



Hybrid Approach to Curriculum Development for the Indonesian Context: A Theoretical Study in the Independent Curriculum Era

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum provides broad flexibility for schools to design learning based on students' needs and contextual characteristics; however, its adoption continues to face challenges related to unequal access, varying levels of teacher readiness, and disparities in school resources. This study aims to formulate a hybrid curriculum model that offers a more adaptive and equitable approach to curriculum development suited to Indonesia's diverse educational landscape. Employing a library research method with a descriptive-analytical approach, the study systematically reviewed relevant literature published within the last five years, focusing on curriculum development models, Merdeka Curriculum implementation, teacher readiness, and educational access gaps. Data were analyzed through thematic categorization, comparative evaluation, and conceptual synthesis. The findings indicate that no single curriculum model sufficiently addresses Indonesia's complex educational context, thereby necessitating a hybrid approach that integrates national standards with localized adaptability. The proposed hybrid curriculum consists of three interconnected components core, adaptive, and support elements which collectively ensure both flexibility and consistency in instructional quality. The study's implications highlight the importance of systemic support, including teacher training, provision of minimum learning resources, and targeted affirmative policies, to enable widespread and sustainable implementation. This research contributes a conceptual framework for curriculum development and provides a foundation for future empirical studies exploring hybrid curriculum practices in diverse school settings.

Keywords:

Educational access;
Hybrid curriculum;
Curriculum
development;;

INTRODUCTION

The development of education in the 21st century requires a curriculum that is able to balance national competency standards with flexibility to adapt to the diversity of local school contexts in Indonesia. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum since 2022 has provided space for educational units to adjust learning based on the characteristics of students, regional potential, and the readiness of school resources. However, the diversity

of school conditions in terms of infrastructure, access to technology, and teacher capabilities makes the implementation of an adaptive and equitable curriculum a complex challenge. In this context, a curriculum development framework is needed that not only provides autonomy but also ensures consistency in learning quality across regions.

A number of studies show that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation is largely determined by school capacity and teacher readiness. Miftahudin (2024) found that the Merdeka Curriculum enhances learning creativity and opens up space for innovation, but disparities in facilities and teacher competencies are major obstacles to quality equity. Similar findings were shown by Marlia et al. (2024) through a systematic study of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level, which highlighted the weak preparedness of teachers and the limitations of supporting facilities, especially in 3T areas. Ibrahim (2023) also emphasized that teachers' understanding of the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum still varies, thereby affecting the quality of implementation in the classroom. Theoretical studies on curriculum development models, such as the goal-oriented Tyler model, the Taba model that emphasizes teacher participation, and the situation-based Skilbeck model, all show that each model has its own strengths but none has been able to fully address the complexity of the current Indonesian educational context (Raudhah, 2025; Wati, 2022).

Although a number of schools have tried to implement a hybrid curriculum approach, these studies are still limited and have not produced a conceptual framework that can be adopted nationally. Research by Tiftazani dan Purwoko (2024), shows that the hybrid approach can combine the national curriculum, international curriculum, and local school characteristics, but this study does not discuss structural challenges such as resource inequality, teacher readiness, and the policy support mechanisms needed for replication in various regions. Thus, there is a research gap in the form of the unavailability of a hybrid curriculum model that comprehensively considers the real conditions of Indonesia's highly diverse schools. The urgency of this research is even greater considering that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires school autonomy, while disparities in capacity and access can lead to unequal quality of learning between regions.

This study attempts to fill this gap by formulating a conceptual framework for a hybrid curriculum that integrates national standards, flexibility in school-based

curriculum development, and systemic support mechanisms that take into account disparities in access and teacher readiness. The research focuses on a comparative analysis of relevant curriculum models, empirical findings on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum over the past five years, and a synthesis of theories to present a hybrid curriculum development approach that is responsive to the diversity of educational contexts in Indonesia. The purpose of this study is to produce a conceptual model of a hybrid curriculum that can provide direction for school curriculum development and serve as a basis for future curriculum research and policy.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses library research with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine classical and contemporary curriculum development models, analyze empirical findings on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and develop a conceptual framework for a hybrid model relevant to the Indonesian educational context. This approach was chosen because the research was not oriented towards collecting field data, but rather aimed at theoretical synthesis through the systematic integration of available literature. As emphasized by Creswell (2014), literature review allows researchers to build conceptual understanding and find patterns of relationships between theories and research results to formulate new models or concepts. Therefore, this method is considered the most appropriate for conceptual and theoretical research purposes.

The research design refers to a systematic literature review model adapted for conceptual purposes. The review procedure was carried out through a series of stages: literature identification, source selection based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, content review, thematic categorization, and comparative synthesis. The identification stage began with a search of scientific literature on the Google Scholar, SINTA, and official Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology databases. The search was conducted using the keywords "curriculum development models," "hybrid curriculum," "Merdeka Curriculum," "teacher readiness," "educational equity," "school-based curriculum," and "contextual curriculum design." Each keyword combination was tailored to the analysis requirements of each subtopic (Zawacki-Richter, 2020).

