

THE IMPACT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The study evaluates the impact of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum on academic achievement and student development holistically. Through the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, this study analyzed a body of literature related to the policy and practice of the curriculum. The results of the analysis show that the Independent Curriculum encourages project-based learning, flexibility, and the development of 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication. However, key challenges include infrastructure limitations, teacher competence, and policy coordination. This study concludes that the Independent Curriculum has great potential to improve the quality of education if supported by teacher training, facility improvement, and collaboration of various parties.

Keyword: *Independent Curriculum, Academic Achievement, Project-Based Learning, 21st Century Competencies, Educational Challenges.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars in the development of quality and highly competitive human resources. Although several studies have discussed the design of the Independent Curriculum, few have comprehensively examined its dual impact on both academic performance and holistic student development. Through education, individuals are not only equipped with knowledge and skills, but also moral, ethical, and character values that support them in contributing to society. Therefore, improving the quality of education is an important priority for the government to ensure that the next generation is able to face increasingly complex global challenges. (Sanga & Wangdra, 2023)

In an effort to realize quality education, the Indonesian government has carried out various curriculum reforms from time to time. One of the latest innovations is the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which aims to answer the challenges of 21st century education. This curriculum is designed with a flexible, adaptive, and student-oriented approach. The basic philosophy of the Independent Curriculum is to give freedom to schools, teachers, and students to determine the best way in the learning process. (Lestari et al., 2023)

Through the Independent Curriculum, schools have the flexibility to develop learning programs that are in accordance with local conditions and student needs. Teachers are also given a greater role to design creative and innovative teaching and learning activities, which focus not only on achieving academic grades but also on developing students' holistic competencies. Thus, students are expected to be actively involved in the learning process, making it more relevant to daily life and encouraging them to think critically, creatively, and be able to solve problems. (Hasibuan et al., 2024)

In addition, the Independent Curriculum emphasizes contextual learning that pays attention to local potential, culture, and community needs. It aims to create an immersive learning experience, where students not only understand theory but are also able to apply their knowledge in real-world situations. With this approach, education is no longer uniform and rigid, but more inclusive and responsive to the diversity of students throughout Indonesia. (Annisha, 2024)

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum reflects the government's commitment to creating an education system that is relevant to the times. This curriculum is not only a tool to improve the quality of education, but also a strategic step in forming a generation that is independent, innovative, and ready to face challenges at the national and global levels.

The Independent Curriculum offers a student-centered learning approach with an emphasis on character development, mastery of basic competencies, and the freedom to choose a learning path that suits their interests and talents. This approach is expected to improve (Heryanti et al., 2023) academic achievement while encouraging students' non-academic development, such as critical thinking, creative, collaborative, and communication skills.

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in various schools still faces challenges. Some schools reported obstacles such as teachers' lack of understanding of the curriculum, limited facilities, and differences in students' backgrounds that affected the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. On the other hand, there are positive reports on how the Independent Curriculum has had a significant impact on increasing students' motivation to learn and developing their competencies.

Therefore, this study aims to evaluate both the academic and developmental outcomes of the Independent Curriculum. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, educators, and curriculum developers by highlighting effective practices, identifying key challenges, and offering recommendations for refinement.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach that aims to deeply understand the impact of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum on student achievement and development. This approach allows researchers to systematically explore phenomena through literature analysis that focuses on the description and interpretation of meaningful data. The method used is Systematic Literature Review (SLR), which is a method designed to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize previous research. Through SLR, researchers can obtain a comprehensive overview of the topics discussed using secondary data from various relevant sources.

The research begins by identifying key topics and questions, such as the influence of the Independent Curriculum on academic achievement and the challenges faced in its implementation. Furthermore, literature searches were conducted using scientific databases, such as Google Scholar, using keywords such as "Independent Curriculum," "impact of curriculum implementation," "student achievement," and "non-academic development of students." Articles relevant to the inclusion criteria, such as publications of the last five years and relevance to the Independent Curriculum, will be analyzed, while irrelevant articles are excluded.

The selected literature was analyzed using the content analysis method, focusing on key themes, such as academic impact, skill development, and implementation constraints. The results of this analysis were then compared to identify patterns, trends, and differences in findings in the literature used. The synthesis of findings was carried out to answer research questions, including the positive impact of the Independent Curriculum, implementation constraints, and recommendations for future improvements.

