Evaluation-Based Curriculum Analysis: A Paradigm Shift in Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract

The curriculum in Indonesia continues to evolve in response to the country's conditions. The transition from the 2013 Curriculum (K13) to the Merdeka Curriculum (KM) marks a fundamental shift, particularly in the assessment paradigm. This study aims to analyze how the Merdeka Curriculum is designed based on evaluation, focusing on the philosophical shift and practical implementation of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with a library research approach. Primary and secondary data were analyzed from 17 references, including official guidelines from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, textbooks, and scientific journal articles (2018-2025). The results of the analysis show that the Merdeka Curriculum replaces the rigid Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) with more flexible Learning Objective Achievement Criteria (KKTP), which can be compiled using criteria descriptions, rubrics, or value intervals. The essence of this shift is the strengthening of formative assessment as assessment for learning and assessment as learning, which aims to continuously improve the learning process. Diagnostic assessment (cognitive and non-cognitive) is now required at the beginning to map students' needs. While summative assessments continue to be used as assessments of learning to measure final achievement, authentic assessments, such as performance assessments, projects, and portfolios, are strongly encouraged to measure 21st-century competencies in real-world contexts. The implication of these findings is that there is an urgent need for more practical teacher training to address misconceptions about implementation and improve assessment literacy.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia has undergone constant curriculum changes, often in line with political leadership changes and responses to developments of the times (Putri & Amirul, 2023; Putri & Zakir, 2023; Septy et al., 2024). Since independence, Indonesia has undergone more than ten curriculum changes (Aufa et al., 2024; Darwin et al., 2023). The most recent change is the launch of the Merdeka Curriculum, which was introduced as an effort to recover learning after the learning

loss exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Putri & Zakir, 2023; Stiawan, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed as an improvement on the 2013 Curriculum (K13), with the main characteristics of being simpler, more flexible, and more concise (Putri & Amirul, 2023). This curriculum focuses on essential material, character development through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), and provides educators with the flexibility to conduct learning that is appropriate to the achievement level and needs of students (Aminah, 2024; Nirwana et al., 2024; Tawil & Tampa, 2024; Yulita et al., 2025).

The essence of flexibility and adaptation in the Merdeka Curriculum lies in a fundamental shift in its evaluation paradigm. In the context of education, there is often confusion between the terms measurement, assessment, and evaluation. Measurement is the process of quantifying or assigning a number to an attribute (Musanadah et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2023; Shofiyah, 2018; Tawil & Tampa, 2024). Evaluation is the process of making a judgment about the value or quality of something. Meanwhile, assessment, in the Merdeka Curriculum, is defined as "the process of collecting and processing information to determine the learning needs and developmental achievements or learning outcomes of students" (Cirocki et al., 2025).

The most crucial shift is from the dominance of summative assessment (assessment of learning or assessment of learning outcomes) to the strengthening of formative assessment (assessment for learning or assessment for learning and assessment as learning or assessment as learning) (Putri & Zakir, 2023). While K13 focuses on achieving Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM), which are often absolute numbers, the Merdeka Curriculum replaces them with more descriptive and process-oriented Learning Objective Achievement Criteria (KKTP) (Ardiansyah, 2023; Efriani et al., 2020; Fathonah et al., 2025; Hardiyanti & Sastrawati, 2025; Manullang & Marpaung, 2024; Oktayani et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2023).

Although official guidelines have been provided, implementation in the field faces various challenges. There are misconceptions among teachers regarding the implementation of formative assessment and P5 (Putri & Amirul, 2023). Teachers are reportedly still struggling to adapt and develop a comprehensive understanding of this new assessment (Aminah, 2024). A study at the Darul Hadits Huta Baringin Private Madrasah Aliyah (MAS), for example, found that teachers were not actively implementing formative and summative assessments optimally (Efendi et al., 2024). Another study showed that teachers were still accustomed to traditional assessment methods and lacked confidence in implementing authentic assessments (Akem et al., 2025; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Hamzah et al., 2025; Nirwana et al., 2024). Even at the pre-service teacher level, assessment literacy (AL) is still at a moderate level, with an urgent need for more practical training (Cirocki et al., 2025).

Previous studies have extensively compared K13 and the Merdeka Curriculum (Stiawan, 2024) or analyzed one specific type of assessment, such as formative assessment (Maylafisa & Wardhani, 2024). However, there has been little research that holistically analyzes how the entire structure of the Merdeka Curriculum, from planning to reporting, is designed based on this new evaluation (assessment) system.

Therefore, this article aims to analyze in depth how the assessment paradigm has become the main foundation in the design and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study will examine the central role of the three pillars of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments and how the three work in a cycle to support adaptive and student-centered learning, which is at the core of this new curriculum evaluation.