The literature sources that form the research population consist of scientific journal articles, proceedings, books, and policy reports published within the last five years (2019–

2025), except for classic curriculum works (such as the Tyler, Taba, and Skilbeck models) used as a theoretical basis. The selection of sources was based on three main criteria: relevance to the topic of hybrid curriculum and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, publication quality (as indicated by ISSN or DOI), and online accessibility. Sources that did not meet these criteria were eliminated. Through this selection process, 10 or more articles that met the criteria of quality and relevance were obtained.

The data collection technique was carried out through documentation, namely collecting, reading, and recording important information from each selected source. Each source was analyzed using an analysis instrument in the form of a literature worksheet developed specifically for this study. The worksheet contained several main components: literature identity, research objectives, methodology used by the original author, key findings, implications for curriculum development, and relevance to the Indonesian context and the hybrid model to be formulated. The use of this instrument aimed to maintain consistency in the analysis of the literature and facilitate the concept synthesis process.

Research instruments in literature reviews differ from those in field research because they do not measure variables but organize information. Therefore, literature analysis instruments are designed to map research gaps, identify patterns, and trace relationships between concepts. The validity of the instrument was tested through expert judgment by requesting reviews from curriculum experts who examined the completeness and relevance of the components in the worksheet. The review results showed that the instruments covered critical aspects of curriculum literature review. The reliability of the instruments was tested through double reading of the first three articles, which showed consistency in data interpretation, thus the instruments were considered reliable.

The data analysis technique in this study was carried out in three stages: categorization, comparison, and synthesis. The categorization stage was carried out by grouping the literature into four broad categories: classical curriculum models (Tyler, Taba), contemporary curriculum models (Skilbeck and adaptive models), empirical findings on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and research related to hybrid curricula. After categorization, the comparison stage identified similarities and differences between the literature and assessed the relevance of the concepts in the

context of Indonesian education. This stage served to develop a sharper understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each curriculum model and the empirical conditions underlying the need for a hybrid approach.

The synthesis stage is the core of this method. Synthesis is carried out by combining important elements from classical and contemporary curriculum models, as well as empirical research findings, to develop a hybrid curriculum conceptual framework. The synthesis process refers to the integrative approach proposed by Snyder (2019), in which the literature is not merely summarized but combined to produce new concepts that are coherent and relevant. The resulting hybrid model is then evaluated based on its suitability to the actual conditions of schools in Indonesia, such as disparities in access, teacher readiness, and the need for learning flexibility. Thus, the synthesis of the literature not only aims to provide a theoretical overview but also to present a conceptual foundation that can be used in the development of national curriculum policy.

The research model used in this study is a conceptual model that combines the dimensions of national standards, local flexibility, and systemic support. In this model, the curriculum is viewed as a system consisting of three main components: core competencies, local adaptation, and support systems. Core competencies represent national learning achievement standards that cannot be ignored. The adaptive component provides flexibility for schools to design learning according to the needs of students and the potential of the environment. The support component includes teacher training, resource provision, supervision, and monitoring. This model does not use mathematical symbols, but rather describes the relationships between components descriptively to illustrate the process and structure of a hybrid curriculum that can be used in various educational contexts (Kitchenham dan Charters, 2007).

This research method enables the development of a conceptual framework for a hybrid curriculum based on scientific evidence and established theory. By utilizing a systematic literature review approach, this study not only collects theories but also integrates empirical research findings into a comprehensive curriculum model. This method provides a strong foundation for the development of an adaptive curriculum that can address the challenges of educational access gaps, diverse school conditions, and teacher readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

FINDINGS

The data for this study were collected through a systematic literature search conducted from January to March 2025 using major academic databases, including Google Scholar, ERIC, Scopus, DOAJ, and SINTA. From an initial pool of 67 sources, a total of 10 publications met the inclusion criteria, which required relevance to curriculum development models, Merdeka Curriculum implementation, teacher readiness, hybrid curriculum approaches, and educational access issues; publication within the last five years; and availability through open and verifiable access. All selected literature was reviewed using an analytical worksheet specifically designed to extract key information such as research purpose, methodological orientation, main findings, and implications for curriculum development in Indonesia.

The categorization of the selected studies revealed four major thematic groups: classical curriculum models, contemporary curriculum models, empirical studies on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and research on hybrid curriculum approaches. The results of the categorization are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Literature Finding Categories Based on Analysis Focus

Category	Focus	Summary of Findings
Classical Curriculum Models	Tyler, Taba	Offer strong structural foundations and systematic development steps; useful for defining core curriculum components.
Contemporary Curriculum Models	Skilbeck, School-Based Curriculum	Emphasize situational analysis and contextual flexibility; support adaptive curriculum components.
Merdeka Curriculum Implementation	Teacher readiness, resources, access gaps	Reveal significant disparities in teacher competence and school resources, affecting curriculum enactment across regions.
Hybrid Curriculum Studies	Integration of national, local, and international frameworks	Show potential for enhancing relevance, but lack emphasis on equity and systemic support for under-resourced schools.

