

## IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM: A QUALITATIVE STUDY AT MTS INSAN MADANI, SITUBONDO

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**Abstract:** A curriculum is a plan and regulation containing objectives, content, learning materials, and teaching methods used as guidelines in teaching and learning activities. The curriculum is the leading guide for educators to ensure every student has access to rigorous academic experiences. The word "Curriculum" comes from the Latin Currece, which means "Running" or "Continuing". The curriculum can also be interpreted as a set or system of plans and arrangements regarding learning materials that can be used as teaching and learning activity guidelines. In essence, the curriculum can also be called a learning plan. Therefore, all parties involved and directly related to the function of this curriculum must understand it. This research is qualitative. The method used is the systematic literature review (SLR) approach, which collects data and evaluates and synthesizes relevant evidence. The target of this study was students at the Mts. Insan Madani educational unit is located in Gebang Village, Jatibanteng District, Situbondo Regency. The data collection technique used is qualitative data that is reviewed and collected in the form of writing and images; qualitative data can be obtained through various data collection techniques, such as images, voice recordings, and videos. Implementing the independent curriculum is a practical learning experience and is easy to communicate with various parties. The results of this study reveal that implementing the independent curriculum at the educational unit level has several influences, namely from its natural resources and the changes in the existing curriculum. As a result, some teachers still do not understand how to implement the independent curriculum.

**Keywords:** Independent learning, Independent Curriculum, Education.

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### INTRODUCTION

The independent curriculum is one of the strategic steps in the effort to transform education in Indonesia, which aims to provide freedom and flexibility for educational units in designing and implementing learning according to the needs of students. The implementation of this independent curriculum emerged as a response to the challenges of the world of education that continues to develop, as well as the need to adapt the independent curriculum to the increasingly dynamic developments of the era. With the main principle of independent learning, this curriculum prioritizes character development, 21st-century skills, and a deep understanding of each learning material. This article will discuss various aspects of implementing the independent curriculum in educational units, the challenges faced, and their impact on the quality of education in Indonesia. Not a few educational unit managers assume that the curriculum is just a collection of subjects and

teaching methods that will be delivered to students. So that not much development or innovation is carried out (Ramadan & Imam Tabroni, 2020).

One of the basic foundations in education, especially education in Indonesia, is the use of curriculum in educational units. Therefore, the curriculum is one of the efforts that can be made to provide change for the nation. The current updated independent curriculum is one of the government's efforts to improve the foundation for optimal learning (Mulyono, 2022). Therefore, curriculum renewal or development must be seen as a demand for change so that the applicable curriculum remains relevant to the needs of society. Before the independent curriculum is implemented, a periodic review is needed to determine whether the dynamics of developments in the field of science, as outlined in the form of subject matter and delivery methods, are appropriate. Therefore, curriculum planners and developers must conduct careful analysis and then prepare a learning plan by determining the model, arranging learning strategies, and implementing them into the teaching and learning process (PBM). The implementation of the independent curriculum aims to improve the competence of graduates, both soft skills and hard skills so that they are more prepared and relevant to the development of the times and to prepare graduates as future leaders of the nation who are superior and have personality.

The Minister of Education and Culture initiates the independent curriculum program and aims to encourage students to master various sciences as provisions for entering the world of work. The curriculum in education plays a very important role as an element or component that is positioned to support educational and learning goals. The independent curriculum is currently a topic of discussion in Indonesia's education world. The independent curriculum is a breakthrough that helps teachers and principals change the learning process to be relevant, in-depth, and enjoyable. The curriculum to date from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has launched 21 episodes of the independent learning curriculum that have touched on various aspects of education. The independent learning curriculum also aims to encourage improvements in the quality and recovery of education, namely, to improve the quality and recovery from the learning crisis (Damayanti dkk., 2023).

In this case, learning is done more through project work. Students are free to actively explore, explore, and describe actual issues such as the environment, circular economy, sanitation, and so on to foster *critical thinking, creativity, and complex problem-solving skills* as a form of character development and competency of the Pancasila learning profile. The role of the teacher is not only in classroom learning but also includes being a curriculum designer. Teachers as teachers are only limited to providing learning materials to students. In contrast, as curriculum designers, teachers are responsible for developing and adapting learning materials to suit the needs of students and their environment (Harwisaputra, 2023).

The independent curriculum at the educational unit level focuses on various aspects, starting from the curriculum objectives and challenges faced to its impact on student learning. For example:

- 1) Negative impacts are an additional burden for teachers, misunderstandings about flexibility, difficulties in assessment, and difficulties in adapting.
- 2) This has had positive impacts on more flexible learning, strengthening the profile of Pancasila students, active student participation, and increasing the role of teachers.

