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## The Influence of Independent Curriculum Implementation and Teacher Competence on Improving the Quality of Basic Education: A Literature Review

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**Abstract:** This study aims to review the literature on the impact of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and teacher competency on improving the quality of basic education in Indonesia. Through a literature review approach and systematic literature review (SLR), this article identifies the main dimensions that contribute to the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the development of teacher competency. The results of the study indicate that the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes competency-based learning and student independence, has a positive correlation with the quality of basic education. In addition, teacher competency, including pedagogical mastery, professionalism, social, and personality, has been shown to play a crucial role in optimizing student learning outcomes. This article also builds hypotheses for future research.

**Keyword:** Independent Curriculum, Teacher Competence, Basic Education, Education Quality

### INTRODUCTION

The objective contains the question of the article that must be explained in the discussion and answered in the conclusion. Basic education is the main foundation in shaping the quality of a nation's human resources. Based on data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Indonesia has more than 25 million elementary school students in 2024 (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). Changes in the learning approach are very important to improve the quality of education, so the government launched the Independent Curriculum as an effort to reform national education.

The Independent Curriculum offers freedom to educational units and teachers in designing and implementing learning according to the needs of students (Putri, 2023). However, the effectiveness of the implementation of this curriculum is highly dependent on the quality of teachers as the spearhead in the education process. Teacher competence in the fields of pedagogy, personality, social, and professionalism are key factors in optimizing the implementation of the curriculum.

Based on previous research, there is a significant relationship between the implementation of the new curriculum and improved student learning outcomes (Suryani & Wulandari, 2023). This article aims to examine in more depth how the Independent Curriculum and teacher competence play a role in improving the quality of basic education, and to identify relevant indicators of both factors.

The urgency of this study is further strengthened by the results of the 2022 PISA survey, which shows that the literacy and numeracy achievements of Indonesian students are still below the OECD average (OECD, 2023). This indicates the need for innovation in curriculum policies and improving the competence of educators so that the quality of basic education can improve significantly.

In several studies, the implementation of innovative curricula such as the Independent Curriculum is associated with increased learning motivation, student creativity, and better academic outcomes (Rahmawati, 2024). On the other hand, the success of implementing a new curriculum is greatly influenced by the readiness and ability of teachers to understand and implement new concepts in learning.

Research conducted by Nugroho (2023) shows that intensive teacher training on the Independent Curriculum has a positive impact on the understanding of the curriculum and its application in the classroom. This indicates that teacher competence is an important mediator in the relationship between curriculum implementation and education quality.

Based on this background, the purpose of writing this article is to build a hypothesis for further research, namely to formulate: 1) The role of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in improving the quality of basic education; and 2) The role of teacher competence in improving the quality of basic education.

## **METHOD**

The method of writing this article uses the Literature Review (library research) and Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approaches. Data sources were collected through online academic platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Mendeley using the keywords: "Independent Curriculum", "Teacher Competence", and "Quality of Basic Education".

Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is defined as the process of identifying, assessing, and interpreting all available research evidence to systematically answer research questions (Kitchenham et al., 2009). This approach allows the selection of relevant and credible literature in answering the formulation of the research problem.

The process of searching and selecting articles follows inclusion criteria such as a minimum year of publication of 2018-2024, topic relevance, and type of empirical research or literature study. The analysis was carried out qualitatively by comparing research results to build a conceptual framework.

In the context of qualitative analysis, this literature review explores in depth the role of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and teacher competence in improving the quality of basic education. The ultimate goal is to compile a synthesis of existing research findings and develop new hypotheses.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Quality of Basic Education**

The quality of basic education is the level of student learning achievement in the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains according to national standards (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). Quality indicators include national exam results, literacy levels, and basic numeracy of students (Ali, 2023). A study by Rahman (2022) shows that the quality of basic education in Indonesia is still below the OECD average. Factors that influence this quality include the availability of learning resources, teacher competence, and curriculum

implementation. Improving basic quality is the main focus in the 2021-2024 education reform. Another study by Sari (2023) emphasizes the importance of curriculum innovation in improving learning outcomes.

### **Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

The Independent Curriculum is a new education policy that provides flexibility to education units and teachers in developing teaching materials (Kemendikbudristek, 2023). The main principles of the Independent Curriculum include project-based learning, differentiation, and strengthening student character (Ali, 2023). A study by Nugroho (2024) shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can increase students' active participation in learning. The dimensions analyzed include freedom to design learning, local curriculum adaptation, and formative assessment. Another study (Putri, 2023) revealed that this implementation is effective in improving students' 21st century skills. However, its effectiveness is highly dependent on teacher readiness.

