Pre- and Post-Pandemic Curriculum Needs: A Constructivist Perspective

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Change is an inevitability in education, where the curriculum must serve as a dynamic roadmap guiding learners to construct knowledge actively and independently. This article examines the evolving needs of Indonesia's educational curriculum before and after the Covid-19 pandemic through the lens of constructivism, a learning philosophy that positions students as active knowledge constructors. Employing a qualitative approach grounded in literature review and descriptive analysis, the study explores how the 2013 Curriculum, the Emergency Curriculum, and the Merdeka Curriculum have responded to shifting pedagogical demands in both face-to-face and remote learning contexts. Findings indicate that the pandemic accelerated a paradigm shift toward more flexible, student-centered, and project-based curriculum models. However, the primary challenges remain in the uneven readiness of educators and disparities in technological infrastructure. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to reinforcing the philosophical foundation for the development of adaptive curricula aligned with future educational demands. It also offers strategic recommendations for policymakers and educational practitioners. Furthermore, the study opens avenues for future research on the practical implementation of constructivist curricula across diverse settings, including teacher capacity-building and the evaluation of project-based learning effectiveness within the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

Introduction

Change is an inevitability in human life. Like the ceaseless flow of a river, the education system is never static. Ideally, the curriculum should function as a dynamic living map, not merely guiding learners to memorize information, but enabling them to develop deep and independent understanding (Ansyar, 2017). In an era increasingly defined by rapid change and uncertainty, a learning process that liberates the mind to actively construct knowledge is no longer optional; it is essential. Therefore, in the post-pandemic context, a curriculum that empowers students to build knowledge constructively emerges as an imperative that must be realized (Munajim et al., 2020).

However, the reality on the ground in Indonesia presents significant challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic disrupted conventional educational structures, forcing a sudden transition from face-to-face instruction to remote learning, which brought with it numerous limitations. The national curriculum, ranging from the 2013 Curriculum to the Emergency Curriculum and now the Merdeka Curriculum, was compelled to adapt rapidly (Munajim et al., 2020). Disparities in technological access, teacher preparedness, and the quality of learning interaction have become persistent obstacles impeding the learning process in many contexts (Adi et al., 2021; Amalia & Sa'adah, 2020; Dewi, 2020). This reality urges a critical reconsideration: How can the current curriculum accommodate the learning needs of the future ones that emphasize active cognition and meaningful student understanding?

In this light, a reexamination of constructivism as both a philosophy and a theory of learning becomes highly relevant. Constructivism asserts that knowledge is not passively transmitted from teacher to student but is actively constructed by learners themselves through experience and interaction with their environment. This approach provides learners with the space to develop independent and critical thinking skills that are indispensable in navigating the complexities of a post-pandemic world (Masgumelar & Mustafa, 2021). Through the lens of constructivism, the curriculum transforms from a static document into a dynamic framework that facilitates student-centered learning an approach crucial for both

distance education and the flexible face-to-face instruction now emerging (Hakiky et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the importance of understanding constructivism in the context of post-pandemic curriculum lies in its potential to enhance the readiness of both educators and students amid the technological transformation of education. The Merdeka Curriculum, as one response to the learning crisis brought on by Covid-19, provides educators with greater autonomy to design instruction tailored to the characteristics and needs of their learners (Alfaeni et al., 2023; Awalludin et al., 2024; Caesaria & Adit, 2022). Yet, without a deep understanding of constructivist principles, the implementation of this curriculum risks becoming a superficial shift in instructional models, lacking any substantial transformation in the teaching and learning process. Thus, a constructivist perspective offers a sharper and more applicable direction for optimizing the post-pandemic curriculum.

This article addresses the issue precisely because it presents a meaningful distinction in curriculum and pedagogical studies. On one hand, it integrates the philosophical underpinnings of constructivism with the actual curricular shifts occurring in the post-pandemic period a topic that remains underexplored. On the other hand, its focus on the Merdeka Curriculum as the context for implementation offers a sense of novelty, given that the policy itself is still undergoing evaluation and development. This study aims to make a concrete contribution by analyzing how constructivism can inform the development of a curriculum that is adaptive, innovative, and meaningful, particularly in the context of an Indonesian education system still in the midst of recovery and transformation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly reshaped the global educational landscape, triggering rapid transformations in curriculum design and implementation across educational levels and disciplines. This literature review aims to examine the evolution of curriculum development before and after the pandemic, with particular attention to the emerging challenges and opportunities during this transitional period.

