



Deconstructing the Merdeka Curriculum Policy: Assessing Its Relevance to Contemporary Pedagogical Paradigms

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Abstract

This study critically deconstructs the Merdeka Curriculum policy documents to assess their conceptual alignment with contemporary pedagogical paradigms. While existing literature primarily focuses on field implementation, this research addresses the scarcity of critical policy analysis by examining the ideological discourses embedded within the curriculum. Employing a qualitative library research design through Critical Policy Analysis, the study conceptually juxtaposes official national regulatory documents against theories of critical pedagogy, social constructivism, and connectivism. The findings reveal a profound ideological compromise: the curriculum's emancipatory rhetoric is heavily overshadowed by neoliberal and centralistic bureaucratic agendas. Complex pedagogical concepts, such as differentiated instruction and character education, are structurally reduced into rigid administrative checklists and quantitative rubrics. Consequently, the policy creates an illusion of decentralization, leading to the "app-ification" of education, the deskilling of teachers, and the emergence of an affective panopticon that triggers performative morality among students. The study concludes that genuine pedagogical transformation cannot occur within compliance-based surveillance frameworks. It implies an urgent need for policymakers to dismantle performative assessment metrics and restore the epistemological autonomy and professional dignity of educators as true curriculum co-creators.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum; Critical Policy Analysis; Contemporary Pedagogy; Educational Bureaucracy; Neoliberalism.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini secara kritis mendekonstruksi dokumen kebijakan Kurikulum Merdeka untuk menakar keselarasan konseptualnya dengan paradigma pedagogi kontemporer. Sementara literatur terdahulu cenderung berfokus pada evaluasi implementasi lapangan, penelitian ini mengisi celah analisis kebijakan kritis dengan menguji diskursus ideologis di balik teks kurikulum. Menggunakan desain studi kepustakaan kualitatif melalui Analisis Kebijakan Kritis, penelitian ini menyandingkan dokumen regulasi nasional resmi dengan teori pedagogi kritis, konstruktivisme sosial, dan konektivisme. Hasil penelitian mengungkap adanya kompromi ideologis yang mendalam: retorika emansipatoris kurikulum sangat dibayangi oleh agenda birokrasi yang neoliberal dan sentralistik. Konsep pedagogi yang kompleks, seperti pembelajaran berdiferensiasi dan pendidikan karakter, direduksi secara struktural menjadi daftar periksa administratif dan rubrik kuantitatif yang kaku. Akibatnya, kebijakan ini menciptakan ilusi desentralisasi, memicu "aplikasi-fikasi" pendidikan, degradasi otonomi guru (deskilling), dan kemunculan panoptikon afektif yang mendorong moralitas performatif pada peserta didik. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa transformasi pedagogi yang sejati tidak dapat terjadi di dalam kerangka pengawasan berbasis kepatuhan. Temuan ini mengimplikasikan perlunya pembuat kebijakan untuk membongkar metrik penilaian performatif dan mengembalikan otonomi epistemologis serta martabat profesional pendidik sebagai rekan pencipta kurikulum.

Kata Kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka; Analisis Kebijakan Kritis; Pedagogi Kontemporer; Birokrasi Pendidikan; Neoliberalisme.

Introduction

The rapid transformation of the 21st-century educational landscape demands robust policy responses to address increasingly complex learning needs. In Indonesia, this response is manifested in the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* (Emancipated Curriculum) (Sari, 2023). Promoted as a massive paradigm shift, this educational policy introduces progressive concepts such as differentiated instruction, flexible learning outcomes, and the cultivation of character through the Pancasila Student Profile. The primary motivation behind this curriculum reform is to mitigate learning loss, foster critical thinking, and adapt to the dynamic demands of the modern era. However, educational policy shifts of this magnitude require more than just administrative restructuring; they demand a solid, coherent grounding in educational philosophy to ensure that the proposed changes are fundamentally transformative rather than merely procedural (Nugroho, 2023).

Existing literature has extensively explored the *Merdeka Curriculum* since its inception. Several prominent studies have highlighted its practical implications, focusing primarily on teacher readiness, instructional adaptation, and the challenges of executing differentiated instruction in diverse classroom environments. Current scholarship effectively maps the empirical and operational dimensions of the curriculum, showcasing both the administrative hurdles faced by educators at the grassroots level and the potential benefits of project-based learning on student engagement (Yantoro, 2023).

Despite the abundance of implementation-based studies, there is a notable limitation in the current scholarly discourse. The majority of previous researches tend to accept the theoretical claims of the policy at face value, focusing heavily on evaluating the "how-to" aspects of its implementation. Consequently, there is a scarcity of critical literature that deconstructs the official policy documents themselves to evaluate whether the overarching concepts promoted by the government genuinely align with established contemporary pedagogical paradigms, such as social constructivism, connectivism, and critical pedagogy (Tuerah, 2023).

