



Transformation Of Character Education Through The Merdeka Curriculum And The Project For Strengthening The Pancasila Student Profile

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ABSTRACT: The transformation of character education at the elementary school level through implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile Solidification Project aims to support character values which are an important foundation for individual development. this research conceptually describes how character education has changed at the elementary school level through the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum and the project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students (P5). In this context, the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater flexibility in integrating character learning with academic material, at the same time the Strengthening Pancasila Student Profile Project emphasizes foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy, and concrete Pancasila Student Character. This research outlines concrete steps in implementing these two initiatives in the elementary school environment and their positive impact on student character formation. This research uses a literature study research method (Library Research). The data collection technique in this article is reviewing journals, books, references, and field studies that are appropriate to the research problem. The results of this research are 1) Study of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the transformation of Character Education; 2) Study of the implementation of P5 in concrete steps for character formation in elementary school students; 3) Concrete steps that can be implemented as a manifestation of the transformation of character education in the Merdeka and P5 curriculum. Further research is needed to evaluate the overall and long-term effectiveness of implementing this curriculum.

Keywords: Caracter Education, Merdeka Curriculum, P5

Abstrak: Transformasi pendidikan karakter di tingkat Sekolah Dasar melalui implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dan Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila bertujuan untuk memperkuat nilai-nilai karakter yang merupakan fondasi penting bagi perkembangan individu. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mendeskripsikan secara konseptual bagaimana perubahan Pendidikan karakter di Tingkat Sekolah Dasar melalui implementasi kurikulum Merdeka dan proyek penguatan profil pelajar Pancasila (P5). Dalam konteks ini, Kurikulum Merdeka memberikan fleksibilitas yang lebih besar dalam mengintegrasikan pembelajaran karakter dengan materi akademis, sementara Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila menekankan pada keterampilan fondasional seperti literasi, numerasi, dan karakter Pelajar Pancasila secara konkret. Penelitian ini menguraikan langkah-langkah konkrit dalam menerapkan kedua inisiatif ini di lingkungan Sekolah Dasar dan dampak positifnya terhadap pembentukan karakter siswa. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian studi literatur (Library Research). Teknik Pengumpulan data dalam artikel ini adalah mengkaji jurnal, buku, referensi, dan studi lapangan yang sesuai dengan masalah penelitian. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah 1) Kajian tentang Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam transformasi Pendidikan Karakter; 2) Kajian tentang Implementasi P5 dalam Langkah konkrit Pembentukan karakter siswa SD; 3) Langkah-langkah Konkrit yang dapat diterapkan sebagai perwujudan transformasi Pendidikan karakter pada kurikulum Merdeka dan P5. Penelitian lebih lanjut diperlukan untuk mengevaluasi efektivitas penerapan kurikulum ini secara menyeluruh dan jangka panjang.

Keywords: Pendidikan Karakter; Kurikulum Merdeka; P5

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INTRODUCTION

Character education is a main concern in efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. Elementary school is an important phase in forming children's character because Currently they begin to internalize the values that will shape their personality and behavior in the future (Kurniawaty, dkk, 2022). However, in recent years, many have expressed concern about the decline in the quality of character education in elementary schools, which is reflected in cases of inappropriate behavior among students (Mudana, 2019). After the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia experienced several significant challenges in character education at the elementary school level (Hamzah, 2022). Social distancing and school closures in response to the pandemic mean students are unable to interact directly with their teachers and classmates. This limited social interaction can reduce opportunities to practice values such as cooperation, empathy, and tolerance. Distance education adopted during the pandemic forces students to spend more time in front of computer screens or gadgets (Rahmawati, et al, 2021). Excessive use of technology can reduce social engagement and disrupt students' emotional and social development [10]. Apart from that, there are indications of a loss of interest in learning in grades 1 and 2 of elementary school after post-COVID-19. this is shown by the data obtained below (BSKAP Kemendikbudristek, 2021):

