

From Competency-Based to Merdeka Curriculum: A Comparative Study Based on Richards' Curriculum Development Theory

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Abstract

This study presents a comparative analysis of Indonesia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and the newly implemented Merdeka Curriculum, utilizing Richards' curriculum development theory as a theoretical framework. The research aims to identify the systematic differences between the two curricula and to evaluate how these differences influence teaching practices and learning experiences in Indonesian schools. To achieve this, a qualitative research design was employed, combining document analysis, semi-structured teacher interviews, and classroom observations conducted across multiple Indonesian schools. The analysis examines both curricula across six key dimensions: goals, content, pedagogy, assessment, flexibility, and teacher autonomy. Findings reveal that while the CBC emphasizes standardized competencies and measurable outcomes, the Merdeka Curriculum offers greater flexibility, student-centered approaches, and enhanced teacher autonomy. The transition reflects Indonesia's educational reform agenda to address 21st-century learning needs while respecting local contexts. Richards' framework proves valuable in identifying systematic strengths and weaknesses in both approaches. Although the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates significant potential for fostering creativity and critical thinking, its implementation faces challenges related to resource distribution and teacher readiness. This study contributes to the literature by providing an empirically grounded comparison of two major national curricula, offering analytical insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and educators engaged in curriculum reform efforts in Indonesia and comparable educational settings.

Keywords: *Keywords: curriculum development, Competency-Based Curriculum, Merdeka Curriculum, Richards' theory, educational reform, Indonesia*

Introduction

Over the past two decades, Indonesia's educational landscape has undergone remarkable transformation, with curriculum reform serving as a central strategy for improving the quality and relevance of education nationwide. The transition from the *Competency-Based Curriculum* (CBC) to the *Merdeka Curriculum* in 2022 marks one of the most substantial shifts in national education policy, reflecting broader global movements toward learner-centered and flexible approaches to teaching and learning (Michie, 2019). This transformation highlights a growing recognition that effective education must not only transmit knowledge but also cultivate creativity, adaptability, and critical thinking

skills essential for participation in an increasingly complex and interconnected world (Priestley, 2025)

Since its introduction in 2004, the CBC has structured Indonesia's education system around the mastery of core competencies encompassing spiritual, social, cognitive, and psychomotor domains (Martatiyana et al., 2023). Designed to standardize learning outcomes and ensure measurable competencies, it represented a shift from content-based education toward outcomes-oriented learning. However, various studies have shown that while the CBC improved assessment clarity and curricular coherence, its implementation often produced rigid and fragmented learning experiences (Musthafa & Hamied, 2014). Teachers reported administrative overload due to excessive documentation requirements, while classroom instruction tended to focus on fulfilling competency checklists rather than fostering deep understanding and creativity (Saksono et al., 2022). Similar findings have been noted by other researchers, who argue that CBC implementation frequently emphasized procedural compliance over pedagogical depth (Nugroho, 2018) and created tensions between national standards and local classroom realities (Jaya & Sari, 2020). Additionally, limited teacher professional development and inconsistent resource availability across regions further exacerbated disparities in CBC enactment (Prasetyo & Retnawati, 2017). As a result, the CBC was criticized for limiting pedagogical innovation and for its insufficient responsiveness to local diversity and student individuality within Indonesia's vast and heterogeneous education system.

In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology launched the *Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka)* in 2022 as part of the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) policy framework. Philosophically rooted in the idea of educational freedom, this curriculum aims to empower teachers and students to co-construct learning processes that are meaningful, contextual, and character-driven (RISET, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, streamlined subject content for deeper exploration, local adaptation of up to 20% of the curriculum, and the cultivation of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* a set of competencies aligned with Indonesia's foundational values. It also seeks to reduce administrative burdens on teachers by simplifying lesson planning and evaluation requirements. Early evaluations suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum enhances student engagement, promotes active learning, and motivates teachers to innovate; however, issues of unequal resource allocation, digital readiness, and teacher capacity remain significant barriers to its equitable implementation (Widodo, 2023; Widodo, 2024).

This shift from CBC to the Merdeka Curriculum must be understood within the broader global context of curriculum reform. Around the world, educational systems have been rethinking how best to prepare students for uncertain futures by balancing standardization with flexibility and knowledge transmission with the development of critical competencies. As (Priestley, 2025; Priestley et al., 2021) note, curriculum reform is rarely a purely technical process; it is deeply ideological, reflecting societal values, political agendas, and cultural priorities. Thus, analyzing Indonesia's current reform requires not only a descriptive comparison but also a theoretical framework capable of illuminating the interrelationships between curriculum components, policy intentions, and classroom realities.

