

Integrating Heideggerian Ontology into Educational Management: A Framework for Implementing Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka

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**Abstract**

The Independent Learning Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) in Indonesia reflects a shift in education toward a holistic understanding of human life and existence, which resonates with the philosophical tenets of Martin Heidegger's ontology. This paper conducts an intellectual and existential analysis of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* to address the persistent theory-practice gap in educational management. Although the curriculum promotes flexibility and student-centered learning, its implementation continues to face several challenges, including disparities in resources, unclear operational guidelines, and the persistent dominance of quantitative evaluation methods. Heideggerian ontology offers a crucial existential dimension by viewing the student as *Dasein*, a being conscious of its presence and meaning in the world, and by understanding education as a process of becoming an authentic human being rather than merely a means of career preparation. By bringing these perspectives together, educational management can move beyond a mechanistic paradigm. Educational administrators can integrate data-based accountability informed by positivism, accommodate contextual plurality associated with postmodernism, and cultivate existential reflection grounded in Heideggerian ontology. The analysis shows that Heidegger's emphasis on authentic understanding, contextual awareness, and experiential learning provides a necessary framework to ensure that the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is implemented as a transformative praxis that liberates individuals and addresses a profound philosophical gap in educational policy.

Keywords: authenticity; *Dasein*; educational management; Heideggerian ontology; *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Abstrak

Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia mencerminkan pergeseran pendidikan menuju pemahaman yang lebih holistik mengenai kehidupan dan eksistensi manusia, yang memiliki kesesuaian dengan prinsip-prinsip filosofis ontologi Martin Heidegger. Artikel ini melakukan analisis intelektual dan eksistensial terhadap Kurikulum Merdeka untuk menjawab kesenjangan teoretis dan praktis yang masih berlangsung dalam manajemen pendidikan. Meskipun kurikulum ini mendorong fleksibilitas dan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada peserta didik, implementasinya masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan, termasuk kesenjangan sumber daya, ketidakjelasan pedoman operasional, serta dominasi metode evaluasi yang bersifat kuantitatif. Ontologi Heidegger menawarkan dimensi eksistensial yang penting dengan memandang peserta didik sebagai Dasein, yaitu keberadaan yang menyadari kehadiran dan makna dirinya di dalam dunia, serta memahami pendidikan sebagai proses menjadi manusia yang autentik, bukan sekadar sarana mempersiapkan karier. Dengan mempertemukan kedua perspektif tersebut, manajemen pendidikan dapat bergerak melampaui paradigma mekanistik. Pengelola pendidikan dapat mengintegrasikan akuntabilitas berbasis data yang dipengaruhi positivisme, mengakomodasi pluralitas kontekstual yang berkaitan dengan postmodernisme, serta mengembangkan refleksi eksistensial yang berlandaskan ontologi Heidegger. Analisis ini menunjukkan bahwa penekanan Heidegger pada pemahaman autentik, kesadaran kontekstual, dan pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman menyediakan kerangka yang diperlukan untuk memastikan bahwa Kurikulum Merdeka diterapkan sebagai praksis transformatif yang membebaskan individu sekaligus menjawab kesenjangan filosofis yang mendalam dalam kebijakan pendidikan.

Kata kunci: autentisitas; *Dasein*; *Kurikulum Merdeka*; manajemen pendidikan; ontologi Heidegger