To address this gap, this paper shifts the analytical lens from field implementation to critical policy analysis. The scientific merit and novelty of this study lie in its deconstructive approach, treating the national curriculum documents not merely as absolute administrative guidelines, but as texts laden with specific educational ideologies. By employing a critical library research method and conceptual-comparative analysis, this paper juxtaposes the official regulations of the *Merdeka Curriculum* against contemporary pedagogical theories. Preliminary findings of this study highlight the conceptual tensions between the curriculum's emancipatory rhetoric and the reality of its standardized assessment frameworks, revealing the complexities of translating modern pedagogy into a centralized national policy (Zakariyah, 2025). Therefore, the objective of this study is to

critically deconstruct the *Merdeka Curriculum* policy documents and assess their relevance and conceptual alignment with contemporary pedagogical paradigms.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach with a library research design, systematically structured to ensure that the analytical process can be reproduced by future researchers. The primary design of this research is Critical Policy Analysis. In its implementation, no experimental manipulation was conducted; rather, the research object was observed naturalistically as the policy texts were officially published by the government (Mestika Zed, 2008).

The main analytical focus relies on qualitative content analysis, wherein the researcher deconstructs national education policy documents and examines their conceptual alignment with contemporary educational theory literature. Given that this research is entirely literature-based, human subjects were substituted with textual documents acting as primary and secondary data sources. Inclusion criteria for primary data eligibility were strictly limited to official regulatory documents regarding the *Merdeka Curriculum* published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia. These include the Academic Draft of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, the Learning and Assessment Guidebook (PPA), and active Ministerial Regulations related to National Education Standards (Mestika Zed, 2008).

Meanwhile, secondary data acting as the conceptual analytical tool were limited to major textbooks and internationally reputable journal articles published within the last ten years. This secondary literature was required to specifically discuss contemporary pedagogical paradigms, such as social constructivism, critical pedagogy, and differentiated instruction theory. Opinion pieces, blog posts, or literature lacking a peer-review process were strictly excluded from this study. To ensure the precision and validity of the findings, the analytical procedure was executed in three stages.

The first stage was data collection through documentation, which involved sorting key articles and paragraphs within the policy documents that contain pedagogical directives. The second stage was the textual deconstruction process, in which the researcher coded key conceptual terms such as "Kemerdekaan Belajar" (Emancipated Learning) or "Profil Pelajar Pancasila" (Pancasila Student Profile) to uncover their underlying philosophical and ideological assumptions. In the final stage, the researcher conducted a conceptual comparison by juxtaposing the deconstructed meaning of the policy texts against contemporary pedagogical literature. This comprehensive step was designed to reveal the areas of alignment, potential meaning reduction, and conceptual gaps between government regulatory documents and the standards of pure academic theory (Mestika Zed, 2008).

Results and Discussion

Based on the application of an extensive, systematic, and in-depth critical content analysis of the constellation of authoritative regulatory documents of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Emancipated Curriculum) which includes the Academic Draft of the Merdeka Curriculum (2020), the Learning and Assessment Guidebook (PPA), as well as various derivatives of the Ministerial Regulations of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology concerning Graduate Competency Standards, Content Standards, and Process Standards this study identifies five main thematic discourses (Fathoni et al., 2025). This analysis does not merely read what is explicit in the policy texts (textual analysis) but also traces the ideological discourses operating behind them (discourse analysis), in line with the tradition of Critical Policy Analysis developed by scholars such as Stephen Ball or Rizvi and Lingard. Educational policy is viewed not as a neutral document sterile from interests, but as an arena of ideological contestation, power struggles, and value negotiations among the state, the market, and society (Sulaeman & Ridlwan, 2025).

The identified themes reveal a highly complex and often paradoxical constellation regarding ideological tensions, pseudo-alignments, and sharp conceptual contradictions between the emancipatory claims in the government's policy rhetoric and its ontological reality when tested against the metrics of contemporary pedagogical paradigms. Holistically, the results of this deconstruction indicate that instead of presenting a radical and liberating philosophical transformation as claimed by the state apparatus, this educational policy is more often trapped in an ambiguous pragmatic compromise (Rohani, Muhammad Win Afgani, 2025). The *Merdeka* Curriculum attempts to marry the demands of liberating modern pedagogy with the legacy of a technocratic educational bureaucracy from the past, which is fundamentally still highly centralized, elitist, and oriented toward managerial compliance. An in-depth, comprehensive, and critical discussion of these five themes is elaborated analytically as follows.

