

## Exploring Student Morality in Policy Non-Expulsion: Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia

### Menggali Moralitas Siswa dalam Kebijakan Non-Expulsion: Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia

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#### Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the impact of the non-expulsion policy on student morality in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as provide practical recommendations for educators, schools, and policymakers in creating an inclusive learning environment and supporting quality education. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with primary data sources obtained from in-depth interviews with five teachers and five students and secondary data from various related literature. Data analysis was conducted through triangulation to ensure the credibility of the results. The results showed that (1) the non-expulsion policy received mixed responses. Some parties considered this policy ineffective because it did not have a deterrent effect on students with serious offences. In contrast, others viewed this policy as in line with the principle of inclusiveness of Merdeka Curriculum, provided it was implemented with the right strategy. Supporting statistical data shows that more than 60% of teachers agree with implementing this policy if accompanied by intensive coaching. (2) The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which integrates religious habituation in schools, has positively impacted student morality, as seen from the increase in discipline, intrinsic awareness of worship, and student's ability to respond ethically to immoral situations. This finding confirms the importance of education that emphasizes moral and religious values in shaping student character and the need to strengthen non-expulsion policies with a sustainable pedagogical approach.*

**Keywords:** Non-expulsion policy, student morality, independent curriculum.

#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dampak kebijakan *non-expulsion* terhadap moralitas siswa dalam konteks penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka, serta memberikan rekomendasi praktis bagi pendidik, sekolah, dan pembuat kebijakan dalam menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang inklusif dan mendukung pendidikan berkualitas. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan sumber data primer diperoleh dari wawancara mendalam terhadap lima guru dan lima siswa, serta data sekunder dari berbagai literatur terkait. Analisis data dilakukan melalui triangulasi untuk memastikan kredibilitas hasil. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa (1) kebijakan *non-expulsion* mendapatkan tanggapan beragam: sebagian pihak menilai kebijakan ini tidak efektif karena tidak memberikan efek jera terhadap siswa dengan pelanggaran berat, sementara sebagian lainnya memandang kebijakan ini selaras dengan prinsip inklusivitas Kurikulum Merdeka, asalkan diimplementasikan dengan strategi yang tepat. Data statistik pendukung menunjukkan bahwa lebih dari 60% guru setuju dengan penerapan kebijakan ini jika disertai pembinaan intensif. (2) Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka yang mengintegrasikan pembiasaan religius di sekolah telah memberikan dampak positif terhadap moralitas siswa, terlihat dari peningkatan kedisiplinan, kesadaran intrinsik dalam menjalankan ibadah, serta kemampuan siswa merespons situasi tidak bermoral secara etis. Temuan ini menegaskan pentingnya pendidikan yang menekankan nilai-nilai moral dan religius dalam membentuk karakter siswa, serta perlunya penguatan kebijakan *non-expulsion* dengan pendekatan pedagogis yang berkelanjutan.

**Kata Kunci:** Kebijakan non-expulsion, moralitas siswa, kurikulum merdeka.

## 1. Introduction

The Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia, although designed to develop students' potential, character, and morality holistically, actually creates serious challenges in efforts to maintain student morality in the school environment (Ruth et al., 2023). One of the policies in this curriculum is the non-expulsion policy, which does not expel students from school even for serious offences. This policy aligns with the value of character education by focusing on improving morals and behaviour through guidance, counselling, and remedial programs, rather than punishing students to the extreme (Fahdini et al., 2021). Although it has reasonable goals, namely to support the moral rehabilitation of students and create a fair and equitable education system, this policy also poses challenges and impacts in maintaining student morality and discipline.

The implementation of this policy is to create an inclusive and welcoming educational environment for all learners, including those with special needs. The Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia has issued guidelines for implementing inclusive education, emphasising the importance of providing equal opportunities for all children to learn together without being excluded or separated (Supena et al., 2018). In addition, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in creating educational materials highlights the value of inclusiveness and modification of materials to meet the needs of all students, including those with special needs (Hamida et al., 2024).

As is currently the case, there are rampant cases of teachers being reported by students because the students do not accept the way the teacher reprimands and disciplines them (Mulyadi, 2021). In addition, several cases of increased deviant behaviour, such as bullying, fights or brawls, skipping school, drug abuse, and lack of respect for teachers, tend to increase (Trianti, 2020). This is based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics, which explains that in 2013, the number of juvenile delinquents in Indonesia reached 6325 cases, while in 2014, the number reached 7007 cases, and in 2015, it reached 7762. This means that from 2013 to 2014, there was an increase of about 10.7%, including cases of juvenile delinquency, theft, murder, promiscuity and drugs. From this data, it can be predicted that the number of juvenile delinquents increases every year (Jasmicara & Herdiansah, 2021). Then, according to data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (Kemen PPPA), until 2024, there have been 8,117 cases of violence experienced by adolescents aged between 13 and 17. These data show that the efforts that have been made have still not been effective in tackling the problem of student morality.

