

INDONESIAN LANGUAGE TEACHERS' READINESS TO IMPLEMENT THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The independent curriculum is a policy prepared by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, which aims to promote the existing curriculum. Based on initial observations made by researchers at SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City, the school has implemented the Independent Curriculum in 2023 since the issuance of circular number 56/M/2022 concerning the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which contains guidelines for implementing the curriculum in the context of learning recovery. This research aims to describe the Readiness of Indonesian Language Teachers in Implementing the Independent Curriculum at SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City. This type of research uses a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. This research provides a precise description and explanation of the conditions or symptoms encountered. The research results show that the level of understanding of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is that teachers understand very well the implementation of the independent curriculum and can adapt to its implementation. In terms of planning the learning process, the results obtained were that the teacher had designed a teaching module consisting of general information, core components and attachments. Teachers have also studied the flow and learning objectives to develop teaching modules. Furthermore, from carrying out learning activities, the results obtained were that teachers felt they had demands to be creative and innovative, in terms of processing assessments and reporting learning results, it was found that the results of the forms of assessment carried out by teachers were all the same in accordance with the provisions of the Independent Curriculum, then in terms of the availability of facilities and infrastructure, the school provided the facilities and good infrastructure. The conclusion of the questionnaire evaluation shows that the majority of teachers feel quite familiar with the Independent Curriculum and are positive about its implementation in schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The Kampus Mengajar Program is part of the Kampus Merdeka program, which invites students across Indonesia to become teachers and teach elementary school (SD) students in 3T regions, namely frontier, disadvantaged, and outermost areas, in order to

strengthen learning and help schools during the learning period, especially amid the pandemic. The implementation of Kampus Mengajar can provide experience and empower students, and it has a positive impact on them (Anwar, 2021).

According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the Independent Curriculum features various types of intracurricular learning with optimized content, giving students sufficient time to become familiar with concepts and strengthen their competencies. This curriculum can maximize learning by giving students enough time to explore concepts and consolidate their knowledge.

Merdeka Belajar focuses on freedom and creative thinking. One of the programs presented by the Ministry of Education and Culture at the launch of Merdeka Belajar was the start of the Sekolah Penggerak (Driving School) program. This school program is designed to support every school in creating generations of lifelong learners who embody the character of Pancasila students. The success of all this requires the role of teachers (Rahayu et al., 2022). This curriculum sets out the choices available to all education units and gathers information about the education units that are ready to implement the Merdeka Belajar curriculum (Nugraha, 2022).

Previous researchers, Kholik et al. (2022), explained that the Independent Curriculum program has a positive impact on improving students' knowledge and skills as well as on increasing the capacity of instructors. According to Rawis et al. (2023), the Independent Curriculum is one in which students can develop individual character that is courageous, independent, sociable, civilized, polite, and capable, rather than relying solely on a ranking system. The Merdeka Belajar curriculum is a curriculum that contains a great deal of intracurricular learning, whose content is further strengthened, giving students sufficient time to understand learning concepts and develop their own competencies. Meanwhile, Ansumanti (2022) states that the Independent Curriculum is a policy that prioritizes freedom of thought, which is especially important for teachers to have.

The curriculum has undergone various changes in line with the times. The curriculum is regarded as the core of a learning program, and therefore requires gradual development of planning, implementation, and evaluation in accordance with the needs of science, technology, and the arts, as well as the competencies required by society (Junaidi & Wulandari, 2020).

Learning activities begin with a series of activities that support the success of the teaching and learning process, namely preparation, implementation, and evaluation of

learning. In Indonesian, the word *kesiapan* (readiness) derives from the word *siap* (ready) with the prefix *ke-* and the suffix *-an*. According to the dictionary of psychology, readiness is a point of maturity for receiving and practicing certain behaviors.

Readiness can also be described as the entire state of an individual in responding to and carrying out an activity, in which that attitude comprises the skills, mentality, and attitudes that must be possessed and planned for in carrying out an activity (Ansumanti, 2022).

