



## *The Concept of “Freedom of Learning” in a Multicultural Education Perspective*

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**Abstract:** This study seeks to examine the concept of “*Merdeka Belajar*” or “Freedom of Learning” which has been initiated by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim. The study of freedom of learning uses text study with content analysis method. The concept of “Freedom of Learning” is very interesting when studied with a multicultural education perspective. Moreover, the two concepts have the same relevance and spirit, namely freedom and justice in the human resources development context, particularly through the educational process. Based on the results, the implementation of “*Merdeka Belajar*” program so far includes four aspects, namely financing, teachers / educators, assessment, and graduates. In a multicultural perspective, problems in management and assessment aspects basically caused by a misunderstanding of the meaning of standards and standardization. Meanwhile, the teacher and graduate aspects lie in the importance of developing multicultural competencies. Integrating a multicultural education perspective in the “Freedom of Learning” policy also transforms an education system that is creative, innovative, and character.

**Abstrak:** Tulisan ini berupaya mengkaji konsep dan kebijakan *Merdeka Belajar* yang digagas oleh Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, Nadiem Makarim. Kajian tentang *Merdeka Belajar* ini menggunakan kajian teks dengan metode analisis isi. Konsep *Merdeka Belajar* tersebut sangat menarik jika dilihat dari perspektif pendidikan multi kultural. Apalagi, kedua konsep tersebut memiliki relevansi dan spirit yang sama, yakni kebebasan dan keadilan dalam rangka pengembangan sumberdaya manusia, khususnya melalui proses pendidikan. Dari hasil kajian, pelaksanaan program *Merdeka Belajar* sejauh ini meliputi empat aspek, yakni pembiayaan, guru/pendidik, penilaian, dan lulusan. Dalam perspektif multikultural, adanya permasalahan pada aspek pengelolaan dan penilaian pada dasarnya terletak pada kesalah pahaman mengenai makna standar dan standarisasi. Sedangkan aspek guru dan lulusan terletak pada pentingnya pengembangan kompetensi multikultural. Memasukkan perspektif pendidikan multikultural dalam kebijakan *Merdeka Belajar* juga memperkuat daya transformasi pendidikan yang kreatif, inovatif, dan berkarakter.

**Keywords:** *Freedom of Learning, Multicultural Education*

## INTRODUCTION

Since the Minister of Education and Culture coined by Nadiem Makarim, the world of education has received a lot of attention from the public. With a very minimum career background in the education bureaucracy, President Jokowi's decision is considered *out of the box*. Perhaps the President has other considerations concerning Nadiem's quick success in managing Gojek, which is actually also related to Human Resources (HR) management. With this capital, Nadiem is expected to be able to make rapid leaps in spurring the quality of human resources in Indonesia.

After waiting a few months, the public's questions began to be answered little by little. This time, the Ministry of Education and Culture has launched 6 (six) Independent Learning Episodes, namely the Merdeka School episode, the Merdeka Campus Episode, the Change in School Operational Assistance Mechanism (BOS) episode for the 2020 fiscal year, the episode about the Mobilizing Organization Program (POP), the episode entitled Guru Motivator, and an episode called College Fund Transformation. So far, the launch of the freedom of learning program has only reached six episodes and is still growing. Seeing several episodes that appear, Kemdikbud tends to apply the Freedom of Learning program gradually, although not yet clear stages that will be done.

Technically operational, the six freedom of learning episodes above basically provide convenience and freedom for education practitioners and students. Of course, in many ways more substantive and innovative developments regarding the nature of learning independence are needed.

Although this policy is considered quite transformative and contextual, not a few education observers view the opposite and feel uncomfortable because they already enjoy the rhythm of education management that has long been built. Not a few of those who are comfortable with a scary educational culture (such as haunting exams and supervision), must adapt to an educational culture that is flexible, fun, and liberating. For the author,

this is actually a matter of placing education in the context of national development. In this case, the author wants to see the idea of freedom of Learning in the perspective of multicultural education for two reasons. *First*, national education cannot be separated from the context of the diversity of the Indonesian nation, therefore the concept of independent learning needs to be seen from a multicultural perspective. *Second*, the spirit of the Freedom of Learning concept is related to the spirit of multicultural education, namely transforming education by providing freedom for the development of the potential of each student.

