

EFFORTS TO IMPROVE STUDENT LEARNING INDEPENDENCE THROUGH THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM

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Abstrak

Artikel ini membahas upaya untuk meningkatkan kemandirian belajar siswa melalui penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka dalam konteks pendidikan dasar dan menengah di Indonesia. Pendekatan yang digunakan adalah telaah pustaka terstruktur terhadap studi dan dokumen kebijakan tahun 2020-2025 serta sintesis studi kasus mengenai implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka. Fokus pembahasan mencakup: Kerangka kebijakan yang memberikan ruang bagi pembelajaran mandiri; strategi instruksional (pembelajaran berbasis proyek, kontrak belajar, modul mandiri, portofolio), faktor-faktor pendukung dan hambatan dalam implementasi, serta rekomendasi kebijakan dan praktik. Hasil sintesis menunjukkan bahwa Kurikulum Merdeka secara konseptual mendukung perkembangan kemandirian belajar terutama melalui aktivitas proyek dan kebebasan dalam mengadaptasi materi namun keberhasilan implementasinya memerlukan kapasitas guru, ketersediaan modul dan infrastruktur, serta perubahan budaya penilaian di sekolah.

Kata kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka, kemandirian belajar, self-directed learning, project-based learning, asesmen otentik, pembelajaran mandiri.

Abstract

This article discusses efforts to increase student learning independence through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of primary and secondary education in Indonesia. The approach used is a structured literature review of studies and policy documents for 2020-2025 as well as a synthesis of case studies on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The focus of the discussion includes: a policy framework that provides space for independent learning; instructional strategies (project-based learning, learning contracts, self-paced modules, portfolios), supporting factors and obstacles in implementation, and policy and practice recommendations. The results of the synthesis show that the Independent Curriculum conceptually supports the development of learning independence, especially through project activities and freedom to adapt materials, but the success of its implementation requires teacher capacity, the availability of

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modules and infrastructure, as well as changes in the assessment culture in schools.

Keywords: *Independent Curriculum, learning independence, self-directed learning, project-based learning, authentic assessments, Self-Paced Learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Background

The development of the times in the 21st century brings significant changes in various aspects of life, including education. Students are now not only required to master factual and procedural knowledge, but also must have lifelong learning skills. These skills include the ability to plan, organize, monitor, and evaluate the learning process independently. Self-directed learning is an important factor that determines the success of students in facing increasingly complex, dynamic, and unexpected global challenges. In this context, the education system needs to provide space and support so that students can take responsibility for their own learning process.

Learning independence does not appear suddenly, but must be developed through appropriate learning strategies and a supportive learning environment. Students need to be trained to recognize their learning needs, set learning goals, choose appropriate learning resources and methods, and reflect on the progress that has been made. Therefore, student-centered learning is very important to implement. The paradigm shift from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning requires a more flexible and contextual approach to the curriculum.

In the Indonesian context, the launch of the Independent Curriculum is a step by the government to face the challenges of education in the 21st century. This curriculum is designed to provide freedom to educational units and teachers in choosing materials, learning strategies, and assessment models that are in accordance with the needs of students and the conditions of the school environment. One of the main principles of the Independent Curriculum is learning that focuses on essential competencies and character strengthening through the Pancasila Student Profile. This flexibility of the curriculum allows teachers to create more meaningful, contextual learning experiences and encourages students to become independent learners.

The academic study document on the Independent Curriculum explains that Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is an important element in the implementation of this curriculum. This learning model provides opportunities for students to explore, research, and produce real products that are relevant to everyday life. Through this process, students are not only actively involved, but also trained to make decisions, work together, and conduct self-reflection. All of these elements contribute directly to the development of learning independence.

However, various findings from the initial implementation of the Independent Curriculum in several regions show that the achievement of learning independence is not evenly distributed. Differences in teacher readiness, understanding of the concept of the Independent Curriculum, availability of learning resources, and the condition of school facilities are factors that affect the success of curriculum implementation. Some schools have successfully leveraged curriculum flexibility to encourage independent learning, while others are still stuck in traditional learning methods that tend to focus on teachers.

