

**“MERDEKA BELAJAR” ADAPTATION OF INDONESIAN LEARNING  
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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**Abstract**

*The Covid-19 pandemic has had a major impact on various sectors, one of which is education. UNESCO's decision to prohibit the face-to-face learning process is in line with the educational policy promoted by Nadiem Makarim, namely "Merdeka Belajar". The focus of this paper describes the adaptation of learning carried out by Indonesia with the policy "Merdeka Belajar" in the learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic, and provides an overview of the potential for further studies related to the same scope. In addition to the literature review that is critical-comparative analysis, the description in this article also presents a number of research results that the author has done. The result of the research conducted is the policy "Merdeka Belajar" which initially reaping the pros and cons in the community, in the end it became one of the solutions for education when facing the Covid-19 pandemic, all of which were based on the use of technology. In the end, education no longer only focuses on the value of learning outcomes, but demands the skills, competencies and character of students.*

**Keywords: merdeka belajar, adaptation of learning, Covid-19 pandemic**

**Introduction**

COVID-19 is a new type of virus that was discovered in Wuhan, Hubei, China in 2019, later given the name Coronavirus disease-2019 which was shortened to COVID-19 (Science, 2020; Hui, et al., 2020). The corona virus continues to mutate until September 8, 2021 with a new type, namely *Covid MU*. Symptoms of COVID are generally 38°C fever, dry cough, and shortness of breath and the worst impact for humans is death. Covid-19, which was originally discovered in Wuhan, China, has now spread widely throughout the world, resulting in a global pandemic and weakening various sectors of life, one of which is the education sector.

Educational facilities around the world in 2019-2021 were closed on a large scale. Including the world of education, Indonesia also feels the impact. The Indonesian government through the education office is trying to make various policies so that teaching and learning

activities continue, even though teachers and students remain at home. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) as a world organization that focuses on education, science, and culture on March 4, 2020 suggested implementing distance learning and opening educational platforms that can be used by schools and teachers. This is intended so that the learning process can continue to take place by reaching students from a distance (UNESCO, 2020).

In connection with these developments, the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia took part in making policies by issuing Circular Letter Number 4 of 2020 concerning the Implementation of Education Policies in the Emergency Period for the Spread of Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19). The Ministry of Religion (Kemenag), which oversees Madrasahs, followed the call by issuing Circular Letter Number B-686.1/DJ.II/PP.00/03/2020.

Learning at home (distance) with internet media was finally used as a solution to replace face-to-face classical learning at school. This situation happened so quickly without pause because the government prioritized the safety of the lives of children and teachers, where schools were seen as one of the clusters for the spread of the virus.

The policy requires educators to be able to design learning media as innovations by utilizing online media (online). All educators must adapt to the digital world. Digital learning (digital learning) or online learning (on the network) is considered the most effective learning in this pandemic period (Chick et al., 2020). Even to support online learning, the Ministry of Education and Culture also provides a special website to be accessed during online learning, namely the learning house portal at <https://learning.kemdikbud.go.id/>. In addition to the official portal provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, there are also digital platforms in the field of paid education, such as: Zenius, Ruang Guru, and Kelas Pintar. Various websites that provide various educational platforms with open access and free status, provide opportunities for teachers and students to improve digital literacy.

Coincidentally or not, the occurrence of the Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the implementation of educational policies promoted by Nadiem Makarim who is often referred to as "Learning Independence". Freedom to learn was originally promoted by Nadiem Makarim as the first step that education in Indonesia must take in facing the era of the industrial revolution 4.0. Where in the development of the Industrial Revolution Era 4.0, everyone is required to be able to operate digital technology, because the peculiarities of industry 4.0 are the use of digital media, computerization, big data analysis, and artificial intelligence (AI).