- 3) The goals and characteristics of the independent curriculum.
- 4) Learning approaches.
- 5) Evaluation and assessment.

Implementing the independent curriculum at the educational unit level faces various challenges but also brings great potential to improve the quality of learning and student educational outcomes. The success of implementing this independent curriculum is highly dependent on teacher preparation and training, the availability of resources, and support from schools, parents, and the community. With the right support, the independent curriculum can create a more comprehensive, relevant learning experience that positively impacts the development of students' character and skills. In its implementation, students must discuss with friends, create an item or event regarding the project, and train students to solve problems to get good results (Diah Ayu Saraswati dkk., 2022) . Education providers must act quickly to improve and prepare students as the future generation to be able to adapt to the development of the times through the field of curriculum policy. The curriculum plays a very important role in the success of education because quality education begins with a good and appropriate curriculum.

Curriculum implementation is implementing a curriculum program developed in the previous stage and then implementing and testing it properly (Angga dkk., 2023). The concept of the independent curriculum prioritizes active participation and involvement of all stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and communities, to create a more inclusive and holistic learning environment. By empowering schools and teachers to choose and adapt learning methods that are appropriate to the context and conditions of the school, it is hoped that the quality of education will improve and produce graduates who are better prepared to face future challenges. The problems in learning do not stop there; educators' unpreparedness and lack of competence in using technology as a learning medium also add to the list of problems in the world of education (Susiani, 2022) . The challenges of implementing the independent curriculum are mainly at the core of the education process, namely learning. One of the changes in the learning process is in the evaluation or research system (Supriyadi dkk., 2022) . The law explains how important it is for educators to pay attention to the quality of learning to achieve much better quality education (Ledia dkk., 2024) .

In Indonesia, the curriculum is compiled and applied nationally to all schools to realize the country's desired nationality. Each curriculum always contains the desired targets in the field of education, which means that students possess the desired learning outcomes (Marsela Yulianti dkk., 2022) . This independent learning education allows schools and students to choose to use a curriculum according to each school's needs (Sulistiyani dkk., 2022). Thus, implementing the independent curriculum can be interpreted as an effort to organize, manage, and administer the learning device taught in educational units. Generally, the stages of implementing the independent curriculum include planning, implementation, and evaluation. Implementing the independent learning curriculum gives educational institutions, teachers, and students the freedom to determine the topics or themes they want to study and the appropriate learning methods. The implementation of the independent curriculum includes:

- 1) Diagnostic assessment to identify potential, characteristics, needs, developmental stages, and learning achievement stages in students.
- 2) Planning includes needs analysis, determining learning objectives, compiling materials, selecting methods, and evaluating and making adjustments to achieve the desired competencies.
- 3) The independent curriculum focuses on more flexible learning based on student needs and interests and encourages competency development through projects and context-based learning.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the concept of curriculum can be interpreted as a learning plan for students, a set of goals to be achieved, or part of a system, schooling, education, and society.

## METHOD

This study uses a *systematic literature review* (SLR) approach, a research method carried out systematically and objectively to collect, evaluate, and synthesize highly relevant evidence from various sources of previously published literature reviews (Suciati dkk., 2022) . The literature review is selected based on keywords that are by the focus of the research, which are then reviewed and identified in a structured manner according to the stages set out in the SLR method (Anggraeni dkk., 2024) . In this study, the *systematic literature review* (SLR) method uses three stages, as explained by Farah Faadillah Herindraningrum and Indrawati Yuhertiana, namely:



**Figure 1.** Stages of the *systematic literature review* (SLR) method (2021).

The first step in compiling this article is planning ( *Planning* ). This first step can involve determining the research topic, namely the Implementation of the independent curriculum at the educational unit level in teaching and learning activities of class VIII. Then, various article search criteria are determined from various sources, such as *Google Scholar*, with a search period starting from 2020 to 2024. The keywords used can include several ways of implementing the independent curriculum at the educational unit level in teaching and learning activities of class VIII at Mts.

The second step taken in compiling this article is conducting. In this second step, several articles are collected based on the criteria and keywords that have been determined. This step produces 25 initial articles that match the keywords and then become the initial population in this study. After a selection using inclusion and exclusion criteria, 10 articles that met the requirements were selected. These inclusion criteria include journals with a valid SINTA index and published within the last 5 years, as well as the type of *Research and Development* (R&D) research in educational units. Exclusion criteria include several articles with irrelevant titles or do not match the title and content of this article. After the selection process is complete, the third step is synthesizing the data, where information

from the article is analyzed and evaluated. Then, the results of the synthesis are presented in narrative form.

