

# Post-Modernist Eksperimental Mangunan School in Democratic Curriculum and Post-Pandemic Era: Is It Relevant?

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## Abstract

The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is the national curriculum currently in use. However, alternative curricula can also develop in Indonesia. One of the schools that implements this alternative curriculum is Eksperimental Mangunan JHS, Yogyakarta, which has Mangunan pedagogy. Due to COVID-19, post-modernist schools must implement distance learning and have learning experiences with technology. A qualitative method with a semi-structured interview approach to related parties was used to obtain the required data. The *Merdeka Belajar* and Mangunan Pedagogy curricula are based on democratic education; the difference is that Mangunan schools provide character and environmental education. Besides, the use of technology is carried out in this school following the post-pandemic situation. However, this school does not digitalize education but continues to acclimate to the context of students' educational needs.

**Keywords:** *Mangunan Pedagogy, Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, Post-Modernist School, Post-Pandemic Era, Technology*

## INTRODUCTION

Education is the front line for preparing students' maturity to live in the future. (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018). Students are trained to sharpen their knowledge, critical thinking, social skills, and many other things that will be very important for their future. (Ratheeswari, 2018). For preparing that thing, education provides the best formula to educate children. The curriculum is the key to having the learning system to carry out school learning dynamics.

The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is the newest curriculum used in Indonesia. The Independent Learning Curriculum was launched in 2020 after the 2013 Emergency Curriculum was improved. (Solikhah & Purnomo, 2022). This curriculum was created during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, one of the goals of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum was to catch up with learning lags due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This curriculum was created with the aim that education in Indonesia can be like that in developed countries, where students are free to choose what they are interested in studying. The *Merdeka* Curriculum also aims to encourage students to master various competencies. (Rahayu et al., 2022). This learning concept adheres to the liberal arts education way of learning, where this education aims to provide academic freedom. (Kurennoy, 2020). Ultimately, the projection of this education is to improve the quality of human resources and the quality of education.

Even though the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is a national curriculum, it does not rule out the possibility for schools to adopt various alternative curricula and pedagogy that are based on the principles and values promoted by the school. Eksperimental Mangunan Junior High School is an example of Mangunwijaya pedagogy in implementing the learning process.

Since 1994, this school has been designed to conduct explorative-creative and integral learning experiments (Mulyatno, 2022a). Being an explorative person means discovering, questioning, and taking risks. Then, creative people will carry out new reforms for better development—not stuck to old habits. Integral humans, with deep instincts and consciousness, will

believe in a multi-dimensionally complex life but are not easily confused because they can understand the sameness amidst diversity and variety. Mulyatno (2022) states that the vision and mission of Mangunwijaya pedagogy is that the school embodies an explorative, creative, and integral learning society imbued with brotherly love in plurality and true independence. Also, considering the ecological crisis throughout the world and Indonesia, schools provide gratification on environmental protection. The school learning process encourages students to become highly skilled in navigating today's challenging world. At the Eksperimental Mangunan School, a student-centered learning approach is implemented. This allows students to explore, express opinions, develop according to their development, and have fun while learning (Puspitasari et al., 2019).

Due to COVID-19, teaching and learning activities must be carried out through distance learning using online media. The Eksperimental Mangunan School must do the same from Kindergarten, Elementary, and Junior High School. According to Mulyatno and Pradana (2022) According to the results of their research, learning in a post-modern school environment is quite challenging to do through online classes. Teachers must continue to be creative and innovative to convey Mangunan's values well in the new era. Building intensive communication between teachers, parents, and students must be done. The research results also explain that the learning environment in each student's home triggers students to know and care more about their immediate environment and build intensive communication with the people around them. (Mulyatno, 2022a).

Pradipto and Abraham (2014) They explained in their research that there were significant differences between Mangunwijaya pedagogy and the national curriculum. According to the research results of Pradipto and Abraham (2014), the national curriculum at that time and the Mangunwijaya curriculum have a different focus.

However, from the results of the discussion above, it can be seen that there is a similarity in spirit between the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and the Mangunwijaya pedagogy. This study will be carried out to determine to what extent the implementation of the Mangunwijaya curriculum will be in line with the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Then, after knowing that several schools presented technology as a learning medium in the classroom in the post-modernism era, the second objective was to find out how much influence technology had in the postmodernism Eksperimental Mangunan Middle School after the pandemic situation.

