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Systematic Analysis of Barriers to Implementing the Independent Curriculum in Schools: A Literature Review from Teacher and Facility Perspectives

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Abstrak

Perubahan kurikulum menjadi Kurikulum Merdeka merupakan respon strategis pemerintah untuk memulihkan pembelajaran pasca pandemi dan meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan, namun pelaksanaannya di lapangan menghadapi berbagai kendala kompleks. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara sistematis hambatan-hambatan yang muncul dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di berbagai jenjang pendidikan, mulai dari Sekolah Dasar hingga Sekolah Menengah Atas/Kejuruan. Berbeda dengan penelitian sebelumnya yang umumnya berfokus pada studi kasus tunggal di satu sekolah, penelitian ini menawarkan kebaruan dengan mensintesis data dari berbagai konteks sekolah untuk menemukan pola hambatan yang bersifat sistemik. Metode yang digunakan adalah *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) dengan menganalisis 21 artikel jurnal terakreditasi yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2022 hingga 2024. Hasil penelitian mengidentifikasi tiga kluster hambatan utama: (1) Keterbatasan kompetensi guru dalam pemahaman konsep, penyusunan modul ajar, dan penguasaan teknologi; (2) Minimnya sarana dan prasarana penunjang seperti akses internet dan alat peraga; serta (3) Kesulitan adaptasi siswa terhadap model pembelajaran yang menuntut kemandirian dan berpikir kritis. Simpulan penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa keberhasilan Kurikulum Merdeka tidak hanya bergantung pada kebijakan, tetapi memerlukan intervensi masif pada pelatihan guru yang berkelanjutan dan pemerataan infrastruktur digital.

Kata Kunci: Hambatan Guru, Kurikulum Merdeka, Kesiapan Sekolah, Fasilitas Pendidikan, Tinjauan Literatur.

Abstract

The transition to the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) represents the government's strategic response to recover learning post-pandemic and enhance the quality of education; however, its implementation in the field faces complex obstacles. This study aims to systematically analyze the barriers emerging in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum across various educational levels, from Elementary School to Senior High/Vocational School. Unlike previous research that generally focused on single-case studies in one school, this study offers novelty by synthesizing data from diverse school contexts to identify systemic barrier patterns. The method utilized is a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), analyzing 21 accredited journal articles published between 2022 and 2024. The results identify three main clusters of barriers: (1) Limitations in teacher competence regarding concept understanding, teaching module preparation, and technology mastery; (2) Lack of supporting infrastructure such as internet access and teaching aids; and (3) Student adaptation difficulties towards learning models that demand independence and critical thinking. This study concludes that the success of the Independent Curriculum depends not only on policy but requires massive intervention in continuous teacher training and equitable digital infrastructure.

Keywords: Teacher Barriers, Independent Curriculum, School Readiness, Educational Facilities, Literature Review.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar in building a national civilization that is adaptive to changing times. In Indonesia, the curriculum has undergone significant dynamic changes as an effort to respond to global challenges and local needs. The most recent change is the transition towards the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), launched as a learning recovery solution following the Covid-19 pandemic (Hutasoit et al., 2024). This curriculum offers flexibility for educators to create quality learning tailored to students' needs and learning environments, focusing on character development through the Pancasila Student Profile (Sunarti et al., 2024).

Although the Independent Curriculum carries the idealism of student-centered learning freedom, the reality of its field implementation faces a stark clash with the readiness of the school ecosystem. Several previous studies have highlighted this issue partially. For instance, Anjani et al. (2023), in their research at the elementary school level, found that older teachers experienced significant difficulties in adapting to the technology that serves as the backbone of the Independent Curriculum. Meanwhile, at higher levels, Rizky & Partono (2023) highlighted students' negative stigma towards mathematics and low student character as primary inhibitors. Other research by Saputra et al. (2024) employed a quantitative approach to map teacher barriers in secondary schools but has not yet deeply explored the qualitative aspects regarding facility disparities.