## METHOD

This research is a text study with a content analysis method. The study of the text was carried out to look at the articles, regulations, book guides, and materials related to the concept of freedom of Learning formulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Content analysis is meant here is a collection of research techniques to make a systematic conclusion, credible, or valid and can be copied from the relevant texts (Drisko&Maschi, 2016, p.7), including thoughts of National Education and Culture Minister dituang in several articles, related regulations, and several published guidebooks.

In this text study, after collecting texts related to the concept and program of freedom of Learning, the researcher will conduct an analysis of the study from the perspective of multicultural education. Both texts related to freedom of Learning and texts of multicultural education were juxtaposed first, and then multicultural education were used as a portrait of the study in viewing the concept and program of Merdeka Learning.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### Free Learning Concept

The concept of Freedom of Learning offered by the Minister of Education and Culture, NadiemMakarim, is based on what has been conveyed in several forums,

"freedom of learning is giving freedom to educational institutions, and freedom from bureaucratization, lecturers are freed from complicated bureaucracy and students are given the freedom to choose." their preferred field" (MoEC, 2020a). So, the important point of thinking about the Freedom of Learning is freedom. Education is understood as a space of liberation, not restraint.

On another occasion, in a discussion on National Education Standards, December 13, 2019, Nadiem also said that freedom of learning is freedom of thought and the essence of this independence is mainly found in teachers. Without it happening to the teacher, it is impossible for this independence to happen to students (Tempo, 2019). This statement is not really a new idea. In intellectual history, there have been many thinkers who have championed the idea of freedom of thought (Bury, 1913), even freedom of thought is the basis for the birth of state independence (Swaine, 2018). United Nations Human Rights also includes freedom of thought as the right of every human being (UNHR, 2020). In this context, the Minister of Education and Culture actually wants to restore this independence which has not been implemented in the world of education.

In the context of education in Indonesia, the concept of education in the early days of independence also had the same spirit, namely to liberate human beings outwardly and inwardly as stated by Ki Hajar Dewantara. For Dewantara, education is an attempt to humanize humans through the development of moral character, mind, and the human body in order to fullness of life and harmony with his world (Dewantara, 1977). In responding to the increasingly diverse global challenges, the idea of independence in education, as the ideals of its predecessors, has begun to be discussed again, although with a more contextual policy formulation.

Starting from the spark of thought above, the concept of freedom of learning is actually rooted in three things. *First*, education so far

has not given education practitioners the freedom to choose and determine their desires. They are more often used as objects of standardization and rigid bureaucratization, so they are not able to bring out creativity and innovation. The space for movement of educational institutions, educators and students is limited and burdened with various rules that actually hinder their development, potential, abilities and interests.

*Second*, education has been carried out in the usual ways, slow, difficult, and stuck in routines in the comfort zone. One of the reasons for this lag is the bureaucratic system that is too rigid, so that educational institutions find it difficult and are often considered deviant because they are out of bureaucratic procedures that have been set. There are many breakthroughs that want to be created, but are often hindered by fear of educational bureaucrats. On the other hand, learning and learning styles are also still using the old ways in the midst of fast-paced changes in society. The rapid development of technology is not very interesting in the world of education. As a result, there is a gulf between education, technology, and social change in society.

*Third*, it concerns the fundamental human question that changes from humans and humans create change. This view is based on the argument that each individual has their own uniqueness, and that uniqueness needs to be developed to bring out various advantages.

