

# Applying John Dewey's Constructivism in the Merdeka Curriculum: A Conceptual Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the constructivism theory paradigm developed by John Dewey and explore its relevance to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Dewey's theory of constructivism emphasizes the importance of direct experience and reflection in active learning, where students construct knowledge through interaction with the real world. The method used in this research is a literature review, which involves analyzing Dewey's main texts related to constructivism theory and documents and policies related to the Merdeka curriculum. The analysis technique is carried out by comparing Dewey's principles of constructivism with the characteristics of Merdeka curriculum which focuses on flexibility, freedom of learning, and the development of 21st century skills. The results show that Dewey's principles of constructivism, such as experiential learning, collaboration, and reflection, are very relevant and can be applied in Merdeka curriculum to create a more innovative and student-centered learning environment and the importance of students' freedom to learn according to their potential and interests.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In every learning process, the right learning theory is needed to facilitate and improve the effectiveness of the learning process. One of the theories that can be used in the learning process is the theory of constructivism proposed by John Dewey. Dewey's constructivism theory paradigm emphasizes the importance of real experience and social interaction in the learning process, where students actively build knowledge through direct experience (Budiyanti et al., 2023; Hikmah Uswatun Ummi, 2017; Sikandar, 2015). Dewey's emphasis on active learning through direct experience aligns with the curriculum's focus on student-centered and experiential learning (Aiman Faiz, 2020; Muflich, Ratna Mutiara Ramadhan, 2023). Dewey argued that education should be active and student-centred, and students should be directly involved in the construction of their knowledge, not just passive recipients of information. In the context of Indonesian education, the Merdeka curriculum was introduced as an effort to provide freedom and flexibility in the learning process, so that students can develop their potential optimally. Within this framework, constructivism theory, pioneered by John Dewey, offers a relevant philosophical and pedagogical foundation to support the implementation of the curriculum.

So far, studies on John Dewey's constructivism theory paradigm and its relevance to the independent learning curriculum tend to discuss three things. First, implementation of the Flow of Constructivism Towards a Merdeka curriculum in the Perspective of Islamic Education Philosophy (Tsanawiyah et al., 2022). Second, John

Dewey's Pragmatism-Constructivism Thought as a Learning Method in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Refi Mariska & Abdul Khobir, 2023). Third, John Dewey and Jean Piaget's Views on the Education Curriculum: Perspective of Active Learning Theory and Constructivism (Muflich, Ratna Mutiara Ramadhan, 2023). From the three trends above, it appears that although there are in-depth studies on various aspects of constructivism theory and its application in education, no one has specifically discussed John Dewey's constructivism theory paradigm and its relevance to the Merdeka curriculum. This indicates a gap in the literature that needs to be filled, especially in the context of how Dewey's principles can be adapted to support the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum.

This paper aims to complement the existing shortcomings in the study of John Dewey's Constructivism Theory Paradigm and its relevance to the Merdeka curriculum. This research will be carried out by deeply analyzing how the constructivism theory proposed by John Dewey can be considered relevant to the Merdeka curriculum currently implemented. In this context, it is important to explore Dewey's thoughts that emphasise learning experiences as the core of the educational process, as well as how these principles can be integrated in a more flexible and student-oriented curriculum. Therefore, the aim of this study is to corroborate previous research results that have been conducted in this area. By conducting a comprehensive analysis, it is hoped that this paper can provide new contributions and a more in-depth perspective regarding the application of constructivism theory in the context of education in Indonesia. In line with that, this research problem is formulated as follows: (1) How is the Theory of Constructivism According to John Dewey? This question will direct the discussion to the basic concepts and principles proposed by Dewey in his constructivism theory, as well as its implications for educational practice (2) How is its relevance to the Merdeka curriculum?

In the context of Indonesian education, the Merdeka curriculum was introduced as a major effort to provide freedom and flexibility in the learning process, with the aim that students can develop their potential optimally, according to their respective interests, talents, and needs so that the learning process becomes more comfortable (Lely et al., 2024). This curriculum provides space for students to learn independently and more actively, without being limited by a rigid system. In the context of a Merdeka curriculum, this approach makes sense. Because the curriculum gives students the freedom to explore and build knowledge according to their interests and needs. In this way, students can connect new knowledge with previous experiences, thus creating a deeper and more meaningful understanding. In addition, the constructivism approach also encourages the development of critical and creative thinking skills in students. This theory encourages students to construct their own knowledge through activities that involve problem-solving, reflection, and discussion, which in turn can improve their understanding and skills in their daily lives (Suparlan, 2019). Thus, constructivism is a solid foundation to support the implementation of Merdeka curriculum, so that students not only acquire knowledge, but also skills that can be applied in various contexts of their lives (Ariandini & Hidayati, 2023).