In terms of curriculum flexibility, numerous studies have highlighted a marked shift from rigid, traditional structures toward more dynamic and adaptive models in the post-pandemic era. For example, Hadar et al. observed that teacher

education curricula evolved into more responsive designs, facilitating negotiated curricula aligned with the changing needs of society (Hadar et al., 2020). This flexibility is further reflected in the findings of Nurhattati et al., who documented how teachers and school principals were compelled to redesign lesson plans, transitioning from conventional face-to-face teaching to online modalities tailored to pandemic conditions (Nurhattati et al., 2023). Such adaptability mirrors broader educational trends in which curricula are increasingly designed to address emerging challenges, as discussed by Adedoyin and Soykan (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020).

The integration of technology into education represents another critical response to the pandemic. Chin et al. reported a significant shift toward hybrid learning models particularly in medical training that leveraged online platforms to maintain instructional continuity (Chin et al., 2020). The demands of remote learning during this period prompted innovation in instructional practices, with educators creatively utilizing digital resources to enrich the learning experience despite constraints (Mohmmed et al., 2020). Moreover, a growing body of research suggests that educators are increasingly accepting online learning as a permanent component of educational practice post-pandemic, reinforcing the argument that distance learning will remain relevant and necessary in the future (Roman et al., 2023).

Another major shift noted in the literature is the emphasis on blended learning approaches. Rafi et al., for instance, discussed the harmonization of online and face-to-face instruction in ways that align with technological advancements and learner needs (Rafi et al., 2022). For many institutions, blended learning has become a critical strategy to address learning gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, aiming to reduce achievement disparities and promote educational equity (Harrienger, 2022). As institutions transition to blended curricula, research underscores the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy to foster inclusive and effective learning environments (Harrienger, 2022).

In addition, the pandemic has sparked renewed discourse on curriculum frameworks that prioritize well-being and social-emotional learning, as highlighted in several studies (Robbins et al., 2020). The impact of COVID-19 on educational well-being has led many programs to adjust their structures and support systems to

promote mental health alongside academic achievement (ElHawary et al., 2021). This perspective aligns with evolving educational philosophies that advocate for holistic curriculum development, encouraging institutions to balance academic rigor with personal growth and well-being (Islam et al., 2024).

In summary, the COVID-19 pandemic has served as a catalyst for substantive curriculum reform, shifting educational models from rigid, traditional frameworks toward more adaptive, technology-integrated, and learner-centered approaches. Evidence suggests a systemic move toward blended learning, coupled with a growing emphasis on culturally responsive pedagogy and the integration of social-emotional dimensions. As we move into the post-pandemic era, these insights will be crucial in shaping future educational practices and curriculum design.

This article contributes a distinctive perspective by focusing specifically on the curriculum needs of Indonesian education in the post-pandemic context, analyzed through the lens of constructivist philosophy. Unlike previous literature that primarily addresses structural and technical curriculum changes in global or sectoral contexts, this study offers a conceptual approach that connects curriculum dynamics with the active learning process, emphasizing the role of learners as knowledge constructors. Thus, it proposes a holistic framework that not only engages with policy and technological considerations but also reinforces the pedagogical foundation for designing adaptive and meaningful curricula.

Furthermore, the article positions the Merdeka Curriculum as a real-world case study currently undergoing evaluation and development. This contributes both empirical and philosophical insights to the discourse on curriculum reform in Indonesia, offering valuable perspectives for policymakers and educators on how constructivist theory can guide the implementation of curricula that are responsive to post-pandemic challenges.

In addition, this article strengthens its scholarly relevance by critically integrating both international and local literature, offering a comprehensive and contextually grounded analytical framework. Consequently, the article is not merely a synthesis of findings but also a contribution of thought that fosters

curricular innovation and sustainable learning strategies in the era of Society 5.0 and the future of Indonesian education.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of curriculum needs in education before and after the Covid-19 pandemic. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables the researcher to explore meanings, perspectives, and complex phenomena in a comprehensive manner particularly within the dynamic and context-dependent landscape of education. This approach shifts the research focus away from merely numerical data and toward a holistic and nuanced depiction of educational phenomena (Merriam, 2014).

