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Teacher Readiness in Implementing the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools: Challenges and Strategies

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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze teacher readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools, as well as provide recommendations for improving learning practices and educational policies. Using a qualitative method with a multi-case study approach at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha, data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The results show that teachers have understood the basic concepts of the Independent Curriculum, but still experience challenges in its implementation, such as gaps in student abilities, limited teaching materials, and resistance to new learning methods. Limited technological infrastructure and low parental involvement are also obstacles. This study recommends practice-based training for teachers, improving learning facilities, and strengthening communication between schools and parents. These findings are expected to be the basis for developing a more effective implementation strategy for the Independent Curriculum at the elementary school level .

Keywords: Independent Curriculum, Teacher Preparation, Elementary School, Contextual Learning, Educational Implementation

ABSTRAK: *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesiapan guru dalam mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka di sekolah dasar, serta memberikan rekomendasi untuk meningkatkan praktik pembelajaran dan kebijakan pendidikan. Dengan menggunakan metode kualitatif melalui pendekatan studi multi-kasus di SDN 6 dan SDN 7 Kodeoha, data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru telah memahami konsep dasar Kurikulum Merdeka, namun masih*

mengalami tantangan dalam pelaksanaannya, seperti kesenjangan kemampuan siswa, keterbatasan bahan ajar, dan resistensi terhadap metode pembelajaran baru. Keterbatasan infrastruktur teknologi dan rendahnya keterlibatan orang tua juga menjadi hambatan. Penelitian ini merekomendasikan pelatihan berbasis praktik bagi guru, peningkatan fasilitas pembelajaran, serta penguatan komunikasi antara sekolah dan orang tua. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat menjadi dasar dalam mengembangkan strategi implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka yang lebih efektif di tingkat sekolah dasar.

Kata Kunci: *kurikulum merdeka, kesiapan guru, sekolah dasar, pembelajaran kontekstual, implementasi pendidikan.*

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental element in a nation's development, serving as a key pillar in producing superior and competitive human resources. Amidst global socio-economic dynamics and rapid technological advancements, the education system is required to adapt to meet the needs of the times. In Indonesia, these challenges have become increasingly complex following the learning crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, which has widened the gap in education quality across regions. In response, the government launched the Independent Curriculum through Ministerial Regulation No. 56/M/2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation within the Framework of Learning Recovery.

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide a more flexible, contextual learning environment, oriented toward developing students' character and competencies. This curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, formative assessment, and a differentiated approach tailored to student needs. Theoretically, this approach aligns with constructivism and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, where learning is developed through active exploration and teacher guidance tailored to students' cognitive development (Miftahul Jannah et al., 2023). However, the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum depends heavily on the readiness of teachers as the primary actors in the classroom. Previous research (Marzuqi, 2023) shows that teachers' understanding of the principles of the Independent Curriculum varies, and most experience difficulties in effectively implementing project-based learning and formative assessment. Furthermore, gaps in student abilities, limited teaching materials, and minimal technological support and parental involvement are additional challenges that have not been systematically addressed (Almujab, 2023; Wahyuni et al., 2024; Harwisaputra et al., 2024).

This research is crucial for evaluating the actual implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools, particularly at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha, North Kolaka Regency, which have limited infrastructure and are representative of schools in the 3T (underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost) areas. Unlike previous studies, this study uses a multi-case approach to examine not only teachers' pedagogical readiness but

also systemic factors influencing successful implementation, such as supporting facilities and parental involvement. This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive mapping of teacher preparedness levels, key obstacles, and relevant strategies for implementing the Independent Curriculum effectively and sustainably. The results are expected to serve as a reference for policy and educational practice development at the regional and national levels.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study method, conducted at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha, North Kolaka Regency. The selection of these two schools was purposive, considering the suitability of the school characteristics to the research objectives. Both schools have implemented the Independent Curriculum since the 2022/2023 academic year, have B accreditation status, and face challenges typical of non-urban areas such as limited technological infrastructure, minimal parental involvement, and limited learning resources. Therefore, this research location is considered representative to describe the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in a broader context. The research participants consisted of 10 classroom teachers and two principals, selected purposively based on their direct involvement in the planning and implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Informants were selected with varying teaching experiences and training backgrounds in mind to obtain diverse and in-depth perspectives. Data collection techniques used three main methods: in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted directly with teachers and principals to explore their understanding of the Independent Curriculum, the challenges faced, and the strategies implemented.