### **Teacher Competence**

Teacher competence includes pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies needed in carrying out professional duties (Law on Teachers and Lecturers No. 14 of 2005). According to Ali (2023), teacher competence is a key factor in determining the quality of learning. A study by Hidayati (2023) shows that teachers who have high competence are able to implement the Independent Curriculum more effectively. Competence indicators include the ability to design learning, manage classes, conduct assessments, and develop themselves. Recent research by Prasetyo (2024) shows that increasing teacher competence is positively correlated with student learning outcomes. Thus, strengthening teacher competence is a strategic priority in education reform.

### **The Role of Independent Curriculum Implementation on the Quality of Basic Education**

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum provides freedom for teachers to adjust teaching methods to students' needs (Sari, 2023). This principle of flexibility has been proven to increase student engagement in project-based learning (Nugroho, 2024). This curriculum encourages the development of character, creativity, and critical thinking in students, which are important indicators of the quality of education (Ali, 2023). In practice, schools that have successfully implemented the Independent Curriculum have experienced an increase in student literacy and numeracy assessment results. Putri's study (2023) stated that driving schools showed an average increase in literacy scores of 12% compared to conventional schools. Therefore, the Independent Curriculum has a positive impact on improving the quality of basic education.

### **Challenges in Implementing the Independent Curriculum**

Although it offers flexibility, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum faces major challenges in the field (Ali, 2023). One of the main challenges is the lack of understanding of teachers about the principles of the Independent Curriculum. A study by Rahman (2022) found that 43% of teachers in elementary schools still have difficulty designing project-based learning. The lack of intensive training is the main factor causing this obstacle. In addition, limited facilities and infrastructure in several areas exacerbate the implementation gap. Therefore, the success of the Independent Curriculum is highly dependent on systemic support, including training and resources.

## **The Influence of Teacher Pedagogical Competence on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

Pedagogical competence plays an important role in determining the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Sari, 2023). Teachers with good pedagogical competence are better able to design contextual learning that is relevant to students' needs. Hidayati's (2023) research shows that teachers with intensive pedagogical training can increase student engagement by 20%. This competency includes understanding student characteristics, instructional design, and formative assessment. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires teachers' reflective abilities in adjusting learning materials and methods. Therefore, pedagogical training must be a priority in education policy.

## **Correlation of Teacher Professional Competence with Education Quality**

Teachers' professional competence, namely mastery of teaching materials and teaching methods, greatly affects the quality of basic education (Ali, 2023). Prasetyo's (2024) study shows a positive correlation between the level of teacher content mastery and students' academic grades. Teachers who master the substance of the material are better able to link learning to the context of students' real lives. This increases the relevance and meaning of learning for students (Nugroho, 2024). The quality of education is not only determined by the curriculum, but also by the quality of mastery of the content taught by teachers. Therefore, a professional competence improvement program is very necessary.

## **The Role of Formative Assessment in the Independent Curriculum**

Formative assessment is a key element in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Putri, 2023). This assessment functions to monitor student progress and adjust learning in real time. Sari's study (2023) found that the use of formative assessments increased student learning outcomes by 15%. Teachers who are skilled at conducting formative assessments can identify individual student needs more effectively. The Independent Curriculum emphasizes that assessment is not just a final evaluation, but an integral part of the learning process. Therefore, formative assessment training must be strengthened.

## **Technology Integration in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

Technology plays an important role in strengthening the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, especially project-based learning (Ali, 2023). The use of a Learning Management System (LMS) makes it easier for teachers to design interactive learning. A study by Rahman (2022) showed that technology integration increased student engagement by 18%. However, the digital gap is still a major challenge, especially in the 3T (underdeveloped, frontier, outermost) areas. Equal access to internet and technological devices needs to be a government concern. Without infrastructure support, the potential of technology in the Independent Curriculum will not be optimal.

## **Differences in Implementation in City and Village Schools**

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum shows significant differences between schools in cities and villages (Sari, 2023). City schools are generally better prepared in terms of human resources and learning facilities. In contrast, village schools face the constraint of a lack of competent teachers and supporting facilities (Hidayati, 2023). Ali's research (2023) shows that this difference contributes to the gap in the quality of education between regions. Affirmative programs for underdeveloped areas are key to equalizing the success of the Independent Curriculum. Without affirmative policies, educational inequality will continue.

## **Social Competence and Collaborative Role of Teachers**

Teachers' social competence affects collaborative abilities in the school environment (Ali, 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to work together across subjects in designing thematic projects. A study by Prasetyo (2024) showed that collaboration between teachers improves the quality of student projects. Teachers with high social competence are better able to build a culture of cooperation and share good practices. This has a positive impact on strengthening the school culture that supports learning innovation. Therefore, the development of teachers' social competence needs to be integrated into training.