When this education policy was launched on December 11, 2019 by the Indonesian minister of education - Nadiem Makarim, this policy became a hot topic of

discussion in the public sphere and was considered by the public to be quite revolutionary so that it reaped many pros and cons in it. This policy is considered imposing and not ready to be implemented in Indonesia because the educators are not ready and the digital technology infrastructure in schools is maximal. But who would have thought that the policy that initially reaped the pros and cons in the community would then be able to become one of the solutions for education in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, all of which are based on the use of technology. In the end, education no longer only focuses on the value of learning outcomes, but demands the skills, competencies and character of the students themselves because of the rapid development of the world with various kinds of changes.

## Discussion

### The concept of "Merdeka Belajar"

The concept of "Merdeka Belajar" which was coined by Nadiem Makarim in his speech at the 2019 National Teacher's Day (HGN) event, according to R. Suyanto Kusumaryono, has several important points that make it one of the educational policies that revolutionized previous education policies that have run in Indonesia. An important concept in this new policy is *First, the* concept of "Freedom of Learning" is the answer to the problems faced by teachers in educational practice. *Second, the* burden of teachers is reduced in carrying out their profession, through freedom of independence in assessing student learning with various types and forms of assessment instruments, freedom from various burdensome administrative processes, freedom from various pressures of intimidation, criminalization, or politicization of teachers.

*Third, it* opens our eyes to find out more about what obstacles are faced by teachers in learning assignments at school, starting from the problem of accepting new students (input), teacher administration in teaching preparation including lesson plans, the learning process, as well as evaluation problems such as USBN. -UN (output). *Fourth, teachers* who are at the forefront of

shaping the nation's future through the learning process, it is important to be able to create a more pleasant learning atmosphere. in the classroom, through an educational policy that will later be useful for teachers and students.

*Fifth*, when Nadiem Makarim gave a speech at the National Teacher's Day (HGN) event, it was assumed that it would no longer be an idea but rather a policy to be implemented. Especially then at the beginning of 2020 there was a worldwide pandemic. Where the concept of independent learning must be applied immediately. Where policy processes, methods, and implementation become autonomous for educational groups.

### Education Policy in Merdeka Belajar

Free learning is one of the programs launched by the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Nadiem Makarim. This step was taken because the quality of education in Indonesia needs to be improved. Freedom to learn on their own has the meaning of freedom of thought and freedom of learning for students (Arif, 2020). Where in "*Merdeka Belajar*" the teacher is no longer the *center* but as a mediator and facilitator and makes students the center of learning.

With this new policy in the world of education, it is hoped that learning objectives can be achieved optimally, students are more actively involved, teachers are able to carry out their competencies, and students are accustomed to contributing and giving opinions in response to the learning they have received. Merdeka Belajar itself has important policies related to learning at the elementary school, junior high scho

#### a. USBN Replaced

Previously, the concept of implementing the National-Based School Examination refers to the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture (Permendikbud) Number 53 of 2015 concerning Assessment of Learning Outcomes by Educators and Education Units in Basic Education and Secondary Education. However, based on

Permendikbud Number 43 of 2019 concerning the implementation of the National Examination, especially in Article 1 paragraph 1, it states that the exams held by the education unit are an assessment of learning outcomes by the education unit which aims to assess the achievement of graduate competency standards for all subjects. Furthermore, Article 5 paragraph 1 states that the form of examinations held by the education unit is in the form of portfolios, assignments, written tests, or other forms of activities determined by the education unit in accordance with the competencies measured based on the National Education Standards. Then Article 6 paragraph 2 states that the graduation of students is determined by the education unit or educational program concerned. Thus, referring to Permendikbud No. 43 of 2019 concerning the Implementation of Examinations organized by the Education Unit and the National Examination, it shows that schools and teachers are independent in assessing student learning outcomes.

In 2021, USBN at the elementary, middle, and high school levels will be replaced with assessments conducted only by school. The following exams are intended to assess the competence of students who This can be done in the form of a written test or other more advanced assessment such as portfolios and assignments (group assignments/works write). USBN's budget is directed to be diverted to develop the capacity of teachers and schools to improve quality learning, so that teachers and schools are more independent in assessing learning outcomes.

