



## An Analysis of Freedom to Learn Curriculum Understanding and Readiness on Primary School Education Department FIP UMJ

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### Abstract

*This Study aims to describe and analyze students' understanding of the freedom to learn curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), specifically among undergraduate and Postgraduate students of the Primary School Education Department at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta. The researchers use phenomenological approach as a type of the qualitative study to closely and comprehensively explain individual understandings based on personal experience. Setting of the study took place at primary school education department faculty of education Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta. Data collection techniques used in this study consist of observation, interview and documentation. The results of the study indicate that postgraduate students demonstrated a high level of understanding of the Freedom to Learn Curriculum, while undergraduate students showed a relatively lower level of comprehension. As the conclusion of the study, it can be conclude that postgraduate students have a better understanding of the Freedom to Learn Curriculum compared to undergraduate students.*

**Keywords:** *Freedom to Learn, Curriculum, Primary School Education*

## INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian education system faces many challenges in improving education quality. One major challenge is creating and using a curriculum that meets the needs of both basic and higher education. To address this, the Ministry of Education introduced the *Freedom to Learn Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka)* in 2020 to reform the education system. This new curriculum builds on the K-13 curriculum and focuses on three key ideas: character building, flexibility, and student-centered learning. It encourages meaningful and self-directed learning, where students take an active role in their education. Simarmata & Mayuni (2023) explain that this approach supports not only academic success but also personal growth and social skills. By allowing students to learn in ways that suit their

individual styles, interests, and developmental stages, the curriculum helps students stay engaged and find meaning in their educational journey (Mazid et al., 2021).

However, successful implementation of the Freedom to Learn curriculum requires more than legal mandates. Teachers need a deep understanding of its principles and how to apply them effectively in the classroom. This responsibility falls on both current and future educators. Undergraduate students in the Primary School Education Department at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta, play an important role in this effort. These prospective teachers must master the curriculum to meet professional teaching standards. However, research indicates that the learning process often lacks practical experiences, such as role-playing and simulations, which are essential for effective teacher training (Hadi et al., 2024). Meanwhile, postgraduate students, many of whom are already as teachers, must reflect on their classroom experiences and revise their approach to the curriculum. Their expertise, such as limited resources or policy barriers, is critical to maximizing the potential impact of the training (Fikri, 2024; Matondang et al., 2023)

The need for this research is highlighted by the ever-changing demands placed on educators. For the undergraduate students, the transition from conceptual knowledge to application is critical. Teacher education programs must address this gap by strengthening the connection between theory and real-world teaching practice. On the other hand, postgraduate students need continuous professional development to deal with the challenges of practice and adapt to the various needs in the classroom. As noted by Irawati et al. (2022), efforts to align teacher preparation with curriculum can improve outcomes, especially in contexts where flexibility and innovation are emphasized.

While many studies have highlighted the broader objectives of the Freedom to Learn Curriculum, such as the development of Pancasila values and supporting educational reform, there is still a gap in the understanding of its utility among future and current education practitioners. For example, a study by Susilo & Sihite (2022). Similarly, Rachmawati et al. (2022) highlighted the crucial role of Sekolah Penggerak (pioneer schools) in the adoption of the curriculum, while Hasim (2020) highlighted the adaptability of the curriculum during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these insights, little attention has been paid to preparing both undergraduate and postgraduate students of Primary Education to effectively implement the curriculum.

This study attempts to fill that gap by investigating the understanding and readiness of these two groups in implementing the Freedom to Learn Curriculum framework. By examining their conceptual and practical understanding, the study

aimed to identify areas where improvements could be made in the Primary Teacher education program. Ultimately, the findings will contribute to a broader understanding of how learning can empower instructors to provide innovative, student-centered learning experiences. Through these efforts, this study aligns with the overarching goal of improving the Indonesian education system and successfully implementing the Freedom to Learn Curriculum as one of the foundations of modern learning (Sumarsih et al., 2022; Yuhastina et al., 2020).

## **METHODS**

This study uses a phenomenological approach, which is a type of qualitative research, to investigate detailed explanations and individual understandings of personal experiences. This method was chosen because the researcher was interested in investigating the phenomenon of the freedom to learn Curriculum within the *Merdeka Belajar* program. The study seeks to describe and analyze various phenomena, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of individuals and groups concerning the curriculum.