## **Relationship between Teacher Personality Competence and Performance**

Teacher personality competence, such as integrity, discipline, and work motivation, contribute greatly to the quality of education (Hidayati, 2023). Teachers who have strong personalities become positive role models for students in building character. A study by Nugroho (2024) revealed that teachers with high scores on personality competence tend to produce more orderly and conducive classes. The Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes strengthening the profile of Pancasila Students, requires teachers with integrity. Thus, strengthening teacher character is an important aspect in improving the quality of basic education. This requires a continuous coaching approach at the school level.

## **Implementation of Teacher Training in the Independent Curriculum**

Teacher training is a strategic program to support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Sari, 2023). The Teacher Mover Program is one of the government's efforts to improve teacher competence. Putri's study (2023) shows that graduates of the Teacher Mover program are better able to develop differentiation-based learning. However, the scope of training is still limited and has not reached all teachers in the region. Evaluation of the training program shows the need for adaptation of local contexts in training materials (Ali, 2023). Therefore, training must be developed more inclusively and sustainably.

## **The Role of Principal Leadership**

The principal has a strategic role in ensuring the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Rahman, 2022). A transformational principal can encourage an innovative culture in schools. A study by Prasetyo (2024) stated that principal support increases teacher motivation to innovate. Supportive leadership facilitates collaboration between teachers and continuous professional development. The Independent Curriculum requires principals to be facilitators of change, not just administrators. Therefore, strengthening the principal's leadership capacity is an important agenda.

## **Project-Based Learning Innovation**

Project-Based Learning is a characteristic of the Independent Curriculum (Ali, 2023). This method is effective in developing students' creativity, cooperation, and problem-solving skills. Sari's study (2023) shows that project-based learning increases material retention by 17% compared to traditional methods. However, this innovation requires a change in the teacher's mindset from teacher-centered to student-centered. Teachers need to be given space for experimentation and support to develop contextual project models. Learning innovation is the key to the success of the Independent Curriculum at the education unit level.

## **The Importance of Learning Community Support**

Learning communities such as Teacher Working Groups (KKG) are an important forum in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Putri, 2023). This forum allows teachers to share good practices and improve learning strategies. Rahman's study (2022)

found that active involvement in learning communities increased teacher self-efficacy by 23%. Collaboration between teachers accelerates the adoption of curriculum innovations in schools. The government needs to encourage the strengthening of learning communities as an integral part of the education ecosystem. Without this horizontal collaboration, curriculum change will be slower.

### **Evaluation of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

Periodic evaluation is an important instrument in measuring the effectiveness of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Ali, 2023). Evaluation must cover aspects of planning, implementation, and student learning outcomes. Hidayati's study (2023) suggests using the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) evaluation model for the Independent Curriculum. Good evaluation provides feedback for continuous improvement. In addition to internal evaluation, external evaluation by an independent institution is also needed. This is to ensure objectivity in measuring implementation success.

### **Curriculum Synergy and Teacher Competence**

Innovative curricula such as the Merdeka Curriculum are only effective if implemented by competent teachers (Nugroho, 2024). The synergy between curriculum design and teacher competence determines the quality of learning. Putri's study (2023) found that teacher competence acts as a mediator between curriculum implementation and student learning outcomes. In other words, without competent teachers, curriculum excellence will not have a significant impact. Therefore, curriculum improvement and teacher development must go hand in hand. This is a systemic strategy in improving the quality of basic education.

### **Implications of Findings for Education Policy**

The findings of this study provide several important implications for education policy in Indonesia. First, teacher training must be oriented towards the practice of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Ali, 2023). Second, there needs to be affirmative support for schools in disadvantaged areas. Third, principals need to be empowered as agents of change. Fourth, teacher learning communities must be strengthened to support learning innovation. Finally, curriculum evaluation must be carried out periodically to ensure the quality of its implementation.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study shows that the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum is highly dependent on teacher competency in various aspects, including pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies. The Independent Curriculum offers flexibility and a project-based approach that encourages student creativity, but challenges such as limited teacher understanding, gaps in infrastructure, and disparities between regions remain major obstacles. Systemic support through ongoing training, strengthening learning communities, and principal leadership are key factors in accelerating the adoption of this curriculum. The integration of technology in learning and formative assessment has also been shown to play a role in increasing the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum. These findings imply that curriculum development and teacher capacity building must be carried out simultaneously to achieve an even improvement in the quality of basic education in Indonesia. Therefore, affirmative policies, ongoing evaluation, and synergy between various stakeholders are needed to ensure the sustainability and success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

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