#### b. The National Examination (UN) has been replaced by the Minimum Competency Assessment.

The National Examination is an activity measuring the achievement of graduate competence in certain subjects nationally by referring to graduate competency standards in accordance with Permendikbud Number 53 of 2015 concerning Assessment of Learning Outcomes by Educators and Education Units in Basic Education and Education Middle

School which was later changed to Permendikbud Number 43 of 2019 concerning the Implementation of Exams held by the Education Unit and National Examination.

Minister Nadiem sees the current situation that the UN material is too dense so that students and teachers tend to test mastery of content, not reasoning competence. In addition, the National Examination is considered a burden for students, teachers and parents because it is an indicator of student success as individuals. Therefore, in 2020, the UN was held for the last time. As a substitute for the UN, in 2021 the UN will be changed to a Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey.

The assessment is not carried out based on subjects or mastery of curriculum materials as applied in the National Examination so far, but rather does a mapping of the two minimum competencies of students, namely in terms of the ability to reason using language (literacy), the ability to reason using mathematics (numbering), and strengthening character building. This assessment is carried out on students in the middle levels such as grade IV SD, class VIII SMP and Class XI SMA with the aim of encouraging teachers and schools to map learning conditions and evaluate so that they can improve the quality of learning.

The results of this assessment test are not used as a benchmark for student selection to the next level. However, this policy direction refers to the international level, following the assessment benchmarks contained in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) but full of local wisdom. For PISA competencies, it is more focused on assessing reading, mathematics and science skills which are applied to countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Meanwhile, the TIMSS competence emphasizes the assessment of mathematics and science abilities as an indicator of the quality of education which is part of the

International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

### c. Shortened RPP

Based on Circular Letter of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 14 of 2019 concerning Simplification of RPP, includes: (1) RPP preparation is carried out with efficient, effective and student-oriented principles; (2) of the 13 components of the RPP contained in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 22 of 2016 concerning the Standards for the Primary and Secondary Education Process, namely school identity, subject identity, class, subject matter, time allocation, learning objectives, basic competencies, learning materials, learning methods, learning media, learning resources, learning steps and assessment of learning outcomes are simplified into core components consisting of learning objectives, learning steps and assessments that must be carried out by teachers and other components only as complementary; (3) schools, groups of subject teachers in schools, Teacher Working Groups/ Subject Teacher Consultations (KKG/MGMP) and individuals can freely choose, create, use and develop lesson plans formats independently for maximum student learning success. With the independence in preparing lesson plans, it is hoped that there will be more interaction between teachers and students who are more active, dynamic with a learning model that is not rigid.

This policy is due to the Implementation of Learning (RPP) so far, teachers are directed to follow the RPP format rigidly. But later, based on this free learning policy, teachers will be free to choose, create, use and develop lesson plans. In the past, lesson plans had too many components and teachers were asked to write very detailed ones (one lesson plan document could be more than 20 pages). But later it will be shortened, namely the RPP containing learning objectives, learning activities and assessments. RPP is only 1 page. So that the writing of lesson plans is carried out efficiently and effectively which

makes teachers have time to prepare and evaluate the learning process itself.

#### **d. PPDB (New Student Admission) Based on Zoning**

Previous PPDB is regulated in Permendikbud Number 14 of 2018 concerning New Student Admission (PPDB). Furthermore, it is regulated in Permendikbud Number 44 of 2019 concerning New Student Admission (PPDB) 2020, as stated in Article 11, in terms of percentage the distribution includes: (1) for zoning lanes of at least 50 percent; (2) affirmation path of at least 15 percent; (3) five percent transfer route for parent/guardian duties; and (4) the achievement path (the remaining quota from the implementation of the zoning, affirmation and transfer of parents/guardians (0-30 percent). This is clearly different from the PPDB policy in previous years, there are at least two important things: (1) quota acceptance of new students through the achievement pathway, originally 15 percent, now to 30 percent; and (2) there is a new addition to the PPDB pathway, namely through the affirmation channel, which is intended primarily for those who hold the Smart Indonesia Card (KIP).