### **Freedom to Learn 6 Episodes**

As a follow-up to the above idea, so far the Ministry of Education and Culture just launched 6 (six) freedom of Learning Episodes, the Merdeka Campus Episode, the 2020 School Operational Assistance Mechanism Change (BOS) episode, an episode about the Mobilizing Organization Program (POP), an episode entitled *Guru Penggerak*, and an episode called Transformasi College Fund. So far, the launch of the Merdeka Learning program has only reached six episodes and is still

growing. Seeing several episodes that appear, Kemdikbud tends to apply the Freedom of Learning program gradually. For more details, the author will describe each episode that has been launched.

### **Merdeka Learning Episode 1-Sekolah Merdeka**

The concept of freedom of learning which was followed up by the Ministry of Education and Culture's policy was implemented in stages. In the initial stage, the policy concept was called Merdeka Learning Episode 1. At this stage, the Ministry of Education and Culture made 4 (four) changes which were considered to be able to release some of the problems that were shackled to the world of education.

First, the replacement of Exams National Standard (USBN) with assessment which is only held by the school. Second, the abolition of the National Examination (UN) in 2021 by replacing the minimum competency assessment and character survey. *Third*, the lesson Plan (RPP) for teaching-learning process is shortened by giving teachers opportunities to choose and develop RPP with a minimum of three core components, namely learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments. *Fourth*, the zoning of new student admissions (PPDB) is more flexible (Kemdikbud, 2019).

Freedom to Learn with the four policy points is the answer to various criticisms and complaints submitted by the public, especially education practitioners. USBN and UN, for example, always receive notes from the public every year with various constructive arguments and criticisms. Starting in 2021, these criticisms will receive answers through Merdeka Learning. Complaints from teachers regarding lesson plans which were considered too much, burdensome, and shackled to freedom, were also slightly reduced. It is hoped that this policy will allow teachers to focus more on learning rather than being shackled by burdensome administrative issues.

Although in the first stage the implementation of freedom of learning is still limited to these 4 aspects, the implications are quite large for educational independence (freedom), namely independence in assessment, independence in designing learning, and independence in managing students. The four forms of freedom of learning directly touch the subject of education, namely schools, teachers and students.

### **Merdeka Learning Episode 2-Independence Campus**

The new independent campus policy was followed by the publication of the freedom of learning Guidebook-Independent Campus (MoEC, 2020a). In the guide, the interpretation of freedom of learning is still very simple. At the implementation stage, the policy is still limited to the freedom of students to take 3 semesters off campus. As a new policy, several universities are forced to overhaul the curriculum by providing alternative choices for students to study. Fulfill the right of 3 semesters conducted off campus. This is of course a new challenge for universities to maximize cooperation programs both with fellow higher education institutions as well as with other institutions and the industrial world.

In addition to the right of students to take 3 semesters outside of their study program, it is also interesting to discuss university accreditation. There are many burdens that are borne by universities in reporting all accreditation needs. Voluntary accreditation is a more human perspective. Voluntary accreditation shows that universities are not fully an object of evaluation that one day can be billed.

Without the willingness of institutions to improve the quality of their education, society will automatically judge. The more these institutions produce excellent graduates, the more people are interested in them. This is in accordance with the democratic principle that public participation in public policy, especially universities, becomes very important as a partner and at

the same time as social control (Clever, 2007). The relationship between assessors and PT should build an equal relationship that is persuasive and educative, not repressive.

### **Merdeka Learning Episode 3-Changes in BOS Mechanism**

The policy for changing the BOS mechanism is actually more about the technical management of education financing. In this third episode, there are 4 main changes, namely the distribution of School Operational Assistance (BOS) which is directly sent to school accounts, more flexible management of BOS funds, increasing BOS units, and tightening BOS reporting to make it more transparent and accountable (Kemdikbud, 2020e). These four programs are to answer several problems in previous years. *The first problem is that* because the distribution is through the province, the distribution of BOS is often late and many school principals provide financing in advance for financing at the beginning of the year. Therefore, the Merdeka Learning program requires the distribution of BOS directly to school accounts with 3x distribution stages per year.

