

Implementation of an Independent Learning Curriculum to Improve Non-Academic Achievement of Students in SD Plus Latansa Demak

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum on improving students' non-academic achievement at SD Plus Latansa Demak. The Merdeka Curriculum is the result of adaptation to learning needs in the digital era, by giving students the freedom to develop their potential outside of academics. In this study, the author uses a qualitative approach to explore how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can improve students' non-academic achievement through organized and interest- and talent-based activities. The results of this study indicate that the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum has great potential in optimizing students' non-academic achievements, with support from more flexible curriculum management, technology-based learning, and intensive assistance to teachers. With the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, students can be freer to explore their interests and talents outside the classroom, which can help them develop their previously untapped potential. Through organized and interest- and talent-based activities, students can feel more motivated and excited about learning, so that their non-academic achievements can also improve significantly.

Keywords : Merdeka curriculum, non-academic achievement, basic education, SD Plus Latansa Demak.

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1. Introduction

Education is the main foundation in shaping the quality of human resources (HR) (Rezki & Teguh, 2023). One of the determining factors for the success of education is the curriculum applied in the teaching and learning process. The curriculum in Indonesia is undergoing rapid changes, one of which is the Merdeka Curriculum introduced in 2021. This curriculum aims to provide freedom to teachers and students in organizing learning activities, both in academic and non-academic aspects. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic which requires digital-based learning, this more flexible curriculum is very relevant to be implemented, especially in developing students' non-academic achievements. The Merdeka curriculum also provides greater space for teachers to create more interesting and innovative learning methods (Marpaung, 2024). This is expected to increase students' interest in learning and optimize their potential in various fields. In addition, with a more flexible curriculum, it is also expected to reduce the pressure felt by teachers and students in the teaching and learning process. Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to make a positive contribution in creating a more creative, independent, and accomplished generation. With the Merdeka Curriculum, it is hoped that students can be more involved in the learning process and feel more motivated to learn. Teachers are also expected to better develop students' talents and interests through a more personalized individual approach. In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum is also expected to create a more pleasant and interactive learning atmosphere for students, so that the teaching and learning process becomes more effective and efficient (Kustiana & Firdaus, 2023). All of this is expected to create a more inclusive and highly competitive educational environment to



produce a superior and quality next generation. In the Merdeka Curriculum, a student who has talent in the arts can be given the opportunity to develop his creativity through art projects that match his interests. Teachers can also provide individualized support and guidance so that students are more motivated and excel in their fields of interest. However, in this case, students who are gifted in mathematics may not get the same opportunity to develop their potential because the curriculum focuses only on the arts. This can lead to injustice and imbalance in the development of students' potential based on their respective interests and talents. Therefore, it is important for schools to have an inclusive approach and provide space for students to explore their various interests and talents (Lucky et al., 2023). Thus, every student has an equal opportunity to develop according to their potential. By providing fair and equitable opportunities, schools can create a learning environment that supports students' holistic and sustainable growth. This will help create a generation that has diverse skills and knowledge, ready to face the challenges of the future. At SD Plus Latansa Demak, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum provides space for students to develop abilities outside of academic aspects, such as sports, arts, and personality. This study aims to evaluate how the implementation of the curriculum can improve students' non-academic achievements, and identify the challenges and opportunities that exist.

Curriculum refers to the plans and arrangements used to achieve specific educational goals. According to (Iman, n.d.), the curriculum serves as a guideline for teachers in carrying out the learning process. The curriculum also serves to guide students in learning according to their level and needs. A curriculum is a learning plan that includes implementation, evaluation, and development. There are several curriculum development models such as administrative models, managerial models, demonstration models, and grass roots models. These models involve education experts, curriculum experts, subject matter experts, and figures from the world of work and companies (Diah & Asmar, 2022). A good curriculum must pay attention to various aspects and ensure that learning objectives can be achieved effectively. By involving various related parties, the curriculum can continue to be developed and adjusted to the development of the times and the needs of the community. Thus, the curriculum can be an effective tool in creating a generation that is ready to face future challenges. (Muhammad et al., 2023)

