

## THE MECRI NADIEM MAKARIM'S "FREEDOM OF LEARNING": A CRITICAL STUDY OF JOHN DEWEY'S PRAGMATIC PHILOSOPHY

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### Abstract

"Freedom of Learning" is the MECRI Nadiem Makarim's sensational policy. Its top goals are to provide students with freedom of thinking and urge teachers to shift their education paradigms from traditional to contemporary ones. However, the facts assume that such a policy is trumping up and secretly includes Indonesian education in a list of the secular capitalist-style curriculum. The facts seem biased and even counter-productive if they are left unexplored. Therefore, this study aimed to diagnose the meaning of the policy in John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy and its effects. This was qualitative research. Observation was a technique for collecting the data. Miles and Huberman's model was a technique for analyzing the data. Credibility and dependability were used to examine the validity of the data. The results showed that the implied meaning of Makarim's freedom of learning policy is interpreted as a process of building students' reality through interaction with their real life. Knowledge is based on students' experiences and constructed using scientific methods. The teacher's role is to develop the students' critical and creative thinking skills through scientific process. The curriculum prepares students for changes, research and verification, and problem-solving activities. More importantly, the policy urges to bring the classes closer to digital technology and e-devices, arouses students' global awareness and learning skills of the 7C's X 3C's + 1P's. In conclusion, the policy aims to advance the value and quality of education for Indonesian in the current era of digital technology.

**Keywords:** freedom of learning, john dewey, pragmatic philosophy

### Abstrak

"Merdeka Belajar" adalah kebijakan sensasional Menteri Pendidikan R.I. Nadiem Makarim yang tujuan utamanya adalah untuk memberikan mahasiswa kebebasan berpikir serta mendorong para guru untuk bisa merubah paradigma pendidikan mereka dari paradigma tradisional ke kontemporer. Namun, fakta berasumsi bahwa kebijakan semacam itu adalah sebuah rekayasa belaka dan secara diam-diam memasukkan pendidikan Indonesia ke dalam daftar kurikulum ala kapitalis sekuler. Fakta tersebut tampak bias dan bahkan kontra-produktif jika dibiarkan tidak dieksplorasi. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendiagnosis makna kebijakan dalam filsafat pragmatis John Dewey dan efek yang menyertainya. Ini adalah penelitian kualitatif. Observasi merupakan teknik pengumpulan data. Model Miles dan Huberman adalah teknik untuk menganalisis data. Kredibilitas dan ketergantungan digunakan untuk menguji validitas data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa makna tersirat dari kebijakan kebebasan belajar menteri Makarim dimaknai sebagai proses membangun realitas siswa melalui interaksi dengan kehidupan nyata mereka. Pengetahuan didasarkan pada pengalaman siswa dan dikonstruksi menggunakan metode ilmiah. Peran guru adalah mengembangkan kemampuan berpikir kritis dan kreatif siswa melalui proses ilmiah. Kurikulum berfokus pada mempersiapkan siswa untuk perubahan, penelitian dan verifikasi, dan kegiatan pemecahan masalah. Lebih penting lagi, kebijakan tersebut mendesak untuk membawa mahasiswa lebih dekat dengan penguasaan teknologi digital dan perangkat elektronik, membangkitkan kesadaran global siswa dan keterampilan belajar 7C's X 3C's + 1P's. Kesimpulannya, kebijakan tersebut bertujuan untuk memajukan nilai dan kualitas pendidikan bagi masyarakat Indonesia di era teknologi digital saat ini.

**Kata Kunci:** merdeka belajar, john dewey, filosofi pragmatik

## 1. Introduction

Historically, the rationales for which the idea is proposed refer to a series of events that have been freshly put into a deep heated debate in the context of Indonesian education. Some of the series of events were after his appointment as a Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (MECRI) in President Joko Widodo's second term cabinet (Hardiyanto, 2019), criticism instantaneously emerged. The pros and cons of the president's decision to appoint Nadiem Makarim as a MECRI were unstoppable and were increasingly widespread. Seeing and referring to the complexities of the problems of education in Indonesia nowadays made the public's rationale question the elected president's decision. The public considered his appointment as a MECRI was inappropriate. The rationales are Nadiem Makarim neither comes from higher education academics nor is a scholar, has insufficient knowledge, expertise, competencies, and experience in being in charge of leading, managing, and administering the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia along with re-solving the tangled complexities of education of Indonesia over the decades starting from elementary to higher education. The public debate was later clarified by the former Chancellor of the University of Indonesia for the 2014-2019 period, Prof. Ari Kuncoro, who believed that Nadiem Makarim's performance has been managerially tested by leading multi-national companies, one of which is Go-Jek (an online multi-service platform business based in Jakarta Indonesia). In addition, according to him, Nadiem's reputation has also been proven as a Harvard University graduate (Azzura, 2019). Despite all the pros and cons, the optimistic traits catching the president's heed are Nadiem Makarim, who is still 37 years old, is an Indonesian citizen working as a very successful Indonesian entrepreneur managing his business worlds such as McKinsey & Co (2006–2009), Zalora Indonesia (2011–2012), Kartuku (2013–2014), and Gojek (2010–2019). From his own authentic experiences, the president appraised that Makarim strongly deserves to fill a strategic position as a MECRI to fix multiple complicated problems and dilemmas in the world of education in Indonesia.

