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# Joseph J. Schwab's Educational Thought and Its Relevance to the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia

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 Firmansyah <sup>1\*</sup>

 <sup>1</sup> Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia

 Email Correspondence: [firmaryah\\_uin@radenfatah.ac.id](mailto:firmaryah_uin@radenfatah.ac.id)

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**Abstract:** The development of education policy in Indonesia through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires a flexible, contextual, and learner-centered curriculum approach. The implementation of this curriculum requires a strong theoretical foundation so that it is not only technical but also reflective. In this context, the ideas of Joseph J. Schwab, particularly his concepts of the practical and the four commonplaces of curriculum, are relevant because they emphasize a deliberative process and contextual curriculum decision-making. Therefore, this study aims to describe Joseph J. Schwab's educational and social background, the main points of Joseph J. Schwab's thinking in the field of education, and analyze the relevance of Schwab's thinking to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. This study is a literature study using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach. Data collection was carried out by gathering various relevant scientific sources identified through online databases, such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and ERIC, using keywords such as: Joseph J. Schwab, curriculum deliberation, The Practical Schwab, Merdeka Curriculum, and Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) to broaden or narrow the search for more relevant results. The literature search focused on publications that appeared in the last 15 years (2010–2025). However, several of Schwab's classic works from the 1960s to the 1970s were included because they are the main foundation of his thinking. The data analysis technique was carried out using a thematic synthesis approach. The results of the study show that the concepts of “the practical” and “four commonplaces of curriculum” developed by Schwab are directly related to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in terms of empowering teachers as curriculum designers, student-centered learning, and the integration of social and cultural contexts in the learning process. Schwab also emphasized the importance of a deliberative process in curriculum decision-making, which supports the principles of autonomy and flexibility of educational units in the Merdeka Curriculum. The theoretical implications of this research enrich the study of educational philosophy in Indonesia by offering Schwab as a reflective and contextual alternative foundation. Practically, these findings provide direction for improving the capacity of teachers as context-aware and collaborative learning designers in curriculum design. This study recommends that Schwab's thinking be more widely integrated into teacher training, curriculum development, and

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national education policy. Thus, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can take place in a more meaningful, democratic, and needs-oriented manner for students.

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**Author Contributions**

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of education in Indonesia continues to undergo transformation in line with the demands of the times, social dynamics, and advances in technology and information. One significant form of educational reform is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which was officially introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia as a response to the need for more contextual, flexible, and learner-oriented education (Rangkuti & Dwi, 2025). This curriculum emphasizes competency development, character building, and teacher empowerment in designing learning processes according to the needs and characteristics of students (Minan et al., 2025; Ningrum & Andriani, 2023).

In this context, various educational approaches and theories from prominent figures are relevant to be re-examined in order to strengthen the philosophical and practical foundations of the curriculum's implementation. One important figure in the discourse on education is Joseph J. Schwab, a curriculum expert who offers revolutionary views on how the curriculum should be developed and implemented. Schwab is known for his idea of the curriculum as a deliberative practice involving various elements or "commonplaces," namely subject matter, students, teachers, and the educational context (Michael Connelly, 2013). This approach emphasizes flexibility, dialogue, and relevance to real needs in the field.

Schwab's ideas are increasingly important to examine in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, which essentially gives teachers and schools the freedom to determine the direction of learning more autonomously. Concepts such as curriculum deliberation, educational pragmatics, and the active role of educators promoted by Schwab are in line with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, which places teachers not merely as implementers of the curriculum, but also as designers and decision-makers in learning.

However, in practice, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia still faces various challenges, such as teacher readiness, limited resources, and gaps in understanding between policy and implementation at the school level (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024; Sephiawardani & Bektiningsih, 2023; Sholeh et al., 2024; Sutinah et al., 2024). Therefore, it is important to present theoretical studies that can enrich conceptual understanding of the curriculum, so that its implementation is not merely procedural, but also reflective and contextual.