Although research on the concept of learning the Mangunwijaya pedagogy, which is juxtaposed with the state curriculum, already exists and research on the experience of teachers and students in the school experimental school related to learning during the Pandemic also exists, the gap in this study is to see further in the current phenomenon regarding spirit or The *Merdeka Curriculum* value learned with the Pedagogy of Mangunwijaya and knowing the existence of technology in the era of postmodernism in the Eksperimental Mangunan junior high school. This study will enrich literacy related to the Mangunwijaya pedagogy because there has never been a study with the same theme. Therefore, to lead this research, two research questions were made: 1. To what extent is the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* Learning harmonized with the Mangunwijaya pedagogy? 2. How significant is the influence of technology in the post-modernism school of Eksperimental Mangunan Junior High School in the post-pandemic era?

### **Eksperimental Mangunan School**

Carrying the concept of learning from Y.B. Mangunwijaya, this school is oriented towards creative, explorative, and integral children's education, which can help them to develop intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual sensitivity. (Mulyatno, 2022a). Children would naturally be more creative if they were allowed to be exploratory. Mangunwijaya meant the idea of creativity to mean that kids do not stick to the norm. Instead, young people might come up with creative approaches to the problem. (Mangunwijaya, 2020). According to this viewpoint, being creative means being active and moving forward even when things seem to be at a standstill. Children sometimes run into dead ends, but inventiveness helps them find a new, better path. Creativity means being driven to find a workaround and steer clear of desperation. This mindset is necessary for underprivileged youngsters to pursue their vision of a brighter future.

As published by the Redaksi Katolikanain, the conversation with Father Edy Wiyanto, departing from concern for the poor and marginalized, Father Mangunjaya provides schools for poor children as well as conducting trials, researching and formulating basic educational practices through the Mangunan Canisius School in Mangunan Village. (*Pendidikan Dasar Untuk Pemekaran Utuh Kepribadian Anak*, 2022). This school was almost on its last legs. Then, in 1994, Father Mangunwijaya used it to conduct the trial. This experimental school is believed to be Romo Mangun's laboratory and foundation for testing basic education concepts suitable for the full development of a child's self. Early attention was given to children with low economic backgrounds, but developments later focused on expanding children and formal primary education.

This school was formed with the Canisius Foundation but became independent under the Basic Education Dynamics (DED) Foundation named Eksperimental Mangunan School. In 2011, the Mangunan Kindergarten was formed. Then, in 2018, Eksperimental Mangunan Junior High School was formed in Yogyakarta.

### **Merdeka Belajar Curriculum or Independent Learning Curriculum**

According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) statistics, 70% of 15-year-old children cannot comprehend simple reading or apply fundamental arithmetic principles to real-world situations. In the past ten to fifteen years, there has not been a considerable improvement in this PISA score. The study demonstrates that there are significant differences in learning quality between geographical areas and between socioeconomic categories. The pandemic of COVID-19 aggravates this.

According to Merdeka Mengajar's webpage, in order to prevent learning loss during the outbreak, the Ministry of Education and Culture streamlined the curriculum under unusual circumstances (emergency curriculum) (*Tentang Kurikulum Merdeka*, 2022). Consequently, 31.5% of schools that employed the emergency curriculum demonstrated that it may lessen the pandemic's effects by 73% literacy and 86% numeracy.

The Freedom-to-Learn curriculum, which the government introduced as the Independent Learning Curriculum (formerly known as the prototype curriculum), was created as part of the learning recovery effort as a more adaptable curriculum framework focused on building students' character and competence. Project-based learning for the development of soft skills and character by the Pancasila student profile, a focus on essential material so that there is enough time for in-depth learning of fundamental competencies like literacy and numeracy, and flexibility for teachers to carry out differentiated learning by the abilities of students are the main features of this curriculum that support recovery of learning.