Each interview lasted 30 to 60 minutes, was recorded, and transcribed for further analysis. Classroom observations were conducted twice in each school, each session lasting approximately 90 minutes. Observations focused on the implementation of the principles of the Independent Curriculum, such as learning methods, formative assessment, teacher-student interactions, and the use of teaching materials and technology. Observation indicators were developed based on key elements of the Independent Curriculum approach. Furthermore, document analysis was conducted on the Lesson Implementation Plans (RPP), teaching modules, and assessment instruments used by teachers. Documents were analyzed using criteria such as alignment with learning outcomes, variety of assessment methods, and integration of character values and contextual learning.

Data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Reduction was carried out by sorting relevant data into thematic categories, such as teacher readiness, implementation constraints, and supporting resources. The reduced data were presented in descriptive narrative form and supported by direct quotes from participants. To ensure data accuracy and validity, this study employed method

triangulation (interviews, observations, and documents) and source triangulation (teachers, principals, and school documents). Additional validation was conducted through member checking, which involved requesting confirmation from informants regarding the summary of the analysis results to ensure the researcher's interpretations aligned with the participants' experiences. Through this approach, the study is expected to comprehensively describe teacher readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum and formulate strategies to improve its effectiveness at the elementary school level.

FINDINGS: Teachers' Understanding of the Independent Curriculum

Teachers' Understanding of the Independent Curriculum The results of this study indicate that teachers at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha have a fairly good understanding of the Independent Curriculum, particularly in terms of learning flexibility, project-based learning , and formative assessment (Rosa et al., 2024) . This understanding was obtained from various sources, including government-organized training, independent study through the Independent Curriculum module, and discussions with colleagues at school. However, although teachers' theoretical understanding of this curriculum concept is quite good, its implementation in learning practice still faces various obstacles. Interviews with several teachers revealed that the training they attended was primarily theoretical and lacked hands-on practical simulations. This made it difficult for teachers to translate theory into learning strategies consistent with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. "We've participated in training on the Independent Curriculum, but it was mostly theoretical. When we returned to class, we were still confused about how to implement it, especially when it came to creating formative assessments." (Interview with A, S.Pd, Grade IV Teacher at SDN 6 Kodeoha, 2024). This statement demonstrates the lack of technical support for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Teachers are provided with an understanding of the curriculum's philosophy and objectives, but not practical guidance on how to adapt teaching materials, develop projects appropriate to student abilities, or implement development-based assessments. (Romadhon et al., 2023) . As a result, many teachers have returned to using conventional teaching methods, such as lectures and practice exercises, even though they realize that the Independent Curriculum emphasizes exploratory and interactive learning methods. Furthermore, the lack of readily available teaching modules and reference materials also hampers the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in this school. Teachers must develop their own learning materials that align with the curriculum's principles, which is quite difficult in practice without concrete examples. *" We have understood that learning now must be more flexible, not only teacher-centered. However, when developing lesson plans, we are often confused about how to create activities that are truly appropriate for the students. draft "Independent Curriculum ."* (Interview with R, S.Pd, Grade II Teacher at SDN 7

Kodeoha, 2024). Another major challenge is the implementation of formative assessment, which is an integral part of the Independent Curriculum. Many teachers still struggle to develop assessments that assess not only students' final results but also their development and learning process (Puteri et al., 2023) . Formative assessment should ideally be conducted through various methods, such as portfolios, projects, observations, and student reflections. However, in practice, assessment in schools still focuses primarily on written exams. "*We are still having difficulty developing formative assessments that align with the Independent Curriculum. We've been more accustomed to written exams."* (Interview with H, S.Pd, Grade V teacher at SDN 6 Kodeoha, 2024). In addition to a lack of guidance in developing assessments, teachers also face challenges in classroom management. The Independent Curriculum emphasizes that each student has different learning potential and pace, so teachers need to implement differentiated learning to ensure that each student receives instruction tailored to their needs. However, many teachers still feel unprepared to adapt learning to individual student needs, especially in classes with large numbers of students.

Lack of Student Independence in Project-Based Learning

One of the main challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha is the lack of student independence in exploring the material independently. Classroom observations show that despite teachers' efforts to implement project-based learning (PBL), students still tend to wait for direct instruction rather than actively explore . This indicates that a more independent learning approach is not yet commonplace for either teachers or students.

