

Strengthening Student Resilience: Student-Centered Learning Model in Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Islamic School

Noptario*

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

22204081026@student.uin-suka.ac.id

M. Ferry Irawan

UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, Indonesia

22204082018@student.uin-suka.ac.id

Abd Razak Zakaria

Universtiy of Malaya, Malaysia

abdrzak@um.edu.my

Abstract

Mental health issue among Indonesian students is prevalent. *The Indonesian National Adolescent Mental Health Survey* reports that over one-third of Indonesian adolescents are grappling with mental health concerns, leading to higher stress levels and negative effect on the academic quality. To address this issue, it is necessary to introduce the concept of resilience to students as a preventive measure against more severe issues. Student-centered learning (SCL) emerges as a viable approach to instilling resilience. Therefore, this research focused on the internalization of resilience through the SCL model in Merdeka curriculum. This qualitative field research involved deputy head of curriculum, the homeroom teacher and students of class 6B. Data were gathered through interviews and observations, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings suggest that the SCL model encourages active and enthusiastic student participation. Teachers employ various strategies, such as project-based learning, problem-based learning, technology integration, differentiated learning, and fostering a positive environment, to instill resilience in students. These initiatives empower

students to cultivate resilience, equipping them with the essential skills to navigate life successfully in the future. This study concludes that SCL model in Merdeka curriculum can instill resilience in students, thus making students strong and resilient in receiving learning.

Keywords: resilience; student centered; independent curriculum; islamic elementary school

INTRODUCTION

The issue of mental health is becoming increasingly common among students (Gao, Ping, & Liu, 2020; Rosvall, 2020), especially teenagers. The prevalence of mental health issues among students, has been on the rise in recent years, with studies showing a significant increase in stress, anxiety, and depression levels among this demographic (Zhou et al., 2020). *The Indonesian National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (INAMHS) reveals that more than a third of Indonesian teenagers (34.9%) aged 10-17 years old exhibit a mental health issue in the past 12 months* (Wahdi et al., 2023). One of the most prevalent issues faced by teenagers is anxiety (26.7%), which can trigger stress (Hirsch et al., 2018) in adolescents or students.

The learning quality of students can be adversely affected by a multitude of negative consequences stemming from stress (Ayaz-Alkaya, Yaman-Sözber, & Bayrak-Kahraman, 2018; ten Hoeve, Castelein, Jansen, & Roodbol, 2017). In addition to adversely affecting overall health and well-being, stress can also have a negative impact on academic performance (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2020). When students experience the challenges of academic life, it is essential for them to possess the capacity to recover

and maintain their enthusiasm for learning (Noptario, Latifah, Fitria, & Zulfa, 2023). This quality is known as resilience.

Resilience is characterized by the capacity to respond adaptively when confronted with challenges (Simons, Beaumont, & Holland, 2018). Students' resilience refers to their ability to face and overcome challenges, stress, and problems in both academic and personal aspects of life (Fullerton, Zhang, & Kleitman, 2021). Instilling resilience in students can help create a resilient generation, capable of facing challenges, and ready to achieve success in the future (Anastasou & Kyriakides, 2024).

According to Benard (2004), enhancing resilience is crucial as it provides individuals with valuable experiences in facing challenges and difficulties in their lives. Resilience is highly important for the success of students in both school and life (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). Students need to enhance resilience within themselves because resilience is regarded as a crucial skill for graduates to face the challenges of the 21st century (Sanderson & Brewer, 2017; Tomlinson, 2017).

Indonesia has currently implemented a new curriculum called the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. The primary foundation of designing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is the philosophy of independent learning (Prihatini & Sugiarti, 2022). Independent learning in Merdeka Belajar curriculum aims to foster students' character in being independent in both classroom settings and when engaging with the community. One of the programs within the Merdeka Belajar curriculum is student centered learning (Otto et al., 2024).

Student centered learning, or SCL, is a learning strategy that positions students as independent and active individuals, fully responsible for the learning they engage in (Rashiva, Subargo, & Baharuddin, 2022). In the implementation of SCL, teachers play the role of facilitators to assist students in acquiring 21st-century skills (Önür & Kozikoğlu, 2020; Stehle & Peters-Burton, 2019). SCL encourages learners to develop their competencies through self-directed, cooperative, active, collaborative, and contextual learning processes (Rashiva et al., 2022).

