



TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores primary school teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum using a qualitative descriptive approach. The research was conducted in selected primary schools in Ciamis, Indonesia. Participants were purposively selected and consisted of teachers who had experience implementing the Independent Curriculum. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and supported by observations and document analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns and meanings from participants' experiences.

The findings reveal that teachers generally hold positive perceptions of the Independent Curriculum, viewing it as a progressive reform that promotes instructional flexibility and student-centered learning. Teachers reported increased opportunities to address diverse student needs through project-based activities and formative assessment. However, significant challenges were also identified, particularly limited understanding of differentiated instruction, difficulties with authentic assessment, and increased administrative workload. These constraints often resulted in partial curriculum implementation.

Institutional support emerged as a critical factor influencing teachers' confidence and adaptability. Teachers who received continuous professional development and leadership support demonstrated greater readiness to apply innovative teaching strategies. In contrast, disparities in training opportunities and learning resources contributed to uneven implementation across schools. To address these challenges, teachers adopted adaptive strategies such as peer collaboration, joint lesson planning, and self-directed learning.

The study concludes that while teachers largely embrace the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum, effective implementation requires sustained professional development, reduced administrative burden, equitable resource distribution, and strong school leadership. These findings highlight the importance of context-sensitive support systems to ensure meaningful curriculum transformation at the primary education level.

Keywords: *Independent Curriculum, teachers' perceptions, primary education, qualitative study, curriculum implementation*

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background

Indonesia's education system has undergone substantial reform with the introduction of the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*), which emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and the development of 21st-century competencies. This curriculum provides greater autonomy for teachers in designing learning activities aligned with students' needs and local contexts. The success of this reform largely depends on teachers' understanding, acceptance, and practical implementation of the curriculum in classrooms.

Teachers play a central role in translating curriculum policy into instructional practice (Ramdhan, 2025). Previous studies indicate that teachers' perceptions significantly influence how effectively educational reforms are implemented. Suryaman (2022) found that while many primary school teachers positively perceived the flexibility offered by the Independent Curriculum, they also reported difficulties in applying differentiated learning and authentic assessment. Similarly, Anggraena et al. (2022) emphasized that limited pedagogical readiness and insufficient professional development remain major barriers to effective curriculum enactment.

Recent research also highlights uneven levels of teacher preparedness across regions. A study by Rahmadayanti and Hartoyo (2022) revealed that elementary teachers often struggle with preparing teaching modules and integrating project-based learning, particularly in schools with limited resources. Furthermore, Fitriani et al. (2023) reported that teachers' perceptions of curriculum implementation are strongly influenced by access to training, institutional support, and availability of learning materials.

In addition, qualitative investigations have shown that although teachers generally support the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum, many experience challenges related to workload, administrative demands, and the shift from traditional teaching approaches (Sari & Wahyudi, 2023). These findings suggest that positive attitudes alone are insufficient without continuous mentoring and systemic support.

In the context of primary schools in Ciamis, variations in school infrastructure, teacher training opportunities, and community support may shape diverse experiences in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Some teachers may benefit from the increased instructional autonomy, while others may face constraints in adapting new pedagogical approaches. Therefore, understanding teachers' perceptions in this local setting is essential for identifying both enabling factors and practical obstacles.

Given the pivotal role of teachers in curriculum reform, this qualitative study aims to explore primary school teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Ciamis. By examining their experiences, challenges, and strategies, this research seeks to provide empirical insights that may inform policymakers and educational stakeholders in improving curriculum support systems and enhancing the quality of primary education.

B. Research Questions

1. How do primary school teachers perceive the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in their teaching practices?
2. What challenges do teachers face in implementing the Independent Curriculum in primary schools in Ciamis?
3. What strategies do teachers use to adapt the Independent Curriculum to their classroom contexts?
4. How do institutional support and available resources influence teachers' perceptions of the Independent Curriculum implementation?
5. How does the Independent Curriculum affect teachers' instructional approaches and student engagement in primary classrooms?

C. Research Objectives

1. To explore primary school teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in classroom practices.
2. To identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum in primary schools in Ciamis.
3. To examine the strategies used by teachers to adapt the Independent Curriculum to their local classroom contexts.
4. To analyze how institutional support and available resources influence teachers' perceptions of the Independent Curriculum implementation.
5. To investigate the impact of the Independent Curriculum on teachers' instructional approaches and student engagement in primary education

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Independent Curriculum in Primary Education

The Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) represents a major reform in Indonesia's primary education system, emphasizing student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and competency development. This curriculum grants teachers greater autonomy to design learning activities aligned with students' needs and local contexts, aiming to strengthen foundational skills such as literacy, numeracy, and character education.