*The second problem is that* the inflexible use of BOS has caused confusion in schools in its use. Even though the operational costs of schools from one institution to another are not the same. Many honorary teachers are forced to receive inadequate salaries because there is a BOS limitation for honorary teachers of 15% for public schools and 30% for private schools. As a result, use in 2020 is made more flexible and the limitation for part-time teachers is increased to 50%.

*The third problem is that* the BOS unit value is considered to be far from adequate. Therefore, starting in 2021, the BOS unit value will increase with an increase in SD (13%), SMP (10%), and SMA (7%). This increase, of course, has a huge impact on school financing, especially for private schools which in fact rely a lot on BOS funds, especially in financing teacher salaries.

*The fourth issue,* the report of funds BOS this time will be tightened up to improve transparency and accountability, and this can be done directly through the page: <https://bos.kemdikbud.go.id/>.

This report is a condition for the distribution of the third stage of BOS. Schools are also required to publish receipts and reports of boss funds on information boards or school websites so that the public can also access the use of these funds.

When viewed from the perspective of freedom as a spirit for independent learning, even though the management of the BOS funds is not directly related to the freedom of education. However, this freedom of management is actually also a supporting force in making breakthroughs according to the conditions of each school.

### **Merdeka Learning Episode 4-Active Organization Program (POP)**

The Motivating Organization Program (POP) is a program that focuses on improving the quality of learning. The program is expected to improve the competence of educators and education staff by involving the role of social organizations in the field of education (Kemdikbud, 2020g).

This program has created a special media that can bring together various mobilizing communities through the <https://school.penggerak.kemdikbud.go.id/> page. On that page, POP is divided into two programs, namely driving schools and driving communities. If the school drive is focused on an internal school where the principal and teachers as the driving force to improve the quality of student learning, the community movers involves not only the principal and teachers, but also parents, community leaders, scholars, volunteers and stakeholders others (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020f).

The program that is new and therefore calls for caution in its implementation. Moreover, the driving community will of course involve many

social communities and this can lead to social jealousy if certain communities are not involved in the program. Although at the outset there were pros and cons, the idea of POP is actually an attempt to increase the power of transformation.

### **Merdeka Learning Episode 5: Motivating Teacher**

This driving teacher program, as Nadiem hopes, can be a driving force for educational transformation. The driving teacher is also expected to be a supporter for the development process of students as a whole, so that their role is not only teaching, but also teaching Pancasila and being an example and being an agent of change for the educational ecosystem (Nadiem Makarim in Kemdikbud, 2020).

The concept of the driving teacher has actually been explained on the Ministry of Education and Culture website that the Motivator Teacher is a learning leader who applies independent learning and moves the education ecosystem to realize student-centered education. Motivating teachers are also expected to be able to mobilize learning communities for teachers in schools and their regions to create a profile of Pancasila students. (MoEC, 2020b).

The term mover teacher is actually interesting. If during this time the teacher's role has been slowly shifted from mentor to facilitator, then POP can actually also be understood as a further step to make teachers not only have the ability to facilitate students but also be able to become motivators for them. In other words, the term teacher mobilizer is also very relevant to the idea of educational transformation that teachers must become transformative actors.

### **Merdeka Learning Episode six: Transforming Government Funds for Higher Education**

Until now, the stages of the Merdeka Learning program have only reached the sixth episode. This episode includes three major breakthroughs that are expected to improve the quality of higher education in

Indonesia, namely 1) Incentives for higher education based on Key Performance Indicators, specifically for state universities; 2) a balancing fund or *matching fund* for collaboration with partners (for PTN and private universities (PTS)), and 3) an independent campus competition program or *competitive fund* (for PTN and PTS) (Kemdikbud, 2020d).

The change in the financing model for universities above actually contains a spirit of cooperation and competition. Although this idea still needs to be tested for implementation, the program idea can be seen as a form of stimulus and financial support to challenge universities in playing their role in the midst of increasingly complex societal challenges.