The results of this study are expected to provide a comprehensive picture of the impact of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum on academic achievement and student development. In addition, this study also aims to identify the factors that support and hinder the success of implementation, as well as provide recommendations for policy makers and education practitioners to improve the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Result

No.	Article Title	Research Findings
1.	The impact of the implementation of the independent curriculum and the readiness of educators on the implementation of learning in schools	The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has a significant impact on students and teachers. This curriculum is designed to improve the quality of education in Indonesia through a more flexible, simple, and student-centered approach. For students, the Independent Curriculum is proven to encourage the development of their character, skills, and knowledge, thereby producing individuals who are more independent, creative, and competent in facing the challenges of the times. One of the important elements of the Merdeka Curriculum is the focus on students' interests-based learning and talents, which provides great opportunities to explore their potential optimally.

		<p>On the other hand, the implementation of this curriculum provides challenges and opportunities for teachers. Teachers are expected to be able to adapt to new demands, including the preparation of relevant learning materials and the application of teaching methods that suit students' learning styles. However, the impact is felt positively because teachers get the opportunity to develop creativity in the learning process, expand teaching skills, and support students in a more personalized way. The successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum depends on the readiness of various parties, including the provision of adequate educational facilities, teacher training, and school community support. In addition, challenges such as limited infrastructure in some areas and teachers' perceptions of the curriculum still need to be overcome. Overall, the Independent Curriculum is expected to be a tool for educational transformation that encourages the improvement of Indonesia's competitiveness and quality of education both at the national and international levels (Hartoyo et al., 2023).</p>
2.	The Influence of the Independent Curriculum on the Quality of Learning of Students in Elementary School	<p>The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has a significant influence on the quality of learning of students in elementary schools. The Independent Curriculum offers flexibility in learning, both for teachers and students, by providing freedom for teachers to determine creative and innovative learning methods, as well as for students to develop their interests and potentials according to individual characteristics. This approach aims to create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere, encouraging students to be more active, independent, and not only focus on the cognitive aspect, but also on the development of social and emotional skills. In addition, the Independent Curriculum integrates teaching modules designed to make it easier for teachers to prepare project-based learning. This project challenges students to think critically, work together, and practice the values of Pancasila, thereby encouraging the increase of their creativity and innovation. There are several challenges in the implementation of this curriculum, such as the lack of educational facilities in several schools and the need for further training for educators in understanding the concept of this new curriculum. The Independent Curriculum has the potential to improve the quality of education by producing students who are not only academically intelligent but also have noble character, critical thinking skills, and skills that are relevant to the needs of the times (Stuart et al., 2024).</p>
3.	The Influence of the Independent Curriculum on the Learning Quality of Elementary School Students	<p>The Independent Curriculum has a positive and negative influence on the quality of learning of elementary school students. On the positive side, this curriculum gives teachers the flexibility to be more creative and innovative in teaching and supports students to develop creativity and</p>

		<p>independence through a project-based approach. With the project and strengthening the profile of Pancasila students, students' skills are honed more optimally, including critical thinking skills and innovation. This curriculum also allows students to learn independently through teaching modules that are equipped with digital access such as barcodes and links to learning materials.</p> <p>However, there are also challenges in the implementation of this curriculum, especially in the early stages of implementation. Teachers often experience confusion with new concepts, and some schools face obstacles in the form of limited facilities. Another negative impact is inequality in learning outcomes; Smart students tend to be more advanced, while underprivileged students face difficulties catching up. The Independent Curriculum is designed to address the weaknesses of the 2013 Curriculum, but it still needs training support for teachers and improvements to the educational infrastructure so that it can be implemented more effectively and equitably (Yufani et al., 2023).</p>
4.	The Impact of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum on the Development of Students' Potential	<p>The Independent Curriculum is an important step towards a more inclusive, relevant, and sustainable education. This curriculum provides freedom to students and educators in the learning process, allowing students to develop according to their potential. The three main aspects of the impact are: 1) providing learning freedom that adapts to individual needs, 2) using a project-based learning approach that allows students to apply knowledge practically to produce products, and 3) strengthening character, literacy, and skills as the basis for developing students' potential. This approach also enhances meaningful learning experiences and teaches students responsibility and collaboration. However, the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires infrastructure support, teacher training, and cooperation between schools, the government, and parents. (Ningtyas & Juliantri, 2022)</p>
5.	The Impact of the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum for Teachers at MTSN 2 South Solok	<p>There are positive and negative impacts of the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. Positive impacts include increased teacher motivation and enthusiasm, freedom and autonomy in designing learning, and increased creativity and innovation that contribute to the quality of learning and student learning outcomes. However, the new curriculum also adds to the workload of teachers, requires more time and effort to understand and implement, and requires intensive training and mentoring. The Merdeka Curriculum also provides more flexibility in learning, allowing students to choose learning methods according to their interests and needs. The effective implementation of this curriculum requires joint efforts from various parties to ensure better quality education (Khalbi et al., 2024).</p>