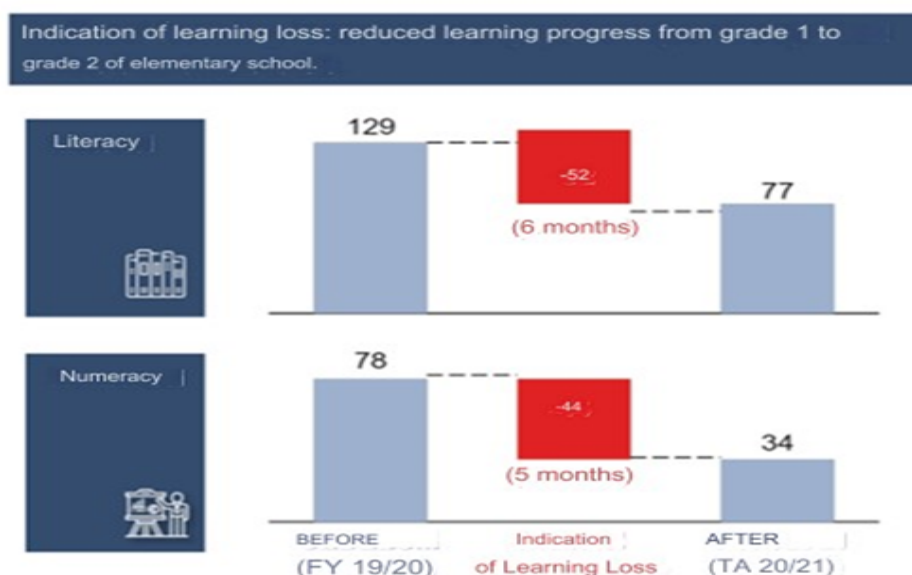


Figure 1: Data showing the decline in learning progress of students from the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Source: BSKAP Kemdikbudristek

The pandemic has created uncertainty and anxiety among students, especially concerning their own and their families' health. There is also uncertainty regarding their educational future (Daniel, 2020). This unstable psychological condition can affect students' ability to develop their personality and character. Not all students have the same access to distance education during the pandemic. Studies have shown that some students experience access gaps, which cause them to fall behind in their learning. This gap can affect students' character development, especially when they feel frustrated or hopeless due to these limitations. During distance learning, students may receive less direct supervision and guidance from their parents or guardians, which can allow negative behaviors to develop without timely intervention. School closures lead to a loss of daily routines and structure that are essential to student development. This instability can affect students' self-discipline, responsibility for school assignments, and adherence to social norms.

To address this challenge, the Indonesian government introduced the Merdeka Curriculum Concept and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. The Merdeka Curriculum grants

schools greater flexibility to tailor the curriculum to local needs and more effectively integrate character education. This shift allows schools to customize the curriculum according to their specific circumstances. One key feature of the Merdeka Curriculum is the improved integration of character education with academic learning. This entails embedding values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and cooperation into the curriculum to bolster students' character development. The Merdeka Curriculum promotes a project-based learning approach that emphasizes active, cooperative, and contextual learning. Through these projects, students not only grasp academic concepts, but also cultivate essential social and critical thinking skills and positive attitudes crucial for character formation. Moreover, teachers have responded positively to the impact of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum on student character development in driving schools, as indicated in the graphic below:

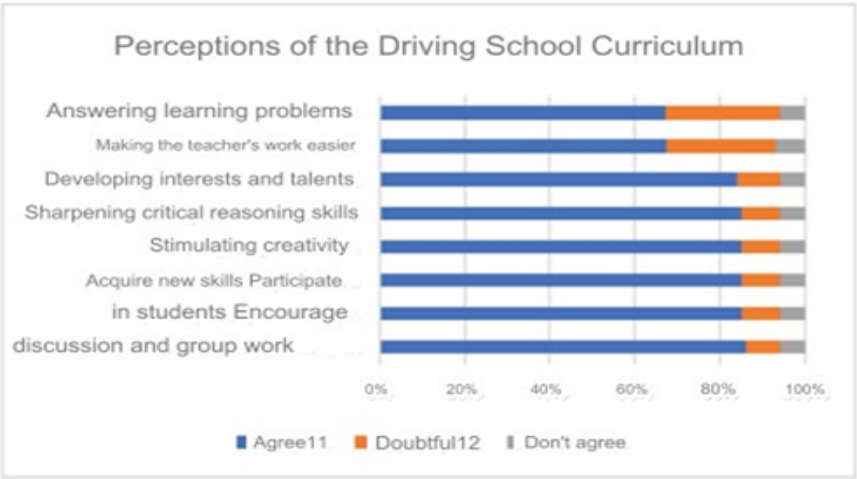


Figure 2 . Teacher Perceptions of the Driving School Program
Source: BSKAP Kemdikbudristek

The graphic above shows that approximately 60-80% of teachers hold a positive view of the implementation of the driving school curriculum. They believe that the Merdeka curriculum effectively addresses current learning challenges. Moreover, the mechanism simplifies teachers' tasks, fosters student interest and motivation, enhances critical thinking skills, encourages creativity, supports students, and promotes group discussions and collaboration within school communities. This approach is seen as a way to foster and develop students' character.

The Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile aims to enhance students' understanding and practice of Pancasila values. The Strengthening Pancasila Student Profile (P5) Project is an initiative in the Merdeka Curriculum, providing students with real-life experiences to embody the noble values of Pancasila and the character of Pancasila students through various learning project activities inside and outside the classroom. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture No.56/M/2022, P5 is a project-based co-curricular activity designed to strengthen efforts towards achieving competence and character aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile, which is based on Graduate Competency Standards (Safitri dan Rahim, 2023). The Pancasila Student Profile encompasses character and abilities developed in everyday life, evident through educational unit culture, intracurricular learning, co-curricular learning projects to strengthen the Pancasila student profile, and extracurricular activities. It comprises 6 main dimensions: faith, devotion to God Almighty, noble morals; global diversity; collaboration; independence; critical thinking; and creativity (Hakim, 2023).

The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) offers students the opportunity to experience knowledge as a way to strengthen their character and learn from their social environment. By integrating Pancasila values through P5, elementary schools can contribute to character education that promotes responsibility, honesty, fairness, and respect for differences. This article aims to explore how these initiatives can change character education in elementary schools, taking into account the current state of character education and the importance of efforts to

strengthen it. It is hoped that this article will provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers in the field of education.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method employed in this study on the transformation of character education through the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile Solidification Project (P5) is multifaceted and systematic. Initially, a literature study is conducted to gather comprehensive information on character education, the Merdeka Curriculum, and P5 by reviewing existing journals, books, and relevant field studies. This is complemented by a policy analysis that examines the framework and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum and P5, involving a review of official documents from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture.

The research uses a descriptive approach with a qualitative focus to explore the experiences and perspectives of different stakeholders at an elementary school in Sukabumi city. This includes teachers who implement the Merdeka Curriculum and P5 in their classrooms, school principals who oversee educational policies, fourth-grade students involved in character education programs, and parents who support their children's education. Data collection methods include in-depth interviews, participant observation of classroom activities, and document analysis of curriculum guidelines and lesson plans.

The data processing phase involves transcribing interviews, organizing observational notes, and categorizing documents based on their relevance to the research questions. For data analysis, thematic analysis is employed to identify key themes from the qualitative data, while descriptive statistics may be used for any quantitative data collected. Research instruments include structured interview guides, observation checklists, and document review templates, all designed to facilitate a thorough examination of the transformation of character education in elementary schools through the Merdeka Curriculum and P5. This comprehensive approach aims to provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and researchers in the field of education.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The transformation of education in elementary schools through the Merdeka Curriculum and P5 refers to efforts to change the traditional educational approach to a more holistic one, focusing on building students' character and strengthening their national identity (Romanti, 2024). The Essential Foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum is in the form of the Independent Learning Paradigm which places the needs of students as the main priority in education. This allows schools and educators to fully adapt learning methods to the students' needs and abilities. In the Merdeka Belajar era, the main focus is on curriculum innovation, including deeper content reduction and flexibility in differentiated learning. Hundreds of thousands of Teacher Mobilizers play an important role as agents of change. They introduce a new paradigm in the world of education and have a positive impact on other fellow teachers, as well as the learning support platforms introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture to strengthen educational transformation.

In the P5 program, the focus is on foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy, and the character of Pancasila students. The program prioritizes differentiated learning and divides learning outcomes into phases across multiple years (Hakim, 2023). This flexible curriculum structure allows teachers to use various teaching tools according to the needs and characteristics of students. There is also an application that provides references for teachers to develop teaching practices independently and share good practices. The implementation of P5 in schools transforms character education at each level of education. The Pancasila Student Profile is designed to answer the question of what kind of profile (competency) Indonesian education aims to produce. The goal is for Indonesian students to become lifelong learners who are competent and have characters that align with Pancasila values. The project to strengthen the Pancasila student profile aims to develop dimensions that can compete on a national and international scale, as in the current era of globalization, a country's progress lies in quality human resources rather than natural resources.

