Teachers' Responses to the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in English Language Learning

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	A major pedagogical change has been established in SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah, an education institution categorized as independent change supporting an independent curriculum, letting schools choose and implement learning materials that are directly related to their needs and context. However, only seventh-grade teachers are currently utilizing the independent curriculum. This study examines the responses of a seventh-grade English teacher towards the Independent Curriculum implemented at the SMPN 18, a secondary school in Bengkulu Tengah, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was used along with descriptive analysis. In order to capture teachers' experiences, views, and challenges, it was necessary to conduct wide-ranging interviews with the teachers and carefully observe the classroom dynamics; especially for English language teaching. The findings indicate teachers' perspectives regarding the benefits and challenges of the new curriculum and strategies which they use for its effective implementation.

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1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial elements in determining a country's progress and the caliber of its human resources is education. In the dynamics of the times, the educational process can give rise to original, creative ideas. Curriculum development is a tool used to raise educational standards. Because "the curriculum is the heart of education," which determines the ongoing education, the application of the applied curriculum will demonstrate the proper education policy. (Munandar, 2017). On the other hand, if a curriculum is implemented in a way that is detrimental to students, it will not yield the best results possible. Structured instruction, evaluation, guidance, counseling, and planning of school activities are all parts of curriculum implementation tactics. In order to accomplish specific objectives, the strategy comprises devices, methods, and plans for the planned activities. The use of methods and different resources or learning strengths are all part of learning strategies, which are action plans (series of activities) (Qolbiyah, 2022).

The 2013 curriculum was replaced with the Merdeka Belajar (Independent Curriculum) by the Indonesian government, which brought about a dramatic change in the nation's educational system. This bold reform sought to give schools more freedom and flexibility in creating their curricula, with the ultimate goal of revolutionizing the educational system. The Independent Curriculum aimed to empower teachers and students by encouraging a more student-centered approach to learning, creating a more vibrant and stimulating learning environment. Despite its good intentions, the 2013 curriculum has drawn criticism for its strict framework and heavy emphasis on standardized testing. It frequently inhibited innovation and creativity in teaching and learning, which prompted requests for a curriculum that was more flexible and responsive. These issues were resolved by the Independent Curriculum, which gave schools the freedom to customize their curricula to each student's unique needs and interests. It placed a strong emphasis on helping students acquire critical thinking,

problem-solving, and teamwork abilities in order to better equip them for the demands of the twenty-first century. However there were difficulties in putting such a big reform into practice. Teachers were forced to adjust to a new pedagogical framework that required more autonomy and creativity because they were used to the 2013 curriculum's structured approach. They also had to create new resources and tests that matched the aims and objectives of the Independent Curriculum. These difficulties brought up significant concerns regarding how prepared educators and educational institutions are to adopt this novel method of instruction.

This study's primary focus is on how the Independent Curriculum is applied to English language instruction. As a universal language, English is essential to preparing Indonesian students for a world that is becoming more interconnected. The objectives of English language education are well-aligned with the Independent Curriculum's emphasis on critical thinking, teamwork, and communication. However, English language teachers faced particular difficulties as a result of the curriculum change, as they had to modify their lesson plans and instructional resources to fit the new requirements. Moreover, a curriculum's implementation is a complex process with many moving parts that must be taken into account to be carried out successfully. The literature offers insightful information about the difficulties, approaches, and results of implementing curricula in various educational contexts. Numerous studies (Frinza et al., 2021; Hamsin, 2021; Fauzi, 2019) highlight the significance of curriculum flexibility, alignment with learning needs, and the role of educators in promoting effective implementation. Furthermore, curriculum revision and continuous improvement depend on the assessment of curriculum policies and their influence on learning outcomes (Mahfud, 2019; Utari et al., 2022). Addressing flaws and improving the curriculum's efficacy require an understanding of the difficulties and obstacles encountered during implementation, such as the exclusion of local content subjects or teacher disciplinary issues (Mahfud, 2019; Nurcholis et al., 2020). Teachers and legislators can maximize student learning experiences by identifying areas for improvement and making well-informed decisions by evaluating the implementation process (Utari et al., 2022).

