

SOCIAL SCIENCE AND EDUCATION | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Carl Rogers' Humanistic Education Concept and its Implementation in Independent Learning-Based Learning

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ARTICLE HISTORY

Received: December 12, 2025

Revised: March 01, 2026

Accepted: May 23, 2026

ABSTRACT

An abstract in a scientific journal should succinctly summarize the key elements of the research conducted. It should begin with a brief background that highlights the relevance or importance of the research topic. Next, the main objective or research question addressed in the study should be clearly stated. The Methods section should concisely describe the approach, techniques, and data used. The abstract should then present the key findings of the study, emphasizing significant results without excessive detail. Finally, the implications or contributions of the research to the relevant field or practice should be discussed. The entire abstract should be written in a single, coherent paragraph, avoiding overly technical terms to ensure accessibility for readers from various disciplines.

Keywords: Student-Centered Pedagogy, Carl Rogers' Humanistic Education, Merdeka Belajar curriculum.

I. Introduction

The Introduction serves as a gateway to your research, providing readers with the necessary context, significance, and objectives. Begin with a broad overview of the research topic, highlighting its importance and relevance to the field. Discuss current trends, unresolved issues, or controversies in the area of study, supported by recent and relevant literature reviews. This demonstrates your awareness of the state of the field and establishes the gap that your research intends to fill. 21st-century education demands a learning paradigm that not only transfers knowledge but also develops students' full human potential—intellectually, affectively, and socially. Rapid changes in the world of work, digitalization, and the need for critical thinking skills and adaptability have forced the education system to shift from traditional instructional models to more student-centered models. In Indonesia, the Merdeka Belajar policy, introduced in 2020, marks this shift by emphasizing pedagogical freedom, differentiation, and strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile. Carl Rogers' humanistic concepts, emphasizing freedom to learn, recognition of self-worth, empathy, and authentic teacher-student engagement, offer a theoretical framework potentially aligned with Merdeka Belajar's goals of developing individual autonomy and potential. This research focuses on the humanistic nature of this policy and Rogers' relevance as a reference (Roger, 2021).



Carl R. Rogers, a classic humanist, proposed that meaningful learning occurs when students feel free, heard, and personally engaged in the learning process. (Insani, 2019) In key works such as *Freedom to Learn* and *On Becoming a Person*, Rogers emphasized principles such as unconditional positive regard, authenticity (congruence), and empathy from educators to create an environment conducive to student self-actualization. According to Rogers, learning is experience-centric; material becomes meaningful when it is connected to the student's own experiences, interests, and goals. This approach shifts the teacher's role from "informer" to "facilitator" who respects student autonomy while providing supportive guidance. This foundation in humanistic psychology is important to analyze in the context of educational policies that demand flexibility and personalization. The Independent Learning Policy was introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology) in 2019–2020 in response to the need for national education reform (Zamzami et al., 2024). The Independent Campus Program and Independent Curriculum emphasize curriculum flexibility, competency-based learning, freedom to choose learning paths, and strengthening the profile of Pancasila Students. The explicit goal of this policy is to increase the relevance of education to the needs of the workforce, facilitate creativity, and create space for more autonomous pedagogical practices at the educational unit level. The 2024 guidance document emphasizes the inclusive and humanistic side of this policy by encouraging the facilitation of individual potential and the recognition of students' interests and talents. This policy transformation provides an opportunity to test the compatibility of Rogers' concepts with the practice of Independent Learning. (Wijaya et al., 2024)

There is a conceptual overlap between Rogers' ideas and the principles of Independent Learning: both prioritize student autonomy, meaningful contextual learning, and supportive, rather than authoritarian, instructional relationships. Rogers places personal learning experiences at the center of meaning, while Independent Learning allows the freedom to choose learning paths/activities relevant to interests. Both perspectives demand a shift in the role of teachers to that of facilitators and designers of learning experiences. Therefore, examining the implementation of Merdeka Belajar through Rogers' humanistic lens has the potential to identify practices that successfully humanize the learning process, as well as structural barriers that prevent the actualization of these principles in practice. This synchronicity argument is supported by an analysis of policy documents and empirical studies that assess the humanistic dimension of curriculum implementation (Widyawati & Huda, 2024).

