

TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE IN IMPLEMENTING THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Teachers nowadays face their own challenges in conducting teaching activities in their classrooms based on the Merdeka Curriculum. Investigating teachers' experiences in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Junior High Schools (SMP), focusing on the challenges faced and the benefits obtained. A qualitative research method was employed, with data obtained through the analysis of internal school documents and teacher reflections. The findings indicate that teachers encounter various challenges in adopting the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in understanding its concepts. However, they also find benefits from the flexibility provided by the curriculum, enabling them to design more relevant and engaging learning experiences for students. Teachers also undergo a change in their roles, shifting from traditional instructors to facilitators of learning more oriented towards developing students' skills. These findings underscore the importance of appropriate support and training for teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The implications of this research emphasize the need for better supportive. The Method used in this research is narrative literature review method from teachers' experience and teacher reflection with the analysis of internal school documents such as interviewing and investigating.

Keywords : *Teacher Strategy; Independent Curriculum*

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of education in Junior High Schools (SMP) is not only a structural change, but also raises questions and challenges that require in-depth understanding. Teachers, as the main agents in bringing this curriculum into the classroom, face a great responsibility to adapt to the new paradigm and ensure that the learning delivered is in accordance with the objectives of the proposed

curriculum. In the course of implementation, teacher experience becomes an important basis in understanding the extent to which the Independent Curriculum contributes to educational transformation. The presentation of the challenges faced and the solutions implemented by teachers is a reflection of the current dynamics of education. Therefore, disclosing teachers' experiences in adopting the Independent Curriculum is the center of attention in order to

understand its effectiveness and relevance in efforts to improve the quality of education at the junior high school level. Disclosure of teacher experiences is not just documentation of developing educational practices, but also provides a window for in-depth understanding of the challenges and opportunities in bringing about changes in the curriculum and learning practices.

This research problem covers various aspects related to teachers' experiences in facing challenges when adopting and implementing the Independent Curriculum in the Junior High School (SMP) environment. One of the main focuses is the challenges faced by teachers in understanding the concepts, philosophy and principles that underlie the Independent Curriculum. Concepts such as project-based learning, the scientific approach, and the development of 21st century skills may require adjustments and deep understanding from teachers before they can be implemented effectively in everyday classroom practice. Apart from that, the research problem also includes an analysis of the benefits obtained by teachers from implementing the Independent Curriculum. By providing greater freedom and flexibility in designing learning, the Independent Curriculum allows teachers to be more responsive to students' needs and interests, as well as to create more interesting and relevant learning experiences. This

can increase student motivation and involvement in the learning process, as well as produce better learning achievements.

However, along with the benefits, the challenges that arise in understanding and implementing the Independent Curriculum also need to be identified and overcome. For example, teachers may experience difficulty in changing mindsets and instructional practices that have been established for years, or they may need additional support in developing new skills and knowledge necessary to implement these new approaches effectively. By analyzing the challenges and benefits associated with implementing the Independent Curriculum, this research aims to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in curriculum change at the junior high school level, as well as to provide useful insights for educational policy makers, school administrators, and teachers in supporting the successful and sustainable implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

The formulation of the objectives of this research includes a series of efforts to comprehensively investigate and analyze teachers' experiences in facing and overcoming various challenges that arise in connection with the process of adopting and implementing the Independent Curriculum in the Junior High School (SMP) environment. In order to achieve this goal, this

research aims to identify in detail the various types of challenges faced by teachers, ranging from difficulties in understanding the concepts and principles underlying the Independent Curriculum, to practical obstacles in implementing new approaches.

Which is carried by this curriculum in daily learning activities. A curriculum is a framework for what students will learn each year they're at school. An Activity-Based curriculum centres around active learning and presenting information to your students in a fun and interactive way. It's a method of teaching that can be used with students. The focus of an Activity-Based curriculum is teaching skills and knowledge to your students through creative tasks and activities. Rather than students passively listening to a teacher, they will complete tasks that practise key skills and allow them to absorb information in an active way. The findings illustrate how teachers' teaching activities and the goals underlying those *activities* can be interpreted in relation to curriculum orientations. (K Zweeris, 2023). Apart from that, this research also aims to deepen understanding of the benefits obtained by teachers and students from implementing the Independent Curriculum in Middle Schools. Through careful analysis, this research will explore the impact of the innovative approaches contained in