In (Richards, 2017) curriculum development theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework for this purpose. Originally designed for language education, Richards' model is highly adaptable across disciplines and educational levels. It identifies five core components *needs analysis, situation analysis, syllabus design, methodology, and evaluation* that together form a dynamic and cyclical process of curriculum development.

Richards emphasizes the interdependence of these elements and the necessity of continual reflection and adaptation to evolving contexts. This systemic perspective offers a structured yet flexible tool for examining how curricula function as interconnected systems shaped by pedagogical, institutional, and sociocultural forces.

The theoretical significance of Richards' model becomes more apparent when viewed against earlier curriculum theories. (Tyler, 2013) rational model, though foundational, approached curriculum development through a linear sequence of objectives, experiences, organization, and evaluation an approach criticized for neglecting contextual complexity (Pinar, 2019). Later theorists such as (Grundy, 1987) and Doll (1993) redefined curriculum as a social and evolving practice rather than a fixed product, highlighting the dynamic interactions between teachers, learners, and content. (Richards, 2017) extended these perspectives by integrating systematic design with contextual responsiveness, making his framework particularly relevant for analyzing contemporary reforms such as Indonesia's transition from CBC to Merdeka Curriculum.

Drawing from Richards' theoretical lens, this study compares the CBC and the Merdeka Curriculum across six analytical dimensions adapted to the Indonesian context: curriculum goals, content, pedagogy, assessment, flexibility, and teacher autonomy. These dimensions align with Richards' original components while providing greater specificity to address issues central to Indonesia's reform agenda especially the emphasis on educational freedom, contextualization, and professional empowerment.

Despite growing interest in the Merdeka Curriculum, scholarly comparisons between it and the previous CBC remain limited. Existing discussions tend to focus on policy implementation or classroom case studies without systematically analyzing the theoretical and structural contrasts between the two frameworks. This gap underscores the need for a comprehensive analysis that not only contrasts design principles but also considers their implications for teaching practice, stakeholder perception, and educational equity.

Accordingly, this research aims to analyze and compare Indonesia's Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) and Merdeka Curriculum using Richards' curriculum development theory as a guiding framework. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How do the CBC and the Merdeka Curriculum differ across key dimensions of curriculum design?
2. What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each approach according to educational stakeholders?
3. What practical implications arise from this transition for policy development and classroom practice in Indonesia?

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to understanding curriculum reform as both a pedagogical and ideological process. By systematically comparing these two major curriculum frameworks, the research provides insights that may guide policy refinement, inform teacher professional development, and enhance implementation strategies. Moreover, the findings aim to enrich international discourse on curriculum design in multicultural and developing contexts, where the tension between standardization and autonomy continues to shape educational reform in the twenty-first century.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a comparative case study design to examine the *Competency-Based Curriculum* (CBC) and the *Merdeka Curriculum* in Indonesia. The comparative case study approach was chosen because it allows for a detailed, contextually rich examination of multiple cases while maintaining focus on specific dimensions of comparison (Yin, 2018). This design enabled the researcher to analyze how each curriculum functions in practice and how contextual factors shape their implementation. The research was conducted over a 12-month period, from January to December 2023, coinciding with the national transition phase in which both curricula were simultaneously implemented in different schools.

Data Collection

To ensure comprehensive and credible findings, multiple data sources were utilized through methodological triangulation (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

1. Document Analysis:

Official curriculum documents, teacher guides, assessment rubrics, and policy briefs related to both CBC and the Merdeka Curriculum were systematically collected and analyzed. These materials were obtained from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's official website (*Kemendikbudristek*) and selected regional education offices. Document analysis was guided by (Richards, 2017) curriculum development theory to identify differences in goals, structure, methodology, and evaluation components.

2. Interviews:

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 45 participants representing key educational stakeholders:

- a. 15 curriculum developers from the Ministry of Education
- b. 15 school principals (8 from CBC schools and 7 from Merdeka Curriculum schools)
- c. 15 teachers (8 from CBC schools and 7 from Merdeka Curriculum schools)

The interviews explored participants' experiences with curriculum design and implementation, perceptions of strengths and weaknesses, and encountered challenges. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for participants to elaborate on their insights while maintaining thematic consistency (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

3. Classroom Observations:

Sixty classroom observations (30 in CBC schools and 30 in Merdeka Curriculum schools) were conducted across four provinces in Celebes, at both primary and secondary levels. Observations focused on teaching methodologies, student engagement, and fidelity of curriculum implementation. Observation notes were recorded systematically using an observation checklist derived from (Richards, 2017) dimensions of curriculum development.