Several evaluative studies and reports on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (2021/2022 to 2023/2024 academic years) provide an overview of the adoption and variations in practices in the field. An internal report from the Ministry of Education and Culture describes the distribution of educational units implementing this curriculum and its initial effects on the quality of learning outcomes in the country. Initial findings indicate diverse implementation based on level, school status, and human resource readiness issues. Furthermore, the MBKM guide for higher education institutions notes that many campuses are adopting flexible learning strategies and external partnerships, while challenges such as faculty readiness, infrastructure, and authentic assessment remain obstacles. These data provide an empirical basis for assessing the extent to which humanistic principles are embodied in the practice of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn). (Ulandari Safitri, 2024)

In recent years (2022–2025), academic research in Indonesia has begun to explore the relevance of humanistic learning theory in local contexts. Qualitative studies and literature reviews have addressed the application of Rog's principles on character development, religious learning, and supportive teaching practices in schools and Islamic institutions. Several articles from 2023–2024 reported positive outcomes, such as increased learning motivation, increased independence, and a more inclusive classroom climate, when a humanistic approach was implemented. However, many studies have highlighted the need for teacher training and policy adjustments to ensure the sustainability of these practices. This empirical evidence

suggests a local basis for linking Rogers' theory to the implementation of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn), but also highlights gaps in quantitative research and long-term evaluation (Widyawati & Huda, 2024).

Although the Merdeka Belajar vision is progressive, several implementation studies have identified obstacles in the field: (1) unequal teacher/lecturer capacity to design autonomous learning, (2) limited digital infrastructure and learning resources, (3) a school culture still oriented toward normative measurement and exams, and (4) assessment mechanisms that do not fully support authentic assessment. These obstacles impact the likelihood of consistently implementing practices aligned with Rogers' principles. Therefore, research that analyzes contextual factors—school organization, teacher training, and assessment systems—is crucial to understanding how humanistic values can be realized within the Merdeka Belajar framework. (Worang & Pangkey, 2024)

Although there is literature on both Rogers and Merdeka Belajar, there is little comprehensive research that theoretically and empirically links Rogers' humanistic concepts to the practice of Merdeka Belajar at various levels of education in Indonesia. Many studies are conceptual or limited to case studies, and evaluations of policy implementation often focus on administrative or quantitative outcomes without delving into the subjective experiences of students and teachers as humanistic subjects. This gap hinders a deep understanding of the mechanisms by which humanistic values can enhance the achievement of Merdeka Belajar goals, such as character development, creativity, and life skills. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap through an integrated program analysis and field studies (Prajoko, 2021).

This study aims to (1) describe Carl Rogers' humanistic educational principles relevant to the Indonesian educational context; (2) analyze the extent to which these principles are implemented in the practice of Merdeka Belajar; and (3) identify supporting and inhibiting factors for implementation. Specific research questions include: how teachers/lecturers understand and apply Rogers' principles in designing Independent Learning; how consistent these practices are with policy values; and what interventions are needed to strengthen the humanistic dimension at the practical level. This formulation focuses on the relationship between theory, policy, and practice to generate applicable recommendations for the future.

Theoretically, this research is expected to broaden the integrative understanding of humanistic psychology and contemporary curriculum policy, particularly how Rogers' concepts are translated into operational indicators for Independent Learning. Practically, the findings can provide recommendations for teacher training, learning design, and authentic assessment mechanisms that support the actualization of humanistic principles. The results also have the potential to serve as a reference for policymakers at the regional and school levels to develop implementation strategies that are more responsive to students' psychosocial needs—a key dimension for Merdeka Belajar to not only transform administratively but also impact the quality of the learning experience (Al et al., 2023).

Implementing a humanistic approach requires increasing educator capacity—not only technical teaching skills but also empathetic skills, facilitating meaningful learning experiences, and using formative assessments that prioritize individual development. Implementation audit findings indicate the need for ongoing training programs and contextualized professional guidance (coaching/mentoring). This research will evaluate effective training programs and barriers to adoption to formulate a realistic professional development package that can be integrated into school/campus development programs in the future. This is crucial for educational actors spearheading implementation to realize policy change. (Syarifuddin, 2022)

The humanistic approach should not be adopted without considering the local cultural context and values. In the Indonesian context, with its diverse cultures, religions, and social structures, adapting Rogers' values requires sensitivity to local norms to avoid friction. This research pays attention to ethical aspects (consent, student privacy), and examines how Pancasila values and cultural content can be interpreted together with humanistic values to produce contextual learning practices that are accepted by the educational community. Local comparative studies will help formulate adaptation principles that do not diminish the humanistic essence but still respect local knowledge. (Sultani1, Alftri, 2023)

This study had some limitations. The representativeness of the sample at the national level may be limited because of variability in implementation and resources. Self-reported data have the potential for social bias, and rapid policy changes may influence the findings. To mitigate these limitations, this study plans to use stratified sampling, triangulate methods (quantitative + qualitative), validate findings through focus group discussions (FGDs) with stakeholders, and collect data from the latest policy documents. With this approach, the results are expected to remain reliable and generate policy and practice recommendations that can be applied across various educational contexts in Indonesia. In short, the relationship between Carl Rogers' humanistic education concept and the Merdeka Belajar policy holds potential synergy that can enrich the quality of learning experiences in Indonesia. Based on a policy framework that provides pedagogical space and diverse initial empirical evidence, this study aims to analyze how humanistic principles can be transformed into concrete, sustainable, and culturally sensitive learning practices. The following chapter outlines a literature review (covering Rogers' theory, the Merdeka Belajar study, and related empirical studies), detailed methodology, field findings, discussions, and policy and practice recommendations. It is hoped that this study will make a tangible contribution to educational processes that humanize students.

II. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Humanistic Education in Contemporary Learning

Humanistic education is an approach that places students at the center of the learning process by emphasizing the development of their holistic human potential. In contemporary educational studies, this approach is understood as a critical response to educational practices that are overly oriented toward cognitive achievement and measuring learning outcomes. Humanistic education views students as whole individuals with interrelated intellectual, emotional, social, moral, and spiritual needs that must be developed in a balanced manner (Suyanto & Jihad, 2018). Various studies in national journals have demonstrated that humanistic education contributes positively to character formation, increased learning motivation, and the creation of an inclusive learning climate. (Jacobus & Geor, 2024) in the *Scientific Journal of Education*, emphasized that learning based on humanistic values encourages students to reflect on their learning experiences, thus making learning more meaningful. These findings indicate that humanistic education is relevant for implementation in educational systems that demand independence, creativity, and active involvement of students. Within this framework, Carl Rogers' thinking occupies a central position. Rogers viewed learning as a personal process that involves the whole individual and not simply an intellectual activity. Learning is effective if students feel psychologically safe and unconditionally accepted in the learning environment (Rogers, 1969). Principles such as student-centered learning, empathy, and freedom to learn, as proposed by Rogers, strengthen the foundation of humanistic education in the contemporary educational context.

2.2. Merdeka Belajar and Student-Centered Pedagogy

Merdeka Belajar is a national education policy that aims to provide educators and students with the freedom to manage the learning process according to their context and learning needs. This policy emphasizes curriculum flexibility, contextual learning, and strengthening student character and competencies. In various studies in the *SINTA* journal, Merdeka Belajar is understood as a systematic effort to shift the learning paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered. (Aiman Faiz, 2020). Research published in *Jurnal Pendidikan* shows that the implementation of Merdeka Belajar encourages teachers to be more creative, reflective, and adaptive in designing learning (Intan Sari, 2022). However, the research also reveals implementation challenges, such as uneven teacher readiness and a school culture that is still oriented

towards cognitive assessment. These findings indicate that the success of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) is determined not only by structural policies but also by the philosophical and pedagogical foundations that support the shift in learning paradigms.

2.3. Relevance of Rogers' Humanistic Theory to Merdeka Belajar

Conceptually, Carl Rogers' humanistic educational thinking strongly aligns with the principles of Merdeka Belajar. Both position students as active subjects in learning and emphasize the importance of freedom, responsibility, and meaningful learning. Rogers's emphasis on the role of teachers as facilitators aligns with the demands of Merdeka Belajar, which grants educators pedagogical autonomy in designing contextual and student-centered learning experiences. Research in the Journal of PGMI Education Partners (SINTA 4) shows that learning based on humanistic values supports the achievement of Merdeka Belajar's goals, particularly in strengthening students' character and learning independence (Ulandari Safitri, 2024). The implementation of humanistic values in Merdeka Belajar can be realized through differentiated learning, project-based learning, self-reflection, and authentic assessments that encourage active student involvement. However, several studies have also noted obstacles in the implementation of the humanistic approach, such as limited teacher understanding and administrative pressures on the curriculum (Hidayat et al., 2024). Therefore, this literature review confirms that Carl Rogers' thoughts can be used as a relevant and reflective conceptual framework to understand and evaluate the implementation of Merdeka Belajar more deeply in the context of Indonesian education.

III. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using library research. This approach was chosen to examine and synthesize Carl Rogers' humanistic education concept and its relevance to the implementation of Merdeka Belajar-based learning, based on theoretical studies and previous research findings. The data sources consisted of secondary data obtained from Carl Rogers' primary books, national journal articles, and educational policy documents related to Merdeka Belajar. Data collection was conducted through documentation studies by selecting relevant and credible literature. Data analysis employed descriptive-analytical techniques through a process of grouping, comparing, and synthesizing the key concepts of humanistic education and the Merdeka Belajar. Data validity was maintained through the use of source triangulation. This approach was used to generate a conceptual synthesis that can serve as a theoretical reference for the development and evaluation of Merdeka Belajar-based learning.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1. Conceptual Findings of Carl Rogers' Humanistic Education