6.	Challenges in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools: Systematic Literature Review	<p>The implementation of the Independent Curriculum faces several main challenges, namely: (1) inadequate facilities and infrastructure; (2) the limitations of teacher competence, especially in the use of technology; (3) difficulties in compiling teaching modules and conducting learning evaluations, including authentic assessments; (4) the conditions of students, parents, and diverse environments; and (5) inequality in government policies. To overcome this challenge, several solutions are recommended such as training for teachers, collaboration in the learning community, increasing support for infrastructure, and strengthening responsive education policies. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires adaptation, innovation, and continuous cooperation from various parties to achieve optimal educational goals (Sucipto et al., 2024).</p>
7.	Challenges and Strategies for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Elementary Level: A Multi-Perspective Finding	<p>The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the elementary school level faces significant challenges, but also has a positive impact. The main challenge in implementing the Independent Curriculum is the readiness of teachers as agents of change, school support in providing adequate facilities, both material and non-material, and the diversity of student characteristics. Despite these challenges, the enthusiasm from various parties for the Independent Curriculum is quite high, with collaborative efforts to maximize the potential of this curriculum. In general, the Independent Curriculum is considered a positive step in improving the quality of education, providing space for students to self-actualize, and spurring creativity and adaptive learning. Strategies to address the challenges include strengthening collaboration between educational elements and increasing training for teachers to optimize the implementation of these curriculum policies (Warsihna et al., 2023).</p>
8.	Challenges in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools	<p>The lack of teacher readiness due to the lack of quality training, low understanding of the substance of the curriculum, and weak school support in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum are one of the challenges. In addition, the lack of coordination between the central government, the regions, and schools is a significant obstacle. Meanwhile, several supporting factors such as the provision of books by the government have helped the learning process, although the implementation has not been maximized. Improving curriculum management, from budgeting, training, mentoring, to planned and integrated evaluations is very important. The success of the Independent Curriculum requires coordination and collaboration between various parties, including schools, supervisors, and the government (Sitorus & Ratnawati, 2024).</p>
9.	Challenges and Opportunities for the Implementation of the Independent	<p>Some of the challenges in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum are limited human</p>

	Curriculum in Madrasahs: Towards a Competitive Superior Madrasah	<p>resources, teacher unpreparedness, inconsistent learning approaches, and difficulties in integrating learning evaluation as an integral part of the learning process. In addition, technology facilities that are still lacking and collaboration between stakeholders that are not optimal are also obstacles. Madrasas have a great opportunity to improve the quality of Islamic education through a flexible and student-focused learning approach. By utilizing educational technology and adapting the curriculum to the needs of students and the demands of the job market, madrasas can strengthen their competitiveness. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum also provides space for teachers to continue to develop their competencies through training, so as to be able to meet the needs of the times and produce graduates who excel globally. (Alfikri et al., 2024)</p>
10.	Opportunities and Challenges of the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum: An Interview Study in Driving and Independent Schools Changing	<p>The Independent Learning Curriculum succeeds in increasing student involvement and teacher creativity through a project-based learning approach with the principle of differentiation. The positive impact can be seen on students' enthusiasm in learning and their increased interest in information technology applied in learning. Collaboration between teachers, principals, parents, and the Education Office is the key to success, supported by teacher training and professional development, as well as the provision of adequate technological infrastructure. Despite challenges such as limited resources, teachers' technological capabilities, and lack of uniformity in mastering new learning methods, active support from the Education Office helped overcome these barriers.</p> <p>The implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum creates an inclusive and student-centered learning environment, providing space for exploration, reflection, and the development of critical and creative skills. (Nazaar et al., 2024)</p>

