



Education Should Embrace All Potential: Students' Reflective Essays on the Meaning of Merdeka Belajar

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ABSTRACT

This research delves into the perspectives of students regarding the concept of *merdeka belajar*, as evidenced in their essays for the philosophy of education course. The selected reflection essays are analyzed to explore how students connect their learning experiences to the idea of *merdeka belajar*. The study aims to uncover how students interpret and apply *merdeka belajar* to their own learning, through the analysis of forty-five essays submitted for the philosophy of education course, with a focus on thirteen selected students. The research was carried out over the course of May 2022. The analysis reveals seven main themes in the essays, which include the students' understanding of *merdeka belajar*, their experiences with family and teacher involvement, their views on children's learning abilities, the role of schools in students' lives, experiential learning, diversity and equality in education, and reflections from prospective teachers. The study highlights the importance of promoting *merdeka belajar* in education and identifies the challenges students face in becoming self-directed learners, along with potential solutions to address these challenges.

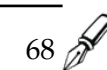


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INTRODUCTION

Children's learning process differs significantly from that of adults. While adults require a conscious effort to learn, children learn spontaneously when they pay attention to something. In traditional Javanese terms, children learn by utilizing their *roso* (heart), *karso* (will), *gelem* (intention), and *cipta* (creativity). Modern education, on the other hand, involves elements of inquiry, investigation, research, and exploration (Mangunwijaya, 2020). It is designed to be liberating and empowering, allowing students to discover their authentic voices. In a society where people are silenced and oppressed, relevant education must enable individuals to hear their own voices instead of external voices, including those of their educators. Freire (2020) championed this approach and sought to liberate those who had been silenced. Freire believed that the traditional "banking" education system reinforced oppression and silence. In this system, teachers act as depositors of knowledge, while students act as passive receivers. Freire argued that this approach stifled critical thinking and perpetuated a culture of silence. Banking education teaches students to become intellectual robots whose sole purpose is to produce measurable results for those in power. Freire challenged this approach, arguing that it left students powerless and unable to question the status quo. He believed that education should be a collaborative process that fosters critical thinking and empowers students to speak their minds.

Supposedly, education is directed at the emancipation process of the learning partners (Mangunwijaya, 2020). Furthermore, Mangunwijaya divides three emancipatory goals that must be worked on, namely: first, exploratory humans. This means humans who like



adventure, like to risk something in *terra incognita* (unknown territory). Second, creative people. This means a human reformer who respects tradition and heritage but loves to venture into newer and innovative territories. Third, the integral human. This means that humans are able to create harmony between the many who are truly aware of the multidimensionality of life and reality, who are not imprinted, and who understand the possibilities of alternative paths. Humans who are exposed but not naked. Therefore, when humans have achieved the three goals that were initiated by Mangunwijaya above, the students need *merdeka belajar* to become independent humans.

In recent years, the term *merdeka belajar* has become a hot topic in the education community. The term *merdeka belajar* was first "echoed" by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Nadiem Makarim. Nadiem Makarim wants to create a fun learning atmosphere for both students and teachers. *Merdeka belajar* has been born from the many complaints of parents against the current national education system. One of them is a complaint about the number of students who are pinned to certain grades (Chaterine, 2021). *Merdeka belajar* is an effort to promote freedom of thought and expression. Basically, the *merdeka belajar* program aims to liberate teachers and students. This concept is in line with the spirit of the Father of National Education, Ki Hadjar Dewantara, who said the purpose of education is to liberate human beings. Education aims to help students become independent and independent human beings, able to contribute to society. To be a free human being means not having to live an ordered life; standing tall because of one's own strength; and being able to organize one's life in an orderly manner (Noventari, 2020).

According to Dewantara, education should be a continuous process that lasts throughout one's life rather than a one-time event. Dewantara felt that pupils should be able to pick what and how they wish to learn based on their own interests and skills. *Merdeka belajar* is a key idea in Indonesian education that emphasizes the value of freedom and self-determination in education. Schools may assist to support the development of vital character characteristics and promote social responsibility in their pupils by implementing this notion into their educational approach (Ainia, 2020).

This belief was later realized by Ki Hajar Dewantara in Taman Siswa. When referring to the Pancadarma Taman Siswa, one of the things that is emphasized is the principle of independence (Noventari, 2020; Istiq'faroh, 2020). This principle of independence is self-discipline based on high values of life, both as individuals and as members of society. Dewantara also emphasized the importance of the "Among" system. "Among" means caring for, fostering, and educating children with love. Supporting the natural nature of students is not by "coercion." That's because the child's inner and outer life, according to his nature, is fertile and safe. The "among" system is based on the principle that independence is a condition for reviving and moving the inner and outer powers so that they can live independently, not under the control of any group. The nature of nature is a condition for reviving and achieving progress as quickly and well as possible (Noventari, 2020).

Therefore, Nadiem Makarim stated that the concept of *merdeka belajar* is most appropriate to be used as a philosophy of change from the learning method that has occurred so far. Because in *merdeka belajar*, there is independence and independence for the educational environment to determine for themselves the best way in the learning process. *Merdeka belajar* is to provide opportunities for students to study as freely and freely as possible – without stress and pressure – by paying attention to their natural talents, without forcing them to learn or master the field knowledge beyond their hobbies and abilities, so that each has a portfolio that matches their passion (Abidah et al., 2020). In addition, the concept of *merdeka belajar* in the perspective of John Dewey's progressivism school is to provide freedom and independence to students to learn according to their interests and needs. In Dewey's view, education is not only related to the mastery of knowledge or information, but also related to direct experience in solving problems in the real world (Mustaghfiroh, 2020; Faiz & Kurniawaty, 2020).

