



The Urgency of Curriculum Innovation: Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMPN 4 Cikarang Utara in Bekasi

¹ Wahyudin, ² Qiqi Yuliaty Zaqiah, ³ Bambang Qomaruzzaman

¹ STAI Haji Agus Salim Cikarang Bekasi

^{2,3} Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Sunan Gunung Djati Bandung, Indonesia

E-mail: nswahyudin306@gmail.com, ² qiqiyuliatyzaqiah@uinsgd.ac.id, ³ Bambang.Qianes@uinsgd.ac.id

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Abstract

This study describes innovation in the field of curriculum and implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMPN 4 Cikarang Utara Bekasi. This study used a descriptive qualitative method, reinforced by library research. The author collects and analyzes data using articles, journals, and references related to the problem under study. Also, conducting surveys and interviews with educators and education staff who have practiced the Independent curriculum in schools. The results of this study indicate that the independent curriculum exists to answer the challenges of a dynamic era. Its manifestation is that it must support critical thinking skills in solving problems, have a creative and innovative spirit, and have 21st century communication and collaboration skills and be ready to welcome the Golden Era of 2045. An independent curriculum, makes educators creative in compiling teaching modules, so that they are able to teach students who have a strong character based on the Pancasila Student Profile with competencies to optimally strengthen character, literacy, and numeracy.

Keywords: Urgency, Innovation and Implementation, Independent Curriculum.

Introduction

In an effort to improve the quality of education, the curriculum factor is very crucial in its existence. The curriculum contains planned activity programs and is also the expected learning outcome. According to Oemar Hamalik (2011), citing Johnson (1977) and Posner (1982), the curriculum should not be seen as an activity but should directly focus on various intended learning outcomes. This study emphasizes a shift in the curriculum's perspective from being a means to becoming the goal or end to be achieved. One of the main reasons is that the expected learning outcomes form the basis for planning and formulating various learning objectives.

Contextually, the curriculum in every society ideally reflects the culture of the community. Schools, as educational institutions, are responsible for producing knowledge and values that are fundamental to the development of future generations. In a universal context, the state and society are responsible for identifying the skills, knowledge, values, and various appreciations to be taught to students.

Along with the dynamics of the times, education must always undergo changes to adapt to global developments. Moreover, the curriculum, which is the main principle in education, must always be subject to innovation. According to Muhaimin (2005), there are generally two categories of innovation: top-down innovation through

coercive power strategies or enforcement by those in power. As education implementers, subordinates must follow the developed innovations, such as Competency-Based Curriculum, Module System in Learning, Contextual Teaching and Learning, Quantum Teaching and Learning, and the upcoming Independent Curriculum, which will be implemented simultaneously. Another form of innovation, called bottom-up innovation, is a model created based on ideas, thoughts, creations, and initiatives from schools, teachers, or communities. This model is rarely implemented in Indonesia despite the education system leaning towards decentralization.

Ima Frima F. et al. (2021), citing Husen and Postlethwaite, revealed that the study of curriculum changes can be seen from two aspects: the nature of change and the process and stages of change. The nature of curriculum change is closely related to issues of reform, innovation, and movement. The process and stages of change are closely related to development, diffusion, dissemination, planning, adoption, implementation, and evaluation.

Among the curriculum innovations that have become a trend is the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. According to Green, Howells & Miles (in Zulfa Nurdin, 2016), innovation is something new, introducing and implementing new practices or processes (goods or services), or adopting new patterns from other organizations (Ferizal Rachmad et al., 2022). Meanwhile, according to Al-Fasya et al. (2022), quoting Selamat Ariga (2022), the presence of the Independent Learning Curriculum aims to address the challenges of education in the era of the fourth industrial revolution, where it must support skills in critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and innovation, as well as communication and collaboration skills for students.

The Independent Curriculum does not limit the concept of learning to within the school but emphasizes the creativity of students and teachers.

Monotonous/unidirectional learning becomes an obstacle for students to express their abilities. The limitations of the current curriculum concept hinder the creativity of teachers and students. The current curriculum shows that students must achieve the highest grades in every subject taught in school. However, students have their own skills in different fields. The lack of creativity in showcasing their skills can be attributed to this (Rahmat Fadhli, 2022).

To elaborate further, the Independent Learning Curriculum is designed to provide various learning approaches that are easier and more applicable, with greater flexibility compared to previous curricula, while still focusing on essential materials that need to be mastered. However, this curriculum brands itself as one that provides freedom for educators to implement learning according to their needs, adapting to the characteristics of students (Usanto S in Wibawa et al., 2022).

