THE ROLE OF HUMANISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM BASED ON CHARACTER EDUCATION IN INDONESIA

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Abstract: This study discusses how the humanistic approach contributes to the development of character-based education curricula in Indonesia, particularly in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum represents a reform of the national education system that focuses on strengthening competencies and character building to realize the Profile of Pancasila Students. The study employs a literature review method with a descriptive qualitative approach, by analyzing various written sources related to humanistic theory, character education, and the Merdeka Curriculum policy. The findings indicate that humanistic education places students at the center of the learning process, aiming to help them recognize and develop their potential holistically intellectually, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. These humanistic values align with Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, which emphasizes freedom and the cultivation of noble character in education. In practice, humanistic values are reflected through student-centered learning, the teacher's role as a facilitator, and the Project to Strengthen the Profile of Pancasila Students (P5), which fosters cooperation, independence, and tolerance. However, the implementation of humanistic education still faces several challenges, such as limited teacher understanding, rigid school culture, and assessment systems that focus primarily on academic outcomes. Therefore, teacher training, policy support, and collaboration among schools, families, and the government are needed to optimally apply humanistic values. Through this approach, education is expected to produce Indonesian generations who are faithful, virtuous, and ready to face the challenges of the modern era.
Keywords: Humanism, Merdeka Curriculum, character education

1. INTRODUCTON

National education in Indonesia has undergone several curriculum changes. These changes are carried out so that education can keep pace with the times, technological advancements, and the continuously evolving needs of society. Each curriculum revision represents the government's effort to improve the education system, make it relevant to global challenges, while still firmly upholding the nation's fundamental values. The most recent change is embodied in the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes competency-based and character-based learning. This curriculum

aims to develop Pancasila Students, namely individuals who are faithful, independent, critical thinkers, creative, able to collaborate, and respectful of diversity (Khumaini et al., 2022). This means that contemporary education no longer focuses solely on cognitive abilities, but also on the formation of attitudes and skills needed in modern life.

The Merdeka Curriculum places strong emphasis on the character development of students, particularly in fostering critical and creative thinking, honesty, and responsibility toward themselves and their social environment. In this system, teachers are no longer the sole source of knowledge, but act as facilitators and mentors who help students discover and develop their potential. This approach reflects a shift in educational perspective, from one that prioritizes final outcomes to one that emphasizes the learning process. Students are encouraged to be more active, reflective, and independent in learning activities (Permatasari et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, this direction of change aligns with the humanistic approach in education. Humanism views every individual as possessing valuable potential and uniqueness. The role of education, therefore, is to help learners develop their inherent potential as optimally as possible. Humanism emphasizes freedom of thought, empathy, respect for human dignity, and student-centered learning. These values support the formation of Indonesian individuals who think freely, possess a strong sense of humanity, and are able to act responsibly in accordance with the responsibilities entrusted to them.

This humanistic perspective is also consistent with the educational philosophy of Ki Hajar Dewantara, the Father of Indonesian National Education. Through the among system, Ki Hajar Dewantara taught that education should liberate individuals from intellectual and moral pressure and cultivate noble character. He also introduced the concept of panca dharma natural disposition, independence, culture, nationality, and humanity as the foundation of education aligned with Pancasila values. Therefore, modern humanistic thought and Ki Hajar Dewantara's ideas share the same goal, namely to shape individuals with strong character, independence, and a national identity (Wiryanto & Anggraini, 2022).

Based on the discussion above, this study aims to explain the role of humanistic thought in the development of character-based education curricula in Indonesia,