the Independent Curriculum on the learning process, student learning motivation, and achievement of learning outcomes. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide deeper insight into the effectiveness and relevance of the Independent Curriculum in improving the quality of education at the junior high school level, as well as provide a strong foundation for the development of more effective supporting strategies for teachers in facing the challenges that arise in the teaching context in the Independent Curriculum era. Theoretical studies relevant to this research problem include a thorough understanding of a number of crucial aspects, which include but are not limited to an in-depth understanding of the concepts and philosophy underlying the Independent Curriculum, the essential role played by teachers in shaping the modern educational landscape, as well as teaching strategies that must be adapted to the new paradigm in the world of education. By exploring broad and in-depth theories, this research is able to provide a rich and important theoretical basis for a deeper understanding of the context surrounding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the Junior High School (SMP) environment. According to Mkansi and Acheampong, research philosophies such as the concepts of ontology, epistemology, and axiology can indeed be a source of confusion

for research students, particularly when navigating the quantitative-qualitative debates. Teacher strategy also highlights the persistence of the aforementioned challenge. Quite naturally, research philosophy matters and research on field may find themselves in dilemma when choosing between these paradigms. Understanding the implications of these philosophical choices is crucial for aligning research methods with the goals of the study. However, literature on research philosophies are scant. In the existing literature the philosophical terminology is complicated and poorly defined. By delving into related theories, this research was able to formulate a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics involved in curriculum change, the role of teachers, and learning practices in the Independent Curriculum era. In addition, through a deeper understanding of the theoretical implications of these changes, this research can also provide a broader view of the trends and challenges faced by education today, as well as open up space for the exploration of innovative solutions that can improve the quality of learning in junior high schools. Thus, this in-depth theoretical study not only provides a solid foundation for this research, but also makes a significant contribution to the development of better educational thinking and policies, which are oriented towards broader

and inclusive goals in achieving quality education for all. By understanding and revealing teachers' experiences in implementing the Independent Curriculum, in-depth and useful insights are needed for a number of stakeholders in the world of education. Among other things, education policy makers will gain a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced in formulating and implementing relevant and effective curriculum policies at the junior high school (SMP) level. Through a deeper understanding of teachers' experiences, they can identify policies that are more responsive to local needs and context, and design implementation strategies that are more sustainable and inclusive.

School administrators will have a better understanding of their role in facilitating teaching and learning processes based on the Independent Curriculum. By applying the findings from this research, they can develop learning environments that support innovation, creativity, and student empowerment, thereby creating conditions that are more conducive to successful curriculum implementation. Education practitioners will be able to explore valuable resources from this research to improve their skills in designing and managing learning based on the Independent Curriculum. By understanding the challenges faced by fellow teachers and learning from

effective strategies for overcoming them, they can develop the skills and knowledge necessary to provide more relevant, meaningful and motivating learning for students.

It is hoped that this research can make a significant contribution to the development of better support strategies for teachers in facing the challenges that arise in the context of the Independent Curriculum. By comprehensively analyzing various aspects of teachers' experiences, including challenges faced and successful strategies used, this research can identify areas where additional support is needed. Through evidence-based recommendations, this research can provide valuable direction for policy makers, school administrators, and educational practitioners in their efforts to increase the effectiveness of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and improve the quality of education at the junior high school level. So by doing this variable we will know how success in applying this curriculum at school of course with the students too. This activity make us to know far about the method use in the class. Sometime make it easy to understand and also make it hard to do.

METHOD

This section explains in detail the procedures used in conducting research, including:

1. Research Design:

This research uses a qualitative approach with a research library research design. The type of literature review used investigating and interviewing based on the document prepared. This approach was chosen to investigate teachers' experiences in implementing the Independent Curriculum in Junior High Schools (SMP) through a comprehensive literature review.

2. Population and Sample:

The population of this research is various literature sources related to the Independent Curriculum and teaching practices in junior high schools. The sample was selected purposively by considering the relevance and credibility of the sources used. The researcher used the article analysis to be comparison in this research. From 2020 until now. This title of the article which published in 2024 is about Qualitative research: Understanding its underlying philosophies with the authors are Adelina Asmawi and Saiful Alam that explained In the realm of research, it is emphasized that research must be grounded in a clearly stated research philosophy and set out early in the research process. It is significant because research philosophy enables researchers to promote clarity and decisions about the research design and guide them in identifying a

suitable design. Therefore, understanding the underlying philosophies of qualitative research is crucial for researchers, especially those who are just starting their journey in this field.

3. Data Collection Techniques and Instrument Development:

Data was collected through literature searches and analysis from various databases, scientific journals, books, research reports, and other relevant sources. The instrument used is a systematic and documented literature search and selection technique.