Subsequently, not several months later after being inaugurated, Makarim brought up a critical idea that stirred the public's concentration. The bottomless frenzied debate flared up in an instant. The public rated that the critical idea of freedom of learning put forward by Makarim will gradually lead Indonesia to have a secular (westernized) education system and curriculum development. This kind of propaganda was recurrently built up and thrown into the public domain to deface the Minister's reputation and corrode his performance as well as rejecting the idea not to be transformed into a policy. The cheesy and tawdry issues, nevertheless, do not slacken the MECRI's consistency and performance to make a very phenomenal term of freedom of learning as a policy to abolish the National Examination (NE).

Simply put, there really is nothing to argue about the policy. Makarim's idea of freedom of learning, which has been legally transformed into a policy, is truly run-of-the-mill because its primary goal of it is self-evident and self-explanatory to write off the NE. When referring to the past history, the idea of formally abolishing the NE has long discoursed since the preceding administrations. However, the policy to abolish it was not directly executed simply because it was only an issue and a discourse, there is no policy-making regarding the abolition of NE, and if executed, this will strongly violate the commandment made that the NE is a national standard evaluation system for primary and secondary educations and to equalize the quality of education between regions (Law of RI no. 20/2003; (Zagranski, Richard, Whigham, T William, Dardenne,

L, 2007); McMillan, 2008). Conversely, Makarim precisely eliminated the NE. The rationale is that NE is not a barometer for measuring students' learning, knowledge, and skills. Unexpectedly, Makarim's idea of freedom of learning policy received dire criticism from the public. The public strongly claimed that the NE is particularly critical to measure the levels of mastery and understanding of the elementary, junior, high school, and vocational high school students' knowledge, skills, competencies, and learning.

Similarly, the Public Policy Observer or Chairman of the Bangka Public Service Supervisory and Observer Participation Institute (LP5 Babel), Jumli Jamaluddin, stated, "The NE system aims to be a benchmark for mapping the country's education, which in its meaning has encouraging and undesirable effects. The constructive effects are that students are less afraid of it and do not think of it as a scary specter. On the other hand, it can create a sense of social justice for all students whose educational infrastructure is terribly apprehensive and the minimum number of teachers. However, the deleterious effect is that the student's motivation to improve the quality of their knowledge, skills, and competencies is said to be decreasing. This of course has a significant effect on their challenge to interpret their graduation and continuation of their studies at the tertiary level (Nita, 2019; Hantoro, 2019). Nonetheless, the parties supporting the MECRI's policy affirmed that the NE is not or not extremely significant to be implemented because the NE is not the only instrument in assessing the levels of understanding and mastery of a student's learning materials. In contrast, the NE causes students to become more psychologically depressed and frustrated.

Hereinafter, on various occasions, as directly quoted from Harususilo (2019) and Safi'i (2019), the MECRI explained the four pillars of freedom of learning's policy. The details are as follows.

1. Replacing the National Standards of School Examination with an assessment that is held only from the school. The policy gives full trust and confidence to each school to make its own comprehensive test format. The exam does not have to be written but can be in the form of group assignments, written papers, and so on.
2. Blotting out the previous NE format and substituting it with Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey. Unlike the NE, this assessment is carried out for students in the middle school level (grade IV, VIII, and XI) so that it cannot be used as a basis for selection to the next level. The MECRI hopes that the results of this assessment will be applied by schools to improve the quality of their learning (education).
3. Simplifying the lesson plan (syllabus), which so far has too many components and is rigid. Teachers are given the freedom to make and develop their own lesson plans. Meanwhile, the core components in the syllabus are simplified to only one page, which previously reached more than 20 pages.
4. Providing flexibility in the zoning system and the New Student Admissions Regulations. This new policy adds to the achievement path quota, which was previously only 15 per cent to 30 per cent.

The abolition of the NE by implementing a new system gyrated and strongly struck the public's awareness in interpreting the term, a new system. They questioned "What kind of a new system would be built and implemented in the freedom of learning policy in the Indonesian education context. Did the policy of freedom of learning really closely link to the secular education system and westernized curriculum development?" These kinds of questions arose immediately because of the existence of the word "freedom" accompanying the word "learning."

