

EFL TEACHERS' CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY AT SMA NEGERI 8 MALANG

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Abstract: Changes to the new curriculum have an impact on teachers, they are required to readjust to the new curriculum, namely an independent curriculum because there is a change in the concept of learning activities that must be achieved. Therefore, this encourages researchers to explore what challenges English teacher face in implementing the Independent Curriculum, especially at the planning, implementation, and assessment stages, and how to overcome challenges at these three stages. This research was conducted at one of the high schools in East Java, Indonesia, namely SMA Negeri 8 Malang. The participant is one of the 10th-grade English teachers at the school. Using a case study research design, this study uses a qualitative approach with interviews and observation as research instruments. The analysis applied in this study contained three steps including data reduction, data presentation, and verification. Based on the results that have been found, in general teacher experience difficulties in understanding the independent curriculum while the guidebook has not been obtained, then it is difficult for teacher to adapt learning styles to differences in students' English abilities, and determine appropriate assessments. Therefore, it is recommended that teacher take part in professional training and development, improve personal skills, and conduct formative evaluations and feedback. Then the Ministry of Education and Culture to carry out equal distribution of independent curriculum training and provide guidebooks for teachers in each school.

Key words: English teachers, Independent Curriculum, ELT.

INTRODUCTION

The Independent curriculum was born because of the waning orientation of education itself. Therefore, it is necessary to apply an independent curriculum with the hope of fostering courage and independence of independent thinking, enthusiasm for learning, and optimism, fostering freedom of thought (Daga, 2020). Curriculum design is critical because it governs the objectives, content, materials for learning or teaching materials, and how to apply them to meet educational goals (National Education System Law Chapter 1 Article 1 no. 19). Curriculum is an effort to realize educational goals. (National Education System Law Chapter 9 Article 36 no. 1). The desired paradigm shift comprises increasing teacher flexibility as the power bearer in the academic process, relinquishing control over overly binding standards and requiring a homogenous process of learning in any educational units in the nation of Indonesia, and increasing student agency, specifically students' right and ability to control how they learn through setting objectives for learning, evaluating on their

skills, and taking proactive and responsible measures toward their own achievement. The purpose of education itself is expected to be in accordance with the needs of the community and the state (Sujana, 2019). Thus, it is necessary to create a curriculum that meets the needs of the students and circumstances of the community in order to realize and produce students who are superior and useful in society.

Independent Learning Curriculum seeks to foster an enjoyable learning environment. The goal for independent learning is to create a pleasant environment for teachers, students, and parents (Nasution, 2022). It is envisaged that with the opportunity of learning, educational institutions in Indonesia will become more sophisticated and of higher quality, leading to greater global competitiveness (Sururi et al., 2020). State administrators and good government are those who carry out intellectual tasks for their citizens. Through equitable education, adequate facilities that are regulated with various slick breakthrough policies are able to build intelligent resources that are mature in the scientific paradigm. This kind of task, in Indonesia, has even become a spirit that must always be invigorated by its presence. With the spirit of educating the nation's life, in order to realize the welfare of all Indonesian bloodshed, the policy of state administrators in the field of education can be said to be a representative face representing the state's commitment to participate in realizing this. Seeing the reality, talking about the importance of education and policies of government stakeholders is a very relevant thing to do. With this new curriculum, teachers will have more freedom to select teaching techniques and approaches that best suit the needs of their students (Pertiwi & Pusparini, 2021). Furthermore, the Indonesian Ministry of Learning, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) has implemented a broad policy of self-directed learning, which has reached the 21st episode in the last two years, has announced the implementation of a new curriculum in education institutions, notably the execution of the Independent Curriculum. Faced with the ideal and perfect goals above, several problems arise in the application of an independent curriculum in the practice of English Language Teaching (ELT). Thus, it is necessary to conduct this research to learn about the difficulties that teachers confront in implementing the independent curriculum and how they solve them.

Several past studies have been conducted that explore the implementation of the independent curriculum. Zainuri (2022) analyses the implementation of Independent Curriculum Learning in Islamic Education and Character Subjects at MIN 1 Palembang. Hakim and Nabila (2022) determine the implementation of independent learning policies in education in Indonesia. Rizki and Fakhrunisa (2022) analyze the application of this curriculum by analyzing associated documents such as educational system laws, Ministry of Education and Culture regulations, articles, and journals. From several previous studies, no one has discussed or analyzed the difficulties that English instructors have encountered in implementing the Independent Curriculum, especially at the senior high school level, so we intend to use this opportunity as material for my research.

