

Reconstructing Human Nature in the Merdeka Curriculum: A Philosophical-Anthropological Inquiry

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Abstract

The rapid transformation of Indonesia's educational system has raised concerns about curricula that prioritize measurable outcomes and technical skills, often neglecting the deeper dimensions of human identity. This qualitative study aims to reconstruct the concept of human nature as the ontological, anthropological, and philosophical foundation for developing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Employing a critical library research approach, this study analyzes philosophical and anthropological perspectives on education alongside policy documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum possesses significant humanistic potential through its emphasis on learner autonomy, differentiated instruction, and character development as articulated in the Pancasila Student Profile. However, tensions persist between industrial demands and the vision of education as a humanization process. This research underscores the importance of grounding curriculum development in a holistic understanding of human nature to ensure education nurtures learners comprehensively.

Keywords: Educational Anthropology, Human Nature, Merdeka Curriculum, Philosophy of Education, Curriculum Development



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Introduction

Educational reforms in Indonesia continue to face significant challenges. PISA survey results indicate that the majority of Indonesian students have not achieved minimum competency in reading and mathematics (Megawati & Sutarto, 2021). This reflects fundamental issues in education quality, such as regional disparities, the social impacts of the pandemic, and learning practices that overly emphasize academic aspects (Langoday et al., 2024). Consequently, education often loses its role as a process of holistic human formation, creating a "void" in the development of students' values, character, and identity (Dirgantoro & Soesanto, 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum emerges as an effort to address these issues through student-centered learning and providing teachers with the flexibility to design contextual and relevant learning for the 21st century (Syarifuddin & Hz, 2023). However, the success of this curriculum cannot be supported solely by adjustments to content or methods. It requires a deeper conceptual foundation: an understanding of human nature as the core of education. This is important, given that previous studies on human nature in the curriculum have predominantly focused on 21st-century competencies and skills (Rumahorbo & Andriany, 2024) and learning process evaluation (Irawan et al., 2023), while the position of humans as the primary subjects of educational transformation has received less serious attention. This is the research gap that this study aims to bridge: it offers novelty by reconstructing

human nature as the conceptual foundation for the Merdeka Curriculum, moving beyond the dominant technical reforms.

To address this gap, this study is grounded in the philosophy and anthropology of education as the conceptual basis for understanding humans in ontological, epistemological, and axiological dimensions. Philosophical schools such as idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, as well as Pancasila philosophy and Islamic educational philosophy view humans as multidimensional beings: rational, moral, social, possessing historical consciousness, and imbued with spiritual values (We'u & Pali, 2024). The thoughts of Plato, Aristotle, Dewey, Freire, and Ki Hajar Dewantara show that education is not merely a transfer of knowledge, but a process of humanization that cultivates wisdom, character, and independence. In this framework, humans are understood as subjects who are rational, embodied, conscientious, and possess historical consciousness (Tolchah, 2015), so the curriculum should facilitate the development of all these dimensions.

Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum should be interpreted not only as a technical innovation but as a philosophical and anthropological project to build holistic Indonesian humans: faithful, critically rational, cultured, creative, and able to live consciously and meaningfully amid the dynamics of the times (Nadiva, 2023).

In line with this, the main objective of this research is to formulate the nature of humans in depth as the foundation for developing the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, this research also develops a conceptual framework and practical recommendations so that the curriculum does not only produce academically competent students but also noble character, socially responsible, and able to face the challenges of the times reflectively and meaningfully (Marlina et al., 2023).

Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method with a library research approach (Qolbi & Susiawati, 2025). This technique was carried out by collecting various written sources relevant to the research topic. The research process began by identifying primary and secondary sources related to the theme of human nature and education. Each source was then read in-depth to understand the concepts, theories, and thoughts contained therein (Fadli, 2021; Isnaini, 2020). The obtained data were analyzed by describing, interpreting, and comparing ideas found in the literature, especially those related to the reconstruction of human nature as the basis for developing the Merdeka Curriculum (Alanur et al., 2024).

The analysis stage was carried out by grouping data according to the research focus, namely educational philosophy, educational anthropology perspectives, and Merdeka Curriculum policies (Handayani et al., 2024). After that, the researchers conducted synthesis and critical interpretation of these findings. Through this procedure, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the concept of human nature and its implications for developing a more humane and character-based educational curriculum (Muhamad et al., 2023; Zuhri & Nasir, 2023).

Results and Discussions

1. Results

Before proceeding to a deeper analysis, it is important to emphasize that the entire study process in this research is based on the basic assumption that education cannot be separated from the conception of humans. Every policy, learning approach, and curriculum formulation is essentially a manifestation of a particular view of human nature. Therefore, the philosophy of education becomes the epistemic foundation for reading the direction of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The Merdeka Curriculum, as shown in various official documents, does not merely offer technical updates such as simplifying material, differentiating learning, or improving assessment. Behind all that, there is a philosophical construction that places humans as free, reflective, creative, and moral beings. To understand this, anthropological and educational philosophy studies are

used as analytical tools to dissect how philosophical schools shape the Merdeka Curriculum's framework in viewing students.