This is the public's trepidation and dismay that Indonesian education will adopt the western education system despite the fact that it has already been adopted. Afterward, in the Indonesian context, the term freedom of learning is something that is worrying, and damaging, and connotes naturalism, secularism, anticlericalism, and atheism. The freedom of learning is assumed to be contradictory and this is, of course, against religious doctrine because the ideologies have certainly led to a separation between religion and state affairs (Hashemi, 2009; Luke, 2016; Lee, L., & Bullivant, 2016; & John, 2017)). That is not really surprising if the idea of freedom of learning gets strong reactions and strict attention from the public.

The author, therefore, would like to crave to diagnose the implied meaning of MECRI Makarim's freedom of learning policy at an academic level of John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy. The rationales are, firstly, the freedom of learning policy has already had a juridical foundation. Secondly, some assumed that the policy seems careless and does not touch on fundamental issues of Indonesian education and it just took care of administrative glitches. Thirdly, it is to let the public know that the idea of freedom of learning is strongly linked to the perspective of the educational philosophy of pragmatism and far from mere administrative hitches. Fourthly, it is to avoid confusion or mix-up that is not of an academic nature. Lastly, the freedom of learning has no relevance to the secular education system and curriculum development. On that basis, the purpose of this small-scale research is to philosophically explain the meaning of the freedom of learning policy. The formulated single question is to what extent the idea of Makarim's freedom of learning policy is closely correlated to John Dewey's pragmatic philosophical foundation.

## 2. Method

The qualitative approach was a research method used in carrying out this small-scale study (Kriyantono, 2006). Shortly speaking, research using this qualitative approach essentially aims to critically explain the meaning of freedom of learning's policy conceived by Nadiem Makarim as a MECRI (Yusuf, 2014; Sugiyono, 2007). This research was included in the domain of literature research where the main problem was translating the meaning of a big idea proposed by the MECRI as regards freedom of learning in the domain of John Dewey's pragmatism philosophy. This was important to study philosophically because the public judges that freedom of learning, as directly quoted by the author, is a concept that provides teachers with the freedom to translate the curriculum in the style of the secular capitalist; and the four pillars of the freedom of learning's policy actually only touch on technical and administrative issues (Jannah, 2019). "Such a superficial interpretation could build a deleterious discourse that Indonesian education has led to the wrong form of education negating or ignoring the noble values of the Indonesian nation where religious and moral principles are ignored or even eliminated in the instructional process. The perceptions and conceptions that were currently being massively constructed need to be clarified using scientific methods so that the public realized and understood the rationale for the coined term that freedom of learning is not just a technical and administrative dilemma. Most importantly, the idea of freedom of learning absolutely and strongly elevates the Indonesian people's religious, moral, and cultural values.

## Techniques of Data Collection and Data Analysis

The library observation was a technique of data collection whose primary sources of data were documents such as writing, policies, or regulations. Furthermore, the researchers became complete observers secretly observing discussions conducted by certain people, and were limited to open spaces. This observation aimed to obtain more credible and valid information (Yusuf, 2014; Sugiyono, 2007). On the other hand, the data analysis technique used by the researchers was the Miles and Huberman model with the analysis pattern following the simultaneous flow model starting from, first, the data reduction stage. This stage was the phase where the researchers selected, simplified, separated, and or transformed the raw data that was in written records in the field. The second was the data display. This stage was to compile all data properly and correctly in the form of semantic mapping and or flowcharts to make it easier for the researchers to understand what was happening and the last was drawing conclusions and or verification. This final phase was the answer to the problem formulation that had been formulated since the beginning of the research (Yusuf, 2014; Sugiyono, 2007).

The validity and reliability were first used to obtain accurate, valid, and correct data by extending the time of participation of the researchers in the library or field, increasing observational persistence, and triangulation using various methods/data sources: observation and documentation according to the rules, conducting checks with other members in the group, analyzing negative cases and using appropriate references. Second, the dependability test was used to audit the entire process, starting from re-testing the research stages that had been carried out, such as determining the focus of the problem, when going into the research field, determining information or data sources, collecting and analyzing data, auditing research results, and conclusions (Yusuf, 2014; Sugiyono, 2007).

### 3. Results and Discussion

There are two clusters in this session. The first is a brief presentation session of the observation result in the form of an infographic and this is closely related to the research question that has been previously proposed, namely, to what extent the idea of the Makarim freedom of learning policy is closely correlated to the John Dewey's pragmatic philosophical foundation of education. The second is a discussion session. These two sessions were simultaneously displayed. Here are the details.