4. Data Analysis Techniques:

The data collected was analyzed systematically through a process of selection, classification, synthesis and interpretation of information contained in the reviewed literature sources.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of this research include significant findings obtained from analysis of teachers' experiences in implementing the Independent Curriculum in Junior High Schools (SMP). Based on article of Adelina Asmawi and Saiful Alam (2024) explain that In the realm of research, it is emphasized that research must be grounded in a clearly stated research philosophy and set out early in the research process. It is significant because research philosophy enables researchers to promote clarity and decisions about the research design

and guide them in identifying a suitable design. Therefore, understanding the underlying philosophies of qualitative research is crucial for researchers, especially those who are just starting their journey in this field. Here are some of the main results of this research:

1. Understanding of the Challenges Faced by Teachers:

Through this research, we explore the complex landscape of challenges faced by educators in embracing and implementing the Independent Curriculum in the educational environment. This research opens a window to a deeper understanding of various aspects of this challenge, involving a process of in-depth analysis of the practical and conceptual realities involved. First of all, teachers found challenges in deeply understanding the new concepts introduced by the Independent Curriculum. The change in educational paradigm required by this curriculum often requires mastering concepts that are different from those with which they are accustomed. This includes a deeper understanding of concepts such as project-based learning, authentic assessment, and competency-based learning that are at the core of the Independent Curriculum.

In addition, challenges also arise in adapting to changing teaching roles and practices in response to

new curriculum requirements. Teachers must develop new skills and broaden their horizons to become effective facilitators of learning in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, which places greater emphasis on student-centred learning and the development of 21st century skills. This process not only requires practical adjustments in the delivery of learning materials, but also requires teachers to update their evaluation strategies and integrate technology more effectively in the learning process. Educators have a significant and strategic role in the educational process. This is due to their position at the forefront in implementing education. They interact directly with students to transfer knowledge and skills, while guiding and providing examples in the application of positive values. Educators are true educational practitioners. Considering the important role of educators in the current global context, the need for quality educators is a necessity to ensure the nation's brilliant future. The current increasing need for quality educators must be responded to positively by education managers. This positive response should be reflected in continuous efforts to improve the quality of the educational programs they offer. Improving the quality of education

at the higher education level will have a positive impact on the formation of quality educators in the future. Furthermore, practical obstacles in implementing the new approaches required by the Independent Curriculum are also a major challenge for teachers. These include obstacles such as limited resources, time pressure, and inadequate support from the school or other stakeholders. Teachers often face logistical challenges in designing and implementing adequate learning according to the demands of the new curriculum, especially in the context of large classes or limited adequate infrastructure. Thus, a deep understanding of these challenges is important in designing effective support strategies for teachers in facing the complex and dynamic realities of implementing the Independent Curriculum.

2. Benefits of the Flexibility of the Independent Curriculum:

Despite the challenges faced, teachers consistently find significant added value from the flexibility introduced by the Independent Curriculum. In facing the complexity of today's educational challenges, teachers are able to turn challenges into opportunities by taking advantage of the flexibility offered by this curriculum. With the flexibility provided, they are able to explore a

variety of learning approaches and adapt them to students' specific needs and interests, creating a learning environment that is more diverse and responsive to individual needs. In this case, teachers can create more meaningful and contextual learning experiences for students, by linking learning material to real life contexts and the challenges faced by students in society.

Educators, as educational agents, act as professional practitioners in carrying out their duties. To achieve this professionalism, an educator must fulfill a number of requirements that guarantee his qualifications and credibility in the field of education. This is important in order to create an environment in which educational practitioners can operate effectively and efficiently. A comprehensive professionalism includes competence in educational science, learning methodology, and the substance of the subject matter. The teaching profession will develop and be relevant as long as educators continuously improve their abilities, realizing that the educational process takes place in various contexts and at different times. Therefore, educators must be active in developing themselves, seeking opportunities for growth and change. They must view increasing their capabilities

as a task that must be pursued, not waiting for opportunities to come. With this proactive attitude, educators will continue to strive to improve themselves independently, maintaining professionalism in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. In addition, the flexibility of the Independent Curriculum also allows teachers to explore more innovative and varied evaluation methods, ensuring that measurement of student achievement is not limited to standardized tests but also includes assessment of 21st century skills and character development. Thus, the benefits gained from the flexibility of the Independent Curriculum not only improve the quality of learning in the classroom, but also help prepare students to face the challenges and opportunities in a rapidly changing world.

