An Educator's Perspective on the Presence of Literary Education in Indonesia's *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum)

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ABSTRACT

Literature learning in school is known to be full of challenges, such as the low interest of students, low quality of teachers, and obstacles from the curriculum. Meanwhile, the newly created *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* Curriculum is claimed to have several advantages like being simpler, more freedom for teachers and students, and more relevant. The purpose of this study is to obtain an opinion from a literary educator and practitioner regarding literary education and the impact of the new *Kurikulum Merdeka* on it. This qualitative study used the in-depth interview method for collecting data. The interviewee is a cultural arts educator, poet, and playwright working as a principal in a middle school in the Bandung Regency. The results showed that the interviewee agreed that the freedom provided by the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is suitable for supporting arts and language teachers to facilitate the students' interests and talents in learning literature. However, the interviewee also stated that the mastery of the materials by the teacher has become increasingly important in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. With these findings, it can be concluded that the next step in developing literature learning with the *Kurikulum Merdeka* should be developing the teaching materials that can be used by teachers to increase the learning effectiveness and appeal to the students.

Keywords: Educator, In-depth interview, Kurikulum Merdeka, Literary education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The education system in general is made to prepare students to face the hardships and challenges of life, as stated by Suwandi (2020). Education has a broad scope, and literature is one field of it that is no less important than the others. In education, literature plays a role in adding insight as well as improving language skills, developing cognitive and social abilities, shaping character, and developing the creativity of students (Moody, 1971; Tarigan, 1995). As with other fields of education, literary education today has problems that need to be solved. Generally, schools teach several types of literary material such as prose, poetry, and drama. Unfortunately, previous research found that students' interest and enthusiasm for literature and their literary skills were low, caused by the ineffectiveness of the learning created by the teacher (Haryanto, Pristiwati, & Subyantoro, 2022). This ineffectiveness is caused by teachers' lack of precise strategies, making them unable to develop students' potential. These imprecise strategies include not using the latest technology to support the learning process because teachers are not proficient in using these facilities. In addition, students and the public also have an unfavorable view of the literature subject because its benefits are considered less when compared to the benefits of science subjects (Haryanto, 2020; Nugraha, 2021). In addition, the low quality of literature textbooks, books about literary works in school collections, and curricula that indirectly hinder literature learning are also considered to be other problems of literary education (Herfanda, 2012; Fitriani & Huda, 2022).

From the information above, especially regarding students' interest and enthusiasm for literature, we can conclude that curriculum development must be carried out in response to the development of science, technology, community needs, and the needs of graduate users or future employers (Suwandi, 2020). The *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* Curriculum (hereinafter "*Kurikulum Merdeka*," which means "freedom curriculum") was introduced as a curriculum with diverse curricular learning and more optimal content so that

students have more time to explore more concepts and increase their competence. These benefits are marked by the removal of the specialization program *peminatan* at high school so that students can choose subjects according to their interests, talents, and aspirations, as well as project-based learning which is expected to provide more opportunities for students to explore real-world issues such as environmental and health to support the development of the character and competence of the *Pelajar Pancasila* Profile (a number of characteristics and competencies that are based on the values of Pancasila, and are expected to be achieved by students after learning with the *Kurikulum Merdeka*) (Directorate or Middle School, 2022). The Ministry of Religion, in an article on the use of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in madrasas, said that with the new curriculum, learning is expected to be more in-depth, meaningful, not rushed, and fun (Kementerian Agama, 2022). According to Riana and Sugiarti (2020), the concept of *merdeka belajar* (freedom in learning) implicates the position of learning, thinking, philosophizing, and seeking knowledge. In the context of learning Indonesian literature, this concept is considered to be able to be successful if there is a literary system that can be an instrument, as well as an integration of freedom, independence, expression of literature, and other characteristics that support students' literary abilities (Husna, 2020). The slightly different study by Yusuf and Arfiansyah (2021) found some similarities of the *merdeka belajar* concept with the clutter paradigm, education in the constructivism philosophy, especially on the element of freedom from learners, learning based on direct experience, and teachers that facilitate student learning activities.