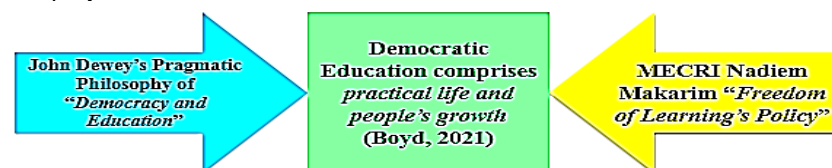


Figure 1. Correlation between Dewey's Pragmatic Philosophy and Makarim's Freedom of Learning

Figure 1 shows a cohesive correlation between the foundations of John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy of education and Nadiem Makarim's freedom of learning policy. The question is why they strongly correlate with one another. The answer is that Nadiem Makarim's freedom of learning policy and the foundation of John Dewey's philosophical base of pragmatism and education expect students to be practically taught by providing learning materials, knowledge, skills, and competencies that have real-world relevance, can be realistically applied and useful for students' real-world lives, and trigger them to grow into better human beings (Boyd, 2021; Herrington, A. & Herrington, 2006). Makarim's freedom of learning policy has become the most critical part of national education programs of Indonesia nowadays and has been based on John

Dewey's pragmatism philosophy and education, the basic goals of Indonesian education should be to promote democratic social life, teach good Indonesian citizens (does not teach chauvinistic attitudes between fellow humans or does not teach the knowledge of hatred against those of different religions, ethnicities, and cultures), improve and rebuild progressive Indonesian society, educate for contemporary change and positive social reforms. The knowledge should be to lead to growth and development; stresses a lifelong learning process and focuses on active learning and relevance to real life. Subjects and skills are required to identify and fix problems in students' lives; emphasize active learning related to the present life and the life of the community in the future (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Ansyar, 2015).

In conjunction with their roles in education, Makarim's freedom of learning policy and Dewey's educational philosophy and philosophical base encourage teachers to be guides and facilitators in problem-solving using a scientific inquiry approach. The teacher acts as a person who changes and improves education and in the learning process, s/he takes a critical role as a project director and lead researcher. The teacher helps students to be aware of the problems that will be encountered by humans now and in the future. Furthermore, the curriculum focus should be centered on student interests, based on human problems and affairs, subject matter, interdisciplinary activities, and project-based. Besides, it should emphasize social research methods and social sciences; examines political, economic, and social issues, focuses on the present and future needs, sensitive to local, national, and global issues. Progressive and reconstructive education philosophy whose philosophical basis is pragmatism is a ladder leading to the freedom of learning (Ornstein, C, A., & Hunkins, 2013; Ansyar, 2015). To sum up, Makarim's freedom of learning policy and Dewey's educational philosophy and philosophical base require democratic education oriented towards *practical life, society's growth, and change and social reform*.

Philosophically, apart from the 4 pillars of MECRI Makarim's freedom of learning policy, the idea of freedom of learning itself has the same meaning, values, and or interpretations as John Dewey's idea of "democracy and education." Especially in Dewey's philosophy of education which emphasizes that as follows:

Education is, in essence, to promote democratic and social living along with developing systems of education preparing young people to improve and reconstruct society; to educate for change and social reform; to live, reflect, analyze, discuss, learn and continue learning (Dewey, 1948; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013; Leeuwen, 2016). Along with developing systems of education in the 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning and skills Drew (2021) elucidates that "In education, the philosophy of pragmatism is an approach to learning and teaching focusing on keeping things practical. Its key theorist is John Dewey proposing 4 instructional principles: *Unity, Interest, Experience, and Integration*. Therefore, a pragmatic teacher is encouraged to integrate these 4 principles into a *problem or project-based learning and learning by doing strategies* in the classroom and focus on topics relevant to students' real-life." Pragmatism believes that students are free, independent, creative and dynamic creatures who have natural abilities to develop, work and live together to build society (Sarah, 2018).

Likewise, Sharma *et al.*, (2018) explicate 4 basic principles in the foundation of the pragmatic philosophy of education as quoted directly below.

#### 1. Principle of Utility

Everything that students learn should have 'utility'. This means that everything should be *useful and meaningful to the students*. A student does not care for learning abstract theoretical ideas that they will never apply to their lives outside of school. Instead, a student wants to learn things that are *relevant to their lives*. By making things relevant and useful, students will be more engaged and eager to learn.

#### 2. Principle of Interest

Curriculum content should also include the *students' interests*. Dewey, as a key pragmatist theorist, argues that students have four interests: *conversation, investigation, construction and creative expression*. Therefore, teachers should focus

on creating lessons that involve talking with one another, investigating things through experimentation, making things, and being creative.

3. Principle of *Experience*

Pragmatists value experience over all else. Students can learn abstract things all day, but unless they *experience* those things, they may never truly learn. Teachers should therefore create a lot of *problem and project-based, experimental and experiential* learning that help students '*learn by doing.*'

4. Principle of *Integration*

Curriculum content is not separate. *Mathematics, science and creative arts* are not three different lessons. Instead, the pragmatic teacher links the curriculum content together through a process we call '*integration*'. The teacher will show students how concepts from different subjects are related to each other and encourage a holistic understanding of the topics they are learning.