Students learning success is determined by the learning process they go through. Teachers play an important role in ensuring that students have a meaningful and effective learning experience in their life. In the learning process, not all students experience a smooth learning process. Some students have learning difficulties so they cannot achieve the learning targets optimally. In addition to this, other factors cause learning not to reach the target optimally, namely the way the teacher implements learning steps in the classroom. Therefore, it is necessary to know the situation of the English teaching and learning process used by the teacher to identify

the factors or challenges experienced when teaching, especially in the planning, implementation, and assessment stages, by discovering the challenges faced by the teacher, can minimize the ineffectiveness of learning in the classroom so that it can achieve learning targets optimally and can improve and develop the quality of EFL teachers in implementing an independent curriculum. This information can also be useful for school institutions in developing the quality of teachers, especially English teachers, principals, teacher educators, and other education departments to develop curriculum.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The focus of this qualitative research is to answer the following problems:

1. What are the EFL teachers' problems in implementing the Independent Curriculum?
2. How do they solve the problems in implementing the Independent Curriculum?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research used a qualitative research method. According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), qualitative research is conducted with an assumed background with the goal to clarify the occurrences that occur and involves other research methodologies. The research design in this study uses a case study. This case can be an event, activity, process, or program (Creswell, 2016: 74). This qualitative research method with a case study approach was chosen because it is in accordance with the purpose of this study, which is to find out what challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing the independent curriculum and how they solve them. This step is carried out to understand the individual character which is studied in depth. In addition to studying individual characters, it also helps determine solutions to problems faced by these individuals. The hope is that when the problems encountered can be resolved. Then the individual will have a better character and way of thinking.

Research Procedure

In this study, the researchers used data collection techniques through interview and observation. The researchers investigated the challenges faced by EFL teacher in implementing the Independent curriculum at SMA Negeri 8 Malang. The participant is one teacher from SMA Negeri 8 Malang school, namely, she is an English teacher in grade 10. She is female and she has implemented the independent curriculum in teaching English in the classroom and has attended seminars on the implementation of the independent curriculum that has been implemented by the school. The researchers collected data using semi-structured interviews to find out answers from participants in-depth and clearly and observation as a research instrument that aims to provide a realistic picture of a behavior or event related to the activity of the research object to be observed directly by the researchers. The type of observation that will be applied in this study is passive participation where the researchers only make observations without participating in the resource person's activities. And the observation technique applied is systematic observation where the purpose of using this technique

is that researchers can make observations in a structured manner so as not to get out of the flow and research objectives.

The questions asked in the interviews referred to challenges at three stages: (1) planning, (2) implementation, and (3) assessment. According to Creswell (2020), this type of gathering and analyzing data method is known as triangulation, which means merging a set of data from several existing data sources.

The interview was conducted for 30 minutes for participant to answer six questions. Semi-structured interviews were used. This interview is more self-contained than a formal interview. The goal of using this style of interview is to find challenges more freely, in which participants are questioned for their thoughts and opinions. Interviews were conducted with the participants twice to ascertain whether the answers given by the participants were the same as the second interview and to dig deeper into the information from the participants. During the interview process, the language used when asking questions to participants was Indonesian language, to avoid miscommunication and to make it easier for participants to convey their intentions or responses to the questions that had been asked. Then there is observation, one of which aims to collect data at the implementation stage which is carried out directly by the researchers. The interview questions are mentioned below:

1. What are the problems you face in implementing the independent curriculum at the planning stage?
2. How do you solve this problem?
3. What are the problems you face in implementing the independent curriculum at the implementation stage?
4. How do you solve this problem?
5. What are the problems you face in implementing the independent curriculum at the assessment stage?
6. How do you solve this problem?

The researchers tell the participant about the goal of the study and how the data analysis and interview procedure will take place before conducting the research and collecting the data. The researchers also informed the participant that their participation was completely voluntary and their statements would be kept confidential. In addition, they reserve the right not to answer interview questions or to discontinue his participation in this research at any time. To ensure the research's credibility, the researchers requested the study's participant to examine and feedback on the conversation data (Creswell, 1998).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study uses the Miles and Huberman model method. Miles and Huberman (1994) stated that the data collection process carried out 3 important activities including data reduction, data display, and verification. while in the field until the completion of the research. The flow component is described in the following stages:

1. Data reduction

Data reduction is a process of summarizing or selecting the main things. Because the data obtained from interviews and observations is quite a lot, so it needs to be

recorded carefully and in detail. Data reduction takes place during the data collection process. This process of transformation will continue till the last report from the study is completed.

