



## The Influence of Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material and Interactive Learning Amid COVID-19 on Students' Excellency Achievement and Character

Lasmah Ambarita  
Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Katharos

**Corresponding Author:** Lasmah Ambarita, [lasma.ambarita@gmail.com](mailto:lasma.ambarita@gmail.com)

---

### ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:* Merdeka Curriculum, Interactive Learning, Students' Excellence Achievement, Character Development

*Received :* 17, January

*Revised :* 31, January

*Accepted:* 13, February

©2025 Ambarita: This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Atribusi 4.0 Internasional](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



### ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact of changes in the Merdeka Curriculum material and interactive learning during the COVID-19 pandemic on students' excellence achievement and character. The objective is to explore how these educational shifts contribute to enhancing students' academic performance and personal development. The research was conducted through surveys and data analysis, focusing on students' responses and performance in interactive learning environments. The study was carried out over six months, with the data collected from 95 students. The results show a positive influence of the Merdeka Curriculum and interactive learning on students' achievements and character development, suggesting that these approaches foster greater academic success and personal growth. This research offers implications for improving future educational practices.

---

## **INTRODUCTION**

The world of education today, in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era, has caused the Indonesian education system to experience a severe learning crisis as many Indonesian children are still unable to read and write simple texts that are taught by teachers. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud Ristek), the Merdeka Curriculum is offered as an additional option for educational credits to recover learning for the 2022-2024 period. The quality of teachers is a key factor in the transformation of learning. A good curriculum will greatly help teachers develop students' abilities and achievements. It also encourages teachers to pay more attention to students' learning progress.

The Merdeka Curriculum has key features that support the learning process, including: 1. Project-based learning to develop soft skills and character (faith, piety, nobility, mutual cooperation, global diversity, independence, critical thinking, and creativity). 2. A focus on what is important and enough time to study basic skills in depth, such as reading, writing, and mathematics. 3. Flexibility for teachers to adjust learning according to students' abilities (teaching at the appropriate level) and to adapt to local conditions and content. This curriculum is planned to be implemented in 2022 in leading schools. The curriculum is important for providing students with opportunities to learn through experience. The Merdeka Curriculum is essential for improving the learning recovery process. The Merdeka Curriculum can and should be developed in schools to provide learning that matches the conditions, abilities, and needs of students.

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to help teachers understand relevant documentation, scope, and the learning modules used. The allocation of class hours in this curriculum is flexible and adjusted to the learning load and learning needs. The positive impact of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is the achievement of outstanding student performance, which can compete at a global level, while also nurturing good Pancasila values and becoming a role model, one of which emphasizes obedience to God.

In the structure of the Merdeka Curriculum, 20-30 percent of the class hours are dedicated to developing the Pancasila student profile through project-based learning. Interactive learning is very important, especially project-based learning for character development, as it provides learning opportunities through experience (Experiential Learning), integrating essential competencies learned by students and a flexible learning structure. The Merdeka Curriculum focuses on essential material to provide space/time for the in-depth development of literacy and numeracy competencies. This learning does not only rely on material targets but emphasizes essential material in the Merdeka Curriculum, improving concentration and achievement. Students' abilities can be further explored with enjoyable learning opportunities.

The formation of students' character is achieved by building tolerance among peers, fostering empathy within the students themselves, creating a positive culture, and implementing character education for students.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Merdeka Curriculum Material*

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to facilitate the achievement of expected competencies by providing a systematic and engaging plan that includes learning materials, methods, boundaries, and assessment strategies. This curriculum emphasizes flexibility, allowing teachers to adapt based on the students' capabilities and readiness. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, schools have the autonomy to select or modify the curriculum in a way that best suits their needs, ensuring that it meets the students' educational requirements optimally (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). The curriculum incorporates various forms of assessment, such as pre-assessment, formative assessment during the learning process, and summative assessment at the end of learning. These assessments are intended to guide corrective actions for students who need further support or a review of the material. The development of teaching modules also takes into account students' characteristics, skills, and interests, promoting an inclusive educational approach (Suryani, 2022). A key component of the Merdeka Curriculum is the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5BK), a project-based learning activity that is intended to strengthen students' Pancasila values and work culture through collaborative teaching by multiple educators (Hermawan, 2022).

### *Teaching Devices*

Teaching devices are essential materials used by educators to achieve the Pancasila Student Profile and learning outcomes. These materials include textbooks, teaching modules, video tutorials, and other multimedia resources. Educators are encouraged to use various materials from different sources that fit the classroom context. The curriculum includes modular education, project modules, textbooks, videos, and other resources aimed at enhancing the Pancasila Student Profile. These tools are adaptable to the diverse learning styles and levels of students, providing a personalized and effective learning experience (Hidayat & Yuliani, 2022).