2020 still uses the zoning system, but in its implementation it is more flexible, with the aim of being able to accommodate inequality in access and quality in various regions. Most importantly, in the proportion of finalization, the regions are authorized to determine and determine their zoning areas. In general, the zoning system in the PPDB has been good, because it can encourage the elimination of discrimination for members of the community to attend the best schools which determines the final proportion and determines the zoning area," said Nadiem. (Director General of Higher Education, 2020).

#### **The Merdeka Belajar Policy that is in harmony with Industry 4.0 and the Learning *New Normal***

Corona virus or better known as Covid-19 has caused tremendous unrest for the world's population, including Indonesia.

The impact of this pandemic paralyzes various sectors ranging from economic, social to education which has an important role for the progress of a country. Around 215 countries from all over the world have been exposed to the COVID-19 virus, so countries in the world, including Indonesia, have implemented a policy *Work From Home (WFH)*. According to UNESCO, around 1,576,767,997 students were forced to carry out learning at home, this number is predicted to continue to increase because the spread of COVID-19 is still ongoing (UNESCO, 2020).

Various ways have been taken by the government to avoid further deterioration. One of the steps taken is to start adapting to the Covid-19 situation or pandemic with the term *New Normal Era*. The new normal era in the field of education using the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* is increasingly being implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Where schools are empowered to use emergency curricula, schools are given the flexibility to choose the appropriate curriculum for the learning needs of their students. However, education must continue in order to achieve quality Indonesian human resources.

An education system with new ways is needed to realize the improvement of society or to support the need for quality and superior human resources. Peter Fisk said there are nine trends or tendencies related to education 4.0 (Peter Fisk in Delepiter Lase, 2019: 29-30) which are also aligned with the new normal learning model. Where in this new normal era, education still has to run based on digital technology. The nine learning tendencies that are in line with the *new normal* are

#### **a. Studying at different times and places**

Students will have more opportunities to study at different times and places. E-learning facilitates opportunities for distance and self-directed learning.

#### **b. Individual learning**

Students will learn with learning tools that are adaptive to their abilities. This shows that students at higher levels are

challenged with more difficult tasks and questions when after passing a certain degree of competence. Students who have difficulty with the subject will get the opportunity to practice more until they reach the required level. Students will be positively reinforced during their individual learning process. This can result in a positive learning experience and will reduce the number of students who lose confidence in their academic abilities. Here, teachers will be able to clearly see which students need help in which areas.

#### c. Students have choices in determining how they learn.

Although each subject taught aims at the same goal, the way to that goal may vary for each student. Similarly, with an individual-oriented learning experience, students will be able to modify their learning process with the tools they feel are necessary for them. Students will study with different tools, programs and techniques based on their own preferences. At this level, the combination of face-to-face learning and distance learning (*blended learning*), reversing the classroom and bringing your own learning tools (*bring your own device*) forms an important terminology in this change.

#### d. Project-based learning

Today's students must be able to adapt to project-based learning, as well as in terms of work. This suggests that they must learn how to apply their skills in the short term to various situations. Students should already be acquainted with project-based learning in secondary schools. This is the time when organizing, collaboration, and time management skills are taught to students so that each student can then use them in their next academic career.

#### e. Field experience

Technological advances enable effective domain-specific learning, thereby providing more space for acquiring skills that engage student knowledge and face-to-face interactions. Thus, the field experience will be deepened through courses or exercises. Schools will provide more opportunities for students to acquire real-

world skills that are representative of their work. This suggests curriculum design needs to provide more space for students to learn more hands-on through field experiences such as internships, mentored projects and collaborative projects.

#### f. Interpretation of data

The development of computer technology eventually took over the tasks of analysis performed manually (mathematically), and immediately handled any statistical analysis, describing and analyzing data and predicting future trends. Therefore, students' interpretation of these data will become a much more important part of future curricula. Students are required to have the skills to apply theoretical knowledge to numbers, and to use their skills to make inferences based on logic and data trends.