Therefore, a study is needed that systematically discusses effective strategies in increasing student learning independence through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This study not only highlights the basic concepts and principles of the Independent Curriculum, but also identifies learning practices that are proven to foster learning

independence, such as the use of self-teaching modules, learning contracts, formative assessments, and project-based learning. In addition, the study also outlines implementation challenges and provides recommendations for teachers, schools, and education policymakers.

Thus, this introduction emphasizes the importance of learning independence as the main competency in the modern era and its relevance to the goals of the Independent Curriculum. This study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of how curriculum approaches and learning strategies can effectively increase student learning independence, as well as how schools can optimize the implementation of the Independent Curriculum to achieve better results.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a structured literature review (SLR) design combined with a case study synthesis to integrate conceptual perspectives, policies, and empirical findings related to the development of learning independence in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive overview of the strategies, challenges, and effectiveness of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in encouraging self-directed learning (SDL) in students.

1. Design and Research Approach

This study follows the SLR model which consists of the stages of planning, data collection, thematic analysis, and synthesis presentation. The mixed evidence approach is used by combining:

- Policy documents such as Independent Curriculum Academic Texts, Learning and Assessment Guides.
- Empirical research (surveys, quasi-experiments, PjBL, classroom studies).
- Field case study from the Independent Curriculum implementation report at the primary and secondary school levels.

2. Research Data Sources

a. Source of Literature Academics

- Literature obtained from several databases
- Google Scholar
- DOAJ
- Garuda Kemdikbud
- Sinta (Accredited National Journal)
- Campus repositories (UM, UNY, UPI, UI).

b. Policy document source

- Academic Manuscript of Merdeka Curriculum
- Learning and Assessment Handbook (Ministry of Education and Culture)
- Learning outcomes and the structure of the Independent Curriculum.

c. Case study source

- Report on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum from the Ministry of Education and Culture and IKM implementing schools
- Journal articles that report the results of research on PjBL, PBL, differentiation, or teaching modules in increasing learning independence.

3. Data collection techniques

The data collection stage follows the SLR procedure as follows:

a. Literature identification and search

- Researchers use keywords:
 - “Independent Curriculum”
 - “Self-paced learning”
 - “Learning independence”
 - “Project-based learning”
 - “Pancasila Student Profile”
 - “Learning flexibility”.
- Additional filters:
 - Year of publication 2020-2025
 - Indonesian and English
 - Document type: Journal articles, proceedings, official reports, and Policy Document.

b. Literature selection

The selection process is carried out in 3 stages:

- Title screening to identify initial relevance
- Abstract reading to ensure the suitability of the research theme
- Full-text reading to select articles that meet the criteria:
 - Explain the learning strategies in the Independent Curriculum
 - Contains indicators or data on learning independence
 - Using accountable research designs (surveys, quasi-experiments, PjBL, case studies).

c. Data Logging and Extraction

For each selected article, the following information is recorded:

- Research objectives
- Research methods
- Subject and context of the school
- Type of intervention (e.g. PjBL, teaching modules, differentiation)
- Key findings related to the influence of strategies on learning independence
- Factors supporting and inhibiting implementation
- The extraction process is carried out using an SLR matrix table to facilitate comparative analysis between studies.

4. Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis is carried out with a thematic analysis approach that goes through several stages:

a. Initial Code

Marking the main concepts of each article, such as:

- Learning strategies
- Formative assessments
- The Role of the Teacher
- Student Engagement
- Indicators of learning independence
- obstacles to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

b. Theme Grouping

Themes are categorized into three main groups:

- Learning independence development strategies (e.g. PjBL, teaching modules, differentiation, coaching).
- Indicators of learning independence achievement (learning planning, monitoring, self-evaluation).
- Supporting factors and obstacles (teacher readiness, learning resources, digital literacy, school culture).

c. Synthesis of Empirical and Policy Findings

At this stage, the researcher integrates:

- Principles of the Independent Curriculum from the policy document
- Empirical findings from the study
- Contextual data from implementation case studies

The synthesis was carried out to answer the research focus: how learning strategies in the Independent Curriculum affect the development of students' learning independence.