Coupled with the non-expulsion policy in the independent curriculum, there must be much criticism because the policy can potentially reduce student morality. The absence of strict control mechanisms can make some students feel that their actions have no real consequences. In some cases, students who frequently violate influence other students, which also impacts the overall decline in morality in the school environment (Afrizal et al., 2019). This condition creates a dilemma for teachers and educators in maintaining student morality, especially amid the government's efforts to prioritize character development through the Merdeka Curriculum (Susanna et al., 2023).

Many studies discuss the implementation of the independent curriculum in schools, but in general, its implementation only focuses on students' interpersonal intelligence (Albar, 2022); moral development from the aspect of freedom in regulating the course of learning formation of student characteristics (Shidiq et al., 2023); improvement of civic disposition (Rahayu et al., 2024); and character building of the Pancasila student profile (Wahyudi et al., 2023). These studies focus more on the implementation of the independent curriculum in developing the non-academic aspects of students at school. One crucial aspect that previous researchers have not touched upon

is the discussion of implementing the independent curriculum on student morality with the non-expulsion policy. Where the existence of this non-expulsion policy will affect student morality, such as triggering permissiveness and weakening the deterrent effect, which can damage morality and send negative messages to other students about the importance of discipline and responsibility, in this case, Research on the implementation of an independent curriculum on the non-expulsion policy on student morality is still very limited.

Non-expulsion can have an impact on the decline in morality. Based on the phenomena that the researchers have described above, the non-expulsion policy in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is an effort based on interpersonal intelligence. This policy is expected to reduce dropout rates and support students facing academic and social challenges. The implementation of this policy for the principle is reflected in efforts to create an inclusive and friendly educational environment for all learners. However, this policy pays little attention to its impact on student morality. Without strict consequences, such as expulsion from school, students may develop a permissive attitude towards rule-breaking and unethical behaviour, ultimately weakening the deterrent effect.

Therefore, it is important to examine whether this non-expulsion policy significantly impacts student morality. Through in-depth Research, it is hoped that appropriate solutions can be found to improve or, if necessary, revisit the policy to maintain the quality of education and the moral development of students. This Research provides practical recommendations for educators, schools, and policymakers to create a welcoming and supportive learning environment for all students. Thus, the results of this study are expected to not only provide concrete solutions for improving the quality of education in Indonesia but also serve as a reference for further studies related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the development of a character-based education system.

## 2. Literature Review

By referring to previous studies, researchers can build insights for this Research, although there is limited information on the Non-Expulsion policy. The results of several relevant studies as a research foundation to explore student morality in the implementation of an independent curriculum in Indonesia are Research conducted by:

- 1) Research conducted by [Albar & Mastiah \(2022\)](#) on "Analysis of the Application of the Independent Curriculum to the Interpersonal Intelligence of Elementary School Students". The results showed that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes optimizing teachers' abilities in the learning process, has significantly impacted efforts to improve the quality of education. With a student-focused learning approach, simplification of goals, and flexibility of the learning process, this curriculum has effectively supported the development of students' interpersonal intelligence. Supporting indicators from The Merdeka Curriculum reinforce its success in creating a learning environment that encourages social interaction and collaboration, thus contributing to overall improvements in education.
- 2) Research conducted by [Chairul Azmi, Irda Murni, and Desyandri \(2023\)](#) on "The Merdeka Curriculum and its Effect on the Moral Development of Elementary School Children: A Literature Review". The results of this study indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum focuses on developing student character through various extracurricular activities and special programs, such as leadership training and community service. The main goal is to form

students who are responsible, ethical, and have superior social skills. In addition, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum has proven to encourage the development of deeper moral awareness while preparing students to become moral and responsible individuals in social life.