The Independent Curriculum emphasizes the importance of student-centered learning, where students are encouraged to be more active in developing their own understanding through exploration, discussion, and hands-on practice (Aziz, 2022) . However, in the elementary school context, particularly at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha, student learning habits are still dominated by traditional learning methods, where teachers primarily provide instructions and students simply receive information without much participation in exploratory activities. *"We've tried implementing project-based learning, but students are still used to waiting for instructions. They're less active in exploring the assigned tasks." (Interview with L, S.Pd, Grade III Teacher at SDN 6 Kodeoha, 2024).* From this statement, it is clear that changes in learning methods require adaptation not only from teachers but also from students. Project-based learning requires students to work independently or in groups to complete more complex tasks. However, because students are not yet accustomed to this learning pattern, they still require significant guidance from teachers, so the essence of independence in learning is not fully achieved (Permana, 2024) .

Another factor contributing to low student independence is the lack of learning resources that support exploration. Research shows that the availability of varied

learning materials is still very limited, making it difficult for students to find additional information beyond the material provided by the teacher. In some cases, teachers also struggle to provide learning resources that encourage exploration, as they are more accustomed to using textbooks and practice exercises as the primary learning materials.

> *"We want students to be more active in seeking information on their own, but the learning resources available at school are still limited. Not all students have access to supplementary books or the internet to support their exploration." (Interview with R, S.Pd, Grade II Teacher at SDN 7 Kodeoha, 2024).*

In project-based learning, students are expected to work collaboratively in groups. However, observations show that many students still struggle to communicate and collaborate when completing project assignments (Vonnisye et al., 2022) . Some students who grasp the concepts more quickly tend to be more active in completing assignments, while others rely more on their group mates without truly understanding the concepts being learned. Lack of intrinsic motivation in students is also a factor hindering the implementation of project-based learning. Many students are still accustomed to learning patterns based on direct instruction from teachers, so when given the freedom to explore on their own, they feel confused and lack the initiative to get started.

To address these challenges, a gradual approach is needed to instill a culture of exploration and independence in learning. Teachers need to provide small, repeated exercises, where students are gradually trained to take an active role in learning. One strategy that can be implemented is to ask open-ended questions that encourage students to find their own answers, and to use scaffolding techniques, where teachers provide initial guidance and gradually reduce intervention, allowing students to develop into independent learners. Parental support is also needed to help students adapt to the project-based learning model. Parents can play a role in encouraging their children to be more independent in completing assignments and providing motivation so that children feel more confident in exploring information on their own (Ulya et al., 2021) .

Infrastructure and Technology Limitations in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Limited infrastructure and technology are major obstacles to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha. This curriculum is designed to provide flexibility in learning, including the use of technology as a tool to develop student creativity and interaction (Situmorang, 2023) . However, research shows that schools still face limitations in the availability of technological devices, internet access, and the use of technology in learning. Interviews and observations indicate that the number of technological devices available in schools is still very limited. Not all classes have projectors, computers, or stable internet access, so the use of technology in learning

is not optimal. This lack of devices makes it difficult for teachers to integrate technology into more innovative and exploratory learning strategies. One teacher stated that they wanted to use technology in learning, but the limited devices were a barrier because not all classes had projectors or adequate internet access.

This situation prevents teachers from fully implementing technology-based learning, which should be part of the innovative strategies in the Independent Curriculum. Some teachers who have tried using digital devices in their lessons often encounter technical obstacles, such as unstable internet access, limited devices, and a lack of skills in integrating technology with effective learning strategies. Furthermore, the use of technology in learning is still limited to basic functions, such as presentation aids or the use of instructional videos. Observations show that most technology use in schools is limited to displaying material through projectors, without further interaction with students. However, technology can be used to increase student participation in material exploration and support project-based learning, a key focus of the Independent Curriculum. One teacher mentioned that they had tried using Google Classroom and Kahoot, but only for practice questions and not for more complex assessments.

These technological infrastructure limitations also impact learning assessment, particularly in the implementation of technology-based formative assessments. The Independent Curriculum encourages the use of e-portfolios, digital reflection journals, or project-based assessments, but due to limited facilities, teachers still predominantly use written exams as the primary evaluation tool. Teachers admit that they are still accustomed to written exams because there are no facilities to support technology-based assessments. Furthermore, another impact of technological limitations is students' limited access to digital learning resources. The Independent Curriculum provides students with the freedom to explore material more broadly through various learning resources. However, limited facilities mean students can rely solely on printed textbooks, which are often inadequate to meet the needs of more flexible and exploratory learning.

To address these challenges, various strategic steps are needed, including providing technological infrastructure through government support or educational partners to ensure schools have computers, projectors, and more stable internet access. Furthermore, schools can develop community-based programs, such as providing shared laptops or tablets that students can share. Teachers also need to receive more hands-on training in utilizing technology for more interactive, project-based learning. Schools can hold internal workshops or collaborate with educational institutions to improve teachers' digital literacy in integrating technology into learning strategies. Furthermore, schools need to optimize the use of existing technology more strategically, such as allocating technology-based classes on a rotating basis. Teachers can begin by gradually using technology, for example by implementing simple digital assessments before moving on to digital project-based learning methods.