## 2. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method utilizing a library research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of John Dewey's theory of constructivism and its relevance in the educational context, particularly in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. The literature included in this study was selected based on specific inclusion criteria, such as scholarly articles, books, and journals that directly discuss Dewey's theories and the Merdeka curriculum, while excluding non-scholarly sources and outdated studies. Data collection involves discourse identification through various sources, including books, scientific journals, articles, and online resources. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings during content analysis, a systematic approach was employed, involving multiple researchers to cross-verify interpretations and utilizing triangulation to confirm consistency across different sources. The analysis will focus on key principles of Dewey's constructivism, such as experiential learning, reflection, and active student involvement, and how these principles can be applied in the current Indonesian educational context, with the data presented in a descriptive narrative format.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Constructivism Theory According to John Dewey

Constructivism is a constructive theory, building in terms of ability, and understanding, in the learning process. By having a constructive nature, it can be expected that the activeness of students will increase their intelligence (Nurvia Urfany, Adilah Afifah, 2013). Constructivist theory according to John Dewey's view is that in the learning process, the teacher presents various problem experiments that occur in schools and students solve these problems. Learning methods that are related to this theory include the discovery learning approach and meaningful learning (Budiyanti et al., 2023). In addition to pragmatism, Dewey is also a figure who initiated the theory of constructivism with Jean Piaget. This theory has the idea that learners learn by constructing the truth and knowledge they get themselves. This theory argues that a person will not gain knowledge if he does it passively (Tsanawiyah et al., 2022).

Constructivism theory proposed by John Dewey is also summarised in cognitive theory, which asserts

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*Applying John Dewey's Constructivism in the Merdeka Curriculum: A Conceptual Analysis.. (Nafidatun Nisa)*

that experience is the foundation of learning. Cognitive theory discusses cognition factors related to a person's psyche or psychological condition. The definition of cognition is the process or human effort in recognizing various kinds of stimulus or information that enter through their sensory organs, storing, connecting, and solving a problem based on the stimulus or information. This definition implies that the symptoms of cognition are often associated with a person's learning process obtained from observation including experience and through the sensory organs so that in the end it can be used to solve problems (Sikandar, 2015).

Learning in constructivism theory is that learning activities are active activities, where students build their own knowledge. Students seek their own meaning from what they learn, this is a process of adjusting new concepts and ideas to the existing framework in their minds (Nurvia Urfany, Adilah Afifah, 2013).

Dewey's thinking requires that a teacher direct students to be involved in projects or tasks that are problem-solving in nature. A teacher is also able to assist students in investigating intellectual and social problems. Constructivism from Dewey's view is a learning process that is directly related to experiments or problems that occur in the field (Andi Asrafiani Arifah et al., 2023) and learning must be active, directly involved, centered on students (SCL = Student-Centered Learning) in the context of social experience (Hikmah Uswatun Ummi, 2017).

### 3.2. John Dewey's Assumptions About the Theory of Educational Constructivism

Constructivist theory is one of the most well-known theories in education. Before we dive into the theory of constructivism, it is good to know first about constructivism. The word constructivism means constructive (Sugrah, 2020). In the realm of philosophy in education, the theory means an attempt to construct a new and cultivated life structure. Based on this explanation, the theory is included in assumptions that have a constructive nature and are built from the realm of competence, understanding, and learning processes. Through the possession of constructive properties, student activities make it possible to increase their intelligence (Waseso, 2018).

Constructivism focuses on the interaction of people and situations in the acquisition and sophistication of skills and knowledge. Constructivism shares a view commensurate with the social cognitive view that learners, behavior, and the environment through a process of interaction (Van Eyghen, 2018). The idea of constructivism is, first of all, that people are learners who actively participate in the development of knowledge and the knowledge they acquire for themselves. Through practice, experimentation, and discussion with other students, you will have the opportunity to deepen the knowledge that the student has acquired. In that way, his knowledge grows and proliferates (Rahmat sinaga, 2018). Teachers should not teach in the sense of teaching many students in the traditional way.

Teachers need to design situations so that students can actively participate in learning materials by processing materials through social interaction and cooperation (Meiyani, 2013). Teachers and educators need to be proactive and unique in explaining learning materials, and teachers should be able to utilize instruments in the teaching and learning process. Not only sticking to classic techniques such as lecturing and old methods but also taking notes until the end. Teachers need to teach students to actively participate in learning.

