

Merdeka Belajar: The Perspective of Progressivism and its Relevance to Teachers as Agents of Change

Umi Kulsum^{1*}, Erlitawanty² 

^{1,2}SMK Negeri 5 Malang, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: kulsum2406@gmail.com

Abstrak

Merdeka belajar dan progresivisme menghendaki adanya perubahan menjadi lebih baik dan berkualitas. Proses perubahan tersebut perlu disikapi secara bijak oleh praktisi pendidikan utamanya guru. Tujuan penulisan untuk mendeskripsikan Merdeka Belajar dengan cara pandang progresivisme dalam pembaharuan pendidikan. Metode penulisan dengan literature review (kajian pustaka). Telaah pustaka dilakukan dengan mengumpulkan data dari berbagai sumber pustaka sebagai sumber ide untuk menggali gagasan baru sehingga kerangka teori baru dapat dikembangkan sebagai dasar pemecahan masalah. Hasil penulisan menunjukkan bahwa Merdeka belajar sebagai upaya menuju pendidikan berkualitas, menciptakan pendidikan berinovasi dan menyenangkan, membangun SDM unggul, cerdas, kreatif menghadapi tantangan masa depan; Konsep merdeka belajar memiliki kesejajaran dengan konsep progresivisme menekankan kemerdekaan dan keleluasaan bagi guru, peserta didik, sekolah terhadap pelaksanaan pendidikan kearah lebih baik; Merdeka belajar dalam cara pandang progresivisme memiliki relevansi dengan guru sebagai agent of change. Berdasarkan hasil tersebut dapat disimpulkan bahwa agen perubahan (agent of change) bagi guru, mengandung makna guru sangat berpengaruh dalam pembaharuan pendidikan yang berkualitas. Mengubah dirinya bertindak professional, mendorong peserta didik selalu berprogres sebagai generasi yang akan menjawab tantangan perubahan zaman, sejalan tujuan merdeka belajar dalam cara pandang progresivisme.

Kata Kunci: Merdeka Belajar, Progresivisme, Agent of change.

Abstract

Merdeka Belajar and Progressivism want changes for the better and with quality. Education practitioners, especially teachers, need to address the change process wisely. This study aims to describe Merdeka Belajar from the point of view of Progressivism in educational renewal—writing method with literature review (literature review). The literature review is carried out by collecting data from various sources of literature as a source of ideas to explore new ideas so that a new theoretical framework can be developed as a basis for solving problems. The results of the writing show that Merdeka Belajar is an effort towards quality education, creating innovative and fun education, and building superior, intelligent, creative human resources to face future challenges; The concept of Merdeka Belajar has parallels with the concept of Progressivism emphasizing independence and freedom for teachers, students, schools towards implementing education in a better direction; Merdeka Belajar in the perspective of Progressivism has relevance to the teacher as an agent of change. Based on these results, the agent of change for teachers implies that teachers are very influential in the renewal of quality education. He was changing himself to act professionally, encouraging students to always progress as a generation that will respond to the challenges of changing times, in line with the goal of Merdeka Belajar in the perspective of Progressivism.

Keywords: Merdeka Belajar, Progressivism, Agent of change

1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the most important thing in directing the progress of a nation. Education is a top priority for the country (Ningrat et al., 2018; Susanto & Suyadi, 2020). Education is necessary for a nation to stand up and obtain what it expects. Education aims to produce an intelligent, superior, and virtuous generation. Not only that, but education also encourages

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change for the better from generation to generation (Agustini, 2020). Through education, it is hoped that it can give birth to innovative, creative things and create generations capable of bringing about change. Good education requires a reformer/agent of change (agent of change) who brings education towards the components needed by students in advancing a country (Sedana, 2019). To achieve educational goals, we continue to improve the quality of education. Improving the quality of education is important to be able to keep up with globalization developments and also be able to compete with several developed countries. The Indonesian government made Various regulations and policies to improve the quality of education, which can improve the quality of human resources so that educational goals can be achieved. Today, one of Indonesia's newest policies announced by the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, is the Merdeka Belajar policy.

This Merdeka Belajar policy provides independence and freedom for students, teachers, and schools in creating innovative education (Agus & Asiah, 2021; Arifin & Muslim, 2020). The main objective of the Merdeka Belajar program is to free students, teachers, and schools from various shackles. Nadiem Makarim said that Merdeka Belajar is freedom of thought. The teacher determines independence of thought. So the teacher is the main key to supporting the new education system. The conclusion from the Merdeka Belajar concept initiated by Nadiem Makarim is an offer to reconstruct the national education system. Reorganization of the education system to welcome changes and progress of the nation that can adapt to changing times (Baharuddin, 2021; Sopiensyah & Masruroh, 2021). By restoring the true nature of education, education to humanize humans or education that liberates. In the Merdeka Belajar concept, teachers and students are subjects in the learning system.