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure representation of diverse educational contexts (Patton, 2015). Schools were selected based on geographic diversity, socioeconomic context, and level of curriculum implementation. CBC schools were chosen from those that had not yet transitioned to the new curriculum, while Merdeka

Curriculum schools were selected from early adopters identified by the Ministry of Education. Participants were selected for their direct involvement in curriculum development, administration, or classroom practice, ensuring informed perspectives across levels of educational governance.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed through a thematic approach informed by (Richards, 2017) curriculum development framework. The process followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model of thematic analysis, which included:

1. Familiarization with data through repeated reading of interview transcripts, field notes, and documents.
2. Development of a coding framework based on six comparative dimensions derived from Richards' model: curriculum goals, content, pedagogy, assessment, flexibility, and teacher autonomy.
3. Systematic coding of all qualitative data using *NVivo 12* software to ensure consistency and transparency in analysis (Bonnycastle, 2015; Brandão, 2015; Kvale, 2009).
4. Identification of themes, patterns, and contrasts within and between cases (Miles et al., 2014).
5. Triangulation of findings across interviews, observations, and documents to enhance credibility and validity (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016).

The triangulated themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and alignment with the study's analytical framework. Cross-case synthesis was then performed to compare how each curriculum demonstrated similarities and differences across the six analytical dimensions. This step allowed the researcher to generate a deeper understanding of how curricular design, implementation practices, and contextual conditions interacted within and across the two cases (Yin, 2018). Finally, the emergent findings were interpreted in relation to existing theoretical perspectives on curriculum development and policy implementation. This interpretive phase ensured that the analysis not only described observable patterns but also provided a theoretically grounded explanation of the systemic factors influencing curriculum enactment in Indonesian schools. Together, these analytic procedures support the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study's conclusions

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the researcher's institutional review board prior to data collection. All participants received information sheets and provided written informed consent in accordance with ethical standards for educational research (Race & Vidal-Hall, 2019) (Calder, 2020). Participant identities were anonymized, and data confidentiality was strictly maintained. The study also complied with ethical guidelines issued by the *Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia*, including official permission from participating schools and regional education authorities.

Limitations

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, the research was conducted during a transition period between curricula, which may not capture the fully stabilized implementation of either approach. Second, ongoing disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic during data collection may have influenced classroom practices and curriculum

delivery (UNESCO, 2021). Finally, the sample primarily included urban and semi-urban schools, limiting generalizability to remote or rural regions where resource disparities and teacher readiness may differ significantly. Despite these limitations, the findings offer valuable insights into Indonesia's evolving curriculum landscape and provide a foundation for future nationwide evaluations.

Findings

Differences between CBC and the Merdeka Curriculum across Key Dimensions of Curriculum Design

Analysis of official curriculum documents, classroom observations, and stakeholder interviews revealed six major dimensions of difference: curriculum goals, content structure, pedagogy, assessment, flexibility, and teacher autonomy corresponding to the adapted framework of (Priestley, 2025; Priestley et al., 2021; Richards, 2017) curriculum development theory.

Curriculum Goals

The CBC emphasized measurable attainment of competencies within the domains of spirituality, social attitude, knowledge, and skills (Humes & Priestley, 2021; Martatiyana et al., 2023; Michie, 2017, 2019; Prastowo, 2014; Priestley, 2025; Priestley et al., 2021). These were organized hierarchically from *Kompetensi Inti* (Core Competencies) to *Kompetensi Dasar* (Basic Competencies), producing a standardized and outcomes-based system. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum prioritizes the holistic development of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* students who embody moral integrity, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (RISET, 2022). Document analysis and interview data indicate that this shift represents a move from outcome-oriented goals to character-oriented transformation, aligning with global calls for value-based education (Priestley, 2025; Priestley et al., 2021). Principals and teachers consistently reported that the new goals better reflect 21st-century competencies but require deeper pedagogical support to be effectively translated into practice.

Content Structure

Under CBC, learning materials were dense, fragmented, and heavily prescribed, leading to content overload and limited integration across subjects. Teachers described the curriculum as “too crowded and hard to finish within the semester.” The Merdeka Curriculum simplifies content by identifying *Essential Learning Outcomes* and granting schools flexibility to design local enrichment modules. Observations confirmed that Merdeka classes tended to focus on fewer topics but explored them through interdisciplinary projects. This content streamlining aligns with (Richards, 2017) *syllabus design* component, which encourages coherence and manageability of content. The shift allows deeper exploration but demands higher teacher capacity in contextual curriculum design.