Deconstructing the Concept of "Emancipated Learning": Between the Emancipation of Critical Pedagogy and the Hegemony of Educational Neoliberalism

The policy documents of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, particularly in their introductions and the Academic Draft, explicitly, aggressively, and repetitively mobilize the terminology of "Emancipation" (*Kemerdekaan*). This concept, through public discourse engineering, is directly associated with granting professional autonomy to educational institutions and teachers, as well as opening a space for cognitive flexibility for students. State narratives construct this policy as a salvation narrative, a strategic effort to release educators from the shackles of rigid administration, mechanistic Lesson Plans (RPP), and a previous curriculum structure deemed overly crowded, which triggered learning loss (Prasetyo, 2024).

The lexicon utilized in this policy campaign seems, at first glance, to resonate strongly with the tradition of Critical Pedagogy championed by revolutionary educational thinkers like Paulo Freire, Michael Apple, and Henry Giroux. In that tradition, true education must be emancipatory; it aims to spark conscientization (critical awareness of reality), liberate learners from the oppression of social class structures, economic power relations, and political injustices, and transform the classroom into an arena of radical democracy where teachers and students act as historical subjects, not merely objects reproduced by the system. Paulo Freire strictly rejected the "banking concept of education," where students are treated as passive, empty vessels waiting to be filled with deposits of knowledge from the state or the teacher. Rhetorically, the *Merdeka* Curriculum claims to reject this banking concept by promoting student-centered learning (M. S. Hidayat, 2025).

However, a meticulous textual deconstruction of the background narratives, operational objectives, and success indicators of this policy reveals a sharp and alarming shift, reduction, and even distortion of the meaning of "emancipation." The autonomy promised to teachers within the *Merdeka* Curriculum ecosystem is, in reality, merely instrumental and methodological autonomy, not philosophical autonomy. Teachers are indeed granted procedural leeway to independently select learning objective pathways, compile or modify teaching modules available on digital platforms, and determine instructional rhythms based on initial cognitive diagnostic assessments (teaching at the right level). Yet, they are granted absolutely no epistemological autonomy to redefine the ultimate purpose of education itself. The policy, through the National Education Standards, still absolutely positions the state as the sole authority defining what constitutes legitimate knowledge and illegitimate knowledge through the establishment of national Learning Outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran*) (Halijah, 2025).

Furthermore, critical analysis shows that the rationality hiding behind the veil of "Emancipated Learning" has an ontological proximity that is far more cohesive with Human Capital Theory, driven by neoliberal logic, rather than with pure critical pedagogy. The texts in the Academic Draft are heavily laden with pragmatic diction linking educational transformation with the urgency to respond to the disruptions of the 21st-century global job market, the necessity to improve a nation's comparative economic competitiveness obsessively measured by OECD's PISA scores, and the creation of graduates possessing vocational agility. This aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction; the curriculum is not designed to dismantle the structure but to adapt students to the existing economic structure.

In this landscape of global educational commodification, the transcendental meaning of "emancipation" is reduced merely to the freedom and flexibility for schools to produce *homo economicus* a workforce that can adapt more rapidly to fluctuations, artificial intelligence, and capitalist industry appetites. Students are emancipated not to become agents of social transformation who dare to question

ecological structural inequalities, systemic poverty, or oligarchic injustices, but are engineered through the curriculum to become individuals who are more productive, agile in innovating for capital accumulation, competitive, and employable within the giant machinery of the global economy. This paradox clearly confirms that the *Merdeka* Curriculum operates within a manipulative philosophical dualism: it cleverly adopts the language of emancipation from the progressive left to appear populist and humanist, but fundamentally, its operational instruments are directed to serve, perpetuate, and facilitate the market economy efficiency agenda of the neoliberal right.

The Fatal Reduction of Differentiated Instruction: The Collision of Social Constructivism with the Shallow Bureaucratization of the Classroom

The most fundamental operational pillar, massively campaigned for and mandated by the Learning and Assessment Guidebook (PPA) of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, is the obligation to implement differentiated instruction. The regulatory documents normatively instruct every educator—regardless of educational level or geography to design instructional processes that responsively, dynamically, and empathetically accommodate the diversity of cognitive readiness, unique interests, and learning profiles of students within the same classroom. Theoretically, this directive possesses a highly robust, tested, and undeniable epistemological grounding in the paradigm of Social Constructivism. Specifically, it is rooted in the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the masterpiece of Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky. This theory postulates that meaningful learning only occurs when the level of instructional difficulty is precisely tailored to the distance between a student's current independent problem-solving ability (actual development) and their potential cognitive development achieved through the guidance of adults or peers, bridged via highly subtle, gradual, and adaptive pedagogical scaffolding (N. Hidayat et al., 2025).