The analysis of the literature revealed two major empirical patterns. First, no single curriculum model, whether classical or contemporary was sufficient to address Indonesia's diverse school conditions. Classical models provided clarity and coherence but lacked contextual sensitivity. Contemporary models encouraged adaptability but risked inconsistency in implementation when school resources varied widely. This

pattern underscored the necessity of designing a hybrid curriculum model that integrates the strengths of both approaches.

Second, all empirical studies on the Merdeka Curriculum consistently identified disparities in teacher readiness, technological access, and availability of instructional materials as dominant challenges. Schools in remote or underserved areas showed the greatest difficulty in implementing differentiated learning, project-based learning, and digital literacy components—central pillars of the Merdeka Curriculum. These findings confirmed that any hybrid curriculum model must incorporate a systemic support component to mitigate existing inequalities.

The synthesis of the reviewed literature resulted in the formulation of a hybrid curriculum structure composed of three interconnected elements: (1) a core component representing national learning standards; (2) an adaptive component allowing for local contextualization; and (3) a support component encompassing teacher training, resource provision, and system-wide supervision. These three components emerged as a direct response to the patterns identified across the reviewed studies and form the empirical basis for the conceptual model developed in this research.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the complexity of Indonesia's educational landscape requires a curriculum design that is both structured and adaptable. The persistent disparities in teacher readiness and educational access across regions suggest that curriculum autonomy cannot function effectively without a clear framework and adequate systemic support. This aligns with the foundational principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, yet highlights gaps between policy intentions and practical realities in schools. The hybrid curriculum model formulated in this research responds to this gap by integrating standardized learning expectations with flexible components that allow schools to contextualize instruction according to their needs.

The hybrid model draws conceptually from classical curriculum theories, particularly Tyler's emphasis on clear learning objectives and systematic planning, which provide coherence to the core curriculum component. At the same time, it incorporates contemporary perspectives, such as Skilbeck's situational analysis and the principles of school-based curriculum development, which support localized adaptation. This

theoretical synthesis helps reconcile the long-standing tension between national standardization and contextual flexibility in Indonesian curriculum policy. It suggests that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive but can instead be combined to create a more responsive and equitable curriculum framework.

The findings also reinforce results from recent empirical studies that have reported considerable variation in the enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum across schools. Teacher readiness emerged as a crucial factor influencing the extent to which curriculum flexibility can be exercised. Schools with stronger pedagogical capacity and better access to resources are more likely to innovate and implement differentiated learning effectively, while those in underserved areas tend to focus on meeting basic instructional requirements. This divergence implies that flexibility without targeted support may inadvertently widen educational inequalities. The support component in the proposed hybrid model directly addresses this problem by embedding teacher professional development, supervision, and resource provision into the structure of curriculum implementation.

The model's integration of support mechanisms also aligns with global trends in curriculum reform, where the role of systemic infrastructure is increasingly recognized as essential for sustaining school-level autonomy. The inclusion of resource provision and professional development underscores the need to view curriculum not merely as a document but as an ecosystem requiring ongoing investment. This emphasis offers a corrective to previous hybrid curriculum studies, which often highlighted content integration but did not consider structural disparities across schools. By doing so, the present study extends the theoretical and practical discourse on hybrid curriculum design and situates it within the broader challenge of educational equity.

The implications of these findings are twofold. At the theoretical level, the study contributes a model that advances the dialogue on curriculum hybridity by incorporating equity-oriented considerations often overlooked in existing frameworks. The model highlights that meaningful flexibility must be accompanied by systemic scaffolding, suggesting a shift from school-centered to system-supported curriculum autonomy. At the practical level, the model provides guidance for policymakers, school leaders, and teacher training institutions seeking to navigate the transition toward more adaptive curricula.

Implementing the hybrid model may assist in standardizing minimum competencies while still enabling meaningful contextualization in diverse learning environments.

Overall, the discussion underscores that the success of a hybrid curriculum in Indonesia depends not only on the design of curriculum components but also on the presence of robust support structures that address disparities in capacity and resources. This systemic perspective reaffirms the need for continued investment in teacher development, school infrastructure, and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that curriculum reform does not reproduce or intensify existing educational inequalities. As such, the model developed through this study provides a coherent conceptual foundation for future empirical research examining the operationalization and impact of hybrid curriculum practices in various school contexts.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum development in Indonesia must balance nationally mandated standards with the wide variation in local school contexts. This study argues that a hybrid curriculum model is a suitable solution to reconcile these demands. Drawing on a systematic literature review, the model combines three key elements: a core component to preserve essential national competencies, an adaptive component that enables schools to tailor learning to their contexts, and a support component to respond to gaps in teacher capacity and learning resources. The findings suggest that curricular flexibility is ineffective without strong structural support, particularly in disadvantaged and remote schools.

This research contributes conceptually by emphasizing that hybrid curriculum design must be equity-focused and reinforced by systemic support to be effective within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. Although the model is consistent with current policy directions, further empirical research is needed to test its practicality, limitations, and influence on learning outcomes across diverse school environments. Future studies should explore implementation strategies and develop instruments to assess school readiness for hybrid curriculum adoption. With ongoing research and policy improvement, this hybrid model can support a more inclusive, adaptable, and sustainable curriculum system in Indonesia.

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