The government has taken concrete steps to implement character education in the current Merdeka curriculum by providing educational institutions with the freedom to integrate character education into both curricular and extracurricular activities. This can be seen in the implementation chart for P5, which illustrates the formation of student character.

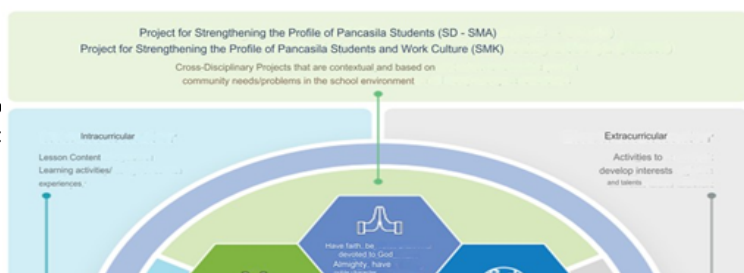
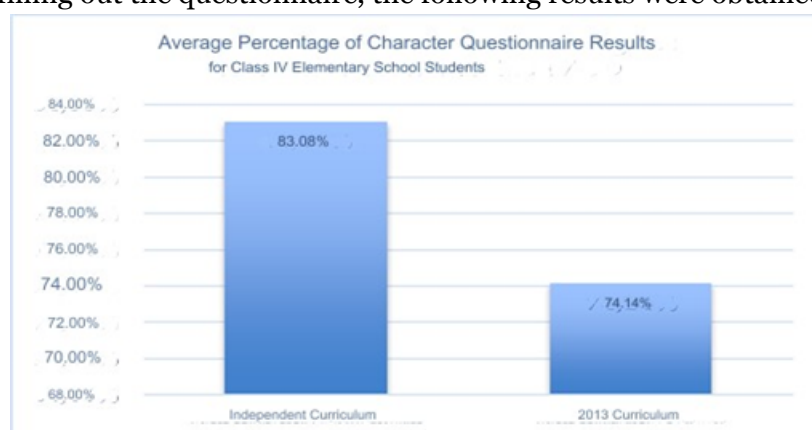


Figure 3: Overview of P5 implementation in educational units.
Source: BPPP Kemendikbudristek, 2021

The Pancasila Student Profile encompasses the character and abilities of individual students. It is developed through daily life and is reflected in each student through cultural and educational activities, in-school learning, projects aimed at enhancing the Pancasila Student Profile, and extracurricular activities (Sufyadi, 2021). The profile consists of six competencies formulated as key dimensions, all of which are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Achieving a complete Pancasila Student Profile requires the simultaneous development of all six dimensions, rather than focusing on them individually. The dimensions are: 1) Faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble character, 2) Global diversity, 3) Working together, 4) Independence, 5) Critical reasoning, and 6) Creativity. These dimensions illustrate that the Pancasila Student Profile not only emphasizes cognitive abilities, but also encompasses attitudes and behavior aligned with the students' identity as Indonesians and global citizens.