Based on reality, the ongoing development of the times has led to the search for new concepts in the educational process (Fahim, 2019). Entering the era of globalization and internationalization, especially in the field of science and technology development, the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, introduced the concept of "Independent Learning Education" in his speech during the National Teacher's Day event in 2019. This concept is part of the effort to improve the quality of education and transform educational institutions into entities capable of contributing to the greater good, especially in the era of the fourth industrial revolution (Sofyan Iskandar et al., 2023).

Building on the previous discussions, it can be understood that the Independent Curriculum is a response to the accelerating pace of the advancing times. Thus, the output of educational institutions can meet the challenges of the times and ultimately be prepared to contribute to the Golden Era 2045 with the quality of competent human resources. Abuddin Nata (2020) states that

the changes in the quality of education involve a shift from knowledge-oriented education to balanced development, from centralized collective learning to individualized and decentralized learning, from education limited to certain stages to lifelong learning, and from a diploma-focused knowledge to the channeling of real strengths.

A fundamental aspect of the Independent Curriculum is its flexibility and focus on essential content based on project-based learning, which is expected to provide freedom for each educational unit. There are three major characteristics of the Independent Curriculum framework:

- 1) The designed learning is project-based, with the main focus on developing soft skills and the Pancasila Student Profile.
- 2) The learning focuses on essential content, allowing sufficient time to develop basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy reinforcement.
- 3) Teachers have a high level of flexibility in delivering differentiated learning according to students' needs, making it contextual and incorporating local values (Juniarti Manalu, 2022).

Based on the aforementioned discussions, it can be considered that curriculum innovation in education is a necessity in line with the ongoing dynamics of the advancing times. Ultimately, it gives rise to quality educational resources as products of educational institutions, ready to contribute to development in various aspects of life..

Methods

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. As stated by J. Moleong (2000), qualitative research is characterized by inquiry or naturalistic, ethnography, symbolic interactionism, insider perspective, and ethnomethodology. In other terminology, qualitative methodology is defined as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observable behaviors. According to Tedi Priatna (2020),

qualitative research is an approach that focuses on natural phenomena or phenomena.

In line with Nana Syaodih Sukmadinata's opinion (2006), qualitative research is aimed at describing and analyzing individual or group phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts. Rochiati W. (2006), citing Creswell's opinion, explains that qualitative research is an inquiry process that investigates social and human problems using different methodological traditions. Researchers build a complex and holistic picture, analyze words, report the views or opinions of informants, and the entire study takes place in a natural setting.

The next stage involves analyzing various sources of references, scientific journals, and articles related to curriculum innovation and the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMPN 4 Cikarang Utara Bekasi. As a step to sharpen the analytical tools, the author strives to read, study, and contextualize them to discuss the intended theme. An important aspect of this section is that the author conducts direct interviews with the Teacher Facilitators and Subject Teachers of Grade 7, delving into the classroom experiences during the Teaching and Learning Activities. To further explore the research findings, the author discusses with the Vice Principal as a senior teacher who supervises the implementation of the independent curriculum in the learning activities.

It begins with observation to systematically find data and information from phenomena based on formulated research objectives. Next, the author conducts interviews to gather data on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMPN 4 Cikarang Utara. As mentioned by Tedi Priatna (2020), an interview is a data collection technique that involves asking questions to respondents, and the respondents' answers are recorded or recorded.

Results and Discussion

Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMPN 4 Cikarang Utara Bekasi

a. Planning Stage

Based on interviews with grade 7 teachers, the Independent Learning Curriculum has been implemented starting from the academic year 2022/2023. This is based on the decision of the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbudristek) that SMPN 4 Cikarang Utara is included as a pilot project for the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum (IKM). It started with continuous training for the School Principal as a School Facilitator, making the school a School Facilitator category. The School Principal, as the program's responsible person, then proposes and forms a Learning Committee (consisting of 5 teachers) who undergo continuous training facilitated by Kemendikbud. The government provides socialization to the teachers (learning committee) through various methods and facilities, both offline and online, to ensure curriculum autonomy. Socialization of the independent curriculum is conducted outside the network through workshops, training, dissemination, and other training activities.