The last step taken in this (SLR) method is the reporting stage, or what is called (*Reporting*), where the results of the analysis and evaluation of various journals are then compiled in written form according to the format that has been applied. These results indicate that the implementation of the independent curriculum in teaching and learning activities is still in its early stages. Therefore, efforts need to be made to improve the quality of the implementation of the curriculum through teacher training, improving school infrastructure, and parental support. Thus, this study can contribute to developing the theory and practice of implementing the independent curriculum and help improve the quality of education in Indonesia.

## **RESULT**

The results of this study show several difficulties and challenges faced by teachers and students, as follows:

1. Teacher readiness: Teachers need to improve their ability to use technology, adapt to the curriculum, and understand the essence of learning tools.
2. Facilities and infrastructure: Inadequate facilities and infrastructure can challenge the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.
3. Learning resources: Learning resources that are still limited to textbooks and guidebooks can be an obstacle.
4. Time allocation: Minimal time allocation can make it difficult for teachers to conduct diagnostic assessments and learning activities.
5. Differentiated learning: Teachers must analyze students' characteristics, backgrounds, learning styles, interests, and talents to design learning plans.
6. Communication: Teachers need to create effective communication with students.
7. Learning evaluation: Teachers need to carry out learning evaluations properly.
8. Conditions of students, parents, and the environment: Conditions of students, parents, and the environment can also be challenging.
9. Socialization: Lack of government socialization regarding the independent curriculum can be an obstacle.
10. Inequality in educational continuity: The Independent Curriculum, which allows freedom in its programs, can increase inequalities in educational continuity, such as difficulty in adjusting learning styles, difficulty in understanding abstract learning objectives, difficulty in balancing learning activities and other activities, lack of support from parents and the environment, lack of readiness in facing change, and limited access to learning resources.

Apart from that, there are positive and negative impacts of implementing the independent curriculum in secondary schools, as follows:

### **Positive impact**

1. Students can learn by following current technological developments.
2. The curriculum becomes simpler and more enjoyable; this prevents students from getting bored during the learning process at school.
3. There is no pressure on students and teachers to achieve passing grades.

4. Students become more independent and confident.
5. Student learning outcomes and activity increased.
6. Students' motivation and achievement in participating in competitions increased.
7. Increase creativity.
8. Developing student competencies more comprehensively.

**Negative impact**

1. Such rapid curriculum changes have given rise to new problems, such as declining student achievement.
2. Unequal quality of education in schools.
3. Unclear understanding of the material.
4. Unequal availability of resources.
5. Unbalanced distribution of time.
6. Pressure on choosing a field of study.

Based on the discussion in this article, the independent curriculum is implemented at the educational unit level in the context of teaching and learning activities (KBM). The independent curriculum gives educational units the freedom to develop a more effective learning process, and its goal is to create a more enjoyable, meaningful, and relevant learning experience that meets the needs of each student.

The principles in this independent curriculum can also determine learning materials, methods, and evaluations that are appropriate for the educational unit and students. This independent curriculum is also oriented towards the Pancasila learning profile, which includes religious and mutual cooperation, character values, and creativity. The role of teachers is also very important in implementing this independent curriculum. Because teachers not only act as facilitators but also provide space for students to learn actively and creatively. The teaching and learning activities themselves also greatly influence the independent curriculum's implementation process because this KBM process emphasizes interactive and collaborative activities.

Thus, implementing the independent curriculum at the educational unit level focuses on more flexible, innovative, and competency-oriented learning, which includes students' cognitive, effective, and psychomotor aspects. To realize this optimally, educators and related parties must strongly commit.

**Table 1.** Article Body Length Weight

No.	Part Name	Main Contents	Proportions in percent
1.	Introduction	Discussing how to implement the independent curriculum at the educational unit level in teaching and learning activities, which poses many challenges for how to implement the independent curriculum at the educational unit level.	30%
2.	Method	Explaining the use of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, which includes the stages of planning, and implementation in reporting, as well as	20%

		the inclusion and execution criteria that have been explained to ensure data validity. And conducting descriptive analysis to synthesize literature findings.	
3.	Results and Discussion	The results of the review show that the implementation of the independent curriculum must be accompanied by cooperation between educators, so that its implementation is more optimal because teachers not only provide protection but also must provide space for their students to be able to learn actively and creatively.	50%
4.	Conclusion and Bibliography	It can be concluded that curriculum implementation is very important at the educational unit level because the curriculum is a reference for effective and creative student learning.	More or less