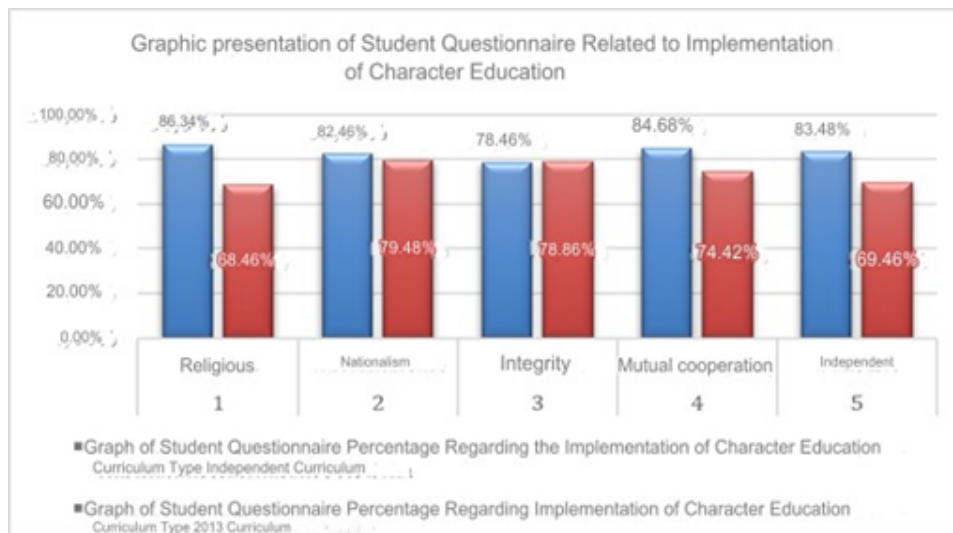
In a field study conducted with fourth grade students at an elementary school in Sukabumi City, we compared the implementation of character education in students following the Merdeka curriculum and those using the 2013 curriculum. The sample included 24 students from each curriculum. After filling out the questionnaire, the following results were obtained:



Graph 1: Average Percentage of Character Questionnaire Results for Class IV Elementary School Students Comparing the Merdeka Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum in a School in Sukabumi City

Based on the average percentage graph, it seems that students who have adopted the Merdeka curriculum exhibit better character traits compared to students who are still following the

2013 curriculum. The average percentage of character questionnaire results for fourth-grade elementary school students in Sukabumi City who have implemented the Merdeka curriculum is 83.08%, while for students who are still using the 2013 curriculum, the percentage is 74.14%. These findings indicate that the Merdeka curriculum has a positive impact and contributes to a better understanding of student character development compared to the 2013 curriculum. This aligns with literature studies conducted by various researchers (including Safitri et al, 2022; Sundari et al, 2023; Rahmawati et al, 2022; Arifin et al, 2023; Irawati et al, 2022; Hamzah et al, 2022; Kurniawaty et al, 2022. Jojor & Sihotang, 2022; serta Safitri & Rahim, 2023,) who all agreed that implementing the Curriculum and the Project for Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile can enhance positive student character, improve learning outcomes, and establish a school culture emphasizing character and a global perspective. The percentage results of each character dimension tested on students, regarding the character developed by each type of curriculum, are illustrated in the graph below.



Graph 2 . Graph of the Average Percentage Results of Character Questionnaires for Class IV Elementary School Students in Sukabumi City in each dimension related to the Implementation of Character Education.

Source: Research Results, 2024

In a graph showing the average percentage of student questionnaires regarding the implementation of character education, both integrated into learning and found in intracurricular and extracurricular activities, students following the Merdeka and P5 curriculums displayed higher percentages in the dimensions of Religious, Nationalism, Mutual Cooperation, and Independence. However, for the Integrity dimension, students following both the Merdeka curriculum and the 2013 curriculum did not show significant differences. Despite the serious challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, including declining student learning outcomes in various countries, Indonesia has managed to maintain or even increase average scores through simultaneous implementation and serious monitoring. This demonstrates the resilience and adaptability of the Indonesian education system. The transformation of character education in elementary schools through this approach is a positive step towards a better and more relevant educational future for every individual.

Based on the results of the study on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and P5 in the transformation of character education in elementary schools, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides great flexibility for schools in integrating character education into the school curriculum. However, research shows that there is still a need for greater consistency in implementing and assessing character aspects. Therefore, it is important to continue evaluating and improving the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum to ensure effective student character development.

Meanwhile, the implementation of P5, in concrete steps for character building for elementary school students, is considered to have succeeded in making a significant contribution to forming the

character of elementary school students by strengthening their understanding of foundational skills such as the Pancasila student character (6 dimensions). Through various learning activities, discussions, and themed projects, students are allowed to understand and apply the character dimensions of Pancasila in their daily lives.

The findings of this study on the transformation of character education through the Merdeka Curriculum and the Pancasila Student Profile Solidification Project (P5) reveal significant insights into the integration of character education within the elementary school curriculum. The results indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides schools with the flexibility to incorporate character education effectively, aligning with the foundational skills emphasized in the Pancasila student character dimensions. This aligns with previous research by Rahim and Safitri (2023), which highlighted the importance of integrating character education into the curriculum to foster holistic student development.

