



Obstacles in implementing the independent curriculum in elementary schools

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ABSTRACT

This research is motivated by the urgency of understanding the obstacles in the implementation of the Independent curriculum. The reality shows that the implementation of the Independent curriculum faces various obstacles. The aim of this study is to explore the obstacles faced by teachers when applying the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools. The method used is a literature review. Data was gathered from articles published between 2022 and 2024 through platforms Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Garuda Kemdikbud. A total of 30 articles were identified, with 11 found to be relevant to the research topic. Data analysis includes determining the topic and research questions, collecting literature, developing inclusion and exclusion criteria, reading and analyzing the literature, synthesizing and organizing the information, and writing and revising the document. The results of the article reviews indicate that teachers face obstacles in implementing the independent curriculum during planning, execution, and assessment activities. These obstacles stem from local government, school principal's policies, and the capacity of teachers. The findings of this research are significant for teachers as a thorough understanding of these challenges can aid in developing more effective policies and strategies related to the Independent Curriculum, thereby enhancing its implementation in elementary schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, has established a policy on the Independent Curriculum in schools as an initiative to improve the quality of the educational process and produce high-quality graduates. The government provides support for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, particularly in assisting teachers to develop project-based and problem-based learning materials. This support includes the Merdeka Mengajar platform, learning communities, resource persons for sharing best practices, a series of webinars, development partners, and a help center (Kurniawan, 2022)(Wahyuningsih, 2023). For example, learning communities support teachers in discussing and resolving learning issues encountered

during the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Through these learning communities, teachers can build networks and communication, stimulate each other's learning, share knowledge and skills, introduce collaborative processes, develop actionable initiatives with measurable results, and generate new knowledge to assist their members. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a decline in the quality of the learning process and a deficit in competencies across all levels of education (Arul et al., 2023)(Hardhita et al., 2024). The Independent Curriculum policy reflects a strong commitment to producing graduates who possess adequate knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Supriadi et al., 2024), and aligns with the rapid changes faced by the education sector that require creativity and innovation (Sutaris, 2022).

Actually, the concept of the Independent Curriculum is widely recognized in international education (Nurhayati et al., 2022), and corresponds to the concepts of independent learning and differentiated learning. While independent learning refers to the collaborative activities between teachers and students in creating an optimal learning process (Cirocki & Anam, 2024), differentiated learning emphasizes the adaptation of the curriculum to student characteristics to ensure that the learning process connects with students' abilities (Barata et al., 2017). Options for implementing the Independent Curriculum include fully adopting the 2013 Curriculum, emergency or special curricula, and the Independent Curriculum (Kepmendikbudristek Nomor 56/M/2022). Schools that implement the Independent Curriculum can choose from options including the independent learning category, the independent transformation category, and the independent sharing category (Keputusan Kepala Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Nomor 008/H/KR/2022). The Independent Curriculum emphasizes essential content, providing ample time for students to delve into concepts and strengthen competencies. The Independent Curriculum has several advantages, such as simplicity and depth due to its focus on essential materials. Teachers have the freedom to implement the learning process according to students' achievements and development, and learning becomes more interactive as students engage in actual projects that are relevant to their daily lives (Fan et al., 2021; Pohontu et al., 2024).

The Independent Curriculum is flexible, providing students with opportunities to learn according to their interests and talents, as well as honing competencies that align with the needs of the times (Mulyasa, 2023). The flexibility of the Independent Curriculum which benefits various student demographics across different regions in Indonesia, includes the adjustment of learning content to local contexts, variation in teaching methods, emphasis on skills and competencies, development of community-based projects, granting autonomy to schools, and the ability to adapt to changes and challenges (Veradegita et al., 2022)(Pratiwi, 2022)(Citrawati, 2024). The Independent Curriculum supports comprehensive, project-based learning, where students not only study theory but also apply knowledge in real-world situations (Prasetyawan, 2023). It is designed to offer flexibility in the learning process (Widiastuti, 2023), allowing students to learn according to their interests and needs while helping them develop the skills necessary to adapt in a constantly changing world (Lönnqvist, 2019). The Independent Curriculum policy aligns with the goals of Indonesia's national education. However, its implementation faces challenges, issues, and obstacles for schools, teachers, and students alike (Weiss et al., 2021). Teachers struggle with developing learning materials (Choirudin et al., 2021), students find it difficult to adapt to project-based and problem-based learning processes (Hakim & Nabila, 2022), and principal may lack an understanding of the essence of the Independent Curriculum (Istaryaningtyas et al., 2021). These obstacles impact both the implementation process and the outcomes achieved.