#### g. Multiple Assessments

Measuring students' abilities through conventional assessment techniques such as question and answer would be irrelevant or insufficient. Assessments must change, students' factual knowledge can be assessed during the learning process, and the application of knowledge can be tested as students work on their projects in the field.

#### h. Student involvement Student

involvement in determining learning materials or curriculum is very important. Students' opinions are taken into account in designing and updating the curriculum. Their input helps curriculum designers produce contemporary, cutting-edge and high-value curricula.

#### i. Mentoring

Mentoring or providing guidance to students is very important to build student learning independence. Mentoring is the basis for student success, thus requiring teachers to become facilitators who will guide students through their learning process. The teacher is no longer the center of the learning process, but as a companion and directing the student learning process.

### **Indonesian Language Towards Merdeka Belajar in the future *New Normal***

The existence of this industrial revolution era makes innovation and change on a large scale and rapidly which directly changes all systems, arrangements to new ways. Where technology shifts the performance and role of humans in doing various things. Everything can be done with machines even in searching for information or learning.

Language is not spared in the development of technology that causes various languages to quickly enter the interaction and communication of people in Indonesia. Starting from English, Japanese, Korean, Arabic and so on. We can prove this from the environment, nowadays we are used to using "Good Morning", "Annyeonghaseyo", as a greeting sentence when meeting or communicating with friends, relatives, family and other people. Not only that, nowadays words are starting to appear *slang* and non-standard when people use social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others. For example, the use of the word "no" is written "No", "No, no". If this is allowed, then Indonesian will lose its authenticity and role as the national language and identity of the Indonesian nation. In fact, Indonesian is learned from the most basic level to university.

To maintain this position, it is necessary to have innovation and collaboration between education and technology. Therefore, the "Merdeka Belajar" program is the answer to this problem. Merdeka belajar is basically intended to provide freedom not only for teachers, but also students to think or work to the fullest. In practice, technology can be an ideal partner to accompany the learning process. For Indonesian, there are various kinds of texts that are studied and are less desirable as subjects. So there needs to be an overhaul in learning. Where usually Indonesian is impressed by learning to tell stories, coupled with Covid-19 which never ends, making children lazy to learn.

Steps that can be taken by teachers are to bring Indonesian language learning

closer to the surrounding environment, one of which is the use of technology and media. For example, when the material being discussed is about news texts, the teacher can direct children to see news from TV, YouTube, radio, newspapers or other social media. Teachers can also stimulate children's enthusiasm in learning by giving assignments to involve their social media. Like uploading interviews as reporters or as news anchors that they make on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tik-tok, or YouTube channels their respective.

But there is one thing that is important to remember, because this pandemic requires no face-to-face meetings, teachers should not just give assignments to students. For several meetings, you can use face-to-face applications such as zoom, skype, GoMeetings, Facetime and more. This is because face-to-face meetings are needed to maintain children's discipline, harmony, interaction between teachers and students and as a medium for teachers to monitor understanding and tasks that have been given previously.

### **Conclusion**

Conclusion of the concept of merdeka belajar is an offer in reconstructing the national education system. Rearrangement of the education system in order to meet the changes and progress of the nation that can adapt to changing times. By way of restoring the essence of true education, namely education to humanize humans or liberating education. In the concept of merdeka belajar, between teachers and students are subjects in the learning system. This means that the teacher is not used as a source of truth by students, but teachers and students collaborate to move and seek the truth. This means that the teacher's position in the classroom is not to plant or uniform the truth according to the teacher, but to explore the truth, reasoning power and critical students see the world and phenomena.

The opportunity for the development of the internet and technology is a momentum for merdeka belajar. Because it can hack into a rigid or non-

liberating education system. This includes reforming the workload of teachers and schools, which are too devoted to administrative matters. Therefore, the freedom to innovate, learn independently, and be creative can be done by the education unit, teachers and students.

In the learning process, an educational ecosystem is developed that facilitates the growth and development of students' reasoning, character, innovation, independence, comfort, and expertise. So independent learning can form superior or quality resources to complete educational opportunities in the Industrial 4.0 era with the aim of advancing the nation and state.

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