It should be understood that in the concept of *merdeka belajar*, the teacher is not the only source of knowledge, but should act as a facilitator and guide in the learning process. Students

are given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own learning, by choosing the topics they want to study and determining the best way to learn. Dewey also emphasized the importance of collaborative learning in the concept of merdeka belajar. Students are expected to cooperate and collaborate with fellow students and teachers in developing their understanding and skills (Mustaghfiroh, 2020).

Azmi & Iswanto (2021) discusses the key principles and objectives of the merdeka belajar policy, which include: First, it gives learners more autonomy and flexibility in choosing their learning routes, setting their own learning goals, and monitoring their own progress to empower them to take ownership of their learning processes and outcomes. Second, it encourages students, teachers, schools and communities to embrace innovation, experimentation and cooperation in order to foster a sustainable learning culture. Thirdly, enhancing the role of institutions as facilitators of learning, not just providers of knowledge, by encouraging a more student-centered and competency-based approach to education, and supporting the creation of broader and more inclusive learning pathways. Finally, improve the quality, relevance and accessibility of education for all by encouraging increased collaboration and partnerships among the various players in the education system, including government agencies, schools, universities, civil society groups and the commercial sector.

Based on previous research, Sihombing et al. (2021) proposed a model called "Merdeka Belajar Online" (MBO) which consists of three components: self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and personalized learning. In another study, Susilawati (2021) discusses the concept of humanism which emphasizes the value and dignity of human beings, as well as their potential to grow and develop. Humanism also emphasizes the importance of freedom, autonomy, and self-determination in education, as well as the need for education to be relevant and meaningful to learners' lives. The self-directed learning policy should therefore be aligned with the principles of humanist education, as it promotes freedom, autonomy, and self-determination in learning. It also recognizes the importance of relevance and meaning in education, as well as the potential of learners to take responsibility for their own learning process.

This research focuses on exploring students' perceptions of self-directed learning and how it can be incorporated into the education system. This research sheds light on the importance of independent learning in education and how it can be effectively promoted among students. The research may also contribute to understanding the challenges students face in becoming independent learners and provide insights into how these challenges can be overcome.

In this paper, the researchers will analyze the selected reflection essays and how students relate the learning experience to the concept of merdeka belajar itself. The reflection essays will reveal how students understand and apply the notion of merdeka belajar to their own learning experiences. The researchers will look at the themes that emerge from the writings and how they relate to the basic principles of merdeka belajar. The researchers hopes to discover any similarities and variations in how students interpret the topic and how it has influenced their learning by assessing the students' opinions.

RESEARCH METHOD

The present research is based on a narrative analysis approach, which aims to explore the perspectives of students regarding the meaning of merdeka belajar as expressed in their essays from the philosophy of education course. According to Ary et al. (2018), both researchers and storytellers have a shared responsibility in determining the meanings associated with personal experiences. To this end, the study collected a total of forty-five student essays that were completed as part of the philosophy of education course assignment. The key research question posed in this study is to explore what merdeka belajar means to students. In their essays, students were expected to draw on their personal learning experiences, starting from elementary school up to their current college education. Additionally, students were requested to include their aspirations if they were to become teachers in the future.

In this study, Performing Arts Education students were invited to share their perspectives on merdeka belajar via the WhatsApp application platform. Specifically, the students were

requested to provide their perspectives in essay format, which were subsequently collected via Google Drive. It is worth noting that these essays served as the assigned coursework for the philosophy of education course. From the collected essays, the researchers selected a sample of thirteen participants for further analysis. The data collection period spanned from the beginning of May 2022 to the end of May 2022.

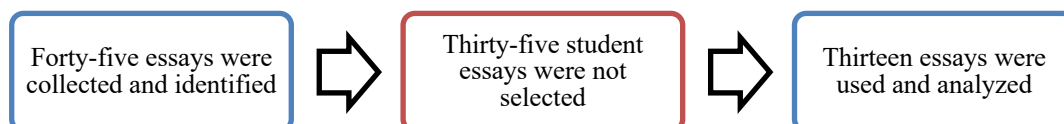


Figure 1. Flowchart of research procedure

The research procedure used in this study involved a series of well-defined steps aimed at obtaining accurate and reliable results. The first step was to collect a total of 45 essays from students for analysis. To ensure that the essays collected were representative of the population of interest, the researchers used a sampling strategy. Selecting essays that focused on relevant topics and reflected the diversity of the student population.

In the second step, the researchers read and identified relevant essays from the 45 essays collected. This process involved careful examination of each essay to ensure that only the most relevant and informative essays were selected for analysis. The selection criteria included the relevance of the topic, clarity of ideas conveyed, and quality of writing. After a thorough reading and identification process, the researchers selected thirteen essays for analysis. The essays selected were those that provided the most significant and useful information relevant to the research questions. The essays covered a wide range of topics, including education, social issues, and personal experiences.

To ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants, the researchers used pseudonyms to refer to them. Numerical representations were also used to indicate the gender of the participants. "FP" was used to represent female participants, while "MP" was used to represent male participants. This approach ensured that the participants' gender did not influence the analysis (Mackey & Gass, 2021; Allen & Wiles, 2016). At the transcription stage, the researchers transcribed the selected essays. This process involved transcribing the content of each essay into a text format that could be easily analyzed. The use of pseudonyms and numerical representation was maintained during this stage to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

There are seven major topics that emerge from essays written by students about their learning experiences from elementary to college, which is associated with the meaning of merdeka belajar.