A study of Joseph J. Schwab's thinking offers a philosophical and pedagogical paradigm (Schwab, 1983), that can serve as a critical foundation for evaluating and developing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. By integrating Schwab's principles into national education practices, it is hoped that a more dialogical curriculum approach will be created that is responsive to the needs of students and relevant to the social realities of Indonesian society.

Various studies have been conducted on the Merdeka Curriculum, covering policy design, implementation, and its impact on the learning process. Most of these studies highlight the role of teachers in developing contextual and project-based learning, as well as how curriculum flexibility opens up opportunities for creativity in the classroom (Kumayas et al., 2025; Ndari & Mahmudah, 2023; Wulandari et al., 2024). However, few have examined this curriculum approach from a deep theoretical perspective, particularly within the framework of classical and contemporary educational theory (Aiman et al., 2024; Andriani et al., 2023).

Meanwhile, studies on Joseph J. Schwab's thinking have been conducted in several educational contexts, particularly in Western countries. These studies generally emphasize the importance of deliberation in curriculum decision-making, as well as the involvement of all parties in the formulation of education policy (Walker, 2022). Schwab is seen as a pioneer of a non-dogmatic curriculum approach that opens up space for participation (Pollock, 2017). However, studies on Schwab in the context of Indonesian education are still very limited, especially in relation to the Merdeka Curriculum.

Some academic literature linking Schwab and educational practices in Indonesia is generally broad in nature and does not touch on specific applied dimensions of national curriculum policy. Therefore, there is a need to fill the gap in academic literature that bridges Schwab's thinking and the dynamics of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia in a more comprehensive and contextual manner.

From a literature review, it appears that there has not been much research that explicitly examines the relevance of Joseph J. Schwab's thinking to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In fact, Schwab's ideas about curriculum flexibility, the importance of teacher involvement, and a deliberative approach are very relevant for critiquing and enriching current curriculum implementation practices in Indonesia. This gap is the basis for the importance of this research. This research is important because it can contribute theoretically and practically to the development of education in Indonesia, particularly in strengthening the philosophical foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

In light of the above, this study aims to: 1) describe Joseph J. Schwab's educational and social background; 2) identify and systematically describe the main points of Joseph J. Schwab's thinking in the field of education; and 3) analyze the relevance of Schwab's thinking to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. This study is expected to provide recommendations for the application of Joseph J. Schwab's ideas in the context of curriculum development and learning practices in Indonesia, especially those in line with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum.

## **METHODS**

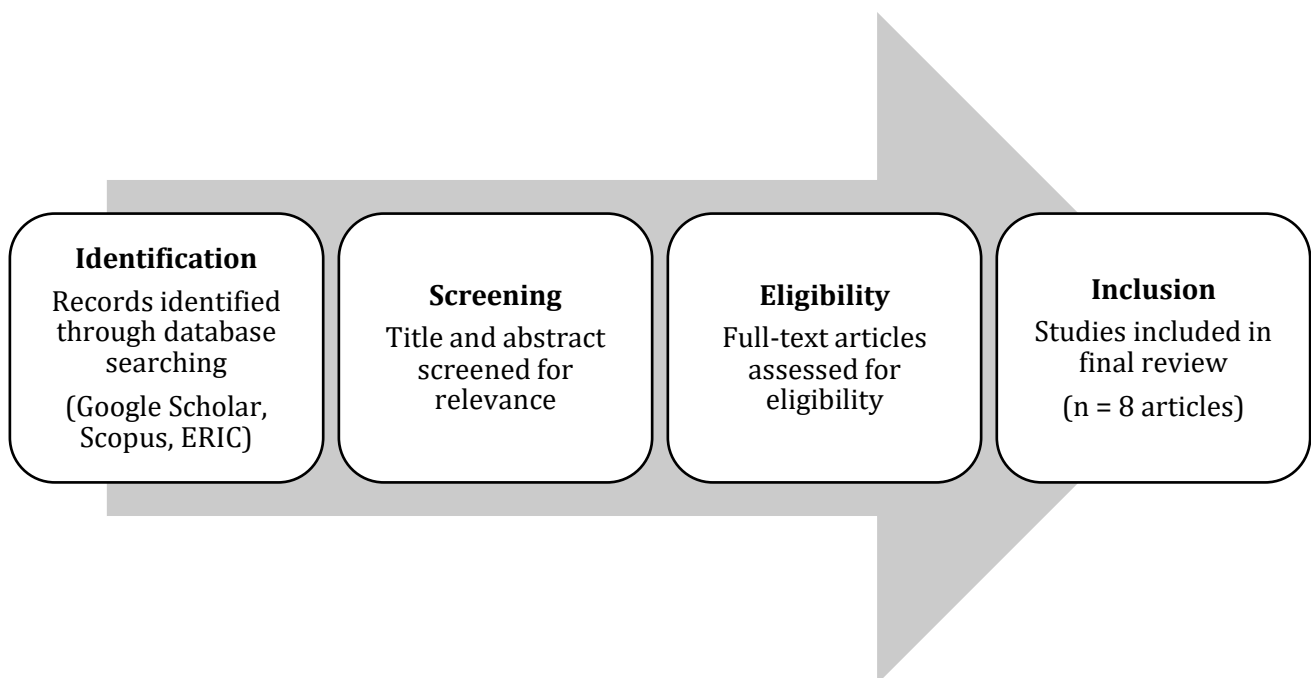
This study is a library research using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach as the main method in exploring and analyzing Joseph J. Schwab's educational thinking and its relevance to modern educational challenges and needs. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to review the literature in a systematic, structured, and comprehensive manner, thereby identifying Schwab's main ideas, related research developments, and research gaps that still need to be further explored (Cabrera & Cabrera, 2023).