Since educators are the main forces behind the teaching and learning process, their role in curriculum implementation is crucial (Adiko & Idji, 2020; Fauzi, 2019). A curriculum's ability to be implemented successfully is influenced by a number of important factors, including support, training, and educator readiness (Xiong et al., 2019; Adiko & Idji, 2020). Giving educators the tools they need, chances for professional growth, and continuous assistance can improve their ability to implement the curriculum successfully and involve students in worthwhile learning experiences (Xiong et al., 2019; Adiko & Idji, 2020). According to Xiong et al. (2019), curriculum leadership is crucial in assisting teachers during the stages of planning, executing, and assessing curriculum delivery. The philosophical foundations of education that guide curriculum design and delivery must be taken into account in addition to the practical aspects of curriculum implementation, such as teacher preparation and resource allocation (Karaduman & Uçar, 2020). The way that teachers implement curricula is shaped by their educational philosophies, which have an impact on choices regarding pedagogy, content, and assessment techniques (Karaduman & Uçar, 2020). Coherence and consistency in curriculum implementation can be enhanced by matching educators' philosophical stances with the goals and objectives of the curriculum (Karaduman & Uçar, 2020).

Moreover, students' character and behavior are greatly influenced by the hidden curriculum, which consists of attitudes, values, and non-cognitive skills taught to them throughout the learning process (Matorevhu & Madzamba, 2022). By comprehending and utilizing the hidden curriculum, teachers can enable students to acquire positive values like cooperation, kindness, and honesty, which will support their overall development (Matorevhu & Madzamba, 2022). Teachers can establish a nurturing learning environment that fosters students' social and emotional development by coordinating the planned curriculum with the hidden curriculum (Matorevhu & Madzamba, 2022). The application of the curriculum goes beyond the confines of the classroom and includes extracurricular activities, community service, and real-world learning applications (Khasanah et al., 2019). According to Khasanah et al. (2019), incorporating curriculum elements into a variety of learning opportunities can improve students' practical skills and competencies as well as their educational journey. Teachers can design a more comprehensive and dynamic learning environment that meets the varied needs and interests of their students by taking into account the larger context in which curriculum implementation takes place (Khasanah et al., 2019).

In addition, SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah is an educational unit that implements an independent curriculum with the category of independent change, meaning that the school provides the freedom to use the learning tools that have been provided. Although only grade VII uses the independent curriculum, all subjects in grade VII, including English, must refer to the independent curriculum. The researcher examined this school because it has only recently switched to the independent curriculum. Therefore, only grade VII uses the independent curriculum. In addition, only one of the four English teachers uses the independent curriculum in their teaching. This teacher teaches grade VII. As a subject that has the aim of understanding foreign languages and syntax in English subjects. Thus, English subjects must improve and prepare themselves to welcome and succeed the

independent curriculum. Prior research has illuminated different facets of curriculum implementation within the English language learning context, offering insightful information about teachers' reactions, obstacles encountered, and methods used during the process. For example, (Abduh et al., 2022) investigated how English teachers perceived the current curriculum change and found that the changes had a positive effect on the methods used to teach English (Abduh et al., 2022). In a similar vein, Mubarok & Sofiana (2022) examined the planning, execution, and assessment procedures of English language instruction in Indonesian schools using the national curriculum (Mubarok & Sofiana, 2022). These studies emphasize how crucial it is to comprehend teachers' viewpoints and the real-world effects of curriculum modifications on instructional strategies.

