

## Independent Curriculum Amidst Limitations: A Portrait of the Challenges of Teachers at SDK Bali Laura

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### ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum demands a change in the learning paradigm to be more flexible, contextual, and student-centered. However, the realization of this curriculum in areas with limited infrastructure and human resources such as SDK Bali Laura faces various challenges. This article aims to critically describe the obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum. With a qualitative descriptive approach, data was obtained through direct observation, interviews with teachers, and review of learning implementation documents. The results show that limited access to training, minimal teaching media, administrative burden, and lack of technological support are the main obstacles. In addition, adaptation to the learning differentiation approach and formative assessment are still challenges for teachers. These findings indicate the need for systematic intervention from related parties, including ongoing mentoring, contextual training, and the provision of relevant learning facilities. Thus, the Independent Curriculum can be more effectively implemented in schools with limited conditions

## INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation in developing superior, resilient, and adaptive human resources to changing times. In order to answer global challenges and improve the quality of learning in Indonesia, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology launched the Independent Curriculum as part of the transformation of the national education system. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiation in the learning process, and strengthening character through the Pancasila student profile. However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the field does not always go as expected, especially in areas that still face various limitations.

One of them is SDK Bali Loura, an elementary school located in an area with limited access to education, both in terms of infrastructure, teacher resources, and technological support. In a context like this, teachers are not only required to understand the concept of the new curriculum, but must also be able to adapt it to real conditions in the field which are often far from ideal. Various studies show that the success of curriculum implementation is largely determined by the readiness and capacity of teachers as the main actors in the learning process. When a new curriculum is implemented without adequate training support, relevant learning resources, and an adaptive evaluation system, teachers will have difficulty interpreting and implementing the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum effectively (Taniredja & Abduh, 2023).

Therefore, this article aims to uncover and critically analyze the challenges faced by SDK Bali Loura teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. By understanding these obstacles, it is hoped that contextual strategies and approaches can be found to support the implementation of a more inclusive and equitable curriculum throughout Indonesia, including areas with limited resources.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Independent Curriculum Concept*

The Independent Curriculum is an effort by the Indonesian government to respond to global dynamics and improve the quality of learning that is more student-centered. This curriculum is designed to be more flexible, emphasizing differentiated learning, formative assessment, and character building through the Pancasila Student Profile (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The main principle of the Independent Curriculum is to provide freedom to educational units and teachers to adjust the learning process to the needs and potential of students.

According to the OECD (2020), modern curriculum reform must involve teacher autonomy, student involvement, and system support that is responsive to local contexts. This is in line with the vision of the Independent Curriculum which prioritizes flexibility and siding with student needs and real conditions in the field.

### *Challenges of Implementation in the 3T Region*

Although the design of the Independent Curriculum offers a progressive approach, its implementation in the 3T (frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged) regions encounters various obstacles. Taniredja and Abduh (2023) emphasized that limited infrastructure, human resources, and access to training and

technology are the main inhibiting factors. Teachers in 3T areas often experience gaps in understanding concepts due to minimal curriculum socialization and non-contextual training (Suyanto, 2021).

In a similar study, Puslitjak (2021) reported that teachers in remote areas feel burdened with administration and lack professional assistance, making it difficult to implement differentiated learning and initial diagnostic assessments optimally.

### ***The Role of Teachers and Communities of Practice***

Teachers play a central role in the successful implementation of the new curriculum. In a decentralized learning approach such as the Merdeka Curriculum, the pedagogical capacity of teachers is a determining factor. Miles and Huberman (2014) stated that curriculum changes will only be effective if the environment and implementers at the school level have the appropriate understanding and skills. Therefore, the existence of a teacher learning community and facilitators is very important as a forum for sharing good practices, reflection, and professional strengthening.

### ***Digital Divide and Availability of Learning Resources***

Digital transformation in education requires equitable technological support. However, in many elementary schools in areas such as SDK Bali Loura, limited access to ICT devices, internet connections, and contextual teaching materials are still major obstacles (Taniredja & Abduh, 2023). This indicates the need for policy interventions that focus not only on curriculum content but also on providing learning support facilities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe in depth the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SDK Bali Loura. This approach was chosen because it is able to reveal the social reality and subjective experiences of teachers directly in the field, especially in the context of elementary schools located in areas with limited resources.

### ***Research Subjects.***

The subjects in this study were class teachers at SDK Bali Loura, who have started implementing the Independent Curriculum since the 2022/2023 academic year. The selection of subjects was carried out purposively, taking into account the direct involvement of teachers in the planning and implementation process of learning based on the Independent Curriculum.