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research method with a library research type (Darwin et al., 2023; Eltoukhi et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2023, 2024, 2025; Jaafar et

al., 2025; Yulita et al., 2025). This approach was chosen to examine, analyze, and synthesize the concepts, principles, and implementation of assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum based on relevant and authoritative written sources. This method is a series of activities that include collecting library data, followed by reading, noting, and analyzing research materials (Yulita et al., 2025).

The research data was sourced from 17 documents consisting of official government documents, reference books, and scientific journal articles. The main primary data source was the Learning and Assessment Guide (2024 Revised Edition) published by the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency (BSKAP) of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology.

Secondary data consists of: i) Three (3) Reference Books: Including "Textbook for Learning Assessment Course" (Shofiyah, 2018), "21st Century Competency Assessment Model (Model-AKA21)" (Tawil & Tampa, 2024), and "Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum" (Ardiansyah, 2023). ii) Thirteen (13) Scientific Journal Articles: Published between 2023 and 2025, specifically discussing the implementation of formative and summative assessments (Aminah, 2024; Efendi et al., 2024; Nuryana, 2024; F. Putri & Zakir, 2023), language assessment (Darwin et al., 2023), challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Aufa et al., 2024; Stiawan, 2024; Yulita et al., 2025), teacher assessment literacy (Cirocki et al., 2025), and specific studies of assessment at various levels (Lutfiah et al., 2024; Maylafisa & Wardhani, 2024; Mujiburrahman et al., 2023; Nirwana et al., 2024; Putri & Amirul, 2023).

The data analysis technique used was content analysis (Putri & Zakir, 2023). The analysis process was carried out in several stages: first, data collection: collecting 17 reference files provided. Second, data reduction: reading and identifying parts of the text from each reference that specifically discussed the definition, principles, types, techniques, instruments, and challenges of implementing assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum. Third, categorization: grouping the data based on the pillars of assessment (diagnostic, formative, summative) and comparing them with the previous curriculum (K13). Fourth, synthesis: synthesizing findings from various sources to construct a coherent argument in answering the research question, namely analyzing how the Merdeka Curriculum makes evaluation (assessment) its main basis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of 17 primary and secondary documents, including policy guidelines, textbooks (Efriani et al., 2020; Shofiyah, 2018; Tawil & Tampa, 2024), and a series of empirical studies (2023-2025) confirmed the main hypothesis: The Merdeka Curriculum is fundamentally designed as an evaluation-based curriculum.

Unlike previous curricula, which often placed evaluation as a separate final stage (generally in the form of summative tests), the Merdeka Curriculum positions assessment as an integrated and continuous cycle that directly informs and improves the learning process. This shift is evident in the three pillars of assessment (diagnostic, formative, and summative), the reconceptualization of Mastery Criteria, and the strengthening of authentic assessment.

Paradigm Shift: Assessment for Learning

The Merdeka Curriculum shifts the emphasis from assessment of learning (assessment of learning outcomes) to assessment for learning (assessment for learning) and assessment as learning (assessment as learning) (Nirwana et al., 2024; F. Putri & Zakir, 2023). In K13, evaluation is often equated with summative assessment, which aims to measure student achievement against the Minimum Passing Criteria (KKM) (Mujiburrahman et al., 2023). In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum adopts more holistic assessment principles. Based on the Learning and Assessment Guidelines and a synthesis by (Ardiansyah, 2023), the five main

principles of assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum are: First, integrated: assessment is an integral part of the learning process. Learning, assessment, and feedback are an inseparable cycle (Putri & Amirul, 2023). Second, educational: assessment aims to monitor and improve the process, as well as evaluate achievement (BSKAP, 2024). The results are used as material for reflection to improve the quality of learning (Mujiburrahman et al., 2023). Third, fair and objective: assessments are designed to be fair, proportional, valid, and reliable (Maylafisa & Wardhani, 2024). Fourth, flexible: educators are given the freedom to choose the timing, techniques, and assessment instruments to be effective in accordance with the objectives (Mujiburrahman et al., 2023). Fifth, student-centered: assessments support adaptive learning that is relevant to students' needs (Nirwana et al., 2024).

This shift also removes the rigid separation between attitude assessment (KI-1 & KI-2), knowledge (KI-3), and skills (KI-4) that existed in K13 (Yulita et al., 2025). The Merdeka Curriculum assesses learning outcomes in an integrated and holistic manner (Ardiansyah, 2023).

Pillar 1: Diagnostic Assessment as the Starting Point for Learning

The most significant innovation in the evaluation-based curriculum flow is the institutionalization of Diagnostic Assessment at the beginning of the learning process (Yulita et al., 2025). Previously, initial assessment was optional, but now it is a mandatory foundation for designing learning. The goal is to specifically identify the competencies, strengths, and weaknesses of students.