The Independent Curriculum is a curriculum that gives students the freedom to choose material that suits their interests and abilities. According to (Andree et al., 2024), this curriculum also provides flexibility for educators in designing more relevant and creative learning. "The Independent Curriculum is a breakthrough that helps teachers and principals in changing the learning process to be relevant, in-depth, and fun. Minister of Education Nadiem Anwar Makarim has launched the independent curriculum with the Independent Teaching Platform as the 15th episode. Many teachers and more than 140 thousand education units have chosen and implemented the independent curriculum in the 2022/2023 school year." (Mumayzizah & Aaron, 2023)(Musnar & Mohammad, 2023). The Independent Curriculum has been proven to provide great benefits to the world of education in Indonesia. With flexibility in designing lessons, teachers can more easily adjust subject matter to students' needs and interests. This of course makes the learning process more interesting and effective, thus creating a more dynamic and productive learning environment. The success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in schools is expected to continue to improve the quality of education in the country. One of the goals is to develop students' potential to the maximum, not only in the academic field, but also in the non-academic field. For example, with the Independent Curriculum, students can choose subjects that suit their interests such as art or sports, so that they can develop holistically. In addition, teachers can be more flexible in creating innovative and interesting learning methods according to the needs of students so that the teaching and learning process becomes more effective. However, there are cases where students choose subjects that do not match their interests simply because of pressure from parents or friends. This can hinder the holistic development of students because they are unable to express themselves according to their true interests and talents. Therefore, it is important for parents and teachers to support and direct students in exploring their interests and talents more freely.

By giving students the freedom to choose subjects according to their interests, it is hoped that they can grow and develop optimally. The support provided can also help students to be more confident and have high motivation in the learning process. Thus, students can reach their maximum potential and achieve success in the future.

Non-academic achievement includes student achievement in various fields, such as sports, the arts, leadership, and other extracurricular activities. According to Pratiwi (2020), non-academic achievement is very important in shaping students' character and can make a positive contribution to their future development. "Non-academic achievements are obtained from students' mastery in showing talents and interests, such as participation in scientific paper competitions, sports, art, and others." (Ahmad, n.d.) Non-academic achievement can also help students develop social skills, teamwork, and confidence. By participating in a variety of activities outside of class hours, students can learn to manage their time, face challenges, and broaden their horizons. Thus, non-academic achievement not only provides valuable experience during the school period, but also helps students become resilient individuals and are prepared for various challenges in the future. (Ramadhani, n.d.)

This study aims to analyze the effect of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum on the improvement of non-academic achievement of students at SD Plus Latansa Demak. The Independent Curriculum is an educational policy that provides flexibility for schools in developing learning that is more flexible, innovative, and adapts to the needs and potential of students. In the context of SD Plus Latansa Demak, the implementation of this curriculum includes various aspects, such as more interactive learning methods, the implementation of project-based learning, and the strengthening of 21st century character and skills. This research will identify how the Independent Curriculum is applied in the school, both in classroom teaching and learning activities and in extracurricular programs that support the development of students' interests and talents. In addition, this study also aims to measure the extent to which the implementation of this curriculum can optimize students' non-academic achievements, such as in the fields of art, sports, leadership, and social and emotional skills. With the freedom to develop a more adaptive curriculum, it is hoped that students can develop more holistically, not only in academic aspects but also in various non-academic competencies that are important for their future lives. The Independent Curriculum also provides opportunities for teachers to be more creative in developing learning strategies that are in accordance with student characteristics, so that they can create a more fun and meaningful learning environment. The results of this research are expected to provide broader insights for schools, educators, and policy makers in improving the quality of education as a whole. By understanding the impact of the Independent Curriculum on students' non-academic achievement, schools can design more effective policies and programs to support the optimal development of students' potential.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to deeply explore the application of the Independent Curriculum and its impact on students' non-academic achievement. This method was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the phenomenon holistically and contextually, as well as get a more comprehensive picture of how the Independent Curriculum is implemented at SD Plus Latansa Demak. The data in this study was collected through various techniques, such as direct observation of the learning process and extracurricular activities, in-depth interviews with principals and teachers, and focus group discussions (FGD) with students to understand their experiences in participating in programs based on the Independent Curriculum. This research was conducted at SD Plus Latansa Demak by involving teachers, principals, and students who are active in extracurricular programs as research subjects. The selection of this subject aims to obtain diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of the curriculum in supporting students' non-academic development. Teachers and school principals have an important role in implementing curriculum policies, while students are the ones who directly experience the impact of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, especially in terms of talent development,