INTRODUCTION

The impact of social change on the curriculum in Indonesia encompasses various factors and historical events that have influenced the development of the country's educational curriculum. The effects of social change on the educational curriculum in Indonesia can be seen through the post-independence education system reforms. The first curriculum introduced in 1947 was a response to the need to reform the education system inherited from the Dutch, with the primary goal of removing Dutch educational influences and emphasizing character education, national consciousness, and community awareness (Halimah & Dewi, 2023). Furthermore, the strengthening of the state ideology also influences the educational curriculum in Indonesia. Some changes in the curriculum also reflect efforts to strengthen the state ideology, such as the addition of religious subjects in the 1952 curriculum, which reflects the importance of religious education in shaping the moral and spiritual development of learners (Marzuki Badrul Munir, 2023). The third factor is global influence. A global factor that also influences curriculum changes is the COVID-19 pandemic. The Curriculum of Independent Learning implemented post-COVID-19 pandemic in 2022 reflects global socio-political influences, with a focus on literacy, numeracy, and character education. This is based on the low scores on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) from Indonesian students (Sari, 2022). Social and political changes, as well as the need to reform the education system, have influenced various aspects of the curriculum in Indonesia, including language development, character education, strengthening the state ideology, and decentralization of education.

The main factor that needs to be improved in efforts to develop a country is education. When a country has good-quality education, it will also affect the quality of its human resources. Indonesia also participates in improving the quality of education so that its citizens can become superior and high-quality nations, one of which is by creating the concept of a independent learning curriculum as a breakthrough in Indonesian education.

The concept of the free learning curriculum aims to provide freedom to learners to organize and develop their learning methods independently. This concept is initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud Ristek) and is part of the education program in Indonesia.

The free learning curriculum concept encourages all learners to be more active in their learning according to their learning styles. This means that students are not only passively following the government's prepared curriculum, but are also given the freedom to determine their learning methods according to their needs. This concept is expected to improve the quality of education and foster creativity and innovation in the Indonesian education system.

The various advantages of the free learning curriculum concept mentioned above are expected to assist in the overall development of education in Indonesia. In doing so, Indonesia can prepare superior and high-quality human resources to face future global competition.

Although the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) was designed to address the challenges of modern learning and the educational crisis resulting from the pandemic, its implementation within educational management and administration continues to encounter significant obstacles, preventing the realization of its full potential. Studies across various regions indicate that schools demonstrate highly diverse levels of readiness in adopting this curriculum. While some institutions are relatively well-established, supported by adequate resources, teacher competence, and sufficient infrastructure, many others remain constrained, both in terms of facilities and in their fundamental understanding of the philosophy underlying the Independent Curriculum (Bastian et al., 2023).

Furthermore, despite the policy's emphasis on flexibility, many teachers perceive that operational guidelines and implementation standards remain insufficiently clear. Consequently, field-level interpretations often vary considerably. (Hadi et al., 2024) This condition risks reducing the notion of "freedom to learn" to a mere slogan if it is not reinforced through adequate training and consistent administrative support.

Resource disparities also constitute a pressing challenge. Urban schools generally have greater access to technology, teacher training, libraries, and internet connectivity. In contrast, schools located in remote, underdeveloped, and frontier regions (*3T areas*) continue to lack such facilities, making it difficult for them to implement flexible learning practices as mandated by the Independent Curriculum (Rosyida, 2025). This situation is further exacerbated by the persistent dominance of quantitative orientations in educational evaluation. Indicators such as average grades, standardized test scores, and international

rankings remain more influential than qualitative dimensions that emphasize students' learning experiences, motivation, creativity, and sense-making.

Moreover, a gap persists between central policy and school-level practice. Regulations issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud Ristek) are often not fully internalized at the school level. Some teachers still lack a fundamental understanding of the Independent Curriculum, and in certain cases, schools have chosen to postpone implementation due to concerns over administrative burdens, adjustment difficulties, and uncertainties in evaluating outcomes (Rosyida, 2025).

Based on this background, several research gaps emerge that warrant closer examination. First is the theoretical-practical gap, where most existing studies emphasize conceptual or policy aspects, while relatively few connect them with existential theories such as Heidegger's thought to highlight the meaning of the student's and teacher's being as persons within a curriculum of freedom. Second is the gap in multidimensional evaluation, since prior research has tended to be confined to quantitative outcomes without sufficiently integrating qualitative dimensions such as students' learning experiences and teachers' reflections. Third is the implementation gap, particularly concerning the readiness of teachers and schools, which calls for longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of training, leadership, and resource distribution. Fourth is the contextual gap, namely, the need for cross-regional and cross-cultural research to understand how the curriculum's flexibility adapts to diverse settings. Finally, there is the philosophical gap, which reflects the lack of inquiry into how educational administration policies can create space for learning as an existential process touching upon identity, meaning, and human existence.