The observed research gap is that the majority of previous studies focused on single-case studies at a specific level or location, thus failing to provide a comprehensive picture of barrier patterns that are cross-level and systemic. Therefore, this study presents a novelty by synthesizing recent literature (2022-2024) that integrates findings from various educational levels (Elementary, Junior High, Senior High/Vocational) and various subjects (Science, Social Studies, Language, Islamic Education) to map the problems of implementing the Independent Curriculum holistically.

The urgency of this research lies in the fact that if fundamental barriers such as teacher competence, technological adaptation, and facility availability are not immediately mapped and resolved, the noble goal of the Independent Curriculum to produce superior, creative, and independent generations will be difficult to achieve. This study aims to deeply analyze the barriers to implementing the Independent Curriculum in terms of teacher readiness, school facilities, and student adaptation to provide recommendations for policymakers.

METHOD

This study employs the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method with a qualitative descriptive approach. This method was chosen to identify, evaluate, and interpret all available research relevant to specific research questions (Sucipto et al., 2024).

Literature Selection The objects of study in this research are scientific articles published between 2022 and 2024. This time frame was selected based on the period of massive implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia. Literature selection standards include: (1) Articles originate from accredited national journals or national seminar proceedings; (2) Have a discussion focus on "barriers", "challenges", "problems", or "readiness" in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum; (3) Available in full text. The total literature analyzed in this study amounts to 21 articles.

Data Analysis Process

Data analysis techniques were conducted through three stages:

1. Data Reduction

Grouping findings from each article based on barrier categories (Teachers, Students, Facilities, Management).

2. Data Presentation

Arranging data in a matrix table to facilitate the reading of problem patterns across educational levels.

3. Conclusion Drawing

Synthesizing findings to answer the research objective regarding the main problems of curriculum implementation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of the 21 selected literatures, it was found that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum across various regions and educational levels faces diverse yet similarly patterned challenges. The findings are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Matrix of Findings on Barriers to Independent Curriculum Implementation

Author (Year)	Level/Subject	Main Barrier Findings
Anjani et al. (2023)	Elementary (SD)	Senior teachers struggle with IT to access the Merdeka Mengajar platform; Limited facilities.
Nurazizah & Rochintaniawati (2023)	Senior High (Biology)	Limited time for project work (PjBL); Technology use not optimal despite LMS availability.
Nainggolan et al. (2024)	Elementary (SD)	Difficulty designing differentiated learning and assessments suitable for student needs.
Yolanda et al. (2024)	Islamic Junior High (MTs)	Teachers struggle translating Learning Outcomes (CP) into Learning Objectives (TP); Minimal references.
Rumiati et al. (2024)	Elementary (SD)	Diverse student understanding; Limited teacher references; Teachers struggle to leave their comfort zone.
Hutasoit et al. (2024)	Elementary (SD)	Limited funds for training and procurement of supporting facilities (laptops/projectors).
Harianto et al. (2023)	Junior High (SMP)	Telecommunication network and electricity constraints (blank spots); Teachers struggle to access PMM.
Sipahutar (2024)	Junior High (SMP)	Teachers struggle adapting to flexible curriculum; Administrative burden reduces student guidance time.
Gunawan & Gumiandari (2024)	Islamic Senior High (MA - Arabic)	Lack of school preparation (teaching materials); Teachers possess low digital literacy in designing digital media.
Adiyansah et al. (2024)	General (Social Studies)	Learning still dominated by lecture methods; Lack of interactive multimedia.

Discussion

Competence and Teacher Readiness Problems

Teachers serve as the vanguard of curriculum implementation. However, findings indicate that teacher readiness remains a major obstacle. Harianto et al. (2023) highlighted that many teachers struggle to access the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) not only due to technical constraints but also due to low digital

literacy, especially among teachers approaching retirement. This aligns with the findings of Anjani et al. (2023), stating that senior teachers at SDN Sukasari III struggle to keep up with technological developments, which form the basis of administration and learning in the Independent Curriculum.