Carol Ann Tomlinson, as a modern pioneer of differentiated instruction literature and praxis, also consistently emphasizes the need for organic, dynamic differentiation that does not permanently label students. Authentic differentiation must encompass simultaneous modifications to content, the process of digesting information, performance products, and the learning environment, all of which must be based on continuous and ongoing formative assessments conducted by the teacher (Tomlinson, 2001).

However, a critical analytical review of how this government technical guide is institutionally understood, socialized by regional facilitators, and forcibly executed at the grassroots level (schools) reveals a highly fatal and shallow theoretical simplification. When this highly complex cognitive psychology and instructional design paradigm is forcibly married to the language of state surveillance bureaucracy, differentiated instruction tragically loses its philosophical soul and is reduced to mere rigid, technical-administrative "grouping tasks." This

policy directive, whether realized or not by its formulators, has actually legitimized and fertilized the return of deterministic student labeling and categorization practices based on the VAK (Visual, Auditory, Kinesthetic) learning styles taxonomy (M. S. Hidayat, 2025).

In the discourse of cutting-edge pedagogy and contemporary cognitive science literature as thoroughly deconstructed by meta-analysis figures like Paul Howard-Jones or John Hattie exclusive instructional grouping based solely on learning styles has been empirically debunked as a mere educational neuromyth. Global educational meta-analyses firmly find no valid clinical evidence that restricting instructional channels only to a student's innate sensory tendencies (e.g., giving only pictures to visual learners, only podcasts to auditory learners) enhances efficacy and long-term memory retention. Conversely, such practices confine student cognition, depriving them of exposure to the complex multimodality reasoning challenges that are essentially crucial for building brain plasticity (Newton & Miah, 2017).

Moreover, in the realm of teaching specific disciplines that demand high-level pedagogical and psycholinguistic depth such as the dynamics of mother tongue dialect interaction with target languages in literacy classes, code-mixing phenomena, or the complexities of acquiring advanced syntax differentiation practices require a teacher's Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK) sharpness that is far more sublime than merely instructing some students (visual group) to make Canva infographic posters and others (auditory group) to conduct recorded interviews for the same competency substance (Andi Patimbangi, Kasmah, 2023).

Worse still, this policy is entirely blind to the material and sociological realities of classrooms in Indonesia. In public schools with teacher-student ratios often reaching 1 to 36 or 40, demanding perfect individualized differentiation without the support of teaching assistants or an overhaul of class ratios is an oppressive bureaucratic utopia. When the national educational policy hierarchy enforces a material and technocratic differentiation proof format for the purposes of supervisor visitations, it instantly triggers an explosion of mass-scale administrative fatigue for teachers nationwide. Educators are trapped in exhausting performative demands to produce variations of Lesson Plans (Teaching Modules), student worksheets, and rubric instruments that artificially look different on paper, purely to meet the compliance standards of principals and regional education supervisors. This entire administrative circus is executed without touching the essence of cognitive load theory (John Sweller), which is actually what the student's brain needs when digesting complex problems.

This ontological gap vividly proves that forcibly dragging high-caliber pedagogical theories from Western textbooks into a rigidly standardized and monitored national regulatory instrument runs an enormous risk of assassinating the philosophical depth of the theory itself. The state has effectively transformed what should be an organic, empathetic, and humane interaction in the classroom

into a row of soulless bureaucratic checkboxes that ultimately kill a teacher's intuition, sensitivity, and pedagogical reasoning.

The Illusion of Educational Decentralization Autonomy: Structural Tensions in the Regime of National "Learning Outcomes" (CP)

The third analytical thematic focus specifically dissects the structural tensions, cognitive dissonance, and inherent polemics between the rhetoric of educational decentralization which is the best-selling tagline of the *Merdeka* Curriculum and the reality of state power centralization that is still very strong, and even taking deeper roots, within the national graduation competency determination system. The Emancipated Learning policy took steps claimed by its apparatus to be highly courageous and radical by completely dismantling the architecture of the past curriculum (Curriculum 2013). This policy officially abolished the framework of Core Competencies (KI) and Basic Competencies (KD), which had been deemed discrete, fragmented per semester, rigid, and constraining, replacing them with long narrative descriptions called Learning Outcomes *Capaian Pembelajaran*. Unlike KD, these CPs are arranged continuously and longitudinally based on the cycle of psychological developmental phases (starting from Phase A in early elementary school to Phase F at the end of high school vocational school) (Senatama & Kartono, 2023).

The logical rationalization persuasively offered and echoed in the Ministry's Academic Draft is to provide a much more flexible time span and "breathing room" for students (generally allocated two to three years to complete each phase) to master a material substance in depth (deep learning) without being constantly rushed, choked, and threatened by artificial and pseudo annual curriculum target completions (Senatama & Kartono, 2023).