5. Data Validity and Validity

The validity of the data is guaranteed through:

- Source triangulation (policy + journal + case study)
- Trail audit in the form of records of the stages of article selection
- Cross-check between research findings with different designs (surveys, experiments, case studies)
- Use of the latest literature (maximum 5 years) to ensure relevance to the Independent Curriculum.

6. Research Limitations

This method has some limitations:

- Depends on the availability of the latest research on the Independent Curriculum
- Not making direct observations to the school
- Variations in the quality of the research methodology being reviewed may affect the strength of conclusions
- Case studies analyzed are limited to publicly published sources.

7. Research Flow

In summary, the flow of the research is as follows:

- Formulation of problems and objectives
- Literature search (2020-2025)
- Article selection and screening
- Data extraction and theme categorization
- Policy synthesis and empirical findings
- Preparation of practice recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the structured literature review show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has a significant impact on increasing students' learning independence, especially when student-focused learning strategies are applied consistently. Self-directed learning (SDL) in this context is defined as the ability of students to plan learning objectives, manage the learning process, choose learning strategies, evaluate achievements, and reflect on the difficulties faced. Various studies and reports on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum show that when learning provides space for freedom and responsibility to students,

a more independent learning process can develop gradually with the support of teachers and a supportive learning environment.

One of the strongest findings in this study is the dominance of Project-Based Learning (PjBL) as an approach that makes a real contribution to increasing learning independence. PjBL allows students to deal with open, complex, and challenging learning situations, thus encouraging them to make their own decisions during the project work process. In practice, students learn to set project goals, organize work steps, divide roles in groups, manage work time, and critically evaluate project results. Many studies between 2021-2024 have noted an increase in intrinsic learning motivation, courage to take initiative, and the ability to solve problems independently. Students become more active in asking about their learning needs, looking for additional sources of information, and even being able to redefine learning strategies when facing obstacles. This condition shows that PjBL not only improves academic skills, but also develops metacognitive competencies that are at the core of learning independence.

In addition to PjBL, differentiated learning also has an important role in supporting the development of learning independence. The differentiation approach provides students with the opportunity to choose the level of material difficulty, the type of learning activity, and the product they want to produce according to their interests, learning profiles, and academic readiness. With this option, students not only follow the teacher's instructions, but also make personal decisions regarding the learning process that suits their characteristics. This makes them feel in control of learning, thus increasing engagement and confidence. Several studies at the elementary and junior high levels show that students are more courageous to try new learning strategies, are more responsible for personal goals, and are able to complete tasks independently because they feel the learning process is relevant to their needs.

The teaching modules designed in the Independent Curriculum are also important findings in this study. A good teaching module provides a flow of learning objectives, steps for learning activities, starter questions, assessment rubrics, and student reflection sheets. The presence of this module provides a clear yet flexible learning structure. Students can understand the direction of learning, measure their own progress, and assess the extent to which learning goals have been achieved. The reflection sheets integrated in the modules help students identify their own strengths and weaknesses, understand mistakes, and devise improvement strategies. Research in 2022 in several schools that implement the Independent Curriculum shows that students who use high-intensity teaching modules experience a significant increase in their ability to plan daily learning activities, track progress, and evaluate learning outcomes periodically.

Formative and reflective assessments are also other components that support the development of learning independence. Teachers who provide targeted and constructive feedback strengthen students' ability to self-monitor. An assessment approach that is not only numerically grade-oriented, but also process-oriented, makes students more focused on competency development rather than simply chasing scores. Reflection techniques such as student journals, checklists, exit tickets, or reflective discussions help students understand progress at each stage of learning. In some case studies, students claimed to be able to detect learning obstacles faster and develop problem-solving strategies because they were used to doing regular reflection. Thus, formative assessments not only serve to assess, but also train self-awareness and responsibility in learning.