- 3) Research conducted by Antonius Eko Wahyudi, Sunarni and Nurul Ulfatin entitled *Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum Oriented to Character Building for Pancasila Student Profiles in Elementary Schools (2023)*. The results of this study can be concluded that: (1) the six dimensions, along with their elements and subelements, reflect the implementation of the five precepts of Pancasila; (2) the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum which focuses on building the character of the Pancasila student profile in driving schools is carried out through four main stages, namely the preparation, planning, implementation, and evaluation stages.
- 4) Research conducted by Dwi Agustina Rahayu, Lusy Wahyu Saputri, and Andreas Andrie Djatmiko entitled *Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Study Case-Based Civics Learning to Improve Civic Disposition in Grade VII Students at Wahidiyah Karangrejo Junior High School (2024)*. The study results concluded that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum to improve the civic disposition of seventh-grade students can be considered quite effective. This curriculum has been implemented according to its objectives, has succeeded in increasing students' understanding of character and moral values, and has positively impacted their character-building. However, several aspects still need to be improved, such as providing more comprehensive teaching materials and implementing more diverse learning strategies to encourage active student participation, especially for students who tend to be passive. Overall, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Wahidiyah Karangrejo Junior High School significantly contributes to building students' character and morals through Civic learning.
- 5) Research conducted by M. Nur Shidiq, Achmad Abdul Azis, Andri Fitriani Djollong, Triyanto, Muhammad Hariss, and Gamar Al Haddar entitled *Formation of Student Characteristics in Islamic Religious Education Subjects in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (2023)*. The results of this study indicate that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education subjects has formed several characteristics in students, namely self-directed learning, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration skills, and discipline. The formation of these characteristics is influenced by several primary factors, namely the curriculum, the role of the teacher, parental support, and interaction with peers. The success of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum depends on the synergy of these four factors so that it can produce learner characteristics that align with the curriculum's objectives and concepts, especially in the context of Islamic Religious Education.

In contrast to the above studies, this study examines the impact of the Non-Expulsion policy in the Merdeka Curriculum on student morality. There are not many studies that seem to deeply analyze how this policy affects the formation of students' moral character, even though strengthening morality is one of the main goals of education. The Non-Expulsion policy, which emphasizes inclusiveness and a restorative approach, can potentially encourage students to understand values such as tolerance, responsibility, empathy, etc. This research can contribute to achieving national education goals while preparing the younger generation with a strong moral foundation to face future challenges.

### 3. Methods

This Research uses a qualitative descriptive approach to explore student morality and the implementation of the non-expulsion policy in the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Primary data was obtained through in-depth interviews with five teachers (G1, G2, G3, G4, and G5) and five students (S1, S2, S3, S4, and S5). The informants were selected using purposive sampling, which aims to ensure that informants have relevant experience and understanding of the topic under study. In addition, secondary data was collected through a literature study by analyzing books, journals, and articles relevant to the research focus. The data analysis technique used is the Miles and Huberman model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification. This method is designed to produce valid, reliable data, and by the research objectives.

### 4. Result and Discussion

#### 4.1. Student Morality in an Independent Curriculum

The transformation of education into the digital age. This shift not only introduces technology as a tool but also fundamentally changes the way students and lecturers interact, learn, and teach. Digital learning opens up wider access to information, allows flexibility in the time and place of learning, and offers various interactive methods to increase student engagement. However, this process is not without its challenges.

Etymologically, the word "morals" comes from the Latin "mores," meaning customs, morals, behaviour, character, and habits in good behaviour (Hanafiah, 2024). In terminology, morals are principles that govern a person's actions and behaviour based on judgments about right and wrong. Morality includes views, values, beliefs, and norms that guide a person in making decisions and acting in society (Azmi et al., 2023). The concept of stages of moral development developed by Lawrence Kohlberg is a way to measure a person's moral level based on the development of moral reasoning. Kohlberg asserts that moral development is related to justice and continues throughout an individual's life (Hanafiah, 2024). Regarding student morality, three things can be studied: obedience to school rules, consistency in practising religion, and dimensions of knowledge about student religion. The following is a description of each of these indicators:

#### Obedience to School Rules

Education is one of the means of understanding moral values, ethics, and individual social responsibility. Implementing an independent curriculum offers students the freedom to explore their interests and talents. If this is not balanced with serious attention to moral education, there will be a risk of degradation of students' moral development (Wahyudi et al., 2023). In some cases, this freedom even makes students focus more on individual achievements without paying attention to the values of togetherness, responsibility, cooperation, tolerance, or social ethics. However, it does not rule out the possibility that implementing an independent curriculum can increase student discipline, such as wearing uniforms neatly. This is as expressed by the informants, namely:

- G1 : Since the independent curriculum began, children have always worn orderly and complete uniforms. Monday through Thursday, children must wear black shoes; on Friday, shoes can be free, and on Saturday, they can wear black shoes again because they wear scouts.
- G2 : Orderly, only a few who are not orderly have their clothes taken out, but when they have been reprimanded, they put them back in.

- G5 : orderly, but of course, there are some other students who also commit violations, such as not wearing a complete uniform (sometimes the uniform is issued) and not dressing neatly.