Merdeka Belajar has the same concept from the perspective of Progressivism. Both have the same direction and goal, with the hope that education in Indonesia will be more advanced and of better quality. Progressivism assumes that in education, all elements are considered the driving force to achieve progress in the future. For Progressivism, ideas, and theories, these ideals must be searched for meaning to achieve progress. In the context of education, Progressivism also views that students are given the freedom and skills to conduct experiments. In addition, Progressivism also requires changes in students to become individuals who are tough and able to face problems and adapt to social life in society. In this context, education will be successful if it can involve students actively in learning, which leads to the ability to think systematically. From the explanation above, it is clear that in Merdeka Belajar and also Progressivism requires changes for the better and quality. Education practitioners, especially teachers, need to address the change process wisely. A teacher has a role in guiding the direction in which this education will be taken. The role of the teacher as a manager who designs learning, implements it in the classroom, controls student competencies, and creates qualified graduates, is an integral part that cannot be separated from the figure of a teacher. The role of the teacher is needed in encouraging change for the better. An agent of change for a teacher implies that the teacher is very influential in reforming the world of education.

2. METHOD

The method used in this paper is a literature review. This literature review is intended to solve a problem that rests on a critical and in-depth study of relevant library materials. A literature review is carried out by collecting data or information from various sources of literature, which are needed as a source of ideas to explore new thoughts or ideas, as a basis for making deductions from existing knowledge so that new theoretical frameworks can be developed, or as a basis for solving problems. Library research utilizes sources to obtain research data (Harahap, 2014). The method is to find and collect several research results and

other supporting sources. In line with this definition, the literature study collects data by examining the literature needed in writing (Bungin, 2017).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

The government continues to improve education by making changes to education sector policies. The government makes Various regulations and policies so educational goals can be achieved. The Ministry of Education and Culture has issued the latest policy. The policy designed to make a big leap in the quality aspect of education is Merdeka Belajar. The main objective of the Merdeka Belajar program is to liberate students, teachers, and schools from various shackles. The “Merdeka Belajar” policy is extraordinary in spirit and purpose, to build superior human resources (HR) to face future challenges. The creation of the “Merdeka Belajar” policy was motivated by the results of the Program for International Student Assessment research (Hewi & Shaleh, 2020; Tohir, 2019). This study's results indicate that Indonesian students' assessment is still very low. Education or school policies will work well if these policies have certain aspects and feasibility. This “Merdeka Belajar” policy was created to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, which is still low. Improving the quality of education is carried out so that Indonesian citizens can follow the development of globalization and also be able to compete with several developed countries. If education quality is not improved, Indonesia will continue to lag behind other countries. Considering this should not happen, the Indonesian government is trying to make several policies to improve education quality. One of the newest policies in Indonesia today, the Merdeka Belajar policy, is expected to improve the quality of education in schools (Anjelina et al., 2021).

The Merdeka Belajar policy is a scenario of significant and fundamental educational changes compared to current educational practices. To achieve these changes, change must be managed by visionary and transformative leaders (teachers), quickly adapting to environmental changes so that educational goals can be quickly achieved and survive in the era of global competition. Fundamental changes to implementing education in a better, quality, and more advanced direction is a concept in Merdeka Belajar. In addition, Merdeka Belajar is a policy created to give freedom of reasoning. The importance of freedom in reasoning should be owned by educators first. It will only be applied to students if educators realize it. Professional teachers must have integrity, knowledge, a good personality, and appropriate abilities and must be educated (they are educated, not only trained) (Sedana, 2019). Thus, teachers can prepare students with high reasoning power, are creative, and establish flexible working relationships with teachers as change agents.

The concept of Merdeka Belajar has the same direction and goals as the concept the view of Progressivism, which emphasizes the importance of the basic principles of independence and freedom for students. The concepts of Merdeka Belajar and the concept of Progressivism offer independence and flexibility to educational institutions to explore the potential of their students to the fullest by adjusting each student's interests, talents, and tendencies (Mustaghfiroh, 2020). Teachers are also given independence and flexibility to use various teaching tools according to the needs and characteristics of students. Applications that provide various references for teachers will be used to develop teaching practices independently, creatively, and always innovate. Therefore, the involvement of teachers, from planning educational innovations to their implementation and evaluation, plays a very large role as agents of change for educational success.

Merdeka Belajar

Merdeka Belajar is a new policy program of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendikbud RI) launched by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim. In his speech commemorating National Teacher's Day, he coined the concept of Pendidikan Merdeka Belajar. This concept is a response to the needs of the education system in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0. The development of independent learning education in the study of learning methods, the system, and its teaching, must meet trends in education in the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era. The main needs to be achieved in the education system or, more specifically, in learning methods are students with a master of new literacy, including data, technological, and human literacy. Mastery of new literacy in teachers is a key to change, including revitalizing a literacy-based curriculum. Teachers are the key to the success of an independent learning education system (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020).