Many studies have examined the successes, challenges, and obstacles in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools. However, these studies are often limited to specific contexts, such as particular classes (Alimuddin, 2023), certain schools (Nisa et al., 2023), or several schools within a particular area (Susetyo, 2020). Other research has described the obstacles in implementing the Independent Curriculum to improve student learning outcomes (Sari et al., 2022)(Aliyyah et al., 2023), even comparing student outcomes between the Independent

Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum (Panginan & Susianti, 2022). These studies predominantly use quantitative approaches (Rosmana et al., 2023), and focus on specific respondents, such as the obstacles faced by school leaders (Isa et al., 2022)(Fitriyani et al., 2023), obstacles encountered by class teachers (Wantiana, 2023)(Digna & Widyasari, 2023), and issues faced by elementary students (Aprima & Sari, 2022)(Sitorus & Ratnawati, 2024). There are also qualitative studies on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum from the teachers' perspective (Ningsi et al., 2024).

Unlike previous studies, this research places greater emphasis on analyzing articles that discuss the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools. This study focuses on identifying the obstacles faced by teachers in terms of planning, implementation, assessment of learning, and related supporting facilities for implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools. This research employs meta-analysis through a literature review to uncover the obstacles experienced by elementary school teachers. The aim of this study is to theoretically describe the obstacles in implementing the Independent Curriculum that are encountered by elementary school teachers. The implications of this research include enhancing the knowledge and understanding of principal, teachers, and stakeholders in elementary schools regarding these obstacles which in turn encourages smoother and more optimal implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study employs a literature review approach. According to Machi & McEvoy (2016) a literature review is a critical examination or analysis of published works on a specific topic. The purpose of a literature review is to provide a deeper understanding of previous research, identify gaps in existing studies, and evaluate relevant findings. Data were collected from online journals accessed through platforms such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Garuda Kemdikbud. The process of the literature review can be seen in the following Figure 1.

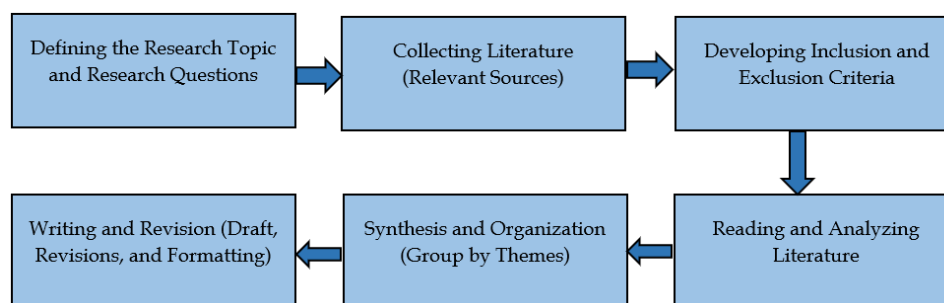


Figure 1. Literature review research procedure (Machi & McEvoy, 2016)

According to Figure 1, determining the research topic and questions involves selecting the topic to be studied and formulating more specific questions. The process of collecting literature means searching for relevant sources, such as journal articles, through databases like Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Garuda Kemdikbud. Developing inclusion and exclusion criteria involves setting standards for selecting literature to include, such as publication year and keywords. The keywords used in the search for articles are "Independent Curriculum" (Indonesia: Kurikulum Merdeka), "Obstacles in Curriculum Implementation" (Indonesia: Kendala Implementasi Kurikulum merdeka), and "Elementary School Curriculum" (Indonesia: Kurikulum Sekolah Dasar). Inclusion criteria consist of articles that are relevant to the research topic and published between 2021 and 2024, considering that the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented during this period. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria include articles that are not related to the topic as well as those published before 2021. Reading and analyzing literature involves reviewing the identified literature and noting key points, methodologies, and findings from each source.