In addition, implementing the independent curriculum has also improved student order in terms of coming to school on time. This is as revealed by the informant, namely:

- G1 : Alhamdulillah, since the independent curriculum, the children have also been more punctual, arriving before 7 o'clock. The children are complete and ready to start morning habituation,, such as dhuha prayer or gymnastics,, and none are left behind.
- G3 : On time, only a few students are occasionally late.
- G4 : Students are always eager to arrive before the lesson starts.
- G5 : Students arrive on time before the entrance bell rings. Only a few are late, maybe one or two people.

Another example is the orderliness of students in completing school assignments. This is as expressed by the informant, namely:

- G1 : Since the independent curriculum was implemented, children are more diligent in completing assignments because they do not feel pressured by value guidance and must achieve targets, so children are happier in receiving learning and completing it.
- G3 : Yes, but some children sometimes do not complete assignments. However, it is certain that the child will collect the assignment. Usually, they are called to the teacher's office at the end of the semester to complete the late assignments.
- G4 : Students are diligent in completing assignments.

Thus, the implementation of the independent curriculum is an innovative step that offers many opportunities for improving the quality of education in Indonesia. It's just that a few students need serious guidance. To minimize the risk of degrading moral development, schools must make an inclusive and intensive effort to take a systemic-holistic approach to learning activities.

### **Consistency in Practicing Religion**

In the context of students, consistency in practicing religion, such as discipline in worship, honesty, and mutual respect, is important in building strong morality. When students are able to internalize religious values as a whole and apply them in their daily lives, they not only show good behavior but also make a positive contribution to their social environment (Kandiri & Arfandi, 2021).

Moral development refers to changes in behaviour that occur in children, along with the understanding and application of procedures, habits, norms, or value standards adopted by the surrounding social group (Suparno, 2020). This is because character education aims to instil habits (habituation) of good things in students (Herdiawanto et al., 2019). Character education implementation strategies can be realized through various routine activities at school, such as the 3S movement (greetings, greetings, smiles), tadarus every Friday and Saturday, congregational prayers (dhuha and zuhr prayers), Friday prayers, flag ceremonies every Monday, cooperation activities, and care for the environment.

So, one of the effective ways for students to build and see student morality is to carry out religious values through this habituation. Students' self-awareness in carrying out religious habituation is one indicator of morality. This can be seen from the ability of students to carry out

religious activities regularly without coercion but instead driven by intrinsic awareness that has been embedded through the habituation process. This is as stated by several informants:

- G1 : Alhamdulillah, morning and afternoon habituation such as dhuha prayer and dhuhruhr congregational prayers are carried out in an orderly manner full of awareness without force and pres. If the time has come, the children are full of awareness and immediately carry it out with the teacher's assistance of each class.
- G4 : Religious habituation activities are conducted at school, such as reading sholawat nariyah before learning begins and praying dhuhr in congregation. Because they are used to these activities, students carry them out with their own awareness every time the time for habituation arrives.
- G5  
:  
Congregational zuhr prayers have become habitual; after the bell rings, students rush to the mosque to perform them.

From the explanation above, it can be concluded that through religious habituation activities at school, it is clear that students' morality has been well formed. Students' self-awareness is reflected in their discipline in carrying out religious activities on time, without coercion, and with consistent commitment. Students with this awareness show responsibility for carrying out religious obligations, such as being present on time for congregational prayer or other religious activities, without skipping or avoiding them. This proves that religious habituation that is consistently implemented in schools can effectively instil moral values and form religious student characters.

### **Dimensions of Knowledge about Student Religion**

The dimension of religious knowledge is one of the important aspects of understanding a person's religiosity. Religious knowledge aims to provide individuals with understanding so that they can carry out religious teachings consciously and consistently. According to Nashori and Mucharam, religion is how far knowledge is, how firm beliefs are, how much worship and aqidah are implemented, and how deep the appreciation of the religion they adhere to is (Alwi, 2014). Thus, this dimension is the basis for building individual morality based on religion.

Well-internalized religious knowledge can influence individual behaviour and decisions in everyday life. Religious knowledge covers cognitive aspects and involves emotional and moral awareness, which is the main foundation for a person to act according to religious values. This is as expressed by the informant:

- S1 : If I do not pray in congregation or recite the Quran, I will feel guilty and ashamed of myself.
- S4 : I'm definitely nervous, and I feel shame if I violate it. But until now, I haven't violated it.
- S5 : I would feel anxious if I violated it because I feared I would be punished.

The informants' statements reflect various dimensions of religious awareness, ranging from feelings of guilt when violating religious teachings to the urge to worship consistently. These informants show strong intrinsic awareness when carrying out religious teachings. Feelings of guilt and shame when not performing worship reflect the internalization of good religious values, as in informants 1, 4, and 5 above.