The concept of Merdeka Belajar is the freedom to think and innovate. Not only improving teacher skills in teaching but the teaching system in the classroom must also be given innovation that is different from before. The teaching system also underwent a process of change, from what was originally nuanced in the classroom to outside the classroom (outing class) and not only listening to the teacher's explanation but rather forming the character of students who are brave, independent, competent and broaden students' insights in creative thinking and critical—the main essence of freedom of thought, which is in the educator. With this happening to educators, it will be possible for students to happen (Ainia, 2020). Merdeka Belajar, in addition to improving students' way of thinking, freeing students to learn outside the classroom will shape students' character so that they are more independent in their attitudes and more courageous in expressing their opinions. This is where the function of student independence in learning is. They are freed in creative thinking and innovation.

The aim of Merdeka Belajar is so that teachers, students, and parents can have a pleasant atmosphere. The Merdeka Belajar program is a milestone for the advancement of education in Indonesia. Merdeka Belajar is one of the programs to create a happy learning atmosphere and a happy atmosphere for students and teachers (Nasution, 2020). The concept of the Merdeka Belajar movement will encourage the education system in Indonesia to be more enjoyable, and students are not burdened with a value system or ranking. It is hoped that implementing Merdeka Belajar can form students who are virtuous, competent, and ready to engage in society according to their fields. Through these policies, it is hoped that Merdeka Belajar can be realized effectively. If the independence of learning is well fulfilled, it will create Merdeka Belajar activities, and the school is also called Sekolah Merdeka. (Hendri, 2020). Merdeka Belajar is one of the concrete solutions to overcome educational problems that are so complete

Progressivism

In language, Progressivism comes from the word progressive, which means to move forward. Progressivism can also be interpreted as a change movement. Progressivism is often associated with the word progress. Progressivism is a philosophical school that wants progress that will bring about change. Progressivism emphasizes the concept of progress, which states that humans can develop and perfect their environment by applying their intelligence with scientific methods (Mustaghfiroh, 2020). Progressivism also emphasizes that education is not just an effort to provide a set of knowledge to students but contains a variety of activities that lead to the training of their thinking skills as a whole so that they can think systematically in scientific ways and make conclusions towards selecting the most feasible alternative for solving the problem at hand (Ibrahim, 2018).

Progressivism requires changes in students to become individuals who are tough and able to face problems and adapt to social life in society. Therefore, progressivism education requires students always to progress, act constructively, think innovatively, and move actively. It aligns with the Merdeka Belajar concept currently implemented by the Ministry of Education and Culture, which provides educational independence for students, teachers, and educational institutions. Progressivism sees that thinking with intelligence is the main grip in education. The intelligence in question is intelligence in the context of multiple intelligences, meaning that the intelligence developed is multidisciplinary intelligence with a wider scope. This multiple intelligences is to develop all students' potential, which is the potential development that builds self-concepts that support mental health (Omeri, 2015). In this context, students are not only seen as individuals but as human beings in a wider social environment.

Progressivism also sees that the existing environment regarding humans and others is not the same and static but always changes. These changes are caused by the human ability to learn many things by anticipating things that might happen in the future. Students can explore knowledge and choose education according to their interests and talents (Fadlillah, 2017). In addition, this concept also offers independence for teachers to develop creativity in teaching and see the potential in each student. With the provision of abilities and skills that have been possessed, students are expected to be able to find and find alternative solutions for themselves that can be used to overcome any problems that will be faced in the future. In other words, education makes students more advanced regarding the individual and their social environment.

Agent of Change

An agent of Change (Change Agent) is a professional officer who influences the innovation decisions of community members according to the direction desired by the change agents. Everyone who works to initiate, plan, and implement social change is a change agent. Educational institutions need change agents who can drive change (drive to change) and not be led by change (lead by change). As a change agent, you must be more prepared to improve the quality of your human resources. The change agent needed knowledge about change and the basic aspects of change as critical to planning, leadership, managing, and evaluating change. One of the agents of change in education is the teacher. As an agent of change, the teacher is the most important part of the education scope. It means that the teacher, as the commander-in-chief who is in charge of bringing about changes in someone who initially does not know, becomes aware of the results of the learning process and the application of positive values carried out professionally. Teacher professionalism has become the demand of the world community (Komara, 2015). The teacher's work is no longer seen as an ordinary job but has become professional.