So far, the independent learning episode will continue to be developed in stages and the public is not sure how many episodes will appear. What is certain is that the concept of freedom of learning has brought many changes. This shows that education is still highly expected as a strategic component of the nation in improving human resources.

## **Discussion**

### **Merdeka of Learning dan Multicultural Education**

The spirit of "Freedom of Learning" as desired by Nadiem Makarim is actually almost the same as the spirit of multicultural education. If Nadiem's idea is to give freedom of learning as an educational transformation, then multicultural education is also an educational transformation movement. Therefore, the concept of independent learning is interesting to see from the perspective of multicultural education.

The appearance of the study of multicultural education has long historical roots. Over the past decade multicultural scholars have attempted to differentiate and clarify the concept of multicultural education. Multicultural education is defined by variety both anthropologically, sociologically, philosophically, and

psychologically. Although initially focused on culture and the differences within it, but it has grown over the years to include a variety of diversity issues that transcend culture, including issues of gender, disability, and other diversity, so that the term itself is no longer in question in its ability to cover a variety of issues that they experience (DomNwachukwu, 2010:83). That is why the concept of multicultural education can develop dynamically and contextually.

These historical roots cannot be separated from the context of the struggle for justice, freedom and independence in the midst of diversity problems. In hal, it is not wrong if the *National Association of Multicultural Education* regard multicultural education as a philosophical concept that is based on the ideals of justice, liberty, equality, and human dignity as it is also been recognized in various documents such as the Declaration of Independence, African Constitution others” (National Association of Multicultural Education, 2020)

Other experts also provide almost the same understanding. Ellen Swartz understands multicultural as education that uses methodologies and teaching materials that promote the distrihe distribution of information and respect the potential of each student. In short, multicultural education is a restatement of educational pedagogy and practice that requires the collective representation of all cultures and groups that are significant to the production of knowledge (Swartz, 1992:33).

In the formulation of James a Banks, Education multicultural interpreted as concept, idea or philosophy as a set of beliefs and explanations that recognize and value the importance of cultural diversity and ethnicity in shaping lifestyles, social experiences, personal identities, educational opportunities of individuals, groups and countries (Banks & Banks, 2019).From this understanding, multicultural education contains at least three meanings, namely: 1) multicultural education as an idea or concept; 2) multicultural education as the

reform movement; and 3) multicultural education as a process.

In a more critical and transformative perspective, Paul C. Gorski emphasizes that multicultural education is a progressive approach to transforming education that holistically criticizes and responds to discriminatory policies and practices in education. It is based on ideals of social justice, educational justice, critical pedagogy, and a dedication to providing an educational experience in which all students reach their full potential as learners and as socially conscious and active beings, whether locally, nationally and globally. Multicultural education recognizes that schools are very important to lay the foundation for the transformation of society and the elimination of injustice (Gorski, 2010). Gorski's view tends to use the critical education paradigm. And indeed, as Nieto admits, critical education has a contribution to multicultural education. The contribution of critical pedagogy to multicultural education is very important in this regard because of the insistence that students should be involved in their own educational process. A central tenet of this critical pedagogy has inspired the inclusion of student voices that have hitherto been missing from most multicultural educational practices (Nieto, 2004).

In other words, multicultural education is actually an educational transformation movement that seeks to encourage, engineer, and produce much greater social change. As a transformation movement, multicultural education must be a spirit for educational institutions in carrying out their educational process. In addition to being able to carry out the learning process with a multicultural approach, educational institutions must also act as a source of inspiration and transformation for the establishment of multicultural values in society.

Some of the concepts of multicultural education put forward by the experts above show that multicultural education can be understood as an effort to transform education that puts diversity as a new

perspective so that equal, liberating and just education can be realized. The diversity is not only at the level of the aspect religion and biological, but also psychological, sociological, and anthropological.

