Independence Curriculum Implementation Challenges: A Case Study in Secondary School of Bengkulu Tengah

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The main goal of this study is to determine the difficulties that SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah, SMPN 14 Bengkulu Tengah, and SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah face in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This study employed a case study methodology and a qualitative research strategy. Six English teachers, the principal, and members of the school curriculum staff participated in this study. The results indicate that the teacher encountered challenges in implementing independent curriculum, including the provision of learning materials, the adjustment of students' learning styles, the creation of assessments, and the lack of adequate ICT resources. These findings highlight the need for improved resource allocation and support to ensure successful curriculum implementation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Implementing the Independence Curriculum represents a significant shift in educational paradigms, emphasizing student autonomy, critical thinking, and self-directed learning. By encouraging students to take charge of their education, this curriculum aims to prepare them for the complexity of the modern world. However, the successful adoption of such an innovative curriculum depends largely on teachers' readiness to embrace this change. Understanding the challenges teachers face and their level of preparedness is essential for ensuring the effective implementation of the Independence Curriculum.

Nadiem Makarim, the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, introduced the Independent Learning as a new initiative. To achieve Indonesia's superior human resources, this curriculum is a step toward changing the educational landscape and an alternative for restructuring the education system (Rendika, et. al., 2022). The notion of self-directed learning is seen as acceptable since it aligns with the goal and mission of Indonesian education, which is to produce competent individuals capable of competing in various areas (Sibagariang et al., 2015). Kurniawan et al. (2020) stated that the concept of independent learning aligns with Ki Hajar Dewantara's goals, which are the freedom to learn creatively and independently to support the development of students character. Students have the opportunity to showcase their potential abilities through the independent curriculum's learning design with enjoyable and stress-free learning environments (Rahayu et al., 2022).

Recent research has provided significant insights into the challenges and readiness of teachers regarding the Independence Curriculum. These studies highlight factors influencing teacher readiness, including professional development, resource availability, and administrative support. According to Tricahyati and Zaim (2023), Padang's English teachers are prepared to implement an independent curriculum, although they still need improvement. Teachers face difficulties communicating learning objectives and putting differentiated learning into practice during the educational process. To support teachers in producing interactive media, workshops and training involving evaluation and IT utilization are still required. Furthermore, the particular circumstances of schools and the local setting impact on how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented. For

instance, Raiyan et al. (2023) show that at Bireuen, this curriculum has not been fully implemented because not all students may have access to the technology, such as using Android smartphones to support an independent learning process.

Students' independent curriculum-based learning approach promotes self-exploration and in-depth study of the subjects covered in the updated curriculum. This curriculum grants students more freedom in character development. Teachers are more flexible in providing autonomy for competencies during the lesson. However, to modify their teaching methods, teachers need to understand the various ways students learn (Fajri and Andwarwulan, 2023). It raised teachers' stress levels and put them under pressure.

The Merdeka Curriculum marks a significant advancement in Indonesian education, yet it still faces many challenges. Rasyidi and Idrus (2024) identify limited resources and difficulties in understanding technology as the most pressing issues. However, these challenges also offer educational institutions an opportunity to improve their standards. To address these issues, institutions should implement actions such as enhancing infrastructure, training educators, developing motivating techniques for students, conducting more contextualized evaluations, and fostering social interaction and teamwork (Satriani et al., 2023). Despite obstacles in its implementation, the Merdeka Curriculum offers chances for creativity and advancement in education. As a result, this study is focused on exploring the specific challenges faced by English teachers at SMPN Bengkulu Tengah, particularly at SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah, SMPN 14 Bengkulu Tengah, and SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah. By investigating these challenges in detail, the research aims to uncover unique insights that can inform tailored solutions for improving educational practices in these schools. Furthermore, it emphasizes the potential for creativity and advancement within the curriculum despite existing obstacles, contributing to the broader discourse on educational reform in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This research used a qualitative research method and a case study. According to Creswell (2013), a case study is a qualitative research technique in which a researcher examines one or more contemporary, real-world restricted systems over an extended period of time by gathering copious amounts of detailed data from various sources of information and presenting a case description and case themes. Furthermore, a case study, according to Yin (2009), is empirical research that examines a current occurrence within the framework of real life, especially in circumstances where it can be challenging to distinguish between the two. The researcher selected a qualitative research method with a case study approach to determine the obstacles faced by EFL teachers in implementing the independent curriculum. This step is taken to comprehend the distinctive personality that is thoroughly examined. It aids in solving the issues these people encounter, in addition to evaluating certain characters.