Synthesis and organization mean analyzing the gathered information, grouping it by theme or topic, and structuring the literature review logically. Writing and revising entail drafting the literature review based on the established structure and then revising it to ensure clarity, coherence, and proper formatting. Data analysis in this study uses thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to Braun & Clarke (2006), the steps in thematic analysis include familiarization with the data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, and defining and naming themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Articles used in this research were sourced from Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and Garuda Kemdikbud. The keywords employed in the search included “Independent Curriculum”, “Obstacles in Curriculum Implementation”, and “elementary school curriculum”. The search results revealed a total of 30 articles discussing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools. Subsequently, through a selection process, the researcher identified 10 articles that were relevant to the research topic. The article search process is illustrated in the following Figure 2.

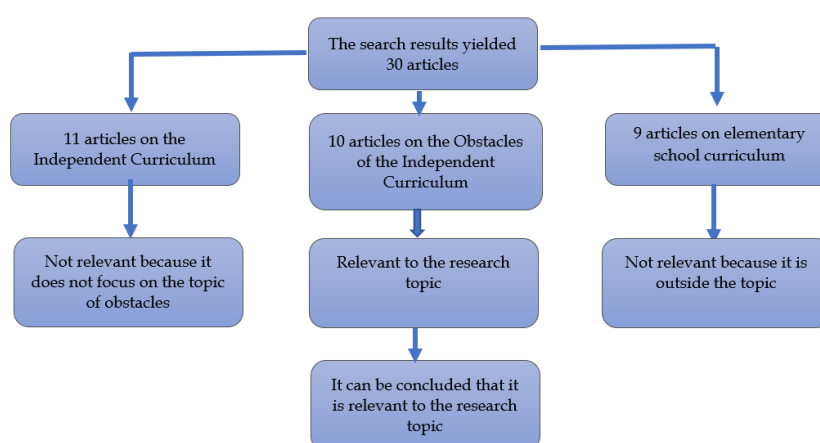


Figure 2. Article selection process

Based on Figure 2, there are 30 articles obtained from the search, with 20 articles deemed irrelevant and 10 articles relevant to the research topic. The next step is the synthesis of the results, which will be explained in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Results of journal article review

No	Title, Author & Journal Information	Review Results
1	Title: Analisis Kendala Dan Solusi Dalam Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran Dengan Menerapkan Kurikulum Independent Pada Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 7 Ponorog (<i>Analysis of Obstacles and Solutions in Implementing Learning by Applying the Independent Curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri 7 Ponorogo</i>). Author: Feby Eka Listiani, Putri Anafi Aisah, Afina Syabila Rahma, Syunu Trihantoyo, Agustin Hanivia Cindy. Journal Information: Sindoro Cendikia Pendidikan, 1 (2), 2023, pp. 10-20 (Listiani et al., 2024)	The obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the independent curriculum are their inability to compile learning tools, especially teaching modules. They find it difficult to switch from a teacher-focused approach to a student-oriented approach, as well as limitations in implementing learning to develop students' critical, creative, and independent thinking skills. In addition, teachers have not been able to utilize technology in planning and implementing learning.
2	Title: Persepsi Guru Terhadap Implementasi Kurikulum Independent Belajar di Sekolah Dasar	The obstacles faced by teachers are the lack of socialization and specific training related to the profile of Pancasila

