

SLR: Teachers' Challenges in Facing the Independent Curriculum to Improve Learning Outcomes in Elementary Schools (Systematic Literature Review 2015–2023)

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Abstract

This article aims to examine in depth the various challenges faced by elementary school teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum, using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method as the main approach. This study analyzed 15 scientific articles published between 2015 and 2023, which are relevant to the context of curriculum implementation at the elementary school level. A total of 15 articles were selected from three databases (Google Scholar, ERIC, and Sinta) using the SLR inclusion criteria, namely empirical studies, focusing on elementary education, and published in the 2015–2023 period. The results of the analysis identified three main challenges that teachers often face, namely: (1) limitations in adequate professional training and assistance, (2) high administrative burden that hinders focus on the learning process, and (3) the existence of gaps in educational infrastructure between regions that have an impact on equal access and quality of curriculum implementation. The study also found that the implementation of strategies such as the development of community-based training (Professional Learning Community), the use of simple, easily accessible technology, and increased collaboration between schools, can contribute significantly to overcoming these barriers and encouraging improved student learning outcomes. The implications of these findings emphasize the importance of developing education policies that support teacher training in a contextual manner, relevant to local conditions, and equitable distribution of funding to ensure the optimal sustainability of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum throughout Indonesia.

1. Introduction

The The Merdeka Curriculum launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022 is a breakthrough in the national education system. This curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, differentiation of learning according to student needs, and provides flexibility to teachers in designing teaching materials. This approach is expected to be able to foster students' independence, creativity, and character from an early age, especially at the elementary school level. (Ministry of Education and Culture., n.d. .) (Anisa, 2022)

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the field faces challenges that are not simple, especially in terms of the readiness of educators. Teachers, as the spearhead of learning, are required to understand the philosophy of the new curriculum, master formative assessment methods, and be able to design contextual and student-centered learning. In this context, various obstacles arise, both technically, administratively, and structurally, which then become the main focus of this study.

Curriculum changes globally often experience implementation obstacles due to teacher resistance triggered by lack of training, lack of systemic support, and limited support resources. In Indonesia, the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum has also raised new challenges, such as unpreparedness in adopting a more flexible and reflective assessment format, as well as confusion in understanding the role of teachers as learning facilitators. (Pratiwi, 2023)

However, systematic studies of implementation challenges and adaptive strategies are still limited, especially in the context of elementary school teachers. This creates a knowledge gap that needs to be filled through a structured and in-depth literature review.

Referring to the theory of educational change, the success of curriculum implementation is largely determined by teacher involvement, systemic support, and resource adequacy. The Independent Curriculum demands flexibility, formative assessment, and contextual learning can only succeed if teachers understand and are ready to implement it. Therefore, challenges such as limited training, high workload, and inadequate infrastructure are major obstacles. (Fullan , 2015)

Studies have shown that intensive training and collaborative support can improve teacher readiness and student learning outcomes. Therefore, in this article, an analytical framework based on the relationship between: Teacher Challenges → Adaptation Strategies → Learning Outcomes is used.

2. Method

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to identify and analyze the challenges faced by elementary school teachers in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum as well as strategies to improve learning outcomes. Literature was obtained through searches on Google Scholar, ERIC, and Sinta databases, using the keywords: "Independent Curriculum", "challenges for elementary school teachers", and "learning outcomes".

Inclusion criteria: (a) empirical studies, (b) focus on elementary school, (c) published in the 2015–2023 range. From the selection results, 15 articles were selected which were then analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, through an open coding and manual categorization process

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the literature review show that the challenges in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools are not only technical, but also structural and systemic. The unequal training of teachers signals the need for a more inclusive and sustainable approach to competency development. Teachers in disadvantaged areas, for example, often face limited access to training programs relevant to the Independent Curriculum. Without adequate training, their understanding of the philosophy and practice of student-based learning becomes less than optimal. (Nugroho, 2023)

The high administrative burden experienced by teachers also underscores the importance of reform in the education management system. Many teachers spend time and energy on administrative tasks such as document drafting, curriculum reporting, and student development evaluation, which ultimately reduces the focus on the learning process. (Fauzi, 2020)

In addition, the digital infrastructure gap between regions is a serious obstacle to the implementation of online learning. Inequality of internet access and limited technological devices in 3T regional schools (disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost) make it difficult for teachers and students to access digital learning resources equally.

In response to these challenges, various adaptive strategies have been implemented with varying effectiveness. To avoid repetition and clarify policy direction, solutions can be grouped into three main approaches:

Training StrategyTeacher training development should be done in a hybrid manner—combining online, offline, and school-based learning community models. Teacher learning communities (Professional Learning Communities) have proven to be effective in strengthening curriculum adaptation because they are able to provide a space for discussion, experience sharing, and designing learning solutions collectively. (Princess, 2023)

Managerial StrategyAdministrative reform in the school environment needs to be implemented immediately. These efforts include simplifying teachers' work procedures, delegating part of the administrative burden to support staff, and integrating information technology to facilitate reporting and document management. (Fauzi, 2020)

Technology StrategyThe use of simple technologies, such as audio-visual media, lightweight applications, and material sharing platforms, has been proven to increase student motivation and engagement, even in areas with limited facilities. This innovation does not require high infrastructure, but creativity in managing existing resources. (Hasanah, 2023)

Thus, limited resources should not be the main obstacle in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. By strengthening three main strategies—training, managerial, and technology—teachers can transform into effective agents of change in creating adaptive, contextual, and meaningful learning for all students in Indonesia.

3.3 Conclusion

Based on the results of the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools still faces various multidimensional challenges. These challenges include limited teacher professional training, high administrative burden, and digital infrastructure gaps between regions. The unevenness of training has a direct impact on teachers' low understanding of the learning philosophy and practices emphasized in the Independent Curriculum. On the other hand, high administrative burdens hinder teachers' focus on designing meaningful, student-centered learning. Meanwhile, limited internet access, especially in remote areas, causes inequality in the implementation of technology-based learning which is one of the important elements in this curriculum.

Nonetheless, a number of strategies have proven effective in dealing with these obstacles. Strengthening the teacher learning community is one of the approaches that can improve understanding of the content and implementation of the curriculum. In addition, the use of simple technology such as audio-visual media also shows a positive impact in increasing student learning motivation, especially in schools that have limited resources.

These findings confirm that improving the quality of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not enough to rely solely on changes in curriculum design. Systemic support is also needed through continuous professional development of teachers, managerial reforms to simplify administrative burdens, and equitable distribution of technology-based education infrastructure that covers all regions of Indonesia. (June, 2021)

As a follow-up, it is recommended to the government and education stakeholders to: (1) expand access to contextual and local needs-based teacher training; (2) simplifying administrative procedures at the level of educational units; and (3) accelerate the development of digital infrastructure evenly. In addition, it is important to continue to encourage community-based learning innovations and simple technologies as adaptive strategies to address challenges in the field.

The limitation of this study is that its scope only covers the national literature and has not been accompanied by empirical field data. Therefore, follow-up studies based on field research are strongly encouraged to corroborate these findings and produce more applicable and contextual policy recommendations.

Author Contributions

Nur Afni: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – Original Draft Preparation.

Candra Utama: Supervision, Writing – Reviewing and Editing.

All authors have equal contributions to the paper. All the authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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