Anggraena et al. (2022) explain that the Independent Curriculum focuses on meaningful learning by reducing administrative rigidity and encouraging flexible instructional planning. Core elements include project-based learning and formative assessment, which support continuous monitoring of student progress. These components are intended to foster critical thinking and creativity from an early age.

However, early implementation studies reveal mixed outcomes. Suryaman (2022) found that although teachers welcomed the flexibility offered by the curriculum, many continued using traditional teaching methods due to limited understanding of differentiated learning. Similarly, Rahmadayanti and Hartoyo (2022) reported that elementary teachers perceived the curriculum positively but struggled with preparing teaching modules and conducting authentic assessments.

Teacher readiness and institutional support also play significant roles in implementation success. Fitriani et al. (2023) demonstrated that teachers who

participated in regular professional development showed higher confidence in applying project-based learning, while those with limited training experienced uncertainty and increased workload.

Overall, the literature suggests that the Independent Curriculum has strong potential to enhance learning quality in primary schools. Nevertheless, its effectiveness largely depends on teachers' pedagogical competence, access to professional development, and school support systems. These factors are particularly relevant in regional contexts such as Ciamis, where educational resources and training opportunities may vary across schools

B. Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Implementation

Teachers' perceptions are a key determinant of successful curriculum implementation, as they influence instructional decisions and classroom practices. Perception encompasses teachers' beliefs, attitudes, and interpretations of educational reforms, including their readiness to adopt new pedagogical approaches.

Suryaman (2022) found that teachers who viewed the Independent Curriculum as an opportunity for professional growth were more inclined to implement student-centered strategies. Conversely, teachers who perceived it as an administrative burden tended to maintain conventional teaching methods. This indicates that perception directly affects curriculum enactment.

Rahmadayanti and Hartoyo (2022) revealed that elementary teachers generally held positive attitudes toward the flexibility of the Independent Curriculum. However, many expressed uncertainty about differentiated instruction and assessment practices, resulting in partial implementation. Fitriani et al. (2023) further reported that access to training and mentoring significantly shaped teachers' perceptions, with supported teachers showing greater confidence and adaptability.

Workload and organizational factors also influence teacher perceptions. Sari and Wahyudi (2023) noted that increased administrative demands and the need to develop new teaching materials often reduced teacher motivation during curriculum transition. Anggraena et al. (2022) emphasized that teachers' sense of autonomy and clarity of policy guidance contribute to positive perceptions, while inconsistent communication may lead to resistance.

In regional settings such as Ciamis, disparities in infrastructure and professional learning opportunities may further affect teachers' experiences. Therefore, examining teachers' perceptions provides critical insight into both the opportunities and challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum at the primary school level.

C. Challenges in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

Despite its progressive framework, the Independent Curriculum presents various challenges for primary school teachers. One of the most frequently reported issues is limited understanding of curriculum concepts, particularly differentiated learning and authentic assessment. Rahmadayanti and Hartoyo (2022) found that many teachers struggled to translate curriculum guidelines into concrete classroom practices, resulting in inconsistent implementation.

Administrative workload is another major concern. Sari and Wahyudi

(2023) reported that teachers perceived an increase in documentation requirements, including lesson planning and assessment reporting, which reduced time for instructional preparation. This situation often leads teachers to prioritize administrative compliance over pedagogical innovation.

Infrastructure and resource disparities further complicate implementation. Fitriani et al. (2023) highlighted that schools with limited access to learning materials and technology faced greater difficulties in conducting project-based learning. Teachers in such settings often relied on conventional teaching methods due to insufficient support.

Professional development also remains uneven across regions. Suryaman (2022) noted that while some teachers benefited from structured training programs, others received minimal guidance, affecting their confidence and readiness. These challenges are particularly evident in regional contexts such as Ciamis, where access to continuous mentoring may vary.

Overall, existing studies indicate that curriculum implementation is influenced not only by individual teacher competence but also by systemic factors, including workload, infrastructure, and institutional support. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure that the Independent Curriculum achieves its intended educational outcomes.

D. Teacher Strategies and Institutional Support

To overcome implementation barriers, teachers employ various adaptive strategies, including collaborative planning, peer discussions, and self-directed professional learning. Rahmadayanti and Hartoyo (2022) observed that teacher learning communities played a vital role in enhancing understanding of curriculum concepts and sharing practical teaching approaches.