Teacher readiness is made one of the main focuses in implementing the Independent Curriculum because teachers are the implementers in the classroom who deal directly with students. Readiness is a condition in which an individual responds to and applies an activity, in which that attitude comprises the skills and mentality that must be prepared and possessed while carrying out certain activities. As mentors and educators, teachers must of course be ready to face the demands set out in the Independent Curriculum. Teachers are expected to have capabilities in physical, social, and emotional terms. The magnitude of the demands that teachers must face shows that teachers' capacity in implementing the Independent Curriculum is very large (Ansumanti, 2022). Teacher readiness for implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is important for ensuring the success and effectiveness of the curriculum. Teacher readiness will directly affect students' learning experience and the achievement of the expected learning objectives. One aspect that needs to be evaluated is teachers' understanding of the concepts and philosophy of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (Arofaturrohman et al., 2023). In addition to the factors above, there are several other views on the requirements for a teacher's preparation for teaching, including preparation of the situation, students, learning objectives, the lessons to be taught, the teaching methods to be used, the learning media to be used, and the type of evaluation technique to be used (Dasopang, 2017). Meanwhile, according to Anggraini (2021), lesson plans (RPP), teaching materials, learning resources, learning media, the curriculum used, and assessment are part of a teacher's preparation for learning. Therefore, learning preparation is important for a teacher before carrying out learning in the classroom, because such preparation will greatly affect the course of the learning process and its objectives. Based on initial observations made by the researchers at SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City, the school has implemented the Independent Curriculum since 2023, following the issuance of Circular Number 56/M/2022 concerning the enforcement of the Independent Curriculum, which contains guidelines for implementing the curriculum in the context of learning recovery. The

implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City, went through several stages of socialization, including socialization via Zoom meetings, in-house training (IHT), and the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM); in addition, Teacher Working Group activities on implementing the Independent Curriculum were also held. This study aims to describe the readiness of Indonesian language teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum at SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City.

Indicators Determining Teacher Readiness

Indicators that determine teachers' readiness in carrying out or applying the Independent Curriculum in schools: to support the effectiveness of implementing the Independent Curriculum, teachers must be ready.

1. Level of Understanding

Teachers' level of understanding in applying the Independent Curriculum can be seen from how well educators understand the learning mechanisms of the Independent Curriculum, the structure and principles of its learning, and the preparation of learning and assessment within the curriculum.

2. Use of Learning Resources

In applying the Independent Curriculum, teachers must be able to make the best possible use of the learning resources provided by the school and the government. The Independent Curriculum provides various learning resources on the Merdeka Mengajar platform.

3. Learning Process

As educators, teachers must be able to develop learning and carry out project-based learning processes. In addition, teachers must be able to support the holistic development of students' competencies and character and create learning that is relevant, or designed to fit the context of students' environment and culture, while always involving the roles of parents and the community.

4. Learning Assessment

The assessment process is the most important part of finding out students' needs, development, and the extent to which learning outcomes have been achieved. Teachers must of course understand the assessment system applied in the Independent Curriculum. The Independent Curriculum has several types of assessment, namely: diagnostic assessment, which is assessment carried out to identify students' skills, strengths, and weaknesses so that learning can be adjusted to students' skills and

conditions. Diagnostic assessment can be carried out periodically, starting when the teacher is about to introduce a new learning topic, ending when the teacher has finished presenting and discussing a topic or subject, and at other times during the semester.

RESEARCH METHOD

This type of research uses a descriptive method with a qualitative approach. This research provides an accurate description and explanation of the conditions or symptoms encountered. According to Sugiyono (2019), qualitative research methods are research methods used to study objects in natural conditions, where the researcher is the key instrument, data collection techniques are carried out by triangulation (combined), data analysis is inductive, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. In this study, the researchers describe the readiness of Indonesian language teachers in implementing project-based learning in the Independent Curriculum at SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City. This research was conducted at SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City. The reason for choosing this location is that SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City, is a school that implements the Independent Curriculum. The research began with the preparation of a research proposal in June 2024.