The researchers employed observation and interviewing as methods of gathering data for this research. First, the researcher conducted active observations at the school to gain a deeper understanding of the daily realities involved in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum. These observations enabled the researcher to witness the learning process firsthand and identify any challenges that might arise. Second, the researcher interviewed the principal, school curriculum staff, and six English teachers in order to get a variety of insights. These participants were from SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah, SMPN 14 Bengkulu Tengah, and SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah. The interview will be a semi-structured interview, in which the interviewer formulates new questions based on predetermined questions, utilizing a form of informal guided interviewing as described by Cohen et al. (2002). Asking open-ended questions and following up with additional questions to get more details about the interviewee's answers and area of interest. The researcher used five questions from Achadiyah and Azmi (2022).

3. RESULT(S) AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

Interviews were conducted in order to get data regarding teacher readiness and challenges in schools. The purpose of the questionnaire was to determine the level of preparation of the teacher for implementing the curriculum, including their ability to create lesson plans (RPP), design the learning process, conduct learning assessments, and create ICT-based learning materials regarding the curriculum. Based on the interview result, it is challenging for English teachers to gain up-to-date, relevant material that will help them create engaging lessons. Moreover, the teacher's responsibilities for carrying out an independent curriculum are unclear. The teacher's comprehension of the objectives of the independent curriculum and the learning outcomes is inadequate, which results in poor preparation. Many workshops and outreach initiatives have been carried out; however, attendance has not been 100%. Although the independent curriculum allows teachers flexibility in

how they want to teach, still have to make sure that the knowledge and abilities are based on the national standard.

In the implementation stage, teachers are required to be able to adapt their lesson plans based on the needs of their students. To create products that are engaging, significant, and appropriate for the local setting, more effort and expertise are needed. English teachers must possess additional abilities in order to implement the curriculum, including project-based learning design, information technology proficiency, and alternative assessment design. Despite having previously received student-oriented instruction and training, some students are unprepared when questioned on subjects in class. This is because the teacher's learning is still insufficient when it comes to managing the class to ensure that it follows the provisions in the independent curriculum. Then, teachers feel there was a gap factor through students' knowledge skills in implementing project-based learning. It was difficult to make students active and participate enough in the project. It was also difficult to monitor each group because too many students have low knowledge. The challenge for teachers was identifying the individual needs of every student and then designing appropriate lesson plans to address those needs.

Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum has different characteristics and approaches compared to the previous curriculum, which consists of authentic assessment and formative assessment. English teachers faced challenges while creating valid and relevant evaluation tools for assessing their students' English proficiency development. The teacher ran into trouble coming up with different questions for the students. Due to the teacher's prior experiences, asking different questions would make students envious because they thought their level of difficulty was higher than other students. Additionally, teachers believed that their efforts were being wasted if they had to address every variation in every student's problems. It also took a really long time to do that. Subsequently, due to the variations in the capabilities and interests of each student, the teacher must conduct their own assessment in order to evaluate the students' abilities collectively.

During the observation phase, the researcher discovered that there weren't enough ICT resources available in the school to support students' independent learning. For instance, the school lacked enough computers and a language laboratory to support the teacher's intention to employ technology in order to construct the project. Teachers were not allowed to demand students bring their own computers because they were aware of their financial situation. This indicates that the school was not ready to make students apply independent learning. Due to the school's lack of projectors, teachers find it challenging to provide additional options, such as projector-based learning. A few projectors were available at the school, so the teacher had to reserve them. Teachers found it hard to negotiate with other teachers for a turn using the projector. A language laboratory did not exist at SMPN 18 and SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah, although a few projectors were present. At SMPN 14 Bengkulu Tengah, there was a language laboratory as well as a few projectors.