The Meaning of Merdeka Belajar

Education is important for freedom because, as long as people are educated, they can recognize that they have a choice. All the freedom in the world comes down to people's choices. It is also important to emphasize that education means empowering people to think in a way that enlightens their thoughts, opinions, ideas, and perceptions. Education does not mean the assimilation of facts and information provided by others. Therefore, freedom of learning for every child is a necessity. Educational institutions are obliged to provide services that are highly desired by every child. That's why people created schools in the first place. Based on the reading of the essays written by the participants, all the essays selected for analysis gave varied views, although there were some views that had similarities.

Table 1. The meaning of merdeka belajar for students.

Topic	Meaning	Participant
Merdeka belajar	Free to get an education	FP8.
	Freedom to explore the potential and uniqueness	FP1, MP4, FP3, MP3.
	Freedom of thought and expression of ideas	FP3, FP9.
	Freedom to innovate	MP1, MP2, FP5.
	Freedom to choose/make your own decisions	FP2, MP4, FP6, FP7, MP3, FP8, FP9, MP4.
	Ability to think critically, creatively, and skillfully	MP1, FP4, FP8, FP9, FP3.
	An independent person	MP1, FP1.
	The right to work, process, and learn freely	MP1, FP3.
	The quality of their teaching and learning	MP2, FP5.
	No longer pressured by other people's views	FP1, FP3, FP6, FP8, MP4.

Based on the table above, it can be concluded that the majority of participants stated that merdeka belajar is the right of every child or individual to be what they want or choose what they want, and other participants defined merdeka belajar as no longer pressured by other people's views, no longer under orders or directions from others, free to explore various things, dare to be different from others, dare to be yourself with all the uniqueness you have, whether from the school, educators (teachers), or parents.

Other opinions: the existence of merdeka belajar as a new paradigm in learning, it can give students the freedom to cultivate their preferred field. The purpose of merdeka belajar itself is to create students who are critical, creative, and skilled in their abilities. Also, another participant stated that merdeka belajar means that every child can show their abilities and continue to process what they are interested in. Learning is not about test scores, but learning about the uniqueness that exists in each individual, experience, comfort, and inner pleasure with positive encouragement given by a teacher.

Merdeka belajar is that every child is free to express the ideas that are in their head. Learning to think independently is a learning process that gives students the freedom to choose what they like purely because of their interests. In addition, the merdeka belajar becomes a field for them by giving them the freedom to explore their potential and not to differentiate from one another. Merdeka belajar means that every child is not required or forced to do anything. That is, students are free to innovate. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning, educators provide a comfortable forum and provide opportunities for students to innovate so that the character of students who are brave, good at socializing, civilized, polite, capable, and do not only rely on a ranking system in class is formed. The most important thing, everyone has the right to get an education to support the learning process.

Experience in Family and Teacher Involvement

The success of children in learning is also determined by the factor of how parents and teachers educate them. Several participants shared how parents and teachers play an important role in supporting a child's learning. Parents express a sincere and deep desire to help their children succeed in school. Parents want their children to succeed academically and are motivated to do what they can to ensure their children's academic success. Two essays written by students show that their parents gave them the freedom to be whatever they wanted.

My parents freed me to choose the secondary school I wanted, allowing me to enter junior high, high school, vocational school, or college according to my wishes, whether in private or public. As a parent or adult, you are obliged to guide, advise, or encourage, not to force your child (FP1).

My parents freed me to choose the school or college I wanted without any coercion from them. My parents never pressured their children to decide what field they wanted for their children. But with this freedom, my parents gave me consequences for me to really pursue the field that I wanted (FP9).

Overall, a balance must be struck between parental guidance and individual autonomy in educational decision-making. Parents can support their children in pursuing their own interests and goals, while also providing guidance and advice to help them make informed choices. Ultimately, the goal should be to foster a sense of independence and self-determination, which will serve children well not just in their educational pursuits, but in all areas of their lives. Meanwhile, one essay shows that when she was at school, she received favorable treatment from the teacher for not being able to answer math problems given by the teacher.

In the past, I could say I wasn't smart enough for math. I had a time when I got inappropriate treatment from my teacher because I couldn't do the questions written in front of the blackboard. My face was scribbled using chalk (FP2).

The participant highlights the damaging effects of mistreatment and negative experiences in academic settings. It also underscores the importance of providing students with a supportive and nurturing environment that encourages growth and learning. By recognizing the unique strengths and abilities of each student, teachers can help students overcome their perceived limitations and achieve their full potential.

Understanding Children's Learning Abilities

Learning ability refers to a person's capacity for acquiring, using, and consuming information. A number of courses are available on learning how to learn, how to learn, and why one doesn't learn something. In society, it is widely accepted that different people learn in different ways. Some people perform better when reading, listening, writing, recalling information, using mathematics, and using visual aids. According to student essays, not everyone has a tendency to be a musician, artist, scientist, mechanic, or mathematician. That being said, not everyone can achieve amazing heights simply because they wish to study a talent or master a subject. However, everyone can understand the most fundamental notions.

Those who are proficient in the fields of math and science are considered "smart" children, while those who are fond of literature and art are underestimated" (FP3).

Each individual has the ability, willingness, experience, and knowledge of each. It cannot be generalized and is required to understand a material (FP4).