Research related to the importance of resilience has been extensively conducted (Blanc et al., 2021; Fernández-Prados, Lozano-Díaz, & Muyor-Rodríguez, 2021; Masten, 2021; Verdolini et al., 2021; Vinkers et al., 2020), However, there is still very little research discussing resilience-building strategies. In a study conducted by Zhuang-Shuang Li, it was stated that resilience has an impact on the levels of stress and issues related to mental and emotional well-being. Hence, it is suggested to formulate educational approaches aimed at strengthening students' resilience (Li & Hasson, 2020). In another study conducted by Bambang Sutrisno, it was discovered that implementing problem based learning approaches in social studies education, particularly with an emphasis on the topic of social deviance, has the potential to augment the resilience of students. A significant improvement in student resilience was observed after the research was conducted (Sutrisno, 2016).

From the above research, it can be concluded that to enhance resilience in students, suitable learning strategies are required. Empowering

student resilience is believed to be achievable through student centered learning, as this approach positions students at the forefront of the educational journey. By doing so, it facilitates the cultivation of creative and innovative thinking, fostering a sense of responsibility for their individual learning process.

The objective of this study is to comprehend the initiatives employed in fostering the resilience concept among students using student centered learning. In this regard, the researcher delves deeper into the strategies used in the implementation of student centered learning to enhance students' resilience. In line with this, the study is expected to contribute to the field of education by emphasizing the importance of instilling resilience in students as an asset for them to become strong individuals in facing the challenges of the 21st century.

METHODS

This qualitative research applied a field research method (van de Ven & Poole, 2017). Qualitative approach was selected to thoroughly explore the internalization of resilience in students utilizing the student centered learning model within an independent curriculum. The data collection methods employed in this research encompassed interviews and observations (Coast, 2017). The subjects of this study were the deputy head of curriculum, the homeroom teacher of class 6B and the students of class 6B. Interviews were conducted with two speakers, namely curriculum vice principal and classroom teachers. The curriculum vice principal was chosen

to provide a managerial perspective, while classroom teachers offer direct insights into the implementation of resilience concepts through the student-centered learning model in the Merdeka curriculum at the Islamic elementary school. Structured in-depth interviews were conducted using instruments that had been prepared in advance. Classroom observations were done to see the implications of student centered learning model and to assess students' level of understanding and application of the resilience concept in their daily lives.

Thematic data analysis was employed based on thematic data analysis theory. It began by comprehending the data, followed by coding and identifying themes and subheadings for visualization in the results and discussion sections (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Data were validated through a rigorous process, including member checking and triangulation. Member checking involved revisiting the findings with participants to validate the accuracy of the interpretations, while triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying information from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, and document analysis. This research was conducted in one of the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah in the city of Yogyakarta during the even semester of the 2023/2024 academic year. It was selected as the research location was based on its perceived capability to address research problems and represent the desired data for the study

DISCUSSION

The Merdeka curriculum is flexible in nature, meaning that each education unit has the right to develop a curriculum according to the conditions and characteristics of its school. Curriculum development also considers the characteristics of students, so that teachers can develop students' abilities according to their interests and desires (Noptario et al., 2024). One of the suitable educational approaches to be implemented in a self-directed curriculum is the student centered learning model. This approach is designed to encourage students to actively engage and show enthusiasm in their learning experiences, aiming to yield optimal educational results (Sam et al., 2023). Furthermore, there are anticipated outcomes for incorporating the concept of resilience in students through student centered learning. This concept aims to cultivate higher level of resilience in students, fostering a mindset that resists surrender and instills an enduring enthusiasm to pursue their goal (Harrison et al., 2024). The initiatives undertaken to instill resilience in students using the student centered learning model within the self-directed curriculum include:

Problem Based Learning

One of the differences between Merdeka curriculum and its predecessors lies in the incorporation of project-based learning. Although the 2013 curriculum allows project-based learning, it does not explicitly emphasize or mention this instructional approach (Latifah et al., 2023). In contrast to Merdeka curriculum, which makes the Pancasila student profile strengthening program one of the flagship programs that implement project-

based learning (Novitasary, 2023). Mrs. R1, the deputy head of curriculum, explained that one of the student-centered learnings carried out is the Pancasila student profile strengthening project, the program can be called P5. In the P5 learning process, teachers and the deputy head of curriculum identify student needs to determine the theme taken in P5 learning. After the theme is chosen, the teacher prepares a learning module that will be used in 1 semester of learning, for example with the theme of entrepreneurship, after students understand how to manage snacks, then the final output of the school will hold a market day as an effort to foster the entrepreneurial spirit in students.