Fitriani et al. (2023) found that teachers who actively engaged in professional development programs demonstrated greater confidence in applying differentiated instruction and project-based learning. Informal peer mentoring also emerged as an effective strategy for addressing classroom challenges, particularly in schools with limited external training opportunities.

Institutional support significantly influences teachers' ability to implement the Independent Curriculum. Sari and Wahyudi (2023) emphasized the importance of school leadership in facilitating curriculum transition by providing time for collaborative planning and reducing administrative pressure. Supportive leadership fosters a positive school climate, encouraging teachers to experiment with innovative instructional practices.

Anggraena et al. (2022) further argued that access to teaching resources and clear policy guidance strengthens teacher autonomy and professional identity. Teachers who feel empowered by their institutions are more likely to develop positive perceptions of curriculum reform.

In regional settings such as Ciamis, institutional support becomes increasingly important due to varying levels of infrastructure and training availability. These findings highlight that successful curriculum implementation requires a combination of teacher initiative and systemic support, emphasizing collaboration between educators, school leaders, and educational authorities.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A. Research Types

This study employs a qualitative research design, specifically a descriptive qualitative approach, to explore teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in primary schools. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study because it allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and interpretations of curriculum practices within their real educational contexts (Ramdhan, 2021).

The focus of this research is not to measure variables statistically, but to capture rich, detailed insights into how teachers perceive, experience, and respond to the Independent Curriculum. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews and supported by classroom observations and document analysis, enabling triangulation to enhance data credibility. This approach facilitates a comprehensive exploration of challenges, strategies, and institutional influences related to curriculum implementation.

B. Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of all primary school teachers implementing the Independent Curriculum in Ciamis.

The sample is selected using purposive sampling, focusing on teachers who meet the following criteria:

1. Actively teaching in primary schools implementing the Independent Curriculum.
2. Having at least one year of experience applying the curriculum.
3. Willing to participate in interviews and provide relevant information.

Approximately 6–10 teachers are involved as research participants to ensure depth of data while maintaining manageability for qualitative analysis. This sampling technique allows the researcher to obtain information-rich cases that reflect diverse teaching experiences and school conditions.

C. Location and Subject

The research is conducted in selected primary schools in Ciamis, West Java, Indonesia. This location is chosen due to the variation in school characteristics, including differences in infrastructure, access to professional development, and institutional support, which provide a meaningful context for examining curriculum implementation.

The subjects of this study are primary school teachers who are directly involved in implementing the Independent Curriculum in their classrooms. Teachers serve as key informants because they play a central role in translating curriculum policy into instructional practice. Their perspectives are essential for understanding both the practical challenges and adaptive strategies associated with curriculum reform at the primary education level.

IV. RESEARCH RESULT

A. Teachers' Perceptions of the Independent Curriculum Implementation

The findings indicate that most primary school teachers hold generally positive perceptions toward the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Participants viewed the curriculum as a progressive reform that provides flexibility in instructional planning and encourages student-centered learning. Teachers reported that the curriculum allowed them to adjust learning activities based on students' abilities and interests, which they believed increased student engagement.

However, positive perceptions were often accompanied by uncertainty in practice. While teachers understood the overall objectives of the curriculum, many admitted that they were still in the process of adapting to new pedagogical approaches, particularly differentiated instruction and formative assessment. Several participants described their implementation as "gradual" or "partial," indicating that they had not yet fully integrated all curriculum components.

Teachers also emphasized that their perceptions evolved over time. Initial confusion gradually shifted toward acceptance as they gained more experience and participated in professional discussions. This suggests that perception is dynamic and influenced by ongoing practice and learning opportunities.

B. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

Multiple challenges emerged from the interviews. The most frequently reported issue was limited understanding of differentiated instruction and authentic assessment. Teachers expressed difficulty in identifying students' individual learning needs and designing appropriate instructional adaptations.

Administrative workload was another major concern. Participants reported spending substantial time on lesson documentation, assessment records, and reporting requirements. These administrative demands often reduced time available for lesson preparation and reflection, leading some teachers to rely on familiar teaching methods.

In addition, disparities in infrastructure and learning resources affected implementation. Teachers in schools with limited access to teaching materials and technology found it difficult to conduct project-based learning effectively. These challenges were particularly evident in regional contexts such as Ciamis, where access to continuous training and educational resources varies across schools.

C. Teacher Strategies in Adapting the Independent Curriculum

To cope with implementation challenges, teachers employed various adaptive strategies. Peer collaboration emerged as the most common approach, with teachers engaging in informal discussions, joint lesson planning, and experience sharing. These collaborative activities helped teachers clarify curriculum concepts and develop practical classroom strategies.