From your educational perspective multicultural that freedom of learning as a concept actually has the same vision, which is to provide equal opportunities and freedom to all parties, especially in this case are educators and students, according to their best potential and abilities, and according to the characteristics of their diversity. With this vision, education not only reflects freedom and justice but also is expected to give birth to creativity and innovation, because freedom of thought is a prerequisite for the emergence of the courage to create and innovate.

To see the perspective of multicultural education in the freedom of learning policy, it is interesting if we look at each episode. In the first episode, Perspectives Multiculturalism can be seen in the elimination of the National Examination which so far does not reflect the level of diversity of students. Multicultural education actually emphasizes the process of appreciating the potential and excellence of each student without limiting uniform tests.

In the second episode, multicultural education can be a more comprehensive perspective in viewing an independent campus. The submission of voluntary accreditation and the freedom of students to choose programs outside the specified study program actually provide a space of freedom and openness. The multicultural perspective will be more complex if we look at the world of higher education as a space for religious expression which may not have been able to develop due to bureaucratization and closed access to such expressions.

The third episode is actually more administrative in nature and is related to flexibility in managing BOS funds. The fourth episode (POPO and fifth (Movement Teacher)) is a new program whose spirit is to improve teacher competence. Related to this,

the author discusses more in the next sub-discussion. While the sixth episode is a continuation of the third episode, which is related to flexibility and transformation of funds for students. College.

### **Standard dan Standardization**

The emergence of the concept of independent learning offered by the Minister of Education and Culture as an answer to the problems of education in Indonesia is actually caused by a misunderstanding of the meaning of standards and standardization. In the study of multicultural education, the meaning of standard and standardization is a serious concern, because the two terms are often confused and misunderstood, resulting in uniformity and restraint. Christine E. Sleeter distinguishes two terms between "standard" and "standardization". Standards indicate a quality and can be used as a guide for teachers and students to achieve high academic levels. While standardization leads to bureaucratization and tends to use inappropriate assessments and tests because it only focuses on low-level knowledge and skills. This standardization of course will have a bad impact on students (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017, p.3).

Standar still need to be used to help teachers and schools achieve their best quality. Meanwhile, standardization needs to be abandoned because it tends to force, limit and pressure students, educators and schools with various bureaucratic processes that are often too burdensome. Of course this standardization is contrary to multicultural values and the spirit of educational transformation.

The distinction between the two terms is interesting if we discuss it with the application of the National Education Standards (SNP). The question is whether the SNP is understood and practiced as a standard or is it a guide for the standardization process. This question becomes important if we look at the level of diversity of educational institutions and students. As we understand that educational institutions in Indonesia have diverse



characteristics with various focuses and emphases, it is not possible for uniformity to be carried out. At the level of learners, they do not fully have the same skills. They may excel in certain areas of knowledge and skills, but are weak in certain (standardized) measures and assessments. One example of standardization is the implementation of the National Examination which is applied to all students nationally. Even though we know that every child has different talents and interests and each institution has different advantages.

In the perspective of multicultural education, graduate competency standards, for example, must be understood as qualifications of abilities that do not need to be standardized for all students with uniform tests, but as a comprehensive assessment to see abilities that are appropriate to the interests, talents and needs of students.

In the context of higher education, the implementation of the IQF curriculum is also still overshadowed by this standardization pattern. With the latest Freedom of Learning policy, in the implementation of the IQF it is necessary to adapt to various processes that give freedom to institutions and students as long as the products produced still meet educational standards. Moreover, the result or product (*outcome*) is also an important foundation in the development of the IQF (Oviyanti et al., 2020). Therefore, the achievement of superior quality standards of education can be done by increasing multicultural competence. This can be one step to find uniqueness and innovation in students who have not been accommodated in the learning process.

