

EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDEPENDENT LEARNING CURRICULUM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER READINESS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This research aims to evaluate the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum and its implications for teacher readiness in secondary schools through a literature review. The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is an educational initiative that provides teachers with more flexibility to create relevant and contextual learning according to students' needs. This study analyzes various literature that discusses the implementation of this curriculum, as well as the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers. The results of the study show that although there is great potential in this curriculum to improve the quality of education, many teachers still face difficulties in adopting the new approaches required. Factors such as lack of adequate training, limited infrastructure support, and resistance to change are the main obstacles. Therefore, this research suggests the need for a more comprehensive professional development strategy, managerial support, and closer collaboration between schools, parents, and communities to ensure the successful implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide deeper insight and become the basis for developing more effective education policies.

Keywords: Independent Learning Curriculum, Teacher Readiness, Middle School

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, the world of education is faced with various challenges that require innovation in learning methods. One of the main challenges is how to prepare students to face rapid changes in the social, economic and technological environment (Isa et al., 2024). In Indonesia, the existing curriculum is often considered less flexible and too focused on theoretical aspects, thus hindering the development of practical skills that are important for students in real life (YULIANA, 2024). This problem triggers the need for more adaptive and relevant educational reform, which can accommodate the diverse potential and interests of students.

The Independent Learning Curriculum is one of the initiatives in the context of educational reform in Indonesia introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This curriculum is designed to provide greater autonomy to schools and teachers in organizing the learning process, so that it can be adapted to local needs and characteristics (Astuti, 2023). This approach seeks to focus learning on developing student competencies, not just on academic achievement, by providing opportunities for students to learn according to their interests and potential. With the Independent Learning Curriculum, students are expected to be more creative, innovative and independent, as well as have better problem-solving skills to face future challenges.

Evaluation of curriculum implementation is a crucial step to ensure that the educational goals that have been set can be achieved effectively and efficiently (Murni et al., 2024). In the context of the Independent Learning Curriculum, evaluation is needed to assess the extent to which this curriculum is successful in providing flexibility and autonomy to schools and teachers in the learning process. This evaluation can help identify strengths and weaknesses in curriculum implementation, including obstacles faced by various stakeholders such as teachers, students and school management. Without comprehensive and periodic evaluations, it is difficult to know whether the existing curriculum is truly having a positive impact on student development (Hindri et al., 2023).

Furthermore, evaluation of curriculum implementation also aims to ensure that the curriculum implemented is not only effective on paper, but is also able to be implemented well in daily practice in the classroom (Sungkalang et al., 2024). Through evaluation, it can be seen whether the learning material taught is in accordance with the needs and characteristics of students, as well as whether the teaching methods used by the teacher are appropriate and effective. This evaluation also makes it possible to see the role of technology and innovation in supporting the teaching and learning process, whether it is optimal or still requires further adjustments (Purba, 2022).

The assessment obtained from the curriculum implementation evaluation process is very important for future development and improvement. By getting clear and constructive feedback, the authorities can make adjustments and improvements to the curriculum in accordance with evolving needs and challenges (Mauliddina & Irianto, 2023). This also provides an opportunity for teachers to improve their teaching methods and learning

strategies, so that they can be more effective in helping students achieve the expected competencies. Continuous and comprehensive curriculum evaluation will ultimately help create an education system that is more responsive, adaptive and relevant to the needs of the times.

Implementing a new curriculum in secondary schools is often faced with various complex challenges. One of the main challenges is the readiness of human resources, especially teachers, in adapting new teaching methods that may be different from the traditional methods they have mastered. Most secondary schools still face gaps in adequate training and professional development for teachers to master the latest curriculum (Lubis & Priyadi, 2022). Apart from that, limited facilities and infrastructure that support curriculum implementation, such as access to technology and complete teaching materials, are also significant obstacles. Without adequate support and facilities, schools will have difficulty in providing relevant and meaningful learning in accordance with the demands of the new curriculum (Djoeaeriah & Iskandar, 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

The study in this research is qualitative with literature. The literature study research method is a research approach that involves the analysis and synthesis of information from various literature sources that are relevant to a particular research topic. Documents taken from literature research are journals, books and references related to the discussion you want to research (Earley, M.A. 2014; Snyder, H. 2019).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Middle Schools

The implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in secondary schools raises new hopes in the world of Indonesian education. This curriculum emphasizes more independent, creative and contextual learning, allowing students to explore their interests and talents in more depth (Damanik et al., 2024). With this approach, students are encouraged to be more proactive in the learning process, not only as recipients of information, but also as critical seekers and processors of information. To support this, the use of technology and innovative learning methods is a priority, including project-based learning and collaboration between students.

