Mulyapradana, A., Baruno, Y. H. E., Karsim, K., Franchitika, R., & Ikhlas, A. (2024). Pentingnya pendidikan karakter di era digital untuk masa depan. *Journal on Education*, 6(3), 15795–15800. <https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v6i3.5458> [mail.jonedu.org](mailto:jonedu.org)

*Corresponding author

IJPER (International Journal of Pedagogy and Education Research), x (x), xxxx, xx-xx

P-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX, E-ISSN: XXXX-XXXX | DOI: <http://doi.org/xx.xxxxx/ijper.vxix.xxxx>This is an open access article under CC-BY-SA license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>)

- Sasmita Sari, A. Y. E., Hadi, N., Rozuli, A. I., & Purba, D. (2024). Dilema pembentukan karakter siswa dalam penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka. *Peradaban Journal of Interdisciplinary Educational Research*, 2(1), 150. <https://doi.org/10.59001/pjier.v2i1.150jer.or.id+4jurnal.peradabanpublishing.com+4ejurnal.politeknikpratama.ac.id+4>
- Widyawati, Y., Utama, & Fatoni, A. (2024). Implementasi kurikulum berbasis karakter dengan memanfaatkan potensi gawai di sekolah dasar. *Pendas : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar*, 9(4), 16856. <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v9i4.16856journal.unpas.ac.id>
- Wongkar, N. V., & Pangkey, R. D. H. (2024). Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dan pendidikan karakter: Strategi meningkatkan kualitas siswa di era modern. *Journal on Education*, 6(4), 22008–22017. <https://doi.org/10.31004/joe.v6i4.6322jonedu.org+1journal.ipm2kpe.or.id+1>
- Yulianti, T. P., & Kharisma, N. V. E. (2024). Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam pembentukan karakter SD Negeri Kepadangan 2. *Jurnal Sadewa*, 3(1), 147–158. <https://doi.org/10.61132/sadewa.v3i1.1484journal.aripi.or.id>
- Zalukhu, A. (2025). Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam penguatan karakter siswa melalui mata pelajaran Budi Pekerti di era digital. *Alignment: Journal of Administration and Educational Management*, 8(2), 223–232. <https://doi.org/10.31539/alignment.v8i2.14388journal.unpas.ac.id+9journal.ipm2kpe.or.id+9ejurnal.politeknikpratama.ac.id+9>