The SLR method was chosen because it applies strict stages in the process of identifying, selecting, analyzing, and synthesizing literature (Mohamed Shaffril et al., 2021). This is done to ensure that the sources analyzed are truly relevant, credible, and representative of the topic being studied. With this approach, the study not only reinterprets Schwab's views but also contextualizes them within contemporary educational discourse.

The literature search and selection process in this study followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure transparency and systematicity in selecting study sources. The search was conducted using keywords such as Joseph J. Schwab, curriculum deliberation, The Practical Schwab, and The

Merdeka Curriculum across the Google Scholar, Scopus, and ERIC databases, with Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) applied to refine the results. The search focused on publications from the last 15 years (2010–2025), although several of Schwab's classic works from the 1960s–1970s were also included as foundational references.

The literature selection stages consisted of *identification*, *screening*, *eligibility*, and *inclusion*. In the identification stage, relevant articles were collected from the databases. The screening stage involved filtering articles based on titles and abstracts and removing duplicates. In the eligibility stage, full-text articles were assessed to determine their relevance to the research focus. Finally, in the inclusion stage, articles that met the inclusion criteria were selected for further analysis. The complete flow of the literature selection process is presented in the PRISMA Flow Diagram in Figure 1.



**Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of the Literature Selection Process**

The data analysis technique was carried out using a thematic synthesis approach, with the following steps:

1. Initial screening of literature based on titles and abstracts to ensure relevance to the focus of the study;
2. Full content analysis of sources that passed the initial screening;
3. Thematic categorization, namely grouping literature based on key themes such as Schwab's basic thinking, the concept of the four components of the curriculum (commonplaces), The Practical approach, and its implications for the modern curriculum;
4. Mapping the relevance between Schwab's ideas and actual educational challenges, such as teacher autonomy, contextual curriculum, democratic education, and 21st-century learning demands.
5. The results of the analysis are presented in the form of a narrative description accompanied by summary tables or matrices to help visualize patterns of findings, identify research gaps, and conceptual implications of this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

Based on the results of a systematic literature search conducted in accordance with the stages of a systematic literature review (SLR), eight articles were found to be relevant to the focus and keywords of the study. The search was conducted through reputable scientific databases, namely Scopus, Google Scholar, and ERIC. The eight articles were then selected and analyzed based on their thematic suitability, theoretical contribution, and relevance to Joseph J. Schwab's educational thinking and contemporary curriculum implementation. A summary of the main findings from each article is presented briefly in the following table.