Types and Sources of Data

1. Primary Data

Primary data, also called original or new data, is information collected by researchers directly from the field. The results of interviews were used as the source of primary data for this research, and Indonesian language teachers served as the primary data sources.

2. Secondary Data

Secondary data is a type of indirect data that can strengthen and add to existing research data. This study uses supporting data in the form of interviews and photo documentation as sources of secondary data.

Sampling Technique

In the research conducted, the sampling technique used was non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is a sampling technique that does not give every element or member of the population an equal chance of being selected as a sample (Sugiyono, 2020).

Data Collection Technique

According to Sugiyono (2020), in general there are four types of data collection techniques, namely observation, interviews, documentation, and a combination/triangulation (observation, interviews, and observation).

Observation

According to Nasution in Sugiyono (2020), observation is a condition in which direct observation is carried out by the researcher in order to better understand the context of the data within the overall social situation so that a holistic (comprehensive) view can be obtained.

Table 1. Observation Sheet Grid for Analyzing Teacher Readiness in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

Component	Sub-Component	Aspects Observed
Teacher Readiness	Level of Understanding	1. Understands the mechanism for applying the Independent Curriculum 2. Understands the concept and objectives of the Independent Curriculum 3. Understands the learning structure of the Independent Curriculum 4. Understands the forms of learning that are in accordance with the Independent Curriculum
	Learning Plan	1. Understands the principles of learning 2. Understands learning outcomes 3. Is able to formulate learning objectives 4. Is able to develop a flow of learning objectives from the learning objectives 5. Designs learning
	Learning Process	1. Develops learning 2. Carries out the learning process 3. Differentiated learning
	Learning Assessment	1. Conducts assessments in accordance with the Independent Curriculum 2. Processes assessment results within one learning objective 3. Processes learning outcomes into final grades for reporting learning results
	Readiness of Facilities and Infrastructure	1. Availability of facilities supporting the learning process (learning media, books and learning resources, completeness of information and communication technology) 2. Completeness of infrastructure supporting the learning process (comfortable classrooms, field, library, healthy canteen)

Interview

According to Esterberg in Sugiyono (2020), an interview is a meeting of two people to exchange information and ideas through questions and answers, so that meaning can be constructed on a particular topic.

The interview type used by the researchers is a guided approach that uses general guidelines, which requires the interviewer to prepare a framework and outline or main points to be asked during the interview. These main points are prepared before the interview, and the interviewer must be able to create an atmosphere that is relaxed yet serious. That is, the interview is conducted earnestly, not playfully, but also not rigidly.

Documentation Study

According to Sugiyono (2020), documentation is the collection of records of past events, whether in the form of writing, pictures/photos, or monumental works by a person or institution.

Documentation study is one qualitative data collection method that involves examining and analyzing documents made by the subject themselves or by others about the subject. Documents can take the form of writing, pictures, diaries, life histories, regulations, policies, or a person's monumental works.

Data analysis in this study began with data reduction, data presentation, and data verification. Data reduction is a data analysis technique that requires intelligent thinking and insight in order to record in detail and carefully the large amount of data obtained from the field. The results of data reduction are processed so that their form looks more complete. The results of data reduction may take the form of sketches, matrices, synopses, and other forms that are needed to facilitate the presentation and affirmation of conclusions (Rijali, 2018).

Data presentation is a collection of structured information that provides opportunities to draw conclusions and take action. Data presentation formats include narrative techniques, matrices, graphs, networks, and diagrams. The aim is to make it easier to read and draw conclusions. Therefore, the presentation must be neatly arranged. Simply put, data presentation can be described as a data analysis technique for finding out what performance will be planned. Data can be presented in the form of tables, graphs, pictures, and the like.