2. Data Display

The researchers' next step after the data reducing process is to display the data. A data presentation is an accumulation of structured data that allows you to draw conclusions and take action. The presentation can take the shape of brief explanations, charts, or correlations between groups, but in qualitative research, it is typically given in the form of a narrative. The goal of data presentation is to help researchers comprehend what happened so that they can plan the next steps.

3. Conclusion Drawing

The final phase in collecting information is to develop conclusions and verify the data. The method begins with data collecting, and then the researchers reviews the challenges that have been gathered before taking notes to form conclusions. Typically, the initial findings are still tentative and may alter during the data-gathering process. However, if backed up by valid reliable evidence, such findings can be reasonable (Rijali, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Question 1: What are the EFL teacher's problems in implementing the Independent Curriculum?

The Independent Curriculum is an educational concept that gives more freedom to teachers in developing learning materials according to the needs of students and local conditions. However, as in the implementation of other curricula, there are several problems that may be faced by English teacher in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Some of these problems include:

1. The problem faced in the planning stage

The problems faced by English teacher in implementing the independent curriculum at the planning stage include limited resources which are obstacles for teacher in implementing the Independent Curriculum because she is constrained by limited resources such as textbooks, teaching materials, and technological devices. English teacher find it difficult to access relevant and up-to-date materials to develop interesting and effective learning. And also the teacher does not clearly understand his duties in implementing an independent curriculum. Understanding the teacher does not understand well what the goals of the independent curriculum are, as well as what goals must be achieved during learning so planning is also not optimal. Many outreach or workshops have been carried out but have not been fully attended. As for the workshops held at schools, the content understood in the workshops was only in the form of discourse and the teacher did not understand the concepts that had been presented in the workshops, what kind of targets were actually to be achieved with the workshops independent curriculum. Even though the independent curriculum gives freedom to teacher in arranging to learn, teacher

still need to ensure that the material and skills taught are following predetermined national standards. However, student books, teacher books, or independent curriculum guidebooks have also not been obtained so when planning to make plans they still do not have guidelines or references for how to plan according to an independent curriculum. An example of an interview answer is as follows.

The problem I faced at the planning stage was that I wasn't very clear on what I should do. There were a lot of socializations but I couldn't participate in all of them. As for the socialization that I participated in at school, it was more about discourses that I didn't understand, and putting them together. Then I also haven't gotten the overall Merdeka curriculum guidebook, so when I made plans I still didn't have those tools. Therefore, with the lack of the first and second sources, of course, I also had difficulties when implementing them in class, they will be brought Where to.

2. The problems faced in the implementation stage

The problems faced at the implementation stage include, in developing teaching materials in the Independent Curriculum, teacher are expected to be able to develop their teaching materials according to student's needs. This requires additional time and skill in developing materials that are interesting, meaningful, and relevant to the local context. Implementation of the independent curriculum requires additional skills from English teacher, such as the ability to design project-based learning, information technology skills, and the ability to design alternative assessments. Teacher need to attend training and professional development to acquire these skills. However, when the teacher's learning is still lacking in managing the class so that it is following what is the provision in the independent curriculum because there are still students who are not ready when asked for subjects in class, even though in previous learning they have been taught and trained in a student-oriented manner. So that this becomes an obstacle for teacher in implementing what is already in the independent curriculum, namely during the learning process It is believed that students will become more engaged, with the teacher serving merely as a facilitator. An example of an interview answer is as follows.

The next problem at the implementation stage is the lack of activity of some students to be creative, even though previously it was explained that the teacher in class is only a facilitator and the main actors are students. And it becomes a problem for me to apply the independent curriculum when learning.

Then the next problem is that the teacher has difficulty understanding student differences in their ability to understand the material, process it, and so on. The teacher feels that the differences in the characters and abilities of the students in the class are quite far. This is felt because of the teacher's perception of the student's family background. Which, children who come from their parents as lecturers, or have been abroad have good English skills compared to children whose conditions during the pandemic yesterday were only at home without meeting the teacher and they studied soberly without much guidance. from parents. This made it difficult for me to translate students' differences, so it was also difficult to find materials with topics that could compensate for their differences in English skills. Likewise, with the way it is delivered to them. Then the last problem is when trying to implement an independent curriculum in

learning, the teacher does not know whether what is being done is correct or not so the teacher feels the need for a reviewer as an assessor or supervisor. There is careful monitoring and evaluation in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum to ensure its effectiveness. English teacher is faced with the challenge of tracking students' progress, identifying individual needs, and adopting appropriate strategies to meet those needs. An example of an interview answer is as follows.

Then the last problem is when I try to apply the independent curriculum in learning, I'm not sure whether what I'm doing is correct. Therefore, I want someone to give me an assessment and advice so that I can know where I am lacking.

