

Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum Concept, Challenges and Benefits in Elementary School Education

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the concept, challenges, and benefits of implementing the independent curriculum at the elementary school level through a literature review approach. The independent curriculum is presented as a reform towards relevant and more student-centered learning, emphasizing flexibility and the development of Pancasila student profiles. Based on the literature review, it was found that there were challenges in its implementation, such as lack of teacher understanding, limited resources, and resistance to change. However, this curriculum also brings significant benefits, such as increased student learning motivation, teacher creativity, and the possibility of holistic learning outcomes. This study recommends ongoing support, such as intensive training and development of learning communities, to overcome these challenges. Therefore, the autonomous curriculum is expected to be implemented optimally, creating an adaptive and high-quality ecosystem for elementary education.

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Introduction

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum, although promising, is not free from various complex challenges, especially related to the readiness of human resources, availability of infrastructure, changes in mindset, and stakeholder support (Naibaho et al., 2025). The curriculum has an important role in the implementation of education (Fuad et al., 2024; Muttaqin, 2021). The education that is currently developing recognizes the need to adjust learning to the development and needs of society and related parties or stakeholders (Muhammad & Nurdyansyah, 2015). Education should not be an isolated entity or separate from the real world. Education has a legal basis that regulates the education system in Indonesia. This is regulated in the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Sisdiknas, 2003).

The law underlies this objective so that education can carry out its functions and roles effectively in society (Nurdyansyah, 2016). The curriculum is an important element in the

learning program that is the foundation and regulator for the education process. The curriculum is the soul of education (Syamsuddin & Hamami, 2023). The curriculum must be designed, implemented, and evaluated dynamically in accordance with the development of the times, the needs of Science, Technology, and Arts (IPTEKS), and the competencies needed by society and users of graduates (Junaidi et al., 2020). The curriculum must reflect competencies and skills that are relevant to the world of work and real life. A good curriculum will prepare students with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed by society and users of graduates.

However, the existing conditions create a gap between the rules and practices in schools. According to (Risky Winarta Naibaho, et al. 2025), it is stated that The Independent Curriculum still faces various challenges that require serious attention. The main obstacles found include teachers' limited understanding of the curriculum concept, less than optimal training effectiveness, limited school resources, and lack of parental involvement in supporting project-based learning. especially for schools in remote areas, is also a major obstacle. Schools in remote areas often do not have access to technological devices, adequate teaching materials, and infrastructure that supports project-based learning. Not only that, resistance to change is also a factor that hinders the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Not all educators and parents welcome this curriculum change. Many teachers feel that their workload has increased because they have to be more creative in developing learning strategies that suit students' needs. Parents are also concerned that the flexibility of the Independent Curriculum may reduce the depth of the material learned by their children.

The curriculum is defined as a set of plans and arrangements as guidelines for organizing learning to achieve certain educational goals (Alhamuddin, 2014). Independent Learning which is set by the central government in an effort to achieve national education goals (Junaidi, 2020). During the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, there were a number of challenges faced. As a step to support the implementation of this curriculum, the government has implemented the Sekolah Penggerak program which functions as a pilot project for the development of school programs (Susilana et al., 2023). The authority to manage education is manifested in the form of a school mover providing flexibility to schools and local governments in planning, implementing and evaluating educational programs implemented in schools, with reference to policy principles. Through this approach, teachers have an important role in developing students' potential to become a superior generation and become the hope of the nation. To achieve this, an interesting and innovative learning atmosphere is needed, so that students are motivated to learn with enthusiasm (Khoirurrijal et al., 2022).

Research Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach that aims to provide a comprehensive picture or description of the problems in the implementation of the independent curriculum. The research method applied in this study is the library research method (Nurhanifah, 2021). This study refers to various sources of information such as books, relevant government-accredited journals and the latest data. The information obtained is then analyzed in depth with the aim of finding theories, analyses, and syntheses related to the implementation of the independent curriculum.

The results of this study will be in the form of an analysis and synthesis of the implementation of the independent curriculum. This library research will provide a deeper understanding of the concepts, theories, and practices related to the implementation of the independent curriculum in the context of Basic Education. This analysis can include challenges, benefits, recommendations, or other important aspects related to the implementation of the independent curriculum.

Result and Discussion

Result

The independent curriculum still faces various challenges that require serious attention. The main obstacles found include teachers' limited understanding of the curriculum concept, less than optimal training effectiveness, limited school resources, and lack of parental involvement in supporting project-based learning. However, this study also revealed that teachers have implemented several adaptation strategies to overcome these obstacles, such as contextual learning, grouping students based on their level of understanding, and implementing more flexible learning methods. In addition, the Independent Curriculum has been proven to have a positive impact on student engagement in learning, increasing their creativity, and providing a more meaningful learning experience.