The literature review results indicate that Carl Rogers' humanistic education positions learning as a personal process that involves all aspects of the learner. Learning is not solely understood as the transfer of cognitive knowledge but rather as a meaningful experiential process oriented toward the development of full human potential. Rogers emphasized that individuals have a natural tendency to learn and develop when they are in a psychologically safe environment that accepts them as they are (Rogers 1969). The main findings of this study indicate that the principle of person-centered education is the foundation of Rogers' humanistic education. This principle emphasizes unconditional positive regard, empathy, and authenticity as prerequisites for creating meaningful learning. These three principles create a learning climate that encourages students to feel valued as individuals, thus encouraging them to express their ideas, take intellectual risks and actively engage in the learning process. In the context of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to

Learn)-based learning, Carl Rogers' humanistic education concept is highly relevant because it aligns with the learner-centered learning paradigm. Merdeka Belajar demands freedom of learning, process flexibility, and respect for the diversity of student potential, which conceptually aligns with Rogers's views on psychological freedom and individual-directed learning. Teachers are no longer positioned as the sole authority providing knowledge but rather as facilitators who create supportive, reflective, and dialogical learning conditions. (Indra Prajoko, 2021). The results of this study indicate that the shift in the teacher's role from teacher-centered to facilitator of learning is a direct implication of Rogers' humanistic education in the implementation of Merdeka Belajar. This pedagogical relationship pattern encourages the growth of self-confidence, responsibility for learning, and student independence in managing the learning process. Thus, Carl Rogers' humanistic education is not only theoretically relevant but also provides a strong conceptual framework to support Merdeka Belajar learning practices that emphasize the development of the whole person.

4.2. Relevance of Carl Rogers' Humanistic Education to Merdeka Belajar

The study findings demonstrate a strong conceptual alignment between Carl Rogers' humanistic education and the Merdeka Belajar policy. Merdeka Belajar emphasizes learning freedom, curriculum flexibility, and student-centered learning, which philosophically aligns with Rogers's ideas on psychological freedom and self-directed learning. This alignment confirms that Merdeka Belajar is not simply an administrative policy but has philosophical roots that are aligned with the humanistic educational paradigm. From Rogers' perspective, learning freedom is not defined as the absence of structure or control, but rather as the availability of psychological space that allows students to determine their own meaning, goals, and learning strategies with the facilitative support of teachers. This psychological freedom is a prerequisite for the growth of intrinsic motivation and authentic learning engagement. This principle aligns with Merdeka Belajar, which grants teachers pedagogical autonomy to adapt learning to the needs, interests, and characteristics of students without being rigidly bound to a uniform learning approach. (Zamzami et al., 2024) The results of a literature review indicate that a student-centered learning approach can increase active participation, a sense of responsibility, and independence in student learning (Wahyuni & Kartowagiran, 2017). In this context, Rogers's thinking strengthens the argument that pedagogically designed freedom to learn actually encourages more meaningful learning rather than diminishing academic quality. Conversely, when students are given the trust to actively participate in the learning process, they tend to demonstrate deeper commitment and meaning in learning. Thus, the results of this study confirm that Carl Rogers' humanistic education can serve as a philosophical and pedagogical foundation for strengthening the implementation of Freedom to Learn. The integration of these two concepts supports a paradigm shift in learning from a solely outcome-oriented approach to a learning process that emphasizes experience, reflection, and the development of holistic human potential. This approach is relevant to addressing the challenges of contemporary education, which demands that students be academically intelligent, independent, reflective, and responsible for their learning process.

4.3. Implementation of Humanistic Values in Freedom to Learn-Based Learning

Based on the results of a literature synthesis, the implementation of Carl Rogers' humanistic educational values in Merdeka Belajar-based learning can be realized through differentiated learning, project-based learning, self-reflection, and authentic assessment. These practices provide space for students to actively engage in the learning process, express their interests and learning experiences, and develop responsibility for the learning process and outcomes. The study results indicate that experiential learning accompanied by self-reflection aligns with Rogers's concept of meaningful learning. Learning that connects knowledge to students' real-life experiences allows for the internalization of values, increased motivation, and

deeper learning engagement. In the context of Merdeka Belajar, this approach strengthens students' positions as active and independent learning subjects, while teachers act as facilitators who create a safe, empathetic, and supportive learning climate (Roger, 2021) (Nurhayati et al., 2019). Conceptually, these findings indicate that Carl Rogers' humanistic education can serve as a pedagogical foundation for understanding and evaluating the implementation of Merdeka Belajar. The integration of these two concepts emphasizes that learning objectives are not solely oriented toward academic achievement but also toward the development of reflective, independent individuals capable of continually realizing their potential. Thus, Rogers's thinking contributes to strengthening the Independent Learning paradigm as an educational approach that places holistic human development as the primary goal of the learning process.

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