**Table 1. Search Results for Websites Related to the Research Topic**

Title, Author, & Year	Key Findings	Source/Website
The Practical: A Language for Curriculum — Joseph J. Schwab (1969)	Schwab criticized the dominance of abstract theory in curriculum studies and offered a practical orientation that emphasized deliberation as a method of curriculum decision-making; the concepts of practical, quasi-practical, and eclectic served as operational models for a curriculum that was responsive to real educational issues.	<a href="https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/442881">https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/442881</a>
The Practical: Arts of Eclectic — Joseph J. Schwab (1971)	Analyzing how the eclectic approach in the curriculum combines various sources of theory and practice; this is a continuation of Schwab's deliberative idea to accommodate diverse perspectives in curriculum decision-making.	<a href="https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/442998">https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/442998</a>
<i>The Practical: Translation into Curriculum</i> — Joseph J. Schwab (1973)	Schwab highlights the importance of collaboration between various experts (subject matter, teachers, students, milieu) in the curriculum design process; curriculum decisions are not only made top-down but through multi-party deliberation — relevant to 21st-century education that demands broad participation.	<a href="https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/443100">https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/443100</a>
<i>The Practical 4: Something for Curriculum Professors to Do</i> — Joseph J. Schwab (1983)	Schwab expands his practical curriculum ideas by emphasizing the role of curriculum professors in advancing deliberative inquiry, curriculum inquiry, and reflective practice within the academy; he argues that curriculum scholarship should engage critically with educational theory and practice to bridge the gap	<a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03626784.1983.11075885">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/03626784.1983.11075885</a>

	between abstract theory and classroom realities, positioning faculty as facilitators of context-responsive curriculum development.	
<i>How Joe Schwab Thinks: A Review of The Practical 1 After 40 Years</i> — Roby (2015)	Reviewing the long-term impact of Schwab's thinking on curriculum studies, particularly his criticism of traditional curriculum theory and its relevance in the context of contemporary educational practice; demonstrating that Schwab's thinking lives on in modern curriculum studies.	<a href="https://journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/article/view/ROBHOW">https://journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/article/view/ROBHOW</a>
<i>Phases in Collaboration: Using Schwab's Deliberation to Respond to Change in Teacher Education</i> — Chris North et al. (2018)	Empirical studies applying Schwab's idea of deliberation in teacher education curriculum change show that the deliberation model remains relevant in contemporary educational transformation, resonating with the 21st-century need for adaptability and collaboration.	<a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17425964.2018.1450239">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17425964.2018.1450239</a>
Reading Schwab's 'Practical' as an Invitation to Curriculum Enquiry — Ian Westbury (2013)	A contemporary analysis that affirms that Schwab's thinking on practicality and deliberation is still significant in the modern era; placing deliberative curriculum inquiry as a bridge between theory and practice.	<a href="https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00220272.2013.795246">https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00220272.2013.795246</a>
<i>Relevansi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar dengan Model Pembelajaran Abad 21</i> — Yose Indarta et al. (2022)	Explaining that 21st-century education requires the development of critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and digital literacy skills — supporting the relevance of Schwab's deliberative curriculum thinking that prioritizes contextual and collaborative decision-making.	<a href="https://edukatif.org/index.php/edukatif/article/view/2589">https://edukatif.org/index.php/edukatif/article/view/2589</a>

Source: compiled from Scopus, Google Scholar, and ERIC sources.