### *Operational Curriculum of Educational Units*

The operational curriculum focuses on student-centered learning, which acknowledges the diversity of developmental needs, learning levels, and interests of the students. It is designed to respond to the unique characteristics of the educational unit, the sociocultural context, and the local environment (Wulandari, 2022). Essential information is highlighted in a clear and concise manner to ensure that it is easily understood and can be effectively utilized by educational institutions. The operational curriculum must align with the national education standards while also allowing for flexibility to accommodate the unique needs of each school and its students (Nasution, 2022).

### ***Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum***

Schools have the autonomy to implement the Merdeka Curriculum through three main options: applying parts and principles of the curriculum without modifying the existing school curriculum, using the materials provided by the government, or establishing a collaboration between the government and the school (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). This flexibility ensures that the curriculum is relevant and responsive to the specific needs of each school community (Sari & Ramadhan, 2022).

### ***Curriculum Evaluation in Schools***

The evaluation process in schools is closely tied to the components of learning, including the curriculum framework, learning outcomes, curriculum structure, and principles of learning and assessment. Teaching materials, including textbooks, education modules, and projects, contribute to the enhancement of the Pancasila Student Profile and the school's operational curriculum (Hidayat & Yuliani, 2022). The evaluation aims to ensure that the curriculum is being implemented effectively and that it meets the learning objectives (Mulyani, 2022).

### ***Interactive Learning Variables***

Interactive learning focuses on engaging students in the learning process through active participation and collaboration. It integrates essential competencies, such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration, which are essential for student success in the modern world. The use of technology in teaching allows for innovative and flexible learning experiences that accommodate diverse learning styles (Fauzi & Suryani, 2022).

### ***Teaching Materials in the Merdeka Curriculum***

The teaching materials used in the Merdeka Curriculum are varied and can include flowcharts, learning outcomes, and educational modules, especially for higher-grade levels such as Grade 11 and 12. These materials may take the form of print-based resources (articles, comics, infographics) or digital formats (audio, video). The teaching goals and steps are structured to be clear and sequential, providing students with enough time to master the skills being taught. This approach recognizes that each student has unique needs and adjusts the materials accordingly, offering flexible opportunities for learning and assessment (Hermawan, 2022).

### ***The Nature of Teaching Modules in the Merdeka Curriculum***

The regulations from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022) underscore the importance of teaching modules that are designed to support learning recovery. The learning outcomes, competencies, and teaching modules should be comprehensive and presented in a clear, narrative format. Flexible learning based on student readiness is emphasized, with collaborative learning being encouraged to foster deeper understanding and skill development (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022).

### ***Operational Curriculum and School Autonomy***

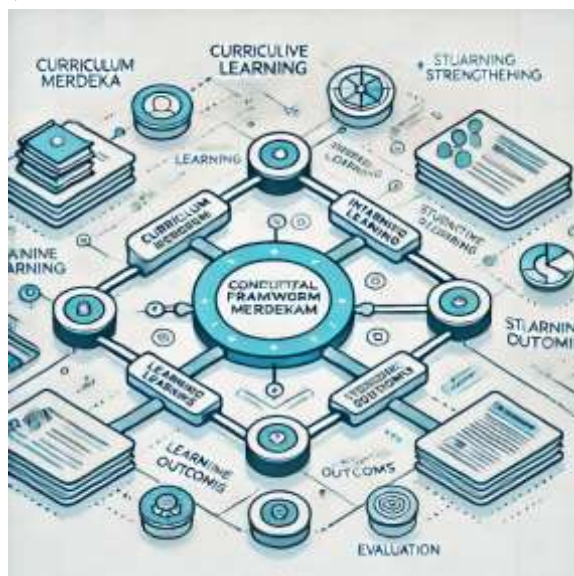
Schools have the freedom to develop their operational curriculum based on the school's vision, mission, and local context. This allows for greater customization to meet the specific needs of students and communities (Wulandari, 2022). The structure of the teaching modules is also flexible, consisting of essential components such as learning hours, learning objectives, Pancasila values, and prerequisite knowledge/skills (Sari & Ramadhan, 2022).

### ***Student Profile Strengthening Projects***

The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project emphasizes a holistic approach to student development, focusing on the integration of various components such as students, teachers, schools, and the broader community. This project also draws on real-life experiences to contextualize learning and strengthen the ecosystem surrounding student development. The project includes a comprehensive planning process, with clear time allocations, themes, modules, sub-items, activities, and evaluation strategies (Nasution, 2022).