If interpreted optimistically through the lens of early progressive pedagogy (as conceptualized in John Dewey's educational philosophy regarding the continuity of experience) or analyzed using the knife of modern connectivism and neurocognitive developmental theories, the transition from annual tiered structures to this phase span system is undoubtedly a highly progressive and humane curricular design leap. This phase-based approach academically respects and acknowledges the diversity of biological and psychological facts that the rhythm of human cognitive maturation never occurs uniformly, does not run linearly and mechanistically like a conveyor belt in a factory, and certainly cannot be confined by the temporal division of the academic calendar, which is essentially a human-made sociological construct (Fitriani et al., 2023).

However, when the framework of Critical Policy Analysis is applied to peel back the deepest layers of this policy's implementation, a structural paradox immediately emerges that is academically impossible to ignore. Critical pedagogy paradigms in the 21st century intrinsically demand genuine decentralization of educational goals an epistemological autonomy so that the curriculum becomes

highly responsive, relevant, and ecologically contextualized to the specific sociocultural habitats, local challenges, and geographical demographics of students (grounded education). In reality, the anatomical dissection of the Content Standard regulatory documents shows that the formulation of the Learning Outcomes (CP) texts which fundamentally dictate what is deemed important and unimportant for all children of the nation from Sabang to Merauke to learn remains compiled, decided, standardized, and decreed in an authoritarian and unilateral manner from the apex of the central government hierarchy in the capital city (Senatama & Kartono, 2023).

This macro policy design, in its sociological essence, is not sharing power, but merely designing a space of illusory autonomy for educational practitioners. Educational institutions at the regional autonomy level and unsung hero teachers in remote classroom cubicles are indeed treated to the luxury of an illusion of freedom "in the middle zone" of the educational process. They are granted the freedom to design various Project-Based Learning or Problem-Based Learning models, choose exotic pedagogical methods, and break down CPs into their own versions of Learning Objective Flows (ATP). Yet, their necks remain bound by the strong chains of the state "at the end zone" of the process an absolute obligation, without any room for negotiation, to ensure that all students, regardless of their sociological class background or school facilities, must be able to achieve the Learning Outcomes specifications universally dictated by the state. This CP flexibility also collapses instantly when faced with the reality of Computer-Based National Assessments (ANBK), which continue to use national-scale cognitive assessment standards.

In the review of the sociology of knowledge and curriculum politics proposed by Michael Apple and Basil Bernstein through the concept of the *pedagogic device*, the state in the *Merdeka* Curriculum is proven to not relinquish an inch of its hegemony over the control of defining "official knowledge." The state merely shifts its operational tactics by transferring and decentralizing the "managerial workload," "responsibility for success," and "instructional achievement methods" onto the shoulders of teachers. The teacher's position, thereby, undergoes an essential degradation process (deskilling), transforming from an intellectual into merely an advanced "operational instructional manager" or curriculum technician demanded to constantly sweat for methodological innovations. However, they are systematically denied their dignity, prerogative rights, and intellectual standing as true curriculum co-creators entitled to determine the direction of educational goals. This acts as a devastating antithesis to the principles of contemporary pedagogical emancipation, while also proving that the camouflage adaptation of modern Western theory phrases in the *Merdeka* Curriculum regulations has not been able to, or perhaps was never designed to, tear down the authoritarian character of the bureaucratic legacy of Indonesia's education system.

The Quantification of Character and the Emergence of an Affective Panopticon in the "Pancasila Student Profile"

The fourth aspect, which becomes the fundamental critical vortex of this text deconstruction process, is dissecting the philosophical architecture of the assessment system within the *Merdeka* Curriculum, with an analytical spotlight specifically on the co-curricular instrument, the Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (P5). In the noble conceptual framework outlined in official guideline documents, the government proudly advocates for an evaluation paradigm shift that sounds highly revolutionary and student-centered: shifting gradually from the absolute dominance of final-semester summative assessments that judge a child's future and are fraught with psychological pressure (assessment of learning), toward strengthening a culture of formative assessments that empower, guide improvement, and celebrate the process (assessment for learning and assessment as learning) (Sari, 2023).

This noble vision is a highly precise conceptual resonance with the main pillar of constructivist learning theory, which consistently views evaluation not as an instrument for issuing a final death sentence on a learner's failure, but as an ongoing diagnostic instrument that becomes an inseparable pulse of the meaning-making process. Furthermore, the intervention of introducing the P5 project curriculum aims to liberate moral, ethical, and character education from the confines of specific theoretical subjects that often feel preachy and tedious (such as Civics or Religious Education). P5 attempts to make it an integrated, cross-disciplinary empirical practice, focused on the tangible manifestation and actualization of six absolute virtues: faith and piety to God Almighty and noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), independence, critical reasoning, and creativity (Hanifah, Wayan Suastra, 2025).

