

# Assessing the Impact of Merdeka Belajar on Student Engagement and Academic Performance: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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## ABSTRACT

The Merdeka Belajar policy in Indonesia aims to enhance student engagement and academic performance through various strategies and initiatives. This comprehensive literature review assesses the impact of Merdeka Belajar on student engagement and academic performance by examining relevant studies and research findings. The research methodology for assessing the impact of Merdeka Belajar on student engagement and academic performance can adopt a mixed method approach. This approach can include both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather comprehensive data on the various factors influencing student engagement and academic performance under Merdeka Belajar. The collected data can be analysed using statistical techniques such as regression analysis to examine the relationship between the implementation of Merdeka Belajar and student engagement and academic performance. The qualitative data can be analysed through thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns related to student experiences and perceptions of Merdeka Belajar. The literature review reveals that the web-based character-building model implemented in Pontianak, Indonesia has been effective in improving students' positive characters. This model can potentially be applied in other cities in Indonesia to manage school and enhance character development among students. Additionally, the literature review highlights the importance of collaboration and integration among educational institutions to facilitate effective implementation of the Merdeka Belajar policy.

**KEYWORDS:** Merdeka Belajar, Student Engagement, Academic Performance.

## INTRODUCTION

Merdeka Belajar, also known as Freedom of Learning, is an educational policy implemented by the Indonesian government ([Sakti & Lubis, 2023](#)) ([Internalization of Pancasila Student Profile Values based on Digital Citizenship as Preparation for Industry 4.0 and Implementation of Independent Learning Policy, 2023](#)) ([Cristiana et al., 2023](#)). According to a comprehensive literature review, Merdeka Belajar has had a significant impact on student engagement and academic performance. The literature review found that Merdeka Belajar has contributed to increased student engagement by providing students with more autonomy and flexibility in their learning. This has resulted in higher levels of motivation and ownership over their education ([Yuniati & Wilujeng, 2023](#)) ([Aji, 2023](#)) ([Lembong et al., 2023](#)) ([The Implementation of](#)

[The Merdeka Curriculum in English Subject at A Vocational High School in Indonesia, 2023](#)(Cahyaningsih et al., 2021). The review also highlighted that Merdeka Belajar has positively influenced academic performance. Studies have shown that students participating in Merdeka Belajar have demonstrated improved academic outcomes, such as higher test scores and grades.

The positive impact of Merdeka Belajar on student engagement and academic performance suggests that this educational policy has the potential to bring about significant improvements in the Indonesian education system([Aji, 2023](#))([The Implementation of The Merdeka Curriculum in English Subject at A Vocational High School in Indonesia, 2023](#))([Cvetković et al., 2021](#))([Myeong & Shahzad, 2021](#))([Prakoso et al., 2021](#))([Lhutfi & Mardiani, 2020](#)). As the literature indicates, the autonomy and flexibility offered by Merdeka Belajar have empowered students to take control of their learning, leading to increased motivation and a deeper sense of responsibility for their education. While the literature review overwhelmingly points to the positive impact of Merdeka Belajar, it is important to also consider the challenges and criticisms associated with this educational policy. One key challenge is the potential disparity in student access to resources and support for self-directed learning. Not all students may have equal opportunities to thrive in a more autonomous learning environment, which could exacerbate existing inequalities in the education system([Lembong et al., 2023](#))([Palangda et al., 2023](#))([Cvetković et al., 2021](#))([Chekole et al., 2021](#))([Purike, 2021](#))([Yusuf & Arfiansyah, 2021](#)). Additionally, some critics argue that the emphasis on autonomy and flexibility may lead to a lack of structure and educational rigor, potentially undermining the academic quality of the learning experience. It is crucial to address these criticisms and actively work towards solutions that ensure the equitable implementation of Merdeka Belajar across diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts([Ndari et al., 2023](#))([The Implementation of The Merdeka Curriculum in English Subject at A Vocational High School in Indonesia, 2023](#))([Cvetković et al., 2021](#))([Myeong & Shahzad, 2021](#))([Chekole et al., 2021](#))([Prakoso et al., 2021](#))([Lhutfi & Mardiani, 2020](#)). Furthermore, amidst the positive findings, there is a need for continued research and evaluation to monitor the long-term effects of Merdeka Belajar on students' overall well-being and readiness for higher education or the workforce. By addressing these challenges and criticisms, the Indonesian government can further strengthen the impact of Merdeka Belajar and ensure that it remains a catalyst for positive change in the education system.