The type of research conducted is a literature review. This review involved the collection, examination, and analysis of a wide range of relevant sources, including peer-reviewed journals, scholarly books, research articles, official reports, and policy documents related to curriculum transformation and evolving educational needs in the pre- and post-pandemic context. The literature review serves as a foundation for building a conceptual framework and provides a comprehensive overview of the issue under investigation (List, 1993).

For data analysis, the study employed descriptive analysis techniques (Merriam, 2014). Descriptive analysis was used to systematically organize and present data from various sources in a structured manner. The researcher categorized key findings relevant to the research topic, then explained and interpreted these findings in a sequential narrative, enabling readers to discern patterns and trends in curriculum development during the pre- and post-pandemic periods.

The descriptive method allowed the researcher to clearly articulate the shifts and emerging needs within educational curricula amid the significant challenges posed by the Covid-19 crisis. Furthermore, the findings were interpreted through the theoretical lens of constructivism, which served as the conceptual basis for understanding the evolving dynamics of learning and curricular change.

Data collection was carried out using a systematic literature search strategy, utilizing reputable academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and leading educational journals (List, 1993). Inclusion criteria were applied to select sources that were relevant, recent, and methodologically robust. The collected data were then critically reviewed and analyzed to support the inquiry into curriculum needs and transformations.

Through this approach, the study provides an integrated and in-depth account of how educational curriculum needs have evolved before and after the Covid-19 pandemic, and how these shifts have been addressed by various stakeholders through policy reforms and curriculum implementation strategies.

Results and Discussion

The Shift in Indonesia's Curriculum Before and After the Covid-19 Pandemic

The educational curriculum is a dynamic entity that must continuously adapt to evolving social, technological, and cultural developments. It is not merely a formal document but a reflection of national needs and future demands. Accordingly, the education system must remain agile in responding to the challenges of the times (Ansyar, 2017).

Prior to the pandemic, the 2013 Curriculum served as the primary framework for education in Indonesia. It adopted an integrated approach designed to balance students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Thematic and integrative learning aimed to shape learners into competent and character-driven individuals equipped for the demands of the 21st century. However, its implementation encountered persistent obstacles, particularly regarding disparities in teacher quality and unequal educational infrastructure, especially in remote regions.

The outbreak of Covid-19 brought about a drastic transformation in education by abruptly halting face-to-face instruction and forcing a shift to remote learning. This sudden transition posed significant challenges, as the education system was unprepared both technologically and in terms of human resources. Online learning was implemented amidst limited internet access, inadequate digital devices, and insufficient readiness among teachers and students, leading to a widespread phenomenon of learning loss (Manik & Sinaga, 2022).
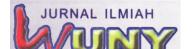
As an emergency response, the government introduced the *Emergency Curriculum*, which simplified content and basic competencies from the 2013 Curriculum to ensure that learning could continue effectively during the pandemic. Although temporary in nature, this curriculum provided a critical opportunity for reflection and served as a catalyst for developing a more flexible and responsive learning model in the post-pandemic period (Munajim et al., 2020).

During the recovery phase, the *Merdeka Curriculum* emerged as a response to the demand for a more flexible, student-centered approach that prioritizes character formation and the development of competencies aligned with students' interests and talents. This curriculum grants greater autonomy to teachers and schools in customizing instructional materials to suit real-life contexts and the diverse needs of learners. It also aligns with 21st-century learning demands, emphasizing creativity and collaboration (Alfaeni et al., 2023; Awalludin et al., 2024; Caesaria & Adit, 2022).

Project-based learning, a core feature of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, reinforces the *Pancasila Student Profile* by offering students meaningful opportunities for exploration and active learning experiences (Caesaria & Adit, 2022). This model is particularly relevant in the post-pandemic learning landscape, which requires high adaptability to change and uncertainty. Students are encouraged to become independent, critical, and creative learners (Alfaeni et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, this curricular transformation faces significant challenges, particularly regarding teacher readiness to adopt technology and implement active learning methodologies. The availability and quality of digital infrastructure across regions is another critical factor in supporting a technology- and collaboration-based curriculum. Without addressing these issues, the full potential of the *Merdeka Curriculum* will be difficult to realize.

