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Independent Learning Curriculum: How Is Teachers' Readiness in Implementing It?

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Abstract: Education must be dynamic and able to adapt in order to keep up with the changes brought on by the advancement of science, as it is constantly evolving and being updated. The purpose of this study is to examine the readiness of teachers to implement the independent learning curriculum and the limitations they encounter during the school learning process. This study describes a story based on the experiences of participants in SMK Kesehatan Imelda (Imelda Health-based Vocational High School), SMK Pemda (Local Government Vocational High School) in Labuhabatu regency and SMA Negeri 1 Aek Natas (State Senior High School) in North Labuhanbatu Regency. The results showed SMK Kesehatan Imelda and SMK Pemda have not implemented the independent learning curriculum. SMA Negeri 1 Aek Natas has conducted on class X with by providing project-based learning and strengthening the Pancasila profile by providing material for 3 hours divided into 1 week. There is still a lack of socialization by the government regarding the implementation of the independent learning curriculum, causing many teachers to be confused about its implementation in schools, beginning with the preparation of lesson plans and extending to the implementation of project-based learning methods.

Keywords: Teacher, Independent Learning Curriculum, Implementation

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum in Indonesia has been revised approximately ten times. In 1947, the first curriculum containing Pancasila as the foundation of Indonesian education was designed and could be implemented (Prihatini & Sugiarti, 2022). The education system at the time incorporated the Dutch education system into its design, used it as the foundation for curriculum content in Indonesian education units, and adapted it to the Indonesian education system (Raharjo, 2020). The curriculum was supplanted with the objective of fostering human character that is consistent with the state's foundation, embodies the spirit of Pancasila, and is submissive to his religion of choice (Ritonga, 2018). The 2013 curriculum which was used before the pandemic became the only curriculum used by educational units in learning. In pandemic period from 2020 to 2021, The Ministry of Education and Culture mandated the issue of a policy on using the 2013 Curriculum and the Emergency Curriculum (simplified Kur-2013) as curriculum references for educational units. In pandemic period from 2021 to 2022, The Ministry of Education and Culture issues a policy on using the 2013 Curriculum, Emergency Curriculum, and Independent Learning Curriculum in Mobilizing Schools and SMK (vocational high school) Centers of Excellence (Purani, N., K. & Putra, I., K., D., A., 2022).

The use of information during the Covid-19 Pandemic, in which all activities were conducted online, resulted in numerous changes in many areas of life, including education (Abbas et al., 2021). Because the development of knowledge can become a provision for students during the online period, education must be dynamic and able to adjust in order to keep up with the changes that are taking place. Consequently, the Free Learning Curriculum has arrived. E-Learning is an Independent Learning Curriculum Platform that teachers use in the learning process, necessitating preparedness on the part of both teachers and students to implement the Free Learning Curriculum (Hadiansyah et al., 2019)

Teachers are still perplexed by the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at all educational levels. Teachers recognize that they lack sufficient experience integrating learning technologies into the teaching and learning process. The primary responsibility of a professional educator is to educate, train, direct, guide, assess, and evaluate students in order to prepare the next generation for the new challenges of the 21st century (Rizayani et al., 2022). According to Nury Batubara & Aman (2019) which found in Independent Learning Curriculum context, In the learning process, the teacher must modify the students' circumstances and the content. In the context of Freedom to Learn, the Merdeka Curriculum prescribes the implementation of differentiated learning based on student characteristics, such as learning patterns (Alrabai, 2015)

Teachers must be able to create innovative learning based on the curriculum in effect (Arisanti, 2022). Teachers must be creative, innovative, not the sole source of the learning process (teacher-centered),

place students not only as learning objects but also as learning subjects, and ultimately lead a fun, happy, democratic learning process that respects each student's opinion so that the substance of learning is truly internalized. The implementation of the Free Learning Curriculum is predicated on technological advancement, but the readiness of all educational components, including teachers who will implement this curriculum in their respective institutions, will be evaluated (Sri Rahayu, 2018).