The results of a systematic literature review of eight key articles show that Joseph J. Schwab's educational thinking consistently emphasizes the importance of a practical and deliberative approach to curriculum development. Schwab's classic articles (1969, 1971, 1973) reveal a fundamental criticism of the dominance of abstract theory that distances the curriculum from the reality of educational practice, while offering deliberation and an eclectic approach as mechanisms for contextual and participatory curriculum decision-making. Contemporary studies (Roby IV, 2015; Westbury, 2013) confirm that Schwab's ideas remain relevant and alive in modern curriculum studies, particularly as a bridge between educational theory and practice. Empirical findings by North et al., (2018) reinforce this relevance by

showing that Schwab's deliberation model is effectively applied in changes to teacher education curricula that require collaboration and continuous adaptation. Meanwhile, research by Indarta et al. (2022) shows that the Merdeka Curriculum's demands for the development of 21st-century skills are in line with Schwab's deliberative principles, which emphasize flexibility, reflectivity, and the involvement of various stakeholders. Overall, the findings of this SLR indicate that Joseph J. Schwab's thinking has strong conceptual and practical relevance as a theoretical foundation for understanding and strengthening the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia.

## **Discussion**

### **1. Educational and Social Background of Joseph J. Schwab**

Joseph Jackson Schwab lived during a period of historical turmoil and major transition, politically, economically, and socio-culturally. He was born in 1909 in the state of Mississippi of United States—a country that was undergoing rapid industrialization and facing various social tensions (Craig, 2022; DeBoer, 2013). Schwab's youth coincided with the Great Depression of the 1930s, which drastically changed the face of American society. This event sparked widespread debate about the role of education in creating social justice and improving economic inequality (Ben-Peretz & Craig, 2018).

Schwab pursued his formal education at the University of Chicago, an institution that would later become the center of his intellectual and professional career. He earned a doctorate in biology, but his academic interests expanded to include philosophy, pedagogy, and curriculum development (DeBoer, 2013). Schwab was known as a multidisciplinary figure who was able to integrate the natural sciences and humanities into educational theory, which later became one of the main strengths of his thinking (Deng, 2024).

As an academic who taught and researched for more than four decades at the University of Chicago, Schwab was at the heart of intellectual developments that were heavily influenced by the spirit of American pragmatism, particularly from figures such as John Dewey (DeBoer, 2013). He was also active in the Committee on the Study of Education, an important forum for the formulation of progressive curriculum theory and practice. In this environment, Schwab not only absorbed views on the importance of experience in learning, but also developed a critical approach to the tendency toward formalism in educational theory (DeBoer, 2013).

Global conflicts such as World War II (1939–1945) and the Cold War also shaped the social backdrop of Schwab's thinking. During this period, education in America was heavily influenced by the need to produce citizens who were loyal, productive, and globally competitive. Education became an ideological instrument of the state, so that many curricula were designed in a centralistic and technocratic manner for economic and political interests. Schwab saw this phenomenon as a deviation from the essence of education, which should liberate and nurture individual potential in a contextual manner (Craig, 2022).

On the other hand, Schwab also observed a growing gap between educational theory developed in academic circles and the daily realities faced by teachers and students (Michael Connelly, 2013). He witnessed how teachers lost their autonomy in designing learning due to the dominance of a rigid national curriculum controlled by experts or authorities outside of schools. This phenomenon prompted Schwab to advocate for a “practical” approach to curriculum development, in which curriculum decisions are not only determined by theory or

central policy, but must involve field actors in a deliberative and democratic manner (Craig, 2022; Michael Connelly, 2013).

From other socio-cultural aspects, Schwab was also greatly influenced by the intellectual tradition of liberal arts, which places freedom of thought, dialogue, and reflection as the foundation of education (DeBoer, 2013). In this context, education is not understood merely as a tool to achieve economic or political goals, but as a process of shaping whole persons. Schwab believes that education should strengthen students' ability to think critically, participate actively in society, and understand the complexities of the real world (Michael Connelly, 2013; Schwab, 1978). Overall, Schwab's social background shaped his distinctive view: that education must be grounded in social reality, participatory, and respectful of contextual diversity. He rejected elitist and purely theoretical education, instead promoting an inclusive, flexible, and practical approach in response to ever-changing social dynamics.

## **2. Key Ideas of Joseph J. Schwab in the Field of Education**

Joseph J. Schwab is known as a prolific and reflective curriculum thinker. For more than three decades, he has written numerous works that critique educational theory and offer new approaches that are more contextual and practical. His major works have not only become key references in curriculum theory, but have also paved the way for a paradigm shift from a normative-theoretical approach to a deliberative-practical approach (DeBoer, 2013; Michael Connelly, 2013).