The freedom of learning policy is, in truth, inseparable from the foundation of pragmatic philosophy emphasizing the 4 educational principles of Unity, Interest, Experience, and Integration. Similarly, the conceptions of Drew (2021), Sharma *et al.*, (2018) strongly affirm the relevance and connection between that 21st-century learning and skills and freedom of learning policy which must be based on pragmatic philosophy. The philosophical base of education, freedom of learning's policy, and other pragmatism ideas lead to education and teaching that focuses on practice, action, applications, direct assessment, realistic problems, open-ended thinking; on 4Cs' skills and competencies, namely: collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity; on information, media and ICT (information, communication, and technology) literacies; on something practical which must produce meaningful results; on values and meanings that are relevant to the students' real-life; on problem-based, project-based, experimentation and experiential learning; on collaborative methods in constructing knowledge and on authentic or performance assessment in measuring learning. In addition, teachers must provide the widest possible opportunity for students to reflect on their learning; articulate or present their works, and defend their ideas about the work they generate in public. Other demands in this 21st-century educational civilization are the integration of theoretical knowledge and practice in facilitating the students to respond to the global needs; the efforts to change the students' paradigm about various information and developments in the 21st-century civilization which continues to be influenced by the transformation of digital technology (Nitko, 2001; Herrington, A. & Herrington, 2006; Mueller, 2016).

The idea above, firstly, encourages Makarim to initiate such a freedom of learning policy in primary, secondary, and tertiary education in Indonesia. The policy is very much in accordance with the 4 principles of John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy of education which stresses freedom of thought in learning and in expressing an opinion. Besides, the foundation (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013) accentuates that education must be related to life and development (growth) which includes practical learning (experimental learning and learning through education) which concerns practical matters for real-life or practical needs of real-world life (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013).

Afterward, Makarim does expect Indonesian education to be able to build student interactions with their environment, change orientation, be able to read changing times, and technological transformation. This is the reality. Meanwhile, in the context of developing student knowledge, he intends for Indonesian education to be able to connect previous experiences and knowledge with the knowledge that is being studied using scientific methods. The expected values are situational and relative and emphasize change and verification. The roles of education in his policy which also refers to pragmatism philosophy foundation are to urge the teachers to explore and develop students' critical and creative thinking through the scientific process. Learning stresses methods that are closely related to environmental changes and scientific

processes, while the curriculum focuses on the assumption that there is no permanent knowledge, there should be the right experience in transmitting culture, preparing students for change, and prioritizing problem-solving activities in the learning process. These roles are the cores of the pragmatism school of philosophy which interpret knowledge as a process by which reality is always changing. The learning process occurs or exists when students are involved in a problem-solving process that can be transferred to various subjects and situations. Both the students and the environment continue to change (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013).

The emergence of the Makarim freedom of learning policy is based on the thoughts of pragmatists who totally reject the idea of universal and absolute truth. Both see eye to eye that the only guidance that helps humans is that when they interact with the world or their own environment, all generalizations and statements (knowledge) that are built must go through research and verification. For Makarim and pragmatists, teaching must be critical or emphasize critical thinking. Teaching must be exploratory, not explanative. The method is more important than the subjects. Questions such as “*why, to what extent, how come, what if*” are more crucial than the form of questions such as “*why, who, where, when, or what* (the 1H+5W’s) because such question forms (why, to what extent, what if, or how come) will provoke students to critically and creatively think of something. Makarim and Dewey do hope that education must emphasize the process to improve the standard of living (students) and humans in general. On that basis, the developed curriculum naturally emphasizes the experiences and interests of Indonesian students so that they are well prepared to achieve a better life. Subjects are more interdisciplinary (inter or interdisciplinary) focusing more on problem-solving and scientific methods (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). To briefly conclude that Makarim’s freedom of learning policy which is backed by philosophies of pragmatism and experimentalism is based on change, process, and relativity: relating to space, time, and motion.

The idea of freedom of learning seems to be an extraordinary idea if it can be interpreted using the scientific method of John Dewey’s pragmatism philosophy and is sincerely and correctly implemented in the classroom in response to the demands of real life. The research finding affirms, without a doubt, to adhere to the philosophical foundations mentioned above considering, first, Dewey’s ideas and Makarim’s idea of freedom of learning have significantly contributed to rejecting the idea of very handcuffed traditional teaching methods to a contemporary, revolutionary, progressive (progressive philosophy) education where students must learn through their experiences, attach importance to students’ learning needs and interests, teach students to be good citizens and learners.