Pedagogy

Classroom observations across 60 sessions revealed that CBC classrooms were largely teacher-centered, dominated by lecture and drill activities focused on competency mastery. In contrast, Merdeka classrooms incorporated project-based learning, discussion circles, and collaborative problem-solving, leading to higher student participation and engagement. Teachers implementing Merdeka reported feeling “freer to innovate” and “more connected to students’ interests.” The data suggest that the

pedagogical orientation has shifted from transmissive to constructivist, reflecting the *methodology* dimension in Richards' theory. However, teachers from rural or under-resourced schools expressed concerns about training gaps and time constraints for preparing project-based tasks.

Assessment

CBC assessment practices relied heavily on quantitative scoring and standardized tests to evaluate competency attainment. Conversely, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes formative and authentic assessment through student portfolios, project rubrics, and narrative feedback. Principals noted that this new system "humanizes evaluation" but "increases workload" due to the demand for qualitative documentation. According to (Richards, 2017), evaluation should serve both accountability and learning purposes. The Merdeka model is more aligned with this dual function, though successful implementation depends on digital support systems and teacher literacy in alternative assessment methods. The following are the assessment results;

Table 1. Comparison of Assessment Types: CBC vs. Merdeka Curriculum

Assessment Type	CBC	Merdeka Curriculum
Standardized written tests	85%	30%
Portfolio	10%	45%
Project-based assessment	5%	50%
Narrative feedback	2%	60%

This table illustrates the contrasting assessment orientations between the CBC model and the Merdeka Curriculum. The CBC approach remains predominantly test-driven, with 85% reliance on standardized written examinations. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum adopts a more diversified and holistic assessment framework, characterized by increased use of portfolios (45%), project-based tasks (50%), and narrative feedback (60%). These figures reflect a paradigmatic shift from summative, score-oriented evaluation toward formative and authentic assessment practices.

Table 2. Principals' Perceptions of Merdeka Curriculum Assessment

Statement	Mean Score
"The Merdeka assessment is more humane"	04.06
"The workload increases"	04.03
"Better digital support is needed"	04.07
"Teachers are prepared for alternative assessment"	03.02

This table presents principals' evaluative judgments regarding the assessment system within the Merdeka Curriculum. Respondents expressed strong agreement that the revised assessment model is more humane ($M = 4.6$), while simultaneously acknowledging an increase in teacher workload ($M = 4.3$). The highest-rated item, the need for enhanced digital support ($M = 4.7$), underscores infrastructural and technological gaps that may hinder implementation. Teacher readiness for alternative assessment methods received a moderate rating ($M = 3.2$), indicating ongoing challenges in professional capacity-building.

(Scale 1–5: 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

Table 3. Time Investment for Assessment: CBC vs. Merdeka

Assessment Component	CBC	Merdeka
Score processing	12 minutes	22 minutes
Documentation	8 minutes	18 minutes
Feedback provision	5 minutes	15 minutes
Total	25 minutes	55 minutes

(minutes per student per week)

This table compares the estimated time allocation required from teachers to complete assessment-related tasks. Under the CBC model, teachers spend approximately 25 minutes per student per week on assessment processes. In the Merdeka Curriculum, this duration increases to 55 minutes, largely due to more extensive documentation and qualitative feedback requirements. These findings align with principals' perceptions that, although pedagogically beneficial, the Merdeka assessment model imposes substantially greater administrative and instructional workload.

Table 4. Sample Data on Student Competency Achievement

Student	CBC Score (quantitative)	Merdeka Score (rubric + portfolio)
A	78	85
B	82	88
C	70	80
D	90	92
E	75	83

The table displays sample student performance using two distinct assessment frameworks. Across all cases, scores derived from the Merdeka Curriculum are consistently higher than those obtained through CBC's predominantly quantitative scoring. This pattern suggests that authentic assessment mechanisms such as rubrics and portfolio evaluation capture a broader range of student competencies, thereby yielding more comprehensive and potentially more accurate measures of learning attainment.