social skills, and creativity. The data collection techniques in this study include several main methods. In-depth interviews were conducted to explore the views of teachers and principals regarding the implementation strategy of the Independent Curriculum, the challenges faced, and the solutions implemented to optimize learning outcomes. Direct observation is used to see how the learning process based on the Independent Curriculum runs in the classroom and how extracurricular activities are developed to support students' non-academic achievements. In addition, focus group discussions (FGDs) are conducted with students to understand how they feel the benefits of this curriculum, including in the aspects of social skills, leadership, and confidence.

After the data is collected, the analysis process is carried out with a thematic approach. The researcher grouped the data based on the main themes that emerged, such as the effectiveness of learning methods, the role of teachers in guiding students, and the impact of the curriculum on improving non-academic achievement. Through this analysis, it is hoped that a deeper understanding of the extent to which the Independent Curriculum can support the overall development of students and provide recommendations that are useful for schools in optimizing the implementation of this curriculum.

3. Results and Discussion

Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SD Plus Latansa Demak

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SD Plus Latansa Demak is going well, although there are challenges related to teachers' understanding of this new curriculum. Through intense training and mentoring, teachers at these schools can design more creative and innovative learning. Students are given the freedom to explore their interests and talents in various fields, such as sports, arts, and leadership. This led to an increase in student motivation and participation in school activities, as well as a reduction in the attendance rate at SD Plus Latansa. In addition, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has also had a positive impact on students' non-academic achievements, such as communication skills, social skills, and self-confidence. With a more fun and relevant learning approach to daily life, students become more active and enthusiastic in learning (Halimatus, 2025). In addition, students are also trained to become independent individuals and have the ability to think critically and creatively in facing various challenges in the future. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has an important role in shaping the young generation who are ready to compete in the era of globalization and technology. This curriculum not only emphasizes academic aspects, but also develops soft skills such as creativity, communication, teamwork, and critical and adaptive thinking skills. With these skills, students are expected to become resilient individuals and be able to face changes and challenges in various fields (Amrullah, J. D. R., 2024)

More than that, character formation and independence in learning will make a positive contribution to the development of the nation. A generation that has high competence and a strong mentality will be able to bring innovation and actively participate in the progress of the country. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum is expected to be able to provide optimal results for the Indonesian education world by creating a learning system that is more flexible, inclusive, and oriented to future needs. This curriculum is designed to adapt learning to students' potential and interests, so that they can develop skills that are relevant to the times (Saputra, A. M. et. al. 2023)

In addition, a more project-based and exploratory approach in the Independent Curriculum encourages students to think critically, creatively, and be able to adapt to technological changes and global dynamics. Thus, the resulting learning ecosystem not only focuses on academics, but also on strengthening character and soft skills needed in the world of work and social life (Philip, P. W. K. 2022). Through consistent implementation and support from various parties, the Independent Curriculum has the potential to improve the quality of Indonesian education, making it more competitive and competitive at the international level.