particularly in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study also discusses how humanistic values align with the Pancasila Student Profile, as well as the role of teachers and the various challenges that arise in its implementation in schools. The results of this study are expected to provide clearer and more beneficial insights for strengthening national education that is character-driven and grounded in humanistic values.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a literature review method (library research), which is conducted by collecting and examining various written sources related to the research topic. These sources include books, scientific journals, previous research findings, academic articles, and official documents that discuss humanistic theory, curriculum development, and character education in Indonesia. The approach used is descriptive qualitative, as this study focuses on clearly and in depth describing how the concept of humanism is applied in curriculum development and the formation of students' character, particularly within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The research process is carried out through several stages. First, data collection is conducted by searching for and gathering relevant literature from reliable sources, both in printed and digital forms. Second, data screening and classification are performed by selecting literature that is most relevant to the research topic. Third, data analysis is conducted using content analysis to examine the content and meaning of the reviewed literature, in order to identify the relationship between humanistic theory, character education, and the Merdeka Curriculum policy. The results of this analysis are then critically interpreted to identify key ideas, patterns, and the application of humanistic values in character education. Through this process, it is expected that conceptual conclusions can be drawn, which may serve as a foundation for developing humanistic-based character education in Indonesia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Figure 1. Model of the Integration of Humanistic Thought in the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on Figure 1, the model is presented as an initial framework to help understand the flow and interconnections among the topics discussed in the following sections. The figure illustrates how the humanistic approach serves as the main foundation in education, which is then integrated into curriculum development principles, its relevance to character education, the role of teachers as humanistic facilitators, and the dynamics and challenges of its implementation in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. Each element in the figure is interconnected and forms a unified whole, with the ultimate goal of strengthening students' character through humanistic values and the Pancasila Student Profile.

The Essence of Humanism in Education

Humanism in education is a perspective that places humans at the center of all learning activities. This approach believes that every individual has unique potential and abilities; therefore, the task of education is to help students recognize and develop their potential optimally (Baharuddin & Wahyuni, 2015). In other words, humanistic education aims to humanize humans through learning processes that respect freedom of thought, creativity, and individual uniqueness. According to Syarifuddin, (2022), the core of humanistic education is self-actualization, namely the process in which individuals strive to develop themselves to achieve their best capabilities. This view

aligns with the theories of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, who explain that humans naturally have the drive to grow and develop toward an ideal state (Goble, 1987). Therefore, educational success is not only measured by academic achievement but also by the development of students' personality, attitudes, and morals.

Humanistic education has broader goals than merely transmitting knowledge. Its main objective is to form a whole personality through meaningful learning experiences. In this approach, learning must include humanistic values that respect students' dignity and freedom of thought. Teachers in humanistic education are no longer merely information providers, but act as guides, motivators, and facilitators who help students find meaning in their learning process. Wulalandari & Anggraini, (2024) add that humanistic education emphasizes the development of all human aspects, including cognitive, affective, moral, psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects in a balanced way. This means education should not only focus on intellectual intelligence but also build empathy, responsibility, and moral values. When this balance is achieved, education will produce individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also mature in personality and morally upright.

Furthermore, Amalia, (2024) emphasizes the importance of integrating cognitive and affective aspects in the learning process. These two aspects must work together so that students not only know what is right but also are willing and able to do what is right. Therefore, humanistic education rejects rigid and authoritarian learning methods, as they can hinder freedom of thought and reduce students' creativity. Overall, the essence of humanistic education is to develop individuals holistically intellectually, emotionally, and morally. Education becomes not only a place to pursue grades but also a means to build character and humanity. Through this approach, education is expected to produce generations who are intelligent, empathetic, socially responsible, and able to contribute positively to society.

Humanistic Principles in Curriculum Development

Humanistic principles in curriculum development emphasize that students are the center of all educational activities. This means the curriculum must be designed by considering students' needs, interests, and uniqueness so that learning truly aligns with their personal development. This approach assumes that every student has different potential and should be given opportunities to develop optimally in terms of knowledge,

emotions, and social skills (Rodliyah, 2021). Therefore, education does not only focus on delivering content but also helps students understand themselves, their learning styles, and their responsibility for their learning process.

In practice, humanistic principles emphasize personalization and empowerment in learning. Learning should not be uniform for all students, but should provide space for students to develop their interests and abilities. Teachers are no longer the sole source of knowledge, but companions who help students find meaning in what they learn. Through this approach, students can think critically, be creative, and solve problems in their own ways (Setiyadi, 2016). Such learning processes create a more enjoyable, meaningful, and real-life-related classroom atmosphere.

In addition to academic abilities, humanistic education also prioritizes character formation and social skills. A curriculum based on humanism seeks to foster values such as empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity. These values are essential so that students are not only intellectually intelligent but also socially sensitive and capable of collaborating with others. This type of education helps form whole individuals who are balanced between intellectual intelligence and emotional maturity. Humanistic curricula must also be flexible and adapt to changing times and socio-cultural environments. This flexibility makes the curriculum open to change and innovation while remaining relevant to real-life needs. Therefore, humanism becomes an important foundation in modern curriculum development, as it aims to create meaningful, liberating, and student-centered education (Arnol et al., 2024).