In the analysis of learning independence indicators, there was an increase in planning, organizing, and self-evaluation skills. In the planning aspect, students demonstrate the ability to develop personal learning objectives and determine the steps that need to be taken to achieve them. They begin to create a more regular and realistic study schedule. In the aspect

of organization, students show the ability to choose learning strategies, organize learning resources, and adjust the learning tempo according to their needs. Students are also becoming more skilled in taking the initiative to look for additional information from the internet, books, or ask friends. In the self-evaluation aspect, students are able to assess learning outcomes based on rubrics and feedback from teachers, and can identify areas that need improvement. This reflective ability shows that students increasingly understand their learning process as a journey that requires metacognitive awareness.

However, this study also found that there are differences in achievement between schools that are influenced by various factors. Teacher readiness is one of the determining factors for success. Teachers who do not understand the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum or are still familiar with traditional learning methods tend to have difficulty implementing student-based strategies. As a result, students' space for exploration and autonomy is limited, so that learning independence does not develop optimally. Infrastructure factors also have a great influence. Schools with digital devices and adequate internet access are more likely to implement exploration-oriented and collaboration-oriented learning, while schools with limited facilities experience barriers to providing a varied learning experience.

In addition, the character and readiness of the students also affect the results. Students who were previously accustomed to passive learning need time and gradual guidance to adapt. Some students even show initial resistance because they feel that self-paced learning requires greater effort. In this context, the role of the teacher as a facilitator is very important to provide support gradually which is then gradually reduced until students are able to learn independently.

Overall, these findings show that the Independent Curriculum has a very relevant philosophical and design foundation to support the development of student learning independence. However, the success of its implementation depends on the readiness of teachers, school support, infrastructure, and a consistent learning approach that places students as active subjects in learning. With the right learning strategy, the Independent Curriculum can be an effective means to form students who are able to learn independently, reflectively, and oriented towards lifelong self-development.

In its implementation, project-based learning at SDN 22 Duingi involves students in complex activities and focuses on solving real problems. This approach makes learning more relevant to everyday life, connects theory to practice, and teaches important skills such as time management, cooperation, and critical thinking. The results of interviews with informants show that the projects given to students encourage them to become active, critical, and creative learners. The project also motivates students to engage in learning in depth, thereby increasing their independence. As revealed by Bioto et al. (2022), the success of this method depends heavily on how teachers create a learning atmosphere that is comfortable, engaging, and appropriate to the needs of students. In addition to project-based learning, the results of the study also show that another strategy used by teachers at SDN 22 Duingi is Wordwall-based learning. Wordwall is a web-based digital tool that allows teachers to create a variety of interactive activities, such as educational games and quizzes. Findings from interviews, observations, and documentation studies show that the use of Wordwall significantly improves students' learning independence. Wordwall provides a fun and challenging learning experience, where students can learn independently while engaging in engaging interactive activities. According to Durrotunnisa & Nur (2022), Wordwall facilitates the learning process by providing interactive media that can be accessed through various platforms, thereby helping teachers create creative and relevant assessment and learning methods. Teachers at SDN 22 Duingi use Wordwall to support the implementation of independent learning in an interesting and effective way. Wordwall allows students to explore material independently through interactive

games, where they can learn as they play. This not only increases students' motivation, but also makes them more responsible for their own learning. In addition, teachers can utilize Wordwall to customize teaching and assessment methods according to students' needs. In this way, teachers create an adaptive learning environment, which encourages students to be more involved in the learning process. The advantage of Wordwall lies in its flexibility and ease of use. Teachers can easily integrate Wordwall into various learning systems, both in the classroom and online. In addition, Wordwall allows students to learn outside of the classroom, thus providing space for them to manage their study time independently. This is in line with the independent learning objectives implemented at SDN 22 Duingi, where students are encouraged to develop time management skills, project management, and independent learning skills.