Students are required to always be able to do all subjects. Students who are good at learning Indonesian will not be considered as smart as students who are good at mathematics. Likewise, those who are good at extracurricular activities will not be considered as intelligent as those who always get academic achievements in academic terms (FP6).

The participants highlighted the importance of recognizing and assessing different skills and abilities, and that intelligence cannot be generalized or limited to one particular field of study. Each individual has their own unique strengths and should be celebrated for their diverse talents and contributions. Several essays mention that the biggest problem for children is when parents and teachers do not provide support, thus making children unmotivated to hone their potential. In addition, parents and teachers should understand the uniqueness of a child. This looks like the essay written below:

In the past, some of my friends at school couldn't be themselves because their parents told them to. In fact, my friend prefers to cook than dance, so her desire to choose a culinary arts major did not come true (FP7).

Teachers must understand how to learn that is suitable for their students and assume that no human being is stupid because humans have their own uniqueness (MP3).

I realized that excluding certain children and ignoring others just because they did not meet those teachers' standards could discourage them, making them feel that they were stupid. In fact, every child has their own talents and potential (FP8).

Overall, the participants highlighted the importance of respecting and supporting individuality in education. When parents and teachers allow children to explore and develop their unique qualities, they can help cultivate a sense of purpose, fulfillment, and self-confidence that will benefit them throughout their lives.

The Role of School in A Child's Life

School plays the most important role in a child's life. A child goes to school not only to acquire knowledge or information but to learn the essentials of group dynamics, and develop interpersonal skills to live in a connected world. Educating children in school helps them communicate better, in addition to respecting and respecting the opinions of others.

In addition, the role of schools is to encourage children to become effective learners. Learning is only effective if the learner is interested in learning. Students learn to take ownership of their own work; students learn to express their views in groups effectively and learn to ask questions so that their concepts are always clear and they can get what is taught; students learn to think outside the box and broaden their horizons of knowledge by not just learning from one source. They are given the freedom to take knowledge from more than one source for the purpose of strengthening their understanding. Several essays argue that one of the determining factors for the success of learning is that schools must provide adequate facilities for all children to develop their potential and skills. Every child has different learning needs.

Schools are expected to be able to facilitate students in various ways to explore the potential that exists in students, for example, extracurricular activities (FP1).

Encourage students to find their identity. They deserve to have a subject they are interested in when they are ready to do so (MP1).

Schools and education in Indonesia should facilitate and provide understanding to students to find potential skills that students like from an early age (MP3).

Schools and education should facilitate students in exploring the potential that exists, but they are different in the field. Not infrequently, educators require students to follow the rules without being free for students to explore (MP4).

The participants believed that schools play an important role in nurturing children's potential, interests, and skill development. Schools may help children get a better education, have a better understanding of their own talents and limits, and pursue their hobbies and interests by offering a supportive and nurturing environment.

Experiential Learning for Students

Learning through experience is doing. Then students apply this knowledge to actual situations and examine their effects. Students first obtain facts from what they have observed or experienced, from theories, and from other types of information from numerous sources. When concepts are acquired in this manner, they stick with students. By responding to and resolving issues and processes from the real world, students gain and increase their decision-making abilities through this experience, as well as communication skills and self-confidence. Children can make the necessary adjustments to their skills, mindset, and practice that are necessary with the support of experiential learning. Following experiential learning, our children may more effectively apply recognized adjustments, as seen below:

Students are expected to first find out or learn from the experience of everyday life after that it is strengthened by knowledge from educators or existing references (FP1).

According to the statement, learning should be a joint endeavor between students and educators, with students encouraged to take an active part in their own learning and educators providing advice and assistance to help them build on prior knowledge and experiences.

Diversity and Equality in Education

Everyone is entitled to a high-quality education. In terms of the effectiveness of a democratic citizenry composition and human growth in general, education has a significant impact on one's

life possibilities. Therefore, a child's chances in life shouldn't be influenced by certain morally unstable factors like their social status, race, or gender from the moment of their birth. Every child should have access to educational opportunities that will help them develop their stamina, resilience, and growth mindset in order to succeed in life. Equality in education should apply to everyone, regardless of personality type or gender restrictions.

In order to establish a learning environment that is more comprehensive, diversity is necessary for schools. Students can learn more about the world and grow in their awareness of various points of view when they are exposed to different cultures and perspectives. Diversity may also teach children how to collaborate with others and encourage creativity and critical thinking abilities. All children should feel welcomed, respected, and appreciated in their schools. Diverse classrooms foster an environment where all children can succeed. Being inclusive helps minority group members, as well as majority group members, become more accepting and understanding. According to the following essays, every child has a right to learn about diversity and equality:

Schools have not been able to embrace all the potential of students (FP1).

Schools cannot provide education fairly to all their students because each student has their own potential (FP2).

The diversity of education obtained in schools is still lacking. The choice of subjects taught in schools is limited to only focusing on the academic field. Although there have been balancing efforts such as holding extracurricular activities for non-academic fields, this is still neglected and even less attention is paid to it. I realize that my school has not provided a fair and diverse education to all students. The support given by educators to students at my school tends to those whose potential is already visible, so the guidance provided is uneven (FP3).

When I was in 8th-grade junior high school, mathematics was presented with material on algebra, building spaces, arcing circles, and so on. Not only did I get the material, but all the students of SMP Negeri 16 Yogyakarta were also involved in it. From this, it is clear that the school has provided an equal and diverse education to all students (FP4).

Schools have not provided equal education to students, because most teachers only see students who excel. Sometimes children who have below-average abilities are often left alone or not guided properly. In fact, students who have abilities below the average must be guided even more (MP2).