Some of Schwab's most influential works (DeBoer, 2013), include:

- a. *The Teaching of Science as Inquiry* (1962). In this work, Schwab discusses science teaching using a scientific approach that emphasizes the process of inquiry, rather than simply the transmission of facts. He argues that science should be taught as an activity of critical and exploratory thinking, rather than mere memorization. This approach has had a major influence on the development of modern inquiry-based science education.
- b. *Structure of the Disciplines* (1964). This paper appeared in the context of the disciplinary curriculum movement, which was popular in the United States at the time. Schwab criticized this approach for placing too much emphasis on the internal structure of science and neglecting the concrete teaching and learning process. He stated that the structure of disciplines should be a tool, not the main goal of education. According to him, good teaching is teaching that can link the structure of science to students' learning experiences.
- c. *The Practical 1–4 series* (1969, 1971, 1973, 1978). This is Schwab's most famous collection of essays, published in the journals *School Review* and *Curriculum Inquiry*. In this series, Schwab states that curriculum theory has experienced “the flight from the field,” which is the disconnect between theory and practice. He offers a new approach called the practical, which emphasizes deliberation, flexibility, and teacher participation in curriculum development. These four writings have the following themes:
  - 1) *The Practical: A Language for Curriculum* (1969): introduces the practical approach.
  - 2) *The Practical: Arts of Eclectic* (1971): emphasizes the need for an open and selective attitude in choosing theories and methods.
  - 3) *The Practical 3: Translation into Curriculum* (1973): explains how the deliberation process can be applied in curriculum design.

- 4) *The Practical 4: Something for Curriculum Professors to Do* (1978): invites curriculum academics to return to the real issues of education in the field.
- d. *Decision and Choice: The Coming Duty of the Curriculum Worker* (1971). Schwab states that curriculum developers must take the position of decision makers, not merely theory processors. He rejects the idea that curriculum can be formulated through static universal principles, and emphasizes the importance of direct involvement with the context and learners.
- e. *Education and the Structure of the Disciplines* (1978). In this essay, Schwab again highlights the importance of the relationship between the structure of science and teaching strategies. He reminds us that teaching cannot be separated from the experiences and understanding of learners, as well as the active role of teachers in building bridges between the two.

Based on his works, it appears that Schwab moved from a scientific and structural approach to a reflective and practical approach, while maintaining intellectual depth and sensitivity to social and pedagogical dynamics. From his rich and diverse works, we can summarize a number of Schwab's main ideas in the field of education:

- a. *Curriculum as a deliberative process*. Schwab rejects the idea that curriculum can be developed solely on the basis of theory or central policy. He introduces the idea of deliberation, which is a process of joint consultation between teachers, students, subject matter experts, and the community in designing the curriculum. This process is reflective, dialogical, and based on local realities (Schwab, 1969).
- b. *The four commonplaces of curriculum*. Schwab (1973) argues that a meaningful curriculum must consider four important elements in a balanced manner, none of which should dominate the curriculum formulation process, namely:
  - 1) Subject matter: the content or knowledge being taught.
  - 2) Learners: the characteristics and needs of students.
  - 3) Teachers: the professionalism and active role of teachers.
  - 4) Milieu: the social, cultural, economic, and geographical context.
- c. *The role of teachers as professional decision-makers*. Schwab sees teachers not merely as implementers of the curriculum, but as key actors who have direct knowledge and experience with students. Teachers must be empowered to make curriculum decisions based on the realities of their classrooms (Schwab, 1983).
- d. *The importance of flexibility and eclecticism*. In "The Practical: Arts of Eclectic," Schwab suggests that educators and curriculum developers should not be fanatical about a single theory or method. Instead, they should be open-minded, choosing the most appropriate approach based on needs and context, and pragmatically combining relevant theories (Schwab, 1971).
- e. *Criticism of traditional curriculum theory*. Schwab rejects technocratic and theoretical approaches to curriculum development that ignore the diversity of social contexts and the needs of learners. He argues that such theories are "moribund" because they are disconnected from actual classroom practice (Schwab, 1969).
- f. *Curriculum as practical action, not just theory*. Schwab emphasizes that theory alone is not enough. Curriculum must be translated into concrete actions that are relevant to the lives of learners and their environment (Michael Connelly, 2013; Schwab, 1973).