3.2. Discussion

This study demonstrated how inadequately schools are prepared to implement an independent curriculum. The primary reason for this low level of preparation is a lack of socialization and training. Teachers, principals, and supervisors need more than a few days of training to fully comprehend the concepts and curriculum implementation. The new curriculum has roughly 14 modifications, and the more changes there are, the more time it takes to understand. This result is consistent with the study of Widyawati et al. (2024), which found that one of the most important aspects of curriculum implementation is teacher readiness. Teachers said they were still unsure about incorporating the curriculum into their regular teaching schedules, despite being aware of the independent curriculum policy—whether through official documentation or social media. Of the educators, 41% demonstrated a good understanding, 39% had a sufficient understanding and 20% had a low understanding. Teachers' roles are essential to the learning process. Teachers will interpret and apply the curriculum, providing students with insights into its effectiveness to help them reach their full potential in the classroom. (Mikser et al., 2023; Ross, 2023).

The next challenge was about material accessibility. The lack of current and relevant resources for English teachers to create interesting courses restricts effective curriculum implementation. The few training workshops made it difficult for teachers who do not attend the workshop to adapt the lesson plans, which requires more time, effort, and expertise. Even teachers who attended the workshop were still confused about the learning process and designing assessments. According to Mantra et al. (2022), teachers need to be equipped with the skills and information needed to successfully and directly contribute to curriculum development and implementation. All teachers should attend teacher training and workshops to become a professional teacher. Mustofa and Mariati (2022) stated that adapting to the new regulation is not an easy task.

Using various teaching techniques can create a stimulating and engaging learning environment. Additionally, some teachers allow students to study independently and take charge of their education. However, because of low student engagement, some teachers continue to play a more teacher-like role in guiding students' activities during the learning process. Learning assessment is also an important component of independent

curriculum. This assessment suggests developing learning models to improve learner competencies based on student needs (Lestari, 2022). This research found that the teacher is still confused about how to design the learning assessment due to the gap in students knowledge.

The last problem was ICT facilitation. Inadequate ICT resources, such as language labs and computers, make it difficult for teachers to incorporate technology into project-based learning. Teachers who participate in curriculum development, according to Sin (2021), reflect on their methods, analyze their experiences, and develop new knowledge. According to Rosidah et al. (2021), teacher preparedness also refers to an educator's capacity to use technology to fulfill their professional responsibilities by offering solutions or answers. Due to technological restrictions or a lack of technology in the learning environment, teachers in Bengkulu Tengah are unable to perform this role.

4. CONCLUSION

The study's findings and discussion suggest that SMPN Bengkulu Tengah, specifically at SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah, SMPN 14 Bengkulu Tengah, and SMPN 29 Bengkulu Tengah, encounters challenges in implementing an independent curriculum because of underprepared teachers and inadequate infrastructure. These challenges require comprehensive support systems, including improved material accessibility, clearer guidelines for teachers, enhanced training programs, and increased investment in ICT infrastructure. This study focuses on the different difficulties teachers of English encounter when adapting to the Independent Curriculum, highlighting the necessity of comprehensive solutions to guarantee the curriculum's successful implementation.

This study makes the following recommendations based on research findings: (1) Teachers should broaden their knowledge and reassess their use of independent curriculum, enabling them to create lesson plan in accordance with current regulations. (2) Teachers should adapt to the students' learning styles, facilitating the previously prepared learning steps in the module throughout the teaching and learning process. This provides an opportunity to inspire students to learn; (3) the teacher prepares and chooses the most suitable model of assessment for the class; (4) Schools should ensure that their technological resources are sufficient to assist teachers in teaching.

In conclusion, even though the focus of this study is on the difficulties encountered by EFL teachers in Bengkulu Tengah, similar difficulties may arise for teachers in other provinces or even other nations. Therefore, the outcomes of this study may also help school institutions improve the quality of their teachers, particularly English teachers. In order for teachers to successfully apply the Independent Curriculum, the researcher suggests that the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) be able to perform an equitable distribution of teacher training and ICT facilitation in schools.

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