### ***Assessment and Evaluation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project***

Assessment in the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project occurs in three stages: diagnostic (at the beginning of the project), formative (periodic during the project), and summative (at the end of the project). The assessment is intended to provide insights into students' performance, progress, and development in relation to the project. The project report is concise and descriptive, integrating knowledge, attitudes, and skills as a unified component (Fauzi & Suryani, 2022).



Picture 1. Conceptual Framework

## **METHODS**

The research method employed in this study is descriptive quantitative research. This approach focuses on collecting numerical data through surveys

or observations conducted in natural settings, aiming to describe the views, experiences, and conditions of the participants. The researcher plays a central role in gathering and analyzing data to provide a clear depiction of the phenomenon being studied. In quantitative descriptive research, the researcher uses statistical tools to quantify variables and examine the relationships between them. This method is highly effective in identifying patterns, trends, and correlations within the data, while maintaining objectivity and reliability in the findings. Descriptive quantitative research is widely used in educational, social, and behavioral sciences to gain insight into specific issues, behaviors, or events by analyzing measurable data in a structured manner (Creswell, J. W., 2014).

## RESULT

In the Merdeka Curriculum, there is no Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM), so it is necessary to assess whether the competencies have been achieved by the end of each phase. Competency achievement indicators are required to facilitate the development of assessment tools. There are aspects that are assessed to ensure that students become proficient and develop. Assessment is an integrated effort that includes competencies in attitudes, knowledge, and skills, which are interconnected. Teachers are given flexibility in choosing the assessment techniques and types to determine whether the learning objectives have been achieved. The forms of assessment include class discussions, product presentations, and oral tests.

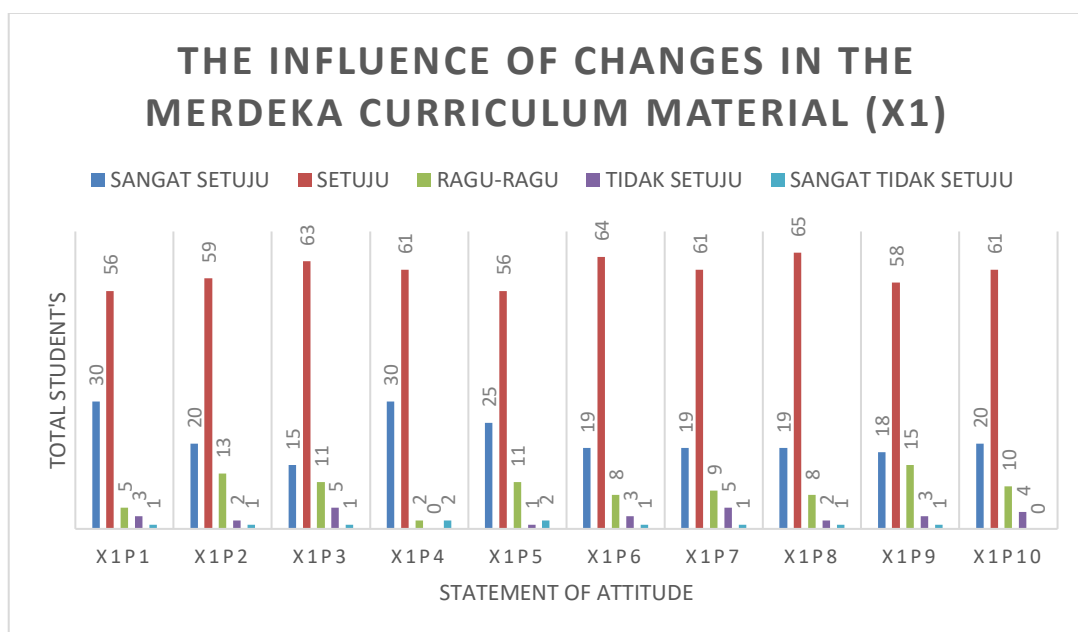
As a "Penggerak" school, SMAN Penggerak implements two curricula: class X and XI follow the Merdeka Curriculum, while class XII uses the K-13 Curriculum. For this research, the author chose to focus on classes XI-1, XI-2, and XI-3, which have a total of 108 students. However, only 95 students were included in the study out of the 100 originally planned. In the research conducted at SMAN Penggerak, the author created a Google Form containing statements where students responded using the options: agree, strongly agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree. Each variable had 10 statements that needed to be responded to by the students. Since this study consists of X1, X2, Y1, and Y2, there are 40 attitude statements in total. The results of the students' responses were managed via Google Drive using Excel Pivot tables to facilitate data analysis and statistics. For this study, the selected learning modules include Mathematics, Physics, Biology, History, and Arts & Crafts. Students themselves choose which subjects to take based on their interests and talents.

### Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material (X1)

Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material (X1)	Code
I am aware of the changes in the Merdeka Curriculum material.	X1P1
I feel supported by the Merdeka Curriculum in the post-Covid-19 pandemic period.	X1P2
I am happy with the number of subjects in the Merdeka Curriculum.	X1P3
I always follow the Merdeka Curriculum lessons every semester.	X1P4
I feel that the teacher strongly supports the Merdeka Curriculum material.	X1P5

Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material (X1)	Code
I find the teaching modules in the Merdeka Curriculum very helpful.	X1P6
I feel that the lesson time for the Merdeka Curriculum is adequate.	X1P7
I feel that the Merdeka Curriculum material taught is relevant to my major.	X1P8
I feel that the Merdeka Curriculum material is easy to master.	X1P9
I feel that the Merdeka Curriculum material is enjoyable.	X1P10

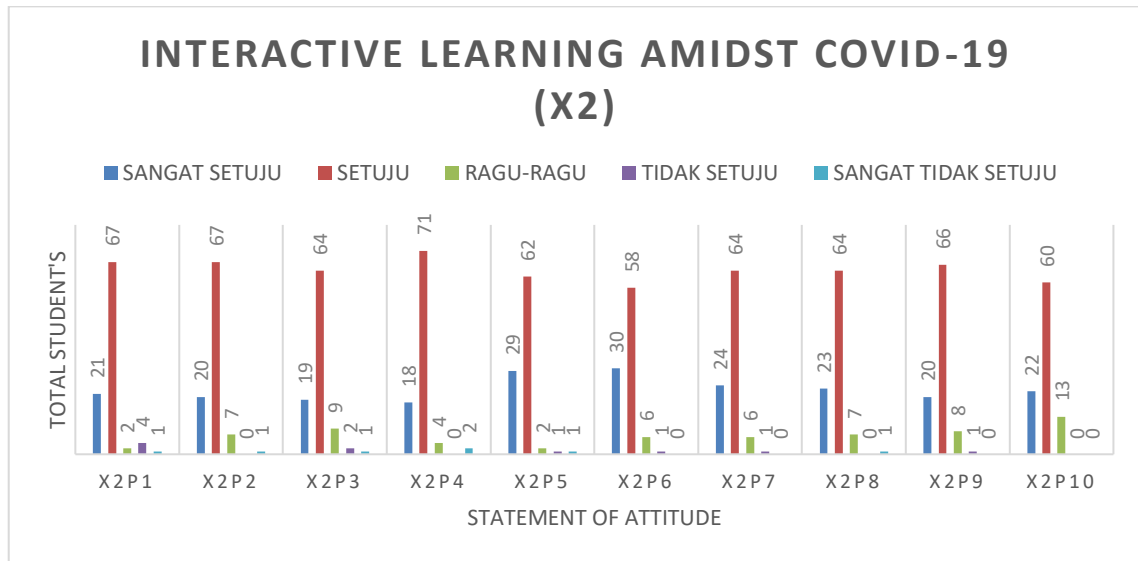
Code	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
X1P1	30	56	5	3	1	95
X1P2	20	59	13	2	1	95
X1P3	15	63	11	5	1	95
X1P4	30	61	2	0	2	95
X1P5	25	56	11	1	2	95
X1P6	19	64	8	3	1	95
X1P7	19	61	9	5	1	95
X1P8	19	65	8	2	1	95
X1P9	18	58	15	3	1	95
X1P10	20	61	10	4	0	95
<b>Total</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>604</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>950</b>
<b>Average per Student</b>	<b>21.5</b>	<b>60.4</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>95</b>



**Interactive Learning Amidst COVID-19 (X2)**

No	Statement	Code
1	I am happy with the availability of school teaching materials.	X2P1
2	I find the teaching materials provided by the teacher helpful.	X2P2
3	I feel that the teaching materials meet the students' needs.	X2P3
4	I enjoy using learning videos, articles, and podcasts as additional tools.	X2P4
5	I enjoy taking quizzes/ tests/ exams using applications.	X2P5
6	I feel comfortable with the appearance of PPTs, presentations, and videos from the teacher.	X2P6
7	I am happy that the subjects are in line with my interests, talents, and aspirations.	X2P7
8	I feel that project-based learning offers broader opportunities.	X2P8
9	I feel that the learning materials are in line with the students' readiness.	X2P9
10	I feel that the learning materials are flexible.	X2P10