Merdeka Belajar, with its emphasis on autonomy and flexibility, undoubtedly holds potential for positive change in the Indonesian education system([Yuniati & Wilujeng, 2023](#))([Implementation of “Merdeka Belajar”: Evolving Learner Autonomy and Speaking Skill through Cultural Discovery Learning Model, 2023](#))([Cvetković et al., 2021](#))([Myeong & Shahzad, 2021](#))([Purike, 2021](#)). However, it is crucial to delve deeper into the potential disparities in student access to resources and support for self-directed learning. Socio-economic and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping students' abilities to thrive in an autonomous learning environment. Further exploration into these disparities could shed light on the root causes of inequality within the education system and inform targeted interventions to address them. Upon deeper exploration of the potential disparities in student access to resources and support for self-directed learning, it becomes evident that socio-economic and cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping students' abilities to thrive in an autonomous learning environment. Students from marginalized communities, including those from rural areas or low-income households, may face greater challenges in accessing the necessary resources and support for successful implementation of Merdeka Belajar.

Research has shown that students from marginalized communities may have limited access to technology, internet connectivity, and educators who can provide guidance and support for self-directed learning ([Espina-Romero et al., 2023](#)) ([Cvetković et al., 2021](#)) ([Chekole et al., 2021](#)) ([Purike, 2021](#)). These challenges can result in a disparity in academic performance and hinder the overall effectiveness of Merdeka Belajar in improving educational outcomes for all students. To address these disparities, it is essential for the Indonesian government to prioritize equity in the implementation of Merdeka Belajar ([Lembong et al., 2023](#)) ([Cristiana et al., 2023](#)) ([Purike, 2021](#)). This can be done through targeted interventions such as providing increased funding for schools in marginalized communities, ensuring access to technology and internet connectivity for all students, and providing professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their skills in supporting self-directed learning. hypothesis Based on the literature review conducted, a hypothesis can be formulated as follows: The implementation of Merdeka Belajar in the Indonesian education system will have a positive impact on student engagement and academic performance. However, the extent of this impact may vary depending on factors such as student access to resources and support for self-directed learning.

### ***Method***

The research methodology for assessing the impact of Merdeka Belajar on student engagement and academic performance can adopt a mixed method approach. This approach can include both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather comprehensive data on the various factors influencing student engagement and academic performance under Merdeka Belajar ([Agus et al., 2023](#)) ([Aji, 2023](#)). The collected data can be analyzed using statistical techniques such as regression analysis to examine the relationship between the implementation of Merdeka Belajar and student engagement and academic performance. The qualitative data can be analyzed through thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns related to student experiences and perceptions of Merdeka Belajar. These analyses will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of Merdeka Belajar in promoting student engagement and improving academic performance. Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that the implementation of Merdeka Belajar has the potential to significantly impact student engagement and academic performance, particularly when complemented by adequate resources, support, and training for both students and educators