In practice, the Learning Committee (consisting of 5 trained teachers) is responsible for providing guidance to all teachers, especially grade 7 teachers who are tasked with implementing the independent curriculum. This is done to ensure that the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum can proceed in a directed and integrated manner.

b. Implementation Stage

During the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum, every subject teacher must study the curriculum comprehensively. Unlike the previous curriculum, the independent curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to be creative. The independent curriculum focuses on the transformation of knowledge in a free manner. Teachers are given the opportunity to adapt their teaching to the

characteristics and needs of the students. The key characteristics of the Independent Curriculum are as follows: 1) The learning materials are relatively limited but should be explored in-depth by teachers and students, especially to stimulate the creativity of the learners after being prepared by the teachers, 2) It prioritizes flexibility at the educator level. The emphasis is on adjusting the learning materials to the profile and abilities of the learners, and 3) There is a specific time for character development, where around 20-30% of the learning materials are designed to be applicable through project-based learning using the Contextual Teaching and Learning Model during learning activities. This project-based assessment has become the hallmark of the independent curriculum, ensuring that all learners do not get stuck in theoretical cognitive levels but rather focus on experiencing practical knowledge in real life. These skills are essential in an era of disruption and uncertainty.

The presence of teachers in education is crucial because teachers act as designers who blueprint education. Regardless of how capable the learners are, they still need the presence of a teacher. Therefore, the quality of teachers should be a top priority. Quoting Mendikbudristek Nadiem, Bahtiar Siregar et al. (2023) state that independent learning is about freedom of thought and independence. The essence of freedom of thought begins with the teacher. Without it occurring within the teacher, it would not be possible for it to be followed by the students. Learning is a relatively permanent behavior that results from past experiences or planned learning. (Discussion of National Education Standards, at Hotel Century Park, Central Jakarta, on Friday, December 13, 2019).

There are three important stages to support teacher facilitators in the Independent Learning policy, which are building a technology-based education ecosystem, collaborating across sectors, and using data and technological innovation as policy references and learning patterns.

1. Building a Technology-Based Education

Ecosystem

A technology-based education ecosystem is not only about modernizing the education system but also aims to encourage creativity, innovation, and the character of facilitators in education. It is expected that teacher facilitators will have the freedom to think, take action, and analyze risks accurately. This will result in teachers who can support independent learning processes for students.

2. Collaboration across Sectors

As teacher facilitators continue to collaborate with various components to optimize competencies, this collaboration can be done by supporting each other in terms of ideas and/or resources to produce the best innovations and quality.

3. Using Data and Technological Innovation as Policy References and Learning Patterns

The Education Data and Information Center (Pusdatin) of the Ministry of Education and Culture has prepared the best human resources and infrastructure to support government policies. In addition, Pusdatin's strategic work has been carefully planned and implemented to ensure that teachers are ready to learn and teach based on technology, to develop competencies, and to be character-based for the future (Bahtiar Siregar et al., 2023).

Subject Teachers Prepare Teaching Modules and Assessments

In the independent curriculum, the improvement of Lesson Plans (RPP) is transformed into teaching modules. The criteria for teaching modules are as follows: (1) The teaching module includes various tools or media, methods, instructions, and guidelines designed systematically and attractively, (2) The teaching module is the implementation of the Learning Objective Flow (ATP) developed from Learning Outcomes (CP) with the Pancasila Learner Profile as the target, and (3) The teaching module is prepared according to the learners' developmental phase, considering what will be learned with learning objectives and long-term development as a basis.

The teaching module serves as a guide for teachers to deliver learning materials to students. Based on the research findings, it can be mentioned that teaching modules are created by subject teachers. In general, they contain an introduction that motivates students' learning. Then, the learning strategies are adjusted to the subject matter. The next step is the activity stage, which involves initial activities where students observe and study infographics and other materials. The core activity aims to facilitate student learning and concludes with reflection between teachers and students. Then, attitude assessment is conducted through the observation by the teacher during the learning activities, providing qualitative assessments with criteria such as Excellent, Good, Adequate, and Needs Improvement. Knowledge assessment and learning outcome assessment are also conducted during the learning activities.

A significant aspect of the Independent Learning implementation is the project assessment aimed at developing students' character based on the Pancasila Learner Profile. At SMPN 4 Cikarang Utara Bekasi, for the academic year 2022/2023, three themes are determined: 1) Sustainable Lifestyle, 2) Entrepreneurship, and 3) Environmental Care, in addition to the theme "Build Body and Soul," which focuses on strengthening mental health and sports development. In the project assessment, an interesting element is the "Panen Raya" (Bountiful Harvest), where teachers and students organize large-scale and simultaneous activities such as market days, sports and arts competitions between classes, and other competency development activities.