3. The problems faced in the assessment stage

The Merdeka curriculum emphasizes an authentic and formative assessment approach. It becomes a problem for teachers in understanding the principles of authentic and formative assessment and the obstacles they face in applying them. Authentic and formative assessment approaches are two different approaches to the assessment process in the educational context. The following is a brief description of the two approaches:

a. Authentic assessment:

Authentic assessment aims to evaluate students' understanding and application of knowledge and skills in real-life contexts or authentic situations. This approach emphasizes the use of tasks or projects that are relevant to the real world, so students must apply their knowledge and skills in situations that have clear meaning and context. For example, in authentic assessment, students may be asked to write essays, make presentations, or solve real problems related to English. Authentic assessment places more emphasis on deep understanding and application of knowledge rather than mere memorization of facts.

b. Formative assessment:

Formative assessment is a process of assessment that is carried out continuously during the learning process to provide feedback to students about their progress in achieving learning goals. The purpose of formative assessment is to help students to increase their understanding, identify weaknesses, and direct them toward achieving learning goals. Formative assessment can take the form of small assignments, quizzes, class discussions, or other activities designed to provide students with direct feedback. Teacher use the results of this formative assessment to identify individual student needs and develop teaching strategies accordingly.

Both of these approaches have an important think in the evaluation of learning. An authentic assessment provides a more comprehensive picture of student understanding in real-world contexts, while a formative assessment assists

teacher and students in continuously following learning developments. The combination of these two approaches can provide a more complete picture of student achievement in learning English. The problems faced at the assessment stage, English teacher face difficulties in designing appropriate and objective assessment instruments to measure the progress of students' English skills. Then, the teacher experienced difficulties when creating different questions for students. Because of what the teacher experienced before when making different questions would cause jealousy among students because the standard of difficulty that students considered was more difficult than other students. And teacher also feel that their energy is not enough if they have to equate every difference in problems between students. Then the differences in interests and skills possessed by students make the teacher have to have their assessment to be able to assess students' abilities as a whole. An example of an interview answer is as follows.

The problem I faced at the assessment stage was determining the right assessment for students. Then creating different questions for students in case students don't feel jealous of one another. Even if I make two different ones, my energy is not enough.

Question 2: How do they solve the problems in implementing the Independent Curriculum?

The things that are done to overcome problems at the planning stage are teacher looking for information on the internet or YouTube as a support and media information. With the hope of being able to cover the teacher's incomprehension with the independent curriculum, such as appropriate materials and looking for references to activities that focus on student interaction in class. An example of an interview answer is as follows.

To solve problems with planning, I try to find information on the internet and then look for materials that are following the independent curriculum. I also think about activities that focus on students, namely students who are the main role in class.

The things that are done to overcome the problems at the implementation stage are to overcome student differentiation, the teacher teaches the material in the form of just the main points then the development is given to students directly so that students can adjust to their respective creativity. An example of the activities carried out is on the assignments given in each material to students, students determine the committee to handle assignments on that material. Then after the committee determines what the tasks are then it is consulted with the teacher so that the teacher can provide advice to the committee regarding his duties so that they remain in accordance with the material. And this can be a reference for other students to give and submit their best assignments. Likewise with assignments on subsequent materials will be handled by the new committee in rotation. Then regarding students who are still not ready, the teacher continues to accompany them and encourage them to be better. And for students who have good results, they will be asked to display the results of their assignments in front of the class in the hope of motivating other friends to do the same. Then for the last problem regarding the teacher reviewer said it was rather difficult to get an expert. However, the teacher tries to get an assessment of how to

teach his colleagues, namely the same teacher in one school. An example of an interview answer is as follows.

The way I deal with the first regarding differentiated learning is that first I only teach the subject matter at the beginning and then develop it according to the abilities of the students. Then overcoming the second problem regarding students who are still not ready (lack of confidence), I continue to encourage and guide. As an example in the activities that will be carried out by some students who will be the class activity committee that day, I will encourage these students so that they can perform well and be witnessed by other friends so that others will be motivated to do the same.

Things that are done to overcome problems at the assessment stage are that the teacher does not only carry out paper-based assessments that are not only cognitive, but also involve activity values, creative values, and attitudes that have been prepared by the teacher. With this, some students who may not be able to speak English well in the material but have good creativity or even diligently search for material on the internet will help their grades and be able to compete with other friends whose English is already very good. With these problems, teacher need to determine an appropriate assessment model for students, which does not come out of the existing provisions in the independent curriculum. An example of an interview answer is as follows.

