

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY IN FACING THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam konteks manajemen sekolah. Metode penelitian menggunakan kualitatif studi kepustakaan (library research). Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tantangan utama dalam penerapan kurikulum merdeka: (1) kesiapan dan kompetensi guru dalam pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, (2) keterbatasan infrastruktur teknologi, (3) pemahaman konseptual tentang kurikulum, dan (4) koordinasi antar lembaga pendidikan. Hasil analisis mengungkapkan bahwa efektivitas implementasi kurikulum sangat bergantung pada manajemen sekolah yang partisipatif, adaptif, dan kontekstual. Kepemimpinan transformasional kepala sekolah menjadi faktor kunci dalam menggerakkan seluruh pemangku kepentingan. Strategi implementasi yang berhasil meliputi: (1) pelatihan guru berkelanjutan, (2) integrasi kurikulum sekolah, (3) penguatan sistem evaluasi berbasis proyek dan portofolio, serta (4) pelibatan aktif pemangku kepentingan sekolah. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa meskipun menghadapi berbagai tantangan, Kurikulum Merdeka dapat diadaptasi secara optimal melalui manajemen sekolah yang kuat dan kolaboratif. Fleksibilitas kurikulum dalam mengakomodasi nilai-nilai lokal dan karakteristik peserta didik menjadi keunggulan utama. Temuan ini memberikan implikasi praktis bagi pengambil kebijakan dan praktisi pendidikan dalam mengoptimalkan implementasi kurikulum merdeka di berbagai konteks satuan pendidikan.

**Kata kunci:** Kurikulum Merdeka, manajemen sekolah, implementasi kurikulum, pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, analisis kebijakan Pendidikan

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum within the context of school management. The research employs a qualitative approach through library research methodology. Findings indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum, as a response to educational*

*challenges in the digital era, faces several key obstacles: (1) teacher readiness and competency in differentiated learning, (2) technological infrastructure limitations, (3) conceptual understanding of the curriculum, and (4) inter-institutional coordination. Analysis reveals that effective curriculum implementation depends significantly on participatory, adaptive, and contextual school management. Transformational leadership of school principals emerges as a crucial factor in engaging all stakeholders. Successful implementation strategies include: (1) continuous teacher training, (2) school curriculum integration, (3) strengthening project-based and portfolio assessment systems, and (4) active community involvement. The study concludes that despite various challenges, the Merdeka Curriculum can be optimally adapted through strong and collaborative school management. The curriculum's flexibility in accommodating local values and student characteristics represents its primary advantage. These findings provide practical implications for policymakers and education practitioners in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum across diverse educational settings.*

**Keywords:** *Merdeka Curriculum, school management, curriculum implementation, differentiated learning, education policy analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

The essence and mission of National Education is basically oriented towards the development of individual capacity as well as the formation of a civilized and dignified national character in order to realize an intelligent society. Fundamentally, national education aims to actualize the potential of students to become people who: (1) have faith and piety to God Almighty, (2) have noble character, (3) are physically and spiritually healthy, (4) master science, (5) skilled, (6) innovative, (7) independent, and (8) become democratic and responsible citizens. In line with the dynamics of the times and increasingly complex social changes, the education system continues to evolve through various transformations in response to global challenges.

The development of technology in the era of globalization has brought significant changes in modern life, including in the field of education. The rapid advancement of information technology allows for easier access to information and communication without time and place. However, people's dependence on

information technology also has the potential to have negative impacts if not used wisely. In the context of education, learning innovation now leads to a *student-centered learning* approach, where students are the main focus in the learning process (Tyas et al., 2018). This approach encourages students to actively seek knowledge, while teachers act as facilitators. According to Tan et al. (2018), this approach not only improves students' knowledge, but also develops *critical thinking*, creativity, and the ability to innovate to face challenges in the digital era.

In Indonesia's historical context, the education system has undergone eleven curriculum changes since 1947 - starting from a simple curriculum to the 2013 curriculum as the final refinement. The essence of each curriculum change is none other than an effort to continuously improve the previous system. Each curriculum change policy is the result of an in-depth study by education policy makers, especially the Ministry of Education and Culture as the authorized institution. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture introduced the Independent Learning Curriculum, which aims to improve the quality of education and prepare students to face the complexities of the future (Faiz et al., 2021). The concept of Freedom of Learning emphasizes freedom of thought for teachers and students, as well as shaping character through the exploration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes from the environment. Ainia (2020) stated that this curriculum is in line with the demands of 21st century education because it encourages motivation to learn, builds social awareness, confidence, and adaptability.

In the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum, facts in the field are inseparable from various obstacles, such as the unpreparedness of schools and educators. Its implementation is highly dependent on the readiness of educational institutions, although in the end the government requires its implementation.