Based on these identified problems and gaps, several research questions emerge. First, how can the Independent Curriculum within school management reflect the existential meaning of students and teachers, rather than merely focusing on academic achievement? Second, to what extent are schools and teachers across different regions prepared to implement this curriculum, and how can educational administration expand support to ensure more equitable readiness? Third, how can educational management evaluation integrate quantitative and qualitative indicators in a balanced manner, thereby assessing not only what is measurable but also what is felt and experienced? Fourth, how can educational

administration address resource disparities to ensure more equitable and consistent curriculum implementation across diverse locations? Finally, what are the philosophical implications of the Independent Curriculum for the meaning of human existence, and how might these implications serve as a foundation for educational management policies, so that the aims of education extend beyond productivity and competence to the holistic formation of the human person? In this article, we will discuss Heidegger's ontology, the Curriculum of Independent Learning in Indonesia, and educational management and administration.

METHOD

The authors utilizes concept analysis to grasp theories as a means of analyzing data that facilitates intellectual discussions to create meaning. Concept analysis involves scrutinizing a particular concept, which may encompass a spectrum of items from tangible items to theoretical notions. The objective of concept analysis is to elucidate the definition of the concept and investigate its ramifications. The researcher employs analytical techniques like defining terms, logical inference, and deduction, along with referencing arguments from existing literature.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Metaphysics is depicted in current philosophical inquiries, particularly by Positivism

Metaphysics investigates 'the being as being,' and in its inquiry, it goes beyond physics. Its inquiry that goes beyond physics can be traced through the Greek word meta as after or beyond (Wibowo, 2014b), and later the Greek word meta becomes the beginning of debate (Wibowo, 2014). The debate can be traced through Lyotard's assumption about metaphysics. Lyotard argues that metaphysics in philosophy is an attempt to seek fundamental explanations or justifications of reality or existence, and this is done through systematic and logical thinking. However, according to him, metaphysics as such an attempt is unsuccessful and even impossible to achieve. Lyotard considers that the modern world, including in science and technology, has proven the failure of metaphysics and the pursuit of absolute objective truth. According to him, science and technology no longer strive to find objective 'truth,' but rather produce an understanding of reality that is pragmatic and

functional. He rejects the idea that there is one universal view or concept that is true, because the reality we face is always in different contexts. In his famous work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Lyotard, 1979), Lyotard states that metaphysics has been replaced by small narratives or stories that are local and fragmented in nature. These narratives do not have the ambition to claim universal truth, but rather, they become representations of individual and local experiences. Therefore, according to Lyotard, we must reject the idea that there is a 'meta-narrative' or "meta-story" that can bind and provide direction to these small narratives. Lyotard views that in the postmodern era, there is no longer a metaphysics that can be held as a foundation of truth. We must accept the fact that our reality is a complex social construction, and we must build new ways to interact with the world without relying on a metaphysics. Lyotard then regards our era as the post-metaphysical era. This means that the examination of being for our era no longer relies on Metaphysics because 'Metaphysics is outdated or out of date.' (Lyotard, 1979:54-56). Out of date, Metaphysics is no longer a reference because it does not align with the positivist spirit of the times. The characteristics of critical reflection are more suitable for this era. In other words, Metaphysics is another stage of a bygone era's development, preceded by Theology. The present era is the positivist era.

