

Implementation of the Independent Curriculum Policy: Challenges and Opportunities for Teachers and Students

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluates the challenges and opportunities in the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) Curriculum in Indonesia, focusing on teacher readiness, infrastructure, assessment methods, and 21st century skills development. Data shows that although most teachers in urban areas have received adequate training, gaps still occur in remote areas. Disparities in infrastructure and technology access between urban and rural areas are also a significant obstacle. However, the implementation of MBKM has shown positive results in improving students' critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication skills. This study proposes increased continuous training for teachers, technological infrastructure development, as well as innovations in assessment methods as solutions. With continued support from the government, educational institutions, and the private sector, MBKM has great potential to improve the quality of education and prepare Indonesia's young generation for global challenges.

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ABSTRACT

This research evaluates the challenges and opportunities in implementing the Independent Campus Learning Curriculum (MBKM) in Indonesia, with a focus on teacher readiness, infrastructure, assessment methods, and development of 21st century skills. Data shows that although the majority of teachers in urban areas have received adequate training, disparities still occur in remote areas. Disparities in infrastructure and access to technology between urban and rural areas are also significant obstacles. However, the application of MBKM has shown positive results in improving students' critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication skills. This study proposes increasing continuous training for teachers, developing technological infrastructure, as well as innovation in assessment methods as solutions. With continued support from the government, educational institutions and the private sector, MBKM has great potential to improve the quality of education and prepare Indonesia's young generation to face global challenges.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the important pillars in a country's development. In Indonesia, education policies continue to change along with the times and the needs of society (Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021; Ritonga, 2018). One of the newest policies is the Independent Curriculum which was introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This curriculum aims to provide flexibility to schools and teachers in organizing learning according to student

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needs, as well as to develop student competencies through a more personal and contextual approach. The Independent Curriculum is also expected to improve the quality of education through more relevant and meaningful learning (Fakhri, 2023; Wahyuni, 2022). Since independence, Indonesia has experienced various educational policy changes aimed at improving the quality and accessibility of education. Starting from the 1947 Curriculum, which focuses on instilling a spirit of nationality and patriotism, to the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) which emphasizes a scientific approach and developing knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The Independent Curriculum is a curriculum transformation where the Independent Curriculum is a response to various challenges faced in the implementation of the previous curriculum (Ritonga, 2018). The main aim of the Merdeka Curriculum is to provide more flexibility and autonomy to schools and teachers in managing the learning process. Some of the main characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum include that the Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers to design learning that suits students' interests and needs (Halimah, 2023). This is expected to increase student involvement and motivation in learning. This curriculum emphasizes the importance of a personal and contextual approach to learning. Teachers are encouraged to relate subject matter to real life and local contexts, so that learning becomes more meaningful. Focus on developing competencies not only on cognitive aspects, but also affective and psychomotor aspects (Deviana & Sulistyani, 2021; Pandiangan, 2019). This includes strengthening character education and developing 21st century skills such as critical, creative, collaborative thinking and communication. One of the important innovations in the Merdeka Curriculum is project-based learning. This method allows students to learn through real projects that involve collaboration and application of knowledge in practical situations.

It is hoped that the Merdeka Curriculum can have a significant positive impact on the quality of education in Indonesia. With a more flexible and relevant approach, students are expected to be more involved and motivated in the learning process. In addition, by focusing on holistic competency development, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to produce graduates who are not only academically intelligent, but also have strong character and skills that are relevant to the needs of the 21st century (Hakiky et al., 2023; Nerita et al., 2023). This theory supports a project-based learning approach and 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creative, collaborative, and communication (4K). Apart from that, self-determination theory which emphasizes the importance of autonomy, competence and interconnectedness in motivating students is also the basis of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Even though the Independent Curriculum promises various benefits, its implementation is not free from various challenges. One of the main problems is teacher readiness and training. Many teachers are not ready to face these changes due to a lack of adequate training and resources. Most teachers require mentoring and ongoing professional development to be able to adapt the new approach in the Merdeka Curriculum effectively (Akhmadi, 2023; Hakiky et al., 2023). Apart from that, problems with infrastructure and access to technology are also significant obstacles, especially in schools located in remote areas. Limited access to the technology needed to support project-based learning methods and contextual approaches is a major obstacle. Lastly, assessment and evaluation also poses its own challenges. The Merdeka Curriculum demands a more holistic assessment method, which is able to measure various aspects of student competence, including cognitive,

affective and psychomotor aspects. However, many teachers still use traditional assessment methods, making it difficult to assess student competency comprehensively and in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum.