Data verification is a data analysis technique in which the researcher draws conclusions from the data obtained from the research results. These conclusions are provisional results regarding the research questions that the researcher obtained through

interviews, library research, and observation. Conclusions must always be verified throughout the research process until the final conclusion is obtained.

The procedures or steps taken by the researchers in conducting qualitative research are as follows:

1. Planning Stage

The researcher chooses the topic to be studied based on the problems and phenomena that occur. The researcher then studies and seeks information related to the topic and determines the research focus so that the scope of the research is not too large.

2. Implementation Stage

The implementation stage usually includes data collection activities carried out by the researcher in the form of observations and interviews. Observations and interviews are carried out to support the subsequent stages. In addition to observations and interviews, the researcher also documents activities while the research is under way.

3. Data Validity Checking Stage

The data validity checking stage is carried out through data triangulation, in which the researcher compares the data obtained from observations with the data obtained during interviews. The existing data are then checked and analyzed so that conclusions can be drawn. The data from the observations and interviews are then presented systematically based on the analysis in accordance with existing guidelines.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study analyze the findings from the interviews, observations, and documentation study that the researchers conducted with the school. The researchers describe and present the research results on teachers' readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Based on the results of the interviews, observations, and document study, several findings were obtained regarding teachers' readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum. The researchers attempt to describe the data findings obtained and present them in this section to give a picture of the readiness of SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City.

1. Level of Understanding of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools

The researchers conducted interviews with the Indonesian language teachers of SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City, about the Independent Curriculum. Based on the interview results regarding teachers' readiness in implementing the Independent

Curriculum, the following information (data) was obtained, as stated by the first teacher, with the initials EW:

R : What is your opinion of the Independent Curriculum that is currently being implemented; is it easy to understand?

T : "Yes, I understand it, but it takes time to study and understand it in depth, and I carry out the learning process according to the teaching module, with learning more focused on students"

A similar view was also expressed by the second teacher, with the initials MS, as follows:

R : What is your opinion of the Independent Curriculum that is currently being implemented; is it easy to understand?

T : "Yes, the mechanism applied is independent learning, carrying out P5 and also differentiated learning; then students understand better and are more active in learning, and the learning model is the same as the module that has been prepared."

Based on the findings above, it can be described that teachers already understand the implementation of the Independent Curriculum very well and can adapt it in its application.

2. Planning the Learning Process

Based on the observations the researchers made, it was found that teachers had designed teaching modules consisting of general information, core components, and attachments. Teachers had also studied the flow and objectives of learning in order to develop the teaching modules. The following is the interview conducted with the first teacher, with the initials EW:

R : How is the learning planned while the Independent Curriculum is being implemented, and what principles are used?

T : "The principle is to carry out learning that prioritizes students' conditions; usually students are formed into groups, with learning outcomes adjusted to the conditions of the class, and I adapt the models and methods so that students are more enthusiastic about learning".

Next, the results of the interview conducted with the second teacher, with the initials MS, are as follows:

R : How is the learning planned while the Independent Curriculum is being implemented, and what principles are used?

T : "Learning focuses on students and we carry out teamwork for the learning outcomes (CP). In the learning process under the Independent Curriculum, we as teachers have the freedom to design learning; however, if children find it hard to understand the lesson, the method focuses on students' needs so that learning is more effective and efficient".

Based on the findings above, it can be described that teachers have no difficulty in designing teaching modules because they had received guidance beforehand.

3. Carrying Out Learning Activities

At this stage, the researchers describe how the learning process in the Independent Curriculum takes place, covering the development of learning, how teachers apply project-based learning (P5), and how teachers carry out differentiated learning. This was conveyed by the first teacher, with the initials EW, as follows:

R : What is your opinion of the learning design while using the Independent Curriculum?

T : "In the learning process under the Independent Curriculum, we as teachers have the freedom to design learning so that students do not get bored and are more innovative".