The Relevance of Humanism to Character Education Curriculum in Indonesia

The relationship between humanism and character education in Indonesia is clearly seen in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum currently used in schools. This curriculum represents modern humanistic education that places students at the center of the learning process. Its focus is not only on knowledge mastery but also on developing students' potential, independence, and character. This principle aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's concept of education that forms individuals who are independent both physically and spiritually individuals who can think freely, act responsibly, and possess moral and social awareness. Through the Merdeka Curriculum, students are given the freedom to learn according to their interests, talents, and needs (Wiryanto & Anggraini, 2022).

The humanistic approach is also highly relevant to the goals of character education in Indonesia, which aims to develop individuals who are virtuous, honest, and caring toward others. Humanistic education not only emphasizes academic outcomes but also fosters strong character and a balance between cognitive, emotional, and social aspects. This can be seen in the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) in the Merdeka Curriculum, which aims to instill values such as mutual cooperation, independence, creativity, global diversity, and noble character (Prabowo et al., 2024). Through this approach, humanistic values such as respecting individual potential and dignity can develop well, so students become not only intellectually competent but also possess strong character and readiness to face life challenges.

The implementation of the humanistic approach in the Merdeka Curriculum also creates a pleasant and meaningful learning atmosphere. Learning is no longer seen as rigid or boring but becomes an experience that provides freedom and comfort for students to experiment, create, and discover new things. Such learning is believed to increase learning motivation, strengthen emotional engagement, and foster responsibility for their learning process (Nur'aeni et al., 2024). Thus, humanism becomes an important foundation in developing character education curricula in Indonesia, in line with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum that emphasizes learning freedom and holistic human development.

The Role of Teachers as Humanistic Facilitators in Character Education

From the humanistic education perspective, teachers are no longer viewed as the sole source of knowledge whose task is only to deliver material. Instead, teachers act as companions and mentors who help students discover and develop their best potential. Teachers also play a role in "humanizing humans," meaning treating each student as a unique individual with different backgrounds, interests, and abilities. Therefore, teachers' duties are not only teaching but also creating a pleasant and meaningful learning environment so that students can develop holistically in knowledge, emotions, social skills, and spirituality.

The teacher's role as a facilitator requires the ability to design engaging, real-life-relevant, and student-centered learning. Teachers must encourage students to actively think, ask questions, discuss, and reflect on their learning experiences. As explained by Sultani et al., (2023), teachers with a humanistic approach play an important role in

increasing student engagement and motivation, and in developing social and emotional skills that form the basis of character development. In other words, teachers not only help students to "know" but also guide them to "become" individuals with character, confidence, and independence.

Humanistic teachers also use a dialogical approach, creating open and respectful two-way communication between teachers and students. This approach replaces rigid and authoritarian styles with a more reflective and educational system. In such an environment, students feel safe to express opinions, learn from mistakes, and understand the meaning of their actions. Teachers do not rely on punishment to discipline students but use reflection and discussion to build moral awareness and responsibility. Teachers empower students to recognize and develop their strengths, think critically, and take responsibility for themselves and their environment. This aligns with Putri et al., (2023), who emphasize that applying humanistic learning theory, especially in early childhood education, plays a significant role in character formation through psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual development.

Thus, teachers do not only focus on academic success but also on personality and moral development so that students become emotionally mature and virtuous individuals. Through their role as humanistic facilitators, teachers become key figures in realizing true character education. Education no longer focuses solely on exam scores but on forming whole human beings. Teachers become role models in attitude and behavior, guides in learning, and inspirations for students to continuously grow and develop.

Dynamics and Challenges in Implementing Humanistic Values in Character Education Curriculum in Indonesia

Humanistic education has an excellent concept of placing students at the center of the learning process; however, its implementation in practice does not always run smoothly. In reality, applying humanistic values in schools still faces various challenges and dynamics, including conceptual understanding, teacher readiness, and support from the educational environment and policies.

