

IMPLEMENTATION INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN ENGLISH TEACHING IN PRIVATE HIGH SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: In an effort to improve the quality of learning that is more flexible and student-centered, Independent Curriculum is implemented as a new approach in the education system in Indonesia. This curriculum provides freedom for teachers to design teaching strategies that suit the needs and characteristics of learners. In line with this, this study aims to explore the application of Independent Curriculum in learning English as a foreign language (EFL) with a focus on planning, implementing, and assessing learning to improve EFL students' learning experience. This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design of two English teachers selected by purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews and observations. The results show that teachers use diagnostic assessment to adjust learning strategies to students' needs. The flexibility of the curriculum allows for innovative methods, such as Project-Based Learning (PJBL) and interactive technology, which increase student engagement. Teachers also apply different approaches and assessments in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum.

Keywords: Independent Curriculum, Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum plays an important role in education because it has functions related to all aspects of education which in order to harmonize all aspects of education to ensure successful learning. The curriculum functions as a tool realizing the goal of education and become a guideline in implementing the teaching and learning process in various types and levels of schools. In addition, the curriculum can also reflect national values and perspectives to determine the future life of the nation (Azita et al., 2023). The curriculum in Indonesia is constantly updated to ensure that the education system remains relevant to the times and continues to adjust to human needs. Based on Kemendikbudristek Number 56 published in 2022 Independent Curriculum is recovery face-to-face learning restrictions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic (Corona Virus). According to Kemendikbudristek (2023), in the Independent Curriculum, teachers are free to create learning models that can be modified according to each student's learning model. Through a student-centered approach, the Independent Curriculum encourages students to participate in their own education (Zidan & Qamariah, 2023).

The Independent Curriculum has a student first system so that they can learn at their own pace and improve their skills. Thus, students will have skills not only in one field to increase value of each individual (Heriyawati et al., 2023). In the Independent Curriculum include objectives, activity, methods, and evaluation. The goal is for students to strengthen their oral and written English skills. According to (Ayu Anggraeni & Henny Soepriyanti, 2023), English has several skills such as, listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing and presenting. Can be conclude that English teachers play determining factor in cultivating their students' English proficiency. For teachers to mold students into proficient speakers, their own professional abilities must also be prioritized (Sadeghi & Richards, 2021). One of the objectives of the Independent Curriculum created by the government is to improve and hone children's interests and talents freely (Anggaira, 2023). In teaching English, teachers must always develop themselves, be creative and work to develop learning models (Dirwan et al., 2023). In the EFL context, teachers must be interested in each student because, the student is able to learn more effectively and also is able to use English practically not only theoretically.

Although the use of the Independent Curriculum has been going on for about several years, further adaptation and evaluation are still needed to make learning a success. Meanwhile, Previous research has shown that implementing a standalone curriculum poses new challenges (Pantiwati et al., 2023). According to (Ibrahim et al., 2024) even though educators are given provisions such as training before starting learning, there are still problems in the implementation. For this reason, EFL teachers must continue to learn and understand how students' learning needs. Although Independent Curriculum has been implemented in various schools in Indonesia, research exploring its implementation in private schools is limited. Therefore, based on the preliminary research that has been conducted, further research is needed to explore how teachers design lesson plans, activities that support students' engagement and independence in the classroom, and measurable learning outcomes in learning English in the implementation of an Independent Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research was conducted with a qualitative approach using a single case study design. Qualitative research is conducted by interacting with participants. These situations are usually taken for granted and reflect the everyday experiences of individuals, groups, communities and organizations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Case studies aim to create a new understanding of processes and outcomes based on real cases (Bickman & Rog, 2009). This research uses the case study method because it allows an in-depth and holistic exploration of the implementation of Independent Curriculum in English language teaching at a successful private senior high school in Malang.

Data Sources

The data sources used were interviews and observations with two participants to obtain in-depth and accurate information about the implementation of the Independence Curriculum in high school. Documentation, interviews, observations were conducted once to each participant. In addition, notes and documentation were taken to support the research. The questions asked during

the interview related to how teachers design lesson plans and provide assessments to students in the implementation of the independent curriculum. In addition, observations are made to understand the learning process in the classroom, where documentation is used as support.