Furthermore, Aminatun & Oktaviani (2019) have explored how language learning applications can help students develop their autonomous learning skills, highlighting the role that technology plays in improving learning outcomes (Aminatun & Oktaviani, 2019). investigated curriculum implementation changes as well as teachers' confidence in English in Malaysia, presenting a range of viewpoints regarding the necessity of English language instruction and administrators' perspectives on promoting English education (Rahim et al., 2022). These studies highlight how complex curriculum implementation is and how cultural contexts and technology developments must be taken into account when determining how best to implement curricula.

Additionally, Bulan et al. (2020) conducted research on the evaluation of English language learning in the context of the 2013 curriculum with the goal of determining the efficacy of teacher-performed assessments and their influence on the learning outcomes of students. Similar to this, Puspitasari et al. (2020) examined teachers' opinions regarding the English language teaching application of the 2013 curriculum, emphasizing the significance of comprehending teachers' viewpoints in curriculum delivery (Puspitasari et al., 2020). By investigating the practical effects of curriculum implementation on assessment practices and pedagogical beliefs, these studies add to the body of existing literature. Furthermore, in creating learning materials, Wulandari (2019) investigated teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge, highlighting the vital role that learning materials play in language instruction and curriculum implementation (Wulandari, 2019). In a similar vein, Seneechai (2020) reviewed the methods used by EFL teachers and the variables that affect curriculum implementation in the classroom, highlighting the significance of comprehending the tactics and difficulties that teachers face when putting new curriculum into practice (Seneechai, 2020). These studies offer insightful information about how curriculum implementation, pedagogy, and technology interact to improve teaching methods. However, this study aims to find out how teachers respond to the implementation of the independent curriculum in English language learning.

2. METHOD

The method of study uses a qualitative approach to descriptive analysis with direct observation techniques obtained through interviews. A number of factors are taken into account when conducting research with qualitative methods, according to Moleong (2000). First, dealing with multiple realities makes adjusting qualitative methods easier. Secondly, this method directly presents the nature of the relationship between researchers and respondents. Lastly, this method is more sensitive and adaptable to many joint influences that are becoming sharper as well as to the value patterns that are encountered. Researchers had to go directly to the field and interact with participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and the local context (Raco, 2010). The purpose of this field study is to investigate how teachers respond to the implementation of the independent curriculum at SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah with an emphasis on the subject of English. In addition, SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah has only one teacher who teaches using an independent curriculum out of the four teachers who teach English. Only in grade VII, the independent curriculum is used as learning. So, the focus of this study is only on teachers who implement an independent curriculum. Thus, this research will directly observe and conduct interviews with teachers.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Ministry of Education and Culture Research and Technology has officially launched the new name of the prototype curriculum, named (Ayundasari et al., 2022) The independent curriculum was created as a more adaptable framework for instruction that emphasizes core subjects while fostering students' individuality and skill development. The National Standardized Test, National Examination, Learning Implementation Plan, and Zoning New Student Admission regulations are the four areas of change that the Ministry of Education and Culture said support the independent learning program (Rahayu et al., 2022) It is anticipated that by introducing the independent curriculum, students will be more engaged due to project-based learning, which gives them more chances to actively investigate real-world problems (Hikmah, 2022). Three options are available for schools to choose from when implementing the independent curriculum. First, independent

learning, which involves applying some of the autonomous curriculum's tenets without altering the standard school curriculum. The second is autonomous change, which is employing prepared learning resources with an autonomous curriculum. Using an independent curriculum by using prepared learning facilities is one of the criteria for implementing an autonomous curriculum independently changing, according to the findings of observations and teacher interviews at SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah.