## DISCUSSION

The curriculum is one of the most important components in the education system, and it is also a reference for organizing learning activities in educational units. The implementation of the independent curriculum is gradual, both in terms of targets and in terms of its implementation itself. For example, there is still a need for a lot of socialization and training for school staff so that the independent curriculum can run optimally. The curriculum itself has changed several times, so educational units must also be further improved to achieve learning goals. In terms of the independent curriculum itself, there have not been many changes from the previous curriculum; only what needs to be improved is how students can understand the meaning of learning in the independent curriculum properly, the achievement of the implementation of the independent curriculum includes aspects of motor skills, understanding of movement, utilization, and development of the movement. However, the difference that is implemented in the independent curriculum is about the value of strengthening the Pancasila profile (Nur Fauziah dkk., 2023)

Extracurricular learning and the P5 Pancasila student profile strengthening project form the structure of the independent curriculum. However, the Pancasila student profile is not taught separately because it has 18 separate time divisions or different types. However, it is still used as a guideline for teachers in developing the independent curriculum. Several teachers said that there were no examples of independent learning in schools, and teachers also did not have a clear picture of how to implement this independent curriculum but were still in the learning process by attending workshops or related training with the implementation of the independent curriculum. In addition, some teachers still do not understand how to implement this independent curriculum. Some realize and reflect on the difficulties in implementing their learning with the previous curriculum, namely the 2013 curriculum; the material in depth is quite difficult to overcome because the subjects are not explained routinely and in a structured manner (Prihatini & Sugiarti, 2022). Implementing this curriculum also strongly supports the guarantee of hours and professional allowances for teachers in implementing the independent curriculum, supported by the independent teaching platform. With the independent teaching platform, teachers are also helped and facilitated in finding inspiration, references, literacy, and understanding in efforts to implement the independent curriculum (Arisanti, 2022).

The independent curriculum contains three types of learning activities:

- 1) Extracurricular learning is varied so that students have enough time to investigate topics and improve competencies. This also allows teachers to choose educational resources that suit the needs and character of students.
- 2) Co-curricular learning takes the form of a project to improve the profile of Pancasila students, with interdisciplinary learning principles that focus on character development and general competencies.
- 3) Extracurricular learning is carried out according to student interests and teaching unit resources.

The independent curriculum is also designed to catch up on Indonesia's literacy and numeracy backlog (Defa dkk., 2023). It is hoped that the implementation of this independent curriculum can provide a solution to improve the existing curriculum, which is implemented in stages by adjusting it based on the readiness of educational units that implement the independent curriculum as a new curriculum in learning (Melani & Gani, 2023). With the implementation of the independent curriculum, teachers can realize that *advanced material* is easier to apply because learning is focused on each subject by presenting comprehensive material.

The education policy aims to educate the nation and make humans like humans. For example, farmers cannot plant rice to produce corn. Farmers can only take good care of corn plants so that they produce the best quality corn. Likewise, with students, educators can only direct and strengthen them so that their potential and talents can develop optimally (Irvani dkk., 2023). This is the task of a professional teacher, who must understand the characteristics of students, understand the differences in potential, identify differences in learning styles, and view each student as a unique and whole human being (Undari & Desyandri, 2022).

Implementing Independent Curriculum at the educational unit level, such as at Mts. Insan Madani focuses on providing freedom and flexibility in managing learning and providing opportunities for students to develop their potential optimally. Here are some steps for implementing the independent curriculum at Mts. Insan Madani:

1. Adjustment to the profile of Pancasila students: The independent curriculum emphasizes character building by Pancasila values. At Mts. Insan Madani, the learning process is designed to support the formation of balanced attitudes, skills, and knowledge. Learning does not only focus on cognitive aspects but also character building, such as cooperation, integrity, and tolerance.
2. Project-based learning (*Project-Based Learning*): One of the main features of the Merdeka curriculum is the use of a project-based approach. At Mts. Insan Madani, teachers implement various projects that allow students to learn more contextually and applicatively. These projects can be related to everyday life themes that allow students to collaborate, think critically, and solve problems.
3. Simplification of material content and flexibility in determining the curriculum: At Mts. Insan Madani, the curriculum is adjusted to the needs and potential of students. For example, there is an option to reduce the number of subjects taught or give teachers



more freedom in compiling a syllabus according to student characteristics and local needs. This aims to allow students to study the material more deeply and not be burdened with the many lessons.