### **Post-Pandemic Era in Education**

The pandemic has brought changes to the world of education. Currently, the world has entered a post-pandemic period. Based on several studies results, the post-pandemic education situation today has a new face that continues to exist: technology. Rapanta et al. (2021) I agree that a new educational framework must be created to balance technology with existing pedagogy. Furthermore, Ghanbari and Nowroozi (2021) Also, I believe that technology has become part of the development of education. Technological intervention in education is essential because it can develop education at a higher quality level. The COVID-19 pandemic has suddenly accelerated the use and position of technology in education. However, Pérez-Sanagustín et al. (2022) Even though technology helps as a learning medium, many educational adjustments are needed. It is a task that must be completed immediately. In line with these opinions, it can be concluded that technology in the post-pandemic era can provide good benefits for education even though it needs adjustments on many sides.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research was conducted at the Eksperimental Mangunan Junior High School from April to May 2023, using qualitative research methods. The reason for choosing this method is that qualitative research allows researchers to explore the experience, perception, and motivation of the research subject, which in this case is the head of the Foundation of *Dinamika Edukasi Dasar*,

the *Eksperimental Mangunan* Principal, the Vice Principal for the Curriculum, and two subject teachers. Through this approach, researchers can explore more profound meanings of phenomena that occur and understand the social context of the subject better. (Rokhamah et al., 2024).

The approach used in this study is a semi-structured interview. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore topics in depth while maintaining specific structures in the interview. This makes it easier for researchers to compare and analyze data systematically.

The research instrument was questions designed based on findings from previous studies, including Pradipto and Abraham's (2014) research, which examined the correlation between Mangunwijaya pedagogy and the national curriculum and stated that the national curriculum and Mangunwijaya pedagogy have different visions, missions, and the value of existing education. Additionally, questions were asked concerning Mulyatno (2020), who stated that during COVID-19, the *Eksperimental Mangunan* School implemented education using an online system. This presents challenges for teachers when implementing an environment-based learning system. Khusna et al. (2022) Also found that COVID-19 forced distance education, which ultimately had a good impact on education in the post-pandemic era because both teachers and students became more accustomed to technology, which could help the continuity of education. Several questions were prepared, and these questions were adapted and developed to suit the current research context, ensuring that the instrument could reveal relevant and significant information related to the research topic.

In processing qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, researchers have done several steps. The first step was a complete transcription of the interview. Next, the coding is used to identify themes, patterns, and categories. Thematic analysis helped group data, and verification with theory or other data is necessary to ensure accuracy. Reflection on the interview process is also essential to understand its impact on the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Independent Learning Curriculum and Mangunan Pedagogy

Due to adjustments to human life needs, the curriculum has developed occasionally. Education experts, under the supervision of the Minister of Education, created a national curriculum to equalize learning achievement for all students in Indonesia. There are activists in the world of education also continue to carry out and express their ideas on the concept of education, one of whom is a Catholic priest who is also an observer of marginalized people, humanitarian and education activists in Indonesia, Yusuf Bilyarta Mangunwijaya or commonly known as Father Mangun. He thought about the independent learning that should exist in school. Furthermore, this thinking is called Mangunan Pedagogy. Mangunan pedagogy has the spirit that students must be taught to discover their character as early as possible through their independence in explorative learning. (Mangunwijaya, 2020).

Kurniati and Rismawati (2018) They explained that the *Eksperimental Mangunan* School already has a strong foundation, formulated long ago by Father Mangun. The spirit of this education is liberating education. Character education is a vital aspect that will be useful for students' future lives. Apart from that, this school introduced the concept of humanist education from an early age. The foundations of education at this school also foster a sense of the importance of sensitivity, understanding feelings, and the heart. Mulya et al. (2022) It is revealed that this liberating educational approach requires experiential and spiritual-based learning practices. Herrmann (2014) Explains that spiritual democracy must have justice, freedom, peace, equality, and ethical relationships. In practice, this school is very good at implementing the things above. This school pays attention to everything. As the name suggests, learning through direct experience is the primary mission of this school.

The curriculum currently used in Indonesia is the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, which was introduced by the ministry as the Independent Learning Curriculum. This latest curriculum takes the spirit of the liberal arts or democracy curriculum. This curriculum focuses on essential material, allows for deeper learning, and provides sufficient time to master essential competencies such as literacy and numeracy (Zidan & Qamariah, 2023). In addition, the project-based learning approach helps develop soft skills and character according to the Pancasila student profile. Flexibility in

implementation allows teachers to organize differentiated learning according to student's abilities and adapt to local context and content (Natalie et al., 2023). Learning outcomes measured per phase encourage fun and relevant learning relevant to student needs and the conditions of the educational unit. Overall, the current state curriculum aims to create a learning process that is deeper, more meaningful, less rushed, and more explorative.