BSKAP (2024) and Yulita et al., (2025) divide diagnostic assessments into two types: First, Non-Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment: Conducted at the beginning of the school year to identify aspects outside of academics, such as students' psychological and socio-emotional well-being, family conditions, activities at home, as well as students' learning styles, characters, and interests. Second, Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment: Conducted before starting a scope of material. The aim is to identify students' competency achievements, adjust learning to the average competency of students, and identify students who need remedial assistance.

The results of this diagnostic assessment become the initial data (entry point) for teachers to implement differentiated learning, which is a teaching practice that adjusts the learning process, content, and products based on students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles (Mujiburrahman et al., 2023). Thus, (diagnostic) evaluation is no longer conducted after the material has been delivered, but rather before the material is designed.

Pillar 2: Strengthening Formative Assessment as the Core of Improvement (Assessment for/as Learning)

If diagnostic assessment is the foundation, formative assessment is the engine that drives the learning cycle in the Merdeka Curriculum (Putri & Zakir, 2023). This is the biggest improvement compared to K13 (BSKAP, 2024). Formative assessment is defined as the process of systematically and continuously collecting data during the learning process (Lutfiah et al., 2024).

The main purpose of formative assessment is to provide feedback for improvement, not for judgment (Putri & Amirul, 2023). For students, this feedback serves to identify strengths and areas for improvement (BSKAP, 2024; Darwin et al., 2023). For teachers, it serves as material for reflection to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching strategies and make immediate adjustments (Maylafisa & Wardhani, 2024; Nuryana, 2024). A crucial point that distinguishes it is that the results of formative assessment are not used to determine report card grades, promotion to the next grade, or graduation (Putri & Zakir, 2023). The focus is purely on process improvement.

To support this function, formative assessment techniques are highly diverse and encourage moving away from written tests alone. Recommended techniques

include (Darwin et al., 2023; Efendi et al., 2024; Maylafisa & Wardhani, 2024; F. Putri & Zakir, 2023): Class Discussions and Oral Question and Answer Sessions: To confirm students' understanding directly. Products or Projects: Students create models, posters, or dioramas to demonstrate their understanding. Reflection: Students are asked to write down what they have learned and what is still confusing. Self-assessment and Peer-assessment: Trains students to be independent and critical assessors of their own work and that of their peers. Presentations and Drama: Measures communication and collaboration skills. Observation: Teachers observe student performance using instruments such as anecdotal notes or checklists.

Although ideal, implementation in the field presents significant challenges. A study by (Putri & Amirul, 2023) at SMKN 1 Kemlagi found a misconception whereby teachers still gave a lot of daily assignments, but feedback was not given evenly or was only given after several meetings, thus defeating the essence of "formative" (immediate improvement) assessment. This aligns with the findings of (Cirocki et al., 2025) that prospective teachers feel they most need practical training in designing rubrics and providing effective feedback.

Pillar 3: Reconceptualization of Summative Assessment (Assessment of Learning)

Summative assessment continues to play a vital role in the Merdeka Curriculum, namely as an assessment of learning. The aim is to assess the achievement of learning objectives and/or Learning Outcomes (CP) of students at the end of a certain period (e.g., end of subject matter, end of semester, or end of phase) (Aminah, 2024; Darwin et al., 2023; Nirwana et al., 2024).

The main function of summative assessment is as a basis for (Darwin et al., 2023; Putri & Zakir, 2023): Measuring Achievement: Serving as a measuring tool to determine student learning outcomes in a given period. Determining Report Card Grades: Summative data (along with formative data, if decided by the school) is processed into final grades in the learning outcome report. Decision Making: Serving as the basis for determining promotion or graduation from an educational unit.

Although its objectives are similar to the previous curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes that summative assessments do not have to take the form of written tests at the end of the semester (Final Semester Exams). Educators can use various techniques such as portfolios, products, or projects as summative assessments (Darwin et al., 2023).

The most revolutionary change in summative assessment is the elimination of Minimum Passing Criteria (KKM) (Mujiburrahman et al., 2023). KKM in K13 is often in the form of an absolute number (e.g., 75) that is set uniformly and rigidly. The Merdeka Curriculum replaces it with the Learning Objective Achievement Criteria (KKTP) (Efriani et al., 2020).

KKTP is a description or explanation of the abilities that students need to demonstrate as proof that they have achieved the learning objectives (BSKAP, 2024). Educators are given the autonomy to determine KKTP using various approaches (Ardiansyah, 2023; Efendi et al., 2024): Criteria Description Approach: Educators set qualitative criteria. Example: "The report demonstrates the ability to write explanatory texts coherently." Students are considered to have completed the learning objectives if they meet (for example) 3 of the 4 criteria set (Efendi et al., 2024). Rubric Approach: This is the most recommended approach. Educators create a rubric with performance levels (e.g., Emerging, Adequate, Competent, Proficient). Mastery is set at a certain level, for example, "at least reaching the Competent level". Scale or Interval Approach: Educators quantify the rubric into value intervals. For example, the interval 86-100% (Very Good/Complete and needs enrichment) or 41-65% (Fair/Not Complete). This approach allows qualitative data (rubrics) to be processed into quantitative data for report cards. With the KKTP approach,

evaluation becomes more transparent, qualitative, and focused on what students can actually do, not just "passing grades."