Schools and education have not embraced all the potential of students (FP5).

The schools and education provided have not fully seen that the potential of each student is different (FP6).

When I went to school from elementary to high school, schools, and education did not provide an equal and diverse education to all students (FP7).

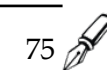
Perhaps, there are students who prefer art to mathematics. I realize that every child cannot be generalized, they have their own talents. However, I feel that many schools still think that all children should be equal in education (FP8).

Diversity and equality in education in the schools that I go to still do not embrace the abilities of each student (FP9).

Schools and education have not provided equality and diversity to all their students. Because there are still some learning systems that require students to understand the same lesson with the same output. In addition, the learning system does not see the ability of the students. Because of what? Because not all students have the same abilities (MP4).

Based on the statements above, there are concerns about the ability of schools to provide diverse education that includes all potential children. There is widespread agreement that the educational system in many schools is one-size-fits-all, failing to recognize each student's individual talents and potential.

Several participants said that schools failed to offer a fair and diverse education to all students and that teachers tended to focus on students who were successful while ignoring others with below-average talent. In addition, some students believe that school learning is too concentrated on academic disciplines, leaving little room for non-academic subjects that may be of interest to some students. Other participants, however, had very good experiences in schools



where they felt the teaching was fair and varied. These institutions value every student's potential and provide opportunities for all children to learn and develop their individual skills.

In general, the statements of the participants implied that schools should become more inclusive of diverse student populations and respect the individual strengths of each child. This can be achieved by establishing a more flexible and individualized approach to learning that allows students to explore their interests and skills, as well as by expanding opportunities for non-academic topics. Furthermore, teachers must be taught to detect and assist children with various abilities, ensuring that all students receive the direction and support they need to thrive in school.

Reflection of Prospective Teachers

An educator is crucial. Effective educators promote and motivate learning. Regardless of the curriculum utilized, a competent teacher teaches children about themselves and life skills like resilience and problem-solving. Teachers can be trusted in a child's life to keep them safe and develop healthy relationships.

A role model teacher is someone who motivates and inspires us to pursue excellence, reach our greatest potential, and recognize our best qualities. A role model teacher is someone we look up to and strive to be like. Relationships between students and teachers can have a big impact on a child's development. Children learn from their teachers, through their dedication to perfection, and through their capacity to help them recognize their own personal development. Teachers are asked for assistance and advice by children. In addition to their other duties, I believe teachers have a big obligation to raise new generations of good people.

Educators are also expected to be able to apply independent learning. Educators should look for a process or solution in learning rather than determining whether students are smart or stupid (FP1).

I want to be a fair teacher when some of my students are not good at learning. I will not generalize because the abilities of students are different. I have to be able to adapt to the various abilities that each student has (FP2).

When I become a teacher in the future, I will position myself as a friend to students. When a teacher positions himself as a friend, students will feel happy and comfortable when learning takes place (FP4).

Build a sense of comfort between students and teachers, making students think I have a friend who wants to share knowledge with his own friends (MP2).

As a teacher, I want to bring positive energy so students will receive it well, chat more with my students, and share knowledge with each other. In addition, discussing the material with a pleasant discussion, which is related to the learning material. The point is to make all students not bored and not think that learning is bad (FP5).

As a teacher, I will study more to see what potential my students have, not by comparing one student to another because what one student has is not necessarily owned by another (FP6).

If I become a teacher in the future, I will try to convey the material well and occasionally provide humor to students so that they are not tense and bored. I also want to invite students to study outside of school, such as going to a park close to the school (FP7).

Children have extraordinary imagination and curiosity. As teachers, of course, they must always appreciate all forms of work or the results of the children's imagination (MP3).

I will appreciate every effort of my students. Maybe this will be difficult, but I don't want them to experience what I went through, and I want their future to be bright, so I am determined to become an educator who is sincere in helping his students gain useful knowledge (FP8).

I admit, actually being a teacher who can truly embrace and understand all of his students is a very difficult thing. However, from the experience that I experienced and I have described above when I become a teacher later, I want to try to become a teacher who is close to all students and can embrace and understand every student under my tutelage without any generalizations between students (FP9).

If I become a future teacher, I will teach students to be assertive, in which I will give students the freedom to express their opinions whether they like it or not (MP4).

The statements above indicate many key topics about the role and duties of educators, as well as their ideas and values regarding teaching and learning. First, there is a focus on the value of individual learning and the need for teachers to promote this process rather than simply classifying children as brilliant or stupid. This implies an emphasis on student-centered learning as well as an appreciation of a variety of student talents and learning styles. Second, there is a focus on the need to develop strong connections with children in order to foster a sense of comfort and friendliness in the classroom. This demonstrates knowledge of the importance of teacher-student interaction in student engagement and achievement. Interaction between teachers and students is critical for student engagement and accomplishment. It allows the teacher to understand each student's individual learning style, strengths, and limitations, allowing for tailored instruction. Contact between the teacher and the student provides fast and effective feedback, inspiring pupils to do better. Good teacher-student interactions foster a healthy classroom atmosphere, which encourages acceptable conduct and increases responsibility. Furthermore, such interactions help students' social-emotional development by creating a secure and supportive learning environment and increasing their self-esteem and confidence, which leads to greater academic achievement.

Third, rather than focusing solely on grades or academic success, there is an emphasis on recognizing and respecting student originality and effort. It shows confidence in children's complete development as well as a desire to foster a happy and rewarding learning environment. Fourth, there is a focus on developing student assertiveness and free speech, as well as building a climate in which students feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas.