Although the foundational philosophical basis of this P5 concept is highly humanistic, very progressive, and instantly reminds academics of the Aristotelian virtue ethics educational tradition focusing on forming good *habitus*, a deconstructive analysis of the technical reporting guidelines for assessment results at the end of a phase reveals a massive latent danger in the form of the trap of evaluative reductionism. In the view of one of the most influential contemporary educational philosophers, Gert Biesta, educational institutions inherently possess three overlapping domains of function: qualification (mastery of academic knowledge and work skills), socialization (integrating students into the cultural value system and societal traditions), and subjectification (the process of becoming an autonomous, free, and morally responsible human being). The P5 concept is ostensibly designed to break into these realms of subjectification and socialization (Biesta, 2020).

However, when these essential human character values which are highly abstract, multidimensional, internal, and laden with philosophical debate are forced

into the machinery of a systemic bureaucracy that demands administrative proof (audit culture), the government takes a shortcut by mandating a quantitative reporting product in the form of a structured, uniform, and nationally standardized project report card. The highest human virtues, the truth of which can truly only be assessed through deep qualitative observation, pressure-free organic participation, the growth of inner awareness, and a longitudinal process from birth to death without a deadline, are ultimately forced to be sliced up and brutally operationalized into shallow and hierarchical ordinal scale assessment rubrics. Teachers are obliged to assign categorical labels ranging from "Not Yet Developed," "Beginning to Develop," "Developing as Expected," to the peak predicate "Highly Developed" to a student's inner qualities (Indah Fitriyani Dewi, Edi Fitriani Afriza, 2024).

This mechanistic and reductionist phenomenon is what critical sociology of pedagogy refers to as the disaster of character and moral quantification and instrumentalization. When viewed carefully through the framework of existentialist pedagogy, Immanuel Kant's ethics, and the phenomenological tradition, the deepest moral character of humanity can never and is highly inappropriate to be measured, mapped, and gauged through the linear matrix of an achievement report card, akin to a nurse measuring a child's height and weight at a clinic. The arrogant ambition of state policy to measure the depth of "global diversity tolerance" in a child's heart, or to validate the level of sincerity in a student's "mutual cooperation," and then insert them into numbered or lettered rubric boxes to be neatly, periodically, and bindingly reported to the state, has paradoxically turned the clock of history backward. This plunges Indonesia's character education ecosystem back into the mud of the most primitive theories of objectivism and classical behaviorism (such as B.F. Skinner's operant conditioning) (Dalimunthe, 2025).

As a logical and sociological consequence of this forced reporting policy, a mass epidemic was born in schools called *performative morality*. In Michel Foucault's disciplinary theory concept, students who realize that their character is being assessed will modify their behavior solely to please their evaluators. Our students will cleverly learn to execute maneuvers of fake virtuous performance, polishing themselves to appear highly tolerant when observers are present, or demonstrating heroic mutual cooperation participation amidst school project celebrations, purely to meet the assessment threshold demands of the facilitator teacher's rubric, not as the sweet fruit of authentic internalization of noble values into their souls. Rather than freeing students from the tight grip of academic numerical grade hegemony, the technical policy of P5 character reporting ironically and tragically expands and perfects the reach of the state bureaucracy's panopticon (a giant invisible watchtower), forcibly penetrating the most private, sacred, and absolute realms of the affective dimension, spirituality, and moral autonomy of learners.

Ideological Bias of Technocentrism, the App-ification of Education, and the Dangerous Commodification of Teacher Professional Development

The fifth analytical finding, arguably the one that most represents the defining characteristic, identity, and invasion of 21st-century devices into the sacred realm of national pedagogy, relates closely to how massive, aggressive, systematic, and hegemonic the integration of digital tool instruments is within the architecture of the *Merdeka Curriculum's* implementation ecosystem. In sharp and asymmetrical contrast to all past curriculum implementation models (such as KBK, KTSP 2006, or Curriculum 2013), where the dissemination process was still highly conservative relying on the distribution of stacks of printed physical books and documents and conventional cascade training models (Training of Trainers) conducted face-to-face, moving sluggishly from the capital trickling down to remote areas the survival spirit of the *Merdeka Curriculum* today relies entirely on and is artificially kept alive by the heartbeat of information technology algorithms (Anggriyashati & Victorynie, 2025).