This change in the curriculum triggered a paradigm transformation in the education system. The transformation aims to: (1) strengthen the autonomy of educators in managing the learning process, (2) reduce excessive standardization that limits the diversity of learning methods in various national education units, and (3) increase *student agency* - the capacity of students to set learning goals, conduct

cognitive reflection, and take responsible initiatives for their academic achievements. In addition, the elimination of the National Exam and the implementation of the zoning system in the selection of student admissions have caused polemics, including difficulties in determining the quality of schools because distance criteria are a priority. The phenomenon of changing the curriculum every time the minister changes is also in the spotlight, considering the immature preparation and the need for more in-depth studies. As a curricular solution, the Independent Curriculum is designed to mitigate *post-pandemic learning loss* by providing pedagogical flexibility to educators in: (1) curriculum development of educational units, (2) implementation of the teaching-learning process, and (3) adjustment to the characteristics of students [4]. This policy is expected to answer contemporary educational challenges through an approach to essentialize teaching materials and internalize the Pancasila Student Profile.

## METHOD

This research applies a qualitative method through the type of *library research* which is oriented towards the collection and analysis of secondary data from various scientific sources related to the management of school management in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Given its nature as a literature study, this study does not involve the location of the research or the subject directly, but rather focuses on an in-depth exploration of the theories and findings of previous research. The study was carried out in the period from May to June 2025 by relying on data sources in the form of indexed national journals, academic textbooks, and relevant education policy documents. The data collection process is carried out through systematic search in academic databases, while data validity is maintained through *triangulation of sources* and *content validity* by selecting literature that has gone through a *peer-review* mechanism. Data analysis uses content *analysis* techniques with the following steps: (1) identification and classification of relevant literature; (2) categorize key concepts; (3) analytical of research patterns, findings, and *gaps* ; and (4) conclusion of results. This approach facilitates a comprehensive interpretation of various academic perspectives in order to formulate a model of change

management strategies in the face of the challenges of implementing an independent curriculum in primary schools.

## DISCUSSION

### 1. Education Curriculum Reform: Independent Curriculum Policy

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia introduced a transformative policy in the form of replacing the 2013 Curriculum with an Independent Curriculum. This policy was officially announced by the Minister of Education and Culture of the Advanced Indonesia Cabinet, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, through the official YouTube channel of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia on Friday, February 11, 2022. In his statement, Nadiem emphasized the importance of teachers' in-depth understanding of the curriculum before it is applied in learning. He stated, "The learning process will not be effective without the teacher's interpretation of the curriculum and basic competencies, even if the teacher has adequate competence."

The concept of Freedom of Learning carries the principle of freedom of *learning*, where students are given the freedom to explore their interests and talents without coercion. One of the significant changes in this curriculum is the shift in learning methods from conventional classrooms to *outdoor learning*. This approach is expected to create a more dynamic learning atmosphere, facilitate more flexible teacher-student interaction, and develop student character such as independence, courage, and social skills. In addition, this curriculum avoids a ranking system that is considered to cause psychological pressure for students and parents, considering that each child has unique intelligence and talents according to their respective fields (Afista et al., 2020). Nadiem Makarim stated that the background of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is to create a fun learning environment that is free from excessive academic burden, including emphasis on achieving certain grades. Support for this policy is strengthened by the findings of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2019, which ranked Indonesia 74th out of 79 countries in math and science skills.

Based on the policy presentation of the Ministry of Education and

Culture on December 11, 2019, there are four main points of education reform (Afista et al., 2020; Evi Hasim, 2020):

1. Abolition of the National Examination (UN): Replaced with the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) and Character Survey which focused on literacy and numeracy, referring to the PISA standard. Assessments are carried out for students in grades 4, 8, and 11 to provide feedback on learning improvements.
2. School Exam Flexibility: The authority to assess the National Standard School Examination (USBN) is left to the educational unit, with portfolio-based, paper-based, or other method-based options.
3. Simplification of Learning Implementation Plans (RPP): Teachers only need to compile a one-page lesson plan, making it more efficient and allowing for focus on improving competence.
4. PPDB Zoning System Expansion: New Student Admissions (PPDB) are expanded to include disadvantaged, frontier, and outermost (3T) areas, with more inclusive affirmation and achievement quotas.

This policy reflects the government's systematic efforts to address the challenges of Indonesia's education quality, while accommodating the diversity of students' potential. Based on the results of the analysis of various literature studies, it can be concluded that the granting of wider authority to schools in managing education is able to increase the effectiveness of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. However, the achievement of this success is inseparable from several very crucial determining factors, including the quality of leadership from the principal, the foundation if the school is private, as well as the role of the supervisor of the city/district office where the school is located, the level of active participation of all members of the school community, and the amount of support provided by various stakeholders in the school environment to dare to learn new things in the implementation of the independent curriculum.