Code	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
X2P1	21	67	2	4	1	95
X2P2	20	67	7	0	1	95
X2P3	19	64	9	2	1	95
X2P4	18	71	4	0	2	95
X2P5	29	62	2	1	1	95
X2P6	30	58	6	1	0	95
X2P7	24	64	6	1	0	95
X2P8	23	64	7	0	1	95
X2P9	20	66	8	1	0	95
X2P10	22	60	13	0	0	95

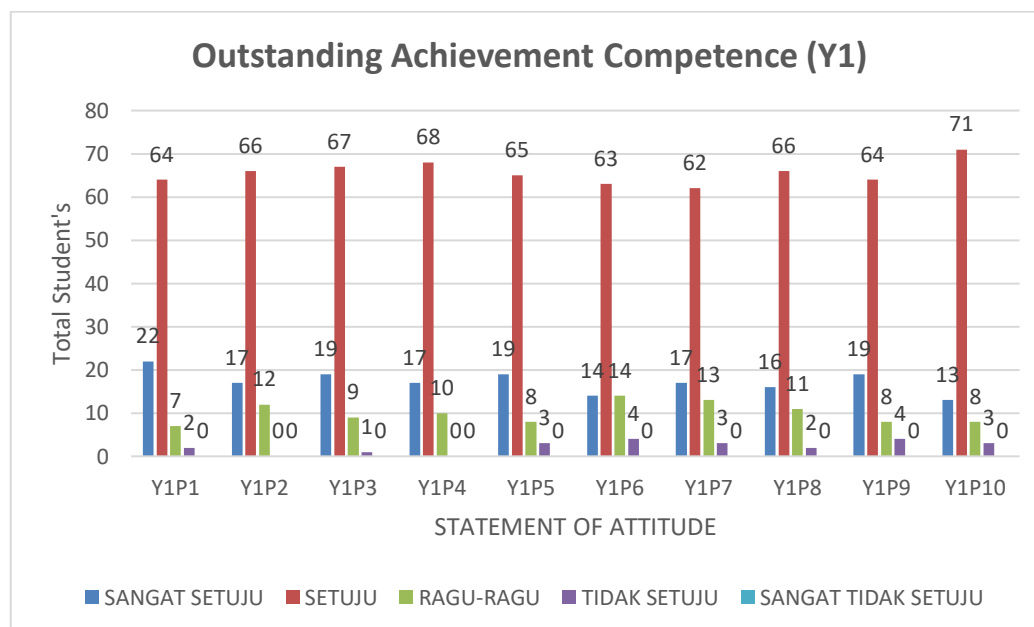


### Outstanding Achievement Competence (Y1)

No	Statement	Code
1	I feel capable of making arguments in class discussions at the end of the learning achievements.	Y1P1
2	I feel capable of creating a product at the end of the learning achievements.	Y1P2
3	I feel capable of presenting assignments at the end of the learning process.	Y1P3
4	I feel capable of completing learning tasks more informatively.	Y1P4
5	I feel capable of improving the quality of learning in achieving learning outcomes.	Y1P5
6	I feel capable of creating a portfolio in the learning achievement process.	Y1P6
7	I feel capable of conducting interviews with others.	Y1P7
8	I feel capable of answering questionnaires from the teacher.	Y1P8
9	I feel capable of answering tests on the learning material.	Y1P9
10	I feel capable of creating a product in the learning achievement process.	Y1P10

Code	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Y1P1	22	64	7	2	0	95
Y1P2	17	66	12	0	0	95
Y1P3	19	67	9	0	0	95
Y1P4	17	68	10	0	0	95
Y1P5	19	65	8	3	0	95
Y1P6	14	63	14	4	0	95

Code	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Y1P7	17	62	13	3	0	95
Y1P8	16	66	11	2	0	95
Y1P9	19	64	8	4	0	95
Y1P10	13	71	8	3	0	95

