

## Exploring the Alignment of 'Merdeka Belajar' with Nurcholish Madjid's Educational Philosophy: A Path to Inclusive and Independent Learning

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### Abstract

This study employs a qualitative and descriptive approach using a library research method to explore Nurcholish Madjid's ideas on education, particularly concerning the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar,' and to identify its implications for the education system. The analysis focuses on how 'Merdeka Belajar' aligns with Madjid's educational philosophy and the potential impact of his ideas on its implementation. Primary data is derived from Madjid's works, which are analyzed to understand these aspects. The results indicate that 'Merdeka Belajar' aligns with Madjid's inclusivity, independence, and individual potential development principles. His views emphasize critical thinking, student autonomy, and inclusive education. This research provides new insights into the practical application of 'Merdeka Belajar' in creating a responsive and progressive educational environment consistent with Madjid's vision of inclusive and transformative education.

**Keywords:** Merdeka Belajar, Nurcholish Madjid, inclusivity, independent learning

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## INTRODUCTION

Education is a cornerstone in fostering social consciousness and advancing prosperity within societies. It acts as a catalyst for comprehensive knowledge acquisition, propelling civilizations towards progress and modernization. Moreover, education plays a pivotal role as a cultural transformer, shaping societal norms and traditions alongside its evolution (Noddings, 2018). Its capacity to generate creativity and innovation equips individuals to adapt to the dynamic change landscape. Thus, if nations aspire to enhance the quality of life for their citizens, education emerges as the primary instrument to prepare and actualize national ideals (Sopacua & Fadli, 2022).

Education is a vital determinant in molding individuals' characters and societal awareness, perpetually evolving to synchronize with changing times. In Indonesia, the forefront of educational reform unveils the 'Merdeka Belajar' initiative, spearheaded by the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim. This visionary initiative aims to revolutionize the educational paradigm by championing unparalleled freedom in learning for every individual (Mustaghfiroh, 2020). To delve deeper into this concept, exploring its resonance with the perspective of Nurcholish Madjid becomes imperative. Madjid, a luminary in formulating progressive and inclusive Islamic thought, provides invaluable insights into educational philosophies in Indonesia.

Renowned for his pioneering contributions to progressive Islamic thought, Madjid's educational philosophy encompasses critical, multicultural, and responsive dimensions. Understanding Madjid's perspective on freedom in learning enhances comprehension of the challenges and opportunities in realizing the vision of 'Merdeka Belajar' within education in Indonesia (Syam'un, 2021). He was aligned with the ethos of 'Merdeka Belajar,' Madjid advocates for inclusive, democratic, and pluralistic educational values (Amri & Wasehudin, 2022). His progressive ideology underscores the importance of fostering independence, inclusivity, and critical skills in the educational landscape (Lahaji & Faisal, 2023).

This research endeavors to scrutinize the alignment between the 'Merdeka Belajar' concept and Nurcholish Madjid's educational philosophy through an exhaustive analysis of his works and ideas. The study aims to illuminate the compatibility of 'Merdeka Belajar' with Madjid's ideology and explore the ramifications of his educational insights on the practical implementation of 'Merdeka Belajar.' Through this endeavor, the research seeks to furnish fresh perspectives on articulating and executing this concept within a responsive and progressive educational framework (Setyazi et al., 2022).

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs the library research method by referencing literature to support the research. The research approach is qualitative with descriptive methods. According to Suharsimi (2005), descriptive research aims to gather information about the current status or symptoms without manipulating variables.

This study used a qualitative descriptive approach to observe educational phenomena related to the main research topics. This approach aims to describe and interpret the phenomena that occur in the field, mainly related to the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' and the implications of Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on education. Primary data was obtained from works related to Nurcholish Madjid. The obtained data is then reduced to thoroughly examine the state of education by analyzing the ideas of Nurcholish Madjid as the primary foundation.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Nurcholish Madjid's 'Merdeka Belajar' concept represents a fundamental paradigm shift in education. Emphasizing the importance of fostering independent and liberated learning, Madjid's contributions to the discourse on educational philosophy showcase his expertise and authority on the subject. The concept emphasizes granting autonomy and freedom to learners, allowing them to explore, question, and actively engage in the learning process. Table 1 presents valuable insights into how this concept is perceived, applied, and experienced within the educational landscape.