Instrument of Data Collection

Documentation, Interview and observation are used by the researcher for the instrument. Documentation is used to collect information from various written and digital sources, such as lesson plans, classroom observation results, and student assessments in reading skills. Two interviews were conducted with English teachers to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of Independent Curriculum. In addition, non-participant observations were conducted twice to directly observe the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom without the involvement of researchers in learning activities. This observation aims to see the strategies applied by teachers as well as students' responses in the learning process.

Data Analysis

The data obtained through documentation, interviews, and observations were analyzed using the thematic analysis method, which includes coding the data, presenting the data, and drawing conclusions. At the stage of coding the data, the information collected is categorized based on the main themes, such as lesson planning, teaching strategies, and assessment in the Independent Curriculum. With the experience of the two teachers who have taught for more than five years and have implemented the Independent Curriculum, it is considered sufficient for researchers to be able to answer questions about this research.

FINDINGS

Teachers' in Designing Lesson Plans in Independent Curriculum

Identifying students' needs and interests before designing a lesson plan is very important for teachers, because each student has different character, ability and background. For this reason, teachers can arrange learning that suits the individual needs of students. The first participant conducted a diagnostic assessment to understand students' Integration, Inclusion and Collaboration (INTIK) aspects. This assessment includes cognitive (understanding of text structure, lexico-grammatical) and noncognitive (visual, kinesthetic, or auditory learning styles) obtained from counseling guidance. The second participant also conducted simple pretests, such as oral tests by telling stories and multiple-choice written tests, to find out students' basic abilities in English skills that are considered difficult, such as listening, speaking, and reading.

In determining the learning outcomes and flow, the first participant emphasized that the learning outcomes have been determined by the government in the module and e-book, while the implementation in the classroom is adjusted by the teacher. The second participant developed learning outcomes based on the targets that students should achieve, such as understanding and analyzing narrative, descriptive, and recount texts. In planning, teachers can involve students after conducting an initial evaluation in the previous class, while the second participant relies more on the consistency of student test results as the basis for planning.

Collaboration with fellow teachers in planning is done through the School Subject Teacher Conference (MGMPs) to equalize learning standards. These meetings are routinely held every month or more frequently ahead of semester exams. In addition, the strategies used in lesson planning adjust to the 21st century approach, which emphasizes critical thinking skills, presentations, and the use of interactive media such as infographics and learning apps to keep students interested even though the material is quite heavy. The first participant uses technology-based strategies and interactive media, while the second participant integrates more games in learning.

In the independent curriculum, differentiated learning is the main principle so that teachers can adjust teaching strategies to the needs of students. The first participant implemented flexible planning based on classroom conditions, while the second participant focused more on reading and writing skills with grouping based on initial test results. The learning design stage includes identifying students' needs through diagnostic assessment, determining learning objectives according to the curriculum, selecting appropriate methods (for example, problem-based learning, project-based learning, or CLIL), and designing the learning process consisting of introductory, core, and closing activities. Evaluation is also designed by conducting formative and summative assessments using rubrics to make learning outcomes more authentic. For students with learning difficulties, teachers can collaborate with homeroom teachers and counseling guidance teachers to find appropriate solutions. In addition, teachers can give simpler questions to students who have difficulties so that their understanding develops gradually.

Implementation of Classroom Activities in the Independent Curriculum

In English learning in the classroom, teachers apply various methods to encourage active participation of students. One of the approaches used is Project-Based Learning (Pjbl), which emphasizes tangible results that students can display. In addition, the use of technology such as interactive learning applications is also used to create a more interesting classroom atmosphere so that students are more active.

To support students' learning independence, there are two main strategies implemented, namely scaffolding based on the results of diagnostic assessments, where participant one groups based on the ability of each learner, and game-based learning that aims to increase student involvement. In classroom learning, of course, technology is very supportive because it is used as a tool in learning, such as the utilization of AI tools to support learning and the development of special applications by participant two, one of which is DESIA (Digital Electronic System Integrated Application) which is designed to support the paperless learning process.