Programs such as the *Sekolah Penggerak* (Driving Schools) and *SMK Centers of Excellence* offer promising practices by providing mentorship and teacher networks to strengthen the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* (Novayanti et al., 2023). Broad-based socialization and professional development are essential to ensure that curriculum reform is not merely symbolic but is reflected

in vibrant and meaningful classroom practices. This foundational work is key to securing the long-term success of education in Indonesia (Febrianningsih & Ramadan, 2023).

As we enter the era of *Society 5.0*, educational curricula must be able to integrate digital technologies with humanistic values in a balanced way (Limbong et al., 2024). In this context, teachers must be prepared both mentally and pedagogically to meet these challenges. Ongoing evaluation of curriculum implementation is critical to ensuring that Indonesian education can cultivate a generation that is resilient and well-prepared to face global transformations (Indarta et al., 2022).

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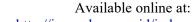
A Constructivist Perspective on the Curriculum Needs of Pre- and Post-COVID-19 Islamic Education

Constructivism is derived from the word "constructive," which implies building or developing, and the suffix "-ism," denoting a school of thought. In philosophical terms, constructivism is an epistemological framework that asserts knowledge as the result of an individual's active construction. In the context of learning, this perspective holds that students build understanding through their experiences and interactions with the surrounding environment (Masgumelar & Mustafa, 2021).

From a constructivist viewpoint, teachers act as facilitators who guide students in developing independent learning strategies with conscious awareness. Learners are given the autonomy to construct knowledge based on personal experiences and critical reasoning. This model contrasts sharply with traditional approaches that tend to rely on unidirectional knowledge transfer (Hakiky et al., 2023; Koptseva, 2020; Pritchard & Woollard, 2010).

Constructivism encourages instructional models in which students are actively involved in constructing their own understanding through processes of exploration and reflection. Teachers are expected to design learning environments that enable students to relate new concepts to prior knowledge. This ongoing process includes the development of concepts, cognitive categories, and schema (Masgumelar & Mustafa, 2021).

The primary goal of constructivist learning theory is to enhance inquiry skills, foster a comprehensive understanding of concepts, and cultivate independent thinking among students. As a result, learning becomes a meaningful and personal experience for each student an essential foundation for addressing diverse learning needs, particularly in the context of evolving curricular demands (Masgumelar & Mustafa, 2021).

Key features of constructivism include the acquisition of knowledge through sensory experiences and social interaction with the physical and cultural environment. Learning is not merely the transfer of information but a dynamic process of uncovering and developing new cognitive structures. Constructivism also emphasizes the integration of prior knowledge with newly acquired understanding. Its principles maintain that cognition is actively constructed, both internally and externally. Students must take an active role in constructing more detailed and scientific concepts, while teachers serve as facilitators who foster exploratory and dialogical learning environments (Anjelita & Supriyanto, 2024).

The stages of a constructivist learning model typically begin with an *aperception* to connect with students' prior experiences, followed by exploration to gather information, discussion to clarify concepts, and application development in real-world contexts. This progression facilitates holistic and meaningful knowledge construction and supports adaptive and context-sensitive learning (Masgumelar & Mustafa, 2021).

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, curricula tended to emphasize structured competency standards. However, in practice, they provided limited opportunities for students to construct knowledge autonomously. Insufficient facilities and a lack of teacher training hindered the optimal implementation of constructivist learning. The 2013 Curriculum in Indonesia had already begun to move toward active

learning models, yet full realization was inconsistent across schools (Pratycia et al., 2023).

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the demand for more flexible curricula that promote student autonomy in learning (Alfaeni et al., 2023; Munajim et al., 2020). The shift to remote learning required students to become more self-directed in constructing knowledge without constant teacher guidance. This context highlighted the relevance of constructivist principles, which center students as active participants in the learning process (Hakiky et al., 2023).