Learning activities consist of observing a condition, gathering information, formulating and testing hypotheses, and also collaborating with others. Another activity is to take students to places outside the classroom. Joint curriculum planning requires teachers from every corner of the scientific field. Students are instructed to adjust to having active participation in the learning process by going beyond the required criteria by setting goals, monitoring and assessing progress, and exploring interests (Mardiana, 2018).

Constructivist learning theory assumes that students have mastered basic knowledge which is then used to construct advanced knowledge (Budiningsih, 2012). Constructivism theory perceives that students should be able to compile knowledge and form it individually. Teacher assistance is needed in finding effective teaching methods and techniques for the formation of student knowledge. Therefore, the teacher should really master the material thoroughly and deeply. It is intended that the teacher can accept an assumption and perception from students and determine whether or not the assumption is worthy of further construction.

### 3.3 The Relevance of Jhon Dewey's Theory of Constructivism to Independent Learning

Jhon Dewey's constructivism theory used in independent learning is a school of progressivism which is a school of educational philosophy that emphasises the importance of democratic education with its famous figure John Dewey flourishing and developing in western society (Astutib, 2024). The flow of progressivism boils down to the flow of pragmatism philosophy introduced by William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952) which emphasizes the benefits for practical life. This means that these two schools both emphasize maximizing human potential in an effort to deal with the problems of everyday life. In addition, this similarity is based on pragmatism's belief that the human mind is very active and wants to always research, not passive and does not just accept certain views before they are proven empirically (Wulandari, 2020). This flow shows a form of rejection of the education system that uses the authorizer system in its application. John Dewey is the person

who initiated the democratic education system and is the person most responsible for designing American education as well as being responsible for the moral life of this nation.

Democracy in education guarantees the values of brotherhood and human rights by looking at the differences between one another either the relationship between fellow students or the relationship between students and their teachers with mutual respect and respect (Yasin, Muhammad, 2024). On the basis of this principle, the idea was born that humans must be educated because with education humans will change and develop towards a healthier, better, and perfect. Meanwhile, the third point refers to the assumption that welfare and happiness can only be achieved if every citizen or member of society can develop their energy or mind to advance the common interest.

In relation to 'Merdeka Belajar' designed by the Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim, it is necessary to understand and change the perspective of education through the lens of progressivism philosophy. This is because progressivism is a school of educational philosophy that assumes that humans have unique and extraordinary abilities and can overcome various problems that threaten humans themselves.

The parallels between the concept of 'independent learning' and the concept of education according to John Dewey's progressivism school of philosophy. Both concepts emphasize the independence and freedom of educational institutions in exploring to the maximum the abilities and potential possessed by students who naturally have diverse abilities and potential. If formulated, the two concepts both contain similar meanings, namely, learners must be free and develop naturally; Direct experience is the best stimulus in learning; Teachers must be able to guide and be good facilitators. Educational institutions should be educational laboratories for learner change; Activities in educational institutions and at home should be co-operable.

The concept of democracy in education, as stated by Dewey, is freedom in education because individuals are dominated by natural desires. This high desire is able to bring out compassion, friendliness, and some prominent characteristics. Natural desires will make individuals into good citizens who will be defenders of their country. But their limitations in dealing with shortcomings that are a universally held capacity have made them distant from these values (Astutib, 2024). Experience and freedom are emotional tools in fostering passion in human beings. From the above description, it can be concluded that educational democracy means a process, namely the process towards democracy in education. With the orientation of producing graduates who are independent, critical thinking, and very tolerant of democratic views and practices.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

John Dewey's theory of constructivism emphasizes that learning should be centered on real experiences and students' active interaction in the learning process. This concept is based on the view that knowledge is not acquired passively, but through a process of exploration, problem-solving and collaboration. The teacher acts as a facilitator who guides students to understand concepts through direct experience and independent discovery. This process allows students to link new knowledge with previous experience so that learning becomes more meaningful. With this approach, students are expected to be more independent, critical, and creative in building their knowledge.

In the context of 'Merdeka Belajar,' Dewey's theory is very relevant because both emphasize the importance of students' freedom to learn according to their potential and interests. This concept also supports a democratic educational environment, where students are free to explore, innovate, and learn from practical experience. Dewey believed that education should prepare individuals to face the challenges of real life actively and creatively. Principles such as experiential learning, active engagement, and free exploration are in line with Merdeka Belajar's vision to create graduates who think critically, are independent, and adaptive to change.

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