This research aims to evaluate the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers and students in implementing the Independent Curriculum Policy and how this policy can improve the quality of education. The main focus of this research includes several important aspects. First, this research will evaluate teacher readiness and training in implementing the Independent Curriculum, in order to understand the extent to which teachers have been prepared and supported in facing this change. Second, this research will identify infrastructure and technology access challenges faced by schools, especially in remote areas which often experience limitations in this regard. Third, this research will assess the assessment methods used in the Merdeka Curriculum and their impact on student learning, to ensure that the new assessment methods are able to reflect students' abilities holistically. Finally, this research will examine the opportunities offered by the Merdeka Curriculum in improving 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, which are critical for students' future success. Thus, it is hoped that this research can provide in-depth insight and practical recommendations to improve the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the quality of education in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

A qualitative approach was chosen for this research because it allows for in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions and views of the informants regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Sugiyono, 2013). Informants who will be involved include teachers, school principals, students, parents/guardians, education supervisors, teacher trainers and education experts. Data collection techniques used include in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), participant observation, and documentation. In-depth interviews will be conducted with teachers, school principals, education supervisors, trainers and education experts to explore their experiences, perceptions and challenges they face in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Focus group discussions will be used to explore the views and experiences of students and parents/guardians regarding the Independent Curriculum, while participatory observation will be carried out in several schools to directly observe the learning process and use of supporting facilities. Documentation such as meeting notes, training modules, teaching materials, and evaluation reports will also be collected to support the data obtained. The transcribed data will be analyzed using the coding method to identify main themes which are then grouped into relevant categories (Matthew B. Miles, 1994). Thematic analysis will be used to identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) in the data, while triangulation of data from multiple sources of information will be carried out to increase the validity and reliability of the findings. The validity and reliability of the research will be increased through member checking, where initial findings will be confirmed again with several informants, as well as through peer debriefing and audit trails that document the research process in detail. With this method, the research is expected to provide in-depth insight into

the challenges and opportunities in implementing the Independent Curriculum and its impact on the quality of education in Indonesia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research shows that teacher readiness and training in implementing the Independent Curriculum varies in various regions. In urban schools, teachers tend to have better access to training and resources. Many of them have participated in intensive training organized by the government or related educational institutions. This training includes an introduction to the principles of the Independent Curriculum, project-based learning techniques, and the use of technology in learning. However, in remote areas, teacher readiness is still a big challenge. Many teachers complain about a lack of adequate training and difficulty accessing necessary resources. Some teachers feel that they do not fully understand the concept of the Independent Curriculum and how to apply it in the daily learning process. This deficiency creates uncertainty and discomfort among teachers in implementing the new curriculum. To overcome these challenges, several targeted and sustainable strategies are needed. First, ongoing training for teachers must be held intensively and continuously in order to increase their competence in implementing the Independent Curriculum. These training programs need to cover various aspects, from project-based teaching methodologies to the use of educational technology. Second, infrastructure development is a priority, with a focus on increasing access to technology and supporting facilities in schools, especially those in remote areas. This support will ensure that all students, without exception, can utilize technology in their learning process. Third, innovation in assessment needs to be developed to create assessment methods that are more holistic and in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. This assessment method must be able to measure various aspects of student competence, both cognitive, affective and psychomotor, thereby providing a more comprehensive picture of student progress and abilities. By implementing these strategies, it is hoped that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can run more effectively and provide optimal results.

1. Challenges of Infrastructure and Technology Access in the Independent Curriculum

The research results show that infrastructure and access to technology are still significant obstacles, especially in schools located in remote areas. These schools often face problems such as unstable or even non-existent internet connections, a lack of technological devices such as computers or tablets, and inadequate physical facilities. These challenges hinder the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which relies heavily on the use of technology for interactive and project-based learning (Setiawan et al., 2023). In contrast, urban schools generally have better access to infrastructure and technology. Many of them have integrated technology into daily learning, which supports the implementation of the Independent Curriculum more effectively. However, this gap creates disparities in the quality of education between urban and remote areas (Hanafiah et al., 2023).

Research finds that the assessment method used in the Independent Curriculum still faces challenges in its implementation. Many teachers still tend to use traditional assessment methods due to limited understanding and skills in the holistic assessment methods expected by the Independent Curriculum. Project-based assessments and competency assessments are often considered complicated and require more time, so some teachers have difficulty integrating them in an effective way (Setiawan et al., 2023).

However, there are also some good examples where teachers have successfully implemented new assessment methods well, which has had a positive impact on student learning. Students who engage in project-based assessments show improvements in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills (Dewi, 2015; Insyasiska et al., 2017). They are more motivated and engaged in the learning process, demonstrating a deeper understanding of the material being taught.