Previous research has addressed the preparedness of junior high school school teachers to implement the Independent Learning Curriculum, which emphasizes on mathematics (Hadiansyah et al., 2019), learning in elementary schools (Zahir et al., 2022), the advantages and disadvantages of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Learning History in a Historical Perspective (Almarisi, 2023). The results of the investigation indicate that teachers have received training on the Independent Learning Curriculum. However, teachers have not implemented learning according to the Independent Learning Curriculum's guiding principles. Consequently, teachers struggle to implement the Independent Learning Curriculum when designing, implementing, and evaluating learning, as well as following up on evaluation results (Arifin & Rizaldy, 2023)

Independent Learning Curriculum, which focuses on fundamental courses and gives students ample time to comprehend concepts and perfect their skills, can be described as a curriculum that emphasizes diversified learning. Due to the ongoing development of the Independent Learning Curriculum, nothing is proceeding as planned. Many educators continue to find it challenging to implement the Independent Learning Curriculum. This is largely due to the fact that teachers were not adequately trained on Independent Learning Curriculum program. In addition, teachers continue to struggle to surmount their reliance on outmoded curriculum (Nury Batubara & Aman, 2019). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discuss teacher readiness in implementing the independent learning curriculum and the constraints experienced by teachers in the learning process at school. This study was designed using narrative inquiry so that the teacher's experience is seen as part of the storytelling and development of a continuous student learning cycle.

METHODS

This research is a research that is used to describe a story based on the experiences experienced by participants. In this investigation, the teacher's personal experience in identifying meaningful learning practices was utilized. The chosen participants were teachers at SMK Kesehatan Imelda (Imelda Health-based Vocational High School), SMK Pemda (Local Government Vocational High School) in Labuhabatu regency and SMA Negeri 1 Aek Natas (State Senior High School) in North Labuhanbatu Regency. Eight participants were used as samples for this study. They are willing to share their Independent Learning Curriculum implementation experiences. Interviews with a semi-structured format were used to collect data in order to obtain comprehensive information about the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. The queries address a variety of topics, including (1) the curriculum used in each school, (2) comprehension of the concept of the Independent Learning Curriculum, (3) implementation difficulties, and (4) impressions of the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. Using the Miles and Huberman Models, data analysis was conducted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings are presented in a logical manner to illustrate the preparedness of teachers to implement the Merdeka curriculum. On the basis of two interview sessions, the research findings are presented in chronological order to illustrate the teacher's response and readiness to implement a series of continuous experiences and thoughts in order to develop meaningful insights. The results and discussion are presented in several subchapters: (1) the Independent Learning Curriculum must be implemented in the 2022/2023 academic year, but there are still schools that have not implemented it; (2) lack of socialization of the Independent Learning Curriculum, so that many teachers are unable to implement it; (3) teachers encounter difficulties in implementing project-based assignments; (4) teachers who have implemented do not encounter problems. However, teachers who have not yet implemented project-based learning continue to encounter implementation challenges.

Independent Learning Curriculum Must Be Implemented in the 2022/2023 Academic Year

The Merdeka curriculum is designed to teach backwardness in literacy and numeracy. An Independent Learning Curriculum that will provide solutions for improving the curriculum and this can be implemented in stages according to the readiness of each school. This Independent Learning Curriculum is implemented from the most basic education, namely TK-B (Kindergarten, level B), SDLB (extraordinary school of elementary school level) class I and IV, SMP (junior high school), SMPLB (extraordinary school of junior high school level) class VII, SMA (senior high school), SMALB (extraordinary school of senior high school level), and SMK (vocational high school) Class X (Arisanti, 2022). The results of interviews with teachers from SMK Kesehatan Imelda (Imelda Health-based Vocational High School) and SMK Pemda (Local Government Vocational High School) in Labuhabatu regency indicate that for the 2022/2023 academic year, the school will continue to use the K-13 curriculum, while SMA Negeri 1 Aek Natas (State Senior High School) in North Labuhanbatu Regency has implemented the Independent Learning Curriculum for class X and the K-13 curriculum for classes XI and XII.