In facing the era of Industry 4.0, teachers must upgrade themselves by developing their pedagogical competencies, enabling them to guide and direct students to utilize their reasoning abilities effectively. Teachers with freedom of thought can provide stimuli that stimulate students to use their reasoning abilities effectively and be creative according to their talents and

abilities (Dahlia Sibagariang et al., 2021). According to Maria Marta Manao et al. (2022), citing the Ministry of Education and Culture's website, it

is stated that Teacher Facilitators are learning leaders who are able to apply freedom in learning and participate in driving the education ecosystem to realize student-centered education. Supported by E. Mulyasa (2020), the role of teacher facilitators is to make changes in schools through small changes in classrooms through learning and sending students to help balance the increasingly complex demands of development brought by innovation and creativity.

There are several studies on the role of teacher facilitators, such as Dhani's research article (2020) which mentions the role of teachers in developing the independent learning curriculum, including: (1) formulating specific learning objectives according to the curriculum goals and the characteristics of the subjects, students, and classroom conditions, (2) designing an effective learning process that helps students achieve the predetermined learning objectives or competencies, (3) implementing the learning process as the curriculum implementation, (4) conducting process and learning outcome evaluations, and (5) evaluating the interactions of the implemented curriculum components (Mulyadi et al., 2022).

c. Evaluation Stage

As mentioned earlier, in the independent curriculum, teachers are required to prepare teaching modules that include attitude, knowledge, and learning outcome assessments. Below is an example of the Assessment Rubric for Strengthening the Pancasila Learner Profile (P5) in the planning stage:

Assessment Rubric for P5 Planning Stage

Theme: Sustainable Lifestyle

Topic: Cultivating Chili Plants

Planning

Indicator 1:

Dimension: Faithful and Devout to the One Supreme God and Noble-Moraled

Element: Morals towards nature

Sub-Element: Understanding the interconnectedness of the Earth's ecosystems

- Developing (D): Has not fully understood the theory of vegetable cultivation.

- Developing (D+): Able to understand the theory of vegetable cultivation.

- Developing as Expected (DE): Has been able to understand various theories of vegetable cultivation.

- Highly Developed (HD): Fully capable of understanding various theories of vegetable cultivation.

Indicator 2:

Dimension: Creative

Element: Producing original works and actions

- Developing (D): Has not fully been able to produce an artwork (drawing) about vegetable plants.

- Developing (D+): Able to produce an artwork (drawing) about vegetable plants.

- Developing as Expected (DE): Has been able to produce an artwork (drawing) about vegetable plants.

- Highly Developed (HD): Fully capable of producing an artwork (drawing) about vegetable plants.

The assessment that will be included in the report consists of quantitative values (numbers) for literacy and numeracy, as well as a project assessment containing descriptions of the progress of attitudes and character of the learners based on the Pancasila Learner Profile.

Based on Ika Wahyu Susiani's research (2022), the independent learning curriculum is a government response to the post-pandemic education situation in Indonesia. The policy was initiated as an effort to help restore education in Indonesia through project-based learning. Project-based learning is crucial in developing learners' character as it provides them with opportunities to learn based on experiences (experiential learning). Independent learning is also intended to create a joyful learning atmosphere for both students and teachers as learning facilitators.

According to Febia Ghina Tsuraya et al.'s study (2022), it is stated that the implementation of the independent curriculum is not carried out simultaneously and comprehensively as described by Kemendikbudristek. This means that each educational institution is given flexible opportunities for implementation. Some supporting programs for implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum (IKM) include Initiating Schools (SP) and Vocational Schools as Centers of Excellence (SMK-PK).

Initiating Schools implement five actions to improve the quality of teaching in Indonesia: (1) Consultative and Asymmetrical Mentoring, (2) Strengthening Human Resources in Schools, (3) Lessons with a New Paradigm, (4) Data-Based Planning, and (5) School Digitization. The Initiating Schools program involves collaboration from various parties, including experienced teachers, supervisors and mentors, principals, teacher committees, teachers, students, partners, parents' councils, and local governments. All components collaborate to improve the quality of education in Indonesia in an integrated manner.