The answer from Mrs. R1 is in line with the results of research conducted by (Cai, Zhu, Yu, & Tian, 2023) who researched teacher ethics and project based learning, finding that teachers preferred project based learning because it stimulates students to actively follow the learning process. Student centered learning can have implications for student's complete understanding, so it is expected to be a long term memory for students. Project based learning can also be done in other subjects, which are contextualized with Merdeka curriculum, such as what was done by Mrs. R2 as a classroom teacher, who once provided project based learning with simple science materials, such as learning about dissolving, air pressure, making lamps and others. Furthermore, during the previous semester in R2's class, the focus was on sustainable living in P5 learning. The main project involved recycling waste through project based learning. The objective was to enhance students' understanding of environmental

conservation and the transformative potential of waste management. This approach aims to underscore the significance of safeguarding the environment and repurposing waste into a positive asset.

Project based learning is expected that it can increase perseverance, ability, knowledge and train students in overcoming difficulties (Marnewick, 2023). _ Challenges faced when working on assignments may increase students' problem-solving skills.

Problem Based Learning

In Merdeka curriculum, each school is given the freedom to develop the curriculum based on students' characteristics and needs. In this regard, teachers, as facilitators of student learning, must be able to provide an optimal learning model to achieve desired learning objectives. Problem based learning can be done to improve students' resilience, preventing them from being easily giving up when facing difficulties. According to Mrs. R2, problem based learning is often used in her class, because by providing a problem in learning, it is expected to foster students' curiosity and will have implications for increasing students' enthusiasm for learning to find out the solutions to the problems presented (Yang, Li, Su, & Ding, 2023).

For example, in P5 learning on the theme of sustainable lifestyle, students are given problems on how to manage waste in the school environment, so that waste that is considered disturbing can be something of positive value. The problems taken in the problem based learning process should be problems that are often encountered by students in everyday life, so that students can apply their learning results in everyday life. Like the

waste problem presented by Mrs. R2 in P5 learning that is often encountered by students at home, it will stimulate students to be excited and more enthusiastic in following the learning process. In addition, the implication of project based learning lies in students' complete understanding and holistic nature, because students directly look for solutions to solve the problems presented.

Problem based learning is a suitable model for instilling the concept of resilience in students, in accordance with the explanation of Mrs. R1 as the vice principal of curriculum that problem based learning can make students persistent in solving problems. Such persistence helps them to have an unyielding spirit and always present solutions to every existing problem. In addition, with learning that is carried out variatively by presenting problems in learning, it will foster student enthusiasm in learning so that the learning process carried out is not monotonous and boring (Son, 2023).

Technology Integration in learning

In today's era of digitalization, it is very important to foster students' interest in technological literacy. Technology literacy is expected to lead students to use technology wisely so that they not only use technology for fun, but can be used as credible and diverse learning resources (Mishra et al., 2024). According to Mrs. R2, almost all students in her class have mobile phones, yet most of them uses mobile phones only to access social media. This condition implies the needs to integrate technology into students' learning process.

In R2's class, Kahoot was used to evaluate the learning process. It is relatively new for students and makes pleasant learning impression, in addition to improve their enthusiasm in participating in the learning process learning. The opinion of Mrs. R2 is in line with research conducted by (Ali & Abdalgane, 2022) which examines the impact of digital learning using the Kahoot application. Their study found that integrating Kahoot application into the learning process may foster students' learning enthusiasm and motivation, indicating positive implications for students.

The use of technology in learning will also instill resilience in students, as explained by Mrs. R2. She said that when using technology in kahoot application-based learning, students can adjust to new things, where previously students only did tests using conventional media such as student worksheets (LKPD). The presence of technology into education demands students to adjust to follow the development of the times (Portugal et al., 2023). Such a learning model may affect students' perseverance, which in turn could develop their resilience.