In Pradipto and Abraham's research (2014), they stated that Mangunwijaya's concept of thought was in contrast to the national education curriculum at that time, where the national curriculum still focused on the learning system of becoming a robot, namely using the concept of learning by rote. On the other hand, the educational concept at Mangunan pedagogy is based on experimental education, where students will have lasting learning experiences through explorative learning. Moreover, Risyanto (2016) He stated in his research that Mangunwijaya-style liberating education only covers 30% of the national curriculum—which at that time was the 1994 Curriculum. However, the results of recent interviews with sources provide another statement.

*"In concept, Father Mangun tries to formulate a good education pattern for children. So, he adopted several educational systems, such as those of John Dewey, Jean Piaget, Ki Hadjar Dewantara, Natural Schools, and many others. Not to forget, Father Mangun invited this school under the Yayasan Dinamika Edukasi Belajar (Basic et al. Foundation) to continue considering the values contained in the national curriculum." Person 1.*

Judging from the answer above and some answers from the follow-up questions, Mangunan pedagogy is a system of integrating learning from many people/other curricula. There is also mention that the actual climate at this school is known as the '*Pohon Kurikulum*' (*Pohon* is a tree in English). In understanding this alternative curriculum, it is intended that there is integration between students, the learning environment, and the educators.

As previously mentioned, the learning system at Eksperimental Mangunan Middle School integrates existing educational concepts, so it can be said that this school still has the same spirit as the national curriculum. This educational concept frees students to experiment and acquire knowledge. The roots of the current national curriculum are democratic education, where students are taught to have the skills of this century: communication, creation, criticism, and collaboration. (Rohana et al., 2018).

Even though they both have the same educational roots—democratic education- this school still has unique qualities and personalities. School management skills and the role of educators are critical. (Suherman & Firmansyah, 2024) This is also explained by (Mangunwijaya, 2020) Educators must recognize students' potential and find the proper method to develop students so that students can explore their potential effectively and creatively. In practice at this school, each class will have two teachers who monitor students' progress. Then, the delivery of the subjects is adjusted to the big theme at each time. Thematic learning is applied so that students can better correlate what they learn at school with their real lives. Besides, school buildings also need attention so that they radiate personality. (Tamansiswa, 2013) Therefore, this school was created with the Joglo Houses concept (the traditional house from Central Java) so that students have a learning experience similar to that at home. Wahyuni et al. (2023) She explained that the Eksperimental Mangunan School is an open school planted with lots of trees.

There are several special activities carried out at this school, including *membaca buku bagus* (reading good books), *komunikasi iman* (faith communication), and *kotak pertanyaan* (box of questions) (Wahyuni et al., 2023). In interviews, it was found that reading good books is one of the specialties at this school, where students can do morning literacy by reading any book and then being asked to discuss with friends and educators what they have learned. Even though a Catholic religious leader initiated this school, it is open to anyone. Therefore, communication of faith is intended so that students understand more about the fundamental values of religion and know the differences so that they can remain tolerant. Students' critical thinking can be built by having a question box where students can write questions that are in their heads and will be discussed together in class. This helps students become more literate.

Another unique thing about this school is that it offers an ecological approach to education. In this education, it is hoped that students will understand that the surrounding environment is the closest and fundamental aspect of human life. So far, there have been many ecological crises due to humans' lack of respect for nature (Mulyatno, 2022). Therefore, a program called 'Nandur Urip' or Planting Life exists. This program is not only implemented at school but also at home. This program invites students to care for plants and consider the surrounding environment. It is hoped that students' concern, sensitivity, and responsibility can grow. Students are also given direct opportunities for field practice, such as helping farmers in the fields so that students can better interpret their learning and reflect on it. Caring for the environment can increase students' opportunities to experience brotherhood and develop empathy. Apart from that, this also teaches students to recognize the beauty and appreciate living creatures (Mulyatno, 2022).

In character education, the national curriculum currently applies to Pancasila education. Eksperimental Mangunan JHS also applies this education to students because it aligns with their ideals. The impressive thing is that this concept does not just stop with practice. However, students are invited to take concrete action to become humanists and Pancasila people. Social service or charity is one of the things that is done. The habit of saying 'sorry, please, and thank you' has also become a doctrine. Teachers admit that if students make mistakes, the approach is not to punish them but rather to invite them to discuss what they have done and ask them what consequences they deserve. The habit of asking questions and discussing is very well instilled. Students and educators get used to a culture of questioning and discussion to explore methods for developing student material.