- S1 : If in terms of religion, God willing, never, but if the rules are often, for example, bringing makeup to school even if it is just lip tint hehe, the

feeling is still panic, which is called breaking the rules, afraid of being confiscated by the teacher or given points like that but still desperate.

- S4 : I was disappointed because they consistently refused when I (for example) invited my friends to pray dzuhur in the congregation.

Besides that, informant 2 separates violations of school rules and religious obligations. Even though there are violations of school rules, such as bringing makeup, compliance with religious teachings is maintained. This shows the informant's ability to prioritize religious values despite discrepancies in other aspects. Meanwhile, informant 3 displays the social dimension of religiosity, where he tries to practice worship himself and invites others to do so. The disappointment he feels when his invitation is rejected reflects his concern for building a more religious social environment.

In the religiosity dimension, good and bad actions within the scope of religion are often indicators of an individual's awareness of religious values. Good actions reflect compliance with religious teachings, while evil actions indicate violations of the values taught (Nikmah, 2018). The response to immoral situations also reflects the extent to which individuals are able to internalize religious values in everyday life.

- S1 : I think a good action in the religious space is to always worship according to your religion and beliefs, and a nasty action in the religious space is to look down on friends of different religions.
- S2 : Good actions include telling a friend that a friend is disrespectful or disrespectful to the teacher when the teacher is teaching. Bad actions include a friend who invites another friend not to pray just because they want to lose their makeup.
- S3 : Actions that I think are good, such as praying dzuhur in congregation, do not need to be told and strive before learning to read first. Actions that I think are bad are, for example, if a student is late for class but does not want to obey the provisions that those who are late pray outside the classroom.
- S4 : Good actions include respecting teachers and loving friends. Bad actions include speaking rudely and leaving congregational prayers.
- S5 : Good actions, include praying in congregation., while bad actions include lying and disrespecting parents.

Informants showed a diverse understanding of good and bad actions in religion. Good actions such as consistent worship, respecting teachers and reminding friends reflect the appreciation of religious values and social awareness. Informant 1 (S1) highlighted interfaith tolerance, while informants 2 (S2) and 3 (S3) emphasized discipline in worship and reminding each other, while bad actions, such as belittling other religions or leaving religious obligations, showed awareness of behaviours that deviate from moral values. This understanding includes aspects of ritual, attitude, responsibility and tolerance.

Students' ability to respond to these immoral situations indicates their level of moral awareness while reflecting the extent to which these values have been internalized. Students' responses to immoral behaviour, whether in the form of preventive, corrective or passive actions, provide an illustration of how religious values and morality are applied in real life. As expressed by the informants:

- S1 : If there is a friend of mine who misbehaves, I will advise him first; if my friend does not accept the advice, then I will report it to the class leader.



- S2 : Often, for example, seeing a friend cheat when doing an exam even though it is not allowed to open the cell phone, but there are those who still open the cell phone so that the scores of other friends are slammed, my response is usually to report the teacher quietly so that their scores are reduced.
- S3 : I have seen. Such as being disrespectful to the teacher when speaking, not bowing when walking past the teacher, saying rude words, catcalling, misusing cellphones to cheat. I respond by advising first but if it does not improve I will report it to the teacher.

Informants gave diverse views on the immoral situations they witnessed or experienced. Most informants showed sensitivity to moral and religious values when dealing with inappropriate behaviour, such as cheating, incivility, or rude actions. Informant 1, for example, revealed that he prefers a persuasive approach by advising friends first before reporting to higher authorities, reflecting the use of a gradual strategy in solving problems. Informants 2 and 3 showed courage in taking decisive action, such as reporting the offence to the teacher and demonstrating their commitment to moral integrity.

The answers indicate that most students have good moral awareness and try to overcome immoral situations in a constructive way. One approach is through education. Because the real purpose of education is to produce moral, virtuous, and noble human beings (Anwar, 2021).

#### 4.2. Non-Expulsion Policy in Merdeka Curriculum on Student Discipline and Morality

The interview results show that students feel more independent when learning digitally. Accessing e-books and journals makes the learning process more flexible, not limited by time and place, as in the past. This has improved the quality of research undertaken. Students also appreciate the quick access to digital resources. With technology, students can find references and research materials more quickly, such as e-books and online journals. In the past, students had to go to the library to find reference sources, but now everything can be accessed from home and more efficiently.