Auguste Comte classified the development of human knowledge into three stages, namely the theological stage, the metaphysical stage, and the positive stage (Michael, 2022). The theological stage is the initial stage in the history of human development, in which humans explain natural phenomena through supernatural concepts and belief in gods. Then, humans move on to the metaphysical stage, where the explanation of natural phenomena is connected to abstract concepts such as substance and causality. In this stage, humans begin to use reason to seek explanations about the universe. However, Comte argued that the metaphysical stage cannot provide valid and objective knowledge about the universe. He rejected metaphysical thinking because metaphysics only produces abstract concepts that cannot be empirically tested and are not related to observations of the real world. According to Comte, the positive stage is the highest in the development of human knowledge. The positive stage is characterized by the use of scientific methods based on empirical observation and hypothesis testing through experiments. In Comte's view, positivism offers a better and

more objective alternative to metaphysics. By using scientific methods, positivism can provide accurate and objective knowledge about the universe and society. Therefore, Comte rejected metaphysics as a form of unproductive and useless knowledge. Through the positivist stage, Comte dismisses Metaphysics. This dismissal in philosophical inquiries, particularly positivism, is likened to metaphysics being a boat that can only be used to cross a small river and is not suitable for crossing the ocean. Therefore, the boat of Metaphysics must be discarded. In other words, when examining the thoughts of Lyotard and Comte, both propose to use Positivism as a suitable vessel to navigate this era.

Referring to Comte's positivism(Wibowo, 2014c), society no longer bases its quest for universal foundations on the theological and metaphysical (divine will or being). This search is based on constant (positive) laws based on phenomena or the relationships of phenomena. In the positive stage, the search is not focused on the search for *phusis* but on phenomena or observations of phenomena. Positivism is no longer interested in metaphysical matters with the project of searching for *phusis* because it is pointless. Searching for relationships in front of the phenomena around us is more important than behind all that exists. Because through the search for certain laws, progress can be relied upon.

Before theological Heidegger, the positivistic critique was directed toward the issue of searching for and understanding Being. Before the post-positivist era, the search was directed towards *phusis*(Heinemann, n.d.), which was later criticized by positivists as an ineffective action. What about Heidegger? Heidegger launched his critique of Philosophy, and this critique is seen as a situation bringing crisis to Philosophy as it has been understood and practiced by philosophers who base their beliefs on logos thought and humans as thinking subjects.

The keyword 'onto-theo-logy' serves as a marker of Heidegger's critique of philosophers. For Heidegger (Halteman, 1998) Ontotheology is a critical term used to describe an allegedly problematic approach to metaphysical theory, which he claims is a characteristic of Western philosophy in general. Through his onto-theological critique, Heidegger surpasses metaphysics (Wibowo, 2014a: 30; Hardiman, 2016a). The point that we can use as a sign of transgression is 1) "the history of Western thought is a history of metaphysics"(Wibowo, 2018). It means that the philosophical framework of Western

Philosophy is Metaphysics, or Western Philosophy operates within the framework of Metaphysics. In this framework, Western Philosophy is "addicted," in Setyo's terms, obsessed with seeking and accessing *Being*. This attitude towards *Being* later becomes the basis of Heidegger's critique. Heidegger's influential critique of the metaphysical approach he elucidated- which animates contemporary discussions of ontotheology, especially in the history of philosophy and philosophy of religion. (Halteman, 1998). The issue of *Being*. The philosophical project of Western Philosophy (from Plato to Nietzsche) is the search for the ultimate cause of *Being*. Perspectives on *Being* become the basis of Heidegger's questions and critique. The ultimate or ultimate *Being* becomes the focus of the search because it is the most noble and divine, and it is wrapped in reasoned thought or discourse. Thus, all "Western thinkers discourse with rationality on *physis* or *arche* from the pre-Socratic perspective" (Wibowo, 2014b). However, regarding this matter, in Heidegger's interpretation of Heraclitus, "the *arche* called *physis* is something that is both visible and hidden... what is hidden? Certainly, the dark side of *physis*." The issue of *Being* in Heidegger's analysis is that "at a certain point in history, *physis* has been reduced to being merely visible, thus becoming just an idea. This reduction began with Plato (idea), Aristotle (substance), Hegel (Absolute Spirit), and Nietzsche (Will to Power)." On this matter, Heidegger sees that nature is nothing but a mere reduction and humans as rational animals.