### **The Post-Modernism Eksperimental Mangunan School in the Post-Pandemic Era**

According to Green (1994), post-modernist education emphasizes the importance of understanding the local context and cultural diversity—every community has uniqueness and differences that must be respected. Apart from that, this educational concept also considers students as active constructors of knowledge. These things are the ideals of Father Mangun that he wants to transmit in education at the Mangunan Eksperimental School. Therefore, learning at this school focuses on their values: exploratory, creative, and integral. Romo Mangun wants to raise the status of marginalized people so that they receive an education that can shape their character and enable them to compete in the future while prioritizing the value of good rational thinking.

During COVID-19, education dynamics in schools also faced challenges; some of them are differences in engagement and approaches that must be taken to achieve learning outcomes. (Natalie & Purnamaningwulan, 2024). Rapid changes must be made by schools in Indonesia, where they have to carry out distance learning using online classes. This is, of course, a concern for educators and students alike. They must adapt quickly to catch up with the massive changes. (Natalie et al., 2024). The teachers admitted that it was a new experience for them. At first, it was a challenge for the school to develop environment-based learning, which is the hallmark of learning at Mangunan School. (Mulyatno, 2022b). However, Eksperimental Mangunan Junior High School continues to innovate and take this opportunity. As written in Mulyatno and Pradana's (2022) Research shows this school carries out dialogical communication with students and parents. The interview explained that parents also play a role in children's formal education because, without them, teachers cannot teach optimally in this pandemic era. Before this pandemic, communication between schools and parents was quite good. On this occasion, communication between the two parties became even more intimate. They used online conference platforms such as Google Meet to conduct learning. There are also dialogue activities with parents individually, where the teacher calls parents to share and check students' progress. So, even though using an online platform as a learning medium, the school could handle it well. All parties, including the foundation, schools, teachers, students, and parents, know the importance of continuous learning, especially technology acceptance. However, the challenge does not cease with communication alone. Some families do not have gadgets that support distance learning. In this way, these teachers would facilitate students by continuously visiting their homes. They did those things to ensure that no student was left behind.

Khusna et al. (2022) Explained that COVID-19 has brought about new changes where technology can play a role in education. Thus, Rapanta et al. (2021) Also, I agree that the educational framework must be adjusted again to balance the technology with the existing pedagogy. The interviewees confirmed this. Even though this Eksperimental Mangunan Junior High School is a post-modernist school, they are not blind to what is developing in education today. Both foundations, schools, and teachers continue to study technology in schools.

In practice, in the current situation, students are allowed to bring cell phones to school. This supports learning if the teacher wants to give some online quizzes. Sometimes, students will also be given projects that use their own devices. However, if there is no need to use a cell phone in class, the cell phone will be collected by the teacher or kept by each individual. Not only technology is used during learning, but extracurricular activities have also started to use technology. In this activity, they will be given a project to make videos, short movies, and many others.

The above was done because of Father Mangun's spirit of integrating educational concepts and adapting them to today's needs. Therefore, teachers respond positively to the use of technology in this school. However, they agreed that they would not digitize education because it was essential to teach about technological literacy. However, technology is not the only important aspect of life. For them, growing students' personalities to be helpful to those around them is more meaningful because it will make 'humans' become 'humans.' They believe teaching adapted to the existing social context will make students more critical and creative.

## CONCLUSION

The research shows similar foundations from the Independent Learning Curriculum/*Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum with the Mangunan Pedagogy. Both adhere to liberal arts education, where project-based learning is the approach used. Regardless, since Eksperimental Mangunan Junior High School integrates existing educational concepts and adapts them to their context, this school still has its uniqueness. The character and environmental education prioritized at this school is to instill good habits for students to become human beings who humanize humans and other created creatures. Apart from that, COVID-19 impacts education, one of which is increasing technological literacy in schools. Eksperimental Mangunan Junior High School accepts this presence but allows students to develop with technology. However, technology is not the main thing in education at this school because this post-modernist school still prioritizes education that is based on the social context around them.

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