3. Changes in the Teacher's Role:

This research thoroughly examines the changes that have occurred in the teacher's role as a result of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, illustrating the complex evolution from traditional teaching approaches to a role that is more diverse, dynamic, and oriented towards student learning. An in-depth analysis of teachers' experiences reveals a striking transformation from the conventional teacher-centered

teaching model to a new paradigm that places greater emphasis on the role of teachers as learning facilitators who empower students to take an active role in their learning process (Susanto, 2020: 65).

These changes not only include shifts in learning approaches, but also include changes in broader learning paradigms, involving adjustments to aspects such as curriculum structure, use of technology in learning, and evaluation of student performance. Teachers no longer only act as sources of knowledge, but also as guides, facilitators, and catalysts for student exploration, reflection, and active learning.

With the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes student-centered learning, teachers are encouraged to adopt a more diverse, inclusive and adaptive approach, which allows them to adapt learning to students' individual learning styles, interests and needs. This involves the use of more varied teaching strategies, such as group discussions, collaborative projects, problem-based learning, and the use of learning-supporting technology.

These changes reflect teachers' adaptation to new demands in an ever-evolving educational context, where students are expected to become independent, critical, collaborative

and innovative learners. By taking on a more progressive and student-centered role, teachers play a key role in facilitating the development of 21st century skills and preparing students to face the complex and dynamic challenges of the future. (Susilo, et al, 2018: 43).

Therefore, changes in the role of teachers are essential in optimizing learning effectiveness and achieving the goals of the Independent Curriculum which aims to prepare students to face an uncertain future.

4. Implications for Teacher Support and Training:

The findings of this research reveal a strong basis for considering the critical role of support and training provided to teachers in their efforts to effectively implement the Independent Curriculum. Facing the complex dynamics and changing requirements of today's educational environment, adequate support for teachers is key to achieving success in implementing this demanding new curriculum.

First of all, the research highlights the need for adequate ongoing support from schools and other educational institutions. This support must not only be technical, but must also be conceptual and pedagogical, helping teachers to understand the concepts and philosophy behind the Independent Curriculum and implement appropriate learning

practices. This involves providing adequate resources, whether in the form of teaching materials, learning technology, or opportunities to collaborate and share best practices with fellow teachers.

Apart from that, the need for proper training is also a major concern. Training must be carefully designed to meet the needs and challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum. This includes developing new skills in designing innovative learning, evaluating student performance with a competency-based approach, and facilitating student-centered learning. This training should also be continuous and ongoing, allowing teachers to continually improve and develop their practice over time. (Kristiawan, M., et al, 2019: 873). Furthermore, the importance of supporting teachers' professional development must also be emphasized. Teachers need to have access to opportunities to take courses, seminars and workshops that are relevant to the Independent Curriculum and the latest educational developments. In addition, they also need to receive support in terms of educational leadership development, enabling them to play a more active role in managing change and leading

innovation in their schools. (Kristiawan, M., & Rahmat, N. 2018 : 373-390).

In facing the rapid pace of development of science and technology in the era of globalization, educators are expected to continue to improve their professionalism as facilitators and mentors. The importance of improving the quality of education is a major highlight for educators to maintain the relevance of their profession. Therefore, in an effort to improve the quality of teaching, educators need to develop various aspects of students' intelligence, including intellectual, emotional and moral. These three aspects must be strengthened as strongly as possible in each individual student. Creative and innovative learning is the key for educators in developing students' full potential and fostering motivation to seek new knowledge in areas of interest through strong independent learning. Developments in the field of information technology are increasingly accelerating scientific progress, so the world of education must be able to make the best use of this technology. It can be concluded that to overcome today's challenges, every educator must have high abilities and professionalism (Tilaar. 2002: 49). Current challenges are not only limited to students' academic achievements, but also involve

students' intellectual, emotional, moral and ethical education.

Thus, the implications of this research finding reinforce the urgency to invest adequate resources in support and training for teachers. This is not only a matter of moral responsibility, but also a strategic necessity in ensuring the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum and improving the quality of education at the junior high school level. Strong and ongoing support for teachers will help create supportive learning environments, enable them to respond more effectively to educational challenges, and prepare students for a bright and hopeful future.