### **Freedom of Learning and Teacher's Multicultural Competence**

In the context of developing and expanding policies regarding the concept of Freedom to learn, we need to look at the study of multicultural education, especially the discussion on multicultural competence. Multicultural competence, in the discourse of multicultural education, is interesting to follow for two reasons. *First*, multicultural

competence helps policy makers, schools and education practitioners to recognize the complexity of diversity, so that all stakeholders can have the openness to make changes according to the characteristics inherent in society, institutions, teachers and students.

Second, increasing multicultural competence for teachers can help them to think more inclusively in dealing with the level of diversity of students, both gender, cultural, talent and interest diversity, as well as their expectations. With a good understanding of multiculturalism, teachers will find it easier to answer students' problems and develop their potential. This can be done with the *experiential reflecting processing* training model, namely increasing competence through programs that involve learning experiences by both teachers and students (Fadriati, 2020).

The teacher's multicultural competence is related to the freedom of learning policies episode 4 (activating organization program) and episode 5 (moving teacher). As a motivator, teachers need to be equipped with the ability to see students in a multicultural perspective. The multicultural perspective in this case sees that students are not burdened by standardization of assessments, but are developed according to salient characteristics.

The ability of teachers to see this diversity is actually more or less owned by a teacher, but teachers are often forced to submit to the indicators of graduation and standardization of assessments that have been set. This standardization will actually give birth to a single stigma that outstanding students are students who are successful in answering standardized and rigid tests.

Thus, multicultural competence can be a more complex perspective in supporting the program of mobilizing organizations and driving teachers as desired by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This will provide convenience and freedom for teachers and students in conducting learning programs according to their respective characteristics.

## Diverse Features

One that must be understood is that every institution, teacher, and student has various advantages. So with the abolition of standardization, schools need to identify and improve the potential possessed by schools, teachers, and students. By looking at their uniqueness and giving them freedom, they actually have a lot of wealth of achievements that can be developed.

The understanding of multicultural competence is of course not a competency requirement that must be pursued by teachers, but is practiced based on the experience they have gone through. Administratively, teachers may be overburdened with competency indicators, but by giving them their freedom to see the phenomena of students, they actually do it easily. What needs to be emphasized is that teachers have the same perception of the diversity and uniqueness of each individual student. From here, teachers and students are given the freedom to develop their potential according to their characteristics.

One of the reasons for this lack of understanding of diversity and freedom in determining varied learning steps is the “educational ritual” that has been passed down from year to year through standardization and bureaucratization procedures. As a result, schools only focus on the same material and learning, and therefore the achievements tend to be uniform and do not have new and unique advantages. In turn, this phenomenon becomes an obstacle for the courage to be creative and innovate.

For the world of education, there must be a common understanding that the excellence of education lies not in the fulfillment of standardized achievement indicators, but the extent to which these educational institutions are able to produce uniqueness and variants of excellence in various fields of scientific disciplines and technological development. Diverse advantages can only be achieved in various ways.

## CONCLUSION

The concept of *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom of Learning) is actually an educational spirit that has long been owned by the Indonesian people. The early thinkers of independence had proclaimed a free education. However, this spirit was not developed properly, as a result of the standardization system and rigid bureaucracy. This time, through the spirit of Freedom to learn, the Minister of Education and Culture wants to restore that spirit in order to deal with educational stagnation in responding to increasingly diverse global challenges.

Formal educational rituals that are considered too comfortable try to be challenged to show their innovative potential that has been suppressed so far. So the concept of Merdeka Learning is very relevant in the context of national education. Moreover, the issue of education is not a matter of uniformity, but there are certain parts that display unique characteristics, and this is very potential for creation and innovation. In the perspective of multicultural education, the idea of freedom of Learning also supports a more inclusive space for diverse social communities. Diversity issues raised in the study of multicultural education are not just ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and religious diversity, but also talents and interests, social class, and various characteristics inherent in individuals. All forms of diversity can be well facilitated if there is freedom and justice. Finally, the concept of Freedom to Learn needs to be developed by incorporating a multicultural education perspective so that the concept is more comprehensive in realizing the freedom of learning.

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