No	Title, Author & Journal Information	Review Results
	<i>(Teachers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Elementary Schools)</i> . Author: Sunarni, Hari Karyono. Journal Information: Journal on Education, 5(2), 2023, pp. 1613-1620 (Sunarni & Karyono, 2023)	students, not all teachers are able to implement the Independent Curriculum. In addition, not all teachers have IT skills, and limited stable internet access, especially for geographically remote schools.
3	Title: Kendala Guru dalam Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka (<i>Teachers' Obstacles in Implementing the Independent Curriculum</i>). Author: Ira Wantiana, Mellisa. Journal Information: Jurnal Basicedu, 7(3), 2023, pp. 1461 - 1465 (Wantiana & Mellisa, 2023)	Obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in border schools between villages and cities include limited books, internet networks, and especially teacher competence. In addition, government socialization of the curriculum to schools is still lacking, teacher preparation to switch to the Merdeka Curriculum is inadequate, and available learning resources are limited to textbooks.
4	Title: Problematika Implementasi Kurikulum Independent Di Sekolah Dasar (<i>Problems in Implementing the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools</i>). Author: Erwin Simon Paulus Olak Wuwur. Journal Information: Jurnal Soko Guru, 3(1), 2023, pp. 1-9 (Wuwur, 2023)	Obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools include limited understanding and skills regarding the application of creative and innovative learning methods, an unsupportive school environment, inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and less than optimal teacher readiness
5	Title: Analisis Faktor-Faktor Penyebab Kendala Guru Dalam Menerapkan Kurikulum Independent (Studi Kasus: SDN 21 Koto Tuo, Kec. Baso) (<i>Analysis of Factors Causing Teachers' Obstacles in Implementing the Independent Curriculum (Case Study: SDN 21 Koto Tuo, Baso District)</i>). Author: Eli Sasmita, Darmansyah. Journal Information: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Konseling, 4(6), 2022, pp. 5545-5549 (Sasmita & Darmansyah, 2022)	The Obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools include several teachers still being unable to demonstrate interaction skills in the learning process, teachers still not being oriented toward achieving competencies but rather on delivering learning materials, teachers not utilizing technology in planning and executing lessons, inadequate literacy facilities causing both teachers and students to still rely on textbooks, and insufficient support facilities for the Independent Curriculum.
6	Title: Problematika Guru dalam Menerapkan Kurikulum Independent Belajar (<i>Teachers' Obstacles in Implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum</i>) Author: Siti Zulaih, Tika Meldin, Meisin. Journal Information: Terampil: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran Dasar, 9(2), 2022, pp. 163-177 (Zulaih et al., 2022)	The Obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum are found in the planning, execution, and assessment of learning. In lesson planning, difficulties include breaking down learning outcomes into specific learning objectives, organizing the flow of learning objectives, and developing teaching modules. Teachers also struggle to determine appropriate teaching methods and strategies, have limited ability to utilize educational technology, face restrictions due to limited student textbooks, and find it challenging to apply diverse teaching methods and media. Additionally, teachers still have difficulty designing relevant projects and developing assessments for learning.
7	Title: Problematika Wali Kelas Dalam Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka (<i>Obstacles Faced by Classroom Teachers in Implementing the Independent Curriculum</i>). Author: Mahfudh. Journal Information: Modeling: Jurnal Program Studi PGMI, 10(4), 2023, pp. 727-736 (Mahfudh, 2023)	The main obstacles in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools include a lack of preparedness among teachers to face the curriculum, insufficient socialization regarding its implementation, low teacher engagement in Teacher Working Groups, limited time for studying the Independent Curriculum due to the demands of managing classroom or school administration, and a scarcity of teaching media for teachers.
8	Title: Kendala Guru Dalam Menerapkan Kurikulum Independent Di SD Negeri Unggul Lampeuneurut Aceh Besar (<i>Obstacles Faced by Teachers in Implementing the Independent Curriculum at SD Negeri Unggul Lampeuneurut, Aceh Besar</i>). Author: Aisyah Dwita Puspa Sari, Ahadin, Fauzi. Journal Information: Jurnal Ilmiah Mahasiswa: Elementary Education Research, 8(2), 2023, pp. 60-68 (Sari et al., 2023)	The obstacles in implementing the Independent Curriculum include insufficient facilitation for teachers to attend training on the curriculum, with most teachers lacking an understanding of its essence. Additionally, teachers have limited skills in developing learning materials for the Independent Curriculum, leading them to primarily adopt content from online sources. There is also a lack of adequate references available at schools.
9	Title: Hambatan Guru Matematika Dalam Mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Independent Di Sekolah Dasar (<i>Obstacles Faced by Mathematics</i>	The obstacles in implementing the Independent Curriculum for elementary school teachers occur during planning, execution, and assessment of learning. In the