The research was conducted within the undergraduate and postgraduate in Primary School Education program at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta. The primary data sources for this study consisted of selected participants chosen through purposive sampling. These informants were identified as students in the Faculty of Educational Sciences who have relevant knowledge and experience directly related to the issue under investigation.

Data were collected using three main techniques. First, observation was conducted regularly in classroom settings to gain firsthand insights into teaching and learning processes. Second, interviews were carried out with informants, both orally and in written form, to capture their comprehensive responses and reflections on the curriculum. Lastly, a literature review was performed to systematically study relevant documents and references that supported the data analysis process. To ensure the validity of the data, several steps were implemented, including prolonged data collection, consistent observations, triangulation of data sources, and peer debriefing to cross-check findings and interpretations.

The phenomenological data analysis process followed a systematic series of steps. Initially, the researcher described the lived experiences of the research subjects in detail. From the interviews, key statements were extracted, refined, and grouped into meaningful units without redundancy. These units were then developed into textual explanations. The researcher engaged in reflective analysis using imaginative variation to gain a holistic understanding of the data. A comprehensive construction of the meaning and essence of the phenomenon was developed, and the research findings were synthesized into a combined description of the results.

By employing this methodology, the study aims to provide meaningful insights into the understanding, readiness, and challenges faced by students and lecturers in implementing the freedom to learn Curriculum. The findings are expected to contribute to improving the implementation of the curriculum, equipping future and current educators with the knowledge and skills needed for its effective adoption.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The results of this study uncover key insights into the understanding and readiness of undergraduate and postgraduate students of Primary School Education at the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta regarding the Freedom to learn Curriculum. Through the phenomenological approach, data derived from observations, interviews, and document analysis reveal nuanced differences in comprehension, practical application, and the challenges faced by both groups of students.

#### ***Understanding of the Freedom to learn Curriculum.***

The study has shown differences in understanding between both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

Primary School Education undergraduate students demonstrated foundational knowledge of the Freedom to learn Curriculum. They demonstrated an understanding of basic principles, including student autonomy, flexibility, and character development, but struggled to connect these principles to tangible instructional strategies. Their understanding seems to be grounded in theoretical frameworks, with little connection to real-world applications, which leaves a gap in the ability to achieve diverse learning outcomes.

In contrast, postgraduate students demonstrated a more comprehensive understanding, which was shaped by their direct involvement during the teaching profession. They expressed an implicit view of learning objectives, such as fostering creativity, promoting differentiated learning, and increasing student engagement through a project-based approach. However, despite their deeper understanding, these students identified challenges in adapting curriculum in a resource-limited environment, accounting for flexibility and equity, and aligning school-level policies with learning objectives reveal.

#### ***Readiness for Implementation***

The readiness levels of undergraduate and postgraduate students differed significantly, reflecting differences in their experiences and interactions with the teaching environment.

Primary School Education undergraduate students expressed enthusiasm for implementing the curriculum but lacked confidence in their ability to implement it effectively. Their preparedness was hindered by limited practical exposure to the Freedom to learn Curriculum and insufficient integration of its principles into their teacher training programs. The lack of experiential learning opportunities, such as classroom simulations or fieldwork, further exacerbated this gap, as Hasim (2020) noted the role of teacher preparation and alignment with learning expectations he sees it as important.

The postgraduate students, on the other hand, demonstrated higher levels of readiness due to their professional teaching experience. Many participants reported incorporating elements of the Freedom to learn Curriculum, such as flexible lesson planning and project-based learning, into their teaching practices. However, their implementation was not without challenges, including inadequate access to teaching resources, inconsistent policy support, and the complexities of adapting the curriculum to diverse classroom needs. These findings align with Alimuddin (2023) who identified systemic barriers as persistent obstacles in curriculum implementation.

## **Discussion**

The results showed a clear gap between the theoretical knowledge of undergraduate students and the practical knowledge of postgraduate students of Primary School Education Department. This gap highlights the need for teacher education programs to shift their focus, emphasizing the integration of experiential learning and the application of the Freedom to Learn Curriculum. According to Sudarto et al. (2021), adapting teacher training to the context of curriculum implementation is critical to developing effective and confident teachers.