Thus, Heidegger criticizes Western Philosophy. Because with reductionist actions and humans as rational animals, the reality of *Being* can be explained rationally. However, it is something that is both visible and hidden (Wibowo, 2018). When we can 'grasp it,' we must also be aware that it has another side, which is hidden. Western Philosophy forgets 'the *Being*.' Thus, the history of Western philosophy is a history of forgetting *Being*, because *Being* (the Nothing) can never be fully rationalized or conceptualized, but always remains hidden in every appearance (Wibowo, 2018:7).

Being is *Being*, yet it is also *Being* as hidden. *Being* is neither finished nor complete merely because it appears. It is always open to further disclosure. Thus, Heidegger's concept of *Aletheia* understands truth as unconcealment. Every disclosure of *Being* is truth insofar as it is an unconcealment that still contains concealment (Wibowo, 2018:8). *Being* as the hidden dimension of *physis*. *Being* supports and enables existence to come into being (Wibowo,

2021), because, "we often fixate on the existence and forget the Being that exists behind it" ... (Wibowo, 2021). Thus, "the statement that *Be* 'supports' *beings* must be understood within the complexity of ontological differentiation" (Wibowo, 2021). It means not just being fascinated and seeing Being as it is, just Being, because, "the word 'being' that we casually use surprises, Heidegger. He thinks that 'Being' being something must be something other than Being itself. That's what people forget" (Hardiman, 2016:54). The way to uncover the meaning of Being is through 'openness, meditation, an attitude of waiting in front of the revelation of Being itself.' This way, according to Heidegger, assumes that 'reason is not the only access to Being.' "We must start from a Being that asks about Being. Not all Beings can inquire about their Being" (Hardiman, 2016). The Being will open itself so that we can grasp it. Not only ontology but *meontology*.

Heidegger offers us a way of thinking that does not forget Being, because often we talk about something as if it's already within the grasp of our thinking, so that it appears as if it's just there. Neither more nor less. If something is already like this, then it won't be like that. However, truth always encompasses within it something that is "still hidden" (Wibowo, 2014a:25). It means, on a practical everyday level, Heideggerian thinking can help us not to feel, 'I am the holder of meaning about something. And what I hold, convey, and do is right and final.' In other words, the meaning is not singular but plural. Because after Being reveals something (meaning), it remains hidden. It always manifests itself. If person A sees a mountain, then the mountain seen appears to person A and is grasped. However, the mountain does not cease to appear. To person B, the mountain seen by person A still appears as the Being of that mountain. Person B will perceive the same mountain in the Being of person B and the Being of that mountain.

Observing Heidegger's metaphysics, we must acknowledge that there is an element of destruction as well as deconstruction. Destruction, because Heidegger dismantles metaphysics and proposes a metaphysic or ontology to become meontology. Deconstruction, through the statement of Rm. Setyo in "Heidegger: Beyond Metaphysics," that "for Heidegger, thinking must be understood completely anew: an openness, meditation, waiting for attitude in front of the revelation of 'Being' itself, where humans are no longer subjects because reason is no longer the sole access to 'Being' (Wibowo, 2014a:26) In the phrase "... the reason is no longer

the sole access to 'Being'," I understand that Heidegger does not destroy metaphysics but offers another way to access 'Being'. Heidegger arranges and paves a new path to 'Being'. This new path is called meontology. Also, it cannot negate reason in uncovering 'Being'. Because consciousness (intentionality) is always consciousness of something" (Wibowo, 2014a). It means that when I am aware of something, it's not just a specific part of myself that is aware of it. But the totality of my existence.