Table 5. Teachers' Readiness for Alternative Assessment Practices

Assessment Aspect	Readiness Score
Rubric literacy	68
Portfolio development	62
Project-based assessment skills	71
Narrative feedback writing	58
Digital platform proficiency	65

(Readiness scale: 0–100)

This table summarizes teachers' perceived readiness to implement various components of alternative assessment required by the Merdeka Curriculum. The highest readiness levels are reported for project-based assessment skills (Score = 71) and rubric literacy (Score = 68), indicating relative confidence in structured evaluation tools. Conversely, the lowest readiness level is observed in narrative feedback writing (Score = 58), signalling a need for targeted professional development in qualitative assessment

skills. Moderate proficiency in digital platform use (Score = 65) suggests partial but insufficient technological preparedness.

Flexibility

CBC was characterized by rigid national directives that left minimal room for local adaptation. Teachers reported that lesson plans were “template-bound,” reducing contextual creativity. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum allows up to 20% local content integration, enabling schools to design modules reflecting community culture, local industries, or environmental issues. Case examples from Yogyakarta showed integration of *batik-making projects* into art and entrepreneurship subjects. This contextual flexibility embodies (Priestley, 2025; Priestley et al., 2021; Raflizar et al., 2025; Richards, 2017) *situation analysis* principle curriculum should adapt to the learners’ sociocultural environment. Nevertheless, disparities in school resources remain a challenge for equitable innovation.

Teacher Autonomy

Teacher autonomy emerged as one of the most transformative yet unevenly realized aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum. CBC teachers described themselves as “executors of instructions,” while Merdeka teachers saw themselves increasingly as “designers of learning.” This shift repositions teachers as reflective practitioners (Richards, 2017; Tyler, 2013). Yet, several interviewees highlighted ongoing dependence on government training modules, indicating that true professional autonomy is still in transition.

Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Curriculum

Stakeholder interviews revealed a nuanced perception of the advantages and limitations of both curricula.

Strengths of CBC:

- a. Clear learning outcomes and assessment rubrics ensuring nationwide standardization.
- b. Ease of monitoring and reporting student performance at the administrative level.
- c. Structured progression facilitating accountability for teachers and schools.

Weaknesses of CBC:

- a. Excessive administrative burden reducing instructional time.
- b. Inflexibility in adapting to diverse local contexts.
- c. Limited encouragement for creativity, collaboration, and higher-order thinking.

Strengths of the Merdeka Curriculum:

- a. Greater pedagogical freedom and contextual relevance.
- b. Integration of character education through *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*.
- c. Enhanced student engagement via project-based and experiential learning.
- d. Reduction of bureaucratic complexity in lesson planning.

Weaknesses of the Merdeka Curriculum:

- a. Uneven teacher readiness and technological capability.
- b. Lack of standardized resources and clarity in assessment guidelines.
- c. Potential inconsistency in quality across schools.

These perceptions underscore the policy paradox between standardization and autonomy. While CBC ensured national coherence, it constrained innovation; conversely,

Merdeka promotes creativity but risks uneven implementation without sustained professional development and resource equity.

Practical Implications for Policy and Classroom Practice

Findings from all data sources point to several policy and pedagogical implications for Indonesia's ongoing curriculum reform.

Policy Alignment and Support Systems

The success of the Merdeka Curriculum depends on consistent policy support through teacher training, digital infrastructure, and localized resource development. Ministries should prioritize capacity building and peer-learning communities that enable teachers to share best practices. Without such support, the autonomy principle risks widening disparities between urban and rural schools (Widodo, 2023; Widodo, 2024)

Professional Development for Teachers

Teachers need sustained mentoring to design interdisciplinary projects, implement authentic assessment, and integrate local content effectively. In line with (Richards, 2017) emphasis on continuous reflection and adaptation, a feedback-driven professional learning system is essential to ensure the curriculum evolves responsively.

Evaluation Reform and Accountability

Policymakers should establish balanced accountability frameworks that value both qualitative and quantitative indicators. A national digital portfolio system could reduce teacher workload while maintaining transparency in student progress reporting.

Curriculum Localization and Community Partnerships

Schools are encouraged to collaborate with local industries, cultural organizations, and universities to contextualize learning. Evidence from South Sulawesi shows that community-based projects such as *eco-school initiatives* and *cultural heritage documentation* foster student agency and civic engagement, embodying the Merdeka philosophy.

Bridging Policy and Practice

The comparative findings reveal that curriculum transformation is not merely technical but deeply ideological. It involves redefining the teacher's role, the learner's identity, and the relationship between education and society. Sustainable reform therefore requires coherence between curriculum documents, school culture, and classroom realities.