The statement made by Mrs. EW is not much different from that of Mrs. MS, who stated that the learning process must certainly be more creative and innovative. The following statement from Mrs. MS reinforces Mrs. EW's opinion.

R : What is your opinion of the learning design while using the Independent Curriculum?

T : "I choose learning methods and models and adapt them to the material so that my students are more active and learning becomes effective. I also do things such as making posters, clean-up activities, and recycling, which I can then link to the learning material as well".

Based on the findings above, it can be said that teachers' implementation of learning in the Independent Curriculum is already good, because the demands of the Independent Curriculum are in fact not very different from those of the previous curriculum; the only point of attention is the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), for which teachers must add lesson hours. Based on the findings and interview results above, teachers feel they are under demand to be creative and innovative, so teachers must work hard to think about how to develop learning that attracts students' interest.

4. Processing Assessments and Reporting Learning Outcomes

Learning assessment in the Independent Curriculum has three types of assessment. These are diagnostic assessment, or initial assessment, which focuses on learning about students' weaknesses, strengths, and skills and is carried out periodically; formative assessment, which is carried out within one round or competency; and summative assessment, which is carried out at the end of the year. Based on the researchers' interview results, it was found that the form of assessment in grades I and IV is of course carried out in the same form and at the same time. This was explained by the first teacher, with the initials EW, as follows:

R : How have the assessment and learning outcome reporting processes under the Independent Curriculum been so far?

T : "For assessment we adapt; usually I use observation, project discussions, and also presentations. I collect assessment results such as projects, written tests, and observations, then I align them with the CP and determine the assessment criteria".

The same was stated by the second teacher, with the initials MS, as follows:

R : How have the assessment and learning outcome reporting processes under the Independent Curriculum been so far?

T : "Yes, usually I use observation, discussion, and project presentations as well. I collect the assessment results, then evaluate them, and after that use the assessment results as material for reflection."

Based on the findings above, it can be said that the forms of assessment carried out by teachers are all the same, in accordance with the provisions of the Independent Curriculum and school requirements, and the timing of implementation is also not very different.

5. Availability of Facilities and Infrastructure

Regarding the readiness of facilities and infrastructure, it was found that the school provides facilities and infrastructure well, although of course there are shortcomings that the school is still in the process of improving. The researchers interviewed the first teacher, with the initials EW, who explained as follows:

R : Regarding facilities and infrastructure, in your opinion are they in line with the Independent Curriculum that has been implemented so far?

T : "The facilities and infrastructure are fairly good. I use textbooks and a projector, and the school also has computers, adapted to students' learning needs; there is also Wi-Fi, only the internet connection is not very stable"

A similar statement was also made by the second teacher, with the initials MS, as follows:

R : Regarding facilities and infrastructure, in your opinion are they in line with the Independent Curriculum that has been implemented so far?

T : "The facilities and infrastructure are complete; it is just that sometimes there are obstacles in using them because they are used in turns."

Based on the statements of several informants, it can be seen that at SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City, the preparation of facilities and infrastructure is good and supports both students and teachers. Good infrastructure reflects the school's readiness to implement the Independent Curriculum.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that Indonesian language teachers at SMPN 03 Simpang Kiri, Subulussalam City, have shown readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum. This readiness is seen in teachers' understanding of how the curriculum is applied, their ability to design teaching modules, and learning implementation that already meets the demands of the curriculum.

Teachers feel the need to be more creative and innovative in attracting students' interest, and are able to manage assessment and reporting of learning outcomes in accordance with the provisions of the Independent Curriculum. School infrastructure,

such as classrooms, play areas, internet access, and learning media, also supports implementation of the curriculum.

The evaluation results show that most teachers feel familiar with the Independent Curriculum and are optimistic about its positive impact on education. However, challenges such as students' lack of knowledge, parental support, and teacher training still need further attention. Overall, the Independent Curriculum is considered to have a positive impact and is expected to improve the quality of education in the future.

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