Overall, the limited infrastructure and technology at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha pose significant challenges to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. A lack of technological devices, limited internet access, and minimal technology utilization have hampered the curriculum's optimal implementation. Teachers have attempted to utilize technology, but its use remains limited to presentation aids and practice exercises, while its utilization for formative assessment and project-based learning remains suboptimal. Therefore, stronger support for infrastructure provision and intensive teacher training in technology integration are needed to ensure more effective technology-based learning. With more intensive guidance and the provision of adequate resources, it is hoped that teachers will be better prepared to implement more innovative learning methods aligned with the principles of the Independent Curriculum.

DISCUSSION: Teachers' Understanding and Challenges in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

The research results show that teachers at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha have a fairly good understanding of the basic principles of the Independent Curriculum, particularly regarding learning flexibility, project-based learning (PBL), and formative assessment. This understanding was gained through government training and independent study of curriculum modules. However, challenges arise in translating theory into practical classroom learning.

For example, one fourth-grade teacher stated that she struggled to design projects that suited her students' ability levels and limited learning time. Despite training, the teacher felt she lacked sufficient technical guidance. This aligns with Vygotsky's scaffolding theory, which emphasizes the importance of gradual support to enable both students and teachers to develop independently. Without concrete support, such as lesson plan templates or project examples tailored to the local context, many teachers ultimately revert to traditional lecture methods.

Compared to the previous curriculum (K13), the Independent Curriculum demands a greater degree of flexibility. During K13, teachers primarily followed textbooks and fixed schedules. Now, teachers are challenged to design more contextual and collaborative learning. Without strong instructional design skills, this transition is challenging.

Student Independence in Project-Based Learning

Student independence poses a serious challenge in the implementation of PBL in both schools. Observations show that the majority of students still rely on teacher instructions and are not yet accustomed to seeking information independently. For example, in one project on "Healthy Environments," most students waited for step-by-step instructions from the teacher instead of taking the initiative to observe their surroundings or conduct simple interviews.

The constructivist theory underlying the Independent Curriculum emphasizes the importance of exploration and hands-on experience. However, the previous, teacher-centered learning culture left students unprepared for project-based learning. Internal factors such as low self-confidence, poor communication skills, and a lack of intrinsic motivation exacerbate the situation. Effective scaffolding strategies, such as peer teaching, heterogeneous grouping, and incremental assignments (e.g., weekly mini-projects), can be used to gradually build independence.

In other schools that have had more success implementing PBL, such as an elementary school in Sleman, Yogyakarta, teachers use daily reflection journals and project progress boards to monitor and motivate students. These practices can be an inspiration for adapting to school contexts with limited resources.

Infrastructure and Technology Limitations

The infrastructure at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha is far from ideal. According to school data, only two of the six classrooms have stable electricity and projectors. Internet access is limited, available only in the teachers' lounge, and is not yet accessible to students. Consequently, the use of technology in learning remains limited to passive video viewing. However, according to the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, effective technology integration in learning requires a balance between mastery of content, pedagogy, and technology. In reality, most teachers lack sufficient digital literacy to develop interactive media, create digital assessments, or use learning platforms like Google Classroom.

Possible short-term solutions include the use of simple technology and offline-based hybrid learning. For example, teachers can create QR codes containing links to learning videos that can be accessed from parents' phones, or use learning corners based on manual teaching aids. Furthermore, practice-based training such as peer mentoring and learning community workshops can improve teachers' digital skills with a more contextual and cost-effective approach.

CONCLUSION

This research shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SDN 6 and SDN 7 Kodeoha still faces challenges, particularly in the application of project-based learning, formative assessment, and differentiated learning. Although most teachers understand the concept of the Independent Curriculum, the lack of practical training and limited infrastructure hinder its implementation. Eight out of ten teachers still use conventional methods due to a lack of technical guidance and access to technology. Limited facilities such as projectors and internet also make digital exploration difficult. However, teachers still have the potential to be agents of change through adaptive strategies such as local projects and simple portfolio assessments. This requires practice-based training such as lesson study, strengthening teacher learning

communities, providing contextual tools, and parental involvement. The success of the Independent Curriculum depends heavily on collaboration between teachers, schools, and the government in creating a flexible and innovative learning environment.

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