So far what I have done to overcome the problems at the assessment stage is to try to provide an assessment that is not paper-based but also involves the value of the activity, the value of their creativity. Then for students who score low on the material, I provide opportunities for students to improve their grades by giving special assignments according to the agreement between me and the student. Maybe for a student whose English is mediocre then he is creative and diligently searches for materials on the internet that will help him match the values of his friends whose grades are already good.

Discussion

Researchers conducted research to find out what problems English teacher face in implementing an independent curriculum and how to overcome them. In general, current research shows that there are still many challenges faced by the teacher in implementing an independent curriculum, the teacher still does not have limited resources such as guidebooks, teaching materials, modules, and technological devices. Meanwhile, in the implementation of an independent curriculum, it is necessary to develop interesting and effective learning. However, Zulaiha, Meldina, and Meisin's (2022) research does not have this challenge, in the sense that the teachers in the schools studied have made learning tools even though they still need refinement and revision.

In addition, teachers face challenges in determining appropriate learning strategies and approaches for children so that learning becomes fun and students become an active part. According to Farida Jaya's (2019) perspective, lesson preparation is a description of what a teacher will accomplish in class to fulfill the goals established efficiently and effectively. Therefore, as a learning designer, the teacher is responsible for designing learning programs, which include organizing

teaching materials, presentations, and evaluations, all according to the learning objectives that have been set. Learning planning is basically determining the most effective learning method to achieve the desired learning outcomes.

Success in implementing the independent curriculum does not only depend on the lesson plans but also on how the lessons are implemented in accordance with the lesson plans that have been made. The results of interviews conducted by researchers indicate that the teacher faces a number of problems in the learning process. These problems include textbooks that only consist of student books and the lack of ability and readiness of the teacher to use instructional media in accordance with the objectives of the independent curriculum, teaching materials that are too broad, and learning methods lacking. This is in accordance with the theory put forward by Mulyasa (2021), which states that free learning focuses on learning processes that can increase student creativity through techniques and approaches that can improve students' thinking skills.

Then there are other problems, namely the teacher does not experience significant difficulties in carrying out diagnostic, formative, and summative evaluations; they only experience difficulties in determining the appropriate evaluation with learning objectives. In project-based learning, evaluation can come in many forms, such as presentations, projects, products, spoken, or written. This is in accordance with the theory put forward by Indrastoeti and Istiyati (2017), which states that evaluation is divided into two categories: formative evaluation and summative evaluation. There are also those who call evaluation for learning and evaluation for learning. Formative assessment is an important component of the learning process that is carried out. Formative assessments are used to monitor how well the learning process is going according to plan. While the summative assessment is carried out at the end of the learning unit to determine the level of effectiveness of the learning program.

The teacher's problem in facing problems at the learning assessment stage is that they have to look for more references or information about learning evaluation and regularly attend training. This is in accordance with Syafi'i (2021), who states that the things needed to guide the free learning curriculum are as follows: workshops for principals and supervisors designed by expert trainers every month, strengthening of teachers of learning committees, including heads of schools and subject teachers, mentoring by expert trainers via the internet, coaching the school principal every month, and filling out surveys to identify problems that might occur.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study aims to find out what challenges English teachers face in implementing the Independent Curriculum and how to overcome these challenges. Identifying the challenges in teaching English in high schools, encourages researchers to answer questions and discuss what can be done for assisting teachers in fulfilling their duty to implement the Independent Curriculum. Seeing some of the challenges faced by the teacher at the planning, implementation, and assessment stages in this study, for example, they have not mastered the provisions in planning properly, have not been able to apply learning steps optimally, and are still confused about the right assessment model. It can be seen from the challenges they face and the way they deal with them that the problems are their own. Therefore, they need to attend more

teacher training programs or workshops in the future to prepare the teacher with adequate knowledge of the Independent Curriculum.

Based on the research findings previously described, this study recommends: (1) the teacher deepen their knowledge and readjust the use of the independent curriculum so they can plan according to existing regulations, (2) the teacher needs to make changes to their student's learning styles so that the following steps can be implemented. followed. learning steps that have been prepared previously in the module can be realized during the teaching and learning process, thus the teacher has a greater opportunity to apply various learning models that can motivate students in learning, (3) the teacher prepares and determines the appropriate assessment model for students.

In conclusion, although this study focuses on the challenges faced by EFL teachers in East Java, Indonesia, teachers in other provinces and even countries may experience the same challenges. Therefore, the findings of this study can also be useful for school institutions in developing teacher quality, especially English teachers, school principals, teacher educators, and other educational offices to develop curricula. For the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) it is suggested to be able to conduct equal distribution of training for teachers in schools so that they can implement the Independent Curriculum.

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