Differentiated learning

Differentiated learning is a re-presentation of the Merdeka curriculum designed to provide subject matter that suits students' interest and needs (Atikah et al., 2024). It is carried out to identify students' needs, speed of student understanding and student desires, so that teachers can choose the best media, methods and learning models, so that learning can be maximal (De Jager & Dondolo, 2023). Differentiated learning in Merdeka curriculum should be considered as one of the efforts to develop

a student-focused curriculum that pay attention to student interest and needs.

As explained by Mrs. R2, that differentiated learning is carried out in her class in an effort to get to know students more deeply so that they can provide the right touch in the student learning process. This is done because the speed of understanding and student desires certainly vary, so that teachers should be able to recognize the needs and desires of students, so that the dose of learning given can be precise and accurate. Differentiated instruction is addressed through an initial assessment aimed at gauging the depth of students' comprehension. Following the acquisition of data regarding students' understanding levels, the subsequent approach involves the teacher grouping students strategically to employ tailored strategies, fostering heightened enthusiasm for learning. Mrs. R2 exemplifies this approach by pairing students who may struggle with those who grasp concepts more easily, fostering a positive influence from the latter on those with a slower absorption rate in understanding the learning material.

Differentiated learning is one of the programs that can be applied by teachers as an effort to instill resilience in students. This is in accordance with the guest of research conducted by (Fontenelle-Tereshchuk, 2023; Sitompul et al., 2022) who found that the teaching and learning process carried out by looking at the potential of students will provide the best learning to students, because teachers can identify students' weaknesses and strengths. Using differentiated learning will have implications for student learning motivation which increases due to the learning carried out by

teachers in the classroom in accordance with what is needed and what students want.

Creating a positive environment

Professional teachers not only provide material to students, but the teacher's task is more than that, teachers should be able to know students more deeply and know the psychological condition of students to identify supporting factors and focal points inhibiting students in following learning (Liao, Li, Dong, & Wang, 2023). The teacher's role is to create a positive environment for student learning, so that students can be safe and comfortable in following learning. In addition to the school environment, teachers can also supervise the environment of students outside the school by collaborating with parents, so that teachers and parents can monitor the activities carried out by students so that they are always under proper supervision. Therefore, it is important for teachers to maintain communication with parents in an effort to provide maximum learning for students.

By creating a positive environment for students, it will have implications for improving students' emotional well-being and developing students' interpersonal skills. Improving students' wellbeing can help them achieve positive mind and keep students from stress and depreciation, because a positive environment will always encourage students to always be enthusiastic in studying. In addition, the development of students' interpersonal skills will grow students' interpersonal abilities such as the

ability to collaborate, communicate, cooperation, empathy and so on, so that students will have resilience in themselves (Salim et al., 2024).

This research can be useful for teachers and elementary schools in an effort to improve students' mental health by enhancing students' resilience when facing existing problems. Implementing the concept of resilience may positively affect learning environment, which affects student success in pursuing their dreams (Gardner & Stephens-Piscecco, 2019). In other word, this research has an important impact in efforts to form the personality of students who are always enthusiastic in learning and studying.

CONCLUSION

Instilling the concept of resilience in students can be done by using the student-centered learning model in Merdeka curriculum. Student-oriented learning may stimulate students' active participation and enthusiasm in the learning process, which is expected to have a positive impact on students. Instilling resilience is very important to strive for in child development, especially in the learning process, because with the concept of resilience in students will make students become resilient individuals, do not give up easily, are always optimistic and can adapt to new things. In the student-centered learning model, teacher can apply the concept of resilience in students through several strategies, such as conducting project based learning, problem based learning, integrating technology in learning, differentiated learning and creating a positive environment for students. With these strategies, students can have

resilience in themselves, so that they can be a provision for students in living life later. This research is only limited to the internalization of resilience among students. Therefore, future students researchers examine the concept of cultivating resilience among teachers, because teachers play an important role in the world of education, while the burden that teachers have is also not small, so it is also important for teachers to have a resilient attitude in carrying out their duties. Therefore, it can be concluded that the student-centered learning model in Merdeka curriculum can instill resilience in students, thus making students strong and resilient in receiving learning.

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