However, the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in secondary schools cannot be separated from various challenges that

require serious attention. One of the main challenges is the mental readiness and skills of teachers in carrying out their role as learning facilitators, no longer just providing material. This paradigm change requires ongoing professional training and development so that teachers can provide learning that is in accordance with the principles of Freedom to Learn (Wibowo et al., 2022). Apart from that, differences in technological infrastructure between schools in urban and rural areas are also an obstacle, given the unequal access to equipment and adequate internet connections.

Then, the importance of support from all stakeholders, including parents, students and school administration, should not be ignored. Effective socialization and continuous communication regarding the benefits and mechanisms of the Independent Learning Curriculum are the keys to obtaining full support and reducing resistance to change (Agus et al., 2023). Regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms from the implementation of this curriculum are also very necessary to ensure that the desired educational goals are achieved well. With strong cooperation and commitment from various parties, it is hoped that the Independent Learning Curriculum can create a generation that is intelligent, creative and ready to face global challenges (Sumantri, 2023).

Continuing the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, it is important to create a flexible and enjoyable learning environment for students. This can be realized through preparing a more dynamic and varied schedule, allowing students to be involved in various learning activities that are both challenging and interesting. Schools can integrate extracurricular activities or learning outside the classroom as part of the curriculum, offering students the opportunity to learn from real-life experiences. The use of adaptive classrooms and encouraging cross-disciplinary learning is also an important aspect that can spur creativity and innovation among students (Pertiwi, 2023).

Technology support is another integral part that must be optimized in supporting the Independent Learning Curriculum. The use of digital platforms for distance learning, open learning resources, and educational applications can expand students' access to information and learning materials that may previously have been inaccessible (Stoiber, 2024). In this context, schools need to ensure that all supporting infrastructure is in optimal condition, and there is a good technology management policy so that its use is effective and efficient. Regular training and developing the digital skills of students and teachers must also be a priority, to support the skills needed in the digital era.

As an ongoing step, evaluation focuses on learning outcomes, not just final results or test scores. An inclusive and comprehensive competency assessment, covering cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects should be implemented, so that student development can be monitored more holistically. The role of counseling is also increasingly important to facilitate students in overcoming personal and academic challenges that arise during learning (Hayat et al., 2023). In this way, the Independent Learning Curriculum is not only a program to improve the quality of education, but also a catalyst for students' personal and social development.

Factors That Influence Teacher Readiness in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

Teachers' readiness to implement the Independent Curriculum is influenced by various factors, one of which is the teacher's knowledge and understanding of the curriculum itself. A deep understanding of the principles and objectives of the Independent Curriculum and how to implement them in the classroom is very crucial. Intensive and ongoing training and workshop programs for teachers can help improve this understanding (Lao & Yan, 2024). Apart from that, the existence of clear guidelines and supporting resources such as modules and teaching materials will really help teachers in designing, implementing and evaluating the learning process according to the new curriculum.

Another factor that influences teacher readiness is the availability and skills in using educational technology. In the digital era, the use of technology in the teaching and learning process has become an important aspect. Teachers who are familiar and skilled in using various digital platforms and technology-based teaching tools will be better prepared to implement interactive and effective learning. Training on educational technology and access to adequate equipment and infrastructure also determine teacher readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum (Widyawati et al., 2024).

In addition, support from the school environment and colleagues plays an important role in teacher readiness. Principals and school management who are proactive in providing resources, building a collaborative culture, and providing motivation to teachers will increase teacher confidence and readiness. Mentoring programs and learning communities among teachers can also be a forum for exchanging experiences and innovative ideas related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Susuoroka et al., 2023).

This support creates a conducive ecosystem for teachers to continue to develop and adapt to the changes brought by the new curriculum.

The next factor that influences teacher readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum is flexibility and creativity in teaching. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes learning that can be adapted to students' needs and potential (Fitri et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers are required to be able to design varied and innovative learning activities, as well as use interactive and student-centered learning methods. The ability to assess student needs and make adjustments to curriculum and teaching methods is essential. Therefore, teachers who have high creativity and flexibility in teaching approaches will be better prepared to implement the Independent Curriculum.

Psychological factors also play an important role in teacher readiness. Self-confidence, motivation, and enthusiasm to continue to improve oneself are aspects that need to be present in a teacher. Teachers who have self-confidence and confidence in their abilities in implementing the new curriculum tend to adapt and implement changes more easily (Endang et al., 2023). Apart from that, appreciation and appreciation from schools or students for teachers' efforts and dedication can also increase work enthusiasm and motivation. Training that is not only technical but also addresses psychological and emotional aspects is an important step to ensure holistic teacher readiness (Ningrum et al., 2024).