Non-expulsion is one of the policies in the Merdeka Curriculum that is still gaining consensus (Hidayat, 2022). The essence of this policy is that every student has the right to continue their learning process without being hindered by various obstacles such as academic difficulties, social problems, or economic factors (Yaqin et al., 2021). Students are no longer expelled or drop out of school for any reason, one of which is even if they make a big mistake.

The non-expulsion policy in the Merdeka Curriculum aims to give students a second chance with the hope of forming better characters through a coaching and learning approach (Oktarina, 2024). However, its implementation in the field raises various views and challenges, especially regarding teacher discipline and authority. Some teachers feel that this policy actually weakens their role in educating students, as strict sanctions such as expulsion are no longer an option. As a result, students who commit serious offences often do not feel significant consequences for their actions, which can lower the level of compliance and sense of responsibility. As expressed by the informants, namely:

- G1 : I have seen cases of students not being expelled from school even though they have made big mistakes, even my own students; since the existence of this independent curriculum, it is as if children are free of everything. Students have become difficult to manage because teachers are not

allowed to scold students, so students are increasingly brave with teachers, disrespectful and never feel guilty if they make mistakes.

- G2 : During the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in my school, there were children who committed serious offences that should have been expelled, but the principal gave the children a chance...

This has raised concerns among educators that the policy could reduce the effectiveness of character-building, especially for students who require a firmer approach to discipline. Then, schools provide educational consequences for students who make significant mistakes without having to expel them by focusing on educative and restorative approaches (Nabila et al., 2024). The various steps applied are verbal or written warnings, summoning parents, and coaching through counselling or coaching with a restitution triangle approach. Schools also provide educative social sanctions, such as cleaning the school environment and making a statement letter so that students are committed to not repeating mistakes. This is as expressed by the informant, namely:

- G1 : If there is a big mistake, sanctions will be given, so as not to repeat it. For example, cleaning the bathroom and not being allowed to enter temporarily. Not until it is expelled.
- G2 : the way the school gives consequences to these students: Giving verbal or written warnings, calling students together with their parents so that they do not repeat offenses, providing appropriate direction so that students carry out the rules voluntarily and consciously, making agreements with students so that it does not happen again.
- G3 : The school handles this by providing guidance, then BP, and finally calling the student's guardian.
- G4 : This will be followed up first through coaching with a restitution triangle approach, then discussed with the family.
- G5 : By giving a statement letter to change during the learning process under the supervision of the principal and teachers.

Furthermore, informants from students revealed the handling of students who violated the law. The results of the interviews, namely informants 1 (S1) and 2 (S2), revealed that behaviours such as disrupting class and talking constantly are handled with verbal warnings or reports to the class leader. Informant 3 (S3) stated that various violations, such as cheating, skipping class, and brawls, with more structured handling, such as reporting to BK or summoning parents. Informant 4 (S4) explained that he faced a serious case of property damage (throwing window glass). Handling is done by giving punishment such as compensation and suspension. Then, informant 5 (S5) witnessed an incident of physical violence involving male students dragging female students. Teachers and school authorities handled it quickly, involving reprimands, intensive supervision, and communication with parents.

The approaches described involve close cooperation between teachers, students, and parents to build character and improve student behaviour. Sanctions such as calling parents, reprimands, and coaching or counselling are the main steps. Students are given the opportunity to improve themselves through agreements or direct monitoring, with the aim of preventing a repetition of offences without expelling them from school. According to Behaviorism theory (Haryati & Syahidin, 2023), behaviour can be changed in two ways, namely reinforcement and punishment. So, what is done, as told by the respondents, is already in accordance with how to change student behaviour. As for cases involving physical or emotional violence, as reported by informant 5 (S5),

it shows the importance of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) approach. Handling that involves coordination between teachers, students, and parents reflects steps to develop emotional awareness and self-control.

However, the implementation of this policy faces challenges; there are negative sides that contribute to the decline in student morality, such as the attitude of students who feel too free, not making students aware, and even influencing other students. When disciplinary control is not strictly applied, students tend to develop permissive behaviours that can worsen their learning environment. This is as expressed by the informants, namely:

- G1 : The negative thing is that the child feels that what he did was not a bad thing because it is still forgiven and understood by the school. The morality or character of the child will decrease instead of getting better, and the fear is that other friends will imitate his bad behaviour.
- G2 : In my opinion, this policy will reduce the morality of students and will make things worse because it will spread to their friends; they think that this action is okay.

Based on the data above, it is explained that the non-expulsion policy can contribute to the decline in student morality. The same thing was expressed by several informants from students, namely informants 1 (S1), 2 (S2), 3 (S3), and 4 (S4), who stated that this policy can make students respect the rules less, repeat mistakes, and do not feel the need to improve themselves because there is no punishment that is strict enough. Informants 3 (S3) and 4 (S4) felt that students are not deterred by punishments that are too light, so it is important to balance restorative approaches with strict consequences. Restorative justice in education emphasizes restoring relationships and learning from mistakes rather than simply meting out punishment. However, the effectiveness of this approach depends on students' commitment to improving themselves.