Heidegger's Ontology and Education

Being-Time and Education

Martin Heidegger's philosophy, particularly as discussed in his seminal work "Being and Time," provides profound insights into the nature of existence and its relation to education. Heidegger's educational approach is deeply rooted in existential phenomenology, stressing the significance of grasping the essence of existence and the role of education in nurturing genuine beings (Thomas, 2016). Heidegger's ontology revolves around the concept of the "ontological difference," which distinguishes between beings (the objects of our experience) and Being itself. This differentiation is crucial for comprehending his perspective on education. Heidegger contends that education should not merely focus on the accumulation of knowledge or skills but should instead aim to help individuals comprehend their existence and the essence of Being. This entails a departure from the traditional view of education as a means to an end (such as career preparation) to a more existential understanding where education is viewed as a process of becoming a human being (Thomas, 2016).

Heidegger's emphasis on authenticity and the significance of being toward death implies that education should prompt individuals to confront their mortality and ponder the meaning of their existence. This viewpoint challenges the conventional notion of education as a process of acquiring facts and abilities, advocating instead for an education that cultivates a deeper understanding of one's being and the world around them (Babich, 2017:7). Moreover, Heidegger's philosophy underscores the role of attentiveness in education. He argues that education should not revolve around the acquisition of content but should instead focus on engaging with objects and texts in a manner that facilitates the derivation of insights and comprehension. This approach contrasts with the traditional emphasis on content acquisition

and suggests that education should foster a way of being in the world that is attuned to the essence of things (Yosef-Hassidim, 2014:436). Furthermore, Heidegger's work indicates that the impact of existential education extends beyond formal schooling. It pertains to understanding the essence of being human, which is an ongoing process extending beyond formal education. This perspective underscores the significance of education in shaping the core of human existence and preparing individuals for life's challenges (Thomson, 2004).

Heidegger's philosophy of education is grounded in existential phenomenology, emphasizing the importance of grasping the essence of being and nurturing genuine existence. His work challenges conventional views of education, advocating for an education that focuses on the journey of becoming a human being rather than merely acquiring knowledge or skills. This perspective highlights the need for education to engage with the essence of things and help individuals confront their mortality and ponder the meaning of their existence.

Existentialism and Education

Heidegger's distinction between beings and Being, known as the ontological difference, forms the basis of his existential philosophy. This differentiation is pivotal for grasping the connection between Heidegger's concept of Being and existentialism. According to Heidegger's ontological difference, beings (such as plants, animals, humans, rocks, etc.) possess a specific mode of Being, but Being itself is not a being. This implies that the essence of entities (beings) differs fundamentally from the very presence or presence of what exists (Being). Being cannot be reduced to a being or a mode of being like substantiality; instead, it relies on human understanding, a unique attribute of *Daseins* (human beings) (Stevens, 2022).

Existentialism, as a philosophical movement, accentuates individual existence, freedom, and choice, focusing on the meaning of Being and the individual's role in the world. Heidegger's ontological difference holds significance in existentialism because it underscores the distinctiveness of human existence and the importance of grasping the essence of Being. By delineating beings from Being, Heidegger suggests that human existence's essence lies not in acquiring knowledge or skills but in developing an understanding of Being (Käufer, 2005). This understanding is vital in existentialism as it enables individuals to contemplate their existence, freedom, and choices. Heidegger's work indicates that the impact of existential

education transcends formal schooling, emphasizing the lifelong process of understanding human existence. This viewpoint underscores education's role in shaping human essence and preparing individuals for life's challenges (Hatab, 2014).

Heidegger's ontological difference between beings and Being is fundamental to his existential philosophy, highlighting the unique nature of human existence and the significance of comprehending the essence of Being. This differentiation is crucial in existentialism as it enables individuals to reflect on their existence, freedom, and choices, central aspects of the existentialist perspective on human life.