Teachers must be the most prepared agents of change in implementing educational innovations. Teachers must take steps and initiatives to design learning processes that are active, innovative, creative, effective, and enjoyable. In addition, as the spearhead in implementing education, the teacher's role is to encourage change for the better. Charisma and expertise in managing and facilitating students in the teaching and learning process and the preparation and management of administration are very much needed by students, schools, the community, and the government. The teacher's competence as a professional, educational, social, and personality figure is needed in helping to realize the ideals of educating the nation's life. Teachers must have pedagogic, professional, personality, and social competence (Zaragoza et al., 2021). In the 21st century, schools need teachers who can innovate sustainably using these four competencies.

Furthermore, competency is also a provision for teachers to become agents of change in the educational process (Andrian, 2018). The term refers to someone who is professionally tasked with influencing others in innovative ways. In essence, the role of the teacher is to shape and produce a potential and superior generation. To become agents of change in schools, teachers must be skilled in using authority, responsibility, connections, demonstrations, and professionalism (Damayanti et al., 2021).

Observing the teacher's role as an educator, then he is the person who bears the responsibility to guide. With his teaching activities, he forms his teacher's identity and will provide a change in his students. As agents of change, teachers change students to be better, smarter, and have more skills useful for their professional development. The teacher's role is strategic and needed in responding to changing times, so their presence is expected to guide education in a better direction. The role of the change agent includes changing students' knowledge, ways of thinking, lifestyle, habits, and social relations (Raihana, 2018). Changes in knowledge are carried out by guiding children to find answers to each question through various activities in the learning process. The teacher's role as an agent of change is not only in class, the school environment, and society (Bourn, 2016). Making changes outside the classroom is more challenging than making changes in the classroom. However, teachers must view this situation as a form of greater involvement as agents of change in society broadly or globally.

Teachers must do two ways to survive in their professional performance: first, by being critical of various government education policies that suppress their autonomy and professionalism, and second, by being self-critical to rediscover their freedom and autonomy as agents of change (agents). When education policies do not favor teachers, one force can become a bargaining chip for teachers' strength: to regain freedom and live their own identity as agents of change. That is the deepest essence of the existence of a teacher. As a change agent, the teacher will transform himself into someone who acts professionally; turns their students into students with character; and teachers who change the learning process to be more qualified and meaningful (Gistituati & Aimon, 2020).

Discussion

Teachers as Transformative Intellectuals

The role of the teacher in society determines how we construct the social order. We must re-understand the role of teachers as engaged and transformative intellectuals. In addition to being critical, teachers can relate pedagogical theory to broader social issues to control and direct their performance more actively and transformatively. Through their professional performance, teachers can play a more active role in developing more productive critical awareness in students. Transformational leadership concerns encouraging others to develop and produce a performance that exceeds the expected standard and focuses on the influence and relationship of superiors and subordinates (in this case, teachers and students) (Putra & Sriathi, 2014). Transformational leadership, as a leader who inspires followers to go beyond their interests, can profoundly and extraordinarily impact followers. Transformational leaders create major changes, both within themselves and their organizations. Transformational leadership can bring changes in values and goals, which impact progress. The role of the change agent becomes important in the transformation of change. They can cause change through information and various exemplary traits (role models) (Riyanti & Edison, 2016).

Suppose education is a means of liberation that allows everyone to shape social order in society actively. In that case, democratic inspiration is the soul that supports teachers' performance as agents of change. For this reason, teachers must develop a new paradigm whose basic inspiration are democratic values that prioritize the participation of each

individual in managing the governance of community life. The basic idea of inspiring democracy in education is the belief that everyone has the same right to be involved in community development. In this context, teachers have a central role in instilling this democratic inspiration in every student so that they can be actively and productively involved later when they enter society. The teacher must live up to his identity as a transformative intellectual who, through his performance, contributes to developing a new social order and his existence and role as an agent of change in society.

Leaders are Agents of Change

As agents of change, teachers are nothing but leaders for themselves and others so they can build a new order according to their ideals and hopes. This view presupposes that there is the potential to develop within the individual. A requirement for teacher self-development as agents of change is that we believe there is goodness, potential, and growth in every individual to change for the better and develop to become more perfect. For that, every individual teacher has the potential to become a leader. Teachers are leaders and agents of educational change because any attempt to renew education will only succeed with teachers' involvement. In any school reform, a change initiative that does not touch the teacher's life will not change things. Teachers are at the forefront and agents of change in education (Herwani, 2022).

Structurally, the principal is an educational leader. However, the real teacher is the real teacher because he manages the class and meets students face to face. The teacher's leadership ability is tested in meetings with students. The teacher is a leader in his own life, and he builds an idealism and shared aspirations. Leadership is a human capacity to build a better future jointly and to be able to maintain an ongoing process of change. This change fosters and strengthens individual identity as agents of change.

4. CONCLUSION

Agents of change for teachers imply that teachers are influential in renewing quality education, changing themselves to act professionally, and encouraging students to always progress as a generation that will answer the challenges of changing times, in line with the goals of Merdeka Belajar from a progressivist point of view.

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