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Integrating Global Issues into Kurikulum Merdeka Development in Teacher Education: A Case Study of UPI Bandung

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This article contributes to:

Abstract. Integrating global issues into teacher education curricula is essential for preparing future educators with global competence—the ability to understand global challenges, respect diverse perspectives, and act toward sustainable development. This study investigates the strategic integration of global issues into the development of the Kurikulum Merdeka at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) Bandung. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with faculty members, program heads, and curriculum developers, supported by document analysis and participatory observation. The findings show that UPI has taken progressive steps in integrating global themes—such as sustainability, social justice, global literacy, and digital citizenship—into courses, student projects, and academic collaborations. Initiatives like Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and SDG-based community service programs highlight UPI's commitment to global education. However, implementation remains uneven across departments, with challenges such as limited faculty training, insufficient digital infrastructure, and a lack of shared understanding regarding the importance of global competencies. The study concludes that a systemic and institutionalized approach is required to embed global literacy as a core element of teacher education. Strengthening faculty capacity, curriculum flexibility, and international collaboration will be key to ensuring that future teachers are not only locally grounded but also globally responsive.

Keywords: Global Competence, Curriculum Integration, *Kurikulum Merdeka*, Teacher Education, Internationalization.

1. Introduction

The integration of global issues in education has become increasingly urgent in the context of rapid globalization, digital transformation, and transnational challenges such as climate change, inequality, and cultural polarization [1]. In teacher education institutions (LPTKs), particularly in Indonesia, preparing prospective teachers who are globally competent is essential for cultivating future citizens who are empathetic, critical, and action-oriented [2]. According to the OECD, global competence is defined as "the capacity to examine local, global and intercultural issues, to understand and appreciate the perspectives and world views of others, to engage in open, appropriate and effective interactions with people from different cultures, and to act for collective well-being and sustainable development."

Global competence is not an auxiliary skill but a foundational disposition in the 21st-century teacher's profile [3]. As Rizvi and Lingard emphasize, globalization reshapes not only economic and political spheres but also educational landscapes, necessitating a curriculum that transcends national boundaries and encourages cosmopolitan thinking [4]. Therefore, teacher education must promote the understanding of global interdependence and the skills to address complex global issues through an interdisciplinary, participatory, and contextualized curriculum [5]. The Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education

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provides an opportunity for such integration. Its flexibility, emphasis on student autonomy, and contextualized learning align well with the aims of global education [6]. Through this curriculum, future educators can be trained not only to deliver content knowledge but also to become facilitators of transformative learning who guide students to critically engage with global realities [7].

Transformative learning theory, proposed by Mezirow, underpins this pedagogical shift by asserting that education should lead to critical reflection and transformation of perspectives [8]. Teachers trained under this paradigm are expected to go beyond knowledge transmission to empowering learners as agents of social and global change [9]. As Bourn notes, global learning is about "understanding the interconnectedness of global systems and one's role within them," which requires an educational experience that is critical, ethical, and action-oriented [10].

In this context, LPTKs such as Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) Bandung are tasked not only with curricular reform but also institutional transformation. They must become ecosystems of global literacy that promote interdisciplinary collaboration, digital fluency, intercultural dialogue, and ethical responsibility [11]. This includes integrating Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into course content, utilizing digital platforms such as MOOCs for global exposure, and engaging in international partnerships [12].

However, implementing these goals is not without challenges. Institutional resistance, uneven faculty capacity, and limited digital infrastructure remain significant hurdles in LPTKs across Indonesia [13]. Moreover, there is a need for consistent policy support, assessment reforms, and inclusive practices that align with global standards while respecting local contexts [14]. In addition, global competence is deeply intertwined with the development of soft skills and cross-cultural communication [15]. Teachers who possess global awareness are more likely to cultivate inclusive classrooms, support diverse learners, and encourage collaborative problem-solving based on empathy and justice. These skills are particularly critical in multicultural societies like Indonesia, where social cohesion and intercultural understanding must be nurtured through education [16].

Scholars have also emphasized that global education should not be viewed merely as international content insertion, but rather as a transformation of the entire pedagogical approach [17]. This includes creating classroom environments that encourage inquiry, open dialogue, and critical engagement with real-world issues. Pedagogical models such as problem-based learning, service learning, and collaborative projects with international peers have proven effective in promoting global awareness and civic responsibility [18]. Furthermore, educational institutions must align their vision and mission with global citizenship values, embedding them into leadership, faculty development, and community engagement strategies [19]. Teacher preparation programs should include mandatory modules on global education, intercultural ethics, and sustainability literacy [20]. These elements are essential for producing teachers who are not only professionally competent but also socially and globally conscious.