### ***Data Collection Techniques***

Data were collected through three main techniques, namely:

1. *In-Depth Interviews*: Conducted in a semi-structured manner to explore teachers' understanding of the Independent Curriculum, as well as the obstacles they experienced in implementing it.
2. *Direct Observation*: Researchers observed the learning process in the classroom, teacher and student interactions, and the availability of learning support facilities.

3. *Documentation*: Includes analysis of learning planning documents, assessments, and teacher reflection reports during the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

#### ***Data Analysis Techniques***

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The entire analysis process was carried out repeatedly to ensure the validity of the interpretation.

#### ***Data Validity***

To ensure the validity of the data, the researcher used source and method triangulation techniques. Interviews were verified with observation and documentation. In addition, member checks were conducted with teachers to ensure that the researcher's interpretation was in accordance with the actual conditions.

## **RESULTS**

Based on interviews, observations, and documentation conducted with teachers at SDK Bali Loura, several main factors were found to be challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum. These challenges can be classified into four main categories:

1. *Limited Conceptual Understanding of the Independent Curriculum*. The majority of teachers admitted that they were still confused in understanding the essence of differentiated learning, initial diagnostic assessments, and strengthening the Pancasila student profile. One-way training and time constraints made their understanding incomplete and not yet applicable.
2. *Minimal Access to Learning Resources and Technology*. Teachers have difficulty in providing contextual teaching materials that are in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. In addition, limited technological facilities such as ICT devices and unstable internet connections are obstacles in accessing the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) and other online learning resources.
3. *Administrative Burden and Additional Tasks*. Teachers at SDK Bali Loura have dual responsibilities, both as teachers and school activity managers. This condition makes it difficult for them to focus on studying and designing learning that is in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, including in the preparation of teaching modules and formative assessments.
4. *Limited Mentoring and Community of Practice*. The absence of special mentors or facilitators at the school means that teachers do not have a sustainable discussion space. Learning community activities have not been running optimally, so that the transfer of good practices is difficult to do systematically.

## **DISCUSSION**

These findings indicate that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in areas with limitations such as the Bali Loura SDK requires a more contextual and gradual approach. In the perspective of Miles and Huberman (2014), the success of curriculum change is highly dependent on the environment

in which the policy is implemented. The limited understanding of teachers is a consequence of the curriculum socialization process that has not been maximized. This is in line with the findings of Suyanto (2021) who stated that teachers in the 3T areas tend to receive less in-depth training, so they only understand the surface of the curriculum concept. In fact, the Independent Curriculum demands teacher autonomy in designing learning according to student needs. The problem of access to technology and resources is also a significant factor.

As stated by Taniredja and Abduh (2023), the digital gap and lack of learning infrastructure are often barriers to curriculum transformation in the regions. In addition, administrative challenges and lack of collaboration between teachers reinforce that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not enough with just a policy document, but needs to be accompanied by ongoing mentoring, simplifying the workload, and strengthening the teacher learning community. Overall, these challenges emphasize the importance of an inclusive and adaptive approach in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, especially in areas with limitations. Curriculum reform must pay attention to local capacity so that the spirit of "independent learning" is not just a slogan, but is truly realized in daily learning practices.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SDK Bali Loura reflects the reality that educational transformation cannot be separated from the local context, especially in areas with limited resources. The results of this study indicate that teachers face various challenges, ranging from limited conceptual understanding, minimal facilities and access to technology, high administrative burdens, to weak professional mentoring. These obstacles not only hinder the effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum, but also risk weakening the spirit of educational change initiated by the government. This finding strengthens the argument that the success of the curriculum is not enough to be designed nationally, but must also be followed by an implementation strategy that considers the readiness and needs of implementing actors in the field, in this case teachers. Without ongoing systemic support, the Independent Curriculum has the potential to become an idealism that is difficult to realize, especially in schools in the 3T areas.

## FURTHER STUDY

Based on the findings and analysis, here are some suggestions that can be used as a reference for policy makers and education practitioners:

1. Continuous Improvement of Teacher Capacity. The government needs to expand and deepen the Independent Curriculum training with a more contextual and practical approach. Training based on direct practice, microteaching, and workshops based on local problems will help teachers understand and implement the curriculum effectively.

2. Provision of Facilities and Access to Technology. Adequate infrastructure investment is needed, including internet networks, digital devices, and learning resources that are relevant to the regional context. This is important to bridge the digital divide between schools in urban and remote areas.
3. Professional Mentoring and Strengthening the Community of Practice. The formation of an active and sustainable teacher learning community can be a space for sharing good practices, reflection, and strengthening professionalism. The presence of facilitators or field assistants is also very important in the curriculum transition process.
4. Simplifying Teacher Administrative Burden. The government and education units need to review the administrative workload of teachers so that they have more space to focus on planning and implementing meaningful learning.

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