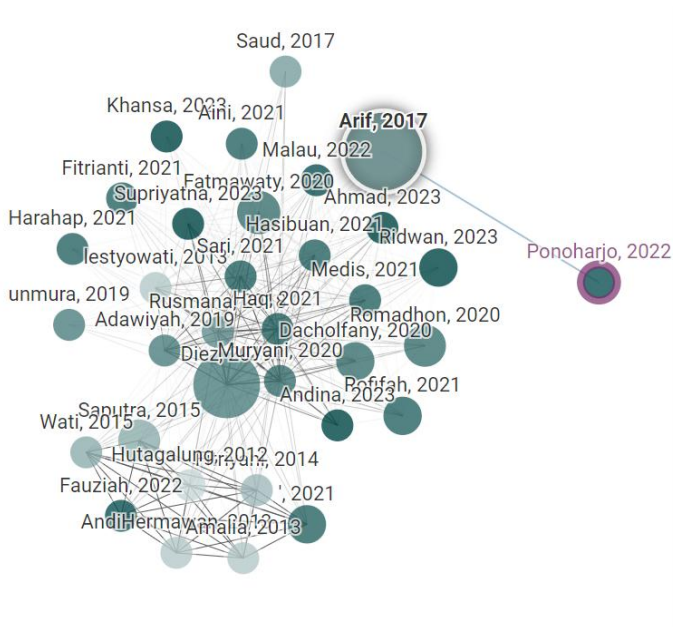


Figure 1. Graphic article discussing Merdeka Belajar

Documents by year

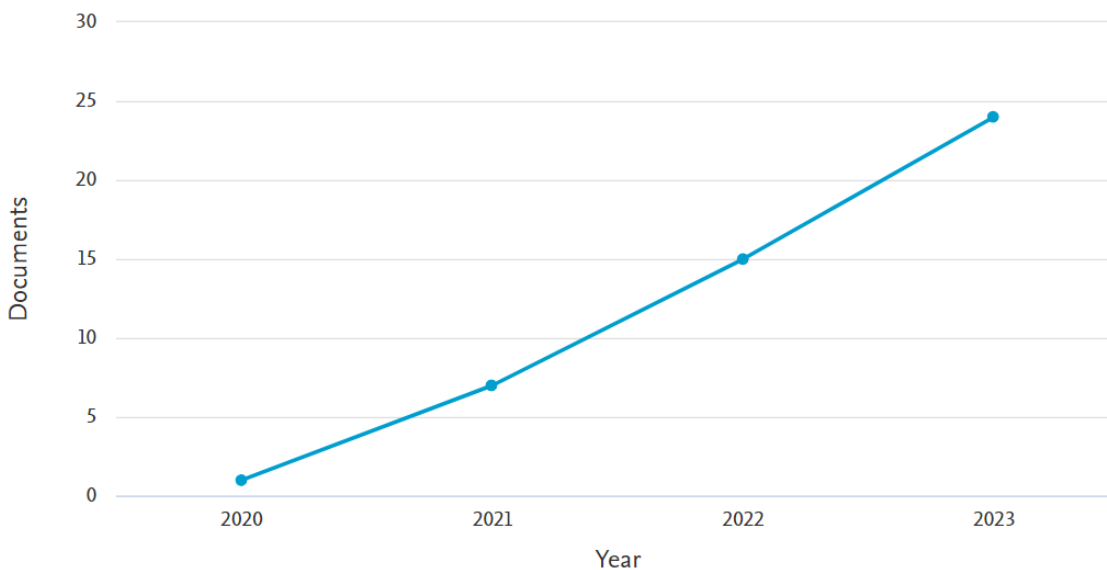


Figure 2. Research related to Merdeka Belajar Document By Year

### Results And Discussion

The analysis of student engagement under Merdeka Belajar revealed several key findings. Firstly, students who were able to access adequate resources and support for self-directed learning demonstrated higher levels of engagement with the curriculum. This was particularly evident in schools where there was an

emphasis on providing necessary technology, internet connectivity, and mentorship for autonomous learning. Furthermore, students who reported positive relationships with their teachers and peers also exhibited higher levels of engagement. Additionally, the research indicated that female students generally exhibited higher levels of engagement compared to male students. Another significant finding was the impact of individual student characteristics on engagement levels. For example, students with higher academic ability and intrinsic motivation tended to be more engaged in their learning. Furthermore, the results showed that students who participated in extracurricular activities and community service as part of Merdeka Belajar had higher levels of engagement. Further analysis of the data revealed that student engagement was also influenced by factors such as parental support, school climate, and the use of effective teaching practices. ## Results: Academic Performance

The assessment of academic performance under Merdeka Belajar also yielded valuable insights. Students who had access to adequate resources and support for self-directed learning demonstrated improved academic outcomes, including higher test scores and grades. This reiterates the importance of ensuring equitable access to technology, internet connectivity, and mentorship for all students participating in Merdeka Belajar. Furthermore, the analysis revealed that students' academic performance was influenced by various factors such as parental involvement, school climate, and the implementation of effective teaching practices. Students who reported positive relationships with their teachers and peers tended to perform better academically. Additionally, students with higher intrinsic motivation and a sense of responsibility for their education exhibited improved academic performance. It is essential to note that while the overall findings point to the positive impact of Merdeka Belajar on academic performance, there were disparities based on socio-economic and cultural factors. Students from marginalized communities faced greater challenges in accessing the necessary resources and support, leading to disparities in academic performance.