4. A personal and innovative learning approach: The independent curriculum gives teachers the opportunity to innovate in teaching methods. At Mts.Insan Madani, learning emphasizes a personal approach, namely recognizing the abilities and interests of each student, and providing materials that are in accordance with the level of understanding and talents of students.
5. Utilization of technology in learning: With the development of the times, Mts. Insan Madani utilizes technology in implementing the independent curriculum. This includes the use of digital platforms for distance learning and interactive learning media that can increase student engagement. Technology is also used for more objective and transparent assessment and evaluation.
6. Teacher competency development: Implementation of the independent curriculum requires good teacher readiness and competence. At Mts. Insan Madani, teachers are involved in training and workshops to improve their ability to implement the independent curriculum, such as training on project-based approaches, competency-based assessments, and the use of educational technology.
7. Formative assessment and evaluation: The independent curriculum emphasizes formative assessment, which emphasizes more on the learning process and the learning process and student development. At Mts. Insan Madani, evaluations are carried out at the end of the semester and throughout the learning process to provide constructive feedback for students and improve the learning methods used.
8. Parent and community involvement: Mts. Insan Madani also realizes the importance of parental and community involvement in supporting the successful implementation of the independent curriculum. With good communication between schools, parents, and the community, educational programs in schools can be more effective and relevant to the needs of students.
9. Strengthening extracurricular activities: Mts. Insan Madani also pays more attention to extracurricular activities as part of student competency development. These activities are designed to support students' interests and talents outside of academics, such as arts, sports, and entrepreneurship. These activities are also in line with the spirit of the independent curriculum in creating holistic students.
10. Periodic evaluation and improvement: The implementation of the independent curriculum at Mts. Insan Madani is continuously carried out, and evaluations are carried out to identify strengths and weaknesses in the learning process. This allows for adjustments and improvements at each stage so that the learning process can continue to develop and be more effective.

With the explanation above, in implementing the independent curriculum at Mts. Insan Madani tries to create a learning environment that supports the development of students' potential as a whole by the principles of the independent curriculum, which emphasizes freedom, creativity, and diversity in education. The goal is for students to be able to master the competencies or abilities that have been set. The implementation of this curriculum is carried out by applying the principles and demands of the curriculum that have been developed previously. The implementation of the independent curriculum, for example, seeks to restore learning by recognizing students' potential more deeply to create relevant learning. In implementing the curriculum, teachers act as technical implementers who apply the existing curriculum. Teachers can also recognize students' potential more to create relevant learning. The parties involved in curriculum preparation are the education office, teachers, principals, school supervisors, school committees, and parent/guardian associations.

Education in Indonesia is currently facing various challenges in welcoming the new phase. Indonesia Emas, namely 100 years of Indonesian independence, in 2045. In addition, there is also the challenge of globalization of education, which is predicted to occur in 2030. It is starting to appear that globalization has brought many changes in all lines of life (Fitriana dkk., 2022) .

Education always strives to create students who are innovative at all times. Not only can they be highly educated, but they can also become agents of change in small and large scopes. The changes and innovations produced can provide maximum contributions to the progress of a nation with quality human resources. Most of the target teachers discuss the relationship and role of teachers in implementing the independent learning curriculum, and the results obtained were out of 7 articles, 6 articles had positive results where teachers can better understand their role in preparing students to face the independent learning curriculum (Setiawan & Sofyan, 2022) . Then, for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology targets in terms of leadership, the results were obtained where the independent learning policy was considered a form of high direction and support behavior.

In Indonesia, the curriculum is prepared and applied nationally to all schools to realize the national ideals of the Indonesian nation. Every curriculum always contains the desired targets in the field of education, meaning the desired learning outcomes that students want to have (Marsela Yulianti dkk., 2022) . Curriculum development is carried out as an anticipatory step in responding to challenges that arise due to these developments while still paying attention to the situation, conditions, and norms that apply in society. The steps for curriculum development are arranged in such a way that they are by their nature so that students, as learning components, get adequate competence in mastering and utilizing technology as desired.

Independent learning education is education that provides schools and students with the choice to use the curriculum according to each school's needs (Sulistiyani dkk., 2022) . Based on the definition above, it can be concluded that the curriculum is very important to be used and implemented properly so that the educational unit can achieve effective and efficient goals while satisfying the learning needs of students.

## CONCLUSION

Implementing the independent curriculum at the educational unit level aims to provide flexibility in learning tailored to the needs and characteristics of students. This curriculum encourages the provision of more space for teachers to develop innovative teaching materials and methods and pays attention to the potential and enjoyment of students. However, the success of implementing this independent curriculum is highly dependent on the preparation of human resources, infrastructure, and appropriate policy support. It is hoped that a more meaningful, relevant learning process can be created through a flexible and competency-based approach and encourage character development and 21st-century skills. The obstacles faced, such as lack of understanding among educators or limited facilities, need to be overcome through ongoing training and the provision of adequate support so that the objectives of the independent curriculum can be achieved optimally.

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