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Article

Problems of Implementing the Independent Curriculum at MI Ma'arif Singosaren: Challenges and Solutions in Realizing Independent and Inclusive Learning

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify and analyze various challenges in implementing the independent curriculum at MI Ma'arif Singosaren. The independent curriculum is an educational policy that aims to provide flexibility in learning, enable students to learn according to their interests and talents, and encourage teacher creativity to create an inclusive and independent learning environment. However, the implementation of the current curriculum faces various challenges, including teacher preparation, limited infrastructure, time management in learning preparation, and difficulties in implementing an integrated learning approach. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with data obtained through interviews, observation and documentation. The study shows that lack of teacher preparation and lack of infrastructure are the main obstacles to implementing the independent curriculum. To overcome this problem, continuous teacher training, provision of supporting infrastructure, and more effective time management strategies are needed. It is hoped that these steps can further optimize the implementation of the independent curriculum and help realize the main goal of education, namely producing graduates with globally competitive and virtuous character.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an essential process that can shape individual character and competence, and cannot be avoided in the context of community development. Education is an important process in developing individual minds, interests, and talents. Seeing the education system in Indonesia which has undergone various changes in the development of this era. This development can be seen from changes in education policies and applicable standards, such as

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changes in the curriculum.[1] Along with the changing times and global demands in the field of education, Indonesia has made various efforts to improve the quality of national education. One important step taken is the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The independent curriculum is designed to provide flexibility when learning, so that students can learn according to their interests and talents. With this approach, it is hoped that the learning process will be more independent, inclusive and allow all students to gain meaningful learning experiences.[2] Educational institutions are required to be able to balance the education system with the development of the times. In realizing this, curriculum renewal must be in accordance with the progress of the times, such as mastery of technology being important. If this renewal is not carried out, the education and learning process in Indonesia is at risk of being left behind compared to other countries. Curriculum renewal has a significant influence on the learning process. With these updates, the learning process, models, and methods will become more effective and efficient, and experience progress that can improve the quality of education in Indonesia. This is expected to support education in Indonesia to be better.[3]

The Independent Curriculum is an education policy that gives freedom to educational institutions and educators to develop a curriculum that suits the needs of their students and their local context. Novak explained that the Independent Curriculum focuses on a responsive, inclusive, and student-centered learning approach. The independent curriculum aims to develop competencies. In its implementation, the Independent Curriculum involves various interconnected components. According to Haryanto, the pressure for successful implementation is highly dependent on the active role of teachers as facilitators. The need for teachers to facilitate students in developing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes needed to achieve goals. According to Hermawan, the main objective of the Independent Curriculum is to produce graduates who are globally competitive, have noble character, and are able to face the challenges of the times. The strategies used include emphasizing project-based learning, local curriculum development, and the use of information technology.[4]

From the Independent Learning Curriculum, the government encourages teachers to create various forms of creativity and innovation in learning. This aims to ensure that teachers can implement the Independent Learning concept effectively, so that they can achieve the main objective, namely forming the Pancasila Student Profile. One of the challenges faced by teachers when implementing the Independent Curriculum in schools is the need to set aside time to prepare creative, innovative and challenging learning every day. The quality of Human Resources (HR) is also an important factor, especially in encouraging teachers to get out of their comfort zone. Changes made by the principal will be in vain if teachers are reluctant to change. In addition, according to Auliya Javanisa (2022), teachers in schools must also have the ability to motivate and mobilize other teachers so that common goals can be achieved.[5]

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not without challenges, especially at the elementary school level such as MI Ma'arif Singosaren. Various problems arise, ranging from the readiness of teachers to understand and implement this curriculum, infrastructure that may not be adequate, to a more effective learning approach to ensure that

[1] Anjeliani, Silvi, et al. "Analisis Problematika Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar." *Jurnal Inovasi, Evaluasi dan Pengembangan Pembelajaran (JIEPP)*. 4.2 (2024): 294-302.

[2] Junaidi, A. "Analisis Tantangan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*. 7.2 (2022), 45-58.

[3] Siti Zulaiha, Meisin Meisin, and Tika Meldina. "Problematika Guru dalam Menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar," *Terampil: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran Dasar* 9. 2.7 (2023): 163.

[4] Jeanne M. Tuerah Roos M. S. Tuerah. "Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Perspektif Kajian Teori: Analisis Kebijakan untuk Peningkatan Kualitas Pembelajaran di Sekolah." October 24. (2023).

[5] Fitri Hartawati and Maizar Karim, "Tantangan Guru dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Menengah Pertama (SMP)." *Jurnal Pendidikan.* 1.4 (2024): 22.

this curriculum can be operated properly. These problems reflect the need for an in-depth evaluation of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the search for appropriate solutions to achieve the goals that have been set.

The theoretical basis underlying the implementation of the Independent Curriculum refers to the principles of humanistic education, where students play an active role during the teaching and learning process. According to Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, education must be organized democratically and fairly, and also provide equal opportunities for every citizen to learn.[6] Therefore, it is important for schools to ensure that every student has access to quality education that is relevant to the times.