SMK Imelda and SMK Pemda stated that schools were not prepared to implement the Independent Learning Curriculum due to a lack of government indoctrination regarding the procedures for implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum; consequently, teachers did not comprehend its implementation. For SMA Negeri 1 Aek Natas, implementation has begun as a result of the teacher's comprehension of the newly-introduced Independent Learning Curriculum. The implementation at SMA Negeri 1 Aek Natas is comparable to that of grades K-13, with the exception that in the Independent Learning Curriculum, students are free to choose the subjects they wish to study, and learning activities related to the Pancasila profile are conducted for three hours per week.

The independent learning curriculum offers numerous benefits. Among these advantages is the curriculum's simplification and increased profundity. The Independent learning curriculum emphasizes essential knowledge and the phase-appropriate development of students' abilities. A more profound, meaningful, unhurried, and pleasurable education. The second benefit is that it is more autonomous. As there are no specialization programs at the secondary school level, pupils choose their subjects of interest based on their abilities and aspirations (Hadiansyah et al., 2019). For teachers in teaching activities, they can carry out teaching according to an assessment of the level of achievement and development of students. For schools in implementing the independent learning curriculum, they are given authority in the development and management of curriculum and teaching and learning processes that are adapted to the character of the education unit and students. The third advantage is that it is more relevant and interactive. In this case learning is mostly done through project work and students are given the freedom to actively explore, explore and describe actual issues such as environmental issues, circular economy, sanitation and so on to foster critical thinking, careness and complex problem solving abilities as form of character development and competence of the Pancasila Student Profile (Almarisi, 2023).

The Independent learning curriculum in its implementation must be supported by the provision of training, the provision of teacher learning materials and innovative teaching tools, supported by the school principal and the local office. The education unit in providing the teaching tools in question is in the form of textbooks, supporting teaching materials, for example the design and scheme of learning objectives, school operational curricula, teaching modules and projects to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students which are available on digital platforms for teachers. Schools can provide and procure teaching materials and learning tools independently with School Operational Funds (BOS), or regularly with the support of local governments and/or foundations, then implementing this curriculum is supported by training and provision of learning media for teachers and school principals (Almarisi, 2023).

Lack of Socialization about the Independent Curriculum

Curriculum serves a purpose in education, namely as an instrument for accomplishing educational objectives. The curriculum is comprised of essential and supplementary components that work together to accomplish educational objectives. The curriculum component is an interdependent and inseparable system that reflects a unified whole (Abbas et al., 2021). The readiness of teachers in preparing for the implementation of the independent curriculum must be accompanied by socialization of its application. Based on the results of interviews with teachers, it was stated that the lack of outreach from the Government regarding the independent curriculum was one of the reasons teachers were not fully prepared. There are still different perspectives among teachers. The teacher also stated that they were still unable to be creative in giving project-based assignments. The teacher at SMA Negeri 1 Aek Natas stated that the learning activities that are usually carried out by teachers to achieve the Pancasila profile are by carrying out activities

in the form of chili farming, which starts from the planting process to the harvesting process so that students understand the stages of farming.

The impact of the lack of socialization is that teachers still feel confused about making lesson plan independent curriculum versions because the RPP must be written cognitively and for learning media it must also be technology-based which is difficult to implement. Teacher readiness to prepare the Merdeka Learning version of lesson plans is a condition that prepares teachers cognitively (through the process of understanding, using information, compiling and evaluating lesson plans) for the Merdeka Learning version of lesson plans to make (Mawaddah et al., 2022). To achieve the goal of developing a learning system based on physical preparation (sufficient energy and health), psychological preparation (interest and motivation) and physical preparation (availability of supporting facilities and infrastructure) (Ihsan, 2022).