The role of technology cannot be underestimated in facilitating global competence. With the increasing availability of online collaborative tools, virtual exchanges, and open educational resources, LPTKs have access to platforms that can bridge geographical and cultural gaps [21]. Institutions like UPI Bandung can leverage digital technology to offer students real-time interactions with peers around the world, thus expanding their global horizons while fostering intercultural sensitivity [22]. Therefore, integrating global issues in teacher education through the Merdeka Curriculum requires a systemic, multilayered strategy. It involves not only redesigning curriculum and teaching methodologies but also

investing in professional development, fostering institutional culture change, and building sustainable global partnerships. Only through such comprehensive reforms can LPTKs fulfill their role in preparing teachers who are locally grounded yet globally responsive.

To guide this inquiry, the following research questions are addressed: (1) What strategies are used to integrate global issues into the development of the Merdeka Curriculum in LPTKs? (2) How are these strategies implemented within study programs at UPI Bandung? (3) What are the main challenges faced in integrating global issues across teacher education institutions? In conclusion, the development of globally competent teachers through the integration of global issues in the Merdeka Curriculum is a strategic imperative for Indonesia's future education system. UPI Bandung, as a leading LPTK, stands at the forefront of this transformation and must continue to innovate, collaborate, and lead the way toward education that is inclusive, critical, and globally relevant.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore the strategies for integrating global issues into the development of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* within teacher education institutions (LPTKs). The case of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) Bandung was purposively selected due to its national prominence, implementation of global education programs, and active adoption of international frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [23]. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and participatory observation. Key informants included curriculum lecturers, program heads, faculty academic leaders, and curriculum development teams. Supporting documents such as course syllabi, curriculum handbooks, and institutional meeting notes were analyzed to identify how global issues were embedded in teaching materials and graduate outcomes. Observations were conducted during project-based learning activities and curriculum internationalization workshops. Data collection was carried out over two months using methodological triangulation to enhance credibility [24]. Thematic data analysis followed Miles and Huberman’s interactive model, involving data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing with verification through member checking and peer debriefing [25].

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Strategic Integration of Global Issues in the Merdeka Curriculum at UPI Bandung

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) Bandung, as a leading teacher education institution (LPTK), has adopted a multifaceted strategy to integrate global issues into the Merdeka Curriculum. This integration is not only conceptual but is also evidenced in curriculum documents and classroom practices. The approaches can be categorized into four major strategies: embedded curriculum content, project-based learning, international collaboration, and literacy-focused global competence courses.

3.1.1 Embedding Global Themes in Pedagogical and Subject-Specific Courses

UPI embeds global issues into existing pedagogical and subject-specific courses such as "Curriculum Development," "Multicultural Education," and "Comparative Education." Course syllabi (RPS) contain topics such as climate change, digital transformation, educational inequality, and global migration. In these courses, students are expected to develop lesson plans responsive to real-world global challenges. Classroom observations confirm that instructors use multimedia resources (e.g., global

conflict videos) and facilitate critical discussions to enhance student awareness and reflection.

3.1.2 Project-Based Learning Focused on Global Themes

Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is used to encourage students to create authentic educational solutions to global challenges. Students conduct field research, design digital learning media, and assess global competencies within educational contexts. In the "Media and Educational Technology" course, for example, students developed interactive climate education tools for elementary students. This strategy develops students' collaboration, digital, and critical thinking skills, making learning relevant to global realities.

3.1.3 International Collaboration through COIL and Virtual Exchange

UPI implements Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) with institutions in Japan, Australia, and the Netherlands. Courses co-taught with international partners—such as "Digital Pedagogy and Global Citizenship"—allow students to engage in joint tasks and cross-cultural dialogue. These initiatives are formalized in syllabi and course modules, strengthening UPI's commitment to curriculum internationalization and global learning outcomes.

3.1.4 Development of Global Literacy through Specialized Courses

Global competence is also fostered through dedicated courses like "Global Citizenship Education," "Global Digital Literacy," and "Ecopedagogy." These subjects help students examine the relationship between sustainability, ethics, and education. Tasks include local environmental observations, global policy analysis, and digital climate awareness campaigns shared via social media. This demonstrates how global issues can be transformed into student-led activism and meaningful public discourse.