Overall, the participants' statements represent a set of teaching and learning principles and beliefs that promote student-centeredness, healthy connections, and creativity and expression. They imply a dedication to fostering a supportive and engaging learning environment that recognizes and respects each student's individual strengths and potential.

Discussion

Based on the research data obtained, the discussion in this research is as follows:

The Meaning of Merdeka Belajar

Education is a critical component in empowering individuals to make choices and exercise their liberties. Individuals' total freedom is strengthened by the information and skills they gain, which enable them understand their alternatives and make sensible selections. Furthermore, education is necessary for people to think critically and independently, allowing them to establish their own thoughts and points of view. It is vital to recognize that education requires more than simply absorbing the knowledge and facts provided by others (Elder & Paul, 2020; Clarke et al., 2019). Education, on the other hand, is concerned with developing one's ability to reason, assess, and comprehend evidence in order to advance intellectual enlightenment (Brighouse et al., 2018). As a result, education enables people to think independently and freely express their views and opinions. According to Freire (2020), education may be utilized to empower underprivileged persons and communities by fostering critical thinking and the development of a feeling of agency.

Additionally, educational institutions have a significant duty to offer highly desirable educational services to every child. Every kid should have equitable access to education, which includes chances to pick up the skills, information, and talents required to realize their full potential. Institutions may make sure that every child gets the resources they need to exercise their freedom and make decisions that are beneficial to their overall well-being by offering high-quality educational services. Previous research founded that competence as a learning outcome is related to content knowledge, distinct personal characteristics, social skills, emerging leadership skills, creativity, future orientation, social skills, technical skills, crafting and testing, and implementing innovation-related skills, such as marketing, sales, and

entrepreneurial planning skills (Hero & Lindfors, 2019). Students who follow observational pedagogical practices before starting their courses become more motivated to learn, especially if the teacher leads classes and seminars with different critical thinking methods, setting them up to understand all aspects of the problem, ask questions, to look for solutions to difficulties, to decide between some of the most feasible options, to evaluate themselves, etc (Kelemen, 2018; Kelemen, 2015).

Experience in Family and Teacher Involvement

How effectively children learn can be impacted by how their parents and instructors educate them. Several participants underlined the critical role that parents and teachers play in supporting a child's learning during the conversation. Parents demonstrate a real and deep desire to help their children achieve academic success, and they are strongly motivated to take whatever actions are required to guarantee that their children prosper in school. The majority of parents anticipate that their children will finish school and go on to higher levels. For parents, going to school opens up new opportunities for them to be active in their children's education. Parents play a crucial part in assisting their children's educational development because they want their children to succeed in school and want to see them succeed. Additionally, schools affect how children participate in their educational growth by influencing their desire to learn and grow. Parents' involvement at home and at school increased in proportion to how much they felt their child's teacher valued their contribution to their child's education, tried to keep them informed about their child's strengths and weaknesses, and offered them specific suggestions to help their child (Epstein, 2018; Muller, 2018; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Uslu & Gizir, 2017).

Most crucially, parents shouldn't neglect their children's education in the name of agency or mistreat them in the name of friendship. Numerous studies highlight the significance of continuing to offer further help to numerous families in order to improve young children's home learning experiences. To facilitate a smooth transition to school, this is done in the early years of life (Muller, 2018; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). Between adults and children, there must be a sense of shared involvement in learning. Collaboration between adults and children, understanding, and respect for adults' regard for children's autonomy and independence increase children's participation (Doctoroff & Arnold, 2017; Grolnick, 2015; Kangas et al., 2015). As a result, evolutionary theory educates educators and parents about how children have evolved to learn and may lead to more innovative teaching strategies that will make learning more fun and effective for children. When children's learning is made more enjoyable and effective, it may have a favorable impact on their academic progress, motivation, and general enjoyment of learning. Families and teachers must work together to provide a supportive and engaging learning environment that supports the best results for children. There is no question that parents should be involved in their children's education, but the specific ways in which they participate should depend on the situation (Bjorklund, 2022; Romsaitong & Brown, 2020).

Understanding Children's Learning Abilities

Learning capacity refers to a person's ability to receive, apply, and assimilate knowledge. There are several courses available that teach how to learn efficiently, the art of learning, and the causes of learning difficulties. It is well known in modern culture that people have varied learning preferences. Some people do better when they read, listen, write, recollect knowledge, use mathematical principles, or use visual aids. According to student submissions, not everyone has the desire to be a musician, artist, scientist, mechanic, or mathematician. It is not feasible for everyone to reach extraordinary heights just by wishing to master a topic or ability. Nonetheless, everyone is capable of grasping the most fundamental principles.

According to previous studies, many teachers prefer to manage pupils with abilities for instruction because they believe practice is more successful and efficient (Stronge, 2018; Sieberer-Nagler, 2016; Le et al., 2018). Li & Chen (2016) advocate the value of peer and self-assessment in meeting each student's individual learning needs. It nudges students to use this new knowledge in a meaningful way and pushes them to engage in higher levels of thinking

and learning. In order to seek deep learning, collaborate with others, and transition from dependency and independence to interdependence, peer and self-assessment can be used explicitly and effectively. Students have inquired about the inconsistencies in using assessments, and these requirements must be addressed. In contrast to the assessment process, which pits one person against another either implicitly or openly, the learning to work together approach involves supporting one another.