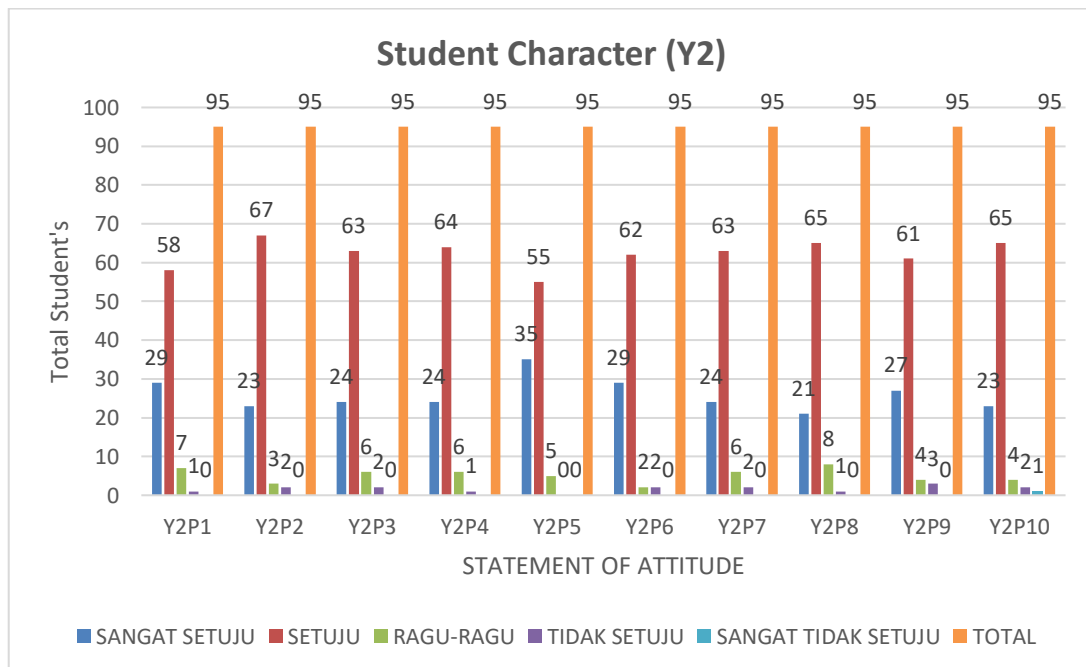


The highest agreement response: "I am capable of creating a product in the learning achievement process (Y1P10)" with 71 students out of 95 students (75%).

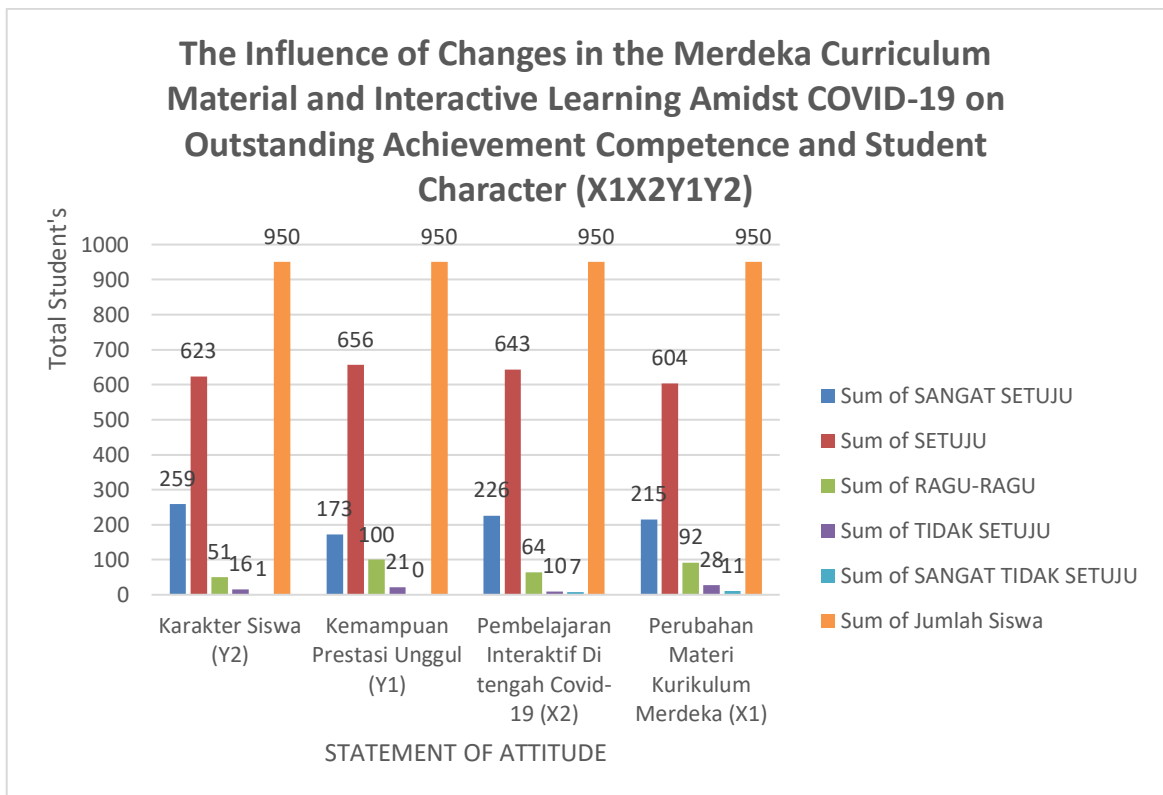
### Student Character (Y2)