According to Rizayani et al. (2022), the teacher begins to shorten the lesson plans or rearrange the lesson plans. Teachers are more focused on learning in class and innovation in preparation both in terms of lesson plan content and attachments. The motivational aspect is expressed in the emotional stage, where the teacher has a clear goal of compiling a short lesson plan. Infrastructure that supports short lesson plans is an educational tool that can be followed by every teacher to develop their competence in preparing lesson plans.

Teachers have the impression that in any curriculum, teachers must be innovative. However, this Independent Curriculum requires teachers to be even more innovative. The main cause is the complex structure of learning objectives in the form of narrative paragraphs, while the teacher needs to break them down into several smaller learning objectives so that they can be applied to each learning meeting. The series of learning objectives then needs to be arranged by the teacher so as to form a flow of learning objectives. Not only that, teachers are also required to utilize technology in developing teaching materials, learning media, implementing learning, and even evaluating learning. This is in accordance with previous research which found that the Independent Curriculum requires teacher readiness to adapt to technology (Prihatini & Sugiarti, 2022).

Teachers Have Difficulty to Implement Project-Based Assignments

Teachers have a very important role both in curriculum development and its implementation. Likewise, the teacher plays a very important role in implementing the independent learning policy. Teachers can contribute collaboratively and effectively to school curriculum development to organize and structure learning materials, textbooks, and content. Teacher involvement in the curriculum development process is important to align curriculum content with the needs of students in the classroom. As educators, teachers can understand student psychology and know about teaching methods and strategies. The teacher also acts as an evaluator for assessing student learning outcomes. So, in curriculum development, teachers need to have qualities such as planners, designers, managers, evaluators, researchers, decision-makers, and administrators. Teachers can play these roles at every stage of the curriculum development process (Daga, 2021).

The obstacle faced by teachers in implementing the independent curriculum was the project-based learning method, in which the teacher had to give assignments that were done by groups, and students were directly involved in carrying out these assignments. The results of interviews with teachers stated that, for now, teachers still use simple project-based assignments. One of these tasks is to provide training for students besides farming, namely by presenting resource persons who are in accordance with the subject matter. The invited resource persons are teachers who are also members of the subject association. Several studies suggest independent learning in relation to the role of the teacher. According to Dhani (2020), the teacher's role in developing an independent learning curriculum, namely (1) formulating specific learning objectives according to curriculum objectives and characteristics of subjects and students and class conditions; (2) designing learning processes that can effectively help students achieve learning objectives or predetermined competencies; (3) carrying out the learning process as curriculum implementation; (4) carrying out evaluation of learning processes and outcomes; and (5) carrying out an evaluation of the interaction of curriculum components that have been implemented.

One of the roles of the teacher is to carry out learning innovations to answer students' needs and create a liberating learning climate. Learning innovation is expected to be able to help students think independently, innovate independently, learn independently and creatively, and learn independently for happiness. The role of the teacher in learning innovation creates innovative teachers. As an innovative teacher, the teacher is responsible for helping students learn and behave in new, different ways. This means that teachers must have the knowledge, skills, and values on which they rely. Teachers master the latest learning methods, strategies, and media. Even teachers master learning technology to support educational activities. Innovative teachers are teachers who are competitive not only because they are innovative,

creative, and critical but also because they master innovative technologies that are designed and applied in learning (Alrabai, 2015).

The implications of learning innovation include learning method innovation and learning design innovation. (1) Learning method innovation means that teachers use new and meaningful methods, for example, applying cloud technology, conducting online education, or using electronic whiteboards to solve teaching problems and become a blackboard to solve problems and the existence of teaching; (2) learning design innovation means a means to implement innovative learning designs that inspire students to integrate knowledge with practical and flexible innovative abilities, enabling students to make greater contributions to relevant fields in the future (Abbas et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

There are still schools that have not implemented the government-designed independent curriculum because there is still a lack of socialization and also minimal teacher readiness due to confusion in the stages of implementation, especially for project-based assignments. Therefore, socialization is still required along with an intense commitment from teachers in order for this independent curriculum to be successful.

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