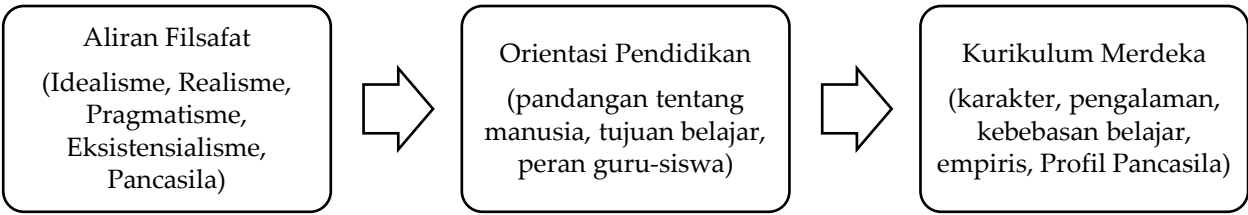


Figure 1. Scheme of Integration of Anthropological-Philosophical Perspectives in The Independent Curriculum

After observing the integration scheme above, it can be seen that the relationship between philosophical views and curriculum construction is not linear but complementary. Each school of philosophy contributes a different horizon of understanding about humans: how humans exist, how humans learn, what the purpose of human education is, and how humans should live meaningfully amidst changing times.

This philosophical orientation is the epistemological foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Differentiated learning, diagnostic assessment, the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, and freedom to learn are not merely technical strategies but practical expressions of the view of humans as unique, autonomous, adaptive, and moral beings. The following analysis shows how these philosophical roots work in reconstructing human nature and curriculum development.

2. Discussions

a. Human Nature in Philosophical Perspective

Understanding human nature is an important foundation in formulating educational orientation. Each school of philosophy offers a different perspective that collectively enriches the way we understand humans as educational subjects. The analysis shows that the five schools of philosophy—idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, and Pancasila philosophy—are inseparable in examining the concept of humans holistically. These five schools provide different but complementary lenses: from spiritual, empirical, practical, existential, to comprehensive-holistic dimensions.

In idealism, humans are viewed as spiritual beings who have rational and moral potential (Muhammad Alifkhan, 2023). Realism underlines the empirical dimension of humans as beings who learn from the real world. Pragmatism understands humans as active agents who transform knowledge through interaction and action. Existentialism interprets humans as free individuals who create meaning in life through personal choices (Saputro & Wibowo, 2023). Meanwhile, Pancasila philosophy offers a unique Indonesian synthesis that sees humans as monopluralist beings who balance physical-spiritual, individual-social, and religious aspects.

To clarify the contribution of each school in describing human nature, the following table presents a comparative summary of these five perspectives.

Table 1.
Human Nature in Various Schools of Philosophy

School of Philosophy	Human Nature According to the School	Key Characteristics
Idealism	Humans as spiritual beings pursuing moral perfection.	Values, morals, intellect, universal truth.
Realism	Humans as part of the real world developing through empirical experience.	Facts, observation, natural laws, objective rationality.
Pragmatism	Humans as active individuals forming knowledge through experience and action.	Experience, process, adaptation, problem-solving.
Existentialism	Humans as free beings forming their essence through personal choices.	Freedom, responsibility, authenticity, search for meaning.
Pancasila Philosophy	Humans as monopluralist beings (physical-spiritual, individual-social, religious).	Holistic, moral, cultured, godly.

The table above shows that each school of philosophy emphasizes different aspects of human nature, but it is precisely these differences that allow for a more comprehensive understanding of humans. The idealism and Pancasila approaches highlight moral and spiritual aspects; realism emphasizes facts and empirical experience; pragmatism places life experience as a source of knowledge; while existentialism provides space for freedom, subjectivity, and the search for meaning.

Viewed integrally, these various perspectives show that humans cannot be reduced solely to rational or moral beings, nor merely as free, empirical, social, or religious beings. Each school of philosophy highlights a certain aspect of human existence, but all these aspects are intertwined and form the wholeness of the human self. Thus, human nature must be understood as a multidimensional reality that integrates cognitive, moral, spiritual, experiential, freedom, and relational dimensions in a unified whole. This comprehensive understanding is the basis for formulating educational orientations capable of developing humans as balanced individuals in harmony with the complexity of their lives.

b. Implications of Human Nature for Educational Orientation

The differences in views on human nature in each school of philosophy have direct implications for educational goals, learning methods, and the competencies to be developed in students. In idealism, education is positioned as a means of moral and character formation because humans are believed to have spiritual potential that must be directed towards truth and goodness. Thus, the development of ethical values and character cultivation becomes the main focus of education.