Response is every behavior is essentially a response or reply (response) to a stimulus or stimulus (Wulandari, 2017) Furthermore, the human individual acts as a controller between the stimulus and the response, meaning that the stimulus and the individual factor alone determine the specific form of the response to the stimulus. The interplay of various external factors, such as people and objects, and internal factors, such as attitudes, deceased, and emotions from previous influences, ultimately determines the type of behavior that an individual exhibits (Riduwan, 2019) The definition given above leads one to the conclusion that a response is an individual's or a group's reaction to a stimulus that results in interaction between the perpetrator and the victim by receiving stimuli from the victim's behavior that causes the victim to behave, either by speech or action. This is synonymous with the question of an autonomous curriculum emerging. But the newest curriculum, the independent curriculum, is more than just a lecture. SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah has begun implementing the independent curriculum. The grade VII class is the first to do so. It is anticipated that this curriculum change will result in students who are of a higher caliber. English classes, which support students' proficiency in English as a foreign language, emphasize this hope. The driving school, which uses the same independent curriculum as other schools, is not yet enrolled in SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah. The curriculum follows that of other schools. This is motivated by curiosity and the desire to grow.

Furthermore, SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah is attempting to implement an independent curriculum by organizing in accordance with its guidelines and enlisting the support of various parties within the school. This is due to the current hot topic, which is the curriculum change from the 2013 curriculum to the independent curriculum. The teacher's reaction to the independent curriculum's implementation demonstrates this. Because there are differences in the planning, execution, and evaluation of the learning process when implementing an independent curriculum, the teachers at SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah initially objected and felt uncomfortable. In contrast, the teacher is more in charge or involved in the classroom on a daily basis. Teachers, particularly English teachers, must therefore further develop their skills or competencies in order to fulfill their role as English teachers at SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah as a result of the implementation of the independent curriculum. The fundamental shift in the independent curriculum is the teacher's perspective, which now views them as merely a facilitator of students' learning rather than as the exclusive source of knowledge. And this is actually more beneficial for English teachers teaching seventh grade because it challenges them as they implement the independent curriculum because the learning experiences differ from the 2013 curriculum to the independent curriculum. In addition to allowing teachers to create a learning environment and culture that can help students become self-sufficient, lifelong learners, and to tailor their education to their individual interests, abilities, and potential, the independent curriculum also gives students access to stimulating, demanding, enjoyable, meaningful, practical, and productive learning opportunities.

Nonetheless, grade VII teachers at SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah, including those who teach English, continue to attempt to adhere to the autonomous training offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture Research and Technology. Thus, as demonstrated by the teacher's eagerness to participate in independent training and her skill in implementing the independent curriculum in class VII during the learning process, the English teacher at SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah responded well to the implementation of the independent curriculum. According to the results of studies conducted in the field, English teachers react positively and support the introduction of the independent curriculum because it emphasizes students' role in learning relative to their teachers and helps them develop a Pancasila student profile by having them emulate Ki Hajar Dewantoro. Furthermore, in terms of assessment, the independent curriculum covers not only cognitive but also affective and, particularly, projects or skills that are turned into assessments involving English subjects, making it easier for English teachers to be creative in their learning and material delivery. Nevertheless, it is indisputable that there are still many shortcomings on the part of English educators in creating an independent curriculum.

4. CONCLUSION

SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah faced a major challenge with the controversial change from the 2013 curriculum to an independent curriculum. All parties involved, including teachers, administrators, and parents, felt involved and supported in this transition process as a result of the school's proactive stance in accepting the new curriculum and adherence to its guidelines. Grade VII teachers in particular were instrumental in making the standalone curriculum a success. Engaged in training sessions offered by the Ministry of Education

and Culture Research and Technology, they actively pursued opportunities for professional growth. The English teachers, who accepted the new curriculum's emphasis on communicative language teaching and student-centered approaches, were evident in their dedication to improving their pedagogical skills. The positive feedback from the grade VII English teachers indicates the success of this collaborative effort. They showed a strong interest in the self-paced curriculum by demonstrating their mastery of the new teaching techniques and resources in their classrooms and eagerly participating in the training. The fact that SMPN 18 Bengkulu Tengah successfully implemented the self-paced curriculum is a testament to the school's dedication to offering the best possible education that adapts to the changing needs of its students.

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