In this context, previous studies have shown that many schools face similar difficulties in implementing the Independent Curriculum. A study by Junaidi (2022) in the Journal of Education and Culture revealed that teacher unpreparedness and lack of training were the main factors that hampered the implementation of this new curriculum.[7] In addition, research by Sari et al. (2023) in the Journal of Educational Research stated that infrastructure and policy support from the government also played an important role in the successful implementation of an innovative curriculum.[8]

The purpose of this article is to identify and analyze the various challenges that will be faced in implementing the Independent Curriculum at MI Ma'arif Singosaren. In addition, this article also attempts to offer solutions that can help schools realize independent and inclusive learning, in accordance with the main objectives of the Independent Curriculum. Discussion of the problems of implementing the Independent Curriculum at MI Ma'arif Singosaren is very important to raise, because it can provide deeper insight for educators, policy makers, and other related parties regarding the existing obstacles. Thus, it is hoped that this article can contribute to improving the quality of education in Indonesia, especially in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools.

METHODS

This research method uses qualitative descriptive conducted at MI Ma'arif Singosaren. By interviewing the curriculum vice principal and class teachers regarding the problems of implementing the independent curriculum and its solutions and interviewing class teachers about the learning implementation process. In addition, also observing teacher activities in the learning process at MI Ma'arif Singoaren and documenting matters related to the independent curriculum learning process. The data analysis used is data reduction and data presentation. Drawing conclusions using data validity tests, namely triangulation, to test the credibility of the data by checking data against the same source but using different techniques.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The independent curriculum is a policy that has been designed by the government to make a change in the aspect of superior education quality in facing global challenges in the future. The essence of independent learning is freedom of thought for educators and students. It can also form a character of an independent soul where learning can be free and explore knowledge, attitudes and skills from various aspects. The independent curriculum policy is that teachers can create a comfortable learning process and be able to arouse enthusiasm for learning. The material delivered by the teacher does not become a burden for students. The

[6] Chamisijatin, Lise, and Fendy Hardian Permana. *Telaah kurikulum*. Vol. 1. UMMPress, 2020.

[7] Junaidi, A. "Analisis Tantangan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 7.2. (2022): 45-58.

[8] Sari, R., Amin, M., & Lestari, D. "Peran Infrastruktur dan Kebijakan dalam Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka." *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan*, 8.1. (2023): 25-38.

implementation of the Independent Curriculum learning is centered on students, namely focusing on the personality, experience, background, perspective, interests, talents, capacities and needs of students. In this context, educational strategies must encourage interaction between educators and students. In education there are creative practices that must help students to work to build their knowledge in defining various important things in their eyes and the process, strengthening students' self-confidence and individuality. They also include the development of students' personal qualities, as well as responsibility for themselves and others.[9]

The Independent Learning Curriculum is an initiative of the Indonesian government that was introduced in 2020. Its main goal is to make students more active, creative, and independent during the learning process. This independent curriculum step is considered a solution in achieving ideal education, namely in accordance with current conditions, the goal is to prepare a strong, intelligent, creative generation with a character that is in accordance with the values of the Indonesian nation. In addition, the concept of Merdeka Belajar is in line with Ki Hadjar Dewantara with thoughts that emphasize the balance between creativity, feeling, and will in education. According to Enjelli Hehakaya in this policy, teachers are expected to be able to create a fun learning atmosphere and motivate students, so that they do not feel burdened by the subject matter. To achieve the goal of independent learning, it is necessary to use teacher creativity in designing various learning methods and media.[10]

The education curriculum in Indonesia has undergone various changes, from KTSP to the 2013 National Curriculum. On February 1, 2021, Nadiem Makarim, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, presented a new curriculum called the Merdeka curriculum. Curriculum changes are often a problem in education. The curriculum that is practiced often changes, causing confusion and hindering the education process. The structure of the Independent Curriculum refers to the Pancasila Student Profile (PPP), which serves as a guideline for schools when compiling content, process, and assessment standards. This profile is designed to answer questions about what character or competency is expected from the Indonesian education system. The Pancasila Student Profile consists of six main competencies that are interrelated and mutually supportive, so that to achieve this profile as a whole, all dimensions must be developed simultaneously. The six dimensions include believing in and being devoted to God Almighty and having noble morals, global diversity, working together, being independent, thinking critically, and thinking creatively. This dimension shows that the Pancasila Student Profile does not only focus on cognitive abilities, but also on attitudes and behaviors that are in accordance with the identity of the Indonesian nation and as part of the global community.[11]

This study aims to identify the various challenges faced by MI Ma'arif Singosaren in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, and to offer solutions to support the implementation of this curriculum effectively. This research was conducted through interviews with the vice principal for curriculum and several class masters who were directly involved in implementing the curriculum. The results of direct observations in the field and analysis of school documents were also carried out to support the information, including:

(a) Teacher Readiness in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

This study shows that one of the major challenges in implementing the unique curriculum at MI Maarif Singosaren is the unpreparedness of teachers in understanding and

[9] Mulyasa, H. E. *Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka*. Bumi Aksara, 2023.