Realism emphasizes that education must be rooted in the real world and factual experiences that can be observed. Students need to be trained to develop logical thinking skills, observe natural phenomena, and build knowledge through direct interaction with empirical

reality. Scientific approaches, laboratories, and environment-based learning are real implications of this view.

Pragmatism directs education to be a dynamic process based on direct experience, problem-solving, and curriculum flexibility. Because humans develop through active interaction with their environment, learning must provide space for exploration, experimentation, and reflection. The context of daily life and the meaningfulness of experience become primary concerns.

Existentialism makes an important contribution in interpreting education as a space for students to discover their identity, develop personal freedom, and take responsibility for the decisions they make. Freedom to learn, diversity of interests, personalized learning, and reflective spaces are concrete manifestations of this approach.

Pancasila philosophy integrates all these orientations into a larger goal: to form Indonesian humans who are faithful, civilized, have personality, and possess national character. Because Pancasila humans are monopluralist beings, education must be holistic, developing intellectual, moral, social, and spiritual intelligence as well as cultural identity.

Thus, these findings affirm that education has an integral function to develop humans holistically. Education should not only produce cognitively intelligent individuals but also moral, socially civilized, and possessing meaningful life purposes. This orientation is consistent with the direction of modern curriculum development, including the Merdeka Curriculum, which places students as active subjects with multidimensional potential.

c. Integration of Anthropological-Philosophical Studies in the National Education System

Literature analysis reveals that the philosophical-anthropological perspective forms the foundation for formulating national education. Education must be oriented towards solving real-world problems, and learning should not be based on rote memorization but rather be action-oriented. Education is built for practical needs, not theory alone. The truth of education is measured by how graduates enter the workforce (Yunus, 2023). The monopluralist view of Pancasila integrates the morality of idealism, the rationality of realism, the experience of pragmatism, and the freedom of existentialism in building the character of Indonesian people.

The implementation of these values is evident in the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile, which emphasize not only mastery of competencies but also character, humanization, and enculturation. Thus, education is a conscious effort to prepare students through orientation, learning, or training activities for their future roles. Consequently, education in Indonesia is directed towards developing the whole person: physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually.

d. The Relevance of Philosophical Schools of Thought to Modern Educational Practices

Findings show that the orientation of modern education reflects the integration of various philosophical schools of thought. Every educational practice is based on a certain philosophical foundation that provides direction, value, and meaning to all of its activities" (Islami et al., 2024). The principle of learning by doing from pragmatism is reflected in project-based learning and authentic experiences. Existentialism provides a philosophical basis for learning differentiation and freedom of choice in learning paths (Chairun et al., 2023). Pragmatism-based education emphasizes direct experience, active learning, and the principle of learning by doing to solve real-life problems. Realism is evident in science learning, which requires empirical observation and verification. Idealism and Pancasila reinforce character education as the core of learning. Thus, Indonesian educational practices are not only technical but also philosophical and valuable (Juliangkary et al., 2023).

e. Education as a Human Enrichment Project (Final Synthesis)

The results of the analysis state that humans are multidimensional beings who must be developed holistically. Pancasila functions as Indonesia's philosophical synthesis that integrates values from various world philosophical schools of thought. Education, therefore, is not only a

process of knowledge transfer but also an effort to humanize humans (humanization), cultivate, and shape the character of the nation. Education is not merely a process of transferring knowledge.

Conclusion

This research affirms that humans are multidimensional beings with rational, moral, spiritual, social, and historical aspects. Studies in the philosophy and anthropology of education show that idealism, realism, pragmatism, existentialism, and Pancasila philosophy provide complementary conceptual foundations for understanding human nature as the center of the educational process. The synthesis of these various perspectives reveals that education should facilitate the holistic development of humans, not only intellectually but also in character, values, and self-awareness.

The analysis results show that the Merdeka Curriculum contains a humanistic orientation through differentiated learning, freedom to learn, formative assessment, and emphasis on values and character. However, tensions exist between the orientation of holistic human development and the demands of the industrial world, which tend to emphasize instrumental competencies. These findings underscore the importance of placing human nature as a philosophical foundation so that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum does not fall into mere utilitarian interests.

Furthermore, the Pancasila Student Profile proves to be an anthropological-philosophical representation of Indonesian humans who embody the unity of body-spirit, individual-social, and religious dimensions. Therefore, national education must ensure that the learning process does not stop at achieving cognitive competencies but also shapes moral wisdom, personal maturity, social sensitivity, and humanitarian values. The reconstruction of human nature offered by this research is an important contribution to strengthening the philosophical direction of the Merdeka Curriculum to be more oriented towards the holistic and character-based development of Indonesian humans.

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