Table. 5 Summary of Findings

Research Question	Key Findings	Theoretical Link
1. CBC vs. Merdeka differences	Six major dimensions: goals, content, pedagogy, assessment, flexibility, and teacher autonomy	Richards' (2001) model: needs, situation, syllabus, methodology, evaluation
2. Stakeholder perceptions	CBC = structured but rigid; Merdeka = flexible but uneven	Balance between standardization and freedom (Priestley & Biesta, 2021)

- | | | |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| 3. Practical implications | Need for capacity building, localized implementation, and reflective evaluation | Richards' principle of ongoing curriculum adaptation |
|---------------------------|---|--|

The analysis identified six major dimensions differentiating the CBC and Merdeka Curriculum: curriculum goals, content, pedagogy, assessment, flexibility, and teacher autonomy. The CBC emphasizes measurable competencies and national standardization, while the Merdeka Curriculum promotes character development, project-based learning, and teacher autonomy (RISET, 2022).

Interviews revealed that stakeholders viewed CBC as structured but rigid, whereas the Merdeka Curriculum encourages innovation and contextual learning but faces uneven implementation due to disparities in teacher readiness and resources (Widodo, 2023; Widodo, 2024). Observations confirmed higher student engagement in Merdeka classrooms, consistent with (Richards, 2017) emphasis on dynamic, reflective curriculum systems.

The findings suggest that Indonesia's curriculum reform represents not merely a technical revision but a philosophical transformation toward more humanistic and adaptive education. The shift aligns with (Richards, 2017) theoretical framework emphasizing continuous reflection, contextual adaptation, and holistic learning.

Alignment with Richards' Theory

The Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates stronger alignment with Richards' curriculum development theory, particularly in its emphasis on situation analysis and responsiveness to context. The curriculum's flexibility and teacher autonomy reflect Richards' understanding of curriculum as a dynamic system requiring ongoing adjustment based on feedback and changing circumstances.

However, the implementation challenges also highlight the importance of Richards' emphasis on systematic development and support. The transition requires careful attention to all components of Richards' model, particularly needs analysis and evaluation, to ensure successful implementation.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis between Indonesia's *Competency-Based Curriculum* (CBC) and the *Merdeka Curriculum* through (Richards, 2017) curriculum development framework demonstrates a fundamental philosophical and structural evolution in Indonesian education. While the CBC emphasized measurable outcomes, standardization, and accountability, it often resulted in rigid implementation and limited contextual responsiveness. Conversely, the Merdeka Curriculum promotes flexibility, project-based learning, and teacher autonomy, representing a paradigm shift toward a more humanistic, adaptive, and learner-centered approach.

From Richards' theoretical lens, the two curricula illustrate differing emphases across his five interrelated components *needs analysis*, *situation analysis*, *syllabus design*, *methodology*, and *evaluation*. The CBC prioritized control and consistency but showed limited feedback integration within the curriculum system. The Merdeka Curriculum, by contrast, operationalizes a dynamic cycle of curriculum reflection and adaptation aligned with contextual realities. However, successful implementation requires robust support systems, professional capacity-building, and a culture of continuous reflection to sustain the intended flexibility and innovation.

In essence, the reform marks Indonesia's transition from a technically standardized model to a reflexive and contextual curriculum philosophy. It underscores

that meaningful educational change demands not only structural reform but also cultural transformation where teachers are empowered as reflective practitioners, and learning becomes a collaborative, authentic, and character-building process.

Suggestions

Policy-Level Recommendations

The Ministry of Education should institutionalize continuous *needs and situation analysis* as part of curriculum monitoring. Regular assessments of teacher readiness, local school capacity, and community engagement will ensure that curriculum goals remain responsive to Indonesia's diverse educational contexts. Furthermore, policy alignment between curriculum, teacher training, and digital infrastructure is essential for long-term sustainability.

Professional Development for Teachers

Continuous, mentoring-based professional learning should be prioritized. Teacher training must go beyond procedural understanding to develop reflective thinking, curriculum design skills, and authentic assessment literacy. Establishing *communities of practice* (CoPs) across regions can strengthen peer learning and promote consistent implementation of the Merdeka philosophy.

Curriculum Implementation in Schools

Schools should adopt (Richards, 2017) cyclical model starting from goal-setting to method evaluation to maintain coherence between design and practice. Local curriculum design should integrate cultural and environmental themes relevant to students' lived experiences, making learning both meaningful and place-based.

Future Research

Further longitudinal and mixed-method studies are recommended to assess the long-term impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on learning outcomes, teacher autonomy, and equity across rural and urban schools. Comparative studies with other ASEAN countries could enrich understanding of curriculum reform in multicultural developing contexts.

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