Overall, the application of project-based learning methods and Wordwall at SDN 22 Duingi has succeeded in making a significant contribution to increasing students' learning independence. Both methods have their own advantages in encouraging students to become active, creative, and responsible learners. Project-based learning provides real-life experiences that are relevant to students' lives, while Wordwall offers interactive media that appeals to students in the digital age. The successful implementation of these two methods shows that the combination of contextual and technological approaches can be an effective strategy in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Based on the results of the study, it is known that the sustainability of the learning independence program at SDN 22 Duingi is supported by the use of technology devices such as Chromebooks as the main tool in the learning process. Chromebooks allow students to access various educational resources independently through the Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) platform. These devices provide students with the ability to explore digital learning materials, search for information, and complete assignments more efficiently. The use of this technology not only helps students in time management, digital literacy, and problem-solving, but also supports lifelong learning. With adequate teacher guidance and training, students can leverage these tools to build learning skills that fit the needs of the digital age. According to Mishra & Koehler (2006), the integration of technology in education can increase students' motivation to learn and allow for more personalized and flexible learning. Technologies like Chromebooks also provide students with access to a variety of online educational resources, including interactive modules, learning videos, and formative evaluation tools. These resources offer students the flexibility to learn anytime and anywhere according to their individual needs and pace. With constantly updated access through the PMM platform, students can continue to improve their self-study skills. This is in line with the view of Garrison & Kanuka (2004), who stated that technology plays an important role in facilitating independent learning by providing a space for reflection and interaction in the online learning community. In addition, technology allows students to evaluate their own understanding of the material, assess learning progress, and take the initiative to improve learning outcomes independently. This is also in line with the findings of Lai & Hwang (2016), who show that digital learning-based technologies support the development of students' autonomous learning skills by providing interactive tools and resources. The sustainability of this program is also supported by the Smart Learning Community (KOMBEL), which creates a collaborative space for students, teachers, and related parties to share knowledge and experiences, both online and offline. KOMBEL facilitates collaborative learning that encourages students to learn independently, collaborate, share ideas, and create innovation. Through these communities, students can expand their social networks and knowledge, while strengthening a collaborative learning culture. This culture supports the long-term sustainability of student learning independence by providing an environment that encourages exploration and interaction, and innovation. According to Vygotsky (1978),

collaborative learning in a social context can improve students' cognitive development, especially when students interact with peers or more competent individuals.

In addition, the sustainability of the learning independence program is also reflected in the use of Chromebooks by teachers to improve their competence. Teachers use this tool to take part in training available on the Merdeka Teaching platform, enrich teaching methods, and manage the learning process in a more adaptive and innovative way. With this technology, teachers can create a learning environment that suits the needs of students, supporting more effective and relevant learning. According to Koehler et al. (2013), Technology training for teachers can enhance their capacity to design interactive and relevant learning, thereby creating a more meaningful learning experience for students. Overall, the sustainability of the learning independence program at SDN 22 Duingi shows that the provision of adequate technology, collaboration through the learning community, and the development of teacher competencies are key elements in creating relevant and productive learning. This support allows students to learn independently, tailor learning to their own needs, and prepare for future challenges. With a combination of technology, community collaboration, and teacher professional development, the program is expected to become a relevant and innovative sustainability model in the future.

Evaluation Of Student Learning Independence

Based on the findings of the study, it is known that the evaluation of student learning independence at SDN 22 Duingi is carried out through a formative and summative evaluation approach, which is designed to support the development of students' independent learning skills. Formative evaluations are implemented throughout the learning process to continuously monitor student progress and provide feedback that supports improvement. Teachers use a variety of methods, such as short quizzes, daily assignments, class discussions, and small group projects, to evaluate students' understanding of the material. These evaluations provide teachers with hands-on insight into students' strengths and weaknesses, allowing students to recognize their own abilities and take steps to improve. In addition, formative evaluations train students to monitor their learning progress, plan improvements independently, and encourage self-reflection. Nicol & Macfarlane-Dick (2006) explain that effective feedback in formative evaluation should provide specific guidance that helps students to develop independently. Meanwhile, summative evaluation is carried out at the end of the learning period to assess students' achievement towards learning objectives. This evaluation involves final exams, project reports, and student portfolios designed to measure the extent to which a student's competency has been achieved. The results of the summative evaluation are also used by teachers to provide more thorough final feedback to students. Summative evaluation not only serves as a measuring tool, but also motivates students to plan and manage their study time independently to achieve maximum results. Harlen (2013) emphasizes that a good summative evaluation can provide an overview of students' achievements while encouraging them to understand the importance of taking responsibility for their own work. The findings of this study also show that the combination of formative and summative evaluation at SDN 22 Duingi has a complementary role in building student learning independence. Formative evaluation provides an opportunity for students to continuously improve their learning process throughout learning, while summative evaluation provides a framework for students to understand their learning outcomes. Hattie (2012) argues that effective evaluation not only assesses learning outcomes, but also encourages students to reflect on their learning process, which ultimately supports the development of independent learning skills. Furthermore, teachers at SDN 22 Duingi play an important role as facilitators in this evaluation process. Teachers not only provide assessments, but also guide students in understanding the results of their evaluations, planning improvement steps, and developing better learning strategies. According to Andrade