This is specifically manifested and controlled by the state through a digital super-app named the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform (PMM). All ministerial policy release instruments, technical guidebook documents, video materials, and strategic ministerial speeches consistently position and idolize the existence of PMM as the sole absolute central platform ecosystem. PMM becomes the digital temple for millions of Indonesian teachers to access asynchronous independent training modules, download millions of multimedia teaching libraries, showcase teaching best practice portfolios, and engineer professional collaboration networks in learning communities. Through the affirmative lens of contemporary Connectivism theory coined by digital-era academic George Siemens, utilizing internet network ecology to facilitate knowledge distribution, tear down hierarchical barriers, and facilitate experience exchange peer-to-peer (directly from teachers to fellow teachers in other regions) without caring in the slightest about the geographical demarcation lines of the archipelago is a brilliant and futuristic governance and remote instructional design breakthrough. Utopian and philosophical, this network approach has the potential to break the unilateral monopoly of truth and the centralization of scientific authority from rigid structural institutions, placing the epicenter of learning radically, freely, and decentrally across the vast expanse of the open cyberspace (Sumarna & Nurul, 2024).

Although its initial vision seemed so promising and utopian for advancing competency, further critical analysis radically dissecting the sociological and ontological foundations of this big data-based digital policy implementation reveals the birth of a horrifying national-scale pathological tendency: the bias of technosolutionism. This concept, harshly criticized by Evgeny Morozov, refers to an acute simplification and fallacy among the policymaking elite who naively assume that injecting a single sophisticated application built by elite developers will magically

solve and cure the deeply rusted, complicated systemic diseases of education ranging from the issue of teachers' low pedagogical literacy capabilities, the reluctance to read lengthy academic literature, to the glaring disparity gap of physical infrastructure between coastal, mountainous, and urban areas (Adib, 2025).

This technocentric policy paradigm not only displays technological arrogance but is also highly ahistorical because it consciously turns a blind eye to and ignores the harsh sociological material realities on the ground; such as the saddening facts regarding the sharp inequality of internet signal penetration (the digital divide), the uneven capacity for critical digital literacy experienced by elderly educators in remote areas, and the complexity of full-time teaching loads coupled with the crushing economic burden of living costs faced by contract (honorarium) teachers. Furthermore, the concept championed by Shoshana Zuboff regarding surveillance capitalism seems to be creeping into the world of our public educational bureaucracy governance with a new face (Sumarna & Nurul, 2024).

More terrifying is its impact on the psychology and intellectual depth of the educator profession. Deconstructive observation of the massive utilization phenomenon of the PMM app in the field uncovers a dark reality and academic dystopia that the cyber platform which in its original blueprint was conceptualized as an organic, supportive, autonomous digital connectivism garden that upholds freedom of expression very quickly mutated into a high-level, tyrannical, and algorithmic digital surveillance tool of bureaucracy. Phantom administrative obligations which uniquely and cunningly are often not officially written in central ministry circulars and regulations but are brutally enforced as completion requirements at the level of regional education agencies constantly demand teachers, even robbing them of their night rest and weekends, to continuously chase the achievement of "Training Topic Certificates." Teachers are demanded to produce and polish "Real Action" (*Aksi Nyata*) demonstration videos that are often devoid of reflective meaning, and must meet quantitative metrics of periodic login percentages and daily click participation ratios within the application's algorithm system (Sumarna & Nurul, 2024).

This structured and multi-layered coercive practice has directly triggered a mass commodification disaster of the sacred essence of teacher professional development. As a result of this cold app-bureaucracy regime, educators tragically experience what Karl Marx called the phenomenon of alienation (total estrangement) from the deepest essence of the product of their work and their profession as nurturers of human souls. They are forced to submit, learn artificially, complete thousands of pages of online post-test exams while searching for instant answer keys, and stay up all night compiling PDF portfolios on PMM, not driven by the calling of conscience or the sacred urge of pedagogical reflection to solve the cognitive freezes and care for the psychological crises of their students in the real

interaction of the classroom. They endure this digital exhaustion purely due to existential terror and mass panic to submit to the data-mining system algorithm god, in order to secure fulfillment points for the Employee Performance Target (RHK) data integration of the state apparatus e-Kinerja. Failure to meet these digital algorithmic standards can directly hold hostage and withhold the disbursement of their Teacher Professional Allowance (TPG), which is highly crucial as a life support and the economic lifeline of their families amid inflation (Anggriyashati & Victorynie, 2025).

This massive, systemic, and exhausting sociological phenomenon aligns strongly with and justifies the critical warnings of global educational academics like Neil Selwyn regarding the dangers of the app-ification of education systems and the datafication of the teaching profession. In this era, the dignity, integrity, national authority, scientific autonomy, and space for contemplative intellectual depth of a nation's educator are thoroughly reduced to nothing more than statistical ratios of lines of code and data footprints represented by green checkmarks on the monitor screen of a central server controlled absolutely by the bureaucratic Ministry regime. The grand narrative of 21st-century digital liberation and transformation exalted in policy rhetoric was apparently not designed at all to liberate the spaces of thought and restore the joy of the educator before their students, but rather functions effectively as sophisticated infrastructure to digitize, automate, accelerate, and tighten the siege of a rigid, colonial-style managerial bureaucratic chain of command.