These claims and opinions regarding the advantages of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* have received attention from the public, especially teachers and academics throughout Indonesia (Hadi, 2020). However, there are not many research articles that describe the effectiveness of this new curriculum from the teacher's point of view. Information regarding the relationship between the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and literary education, in particular, is even more difficult to find. Since finding out the perspective of a teacher and literary practitioner about literary education is important in determining the effectiveness of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, this research was created to obtain the opinion of an educator regarding literary education and the impact of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* on it.

2. METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative approach, with the in-depth interview method for the data collection. In depth-interviews are inductive or open-ended, ranging from unstructured to semi structured, and conducted between the researcher and one participant at a time (Leavy, 2017).

The participant was determined through purposive sampling, a type of sampling in which the participant is deliberately chosen by the researcher for their qualities relevant to the study (Etikan et al., 2016; Bernard, 2017). In this case, they were chosen due to their experience in arts and literature education, as well as their standing in the Bandung arts and literature community. The participant chosen for this study is the head of a *madrasah tsanawiyah* (MTs, equivalent to middle school but with a focus on the Islam religion) in Bandung Regency, West Java, who is also a teacher, poet, playwright, and owner of an art studio. The participant also used to teach in a university, a high school, and an elementary school.

Per the characteristics of in-depth interviews, the interview conducted in this study was semi structured—a set of questions were prepared, but the participant indirectly led the sequencing of the topics through their explanations (Roulston & Choi, 2018). The topics in the interview included the past state of literature learning according to the participant's experience, literary education in the digital or today's era, literary education in the future, the role of the curriculum in general, the relationship between the new *Kurikulum Merdeka* and literary education, and the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* for literary education. Some materials of literary education are also considered forms of art, so the participant described some of their explanation as part of literary education, art education, or both.

The data from the interview was analyzed using the grounded theory method—the questions were prepared to inductively explore the topic through the participant's thoughts and experience until a new theory, knowledge, or simply conclusion regarding literary education in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* was chosen (Cassell & Bishop, 2018; Walker & Myrick, 2006). The response was also crosschecked with secondary information gathered from research articles, quotes, and others for validation and comparison.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

According to the participant, literature teachers must be knowledgeable in at least one literature subject such as writing poetry, play, or prose fiction. Unfortunately, so far, the participant has found that there are literature teachers in several schools without a literature academic background, so naturally, there will be obstacles in the learning process, such as literature learning which is dominated by theoretical material due to the teacher's lack of expertise and knowledge of teachers in the literature field. This makes the learning process boring, monotonous, and uninteresting. This participant's opinion matched the findings in Nugraha (2021) and the opinion of Haryanto et al. (2022). However, the participant also argued that in the case of learning

literature, nonlinearly educated teachers can teach literary materials well if supported by their innovation and creativity. It is important for students to feel happy and interested in literary lessons, so they also need to enjoy being taught by their teachers. Nugraha (2021) also explained that the literature learning process must be enjoyable, but if we analyze the participant's claim regarding innovative and creative but nonlinearly educated teachers with Nugraha's and Haryanto et al.'s (2022) opinion regarding teacher quality being one of the causes of the literature learning's decline, there is a possibility that innovativeness and creativity are stronger indicators of a good quality teacher than linearity in education, at least in literature education.

In addition, this digital era also requires teachers to study and utilize technology, so that it can be used as a good learning medium for students. According to the participant, technology has the potential to help teachers guide students in studying literary works, and even make students more productive. An example of this newer form of literature learning in the context of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in the digital era provided by the participant is through the use of YouTube channels that can be accessed easily today. This opinion is consistent with previous findings in Suwandi (2020) which state that technology is an important aspect of curriculum and education planning. Nugraha (2021) also explained technology more broadly, who stated that the internet and digital information technology support the development of 21st-century skills, as well as Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) and 4Cs (critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration, and creativity and innovation). The participant mentioned the consequence of poor technology planning in education, that the use of technology by students without teacher guidance can also keep them from reading literary works, which is another reason why teachers should always get more acquainted with the latest technology.