The study by Srimaharaj et al. (2020) suggests that a student's cognitive performance can have a significant impact on their ability to learn and succeed academically. The study found that there are different levels of cognitive function among students, ranging from low to neutral, good, and high. Students with lower levels of cognitive function may struggle to learn and perform in the classroom, while those with higher levels of cognitive function may excel.

The Role of School in A Child's Life

The most significant part in a child's life is school. A kid attends school not just to get knowledge or information, but also to learn the fundamentals of group dynamics and to build interpersonal skills in order to thrive in a linked world. Schooling helps youngsters communicate better, as well as respecting and honoring the viewpoints of others. Based on the previous studies, students need to pay attention, observe, memorize, understand, set goals, and pursue their own education in order to learn in school. This cognitive activity would not be possible without the learner's active participation. Teachers must encourage students to become engaged and goal-oriented by utilizing their innate curiosity to learn, comprehend, and master new things (Jeffery & Bauer, 2020; Jonassen & Carr, 2020; Sprenger, 2018; Erickson et al., 2017). Additionally, research shows the significance of teenage self-evaluation, family support, and the school environment (Kaplan Toren & Seginer, 2015; Drymon, 2015; Sun et al., 2021; Michael & Attias, 2016). According to Lehl et al. (2020), teachers evaluate children's preparation for school and parents offer information about their home and preschool experiences. Academic self-concept is changeable and responsive to treatments that can be achieved in the school setting.

Experiential Learning for Students

Active engagement is required in the process of learning via experience. Students apply their newly gained information to real-world settings and evaluate the results. Initially, students receive knowledge from numerous sources, such as personal observations, experiences, theories, and other informative items. This method leads in a greater recall of knowledge by the pupils. Students build decision-making skills, improve communication abilities, and raise self-confidence as they respond to and manage issues and processes in real-life settings. Experiential learning gives children the assistance they need to make the necessary changes to their abilities, thinking, and practice.

Students encounter conflicting ideals and gaps between theory and practice when they participate in ambiguous and complicated learning settings. Their private thoughts, views, and even work ethics are called into question (Alam, 2022; Haug, 2017; Boylan & Woolsey, 2015). Furthermore, experiential learning is participatory, interactive, and practical. Experiential learning is participatory, which means learners are actively involved in the learning process. This is different from passive learning, where learners are expected to sit and absorb information without being actively involved. Participatory learning can take many forms, including small group work, role play, and simulation. Experiential learning is interactive. This means that learners have the opportunity to interact with each other, as well as with the learning materials. Interactive learning is often facilitated by technology, such as online discussion forums and virtual learning environments. However, it can also take place in a face-to-face setting, such as in classroom discussions and debates. Experiential learning is practical. This means that learners have the opportunity to apply the knowledge they acquire in the real world. Practical learning can take many forms, including internships, fieldwork, and learning projects. Practical learning is often seen as a key component of experiential learning, as it gives

learners the opportunity to develop important skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and communication (Lehane, 2020; Jose et al., 2017; McCarthy, 2016; Matsuo, 2015; Bartle, 2015; Kolb, 2014; Kolb et al., 2014).

As a result, experiential learning theory aids in a deeper and more thorough understanding of learning and adaptability than ever before. This idea aids in learning enhancement and the construction of improved educational and developmental procedures (Chan, 2023; Morris, 2020; Andresen et al., 2020; Bion, 2021; Agrawal et al., 2016). Kolb's theory of experiential learning has several applications, including assisting students in self-awareness; assisting teachers in establishing reflective practice; recognizing the preferred learning styles of students; and enhancing teaching abilities. For instance, there will be a significant improvement at the end of the year if the teacher reviews his work each day and identifies one little modification that has to be made. Positive outcomes will occur when this practice is followed as a rule or habit (Morris, 2020).

The aim of experiential learning is to get students actively involved in asking questions, solving problems, thinking critically, and creatively, and creating meaning. Students are also tested on their ability to take responsibility, make decisions, and be accountable for results. Therefore, not all children, teenagers, or adults in the United States learned in the same way or at the same pace. They are beginning to think that the knowledge gained from adventure programs and other experiential learning contexts has a lot of potentials to be applied in traditional "educational settings," such as schools and colleges, therapeutic programs, or the world of business and industry (Kolb & Kolb, 2018; Fewster-Thuente & Battersen, 2018; Kolb & Kolb, 2017; Pritchard, 2017; Holt, 2017; Adler, 2015).

Diversity and Equality in Education

Every individual has the right to acquire a high-quality education. Education has a significant impact on an individual's life chances, including personal development and the efficacy of democratic participation. As a result, a child's life possibilities should not be influenced by characteristics such as their social position, color, or gender from birth, as they are intrinsically unfair. Every child ought to have access to educational programs that will help them build resilience, fortitude, and a growth mentality, all of which are necessary for life's success. The idea of educational equality should apply to all people, regardless of personality type or gender identity.

Schools must welcome diversity in order to provide a more holistic learning environment. Students may broaden their awareness of the world and increase their capacity to respect varied opinions when they are exposed to different cultures and perspectives. Children can benefit from diversity in terms of teamwork, creativity, and critical thinking. Every kid in their school should feel appreciated, respected, and welcomed. Every child has the capacity to succeed in classrooms with varied student populations. Inclusivity fosters acceptance and understanding among members of both minority and majority groups (Hymel & Katz, 2019; Juvonen et al., 2019; Juvonen, 2018; Schwarzenenthal et al., 2018; Spratt & Florian, 2015).