Support from parents and the community cannot be ignored in ensuring teacher readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Parents who understand and support new education policies and curricula will provide moral encouragement to teachers. Good collaboration between school and home in overcoming various challenges of curriculum implementation will strengthen teachers' efforts in creating an optimal learning environment. Active community participation, including from the government and non-government sectors, in providing additional resources and giving awards to teachers will further increase readiness and harmonious cooperation for the success of the Independent Curriculum (Khery et al., 2024).

Impact of Curriculum Implementation on Learning Quality

Implementation of a new curriculum such as the Merdeka Curriculum has a significant impact on the quality of learning. One of the main impacts is increased flexibility and adaptability in teaching methods. Teachers become freer in designing and adapting learning materials according to student needs

and characteristics. This allows for more personalized, relevant and contextual learning, which in turn can increase students' interest and motivation to learn (Payung et al., 2024). By adopting a more student-centered approach, the new curriculum has the potential to increase student engagement and deepen their understanding of the material taught.

Additionally, new curricula often integrate technology into the learning process, which can bring innovation and efficiency. The use of digital tools and online learning platforms allows students to learn in a more interactive and engaging way. Technology also provides opportunities for teachers to track student progress in more detail and provide faster and more specific feedback (Zaini, 2024). Thus, technology can help overcome some traditional challenges in learning and improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning.

Another positive impact of implementing the new curriculum is on the development of non-academic competencies such as critical thinking skills, creativity and collaboration. Modern curricula often include real-world coursework projects, project-based assignments, and other activities that stimulate students to work together, solve problems, and think outside conventional boundaries. Developing these competencies is very important to prepare students to face the challenges of the 21st century world of work which continues to change and is increasingly complex (Apoko & Sya'ban, 2022). By focusing on broader competencies, students can gain a more holistic learning experience.

However, implementing the new curriculum also presents its own challenges that can affect the quality of learning. One of the main challenges is the teacher's readiness and ability to implement the curriculum. New curricula usually require fundamental changes in teaching approaches, requiring intensive training and ongoing support. If there is insufficient support, teachers may feel overwhelmed and lack self-confidence, which can hinder the effectiveness of their teaching (Leung et al., 2023). In addition, adequate infrastructure and resources are needed to ensure the success of the new curriculum, including access to technology and relevant teaching materials. Without comprehensive support, the implementation of a new curriculum may not reach its full potential in improving the quality of learning.

Apart from challenges to teacher readiness, implementing the new curriculum also requires changes in overall school culture and habits. These changes require time and commitment from all parties involved, including school management, parents and students. Adaptation to new curricula often encounters initial resistance from those unfamiliar with the new approach

(Amel et al., 2024). To overcome this, clear communication and good collaboration between schools and the teaching community are the keys to success. Thus, it is important for school management to support this transition with effective communication strategies and active participation from all school components.

Furthermore, with the new curriculum, evaluation of student learning outcomes also needs to be considered and may require adjustments. Traditional assessment methods that only focus on academic results may not be sufficient to measure students' abilities comprehensively. A more holistic assessment approach that includes cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects needs to be developed and implemented (Mahadew, 2024). This can provide a more comprehensive picture of student development and help teachers provide more constructive and useful feedback to students.

The long-term impact of implementing the new curriculum can also be felt in the formation of a generation that is better prepared to face global dynamics. With a curriculum that continues to develop according to current needs, students are expected to have skills that are relevant and adaptive to change (Amel et al., 2024). A holistic and integrative curriculum can equip students with critical thinking skills, communicate well, and have high creativity. Investment in a future-oriented curriculum will ultimately produce quality human resources capable of competing at the global level (Muashomah et al., 2024).

Although the impact of implementing a new curriculum on the quality of learning has many positive aspects, true success depends on how challenges are overcome and how support is provided. Successful implementation requires careful planning, consistent implementation, and continuous evaluation. All stakeholders in the education ecosystem need to collaborate to ensure the goals of the new curriculum are achieved, so that in the end it can provide maximum benefits for student development and the overall quality of education (Prahastina et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Evaluation of the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in secondary schools shows that teacher readiness plays a crucial role in the success of the program. On the one hand, this program provides freedom for teachers to design learning activities that are more contextual and relevant to students' needs. However, the main challenge faced is how to equip teachers with the necessary competencies to adopt this new approach.

Many teachers still need intensive training and ongoing support to be able to integrate the more dynamic and creative teaching methods demanded by the Merdeka Belajar curriculum.

The implications of the results of this evaluation also show that systemic support from all school components and other stakeholders is very important. Schools need to provide facilities and infrastructure that support creative learning processes, as well as management that is responsive to teachers' professional development needs. In addition, active participation from parents and the community in supporting and understanding these changes will be very helpful in encouraging teacher readiness and successful curriculum implementation. Thus, the success of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum not only depends on individual teacher readiness, but also on a collaborative and holistic framework that involves the entire educational ecosystem.

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