The Curriculum of Independent Learning in Indonesia

The Independent Learning Curriculum in Indonesia, also known as Kurikulum Merdeka, represents a significant component of the nation's educational reform endeavors. Its primary objective is to grant educators the flexibility necessary to craft high-quality learning experiences tailored to the unique needs and learning contexts of their students. This curriculum places a strong emphasis on fostering the development of student competencies and character education, with a specific focus on harnessing students' talents to enable them to achieve their full potential (Nurmelly, 2022).

For the academic year 2023/2024, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan) has reopened the registration process for educational institutions interested in independently implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum. Originally scheduled to run from February 6, 2022, to March 31, 2023, the registration period has been extended until April 14, 2023. Interested educational units are required to register via the independent learning platform or *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* (PMM) and must adhere to specific registration conditions. Units that have not previously registered can select one of three implementation categories within the Independent Learning Curriculum, depending on their preparedness: Independent Learning (In Bahasa, Mandiri Belajar), Independent Transformation (Mandiri Berubah), Independent Sharing (Mandiri Berbagi) (Nurani et al., 2022).

Educational units that have already implemented the Independent Learning Curriculum during the 2022/2023 academic year under the Mandiri Belajar status have the

option to transition to either Mandiri Berubah or Mandiri Berbagi status. Similarly, units previously categorized as Mandiri Berubah may opt to transition to Mandiri Berbagi.

Furthermore, educational units currently utilizing the Independent Learning Curriculum are encouraged to reflect on their experiences and provide feedback to the government. Registration for this program must be completed using an account owned by the head of the educational unit on the platform.

The Independent Learning Curriculum is part of a broader initiative aimed at shifting the educational focus from mere knowledge acquisition to the holistic development of individuals. This encompasses not only academic knowledge and skills but also character development and the exploration of students' talents. By adopting this approach, the curriculum endeavors to equip students with the necessary skills and understanding to navigate life's challenges and contribute meaningfully to the global community.

Bridging Gaps in Educational Management: Integrating Positivist, Postmodern, and Heideggerian Perspectives

In the practice of educational management and administration, the previously mentioned gaps between central policies, local needs, and the demands for educational meaning often manifest as real dilemmas in the field. Principals, for example, are frequently faced with the demand to present objective data and quantitative indicators, while at the same time having to accommodate socio-cultural diversity and safeguard the deeper dimension of education as a space of meaningfulness.

A concrete example can be seen when a secondary school in Indonesia faced a decline in average mathematics scores over the past three years. The principal immediately took data-driven measures: reviewing national exam results, student attendance rates, and disciplinary records. Based on this analysis, a remedial program was launched with the target of improving scores by ten percent within two years. This approach reflects a positivist paradigm in educational management, namely the use of empirical data and quantitative indicators as the basis for policy decisions. As emphasized by Rosyida, (Rosyida, 2025) the application of positivist principles can enhance transparency and accountability, as each policy can be measured and justified.

However, a gap emerged when improved scores did not automatically correspond with increased student motivation. Many students complained that the learning process was too exam-oriented, while teachers felt that their teaching methods were standardized, leaving little room for creativity. Here, Jean-François Lyotard's postmodernist perspective becomes relevant: education should not be fully subjected to the "grand narrative" of national standardization but must allow space for the diversity of local experiences.

In response, the principal created a participatory dialogue involving students, teachers, and parents to ensure that the remedial program was not merely a formality but genuinely addressed the students' needs. From these conversations, it emerged that some students struggled to participate in remedial sessions because they had to help with household chores at night. This situation demonstrates that academic policies cannot be separated from the students' social realities. As shown by Halizayanti, Ibrahim, and Dewi (Vina Halizayanti.F et al., 2022). The effectiveness of remedial programs is strongly influenced by family support and the school's ability to understand students' social limitations. In other words, without considering these social factors, remedial programs risk failing to achieve their goal of improving academic performance.