In classroom teaching and learning activities, the stages include opening activities (prayer, attendance, sparking questions, and ice breaking), core activities (delivery of varied and interactive materials with division of learning or playing groups), and closing activities (prayer and reflection). The low motivation of students can be overcome with a more flexible and creative approach, for example by providing a variety of activities that can attract students' interest and implementing game-based learning to increase their involvement. Project-based learning through heterogeneous group work and individual assignments are also applied for formative and summative assessment. Results on group assignments are usually done at the end of learning, such as presentations or uploading assignments for students on social media. In addition, according to participant one, if

there is a mismatch between the lesson plan and the conditions in the classroom, teachers need to improvise and adjust to better suit the needs of students. Flexibility and innovation in learning strategies are key in accommodating students' needs in the Independent Curriculum.

Assessment in Independent Curriculum

Teachers determine success indicators in English learning using an assessment rubric with several categories such as very good, good, less, and needs improvement. This rubric is applied in individual and group projects to increase students' learning motivation. In Merdeka Curriculum, three types of assessment are applied, including assessment as learning, assessment for learning, and assessment of learning. All three assessments are carried out by both participants to ensure that the evaluation of learning is carried out holistically and according to student needs.

Feedback is given through various means, such as assessments on notebooks, digital apps, and digital portfolios, which are part of assessment for learning to help students understand their achievements. The assessment models used include multiple choice, true or false, and essay. Assessment as learning is applied through self- or peer-assessment, while assessment of learning is used in the midterm and final exams.

DISCUSSION

Based on the research conducted to explore the implementation of Independent Curriculum in the teaching English as a foreign language in senior high school, some important findings were found. The findings in this study show that in school learning planning in one of the senior high schools that implement the Independent Curriculum, it has followed the procedures set by the government, with the first focus on diagnostic assessment. In the early stages before lesson planning, both participants conduct diagnostic assessments to find out the basic abilities are useful so that teachers can adjust the needs and interests of students in the learning process. This is in accordance with the statement from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020) which states that, diagnostic assessment is carried out to identify the strengths, weaknesses, and competencies of students, so that the learning model can be adjusted to their needs, which means that diagnostic assessment serves to map the initial abilities of students before learning begins.

At the diagnostic assessment stage in the Independent Curriculum, (Ardiansyah et al., 2023) mentioned that diagnostic assessment are divided into two types, namely cognitive and non-cognitive. Cognitive tests aim to identify student abilities, adjust classroom learning to the average ability of students and provide opportunities for students to repeat or provide additional lessons for students who do not meet the average, which is done through tests such as understanding text structure or lexico-grammatics. While non-cognitive the goal is to study the psychological and emotional of students, learn how their learning activities outside of school, study their families, study their social backgrounds, and understand their learning styles, interests, and personalities, which is done by working with counseling guidance teachers where teachers can find out about learning styles (visual, kinesthetic, or audio) which can be used to adjust learning strategies.

In addition, in the Independent Curriculum, in preparing lesson plans, teachers must understand the learning outcomes. Both of them stated that learning outcomes are targets that must be achieved by students that have been determined and compiled by the government, but in practice these learning outcomes are fully submitted and developed by teachers tailored to student conditions. This provides flexibility for teachers to innovate in accordance with the concept of the Independent Curriculum. The 21st century approach is applied by emphasizing critical thinking

skills, presentations, as well as the use of interactive media such as infographics, learning apps, and games to increase student engagement and increase learner interaction. The learning process includes introductory activities (apperception, triggering questions), core activities (implementation of learning strategies), and closing activities (reflection, assessment). In assessment, formative and summative assessments are applied using rubrics, in order to produce authentic evaluation. In addition, the Independent Curriculum emphasizes deep learning and differentiated learning, so learning strategies must be flexible, inclusive, and able to accommodate various learning styles of students, both visual, kinesthetic, and auditory. Supported by (Agus Hidayatullah et al., 2024), which states that the main principle of this curriculum is to give teachers the freedom to be creative according to the context of students and their environment.

By paying attention to the established competency outcomes, teachers can more easily evaluate student progress and design learning activities that are more focused on achieving these goals. Thus, learners can achieve them according to the end of the phases at the senior high school level, namely phases E and F. This is supported by (Anggraena et al., 2022), which states that learning outcomes are competencies that become targets for students, which teachers determine based on the abilities of each student in operational and concrete learning, so that students can achieve them according to the end of the phase. Another thing that teachers need to pay attention to in developing lesson plans is adjusting to the different ability levels of students in the classroom. This is important in the context of the Independent Curriculum because it emphasizes a differentiated approach. The differences in question include learning styles, cognitive abilities, interests, readiness levels, and student backgrounds (Sarnoto, 2024).