Impact on Non-Academic Achievement

Along with the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, there has been a significant increase in student non-academic achievement. Extracurricular programs that were previously given little attention are now more structured and in-depth. Students show greater interest in participating in extracurricular activities, and many have achieved achievements at the district to provincial levels in the fields of religion, sports and the arts. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has had a positive impact on students' non-academic achievements. (Alfisyah, M. R. M. 2024). With the freedom for schools to design more targeted extracurricular programs, students' interest in extracurricular activities outside of academia is increasing. Fields such as religion, sports, and the arts are now getting more attention, encouraging students to develop their talents optimally. As a result, many students managed to make achievements from the district to the provincial level, showing that learning not only focuses on academic aspects, but also character and skill development. This increase in non-academic achievement also has a positive impact on students in terms of developing soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, and creativity. With better support for extracurricular programs, students also have greater opportunities to explore their interests and talents outside of academia (Midiaty, M., Mulawarman, W. G., & Masruhim, M. A. 2024). This not only boosts students' confidence, but also provides valuable experience that can help them face future challenges.

In addition, participation in extracurricular activities can also help students build a wide social network. Through interaction with peers and mentors, students can learn to communicate well, develop interpersonal skills, and broaden their horizons about the world around them. Thus, extracurricular programs not only provide opportunities to improve non-academic achievements, but also shape students' character and personality holistically (Atoullah, N. W., & Hanif, M. 2025). With the right support, extracurricular programs can be an effective vehicle in shaping the young generation who are ready to face future challenges. Through active participation in extracurricular activities, students can also develop leadership skills, learn to work in teams, and manage time efficiently. In addition, these programs also provide opportunities for students to explore their interests and talents outside of academic subjects, thus helping them find their passion and purpose in life. Thus, extracurricular programs are not only a place to play and have fun, but also a means to prepare the younger generation to become resilient and globally competitive individuals (Agustin, A. H. A., Suryana, S., & Saprialman, S. 2024).

Challenges in Implementation

Although the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum shows positive results, there are several challenges faced in its implementation. One of them is the readiness of educators to adjust teaching methods with a more flexible and student-centered approach. Not all teachers have the understanding and skills to adapt this curriculum effectively. In addition, the limited facilities and infrastructure in some schools are also an obstacle, especially in supporting project-based and exploratory learning that is the hallmark of the Independent Curriculum (Aisyah, N., & Faelasup, F. 2024). The disparity of facilities between schools in urban and rural areas often hinders equality in the implementation of this curriculum. Another challenge is the readiness of students to face a more independent learning system. Not all students are familiar with an approach that demands active involvement in the learning process, so further guidance is needed to ensure they can adapt well (Sari, I., & Sassi, K. 2024).

However, with the right support from the government, schools, and the community, these challenges can be overcome gradually in order to create a more dynamic and effective learning environment. One of them is the lack of a deep understanding of this new curriculum among some teachers, which results in some uncertainty in classroom implementation. In addition, the

limitations of learning facilities and means, such as limited internet access, are obstacles in optimizing technology-based learning (Wang, C., et al. 2023).

4. Conclusions

Although the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum shows positive results, there are several challenges faced in its implementation. One of them is the readiness of educators to adjust teaching methods with a more flexible and student-centered approach. Not all teachers have the understanding and skills to adapt this curriculum effectively. In addition, the limited facilities and infrastructure in some schools are also an obstacle, especially in supporting project-based and exploratory learning that is the hallmark of the Independent Curriculum (Aisyah, N., & Faelasup, F. 2024). The disparity of facilities between schools in urban and rural areas often hinders equality in the implementation of this curriculum. Another challenge is the readiness of students to face a more independent learning system. Not all students are familiar with an approach that demands active involvement in the learning process, so further guidance is needed to ensure they can adapt well (Sari, I., & Sassi, K. 2024). However, with the right support from the government, schools, and the community, these challenges can be overcome gradually in order to create a more dynamic and effective learning environment. One of them is the lack of a deep understanding of this new curriculum among some teachers, which results in some uncertainty in classroom implementation. In addition, the limitations of learning facilities and means, such as limited internet access, are obstacles in optimizing technology-based learning (Wang, C., et al. 2023).

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