The progressivists, moreover, believe that education should focus on the whole child and or students, not on mere contents or on teachers. This educational philosophy emphasizes that students must test their ideas through active experimentation. Learning must be rooted in the questions students have that arise through experience. This is active, not passive learning. The learner must be able to solve problems and critically think to make meaning for his/her personal learning experiences. An effective teacher provides experiences so students can learn by doing. Curriculum content comes from students’ interests and questions. The scientific method should be used by progressive educators so that students can learn material and events systematically and directly. The emphasis is on the process of how a student can know. This kind of paradigm originates from the progressive educational philosophy which was founded in America from the mid-1920s to the mid-1950s. John Dewey was a pioneer of the main idea. One of his teachings is that schools should improve the way of life of the citizens through the experience of freedom and democracy schools. Joint decision-making, teacher planning with students, and topics that students choose are all aspects. Books are tools, not authorities (Cohen, 2020).

Secondly, as the originator of the idea of freedom of learning, Makarim already understands that his idea is completely oriented to the foundation of John Dewey’s philosophy of pragmatism whose philosophy of education is reconstructionism. Makarim’s freedom of learning policy,



therefore, emphasizes answering social questions and efforts to create a better society. Besides, the policy encouraged educators to focus on curricula that highlight social reform as an educational goal. He recognized the potential for human annihilation through technology and the human capacity to create a good society using technology. Similarly, George Counts (1889-1974) recognized that education is a means of preparing people to create new social safety and welfare. Makarim believes that policy and or systems must be changed to overcome education complexities by highlighting processes of inquiry in which the students must rediscover the world (Cohen, 2020).

Historically, pragmatism-based progressive education is a pedagogical movement that began in the late nineteenth century. It has survived in various forms today. The term progressive is used to distinguish this education from the traditional 19th-century Euro-American curriculum, which had its roots in classical preparation for university and was highly distinguished by social class. In contrast, progressive education is rooted in current experiences. Most progressive education programs have in common with the philosophy of pragmatism such as emphasis on learning by doing hands-on projects, expeditionary learning, and experiential learning. The integrated curriculum focuses on thematic units, integration of entrepreneurship into education, emphasis on problem-solving, critical thinking, group work, social skills development, collaborative and cooperative learning, and project-based assessment (Kennedy, 2019).

Makarim's idea of freedom of learning expects that education in Indonesia should have basic principles as has been philosophically defined and shaped in John Dewey's philosophy of pragmatism that focuses on practical matters. The four basic principles are unity, interests, experience, and integration. In Makarim's idea of freedom of learning, a teacher should be a pragmatic teacher who is able to use active project-based learning strategies in the classroom and focuses on topics relevant to students' real life. The main keys when being a pragmatic teacher in this pragmatism philosophy are to focus on teaching how to do practical things which generate useful results; involve practical lessons that have value for the lives of students; always accentuate the uses of project-based learning, play-based learning, experimentation, and experiential learning in constructing the students' knowledge, skills, and competencies in the pragmatic classrooms. The opposite of pragmatic education is what all call *idealist education*.

In contrast to a pragmatic teacher, an idealistic teacher sweeps away from teaching abstract ideas that are useless in the students' real life. If you only want to learn things that are relevant to your life, you are probably a pragmatist. Regarding its origin, the term pragmatism actually comes from a Greek phrase that means practice and action. From this meaning or understanding, the main phrases emerge in the concept of pragmatic philosophy such as facts can change, pragmatics is utilitarian, experience is king, thoughts and actions are interrelated, something is better than nothing, and man is a social being. Then, these phrases are used to build theory or science education. These phrases develop rapidly and have effects on the concept of pragmatism in education where experimental and project-based learning, play-based learning, and group work and negotiation are strategies used in constructing the students' knowledge, skills, and competencies. The role of the pragmatic teacher is to help children act and create resource-rich classrooms with project-based learning. Pragmatic teachers do not directly teach content but facilitate students to actively learn.

A traditional educator, on the other hand, can teach through behaviorist teaching methods such as using a learning ROTE technique. The technique requires every student to memorize anything without any deeper understanding and it is seen as wise on stage. In contrast, the pragmatic educator is a guide on the side. The pragmatic teacher defines assignments and sends students to discover ways to complete the assigned tasks in practical and pragmatic ways. This kind of approach, whose student-centered learning process, is very similar to the forest school approach, humanism in education, and sociocultural education theory (Adeleye, 2017; Dewey, 1948; Tiffany, nd; Sadulloh, 2008; Salahudin, 2011).

From the description above, the effects of the call for this slogan or policy, freedom of learning, on improving the quality of education in Indonesia are the following details. Firstly, this policy stands on the foundation of John Dewey's pragmatism philosophy where every teacher is expected to be able to become a pragmatic teacher to teach practical things that are closely related to students' real life and growth (development). The foundation that makes it easier for teachers to teach practical things is by understanding and mastering the 4 principles of pragmatic philosophy in education. These principles are, first, the Principle of Utility (whatever is learned must-have benefits in the real world for students). The second is the Principle of Interest (curriculum content must be relevant to the real-life needs of students). The third is the Principle of Experience (teachers must create and develop various project-based, problem-based, experimental, and experience-based teaching materials to help students learn by doing). Fourth is the Principle of Integration. The teachers must be able to integrate all different kinds of subjects to become a holistic understanding, for example, linguistics, language education, language research methodology, and pedagogy must be integrated as a whole (Sharma *et al.*, 2018).