2. Opportunities in Improving 21st Century Skills

The Merdeka Curriculum offers a variety of opportunities to improve 21st century skills among students. This research shows that a more flexible and contextual learning approach helps students develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication skills (Nastiti & Wathon, 2019). Students who engage in project-based learning and real-life relevant activities tend to show improvements in skills. However, the importance of implementing the Independent Campus Learning Curriculum (MBKM) does not only lie in the teacher training aspect, but also in improving the overall quality of education in Indonesia. MBKM is designed to provide more flexibility in the teaching and learning process, both at elementary school and university levels (Hakiky et al., 2023). This program aims to create a learning environment that is more adaptive and responsive to student needs and the ever-changing demands of the world of work. MBKM provides flexibility for schools and universities to develop curricula that suit student needs and potential. This allows students to choose subjects or study programs that suit their interests and talents, thereby increasing motivation and learning outcomes (Hakiky et al., 2023). In the era of digital and globalization, skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication have become very important. MBKM emphasizes developing these skills through a more interactive and project-based learning approach. In this way, students not only master academic knowledge, but also practical skills that are relevant to the world of work. MBKM encourages the use of technology as a tool in the teaching and learning process, which is very important in the digital era where technology plays a central role in everyday life. The use of technology in education can help increase access to information, enrich learning resources, and create a more interesting and interactive learning experience (Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021).

Additionally, MBKM allows students to learn from real-life experiences through internship programs, community projects, and collaboration with industry. This experience gives students the opportunity to apply the theory learned in class in real situations, thereby strengthening their understanding and better preparing them to enter the world of work. The implementation of MBKM also requires increasing teacher competency in using innovative learning methods and educational technology, encouraging continuous professional development for teachers, which in turn will improve the quality of teaching and student learning outcomes. By providing more flexibility and resources to schools in various regions, MBKM has the potential to reduce the gap in education quality between urban and remote areas. This program is designed to ensure that all students, regardless of geographic location, have an equal opportunity to receive a quality education. The implementation of the Merdeka

Curriculum and MBKM shows the Indonesian government's commitment to adapting to current developments and preparing the younger generation to face future challenges. Through various innovations in teaching and learning methods, MBKM is expected to improve the overall quality of education and create graduates who are competent, creative and ready to compete at the global level.

Based on the Ministry of Education and Culture Survey (2021) : Shows that 70% of teachers in urban areas have taken part in the Merdeka Curriculum training, while only 45% of teachers in remote areas have received similar training. Data from the Center for Development and Empowerment of Educators and Education Personnel (P4TK) states that more than 60,000 teachers have participated in continuous training programs related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum since 2020. In addition, data from the 2022 Central Statistics Agency (BPS) report reveals that 80% of schools in Urban areas have adequate internet access, while in rural areas, only 40% of schools have similar access. A similar survey was also carried out by the World Bank Study (2021) which stated that only 30% of schools in eastern Indonesia have adequate technological facilities to support online learning. Furthermore, data related to the impact of the MBKM Curriculum on learning shows that students who take project-based assessments show an increase of 25% in critical thinking skills and 20% in collaboration skills compared to students who are assessed using traditional methods and 65% of teachers still find it difficult to apply assessment methods. holistic in accordance with the Independent Curriculum.

The data and statistics presented provide a strong picture of the urgency and benefits of implementing the Independent Campus Learning Curriculum (MBKM) in Indonesia. By looking at teacher readiness and training, infrastructure and access to technology, assessment methods, and opportunities to improve 21st century skills, we can conclude that the implementation of MBKM has great potential to improve the overall quality of education. While challenges remain, such as gaps in teachers' access to and understanding of new methods, data shows significant progress, such as high participation in teacher training and improving students' skills through internships and community projects. By continuing to increase support, training and investment in educational infrastructure, as well as continuing to adapt teaching methods according to the needs of the times, the Merdeka Curriculum and MBKM can become important pillars in preparing Indonesia's young generation to face global challenges and become competitive future leaders.

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Independent Campus Learning Curriculum (MBKM) has great potential to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. Data shows that the majority of teachers in urban areas have received adequate training, although there are still gaps in remote areas. Infrastructure and access to technology also show significant disparities between urban and rural areas. However, efforts to improve 21st century skills through MBKM have shown positive results, with improvements in critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication skills among students. However, the challenges faced in implementing MBKM, such as gaps in access to technology and teacher training, must be addressed immediately to ensure this program can be implemented evenly and effectively throughout Indonesia. It is important to recognize that the success of MBKM also depends on continued support from all stakeholders, including government, educational institutions

and the private sector. To increase the effectiveness of implementing the Independent Campus Learning Curriculum (MBKM), the government needs to expand teacher training, especially in remote areas, and increase investment in technology infrastructure in rural schools. Additionally, improvements in holistic assessment methods must be supported by clear guidance and additional resources. The focus on developing 21st century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication needs to be strengthened through internship programs and community projects. Continuous monitoring and evaluation is also important to ensure success and adapt the program according to needs in the field.

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