As important actors in presenting the independent curriculum, teacher facilitators play a significant role in motivating students to succeed according to their own abilities and interests. In the concept of the independent curriculum, students are prioritized in terms of literacy and numeracy competencies, ensuring that all learners possess 21st-century skills, including character, citizenship, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills.

In general, innovation is an alternative solution to problems. Innovation refers to renewing, changing, and improving processes or products and the way things are done to be more effective and efficient. According to Gerald Hills, innovation is defined as ideas, practices, or objects considered new by an individual or other user units. Furthermore, innovation is also

defined as the ability to apply creativity to solve problems and seize opportunities to enhance and enrich life (Fatimah et al., 2021).

Cece Wijaya et al. (1991) as cited by Siti Julaeha (2021) stated that the innovation process consists of several stages: invention, development, diffusion, and adoption, explained as follows:

- a. Invention involves new discoveries, which are usually adaptations of what already exists. In practice, curriculum and learning innovations often depict a result that is very different from what existed before.
- b. Development is a process before entering a larger scale.
- c. Diffusion is a specific type of communication related to new ideas or concepts. As stated by Rogers (1983, as cited by Siti Julaeha, 2021), diffusion is the process in which innovation is communicated through certain channels continuously among members of a social system.
- d. Adoption involves several important elements that need to be considered, including timing of acceptance, types of innovation, adopting units, communication channels, social structure, and culture (Siti Julaeha, 2021).

One of the products of educational curriculum innovation is the independent curriculum. Conceptually, the independent curriculum represents a new generation in responding to educational challenges in the digital era. The independent curriculum, initiated by Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Anwar Makarim, formulates new policies. The independent curriculum provides freedom for institutions and students to implement their learning processes (Faiz & Kurniawati, 2020, as cited by Tuti Marlina, 2022). The goal of independent learning curriculum is to enhance graduates' competencies, both soft skills and hard skills, to better prepare them for the demands and needs of the current era (Hukma Fikria Adira, as cited by Anita, 2021).

Minister Nadiem Makarim's decision to implement independent learning was not

without reason. Based on the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2019, Indonesian students ranked sixth from the bottom in terms of mathematics and literacy. Indonesia was ranked 74th out of 79 countries surveyed (Evi Hasyim, 2022). In response to this situation, Minister Nadiem established minimum competency assessments, including literacy, numeracy, and character surveys. Literacy is not only measured by reading ability but also the ability to analyze the content and understand the concepts within it. Numeracy assesses students' ability to apply numerical concepts in real-life situations, not just in Mathematics.

Regarding the Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey, Sudarto et al. (2021) stated that these measures are intended to allow each school to determine the most suitable learning model for their students, region, and learning needs. The Minimum Competency Assessment is not as strict as the National Examination (UN), as emphasized by the Director-General of Teacher and Education Personnel (Dirjen GTK), Supriano.

Furthermore, Eni Andari (2022) highlights the advantages of the independent learning curriculum, including: (1) making the education world more flexible, (2) providing students with opportunities to delve into the subjects according to their needs, (3) providing a platform for students to explore general knowledge by serving the community, and (4) preparing students for the workforce. On the other hand, there are also limitations of the independent learning curriculum, such as (1) requiring thorough preparation before implementation, which takes a relatively long time, (2) inadequate planning for education and teaching at present, and (3) the need for additional budget to train human resources to implement the independent learning curriculum.

A significant challenge in the implementation of the independent curriculum is the Pancasila Learner Profile, which aims to demonstrate the desired

character and competencies to be achieved and reinforce the noble values of Pancasila among learners and stakeholders. The Pancasila Learner Profile consists of six dimensions: 1) Faithful and Devout, 2) Global Diversity, 3) Independent, 4) Mutual Cooperation, 5) Critical Thinking, and 6) Creative. These six dimensions must be integrated to create learners who embody the Pancasila Learner Profile and its values (Fahrian Firdaus Syafi'i, 2021).

Conclusion

The independent learning curriculum implemented by the government has become a new paradigm for enhancing the quality of education universally. It is aimed at boosting the quality of education, particularly in terms of strengthening literacy, numeracy, and character surveys. In practice, it begins with improving the quality of educators to become independent thinkers, enabling them to effectively guide learners. It starts with the creation of teaching modules that include assessments of attitudes, knowledge, and learning outcomes. Furthermore, it is crucial for teachers to become lifelong learners themselves, as this will empower learners to develop strong character and embody the Pancasila Learner Profile..

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