No	Statement	Code
1	I understand religious teachings and beliefs in life.	Y2P1
2	I feel capable of preserving noble cultural values and interacting with other cultures in the environment.	Y2P2
3	I feel capable of practicing social justice with others.	Y2P3
4	I have the ability to collaborate voluntarily in activities.	Y2P4
5	I care about the environment.	Y2P5
6	I am responsible for the learning process and outcomes.	Y2P6
7	I am able to think critically and objectively in learning.	Y2P7
8	I am capable of analyzing and evaluating ideas.	Y2P8
9	I am able to produce original work.	Y2P9
10	I have the ability to find alternative solutions to problems.	Y2P10

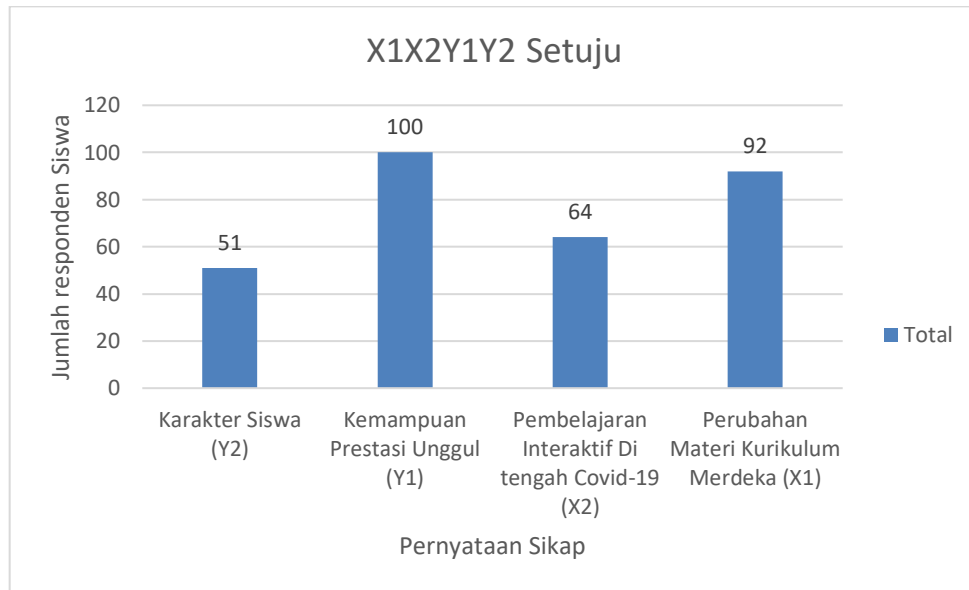
Code	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Y2P1	29	58	7	1	0	95
Y2P2	23	67	3	2	0	95
Y2P3	24	63	6	2	0	95
Y2P4	24	64	6	1	0	95
Y2P5	35	55	5	0	0	95
Y2P6	29	62	2	2	0	95
Y2P7	24	63	6	2	0	95
Y2P8	21	65	8	1	0	95
Y2P9	27	61	4	3	0	95
Y2P10	23	65	4	2	1	95



**The Influence of Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material and Interactive Learning Amidst COVID-19 on Outstanding Achievement Competence And Student Character (X1X2Y1Y2)**



Row Labels	Sum of Agree
Student Character (Y2)	623
Outstanding Achievement Competence (Y1)	656
Interactive Learning Amidst COVID-19 (X2)	643
Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material (X1)	604
Grand Total	2526



Student Character (Y2) had the highest "Agree" response with 623 out of 950 (65.6%) respondents, or an average of 62.3 out of 95 students (65.6%).

Outstanding Achievement Competence (Y1) had the highest "Agree" response with 656 out of 950 (69.1%) respondents, or an average of 65.6 out of 95 students (69.1%).

Interactive Learning Amidst COVID-19 (X2) had the highest "Agree" response with 643 out of 950 (67.7%) respondents, or an average of 64.3 out of 95 students (67.7%).

Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material (X1) had the highest "Agree" response with 604 out of 950 (63.6%) respondents, or an average of 60.4 out of 95 students (63.6%).

The correlation between the variable Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material (X1) and Interactive Learning Amidst COVID-19 (X2) with Outstanding Achievement Competence (Y1) and Student Character (Y2) shows high "Agree" responses, as the average value for X1 is 60.4 students (63.6%), X2 is 64.3 students (67.7%), Y1 is 65.6 students (69.1%), and Y2 is 62.3 students (65.6%) from 95 students. The results show that the average of X1, X2, Y1, and Y2 has above 60% of students in the "Agree" response.