Discussion

The Influence of the Independent Curriculum on Students' Academic Achievement

The Independent Curriculum brings a significant positive impact on students' academic achievement through a flexible, adaptive, and student-centered approach to individual needs and potentials. The curriculum is designed to provide a space of learning freedom, where students can choose learning paths according to their interests, talents, and goals. This not only increases students' motivation in learning, but also allows for the development of strong character, such as responsibility, discipline, and confidence. In addition, this approach encourages critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills—essential skills to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Through project-based learning that emphasizes local contextualization, students are actively engaged in meaningful learning experiences. This approach focuses not only on theoretical understanding, but also on practical applications in real life. For example, students are invited to solve problems that are relevant to their environment or produce works that can benefit society. Thus, learning becomes more relevant, interactive, and able to foster a sense of social responsibility among students.

However, the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum is inseparable from challenges. Teachers as the front line in the learning process need to have a deep understanding of this curriculum concept. Support in the form of intensive and continuous training is needed to improve their competence in applying creative and innovative teaching methods. In addition, adequate infrastructure, such

as school facilities, access to technology, and relevant learning materials, is an important factor to support the effectiveness of implementation.

Despite facing various obstacles, the Independent Curriculum is expected to be able to bring transformation in the national education system. This curriculum is believed to improve the quality of education by producing students who are not only academically superior but also have high adaptability, innovation, and competitiveness at the national and global levels. With the collaboration of all parties, including the government, schools, teachers, parents, and the community, the Independent Curriculum has great potential to create a generation that is ready to face future challenges.

How the Independent Curriculum supports the development of students' character, skills, and non-academic competencies

The Merdeka Curriculum supports the development of students' character, skills, and non-academic competencies through a flexible, inclusive, and individual-need-oriented learning approach. One of its key elements is project-based learning that allows students to apply knowledge in real-world contexts, solve problems creatively, and work together in teams. This approach helps students develop critical thinking skills, creativity, and collaboration skills that are relevant to today's global challenges.

In addition, the Independent Curriculum gives students the freedom to explore their interests and talents, thereby maximizing individual potential. The learning process that emphasizes strengthening character values such as responsibility, honesty, and hard work also helps to form the personality of students with integrity. By harnessing local and cultural potential as part of the learning context, students are also invited to appreciate diversity and understand the importance of their contribution to society.

This holistic approach not only improves the cognitive aspects but also the social-emotional competencies of students, including communication and empathy skills. Although its implementation faces challenges such as teacher readiness and infrastructure, the Independent Curriculum has great potential to create a generation that not only excels academically but also has adaptive and innovative characters and skills.

Challenges faced in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum faces a number of complex challenges and requires special attention from various parties. One of the main challenges is the limited competence of teachers in understanding the concept of this new curriculum. Many teachers find it difficult to compile relevant teaching materials and apply innovative learning methods that suit students' learning styles. Inadequate training and lack of ongoing mentoring exacerbate this situation, potentially hindering the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

In addition, the limitation of educational infrastructure in a number of regions is a significant obstacle. Inadequate facilities, including lack of access to technology, make it difficult for some schools to implement project-based and digital-based learning methods, which are at the core of the Merdeka Curriculum. Differences in socio-economic conditions and student backgrounds also add to the challenges in ensuring inclusive and equitable learning continuity.

Coordination between stakeholders, such as the central government, local governments, schools, and parents, is also often not optimal. The lack of integrated and consistent policies creates gaps in implementation. This inequality is further exacerbated by the lack of support from the school community in creating a conducive learning environment.

Although these challenges are quite significant, several steps can be taken to overcome them, such as the implementation of quality teacher training, strengthening collaboration between elements of education, and improving educational infrastructure. Continuous support and solid cooperation are needed to ensure that the Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented effectively and have a positive impact on education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has a significant positive impact on education in Indonesia, both in terms of students and teachers. The curriculum offers a flexible, student-centered, and project-based learning approach, which not only improves academic achievement, but also develops students' character, critical thinking, creative, collaboration, and communication skills. Teachers are also given the freedom to design innovative learning, although they face challenges in understanding the new curriculum.

The main obstacles to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum include limited teacher competence, inadequate infrastructure, and suboptimal policy coordination. However, with intensive training, infrastructure support, and cooperation from various parties, this curriculum has great potential to

improve the quality of education in an inclusive and sustainable manner. This makes the Independent Curriculum a strategic step to prepare a generation that is independent, innovative, and ready to face global challenges.

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