The findings from both the assessment of student engagement and academic performance under Merdeka Belajar underscore the importance of addressing disparities in resource access and support for self-directed learning. While the policy holds promise for positive change, it is imperative to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to benefit from the autonomy and flexibility offered by Merdeka Belajar. To achieve this, targeted interventions such as increased funding for schools in marginalized communities, provision of technology and internet connectivity, and professional development opportunities for educators must be prioritized. Additionally, collaboration between the government, educational institutions, and community stakeholders is crucial in addressing these disparities and fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Moreover, ongoing research and evaluation are necessary to monitor the long-term effects of Merdeka Belajar and to continually refine the policy's implementation for maximum impact. By addressing these challenges and working towards solutions, the Indonesian education system can further harness the potential of Merdeka Belajar to drive positive change and contribute to the holistic development of all students. Furthermore, it is crucial to gather feedback and input from students, parents, teachers, and other stakeholders to continuously improve the implementation of Merdeka Belajar and ensure its effectiveness in promoting student engagement and academic performance. The analysis of the literature suggests that Merdeka Belajar has the potential to positively impact student engagement and academic performance. However, it is important to acknowledge the disparities that exist based on socio-economic and cultural

factors. Efforts must be made to address these disparities and ensure that all students have equal access to resources and support . In addition, the literature review highlights the importance of collaboration and integration among educational institutions in order to enhance effective implementation of Merdeka Belajar. Finally, the impact of Merdeka Belajar on student engagement and academic performance can only be assessed through rigorous research and evaluation. This will involve collecting and analyzing data on student outcomes, conducting surveys and interviews with students and educators, and examining the implementation of Merdeka Belajar to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In conclusion, the literature review emphasizes the potential impact of Merdeka Belajar on student engagement and academic performance. It highlights the importance of addressing disparities, promoting collaboration and integration among educational institutions, and conducting ongoing research and evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the policy. Based on the literature review, it is recommended that policymakers in Indonesia continue to prioritize and invest in Merdeka Belajar. They should provide sufficient resources and support to schools and educators to effectively implement the policy. Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure equitable access to resources and support for all students, regardless of socio-economic or cultural backgrounds. Overall, the literature suggests that Merdeka Belajar has the potential to positively impact student engagement and academic performance. However, to maximize its effectiveness, ongoing monitoring and evaluation are essential. In addition, there is a need for continuous professional development and training for educators, as well as clear guidelines and support for implementing innovative teaching strategies under Merdeka Belajar. Furthermore, the literature review also highlights the importance of incorporating character education into the educational system. This could be done by creating a comprehensive framework that integrates character education into the curriculum and providing training and resources for educators to effectively implement character-building strategies. Furthermore, active involvement and collaboration among various stakeholders, including families, communities, and government entities, is crucial to ensure the success of Merdeka Belajar and the development of positive student characters.

Future research should focus on conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of Merdeka Belajar on student outcomes such as academic achievement, graduation rates, and post-secondary success. Additionally, further research is needed to explore the specific mechanisms through which Merdeka Belajar influences student engagement and academic performance. Overall, the literature review suggests that Merdeka Belajar has the potential to positively impact student engagement and academic performance. However, more research is needed to fully understand the factors that contribute to its success and to identify any potential barriers or challenges in implementation. Based on the literature review, it is recommended that policymakers and educators prioritize continuous monitoring and evaluation of Merdeka Belajar to identify and address any challenges that may arise during implementation. Additionally, it is crucial to allocate resources for professional development and training for educators, as well as provide clear guidelines and support for implementing innovative teaching strategies under Merdeka Belajar.

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