Fostering equity in education requires taking both distributive and non-distributive factors into account. According to sociocultural definitions of equality in education, differences such as those relating to sexual orientation, religious views, or disability must be acknowledged and accommodated in schools' cultures and practices, including pedagogical methods and curricula (Cole, 2022; Coleman, 2019). This statement highlights the importance of addressing both distributive and non-distributive factors in fostering equity in education. Distributive factors refer to the fair distribution of resources, such as funding and teacher quality, among different schools and districts. Non-distributive factors, on the other hand, involve acknowledging and accommodating differences related to individual student characteristics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and disability, in schools' cultures and practices. The statement emphasizes the sociocultural definitions of equality in education, which require recognizing and valuing diversity in all its forms. This includes promoting inclusivity in schools by adopting practices that accommodate and celebrate differences among students. This approach

involves creating a learning environment that supports the needs of all students, regardless of their background or individual characteristics. According to Ball (2016), achieving educational equality will require that we acknowledge the intricate connections between society's economic, political, sociocultural, and affective systems and educational institutions.

Reflection of Prospective Teachers

A qualified and successful instructor is critical in fostering and inspiring children to learn. A great teacher, regardless of the curriculum, instills vital life skills such as resilience and problem-solving and assists pupils in developing a better awareness of themselves. Furthermore, instructors can be relied on to provide a safe environment and foster positive relationships with their kids. A role model teacher helps pupils to identify and appreciate their unique traits while motivating and inspiring them to strive for excellence. The bond between a teacher and their pupils may have a dramatic influence on the child's entire development. Teachers inculcate essential lessons in their pupils by devoting themselves to excellence, allowing them to perceive their own personal progress and development.

Prospective teachers demonstrate the worth of their own viewpoints by focusing on personal experiences and values to guide their reflective work and to help them recall knowledge and comprehend course content (Van Driel, 2021; Chang, 2019; Robinson et al., 2016; Miller & Shifflet, 2016; Khoza, 2015; Lumpkin et al., 2015). It is well acknowledged that reflection plays a crucial role in both teacher development and teacher education. In the literature and debate surrounding teacher preparation and professional development, the terms "reflection" and "reflective practice" are often used. Reflection is used in a variety of settings for a variety of reasons, and it has been defined in a variety of ways. However, a theoretical or conceptual framework that links ends and means appears to be lacking in much of the reflective practice literature (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Körkkö et al., 2016; Liu, 2015; Moore-Russo & Wilsey, 2014).

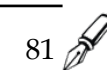
Previous research has shown that field experiences allow teacher candidates to change their minds about their own teaching profession, and in other studies, interactions and experiences with a variety of people and places have a direct impact on changing teacher candidates' views and practices. Therefore, it is crucial to take students' experiences and perspectives seriously, recognize how much more engaged they are in their learning when teachers listen to them and respond, and understand the importance of understanding why, not just how listening to students impacts their learning (Mathew et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2016; Amador & Weiland, 2015).

Merdeka belajar is an education policy initiative in Indonesia that emphasizes freedom of learning to provide students with more flexible and relevant learning options. Reflecting on merdeka belajar as a prospective teacher can be done by assessing how this policy affects prospective teachers' teaching practices and how prospective teachers can help their students achieve their educational goals. In the merdeka belajar paradigm, one of the important things to consider is the role of teachers in encouraging student learning. Prospective teachers are expected to play a more active role in guiding and assisting students in their learning journey as students are given greater choice in selecting their learning route. This may require designing teaching and evaluation procedures that are more adaptable and student-centered.

Another important factor to consider in merdeka belajar framework is the influence of technology in the teaching and learning process. Prospective teachers must ensure that they are up to date with the latest technological developments and can make good use of them in their teaching as the use of online platforms and digital materials increases. This may include acquiring new digital literacy skills as well as how to produce and curate engaging and relevant digital materials for students.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the analysis of the student reflection essays, it was discovered that the majority of the participants believed that merdeka belajar was the right of every child or



individual to be what they wanted or choose what they wanted and other participants determined; not under pressure from others' opinions; no longer being directed by another person; free to explore things; dare to be different from others; unique, whether from school, educators (teachers), or other parties. Participants also discussed the crucial role that parents and instructors play in fostering children's learning. They also discussed how educating students with different learning styles requires creativity, patience, and a desire to comprehend how each student learns best. Facilities, curriculum, climate, teachers, and other elements can all be used to define the function that schools play in children's lives. Schools also have a part in imparting knowledge, morals, and values.

Experiential learning, according to some participants, actively involves students learning by doing, reflecting on processes and experiences, and actively developing their own understanding. Participants also agreed that it is crucial for both teachers and students to support diversity and equality in the classroom. All students should feel at ease in the learning environment so that they can grow as a community and recognize the individual differences among themselves. Due to the dynamic nature of education and their responsibility to advance educational outcomes in the future, several participants also considered their own learning experiences. Teacher candidates must evaluate existing practices in terms of what works and what needs to be modified in their teaching if they want this to occur.

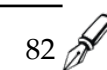
Finally, the conclusions of this study have important implications for the future of education. Educators must work hard to establish a welcoming and inclusive learning atmosphere that encourages student autonomy, accommodates varied learning styles, and incorporates experiential learning opportunities. They may give students the skills, knowledge, and values they need to succeed in the twenty-first century by doing so. More studies may be done to investigate the influence of various teaching approaches, the role of parents and teachers in supporting student learning, and the usefulness of teacher training programs in improving teaching practices.

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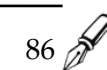


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