No	Title, Author & Journal Information	Review Results
10	<p><i>Teachers in Implementing the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools</i>). Author: Novi Andri Nurcahyono, Jaya Dwi Putra. . Journal Information: Wacana Akademika: Majalah Ilmiah Kependidikan, 6(3), 2022, pp. 377 - 384 (Nurcahyono & Putra, 2022)</p> <p>Title: Problematika Implementasi Kurikulum Independent Di SDN 21 Pekanbaru (<i>Obstacles in Implementing the Independent Curriculum at SDN 21 Pekanbaru</i>). Author: Triska, Zaka Hadikusuma Ramadan. Identitas jurnal: Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar, 9(1), 2024, pp. 4788- 4802 (Triska & Ramadan, 2024)</p>	<p>planning phase, issues include teachers lacking the skills to break down Learning Outcomes into specific learning objectives, an inability to create teaching modules, and insufficient references and resources. During implementation, challenges arise such as limitations in connecting learning material with relevant knowledge, difficulties in understanding students' psychological conditions, and the need for using language that is easily understood by students. In the assessment phase, challenges include the inability to create initial assessments, design project and problem-based evaluations, and a lack of understanding of formative assessment.</p> <p>This study highlights several obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools, namely: 1) insufficient training on the Independent Curriculum; 2) teachers lacking skills in creating teaching modules; 3) difficulties in adapting learning materials to the heterogeneity of students in the classroom; 4) limited availability of student textbooks; and 5) inadequate supporting facilities for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.</p>

Based on Table 1, the obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools can be categorized into planning, implementation, and assessment of learning. There are also obstacles related to inadequate supporting facilities. The analysis of these articles shows that 9 articles mention obstacles in lesson planning, 7 articles identify obstacles in lesson execution, 2 articles discuss obstacles in assessment, and 7 articles raise issues related to insufficient supporting facilities.

The prominent obstacles in lesson planning include teachers' lack of proficiency in developing learning tools, creating comprehensive teaching modules, and designing differentiated learning modules with relevant methods. This affects the quality of the materials produced (Akbar, 2017; Johnson & Walker, 2023), making them unsuitable for students' needs. The inability to develop effective teaching methods can lead to ineffective learning processes, resulting in student boredom and difficulty in understanding the learning material (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2020). In the learning process, notable obstacles include the implementation of differentiated instruction and insufficient use of technology. The diversity of students' abilities and backgrounds can complicate teachers' efforts to design and deliver appropriate learning for all students (Tomlinson, 2021). Additionally, the lack of technology utilization diminishes the quality of teaching and learning, depriving students of opportunities to learn in a more interactive and engaging manner (Ertmer & Ottenbreit, 2010). Obstacles in assessment include difficulties in developing problem-based and project-based assessment instruments, as well as implementing formative assessments, which can prevent teachers from providing accurate evaluations to students (Brown, 2019) and may lead to inconsistencies in assessment (Sadler, 2020). Obstacles related to learning facilities, such as textbooks, internet access, and teaching media, can hinder teachers in both lesson planning and implementation (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). Physical limitations, such as inadequate classroom conditions, can affect students' comfort and concentration. Classrooms that are not conducive to learning can disrupt the educational process (Fraser, 2020). These obstacles will require comprehensive efforts from teachers to maximize various resources in schools, collaborating with relevant parties to enhance the learning process and achieve educational goals in elementary schools.

CONCLUSION

Based on the literature analysis, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools does not always proceed smoothly. On the contrary, there are numerous obstacles, particularly faced by teachers as the implementers of the curriculum policy. These obstacles arise in the stages of planning, implementation, assessment, and supporting facilities, and they stem from local government issues, school leadership policies, and teachers' capacities. The existence of these various obstacles necessitates serious efforts to address them. Understanding these obstacles in curriculum implementation can provide a solid foundation for the government and schools to effectively apply the Independent Curriculum in order to achieve educational goals. The practical recommendations derived from this study include the need for enhanced training programs for teachers, the provision of adequate educational resources, the implementation of regular evaluations and feedback, the development of learning communities, flexibility in curriculum development, and sufficient funding allocation. Recommendations for future research include case studies on obstacles in various regions, direct impacts on students, teachers' and parents' perceptions of the obstacles, strategic solutions for overcoming obstacles, the influence of teacher training in addressing these obstacles, and the role of technology in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

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