Self-directed learning also played an important role. Several participants reported searching for teaching references online, joining educator forums, and reviewing sample lesson modules to improve their understanding. Teachers emphasized that learning from colleagues and external resources helped them gain confidence in applying new instructional methods.

Some teachers also experimented gradually with project-based learning and differentiated instruction, starting with small-scale activities before

expanding implementation. This incremental approach allowed them to adjust teaching practices while managing workload demands.

D. Impact of the Independent Curriculum on Teaching Practices and Student Engagement

Teachers reported noticeable changes in their instructional approaches following the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. These changes included increased use of group-based learning, project-oriented activities, and formative feedback strategies. Teachers indicated that such approaches encouraged greater student interaction and provided more opportunities to assess learning progress continuously. Many participants observed improved student participation, particularly when lessons were intentionally designed to accommodate diverse learning styles and individual learning needs. Students appeared more engaged during collaborative tasks and showed increased motivation when learning activities were connected to real-life contexts.

However, participants also emphasized that these improvements were not evenly distributed across classrooms. Student engagement varied significantly depending on teachers' confidence in applying differentiated instruction and their ability to design inclusive learning experiences. Teachers who possessed stronger pedagogical understanding and had access to professional development demonstrated more effective classroom management and higher levels of student involvement. In contrast, teachers who were still adapting to the curriculum framework often relied on conventional teaching practices, resulting in limited instructional change and lower student participation.

The availability of supporting resources also played a crucial role in shaping classroom dynamics. Teachers working in schools with adequate learning materials and technological support were better able to implement project-based learning and interactive activities. Conversely, limited infrastructure constrained instructional innovation, forcing some teachers to simplify curriculum implementation. These challenges were particularly evident in regional contexts such as Ciamis, where disparities in school resources influenced teaching quality.

Overall, the findings suggest that the Independent Curriculum has initiated positive shifts in teaching practices and student engagement. Nevertheless, its impact remains uneven due to differences in teacher readiness, institutional support, and resource availability. While the curriculum has laid the foundation for more student-centered learning, its full potential has yet to be realized. Sustained professional development, equitable resource distribution, and continuous mentoring are essential to ensure that instructional transformation occurs consistently across classrooms rather than remaining isolated to well-supported settings.

V. CLOSURE

A. Conclusion

1. Teachers generally demonstrated positive perceptions toward the Independent Curriculum, viewing it as a progressive reform that promotes instructional flexibility, student-centered learning, and responsiveness to diverse student needs.
2. Despite this positive outlook, many teachers experienced difficulties in fully implementing key curriculum components, particularly differentiated

instruction and authentic assessment. These limitations resulted in partial curriculum enactment rather than comprehensive pedagogical transformation.

3. Administrative workload emerged as a major barrier, reducing teachers' time for lesson preparation, reflection, and creative instructional planning. This condition often led teachers to rely on conventional teaching methods.
4. Institutional support significantly influenced teachers' confidence and implementation quality. Teachers who received continuous professional development, mentoring, and leadership support demonstrated higher adaptability and instructional innovation.
5. Disparities in resources and training opportunities were evident, especially in regional contexts such as Ciamis, contributing to varied implementation experiences among schools.
6. Teacher collaboration played a vital role in addressing implementation challenges. Peer discussions, joint lesson planning, and informal mentoring supported professional learning and curriculum understanding.
7. Changes in instructional practices were observed, including increased use of project-based learning and formative feedback, which positively affected student engagement. However, these improvements were not consistent across classrooms due to differences in teacher readiness and institutional support.
8. Overall, the study concludes that while teachers largely embrace the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum, effective and sustainable implementation requires systemic support, reduced administrative burden, equitable access to professional development, and strong school leadership.
9. Without these supporting structures, curriculum reform risks remaining procedural rather than achieving meaningful instructional transformation.

B. Suggestion

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Strengthen Continuous Professional Development** : Educational authorities should provide regular, practice-oriented training focusing on differentiated instruction, authentic assessment, and project-based learning.
2. **Reduce Administrative Burden** : Schools should streamline documentation requirements to allow teachers greater focus on instructional planning and student learning.
3. **Enhance Institutional Support** : School leaders should facilitate collaborative learning communities and provide mentoring to support teachers during curriculum transition.
4. **Improve Resource Accessibility** : Equitable distribution of learning materials and technology is essential, particularly in regional areas.
5. **Encourage Teacher Collaboration** : Structured peer-sharing forums should be established to promote reflective practice and knowledge exchange.

These measures are expected to support more effective and sustainable implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the primary education level.

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