Tabel 1. Comparison of Research Findings

Study	Key Findings	Advantages	Disadvantages
Current Study	Merdeka Curriculum enhances character education; P5 contributes significantly to character formation.	Flexibility in curriculum integration; active student involvement.	Inconsistency in implementation across schools.
Rahim & Safitri (2023)	Integration of character education fosters holistic development.	Supports the need for character education in curricula.	Limited focus on practical applications in some contexts.
Hakim (2023)	Practical applications yield better character development outcomes.	Engaging students in real-world applications enhances learning.	Requires additional resources and training for effective implementation.
Pratiwi (2021)	Significant improvements in all character dimensions with integrated programs.	Comprehensive character development across all dimensions.	Variability in implementation strategies may affect outcomes.
Sari (2022)	Challenges in effective integration of character education due to lack of support.	Highlights the need for teacher training and resources.	Schools struggle with uniform application of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Source : Rahim & safitri (2023), Hakim (2023), Pratiwi (2021), Sari (2022)

Moreover, the study's findings suggest that the P5 initiative has successfully contributed to character formation among elementary school students through various learning activities and projects. This is consistent with the work of Hakim (2023), who noted that character education initiatives that engage students in practical, real-world applications tend to yield better outcomes in terms of character development. However, while both studies emphasize the positive impact of these initiatives, they also point out the challenges related to the consistency of implementation and assessment of character aspects.

In comparing the results of this study with those of other researchers, it is evident that while the Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility, there are concerns regarding the uniformity of its application across different schools. For instance, a study by Sari (2022) found that despite the potential benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum, many schools struggle with the effective integration of character education due to a lack of training and resources for teachers. This highlights a disadvantage in the current implementation framework, suggesting that while the curriculum is promising, its success is contingent upon adequate support and training for educators.

Additionally, the research results indicate that students following the Merdeka and P5 curriculums showed higher percentages in dimensions such as Religious, Nationalism, Mutual Cooperation, and Independence. However, the Integrity dimension did not show significant differences when compared to students following the 2013 curriculum. This finding contrasts with the research conducted by Pratiwi (2021), which reported significant improvements in all character dimensions among students exposed to integrated character education programs. This discrepancy may be attributed to variations in the implementation strategies and the specific contexts of the

schools involved in each study.

In conclusion, while the current research supports the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum and P5 in enhancing character education, it also underscores the need for ongoing evaluation and improvement of these initiatives. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of these educational reforms on student character development and explore strategies to address the challenges identified in the implementation process. The evidence suggests that P5 has taken specific steps to develop students' strong character based on positive values. Therefore, it is recommended that concrete steps for transforming character education in the Merdeka and P5 curriculum can be implemented as follows: 1) Providing training and guidance for teachers and parents to support the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and P5, 2) Ensuring the availability of adequate resources and quality supervision from the school to support effective character learning, 3) Continuing to evaluate and improve the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and P5, as well as strengthening students' active involvement in character formation through participation in various learning activities and social projects. Hopefully, this article can inspire more innovation and change in our education system.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and P5 in transforming character education in elementary schools, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides great flexibility for schools to integrate character education into the school curriculum. However, research shows that there's a need for more attention to the consistency of implementation and assessment of character aspects. Therefore, it is important to continue evaluating and improving the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation for effective student character formation.

Meanwhile, the implementation of P5 in concrete steps for character building for elementary school students is considered successful in making a significant contribution to forming their character by strengthening their understanding of foundational skills such as the Pancasila student character (6 dimensions). Through various learning activities, discussions, and themed projects, students are allowed to understand and apply the character dimensions of Pancasila in their daily lives. This shows that P5 has provided concrete steps in forming students' strong character based on positive values. To implement these concrete steps, it is suggested to:

1. Provide training and guidance for teachers and parents to support the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and P5.
2. Ensure the availability of adequate resources and quality supervision from the school to support effective character learning.
3. Continue to evaluate and improve the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and P5, while strengthening students' active involvement in character formation through participation in various learning activities and social projects.

By implementing these steps, it is hoped that the Merdeka and P5 Curriculum can become a strong foundation in transforming character education in elementary schools, forming a young generation with strong characters based on the character values of the Pancasila student profile.

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