- g. *Education as a social and democratic process.* Schwab places education within a democratic framework, where all parties involved in the learning process have a say in decision-making. This reflects the humanistic view that education is a shared resource, not the monopoly of experts (Ben-Peretz & Craig, 2018; Schwab, 1978).

### **3. The Relevance of Joseph J. Schwab's Thoughts to the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia**

Joseph J. Schwab's thoughts, as described above, are still considered relevant today, especially in responding to the challenges and needs of modern education, which are increasingly complex, dynamic, and require active participation from various elements of education. Schwab, through his ideas on "Practical Deliberation" and the concept of "The Four Commonplaces of Curriculum," provides an integral framework for thinking about designing and reforming education. These four elements—teachers, students, subject matter, and context (environment)—are pillars that cannot be ignored in designing a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of the times (Walker, 2022).

One of the main challenges of modern education is the emergence of a new paradigm in learning, namely the shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach (Gillani, 2022). Schwab strongly emphasizes the importance of the role of students as active subjects in the learning process. He acknowledges that students' experiences, interests, and needs must be an integral part of curriculum development. In this case, Schwab's approach supports the idea of constructivism in modern education, which places students as creators of meaning in the learning process, not merely passive recipients of information (DeBoer, 2013).

Furthermore, Schwab highlights the need for deliberative, participatory, and reality-based curriculum decision-making, not merely idealistic theory (Walker, 2022). This is relevant to the current educational needs that face rapid social, cultural, economic, and technological changes. The curriculum must be adaptive and able to adjust to contemporary challenges, such as globalization, the development of digital technology, and the increasing need for media and information literacy (Rahimi & Oh, 2024). Schwab's approach invites educators and curriculum designers to consider local realities and cultural contexts in designing meaningful and contextual learning programs (Michael Connelly, 2013).

In addition, Schwab's approach also offers a solution to the disconnect between education policy and practice in the field. In practice, many curriculum policies are designed top-down without considering the realities in schools or actively involving teachers (North et al., 2018). Schwab rejects this approach and encourages the involvement of teachers as practitioners who understand the real conditions of learning. Teachers are not only seen as implementers, but also as curriculum decision-makers (DeBoer, 2013). This is in line with the principle of teacher professional autonomy, which is increasingly being fought for in modern education (Parker, 2015).

In the context of the 4.0 industrial revolution and 5.0 society, new challenges have emerged in the form of demands for mastery of 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Purwanto et al., 2023). Schwab's approach, which emphasizes deliberation and collective participation in curriculum development, provides space for the development of a flexible curriculum that is able to adapt to changes in competency requirements (Michael Connelly, 2013). This provides a strong foundation for

schools and educational institutions to not only transmit knowledge, but also shape the character and competencies of students so that they are ready to face an uncertain future.

Schwab's thinking also makes an important contribution to promoting the integration of science and values. In an increasingly digitized world, education tends to experience fragmentation and dehumanization. Schwab reminds us of the importance of the human context in education—that education must not lose its ethical, social, and cultural dimensions (DeBoer, 2013). Therefore, the curriculum must be able to answer questions not only about “what should be taught?” but also “why it is important?” and “how it impacts the lives of students and society at large?”

In relation to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, where the student-centered learning approach is the main principle, this is directly in line with one of Schwab's “Four Common Elements of Curriculum,” namely students as the main focus in curriculum design and implementation. Schwab emphasizes that the curriculum must take into account the experiences, interests, needs, and learning context of students (Schwab, 1973). This is reflected in the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides space for students to explore their interests and potential through differentiated learning and projects that strengthen the Pancasila student profile.