Regarding the connection between the Indonesian Language and Literature subject and the curriculum in general, the participant thought that learning should always refer to the curriculum, but it needs to be developed with the teacher's knowledge, experience, and improvisation. The participant firmly agrees with the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and supports its implementation in schools. According to the participant, the new curriculum opens up opportunities for teachers to facilitate good and simple literary learning that is in line with the rapid development of technology. The extra freedom in the new curriculum, as stated by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture through the Directorate of Middle Schools (2022), helps students to become more active in exploring and mastering materials according to the interests and talents of each student and has the potential to encourage students to use technology for creative purposes outside of curricular studies, such as writing a poem and then making it a song, recorded with the help

of mobile or computer applications. This role of technology in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* effectively improves the quantity and quality problems of literary textbooks and literary works in schools that were raised in previous research (Herfanda, 2012; Fitriani & Huda, 2022), since the latest technology can be used as a comprehensive learning medium, and more so if accompanied by a teacher. The student freedom mentioned before also corresponds with the Constructivism philosophical view discussed in Yusuf and Arfiansyah (2021)—the use of technology (which is already deemed important in education by Suwandi (2020)) by students to get creative freely makes the learning process more enjoyable, thus supporting the development of students' will to learn. By highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of students from such learning activities, teachers and parents can also recognize and support children's abilities more easily, so that the learning process can also feel safer and more comfortable. The participant also added that the materials contained in the curriculum correspond with the needs of students so that they could explore the subjects further without having to rush.

In the example of using YouTube for learning that has been described previously, teachers need to accompany students so that learning is more focused, but at the core of the new curriculum, students are expected to be able to learn independently. This idea is supported by Haryanto (2020) that when the effectiveness of learning literature in schools tends to decline, *sekolah penggerak* (the first schools appointed to use the *Kurikulum Merdeka*) are present to provide instructions to develop all elements of education with a uniform perception of "learning for yourself." Teachers must prioritize learning systems based on the freedom of *Kurikulum Merdeka* which can alleviate the literature education system from boring and rigid learning processes such as simply answering questions from an exercise book. Our education system requires more creative and innovative literature learning to create a more effective learning space according to the conditions of students in schools.

The participant also added that the *Kurikulum Merdeka* can seek and discover the hidden talents of each student. In the social concept of positive interpersonal abilities and skills possessed by students in society, education is very important in order to achieve a common benefit. Apart from social concepts, one of the learning theories of humanism states that in learning activities, students must be able to direct themselves so that they know what they are learning, with assistance from the teacher. Students can then find out what to learn and how to learn it themselves. This theory is a theory of humanism that can be applied to the concept of *merdeka belajar* according to Riana and Sugiarti (2020) which consists of the application of humanism in the learning process, creativity in the learning process, a community

approach in the learning communication, multimodal learning, and the key to successful learning at home. So, it can be concluded that this method is an effort that can be made to obtain the goals desired by the both the student and the teacher.

Technically, the participant mentioned that they felt they had implemented a similar teaching method comparable to the *Kurikulum Merdeka* for a long time, although without a formal name and form. This is also another reason why the participant strongly supports the new curriculum.

The new *Kurikulum Merdeka* also has a few downsides, despite all of the advantages mentioned above. According to the participant, the downsides of the new curriculum, as with most of the newly-released curricula, are socialization and implementation, which are both related to teachers. With the size of Indonesia and the sheer number of schools and teachers, the government's socialization of the new curriculum has a limited range and therefore does not reach enough teachers. The socialization itself, according to the participant, may not be clear enough for some teachers and may get them confused with planning the implementation. Putting said problem aside, not all teachers whom the socialization does reach have high enthusiasm for new curricula—the participant said that the conservative, usually older teachers, tend to keep the changes from new curricula to a minimum. Credible research or articles regarding this problem have not been found, so a new survey regarding the effectiveness of new curricula's socialization may be created.

4. CONCLUSION

The curriculum as a reference for educators has an important role in the development of learning, including literature learning. From the interview result, it was found that according to the participant, most of the problems of learning literature that has been mentioned before can be properly solved with the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. In addition, the claim that the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is freer for teachers and students was also agreed upon by the participant. This is what makes the participant agree with this new curriculum and support its implementation in schools. Meanwhile, there is also the problem of new curricula's socialization and implementation which was also explained in the previous section. In the future, the government needs to extend the scope of socialization for teachers, as well as run more programs that maintain teacher quality. In addition, efforts that can be made by teachers and researchers themselves are to further research the socialization problem in order to validate and improve the government's socialization techniques for teachers, as well as develop new learning methods or teaching materials that can be used in schools to increase the effectiveness of learning, including literature.

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