To increase the effectiveness of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, several strategic steps are needed. First, the government and schools must improve the quality of teacher training to make it more applicable, sustainable, and based on direct practice so that teachers can understand and apply learning methods that are in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. Second, schools need additional facilities and learning media to support project-based learning, so the government and related parties must ensure that schools have access to adequate resources. Third, parental involvement needs to be increased through more intensive socialization so that they understand their role in supporting learning at home. Fourth, ongoing mentoring and supervision are needed to ensure that teachers receive guidance and feedback in implementing learning methods that are appropriate to students' needs.

According to Faiz & Purwati (2021), currently education has entered a new phase known as the concept of Merdeka Belajar. This concept emphasizes the importance of someone developing understanding and skills in various fields of science. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the individual's ability to be independent in learning, accessing resources and information, and developing personal interests and expertise. By prioritizing mastery of various fields of science, individuals are expected to be able to adopt critical thinking, have creativity, and have the ability to adapt to changes that occur in an increasingly complex and global world.

The Merdeka Belajar concept directs education to focus more on holistic individual development, with the aim that graduates have in-depth knowledge and relevant abilities to face the challenges and changes that occur in the era of globalization. There is a match between the concept of "Independent Learning" introduced by the Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim and the concept of education according to John Dewey's progressivism philosophy, as expressed by Mustaghfiroh, (2020), Both concepts also contain similar meanings, namely that students must have the freedom to develop naturally, direct experience is the best stimulus

in the learning process, teachers must act as good guides and facilitators, educational institutions must function as educational laboratories to encourage change in students, and activities that occur at school and at home must be able to collaborate with each other. with the aim of forming a free-spirited character through exploration of gaining knowledge from various sources, both in real life and in the digital world (Vhalery et al., 2022).

Discussion

5 Elementary School Selong is a B accredited public elementary institution located in the special city of Selong with a complete address on Jalan. Prof. M. Yamin, SH. RT. 36 Kebon Talo Selong, East Lombok Regency, West Nusa Tenggara Province. This elementary school is chaired by Mr. Pathulloh. Based on the basic education data (Kemendikbudristek, 2024), this primary school has 20 teachers consisting of 7 male teachers and 13 female teachers. 7 of these teachers are certified civil servant teachers and 1 teacher is a first aid worker. 5 Elementary School Selong also has 11 study groups with 286 students consisting of 156 boys and 130 girls.

Based on interviews with the fifth grade homeroom teacher at 5 Elementary School Selong, it was found that one of the things that affects low learning outcomes is students' fear of learning, especially in learning mathematics. This is evidenced by the fact that students tend to be afraid of learning math, afraid of being told to count, do problems, most students do not like math like they like other lessons. Students also when given assignments tend to find it difficult and complain that they cannot do it, even though the form of the problem given is not much different from the examples discussed earlier. Even though they have been given examples, students simply follow the same steps but they still complain of difficulty. Most students stated that they were not interested in math, and they had a general view that math was complex and not fun.

The research entitled "The Correlation of Mathematics Anxiety Level with the Numeracy Ability of Grade V Students" was conducted from May 8, 2024 to May 18, 2024. The sample in this study were 27 fifth grade students at 5 Elementary School Selong. In this study, researchers limited the problem formulation to three namely, knowing the description of math anxiety, numeracy skills, and the relationship between math anxiety and student numeracy skills.

1. Challenges in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

According to Rezky et al., (2019), there are five important domains in developing the quality of human resources (HR), namely professionalism, competitiveness, functional competence, participatory excellence, and cooperation. The purpose of the Independent Learning Curriculum is to create a learning environment that focuses on the needs and potential of individual students. By providing freedom and flexibility to teachers and students, it is hoped that there will be an increase in participation, quality, and relevance of education in accordance with the development of the times and global demands (Events, 2023). Challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum include teachers' lack of understanding of how to implement it, limited facilities and infrastructure, and inadequate learning facilities to support its implementation (Nazara et al., 2024).

The challenge faced in facing the independent curriculum is the readiness of human resources, especially teachers, who are the main pillars in its implementation. Teachers have a central role as the locomotive and driving force for the success of various independent learning

programs, such as differentiated learning, strengthening the profile of Pancasila students, learning assessments, and the use of technology as a learning support tool. Therefore, it is important to continuously and consistently strengthen the existence of teachers through development programs that are in accordance with needs (Lubis, n.d.). However, it must be acknowledged that the teacher professional development programs that have been implemented have not had a significant impact on improving the quality and quality of education in Indonesia.

The importance of continuous and consistent efforts to strengthen the role of teachers through appropriate development programs according to needs. To develop learning, teachers must invest more time and energy in planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process. Carrying out the function of learning assessment which is an integrated part of learning, schools often ignore the importance of implementing learning assessments in achieving curriculum implementation goals. Currently, most teachers are still limited to final/summative learning assessments, while learning assessments should include initial assessments, process assessments (assessment for and as learning), and final learning assessments (assessment of learning), as explained in the concept of evaluation and learning theory. The series of assessment processes should be an interrelated and integrated unit in the learning process, forming a non-linear cycle. They have difficulty in formulating Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), and Learning Objective References (ATP) in the Merdeka Curriculum platform (Rohmayana & Zaki, 2024). In the Merdeka Learning Curriculum, it must be acknowledged that not all students have the ability or readiness to be active and independent in learning. Some students may need additional guidance and support to develop these skills. Teachers transform knowledge and educational institutions need to provide an environment that supports and stimulates students' moral and social behavior to be better (Selvia et al., 2024).

2. Benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum

Merdeka Belajar is expected to be a new spirit in making a change towards a better direction from the previous conditions (Bungawati, 2022), where the policy will provide benefits for the implementation of the independent learning policy for principals, teachers, parents, and local governments (Alhamuddin, 2014). Some of the benefits of the independent curriculum that will be obtained. First, the benefits that will be obtained are the ability of principals, teachers, parents, and local governments to work together in finding and finding effective, efficient, and responsive solutions to conditions, challenges, and educational problems in each school. Second, principals, teachers, parents, and local governments feel they own and are responsible for managing education in schools in their respective areas (Khoirurrijal et al., 2022).

There are several important points related to the advantages of the Independent Curriculum (Uswatun Hasanah, SE, 2022). (<https://lpmpdki.kemdikbud.go.id/mengenal-kurikulum-merdeka/>):

Differentiated learning.

Every child is unique and has been equipped with unique abilities, interests, and talents since birth. Therefore, every teacher must be able to identify and utilize this potential to improve the potential and learning achievements of students. Teachers conduct initial assessments to

identify students' competencies, interests, and talents. This assessment includes measuring the cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of each student. The results of the assessment are then used by teachers to apply differentiated learning approaches and processes according to the needs of each student. In addition to the initial assessment, formative and summative assessments are also carried out in the learning process. The results of this assessment provide information on the development of each student's learning achievements. Thus, the student mapping-based approach becomes the basis for teachers in providing guidance so that each student can achieve maximum competence according to the learning objectives set by the school, as well as to overcome differences in competence between these students.

The substance of student competency achievement is simpler, more essential and deeper. Graduate Competency Standards are a set of minimum criteria that indicate students' abilities in attitudes, skills and knowledge that must be achieved at the end of the education level. The learning achievement approach in the independent curriculum is a graduate competency standard that has been set by the central government. This Learning Outcomes approach simplifies the content of the material taught but remains in-depth, with a focus on establishing a Pancasila student profile and developing literacy and numeracy competencies.

The period for fulfilling Learning Outcomes is more flexible. One of the goals of the Independent Learning Curriculum is to change the learning process so that it is not only an obligation that must be fulfilled, but also a meaningful and enjoyable experience for students. Every teacher is expected to be able to provide the best teaching with a differentiated approach, which not only involves various learning methods and strategies, but also has a deeper depth of understanding.

Project based learning. In addition to learning in the curriculum, there is an allocation of 20% to 30% of the total teaching hours to carry out learning projects. This percentage is not applied specifically to each subject, but is a combination of various disciplines. These projects focus on issues relevant to the surrounding environment, with the aim of increasing students' sensitivity to the environment and their critical, analytical, and problem-solving abilities.

These projects also aim to strengthen the profile of Pancasila Students, not only in improving knowledge and competence comprehensively, but also in an effort to achieve characteristics that are in accordance with the profile of Pancasila Students. Integrating various disciplines and raising environmental issues in learning projects, it is hoped that students can develop a more holistic understanding and be able to link various knowledge and skills in real contexts. In addition, through these projects, students are also invited to play an active role in solving problems and facing challenges that arise, thus encouraging the development of critical and creative thinking skills.

Conclusion

The curriculum has weaknesses or deficiencies and includes challenges faced so that at some point it can be considered less relevant. This is the basis for the curriculum change. Material that is too dense, administration that is too complicated, are points in evaluating the 2013 curriculum. Therefore, to accelerate learning, the government implements the Independent Curriculum in which only essential materials will be studied, teachers and students have freedom in learning, so that it is more based on the characteristics and needs of each, so

that in this curriculum more emphasis is placed on differentiated learning. In this curriculum too, character building becomes clearer where the ultimate goal of this curriculum is the formation of a Pancasila student profile, namely students who have the Pancasila character".

Recommendation

Based on the results of the literature review and the discussion, this study proposes several strategic recommendations to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level. First, it is essential to provide ongoing training and mentoring for teachers, with practical and applicable content that addresses real classroom challenges. Second, both central and local governments should ensure the availability of adequate facilities and learning media to support project-based learning, especially in remote schools. Third, parental involvement must be strengthened through intensive outreach programs to help parents understand their crucial role in supporting students' learning at home. Fourth, schools should establish teacher learning communities as platforms for sharing best practices, fostering collaboration, and promoting innovation according to the specific context of each school. These recommendations are expected to serve as valuable input for stakeholders in building an adaptive and high-quality educational ecosystem through the Merdeka Curriculum.

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