The existential gap mentioned in the background can also be addressed through Heidegger's thought. For Heidegger, education is a space where humans exist as Dasein, conscious of their presence in the world. With this awareness, principals do not merely pursue improvements in numerical outcomes but also initiate self-reflection programs for students, such as personal journaling and classroom discussions on life goals. Teachers are likewise encouraged to reflect on their professional calling so that teaching is not merely an administrative task but a meaningful vocation. Oral demonstrates that Heideggerian authenticity can help teachers develop existential awareness, making the teaching and learning process a space of transformation rather than merely a transfer of knowledge (Oral, 2014).

The integration of these three perspectives, positivism, postmodernism, and Heideggerian existentialism, helps educational management move beyond a mechanistic paradigm. Data is still used to ensure accountability, but schools also listen to the voices of the community with all their narratives, while maintaining education as a space for cultivating

authentic human beings (Feriyansyah & Murtiningsih, 2024). The existential perspective in education allows students not only to understand academic concepts but also to internalize social responsibility and the meaning of their existence as whole citizens (Mechwafanitiara et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, implementation challenges remain significant. Educational administration is often caught in a bureaucracy that prioritizes rapid, standardized quantitative reporting. Accreditation systems place substantial weight on graduation rates, exam scores, or attendance percentages, even though such data do not always capture the quality of the learning experience. This is precisely the point critiqued by Lyotard: grand narratives of standardization can obscure the smaller, concrete voices of the learning community.

Therefore, principals must act as both managers and transformative leaders. They are not merely data collectors or implementers of central policies but mediators between objective demands, local diversity, and the existential dimension of education. Participatory school-based management models can enhance the relevance of educational programs to the needs of the surrounding community (Mushthofa et al., 2022).

Compared to international practices, such as in Finland, which rejects the dominance of national exams and emphasizes teacher creativity as well as student well-being, this integrative approach appears aligned with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka). Indonesia's Independent Curriculum policy, in fact, provides space for the synthesis of these three perspectives: data-based diagnostic assessments (positivism), contextual projects and community participation (postmodernism), and self-reflection and meaningful learning (Heideggerian existentialism).

Thus, this integration addresses the gaps outlined in the introduction: how educational administration can balance data objectivity, contextual plurality, and the dimension of meaning. Educational administration can ultimately be understood as a bridge connecting objective needs, social diversity, and the pursuit of human life's meaning. Without any one of these elements, education risks becoming mechanistic; yet with all three, education has the potential to become a praxis that liberates, nurtures, and transforms both individuals and society.

CONCLUSION

Heidegger's critique of Western metaphysics, defined by its "onto-theo-logical" nature, challenges the tradition of seeking a singular, ultimate cause of Being and treating existence as a homogeneous concept. His concept of "ontological differentiation" insists on recognizing the fundamental differences between various modes of existence (e.g., human vs. stone), advocating for a new way of thinking that embraces the plurality and diversity of existence. This philosophical groundwork provides a potent foundation for understanding and executing the goals of the

The Independent Curriculum, with its emphasis on flexibility and holistic development, directly aligns with the call to move beyond a purely rational, knowledge-based education that prioritizes standardized outcomes. By applying a Heideggerian lens, educational administration can move past the mechanistic paradigm that primarily values rapid, standardized quantitative reporting, such as high grades or test scores. Instead, the integration of positivist accountability, postmodern contextual awareness, and Heideggerian existentialism provides a comprehensive model for educational management.

Ultimately, this integrative approach allows school principals to function as both managers and transformative leaders, mediating between objective policy demands, local socio-cultural diversity, and the students' existential journey. The *Kurikulum Merdeka*, informed by Heideggerian ontology, is thus positioned to become a praxis that extends the aims of education beyond mere productivity and competence, focusing instead on the holistic formation of the human person and ensuring education is a force that liberates and transforms individuals and society.

DECLARATION OF GENERATIVE AI USE

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used during the preparation of this manuscript. The authors reviewed, verified, and edited all AI-assisted output and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and final content of this article. AI was not used to generate the research ideas, analysis, or conclusions, and all references were checked manually against their original sources.

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