The postgraduate students' deeper understanding and better preparedness highlights the importance of professional experience in developing course applicability. Their ability to contextualize and adapt the curriculum as pointed out by (Sumarsih et al., 2022) is consistent with the mission of *Sekolah Penggerak* (pioneer schools), which serve as a model for translating policy into practice. However, the challenges that these students often face—such as limited resources and policy inconsistencies—highlight the need for broader policy reforms, including professional development and better allocation of resources.

The study findings also confirmed the importance of *Belajar* philosophical learning freedom in encouraging teachers to prioritize a student-centered approach. By promoting autonomy and creativity, Ainia (2020) strengthen that the Freedom to Learn Curriculum aligns with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's vision of education as a process of holistic character

development. This balance reflects the flexibility of the learning framework when implemented effectively.

Despite these strengths, the findings highlight critical areas for improvement. Undergraduate students need enhanced practicality in the Freedom to Learn Curriculum, including simulations, projects, and field-based experiences that bridge the gap between theory and practice. For postgraduate students, ongoing professional support in the form of workshops, collaborative forums, and access to new teaching materials is critical to addressing identified regulatory barriers. These suggestions mirror the findings of Rachmawati et al. (2022) highlighted the need for continuous capacity building to strengthen the role of *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila*.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the understanding and readiness of undergraduate and postgraduate students in Primary School Education Department at Muhammadiyah University of Jakarta Faculty of Educational Sciences in implementing the Freedom to Learn Curriculum. Findings revealed significant differences between the two groups, highlighting how theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and systemic support jointly shape coursework readiness.

Undergraduate students demonstrated basic knowledge of the Freedom to Learn Curriculum, including principles of student autonomy, identity formation, and flexibility. However, their understanding is mostly theoretical because they have not had the opportunity to learn experientially. As noted by Heatubun & Talaud (2024), hands-on experiences such as workshops and instructional simulations are necessary to effectively implement the curriculum. Similarly, Fikri (2024) emphasizes the importance of creativity-enhancing activities such as project-based learning, which not only prepares teachers for real-world challenges but also innovates and adapts the learning objectives aligned with capacity development.

The postgraduate students, informed by their teaching experience, demonstrated a deeper and more practical understanding of the course. Consistent with the findings of Sappaile et al. (2024) who demonstrated the ability to adapt curricula to different classroom contexts. They argued that curriculum development is an important part of preparing educators for the demands of Society 5.0. However, institutional constraints such as limited resources and policy inconsistencies hinder their implementation, echoing the findings of Simarmata & Mayuni (2023) on broader challenges in implementing curriculum reform.

Furthermore, a study conducted by Solikhah (2022) revealed that the integration of Freedom to Learn Curriculum into the emerging education system requires pedagogical reform and teacher professional development. As pointed out by Yatim et al. (2023) the

process of behavioural change in curriculum implementation, especially in higher education such as art education, highlights the continued need for professional development and institutional support. The findings of this study are consistent with such research, highlighting the need for continuous professional development and resource allocation for in-service teachers.

The broader implications of this study extend to policy reforms in teacher education. Undergraduate departments must pay attention to the gap between teaching theory and applying it. As pointed out by Matondang et al. (2023), integrating field-based learning opportunities with collaborative learning approaches is critical to preparing future teachers to effectively implement modern learning. Furthermore, targeted support for instructors, as pointed out by Nurdiyanti et al. (2024) is crucial for overcoming barriers to curriculum adoption, especially in resource-limited environments.

In conclusion, this study highlights the impact of the Freedom to Learn Curriculum in promoting innovative, student-centered learning. However, as Hunaepi & Suharta (2024) suggest, realizing this potential requires a collaborative effort by policymakers, educational institutions, and practitioners. Addressing gaps in resource allocation, professional development, and systematic alignment will empower instructors to effectively implement the curriculum. By providing the necessary resources, training, and institutional support, *Merdeka Belajar* can significantly improve the quality of education in Indonesia, paving the way for a strong and equitable learning environment for all students.

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