## DISCUSSION

The research shows that Student Character (Y2) had the highest "Agree" response, with 623 out of 950 (65.6%) respondents, or an average of 62.3 out of 95 students (65.6%). Outstanding Achievement Competence (Y1) received the highest "Agree" response with 656 out of 950 (69.1%) respondents, or an average of 65.6 out of 95 students (69.1%). Interactive Learning Amidst COVID-19 (X2) garnered the highest "Agree" response with 643 out of 950 (67.7%) respondents, or an average of 64.3 out of 95 students (67.7%). Lastly, Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material (X1) had the highest "Agree" response with 604 out of 950 (63.6%) respondents, or an average of 60.4 out of 95 students (63.6%). The

correlation between the variables Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material (X1) and Interactive Learning Amidst COVID-19 (X2) with Outstanding Achievement Competence (Y1) and Student Character (Y2) shows a high "Agree" response. The average value for X1 is 60.4 students (63.6%), for X2 it is 64.3 students (67.7%), for Y1 it is 65.6 students (69.1%), and for Y2 it is 62.3 students (65.6%) out of 95 students. The results indicate that the average responses for X1, X2, Y1, and Y2 are above 60%, reflecting a high level of agreement among students.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material and Interactive Learning Amidst COVID-19 have a positive impact on Outstanding Achievement Competence and Student Character. The high level of "Agree" responses indicates that students feel supported and engaged with the new curriculum approach and the more interactive learning methods. The average "Agree" response for Outstanding Achievement Competence and Student Character was 69.1% and 65.6%, respectively, while for Interactive Learning Amidst COVID-19 and Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material, the response was 67.7% and 63.6%, respectively. This shows that students experience positive effects in terms of academic competence and character development through these changes.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Strengthening the Merdeka Curriculum Material: Given the positive response to the Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum Material, it is recommended that this curriculum be further developed to meet the needs and interests of students. A more flexible and relevant curriculum will motivate students to engage more in learning.
2. Enhancing Interactive Learning: Based on the high response to interactive learning, especially through videos, podcasts, or other digital tools, it is advised that teachers and schools continue to leverage technology as a learning aid. Using varied learning media can enrich the student learning experience.
3. Developing Student Character: Students showed high agreement regarding Student Character. Therefore, programs focused on character development, such as teamwork, responsibility, and social justice, should continue to be integrated into both classroom and extracurricular activities. This will help foster a well-rounded student character ready to face challenges in society.
4. Teacher Training: To ensure effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and interactive learning, teachers should receive continuous training on innovative teaching strategies. Enhancing teachers' competencies in educational technology and character-based learning will result in a more positive impact on students.
5. Regular Monitoring and Evaluation: To ensure the effectiveness of the curriculum changes and interactive learning methods, it is recommended that regular evaluations be conducted on the implementation of these

programs. Feedback from students and teachers is crucial to make ongoing improvements.

### **FURTHER RESEARCH**

Further research should explore the long-term impact of the Merdeka Curriculum and interactive learning on student achievement, teacher performance, and character development, with a focus on diverse educational settings. Additionally, investigating the inclusivity of these methods for students with different learning needs and the psychosocial effects on students' well-being would help refine educational practices and ensure more holistic development.

### **REFERENCES**

- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fauzi, A., & Suryani, R. (2022). *Interactive learning in the digital age: An approach to enhancing students' creativity*. Indonesian Journal of Education, 10(2), 215-230.
- Hermawan, I. (2022). *Pancasila and character education: Strengthening the student profile through project-based learning*. Indonesian Journal of Educational Research, 15(1), 105-120.
- Hidayat, M., & Yuliani, A. (2022). *The role of teaching materials in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum*. Journal of Educational Innovations, 18(3), 180-195.
- Ministry of Education and Culture. (2022). *Pedoman pelaksanaan kurikulum Merdeka dan pemulihan pembelajaran*. Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan.
- Mulyani, E. (2022). *Evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools: A review of its effectiveness and impact*. Journal of Education and Pedagogy, 20(4), 254-270.
- Nasution, A. (2022). *The development of the operational curriculum in schools: A comprehensive framework*. Journal of Educational Policy, 9(2), 132-148.
- Sari, D., & Ramadhan, A. (2022). *Flexibility and autonomy in the Merdeka Curriculum: Impact on school curriculum development*. Indonesian Journal of Curriculum and Teaching, 14(1), 56-70.
- Suryani, R. (2022). *Adapting the Merdeka Curriculum: The importance of flexibility in curriculum design*. Journal of Education Development, 13(2), 202-220.

Wulandari, N. (2022). *Student-centered learning in the Merdeka Curriculum: A transformative approach*. *Journal of Educational Studies*, 8(1), 45-60.