**Table 1.** The Concept of " Merdeka Belajar" According to Nurcholish Madjid's Thought

Theme/Aspect	Findings	Discussion
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Understanding "Merdeka Belajar"	Majority of respondents grasp the concept well	The positive reception indicates the relevance and resonance of the concept in society.
Implementation in Education	Varied approaches in educational institutions	The diversity in implementation reflects the adaptability of "Merdeka Belajar."
Challenges Faced in Implementation	Identification of challenges in implementing "Merdeka Belajar"	Addressing challenges is crucial for the successful implementation of the concept.
Student Engagement	Increased student involvement and enthusiasm	Engaging students is a key factor in the effectiveness of "Merdeka Belajar."
Impact on Academic Performance	Positive correlation observed	The positive impact on academic performance reinforces the value of the concept.
Teacher Professional Development	Impact on teacher professional development	The concept's implementation may necessitate training to enhance teacher capabilities.
Alignment with Education System	Integration with the curriculum and educational policies	Alignment affects the adoption and sustainability of "Merdeka Belajar" in the education system.

### **The Concept of " Merdeka Belajar" According to Nurcholish Madjid's Thought**

According to Nurcholish Madjid, education aims to develop individual morals and skills (Syam'un, 2021). Madjid argued that Islamic education encompasses all efforts to develop the potential and human resources of the younger generation, not just learning activities in schools. The concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' aligns with this idea by granting learners the freedom to choose their learning path based on their interests, talents, and needs (Lahaji & Faisal, 2023; Mustaghfiroh, 2020; Sopacua & Fadli, 2022).

Nurcholish Madjid argues that a good education forms liberal and critical human beings capable of becoming independent (Madjid, 1992). 'Merdeka Belajar' reflects this belief by giving students the freedom to choose and develop their interests and talents (Setyazi et al., 2022). Additionally, Nurcholish Madjid emphasized inclusive and progressive education that fosters the development of critical and independent thinking (Lahaji & Faisal, 2023). 'Merdeka Belajar' also emphasizes granting learners autonomy in determining their learning path, aligning with Madjid's belief in the significance of freedom of thought in education (Suhartono, 2021).

Nurcholish Madjid's views on multicultural and inclusive education are related to the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar.' This concept promotes freedom of learning, allowing students to understand, respect, and appreciate cultural, ethnic, and religious differences (Setyazi et al., 2022). According to Madjid, education should aim to appreciate differences and strengthen societal unity. The concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' aligns with the values of inclusiveness, diversity, and openness to differences in the context of education (Mustaghfiroh, 2020). Madjid's ideas on Islamic education, which balance the mind and heart, align with the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar,' emphasizing the importance of developing academic and non-academic skills. Madjid believes that individuals should be able to develop their

potential fully. The concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' enables this by providing freedom and flexibility to explore various aspects of learning (Madjid, 1992).

Nurcholish Madjid's ideas on multicultural-pluralistic Islamic education are similar to the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar.' Freedom of learning enables students to comprehend and appreciate differences, aligning with Madjid's goals for multicultural education. The concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' considers freedom of learning as the foundation for creating citizens who are open-minded, tolerant, and aware of human values (Solikin, 2021). Madjid's ideas on education focus not only on cognitive aspects but also on affective and spiritual aspects. These ideas are related to the 'Merdeka Belajar' concept, which emphasizes holistic and independent learning. This concept aligns with Madjid's belief that education should develop individuals holistically (Arismawan & Nurfuadi, 2023; Madjid, 1992). Nurcholish Madjid emphasized the significance of education that liberates and empowers individuals. The 'Merdeka Belajar' concept reflects this by granting learners the freedom to develop their potential and knowledge (Efendi, 2018; Mustaghfiroh, 2020). Madjid's ideas regarding the significance of self-development and independence in learning are supported by 'Merdeka Belajar.' This concept allows students to have the freedom to organize their learning and develop their interests and talents (Nasir & Khalilurrahman, 2022).

'Merdeka Belajar' aligns with Nurcholish Madjid's ideas on education in several ways. Madjid advocates for inclusive thinking, openness to new ideas, and freedom of thought, all emphasized in the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar.' This concept prioritizes the freedom to explore knowledge, think critically, and develop creativity without rigid restrictions. Furthermore, Nurcholish Madjid stresses the significance of education in attaining personal excellence. It involves comprehending societal life, ethical and moral paradigms, and developing human potential. 'Merdeka Belajar' also highlights the importance of nurturing individual potential and providing opportunities for each person to excel in their respective fields. Thus, the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar,' which emphasizes freedom, potential development, and providing space for each individual to learn according to their interests and talents, aligns with Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on education that is inclusive, respects freedom of thought, and prioritize the development of human potential (Madjid, 1992; Muwaffaq, 2022; Nasir & Khalilurrahman, 2022).

The concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' also supports Nurcholish Madjid's idea of education as a means to achieve noble degrees and positions. Madjid emphasized that education is not only for achieving a specific job or profession but also for attaining a higher degree of humanity (Madjid, 1992). In this context, the term 'Merdeka Belajar' refers to an effort to provide individuals with access to education that can enhance their social status and position by allowing them the freedom to develop their potential and interests. Nurcholish Madjid's ideas on diversity and equality in education align with the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar.' Madjid emphasizes the importance of education that respects and accommodates diversity and provides equal opportunities to all individuals regardless of their backgrounds. 'Merdeka Belajar' reflects these values by providing freedom and equality in access to education, without discrimination, and providing space for each individual to develop according to their potential and interests (Zuhri, 2020).