3.2 Implementation Across Study Programs

3.2.1 Elementary Teacher Education (PGSD)

In PGSD, global issues are integrated into courses on Environmental Education and Curriculum Design. Students create learning modules on recycling, water conservation, and climate change, followed by local school campaigns. This contextualizes global challenges within national educational goals.

3.2.2 English Language Education

Global perspectives are embedded in courses such as "Global Issues in ELT" and "Intercultural Communication." Students analyze global human rights topics and design narrative-based materials. In COIL sessions, they explore how language frames global discourse, promoting intercultural awareness.

3.2.3 Sociology Education

Courses like "Global Sociology" and "Gender and Society" engage students in analyzing poverty, digital inequality, and political conflict. Students produce policy briefs grounded in global ethics, linking sociology with real-world advocacy.

3.2.4 Educational Technology

Students create multimedia educational content related to the SDGs, such as gender equality and clean energy. Observations show that themes like "Digital Education for Street Children" reflect students' creativity and concern for marginalized communities.

3.2.5 Curriculum and Instruction

Students analyze international curriculum models (e.g., Finland, South Korea) and design global issue-based syllabi. In "International Curriculum Evaluation," they compare justice- and ecology-based frameworks, fostering adaptive curriculum design.

3.2.6 Geography Education

Using GIS, students map climate risk and simulate international environmental diplomacy. They explore how global treaties like the Paris Agreement intersect with Indonesian disaster mitigation policies.

3.2.7 Social Science Education

Students link global conflicts with local food security in tasks like interactive infographics. Discussions on geopolitical crises (e.g., Ukraine-Russia) deepen their understanding of global-local interdependence.

3.2.8 Civic Education (PPKn)

PPKn students engage in UN-style simulations and global human rights debates. Assignments require reflective writing on refugee rights and digital freedom, reinforcing critical citizenship.

3.2.9 Indonesian Language and Literature Education

Students analyze global literary texts and produce SDG-themed creative writing. Activities include poetry and short stories on migration, environmental justice, and cultural identity.

3.2.10 Mathematics Education

Global datasets (e.g., UNDP, WHO) are used to develop contextual mathematical problems. Students conduct regression and modeling on poverty and educational inequality.

3.2.11 Cross-Program and Community-Based Initiatives

Programs such as KKN (community service) focus on SDGs through environmental education and digital literacy. Fieldwork projects address learning loss, digital divide, and vulnerable groups, positioning students as agents of global-local change.

3.3 Challenges in Implementation

Despite progress, several challenges persist. First, there is a lack of faculty training in global education themes, resulting in limited curriculum innovation. Second, uneven understanding among departments—especially between social science and STEM programs—leads to inconsistent implementation. Third, inadequate digital infrastructure hinders virtual international programs and off-campus SDG projects. Fourth, many students lack foreign language proficiency and global literacy, reducing participation in global dialogues. Fifth, institutional incentives for globally oriented teaching remain limited. Faculty often prioritize administrative duties or research over global content development. Sixth, partnerships with foreign universities are often short-term and disconnected from curriculum design. Lastly, rigid national curriculum regulations restrict interdisciplinary innovation. To overcome these barriers, UPI must strengthen academic autonomy and advocate for more flexible national policies.

4. Conclusion

The integration of global issues into the Merdeka Curriculum at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) Bandung reflects a progressive and multidimensional effort through curricular, pedagogical, and collaborative strategies. These include incorporating

themes like environmental sustainability, social justice, digital literacy, and global awareness into various study programs. Programs such as English Education, Social Science Education, and Educational Technology have taken the lead in creating project-based and cross-cultural learning. Concrete practices such as COIL and SDGs-based community service projects demonstrate meaningful contextualization. However, disparities in implementation persist, mainly due to faculty readiness, technological limitations, and inconsistent global literacy competencies among students. A systemic, capacity-building approach and institutional support are necessary to ensure UPI graduates are not only locally competent but globally adaptive.

Based on these findings, LPTKs, especially UPI Bandung, are encouraged to initiate intensive and continuous faculty training on global issues such as climate change, digital citizenship, social justice, and sustainable development. These training programs should involve international collaboration to strengthen both pedagogical and substantive global competence. Furthermore, expanding international partnerships through faculty and student exchanges, collaborative global classrooms, and joint research will help foster intercultural understanding. Establishing a dedicated global integration unit under the LPTK framework can support the design, execution, and monitoring of global issue-based curriculum reforms. Such a unit can serve as an innovation hub linking faculties, international institutions, and national policymakers, ensuring that teacher education remains transformative and globally relevant.

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6. Declaration

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