In the implementation of the independent curriculum in the classroom, the right method or technique to encourage active student participation in English language learning is needed in order to create learning objectives. Learning activities begin with prayer, attendance, questions, and ice breaking to build a conducive learning atmosphere. In addition, critical reading skills are also an important aspect of language learning. Research findings from Yunus and Ubaidillah (2021), show that teachers' understanding of teaching critical reading is influenced by their experiences, including philosophical approaches and strategies to encourage critical thinking in the classroom. Therefore, learning in the Independent Curriculum needs to support the development of higher-order thinking skills. The findings also confirm the importance of training for teachers so that they can apply the basic principles of critical reading teaching and improve the effectiveness of classroom learning. Participant one stated that the project-based learning (PJBL) model focuses on real results or projects created by learners. By using this model, students are not only based on the teacher as a facilitator, but involve students actively in the learning process in accordance with the principle of student-center learning in the Independent Curriculum (Halijah, 2024). The application of project-based learning can have positive results on student learning motivation. In contrast, participant two prioritizes the use of digital applications to encourage students' active participation in learning English classes. This method aims to prevent students from getting bored, so that they can be more active and independent in learning. The difference between the two also reflects differentiated learning in the Independent Curriculum, which uses methods or learning styles that are tailored to the needs of students(Sarnoto, 2024).

Furthermore, on the strategies used to create a classroom atmosphere that supports students' independence in learning, researchers obtained different results from the two participants. The first participant emphasized the use of scaffolding based on the results of the diagnostic assessment by grouping students based on their level of ability in the class heterogeneously. The use of this method is in accordance with the concept of differentiated learning, which is to accept the diversity of learners (Purnawanto, 2023). Meanwhile, participant two stated that through the use of game-based applications with fun and challenging activities, it can encourage students' independence. However, the difference between the two methods has certainly been adjusted to the needs and

interests of students (Sarnoto, 2024). The utilization of technology is also included in the learning strategies carried out by the two participants.

In the assessment in English language learning has an important role in ensuring the achievement of learning objectives. Both participants mentioned that determining indicators of learning success is done by using an assessment rubric consisting of four categories: very good, good, less, and need improvement. This rubric is used to assess individual and group projects, as well as for peer assessment, which allows students to receive assessments from their classmates. It is aligned with the Assessment as a learning principle in the Independent Curriculum, which involves learners in assessments that are used as reflections on learning (kurka, 2024). In addition, the feedback provided by both participants is very diverse, such as comments on the application, assessments in notebooks, and digital portfolios. This kind of feedback reflects the principle of Assessment for Learning which aims to determine the achievement of learning outcomes and then provide feedback for the improvement process to design learning (kurka, 2024).

Both emphasized that in the assessment in the Independent Curriculum, the three types of assessment, Assessment of Learning, Assessment for Learning, and Assessment as Learning, have been implemented according to their respective functions. Formative assessment which is implemented through quizzes and presentations by speaking English which is included in Assessment for Learning to find out the learning outcomes that have been carried out, as well as summative assessment which is implemented through Midterm Assessment (PTS) and End of Semester Assessment (PAS) which is included in Assessment of Learning which aims to measure student learning outcomes. Use of Assessment as Learning which is implemented through peer assessment and attitude assessment. All three are in accordance with the Independent Curriculum guidelines, because the assessment results can be used for learning improvement, so that students understand that the learning process is more important than the achievement of the final score (Kherysuryawan, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The researcher reveals how teaching English as a foreign language in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in one of the high schools, focusing on lesson planning, classroom implementation, and assessment by teachers. The results show that the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum have been applied, reflecting flexibility and student-centered learning. Overall, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in planning, implementing, and assessing English learning provides flexibility and creativity for teachers. With the right diagnostic assessment, diverse learning strategies, and varied assessment approaches, the learning process becomes more meaningful, increases independence, and encourages active student participation.

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