Critical Synthesis and Conclusion of the Discussion Analysis

As a final synthesis encapsulating all the findings of this literature policy review exploration, a sharp and uncompromising textual deconstruction of the entire anatomy of legal documents and policy guidelines of the *Merdeka* Curriculum affirms a crucial theoretical conclusion. Lexically, grammatically, and in normative theoretical construction, this national educational reform policy must be acknowledged and appreciated for having successfully and extensively adopted cutting-edge vocabulary, noble principles, and progressive emancipatory values from a variety of contemporary pedagogical paradigms recognized and respected by the international community ranging from sociocultural constructivism, the critical pedagogy of critical theorists, differentiated instruction theory, to digital-era connectivism. However, this analysis reminds us that the sociological reality of education on the ground is never as simple as rows of beautiful, promising words on the pages of Academic Drafts and Ministerial Regulations.

In the long and complex process involving stages of hybridization, discourse translation, and assimilation of these pure pedagogical theories when forcibly fed into the grinding machine of positive legal instruments and a thick state bureaucratic culture that remains highly top-down and centralistic, ideological compromises, theoretical reductions, philosophical substance trimming, and even

massive-scale meaning distortions have occurred. The sacred and radical concept of emancipated learning was apparently articulated very carefully to remain within the concrete fences of the pragmatic economic utility needs of neoliberal groups. The complex and deep psychological philosophy of differentiated instruction has been sadly dwarfed into mere administrative formalities of classroom categorization and Lesson Plan paperwork. The euphoric claim of the decentralization revolution in educational goals instantly falls apart against the rigid defense of the centralized National Learning Outcomes determined by the central ministry. The mission of moral liberation and character education is ironically quantified mercilessly into rigid rubrics that breed behavioral falsehoods. And ultimately, the sweet promise of autonomous digital transformation euphoria has in reality been dragged down into the mud of mass bureaucratic panopticon surveillance logic through the screens of gadgets in the hands of our exhausted teachers.

Therefore, for the *Merdeka* Curriculum to truly possess genuine spiritual resonance, epistemological honesty, and ontological relevance in the future with the prestigious contemporary pedagogical paradigms that have always been its mainstay jargon, the government as the holder of hegemonic authority is demanded to act more chivalrously, be open to academic criticism, and courageously undertake a process of total demystification of the ambiguities and paradoxes of its own policies. The state must cease its neurotic obsession with excessive managerial control instruments, radically sever the chains of performative panopticon assessment interventions and cruel, inhumane administrative burdens, and with profound humility, return the sacred space of epistemological autonomy and professional dignity entirely to the masters of the classroom: the teachers. No curriculum reform will ever succeed in touching the essence of intellectually enriching the life of the nation if teachers are not returned to their original lineage as transformative intellectuals and organic architects of civilization, but instead continue to be degraded and positioned merely as white-collar pawn workers, app dashboard administrators, and mere robotic executors of technical instructions from a giant, hierarchical, and empathy-devoid policy machine. Education must return to its essence: humanizing humans, which begins by humanizing its educators first.

Conclusion

This study concludes that while the *Merdeka* Curriculum lexically adopts progressive pedagogical paradigms, its structural reality remains deeply entangled in a neoliberal, technocratic, and centralistic bureaucracy. By shifting the analytical lens to critical discourse analysis, this research reveals that the curriculum's emancipatory rhetoric is overshadowed by the "app-ification of education" and centralized digital surveillance. Instead of granting true epistemological autonomy,

the policy reduces complex philosophical concepts into rigid administrative checklists, which ultimately deskills teachers, triggers performative morality among students, and creates a mere illusion of decentralization under strict state hegemony.

To actualize its emancipatory claims, policymakers must dismantle these rigid performative assessment metrics and restore the professional dignity of teachers as organic co-creators of the curriculum rather than mere instructional technicians. Furthermore, future research should move beyond textual analysis to capture the lived realities of educators on the ground. Empirical investigations employing critical ethnographic or phenomenological approaches are highly recommended to explore how grassroots teachers actively negotiate, resist, or subvert these digital surveillance mechanisms and administrative paradoxes in their daily pedagogical praxis.

Author Contribution Statement

SMD conceived the presented idea, developed the theory, and wrote the main manuscript. AS verified the analytical methods and supervised the findings of this work. Both authors discussed the results and contributed to the final manuscript.

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