One common challenge is the misunderstanding of freedom. In humanistic education, freedom means allowing students to express themselves and develop responsibly and ethically. However, in practice, this freedom is sometimes

misinterpreted as unlimited freedom, leading some students to become less disciplined and ignore school rules (Setyawan et al., 2024). This shows that implementing humanistic principles requires not only changing teaching methods but also instilling an understanding of responsible freedom and discipline.

Another major obstacle is teachers' limited understanding and competence in humanistic education concepts. Many teachers still focus on academic achievement and have not provided space for students to learn freely and creatively. The lack of training and professional support makes it difficult for teachers to apply humanistic values in teaching and learning activities. As a result, learning processes have not fully reflected the humanistic spirit that emphasizes respect for students, open communication, and meaningful learning. Other challenges come from authoritarian educational environments and policies that emphasize obedience and hierarchy rather than collaboration and student participation. Additionally, assessment systems that focus on numerical scores make it difficult to implement humanistic approaches. This indicates that implementing humanistic values is not only the teacher's responsibility but also requires support from the entire educational system to create a more open, creative, and inclusive learning environment.

To overcome these challenges, continuous efforts and appropriate strategies are needed. One effort is improving teacher competence through training focused on applying humanistic principles in the classroom. Schools also need to develop reward systems that positively encourage student motivation while still emphasizing moral and social values. Teachers need to provide more personalized guidance to understand each student's character and needs. Furthermore, educational policy reforms are required to support comprehensive implementation of humanistic values (Fitriyah & Sari, 2024). Collaboration between teachers and parents is also crucial. Open, empathetic, and communicative family environments can strengthen humanistic values taught at school. With synergy between teachers and parents, students can more easily understand and practice responsibility, guided freedom, and mutual respect in daily life (Nurhayati & Pratama, 2023). Therefore, the implementation of humanistic education (Table 1) will be more successful when all parties involved in the educational process actively collaborate and support each other.

Table 1. Comparison of Humanistic Principles and Their Implementation in the Merdeka Curriculum

Humanism Aspect	Humanistic Principles in Education	Implementation in the Merdeka Curriculum
Essence of Humanistic Education	Education is human-centered and aims to humanize humans and develop students' potential holistically (cognitive, affective, moral, emotional, and spiritual).	The Merdeka Curriculum places students as active learning subjects, focusing not only on academic achievement but also on character and personality development.
Students as the Center of Learning	Each student has unique potential, interests, and abilities that must be respected and facilitated individually.	Differentiated learning is implemented based on students' interests, talents, and needs through choices of materials, methods, and learning projects.
Freedom and Self-Actualization Principle	Students are given freedom to think, express themselves, and develop responsibly to achieve self-actualization.	The Merdeka Curriculum provides learning freedom through subject choices, P5 projects, and contextual activities relevant to students' lives.
Teacher's Role in Humanistic Education	Teachers act as facilitators, mentors, and motivators who accompany students' learning processes, not as the sole source of knowledge.	Teachers design student-centered learning, encourage discussion, reflection, collaboration, and create a safe and enjoyable learning environment.
Character Development and Human Values	Humanistic education emphasizes character formation, empathy, responsibility, tolerance, and respect for human dignity.	These values are implemented through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), such as mutual cooperation, independence, creativity, and noble character.
Curriculum Flexibility	The curriculum must be adaptive, contextual, and open to changes in time and socio-cultural needs.	The Merdeka Curriculum is flexible, allowing educational institutions to adjust learning to local contexts and future challenges.
Challenges in Implementing Humanism	Risks of misinterpreting freedom, limited teacher understanding, and education systems oriented toward numerical assessment.	Teacher training, strengthening humanistic school culture, parent–school collaboration, and evaluation systems that assess processes and character, not only academic outcomes, are needed.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

CONCLUSIONS

The role of the humanistic approach in the Merdeka Curriculum serves as an essential foundation, as it places students at the center of the learning process and encourages the holistic development of their potential, including cognitive, attitudinal, social, and moral aspects. The implementation of the Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) requires continuous support and government policies to ensure that humanistic values can be effectively applied in character education in Indonesia.

SUGGESTIONS

The implementation of the Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) needs sustained support and clear government policies so that humanistic values can be properly integrated and applied in character education in Indonesia.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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