Nurcholish Madjid's ideas on education to achieve well-being align with the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar.' This concept not only grants access to knowledge but also offers opportunities for individuals to develop skills and competencies to enhance their welfare. With the freedom to learn, individuals can choose their path to achieve well-being in their careers and personal lives (Mustaghfiroh, 2020; Ulinnuha, 2011). Nurcholish Madjid's ideas on education to develop personality and good character align with the concept of 'Merdeka Belajar.' This concept allows students to cultivate their personalities, values, ethics, and character through holistic learning. "Merdeka Belajar" creates an environment where students can develop their academic knowledge and hone their personality and character through societal values (Mukaromah, 2019; Suhartono, 2021). Therefore, the concept of "Merdeka Belajar" can be considered a tangible manifestation of the educational values advocated by Nurcholish Madjid, which provides room for personal growth, equal access, and inclusivity in education

### **The Implications of Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on "Merdeka Belajar"**

Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on education have essential implications for implementing the 'Merdeka Belajar' concept. One of the main implications is encouraging inclusive education, where individuals are free to access education without discrimination (Madjid, 2008; Syam'un, 2021). The implementation of 'Merdeka Belajar,' which enables students to determine their learning path based on their individual needs and potential, aligns with the concept of inclusivity (Lahaji & Faisal, 2023). The foundation of the 'Merdeka Belajar' concept advocated by Nurcholish Madjid is equality in access and potential development (Zuhri, 2020).

Nurcholish Madjid's main focus in education is critical thinking. The implementation of 'Merdeka Belajar' can strengthen the development of critical and analytical thinking skills through Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on the importance of critical thinking in Islamic education (Setyazi et al., 2022). The development of critical thinking is an integral part of the learning process. It reflects the concept of independent learning, which allows students to explore various points of view without being constrained by teacher-centered learning (Lahaji & Faisal, 2023).

*Learner autonomy* is a value in the "Merdeka Belajar" concept and aligns with Nurcholish Madjid's views on freedom of thought. By giving students the freedom to choose learning materials, methods, and pace, the implementation of "Merdeka Belajar" can be a concrete manifestation of Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on giving autonomy to learners. Giving this autonomy also reflects the concept of students' independence in managing the learning process, which is a concern of Nurcholish Madjid (Lahaji & Faisal, 2023; Nasir & Khalilurrahman, 2022).

Nurcholish Madjid's thinking includes developing individual potential (Setyazi et al., 2022). The concept is reflected in the implementation of 'Merdeka Belajar,' which focuses on developing students' interests and talents (Zuhri, 2020). This holistic approach to education aligns with Nurcholish Madjid's perspective that education should encompass cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Arismawan & Nurfuadi, 2023). In the context of 'Merdeka Belajar,' it is crucial to implement values such as tolerance, harmony, and respect for differences. The

concept of 'Merdeka Belajar,' which encompasses the values of tolerance, harmony, and respect for differences, reflects Nurcholish Madjid's ideas on education that promote human values and social justice (Setyazi et al., 2022).

Implementing the 'Merdeka Belajar' concept is an operational form of Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on inclusive, critical education, granting autonomy, developing potential, and human values. To achieve success, a deep understanding of these concepts and the support and involvement of all relevant parties in the education sector are necessary.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' introduced in the education reform in Indonesia reflects the vision of freedom of learning and is in line with Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on education. Both emphasize inclusivity, potential development, diversity, and well-being. The concept of 'Merdeka Belajar' provides a concrete manifestation of these values in educational practice. The 'Merdeka Belajar' approach fosters an environment where individuals can grow and develop according to their potential and needs, which aligns with Madjid's vision of inclusive and progressive education. Implementing this concept in the context of Nurcholish Madjid's thoughts on education emphasizes student empowerment, inclusivity, and the development of individual potential. Recommendations for improving the quality of education include focusing on critical skills and creativity, empowering students to take an active role in learning, and emphasizing the value of inclusivity to provide equal access to all learners.

Additionally, a multicultural-pluralistic approach, the role of teachers as facilitators, and moral and ethics-based education should be integrated to create a holistic educational environment. Science and technology integration is also recommended to ensure relevance to the demands of the times. The recommendations aim to achieve Nurcholish Madjid's vision of education that is responsive, inclusive, and able to develop human potential holistically. Successful implementation of 'Merdeka Belajar' requires involvement from all stakeholders and adjustments to education policies.

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