## **2. Challenges in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

The process of implementing the Independent Curriculum in the field faces various challenges that are quite complex, including aspects of human resources,

availability of infrastructure, conceptual understanding of the curriculum, and coordination between elementary school education institutions.

a. Readiness and Ability Level of Teaching Staff

One of the main challenges faced is the level of readiness and competence possessed by teachers in implementing student-focused learning approaches, such as differentiated learning models and projects to strengthen Pancasila Student Profiles. Not a few educators experience difficulties in compiling teaching modules that are in accordance with the characteristics of students and the context of the local environment. These findings are in line with the results of Sari et al.'s (2023) research which states that many teachers face obstacles in understanding and applying learning strategies that are in accordance with the demands of the Independent Curriculum, especially in terms of the preparation of teaching materials and the use of information technology in learning, as also revealed by Muqorobin (2025).

b. Limitations of Supporting Facilities

Infrastructure problems, such as unstable internet networks and the lack of availability of technological devices, are serious obstacles in the implementation of technology-based learning which is one of the characteristics of the Independent Curriculum (Tarigan & Lubis, 2025). Many educational units have difficulty in providing adequate facilities and infrastructure to support the creation of innovative and interactive learning processes.

The research conducted by Warsihna et al. The year 20204 shows that the limitation of educational facilities and infrastructure is a significant inhibiting factor in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, especially in areas with inadequate infrastructure conditions (Tomasouw et al., 2024).

c. Understanding Curriculum Concepts and Assessment Systems

Educators and education staff still need a deeper understanding of the basic concepts and objectives of the Independent Curriculum, including in the aspect of learning evaluation which emphasizes more on formative

and summative assessments. Difficulties in designing and implementing an evaluation system in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum are challenges that need to be overcome. According to Karlina et al. (2024), the lack of a comprehensive understanding of the learning evaluation system within the framework of the Independent Curriculum can be an obstacle in achieving the goals of the overall curriculum (Karlina et al., 2024).

d. **Coordination Between Educational Institutions**

Educational units in one region or those that are members of a sub-district/cluster often face difficulties in harmonizing the national curriculum. The difference in pedagogical approach and educational goals between public schools, both public and private, requires intensive coordination to create harmony in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. In this case, driving schools and driving teachers need to get facilities from the Education Office to be able to provide training and supervision by regional level supervisors in the implementation of the Independent curriculum at both the elementary school level. This situation requires effective communication and close cooperation between relevant parties in designing and implementing an integrated curriculum.

**3. Independent Curriculum Implementation Strategy**

In an effort to overcome various challenges in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, several strategies have been formulated and implemented that are comprehensive and in accordance with the local context. These strategies are specifically designed to increase the effectiveness of curriculum implementation while ensuring the achievement of holistic educational goals. Here are the strategic steps

1. **Improving Educator Competencies Through Training Programs**

One of the strategic steps taken is the implementation of intensive training and mentoring programs for educators. This training not only focuses on technical aspects such as mastery of learning technology, but also on a philosophical understanding of the Independent Curriculum. This is in accordance with the recommendations issued by the UNNESA S3 Education

Management Study Program (2025) which emphasizes the importance of comprehensive training to support the effective implementation of the curriculum. In addition, the education unit also actively encourages teachers to participate in learning communities and professional discussion forums to share best practices and experiences in implementing the Independent Curriculum. This step aims to create a collaborative and reflective learning culture among educators.

2. Integration of School Curriculum and other curricula (private schools)

As an integrated educational institution, an Educational Unit Operational Curriculum (KOSP) has been developed that accommodates religious values. The curriculum development team consisting of school representatives works intensively together to develop a holistic learning program, covering both academic and spiritual aspects at the same time. This integrative approach ensures that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum remains in line with the institutional identity and vision.

3. Improvement of the Learning Evaluation System

To increase the effectiveness of learning evaluation, the education unit develops a comprehensive assessment system including diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. Educators are given special training in designing evaluation instruments that are in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, such as project-based and portfolio-based assessments. In addition, the results of the evaluation are used as a basis for consideration to make continuous improvements to the learning process and curriculum development.

4. Socialization and Stakeholder Engagement Program

Socialization activities regarding the Independent Curriculum are aimed at all stakeholders, including parents/guardians of students, school committees, and the surrounding community. This socialization activity aims to increase understanding and gain support for the implementation of the new curriculum. The active involvement of all parties in the curriculum implementation process is considered very important to create a conducive and supportive learning environment

## **CONCLUSION**

School management practices have proven a fairly high level of effectiveness in overcoming various difficulties in implementing the Independent Curriculum. By applying an approach that involves various parties, is flexible, and is adjusted to real conditions, the education unit succeeds in developing and running a curriculum that not only meets the learning needs of students, but is also able to integrate Islamic religious values as the hallmark of the institution. The central role of the principal with a leadership style that changes and encourages cooperation is a determining factor in moving all components of the school, including the environment, educators, students, and parents. The obstacles that need to be overcome include aspects of teachers' professional readiness and ability, lack of facilities and infrastructure to support technology, and a lack of understanding of the principles of the Independent Curriculum, as well as the need for curriculum synchronization between public schools and private schools that have religious curricula. In order to overcome these various obstacles, educational institutions need to develop a series of comprehensive strategies that include a program to improve teacher competency on an ongoing basis, designing an integrated curriculum, strengthening learning outcome assessment mechanisms, and actively involving all interested parties from outside the school.

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