The Emergency Curriculum implemented during the pandemic simplified subject matter, enabling students to develop essential knowledge in line with situational constraints. Despite limitations, this approach allowed constructivist learning to persist. For the post-pandemic era, however, curriculum development must become more responsive, emphasizing exploration and character development (Munajim et al., 2020).

The *Merdeka Curriculum* (Independent Curriculum) provides broader opportunities for teachers and students to engage in project-based learning and the development of individual interests and talents (Alfaeni et al., 2023; Awalludin et al., 2024). This approach aligns with constructivist theory, which prioritizes active and reflective learning. Consequently, students are empowered to build meaningful knowledge tailored to their personal needs and contexts.

One of the primary challenges in applying constructivism in the post-pandemic era is teacher readiness as facilitators and the availability of technological infrastructure. Teachers must master innovative pedagogical methods and digital tools to effectively support student knowledge construction. This necessitates systematic training and institutional support from educational bodies and government agencies (Febrianningsih & Ramadan, 2023; Rosidah et al., 2021).

Uneven infrastructure particularly regarding internet access and digital devices remains a significant barrier to the effective implementation of constructivist-based curricula. Governments and stakeholders must actively work to bridge this gap to ensure that the quality of learning is not compromised. A well-prepared learning environment is critical for the effective construction of knowledge.

Support programs such as the *Sekolah Penggerak* (Driving Schools Initiative) serve as platforms to strengthen the implementation of constructivist curricula through training and collaborative teacher networks. This model facilitates the sharing of best practices and enhances teacher competence in active and adaptive learning strategies (Novayanti et al., 2023). Such support is crucial for building an education ecosystem that is responsive to change (Daga, 2021).

In sum, constructivism provides a robust philosophical foundation for addressing curriculum needs both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It demands a learning paradigm that empowers students as active knowledge builders. A curriculum grounded in constructivist principles will be more adaptive, personalized, and aligned with the challenges of the contemporary world paving the way for a generation of learners who are creative, critical, and prepared to navigate global dynamics.
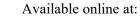
Conclusion

This study reveals that the pre-pandemic curriculum primarily emphasized structured and integrated competency standards. However, it lacked sufficient space for students to construct knowledge independently. Although the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013) introduced a shift toward active learning, its implementation remained uneven due to inadequate teacher preparedness and limited infrastructural support. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the need for curricular reforms that promote flexibility and student autonomy in the learning process.

During the pandemic, the implementation of the Emergency Curriculum characterized by the simplification of content and basic competencies served as an adaptive response to the challenges of remote learning under resource-constrained conditions. Despite its emergency nature, this curriculum still allowed the core principles of constructivism to be applied by enabling students to actively construct essential knowledge. Subsequently, the *Merdeka Curriculum* (Independent Curriculum) emerged as a significant innovation, granting broader autonomy to teachers and students alike. It emphasizes project-based learning and character development aligned with students' individual interests and talents.

Constructivism offers a philosophically robust foundation for post-pandemic curriculum development, positioning students as active participants in the knowledge-building process through interaction and reflection. Nevertheless, the practical application of this approach faces substantial challenges, particularly concerning teacher readiness as facilitators and the uneven distribution of technological infrastructure. Comprehensive teacher training, ongoing mentoring, and programs such as *Sekolah Penggerak* (Driving Schools Program) are vital to enhance teacher competence and foster adaptive, student-centered learning environments.

The findings of this study hold critical implications for researchers and educational policymakers. They underscore the urgent need for curricula that are responsive to evolving circumstances and learner needs. Embedding constructivist principles into curricular frameworks not only enhances the quality of learning but also prepares students to navigate an increasingly dynamic and technology-driven world. Future education policy must prioritize teacher capacity-building, equitable access to technology, and the implementation of empowering, student-centered learning models.

As a direction for further research, this study opens pathways for deeper exploration into the practical implementation of constructivist curricula across diverse educational settings, particularly in under-resourced regions. Empirical studies evaluating the effectiveness of project-based learning and self-directed learning within the *Merdeka Curriculum* are also essential to identify optimal strategies for meaningful learning. Furthermore, research on the readiness of teachers and students to engage with the digital education revolution will offer critical insights for refining post-pandemic curricular strategies.

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