The second effect is the application of the *active learning* approach which includes technology-based learning, inquiry-based learning, problem/project-based learning, activity-based learning, etc. This is a major transformation in which teachers have themselves shifted from back-to-basics (traditional) educational approaches to contemporary ones, one of which is active learning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Beck, 2009; Bean, 2011). This transformation can be seen clearly where the learning process is centred on students; learning objectives emphasize procedural knowledge and skills (how to do/operate); students are grouped based on their respective interests and abilities; teaching materials are based on projects, integrated subjects with various multidisciplinary disciplines divided into thematic units; learning content leads to higher-order thinking skills from analyzing, evaluating, to creating new ideas. In terms of social aspects, teamwork, self-awareness, and interpersonal relationships are easier to build among students.

Theoretically, the transformation from back-to-basics (traditional) educational approaches to active learning have been in line with the principles of active learning proposed by Douglas Barnes in 1989 that learning must be relevant to student needs and the demands of the global market, there must be a discussion between a teacher and students regarding the learning methods applied, it must be critical in understanding the learning content, the teaching materials must be complex and related to the student's real-world life, must emphasize reflective analysis, must take heed of the situation in establishing learning activities and assignments, and authentic learning must reflect learning activities in the classroom (Barnes, 1989; Kyriacou, 1992).

In addition, the active learning approach completely changes the learning situation where the teacher actively leads students to participate or be actively involved in the instructional process. This is in accordance with the opinion of Bonwell & Eison (1991) stating that every student must actively participate in reading, writing, discussing, or being involved in solving every problem (Barnes, 1989). Renkl, Atkinson, Maier, and Staley convey the same thing that active learning involves students in two aspects, namely doing things and thinking about the things done (Kyriacou, 1992) with the basic principles of active learning proposed by Douglas Barnes (Barnes, 1989; Kyriacou, 1992). A class game, learning by teaching, a think-pair-share, a learning cell (2 students learn together by asking and answering questions. It was designed by Marcel Goldschmid in 1971 at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne), a collaborative learning group, just-in-time teaching, a short-written exercise, a class discussion, a student debate, a small group discussion, a reaction to a You Tube's video are alternative techniques of constructing knowledge and skills in an active learning approach. The techniques have an impact on students' deep learning (Renkl, Atkinson, Maier, & Staley, 2002).

The third is project-based learning which is linked to digital technology that has colored the learning materials and teaching methods. Through these learning approaches, students are able to acquire a deeper knowledge through active exploration of real-world problems and challenges

with an emphasis on the depth of understanding of concepts, a broader knowledge base, and better improvement and progress in students' communication, interpersonal, social, leadership, and writing skills where critical thinking and creativity, collaboration, and various forms of communication or 4Cs in a term on 21st-century education and skills become references in solving every single problem encountered. The learning approach previously mentioned truly requires authenticities of learning materials, tasks, and environments in bringing students closer to their real-world (Buendgens-Kosten, 2014). This is one of the bases for issuing the freedom of learning or sovereign campus' policy in the Indonesian education context. From philosophical perspectives, the learning approach was firstly initiated by philosophers such as Confucius and Aristotle, and Socrates. They modeled how to learn through inquiry and critical thinking. Maria Montessori with the formation of education occurs not because of listening to words but of the environment's experience. Jean Piaget with the idea of making meaning out of experiences through asking questions, investigating, interacting with others, and reflecting on these experiences. John Dewey helps students prepare for continuous learning about a dynamic world (Barnes, 1989; Kyriacou, 1992).

Then, Problem-based Learning (Pro-bL) is a pedagogical approach that supports learning independence or a sovereign campus. This approach is more concerned with students learning something knowledge and skills through the experience of solving problems found in trigger materials (the teaching material must be a trigger to stimulate students to solve problems, for example, paper-based clinical scenarios, laboratory data, photos, articles or videos or patients (real or simulated). Pro-by not only focuses on solving problems with specified solutions but also develops the skills the students expect including knowledge acquisition, group collaboration, and communication. The teacher must build and develop students' methods of reasoning to construct their knowledge as embodied in The Maastricht seven-jump process involving clarifying terms, defining problems, brainstorming (students put forward as many ideas and suggestions as they can think of), structuring and hypotheses, learning objectives, independent study, and synthesis (Markham, 2011).