& Brookhart (2020), evaluations that involve self-reflection can help students develop metacognitive awareness, which is one of the important aspects of learning independence. With the support of teachers, students at SDN 22 Duingi are able to recognize their learning needs, set effective learning strategies, and work independently to achieve learning goals. The evaluation of student learning independence at SDN 22 Duingi shows that the integration between formative and summative evaluation supports the development of student independence in a sustainable manner. Formative evaluations help students improve their learning process through constructive feedback, while summative evaluations provide motivation for students to take responsibility for their learning outcomes. This approach not only builds students' learning independence, but also prepares them to become lifelong learners capable of facing future educational challenges.

CONCLUSION

The Independent Curriculum has great potential to increase student learning independence through project-based learning, formative assessment, differentiated learning, and the role of teachers as facilitators. Various studies show that these approaches can develop students' ability to plan, monitor, and evaluate the learning process independently. However, this success is influenced by teacher readiness, school facilities, and a learning culture that supports student autonomy. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum needs to be accompanied by quality training, infrastructure support, and mentoring so that the goal of increasing learning independence can be achieved optimally in all educational units.

SUGGESTION

To ensure that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is truly able to increase students' learning independence, the government, schools, and other education stakeholders need to take more targeted and sustainable strategic steps. The central government and regional education offices need to strengthen teacher training programs that are not only one-off, but sustainable and based on real needs in the field. Training must include designing Project-Based Learning (PjBL), preparing authentic assessment rubrics, scaffolding and fading techniques, formative assessments, and strategies to build a culture of reflection for students. Consistent, practice-based training will help teachers truly move away from traditional learning patterns to a facilitative approach as mandated by the Independent Curriculum.

In addition, it is necessary to develop national and provincial repositories that contain teaching modules, ATP examples, contextual teaching materials, assessment tools, and examples of rubrics that have been tested in the field. The availability of these materials will help ease the burden on teachers in preparing learning tools while ensuring that there are quality standards that remain flexible to be adapted according to the characteristics of students and the school environment. Digital repositories must also be easily accessible, structured, and equipped with user guides so that they can be used by teachers from various competency backgrounds.

Support for educational infrastructure must also be improved. Equitable distribution of learning support devices such as laptops, projectors, and internet access is an important requirement so that all schools, especially those in disadvantaged areas or those with limited budgets, can implement the Independent Curriculum without significant obstacles. Without adequate infrastructure support, learning strategies that require exploration, collaboration, and access to digital information will be difficult to implement optimally and have the potential to widen the gap between educational units. On the other hand, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum must be carried out more systematically

with a focus on indicators of student learning independence. Assessments can be carried out through learning independence surveys, classroom observations, student learning logs, project portfolios, and student self-reflection. The data can be an important basis for governments and schools to formulate follow-up policies, identify emerging problems, and improve learning practices in an ongoing manner.

Finally, it is important to strengthen collaboration between schools, universities, and research institutions. This collaboration can be realized through classroom action research programs (PTK), teacher mentoring, or sharing good practices. The involvement of universities allows the presence of scientific assistance that helps schools evaluate and improve the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in a more systematic manner. Documentation of good practices from various schools can be a reference for other educational units to develop effective strategies in increasing student learning independence. With the comprehensive support of all parties, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can run more optimally and have a real impact on increasing student learning independence as the main competency of the 21st century.

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