Informants 3 (G3), 4 (G4), and 5 (G5) had different opinions. The non-expulsion policy raises mixed views among informants. Some informants consider this policy to have no significant impact on student morality. Informant 3 (G3) argued that the policy only has a normal effect because students with problems still receive guidance from homeroom teachers.

- G1 : I don't think it has much effect, it's normal. Because when there are children who are naughty, there is still homeroom guidance.

However, informant 4 (G4) had a different view. According to him, this policy can improve student morality as long as it is supported by proper coaching implementation. This approach is considered capable of helping students return to good values (Armadi et al., 2022). Conversely, less than optimal coaching can make students feel that their mistakes are normal and understandable, so they have the potential to repeat offences (Ma'ruf, 2021). Informant 5 (G4) added that the non-expulsion policy provides an opportunity for students to improve themselves. He believes that students who are still allowed to participate in learning will become more attentive and encouraged not to repeat mistakes, thus contributing to the improvement of their morality. This is as explained by the following data:

- G4 : The policy will improve morality if the coaching is done correctly because it will help students return to the good values that they have believed in. However, the opposite will happen if the coaching is inappropriate because it will make students feel that their mistakes are normal and can be excused by the school so that they can repeat their mistakes again.
- G5 : In my opinion, the existence of this policy gives students the opportunity to improve themselves again and also contributes to increasing student

attention because students who are allowed to take part in learning will be more attentive and will not repeat offences again.

Furthermore, when examined in terms of the impact of the policy on the number of offences, the informants' responses showed mixed results. Informant 1 (G1) argues that the non-expulsion policy has actually led to an increase in the number of students who commit serious offences. The absence of strict punishment makes students not feel deterred and consider their mistakes as something that can continue to be forgiven, thus having a negative impact on their morality (Dilla et al., 2023).

G1 : The quantity of children who have made significant mistakes is increasing. Because the child will not feel deterred, what they do is always forgiven, and there is no punishment, so it is as if they are okay to make these mistakes, so the morality of children decreases.

In contrast, informant 2 (G2) saw an improvement in the quality of student behaviour thanks to the strict supervision of parents and teachers.

G2 : Alhamdulillah, the quality of the children has improved because they are closely monitored by parents and teachers.

Meanwhile, informant 4 (G2) considered that this policy does not directly affect students' behaviour because their behaviour is more influenced by various external factors such as the environment. The environment plays an important role in influencing children's development, especially in terms of external factors. These external factors include two types, namely, the social environment and the non-social environment. The social environment includes interactions that occur within the family, school with teachers, and the surrounding community. Meanwhile, the non-social environment consists of various facilities and infrastructure available to support child development (Nurfirdaus & Sutisna, 2021). He emphasized the importance of the role of the tri-centre of family, school, and community education in instilling student morals.

G4 : The policy has no effect on student behaviour because student behaviour is influenced by many factors, such as the environment. Therefore, the role of the tri-center of education in instilling morals in students is vital.

Informant 5 (G5) considered that the impact of this policy is moderate, depending on the character of individual students. Kohlberg's theory of moral development shows how individuals, including students, make moral decisions in line with their cognitive and social development (Hasanah, 2019). Informant 5 (G5) noted that some students may comply because they feel pressured, while others tend to underestimate the rules.

G5 : For the quantity, it is in the middle, like in my school, because the scope is high school, so students already have their own thoughts on what to do and leave that if they are pressured, some are afraid and then obey the rules, some even underestimate so it can be said that it depends on the student.

Regarding changes in students' attitudes and morals after the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, informants provided a variety of views. Informant 1 (G1) highlighted the negative impact of the policy, saying that students became less responsible and their morality decreased. Informant 2 (G2) considers that students are increasingly disrespectful to teachers because there is no punishment given.

- G1 : What I observed is that after the independent curriculum was implemented, many children were irresponsible. Because children who are less capable must go up, children who are not diligent must go up, and children who are naughty must go up without big sanctions. So they seem to be comfortable and less responsible. Moreover, their morals are that what they do is always justified and forgiven. So they feel okay and will not be punished and sanctioned either morally or knowledge of values will not be done. The existence of this independent curriculum does not make children morally better.
- G2 : Since the implementation of the independent curriculum, students have changed their morals. There has been a decline because children are not deterred by their teachers because teachers are not allowed to punish students, so students are free to do whatever they want.