Furthermore, the Makarim Freedom of Learning policy emphasizes the use of digital technology in every learning process. Digital technology which has become the core family in the life of every human being and education, is the main supplement in the instructional process of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The effect of digital technology is a paramount consideration in issuing freedom of learning or sovereign campus' policy. All have understood that the industrial revolution 4.0 has had a huge impact on the world of education where, first, the internet of things is the main source and means of "search for" knowledge. Whatever the teachers and students want, it is easily retrieved from the accessing Internet using the Wireless Network Connection. Furthermore, instructional processes can also be carried out online (e-Learning), some of which are synchronous e-Learning (online and real-time instruction using Skype, Chat on WA, FB, virtual classrooms, etc.); asynchronous e-Learning (online but indirectly using e-mail, blogs, wikis, hypertext documents, audio, YouTube, video courses, Web 2.0 social networking, etc. Asynchronous learning is very appropriate for students with physical health problems, those who work, etc. The system gives students the freedom to complete work at their own pace). Flipp classroom is an instructional strategy in which computer-assisted learning is integrated with classroom teaching. Learning content is delivered outside of the classroom, often online via video streaming, online reading material, online chat, and a variety of other e-sources (Boss, 2011, Wood, 2003, Al-Asfour, 2012; (Loutchko, Kurbel, & Pakhomov, 2002).

The freedom of learning or sovereign campus' policy, which is based on the foundation of John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy, culminates in the affirmation of the uses of digital technology and authentic learning materials with its basic principles emphasizing authentic context, authentic activities, collaborative knowledge construction, modeling or examples by practitioners to students, reflection after learning is complete, openness and acceptance of

different opinions, ideas, perspectives among students during the instructional process, presentations and demonstrations of performance in class and in public, learning guidance (scaffolding and coaching) to students who require tutoring and performance-based assessment in assessing learning (Herrington, A. & Herrington, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Özur & Duman, 2019). With the various learning processes mentioned above, it can be believed that students are able to think imaginatively, creatively, and critically with the achievement of finding ideas that can be used for their own lives and their environment. Shortly, the series of explanations above clearly confirms that the freedom of learning or sovereign campus' policy is able to free students from the shackles of past learning processes. Students no longer think that teachers are the source of knowledge. They are no longer just passive listeners to the teacher's explanation. They do not just read textbooks, do assignments and exercises and take exams to get grades at the end of the learning process. However, it is more than all of that. With the freedom of learning policy, students are easily connected to the wider world. They are able to share experiences, knowledge, and learning resources through various digital applications that are often used in the instructional process.

#### 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the public questions and doubts about the capability, integrity, and leadership of the Minister of Education of the Republic of Indonesia, Nadiem Makarim, along with his sensational idea and policy of freedom of learning have been answered through this small-scale research. The cogent answers are that Nadiem Makarim's education policy is to change and move Indonesian education to more progressive, reconstructive, and pragmatic directions based on the learning models of the 7C's X 3C's + 1P's = 21st-century learning skills. By these 21st-century education models, Indonesian education must focus on Critical thinking dan Problem-Solving (which teaches students to discover the truth in assertions), Creativity dan Innovation (which teaches students to think outside the box), Collaboration (teaches students to work together with others to achieve common goals) and Communication (teaches students to convey their best ideas), Cross-Cultural Understanding (teaches to understand and appreciate people of different belief, culture, and social stratification), Computing (teaches how to use ICT, and knowledge tools), Care for our self, other and the planet, Reflectiveness, Career and Learning self-reliance, Risk-taking and Imaginative.

The 21st-century learning models are considered capable of liberating students in the instructional process, in acquiring knowledge, and in developing skills and competencies through active learning, project and problem-based learning, authentic learning materials, and shifting the cognitive domain from lower-order thinking skills (LOTS) to higher-order thinking skills (HOTS). Teacher no longer spends hours transferring knowledge into students' brains or students are not fixated on listening to their teacher's lectures and spend time working on various kinds of exercises on their worksheets. Learning is no longer just a routine. The freedom of learning ensures that they are able to improve and reconstruct their own knowledge and interact well with today's very heterogeneous, flexible, and dynamic society. Besides, the freedom of learning provides them with a more democratic social life without pressure and coercion and educates them to realize that the world has transformed into digital technology systems where the transformation happens every second. That is why it needs total self-change and reform in order to be able to respond to the challenges and demands of today's digital era. All this can happen if John Dewey's pragmatism-based freedom of learning policy is properly implemented in the world of academia and education in Indonesia. The presence of digital technology in every heartbeat of human life forces us philosophically to change and without a doubt to be able to respond to changes and cutting-edge developments with knowledge, skills, and competencies that have been mastered. That is the importance of pragmatic philosophy and the freedom of learning's policy in liberating all human life. This idea or policy is able to lead Indonesian

education toward a more humanist path. Shortly, it is reiterated that Makarim's freedom of learning's ideas and policy are not oriented to secular capitalist-style education and curriculum.

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