5. Contribution to Curriculum Development and Learning Practices:

This research has a substantial impact on the evolution and development of curriculum and learning practices in junior high schools (SMP). The findings from this research not only provide in-depth insight into the challenges and benefits of implementing the Independent Curriculum, but also provide an important contribution to thinking and planning for the future of curriculum and learning strategies at the junior high school level (Hendriarto, P., et al, 2021: 53). First of all, this research provides a better understanding of

the needs and expectations of students at the junior high school level, which is an important basis for designing a responsive and relevant curriculum. By understanding students' learning preferences, their interests, and the challenges they face, educational policy makers can direct their efforts to develop more adaptive and inclusive curricula, which enable every student to reach their full potential (Sherly, S., Dharma, E., & Sihombing, H. 2020: 13–28).

DISCUSSION

In addition, the findings of this research also provide valuable insights into effective and innovative learning practices that can be implemented at the junior high school level. By analyzing successful learning strategies and the challenges of adopting new approaches, education stakeholders can identify best practices that can be implemented in their classrooms to improve the quality of learning and student achievement. The implications of this research can also help shape more holistic and sustainable education policies, taking into account not only academic aspects but also the development of 21st century skills, student well-being, and educational inclusion. This can help create a more enjoyable, meaningful and supportive learning environment for all students, which in turn will increase learning motivation,

student engagement and academic results (Djamarah and Saiful Bahri, 2000: 92).

Furthermore, this research can also contribute to increasing the capacity of teachers and school staff in designing, implementing and evaluating curriculum and learning practices. By strengthening their skills and knowledge of effective and innovative learning strategies, teachers can become powerful agents of change in improving the quality of learning in their classrooms and creating learning environments that promote academic excellence and holistic development of students. (Wahyuni, S. 2022: 134). Thus, the results of this research not only have practical implications for curriculum development and learning practices at the junior high school level, but also have the potential to shape the future direction of education at the national level. By utilizing the findings and recommendations from this research, education policymakers can direct their efforts to create a more responsive, inclusive, and outcome-oriented education system that benefits all students.

The teacher's experience in implementing the Independent Curriculum in Junior High Schools is an inspiring journey and requires deep involvement from educators. The Independent Curriculum is a new approach to education which aims to give teachers more freedom in designing and organizing the learning

process according to the needs and context of students in each school. In implementing the Independent Curriculum, teachers are faced with several challenges and opportunities that they need to understand well. One of the main challenges is increasing creativity in designing learning that is diverse and relevant to students' real lives. This requires a deep understanding of students' characteristics, their interests, and individual needs in the teaching and learning process.

Apart from that, a strong understanding of the essence of the Independent Curriculum as a new paradigm in education is also key. Teachers need to understand that the Independent Curriculum is not just a change in curriculum, but rather a paradigm shift in learning approaches. This requires educators to abandon top-down approaches and switch to approaches that are more based on students' needs and the development of their individual potential. Teachers' experiences in implementing the Independent Curriculum also include a process of adjusting to their new role as learning facilitators who are more active and responsive to student needs. This requires good communication skills, the ability to collaborate with fellow teachers, and mastery of information and communication technology as a means to facilitate technology-based learning. Despite facing a number of challenges, teachers' experience in

implementing the Independent Curriculum also provides various opportunities to improve the quality of education. Teachers have the opportunity to get closer to students, recognize their needs in a more personal way, and develop more interesting and meaningful learning. Apart from that, the Independent Curriculum also provides more space for teachers to innovate and experiment in the learning process, so that it can produce more optimal results in achieving educational goals. With a deep understanding of the principles and objectives of the Independent Curriculum, as well as a strong commitment to continuing to learn and adapt to change, teachers' experience in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Junior High Schools can become a solid foundation in building quality education that is relevant to the demands of the times.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of the analysis presented in the journal confirm the central and undeniable role played by educators in the education system. They are not only teachers, but also educators who are responsible for character formation and overall development of students. Teacher professionalism is an important

foundation in ensuring that the learning process is effective and of high quality. This includes strong qualification requirements as well as the ability to continuously improve in line with Teachers must be able to integrate modern technology into their teaching methods, as well as pay attention to non-academic aspects such as students' emotional and moral intelligence. This requires creativity, innovation, and the ability Thus, teachers are faced with the challenge of facilitating meaningful and relevant learning for students amidst the rapid development of information technology. In facing this challenge, educators are required to have high ability and professionalism. They must continuously develop themselves and be willing to take a proactive role in improving the quality of education. In addition, teachers are also expected to maintain a positive work ethic and enthusiasm to inspire students in their pursuit of deep knowledge and understanding. Thus, the conclusion that can be drawn is the important role of teachers in maintaining the quality of education, as well as the need for their commitment and dedication to continue to improve themselves for the future success of students and society as a whole.

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