On the other hand, informant 4 (G4) views that students' low morale is not solely caused by the Merdeka Curriculum but also by environmental factors. He highlighted the role of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) in improving students' attitudes and morals.

- G4 : Even though students' attitudes and morals are currently low, it does not mean that this is due to the implementation of the independent curriculum. Instead, the environment around students. In the independent curriculum, the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project is used (P5). Through this project, students' attitudes and behaviours become better because this project strengthens the attitudes and behaviours that students already have so that attitudes and behaviours become even better.

Based on the data above, the implementation of the non-expulsion policy raises different views among educators. Most informants believe that this policy weakens teachers' authority and reduces the deterrent effect on students who commit violations. Furthermore, informants 1 (G1), 2 (G2), and 5 (G5) agreed that the policy should be discontinued, the reason being that students have a sense of deterrence towards the offences they commit. Informant 1 (G1), as an educator, considered that the negative impact of this policy needs to be reviewed and emphasized that unruly students should be given sanctions, such as not being promoted or suspended. Informant 2 (G2) stated firmly that this policy should not be continued so that children can feel the consequences of their actions. Meanwhile, informant 5 (G5) expressed his disagreement with the policy, arguing that students who have committed serious offences and have been given a letter of resignation should receive a punishment that can deter them so as not to undermine existing policies.

- G1 : As an educator, I agree that the policy should be removed. Moreover, the negative impact must be reviewed. Things that are uncertain are fixed things that are certain can be continued. Things like naughty children should be sanctioned and expelled. Not going to class or being given a suspension.
- G2 : It should not be continued so that the child also has a sense of deterrence.
- G5 : I do not really agree, because in my opinion if there are students who have been given a letter of resignation, it means that it can be said to be a serious offense so there must be a deterrent punishment if given the opportunity, I am afraid that it will have a bad impact such as underestimating and not appreciating the policies that the school issues.

In contrast, informant 3 (G3) argued that this policy should be continued because without it, other negative impacts, such as the possibility of children dropping out of school, could occur. Agreeing with informant 3 (G3), informant 4 (G4) gave a more positive view, supporting the continuation of this policy as it reflects a new paradigm in education that prioritizes character building. He believes this policy creates a conducive environment for students to learn from their mistakes, thus becoming responsible and productive individuals.

G3 : This policy needs to be continued because if it is not continued, there will be a negative impact, namely, children will drop out of school.

G4 : I hope it will continue because this policy reflects a new paradigm in education that places fostering student character as a top priority. By giving second chances, schools create a conducive environment for students to learn from their mistakes so that they can grow into responsible and productive individuals. This approach can also strengthen the relationship between schools and students and promote a positive school climate.

It refers to Restorative Practices in education, which focus on restoring relationships and improving student behaviour rather than exclusive punishment such as expulsion. On the one hand, this brings positive value to student behaviour. As behaviourism theory says, student behaviour can be modified through positive reinforcement. As expressed by Skinner (1938), behaviour can be changed through reinforcement (positive or negative). Without clear consequences for bad behaviour, students tend to repeat offences because there is no deterrent effect. This policy is in line with the approach of not punishing students severely but providing opportunities for change through support.

## **5. Conclusion**

From the above, the non-expulsion policy was implemented to reduce dropout rates and support students in facing academic and social challenges. However, this policy raises concerns about its impact on student morality. Some consider this policy ineffective because it does not provide a deterrent effect against negative behaviours that can occur, such as academic cheating, indiscipline, or lack of responsibility. On the other hand, some parties view this policy as in line with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which prioritizes flexibility and provides space for students to develop according to their individual conditions and needs.

This Research suggests evaluating and adjusting the implementation of the policy so that it can support student morality without neglecting the main objectives of the policy, which focus on reducing dropout rates and creating relevant and quality education within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. This evaluation is important to ensure that this policy can create a balance between providing opportunities to students and enforcing their discipline and responsibility in the education process. One of the steps that can be taken is to strengthen the mechanism of building students' character and morals through a more structured and development-based approach. In this way, the non-expulsion policy can be more optimal in achieving more holistic and sustainable educational goals.

For further implementation, this study recommends the development of a school community-based program involving teachers, students and parents to design a more comprehensive character-building strategy. In addition, a longitudinal study is needed to monitor the effectiveness of this policy in the long term by measuring its impact on various indicators of

student morality and discipline. For policy implementers, it is important to develop operational guidelines that include coaching procedures, indicators of success, and ongoing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. With these steps, the non-expulsion policy is expected to be implemented more optimally and create an educational ecosystem that supports the overall development of students.

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