Furthermore, Schwab rejects a curriculum approach that is based solely on ideal theory or dictated from above (top-down), and instead proposes a “deliberative discourse” approach, which is a collaborative curriculum development process involving various stakeholders, including teachers (Null, 2023; Schwab, 1969). This resonates with the Merdeka Curriculum policy, which gives greater authority to educational units and teachers to design learning according to local conditions and needs. Teachers are no longer positioned as mere implementers of policy, but as autonomous and reflective curriculum decision-makers (Kuswahyuni & Tejawiani, 2026).

Within Schwab's framework, subject matter is also an important element, but he emphasizes that it should not be separated from the social and cultural context of the learners. The Merdeka Curriculum accommodates this through the development of contextual and thematic content, as well as through the implementation of project-based learning that encourages students to understand real-life issues (Sholeh et al., 2024). Projects that develop the Pancasila learner profile, such as mutual cooperation, independence, and critical thinking, reflect Schwab's approach to integrating social values into the learning process.

The fourth element in Schwab's framework, namely environment (milieu), also receives considerable attention in the Merdeka Curriculum. The social, cultural, and local environment are important sources of learning, in line with the spirit of independent learning that encourages the connection between formal education and real life. Schools are encouraged to make the community part of the learning ecosystem (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024), in line with Schwab's idea that education cannot be separated from the context of the community in which students live.

On the other hand, Schwab's thinking also addresses the implementation challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires a transformation of school culture. He reminds us of the importance of a dialogical, reflective, and contextual process in developing and implementing the curriculum (Schwab, 1971). Therefore, to realize an effective Merdeka

Curriculum, it is necessary to train and strengthen the capacity of teachers so that they are able to carry out their duties.

## CONCLUSION

Joseph J. Schwab's educational thinking, particularly through his practical approach and the concept of the four commonplaces of curriculum, is highly relevant to the spirit and direction of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Schwab emphasizes the importance of a deliberative, participatory, and contextual approach to curriculum development, in which teachers act as professional decision-makers, students become active participants in the learning process, and the surrounding environment functions as an integral component of educational practice. These ideas resonate strongly with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility, differentiated learning, and project-based activities aimed at strengthening the Pancasila student profile. Both perspectives highlight the importance of contextual curriculum development that involves various educational actors and responds to local needs and realities.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to enriching the discourse on educational philosophy and curriculum theory in Indonesia by reintroducing Joseph J. Schwab's ideas as a reflective framework for understanding contemporary curriculum reforms. Schwab's concept of the practical and the four commonplaces of curriculum offers an alternative perspective to technocratic and top-down curriculum models by emphasizing deliberative inquiry, contextual decision-making, and collaboration among educational stakeholders. These ideas provide a conceptual foundation for interpreting the Merdeka Curriculum not merely as a policy innovation but as part of a broader philosophical movement toward more democratic, contextual, and learner-centered education.

Practically, the findings of this study provide insights for educators, school leaders, and curriculum developers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum more effectively. Schwab's framework can guide teachers in designing learning experiences that consider the interaction among subject matter, learners, teachers, and the learning environment. By applying the principle of the four commonplaces, schools can develop more holistic and contextual learning programs that integrate local culture, student needs, and community participation. Furthermore, Schwab's emphasis on deliberation encourages collaborative curriculum planning among teachers, school leaders, and other educational stakeholders, thereby strengthening teacher autonomy and reflective professional practice in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, it relies on a systematic literature review and therefore uses secondary sources rather than empirical data from schools implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Second, the analysis mainly explores conceptual connections between Schwab's ideas and current curriculum policy, without examining how teachers interpret and apply these ideas in practice. Third, the number of analyzed sources is relatively limited. Therefore, future research is recommended to use empirical approaches, such as qualitative case studies in primary and secondary schools across different regions of Indonesia to explore the implementation of deliberative curriculum practices. Experimental or quasi-experimental studies could also examine the effectiveness of curriculum designs based on Schwab's four commonplaces, while further studies in teacher

education programs may investigate how Schwab's concept of deliberation can strengthen teachers' roles as curriculum designers.

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