Beyond the technological aspect, substantial understanding of the curriculum is also an issue. Yolanda et al. (2024) and Sipahutar (2024) found that teachers are still confused in translating Learning Outcomes (CP) into Learning Objectives (TP) and Learning Objective Flows (ATP). Nainggolan et al. (2024) added that teachers at SD Negeri Plaosan 1 felt difficulty in designing differentiated learning, which constitutes the soul of the Independent Curriculum. This indicates that existing training has not been comprehensive enough to shift teachers' teaching paradigms from textual to contextual and personalized.

Limitations of Facilities, Infrastructure, and References

The Independent Curriculum demands interactive and project-based learning, which ideally is supported by adequate facilities. However, Hutasoit et al. (2024), in a case study in Medan, found that limited school funds hinder the provision of technological tools such as laptops and projectors, which are crucial for modern learning. More severe conditions are found in areas with geographical constraints, as reported by Harianto et al. (2023) in West Tanjung Jabung, where unstable electricity and internet networks (blank spots) hinder teachers from accessing digital learning resources.

Limited references are also a significant barrier. Gunawan & Gumiandari (2024) as well as Nurkholidha et al. (2023) noted that textbooks and teaching materials suitable for the Independent Curriculum are often unavailable or distributed late, forcing teachers to seek materials independently with limited resources. Adiyansah et al. (2024) emphasized the need for developing innovative learning media (such as audio-visuals and animation) to overcome student boredom due to lack of facilities; yet, this again clashes with teachers' ability to create them.

Student Adaptation Challenges and Assessment Complexity

Changes in learning methods also impact students. Rumiati et al., (2024) and Rizky & Partono (2023) found that diverse student understanding levels and negative stigmas towards certain subjects (such as mathematics) pose challenges in applying student-centered learning. Students accustomed to being passive in the previous curriculum require time to adapt to the Project-Based Learning model, which demands independence.

Regarding assessment, Syahda & Wahyuningsih (2024) as well as Nurazizah & Rochintaniawati (2023) revealed that teachers still struggle to conduct authentic diagnostic and formative assessments. The administrative burden perceived as heavy divides teachers' focus between teaching and completing documents, causing the essence of assessment for learning improvement to be often neglected. This is reinforced by the findings of Saputra et al. (2024), stating that although teachers' philosophical understanding is quite good, technical skills in assessment and technology use still need improvement.

The Role of Mobilizing Teachers and Collaboration

Amidst various obstacles, the role of Mobilizing Teachers (Guru Penggerak) becomes vital. Sunarti et al. (2024) explained that Mobilizing Teachers can act as catalysts for change by inspiring colleagues. However, their numbers remain limited. Collaboration among stakeholders was also highlighted by Sucipto et al. (2024) as a key solution, where issues of policy inequality and student environmental conditions must be addressed synergistically between the government, schools, and parents.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at various educational levels in Indonesia still faces serious multidimensional challenges. Based on the literature synthesis, it is concluded that the main barriers lie in three aspects: (1) Teacher HR Readiness, where many teachers still experience a lack of digital proficiency and difficulty translating curriculum concepts (CP, TP, ATP) into differentiated learning practices; (2) Infrastructure, in the form of digital facility inequality, internet access, and adequate textbook availability; and (3) Student Adaptation, which requires time to shift from passive learning to active and independent learning.

This study implies that the success of the Independent Curriculum is not sufficient with just policy document changes but requires tangible support in the form of teacher training that is mentoring-based (not just seminars), equitable distribution of digital infrastructure to remote areas, and simplification of administrative burdens so teachers can focus on the essence of learning. It is suggested for future research to develop teacher training models effective in bridging the digital and pedagogical gap in the era of the Independent Curriculum.

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