[10] Hehakaya, E., Pollatu, D., & Ambarita, J. "Problematika Guru dalam Mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka." *DIDAXEI*, *3*.2 (2022): 394-408.

[11] Iskandar, S., Rosmana, P. S., Putri, A. R., Sudirja, D. R., Sari, K., & Citra, W. R. "Faktor Penghambat dan Pendukung Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Serta Pengaruhnya terhadap Hasil Belajar Murid." *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai*, *7*.2 (2023): 4250-4255.

implementing the curriculum. Based on interviews with the Deputy Director of Curriculum and several class teachers who were directly involved in implementing the curriculum, it appears that teachers need intensive training on the concepts, strategies, and methods used in the Merdeka curriculum. The initial training attended by teachers was not comprehensive. Although they have been introduced to the principles of this curriculum, such as project-based learning and a student-centered approach, most teachers find it difficult to adapt their learning methods to the requirements of this new curriculum.

(b) Lack of Supporting Infrastructure
Another challenge identified is the limited infrastructure, especially in terms of technology, which is a key element in implementing a unique curriculum. MI Maarif Singosaren still faces challenges related to the lack of equipment that supports the learning process. This condition has an impact on the school's ability to support technology-based learning which is an important part of the independent curriculum.

(c) Inclusive Learning Approach
Another finding is the difficulty of implementing an inclusive learning approach at MI Ma'arif Singosaren. Teachers feel that this challenge is especially felt when dealing with students from various backgrounds. The Independent Curriculum requires adaptation in teaching methods, but teachers' limited understanding and expertise in supporting students with special needs is an obstacle to inclusive and effective implementation.

(d) Time Management in Learning Preparation
Teachers also reported that the independent curriculum requirement to prepare creative project-based learning materials every day requires better time management. This additional workload can be a challenge, especially when having to balance study preparation with other administrative tasks.

From the results of the study, it is clear that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MI Ma'arif Singosaren faces quite significant challenges, both in terms of teacher readiness and supporting infrastructure. This finding is consistent with the results of the study (Sucipto, 2024) which revealed that teacher unpreparedness and lack of training are the main obstacles to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in various schools.[12] In addition (Iskandar et al, 2023) also stated that infrastructure and policy support from the government greatly influences the success of implementing this curriculum.[13]

In terms of teacher preparation, this is an important aspect of the success of implementing the Merdeka curriculum. (Sahrandi, 2023) stated that the success of this curriculum depends on the role of teachers as active and adaptive facilitators.[14] However, the results of this survey show that most teachers are still not fully ready to adapt to the requirements of the new curriculum. Although there have been several class teachers who have participated in training, it is still considered insufficient to achieve learning success.

Limited infrastructure is a major obstacle, especially in terms of the technology needed to support project-based and technology-based learning. Without adequate facilities, it is difficult for schools to fully implement the technological aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum,

[12] Sucipto Sucipto et al., "Tantangan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Sekolah Dasar: Systematic Literature Review," *Kalam Cendekia: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan* 12, no. 1 (March 11, 2024),

[13] Iskandar, Sofyan, et al. "Faktor Penghambat dan Pendukung Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Serta Pengaruhnya terhadap Hasil Belajar Murid." *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai* 7.2 (2023): 4250-4255.

[14] Sahrandi and Saiful Bahri, "Peran Guru dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar," *Sosial Horizon: Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial* 10, no. 1 (April 30, 2023): 100–108.

as suggested by Nuridayanti.[15] The government and schools need to collaborate in overcoming this problem by providing adequate supporting facilities, both through the school budget and external support.

Although the independent curriculum focuses on inclusive and student-oriented learning, this has not been fully achieved at MI Maarif Singosaren. Teachers need additional training on how to handle students with special needs and apply an integrated approach. Implementing ongoing training and mentoring programs can help overcome this problem. According to (Novak, 2020), a responsive and inclusive approach in this curriculum is important to ensure that all students achieve their best potential.[16]

Preparing more complex learning materials in an independent curriculum is also a challenge, especially for teachers who are used to traditional methods. Developing effective time management strategies and utilizing technology to support the learning planning process can be the solution. Teachers also need administrative support to reduce excessive workload.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MI Ma'arif Singosaren faces various challenges, ranging from teacher readiness, limited infrastructure, to time management. Solutions that can be taken include improving teacher training, providing supporting infrastructure, and developing more efficient time management strategies. By overcoming these challenges, schools can be more optimal in achieving the learning objectives of the Independent Curriculum.

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[15] Nuridayanti, et al. "Peran Teknologi Pendidikan dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka." *Journal on Teacher Education* 5.1 (2023): 88-93.

[16] Novak, J. "The Inclusive Learning Framework in Curriculum Design." *Journal of Educational Research*, 32.4 (2020):198-212.

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