Pillar 4: Strengthening Authentic Assessment as a Manifestation of Real Competence

In line with the focus on 21st-century competencies (Tawil & Tampa, 2024), the Merdeka Curriculum places strong emphasis on Authentic Assessment. Authentic assessment is a meaningful measurement of student learning outcomes (attitudes, skills, and knowledge) that are relevant to real-world contexts and challenges (Darwin et al., 2023; Tawil & Tampa, 2024).

This assessment is considered capable of describing improvements in student learning outcomes holistically, in line with the scientific approach (observing, reasoning, trying) promoted by the curriculum (Tawil & Tampa, 2024). Unlike traditional tests that often measure recall, authentic assessment focuses on complex tasks that allow students to demonstrate their competence (Nirwana et al., 2024; Tawil & Tampa, 2024).

Based on the synthesis of (Darwin et al., 2023; Shofiyah, 2018; Tawil & Tampa, 2024), the main forms of authentic assessment include: First, Performance Assessment: Assessment that requires students to demonstrate and apply their knowledge in a real context (Darwin et al., 2023). This can take the form of practical work (e.g., using a microscope), role-playing, speeches, or sports. This assessment is recorded using observation instruments such as checklists, rating scales, or anecdotal notes (Darwin et al., 2023; Tawil & Tampa, 2024).

Second, Project Assessment: Assessment of complex investigative tasks that must be completed within a certain period of time. Project assessment includes three stages: planning (design), implementation (process), and reporting (product) (Shofiyah, 2018). Third, Portfolio Assessment: A collection of documents or student work that is systematically compiled to show the development, process, and achievement of learning outcomes within a certain period of time. Portfolios allow teachers and students to monitor learning progress reflectively (Nirwana et al., 2024). Fourth, Self-Assessment: Students are asked to reflectively assess themselves in terms of their status, process, and competency achievements (Darwin et al., 2023; Tawil & Tampa, 2024).

Discussion: The Challenge of Teacher Assessment Literacy

The ideal evaluation model in the Merdeka Curriculum (Diagnostic -> Differentiated Learning -> Formative -> Summative -> Authentic) is highly dependent on one key factor: the assessment literacy of educators (Cirocki et al., 2025).

Studies in Indonesia indicate that the greatest implementation challenge is teachers' "misconceptions" (Putri & Amirul, 2023). Teachers are still accustomed to the old paradigm that is oriented towards summative tests (Stiawan, 2024). A study by (Cirocki et al., 2025) on prospective teachers in Indonesia found that although they had a "moderate" level of assessment literacy, there was a significant gap between their theoretical understanding and practical readiness.

Prospective teachers report an urgent need for more practical training, particularly in terms of: i) designing valid tests and rubrics, ii) providing effective formative feedback, iii) implementing alternative assessments (projects, portfolios), and iv) integrating technology and AI in assessment (Cirocki et al., 2025). Without a massive improvement in teacher assessment literacy, this evaluation-based curriculum paradigm risks failing in its implementation and will only become an administrative change on paper.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of 17 primary and secondary references confirms that the Merdeka Curriculum is fundamentally designed as an evaluation-based curriculum. This paradigm shift moves from an assessment model oriented towards final results (assessment of learning) to a model that integrates assessment as an integral part of the learning improvement process (assessment for learning) and as the learning process itself (assessment as learning). The core of this transformation is the strengthening of formative assessment as a driving force for learning, which functions to provide continuous feedback for teachers and students. This is supported by the institutionalization of diagnostic assessment (cognitive and non-cognitive) at the beginning of learning, which serves as the basis for designing differentiated learning that suits the needs and learning readiness of students.

Summative assessments are still maintained to measure final achievement, but they have been reconceptualized with the removal of rigid Minimum Passing Criteria (KKM). Instead, the Learning Objective Achievement Criteria (KKTP) have been introduced, giving teachers the autonomy to determine mastery in a more qualitative and flexible manner through criteria descriptions, rubrics, or value intervals. In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum strongly encourages the implementation of authentic assessments (performance, projects, and portfolios) to measure students' 21st-century competencies in real-world contexts.

Although this assessment model is ideal in theory, its implementation in the field faces a major challenge, namely the uneven level of assessment literacy among teachers. There are misconceptions in the application of formative assessment and an urgent need for more practical training in designing instruments, rubrics, and providing effective feedback. Thus, the future success of this evaluation-based curriculum depends heavily on continued investment in the professional development of teachers in the field of assessment.

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