


The Influence of the Independent Curriculum on the Diverse Character of Junior High School Students 23 Pekanbaru

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the effect of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum on the development of diverse character among students at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru. The Independent Curriculum emphasizes project-based learning that focuses on strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, one of which is the value of global diversity. The research method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques through observation and interviews with teachers and students. This study was conducted from September to November. The results show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has a positive impact on attitudes of tolerance, cooperation, and mutual respect for differences among students. Through project activities and collaboration, students become more open to cultural diversity and opinions. In conclusion, the Independent Curriculum plays an important role in developing students' diverse character, so it needs to be continuously developed in the school environment.

Keywords: *Independent Curriculum, Character, Diversity, Junior High School Students*

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INTRODUCTION

The development of human thinking about the meaning and meaning of education continues to change over time. These changes are driven by various factors, both in the form of new findings, changes in the education system, theoretical developments by experts, and technological advances. The process of learning and education is ongoing, so views on the meaning of education can differ between individuals, countries, times and places. Nevertheless, existing theories and findings remain relevant as a reference as long as there is nothing new.

In a simple sense, education is often interpreted as an effort by human beings to develop their personalities in accordance with the values in society and culture. In its development, the term education or paedagogic means guidance or help given deliberately by adults to become adults. Furthermore, education is defined as the effort of adult human beings to guide children towards maturity in a responsible manner. This definition also reflects the general goal of education, which is to develop the individual's potential to achieve a higher level of life mentally and physically, as listed in several sources. (Martinus Jan Langeveld 1946).

According to the Father of Indonesian Education, Ki Hajar Dewantara (1889-1959), it is defined that education is a process that guides all the forces of nature that exist in students. The goal is for them as human beings and as members of society to achieve the highest safety and happiness. Meanwhile, according to Aristotle (384-322), education is defined as the activity of preparing the intellect for teaching.

According to Hilda Taba (1962), the Curriculum is a learning design that is prepared by considering various things about the learning process and individual development. 1 So, in the preparation of the curriculum, it also considers the learning process and is seen from the human being itself, namely, teachers and students.

In Indonesia, including in Riau, the idea of education also continues to develop. The government, educational institutions, and the community continue to strive to improve the quality of education to suit local and global needs. The educational curriculum continues to be updated, learning methods are innovated, and technology is used to improve access and quality of education, one of these changes occurs in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Education in Indonesia is currently undergoing major changes through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum gives teachers and students the freedom to adapt the learning process to their respective needs and potentials. One of the main goals of the Independent Curriculum is to form a Pancasila Student Profile, which includes six main dimensions, namely faith and fear of God Almighty, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity.

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of the Independent Curriculum on the diverse character of SMP Negeri 23 Pekanbaru students. The results of this research are expected to provide an overview for schools and teachers in developing learning strategies that support the formation of tolerant character, respect for differences, and the spirit of unity in the school environment.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach, which is a method used to describe and analyze a phenomenon based on reality in the field without using statistical calculations.

Research Subject

The subjects of this study are teachers and grade IX students at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru who have implemented the Independent Curriculum for two school years.

Research Location and Time

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 23 Pekanbaru in the odd semester of the 2025/2026 school year, starting from early September 2025 to mid-November 2025.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was carried out through two main methods: observation to observe firsthand how project-based learning is implemented in the classroom, and interviews with teachers and students to understand their views and experiences regarding the application of diversity values.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis in this study was carried out through three comprehensive stages to ensure accurate and relevant results. First, data reduction is carried out by selecting and simplifying data that is considered important and in accordance with the focus of the research, so that irrelevant information can be eliminated. Second, the presentation of data is carried out by compiling the findings in the form of a descriptive narrative, which aims to facilitate the understanding and interpretation of the data. Finally, conclusions are drawn by formulating the results of a thorough analysis to answer the research objectives that have been formulated previously, so as to produce substantive and meaningful answers.

Through this method, the research can obtain a clear picture of the influence of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum on the formation of diverse character of students at SMP Negeri 23 Pekanbaru.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Education has a strategic role in shaping the character and quality of individuals in order to become better human beings and useful to society. The quality of education affects the increase in a person's capacity and competence in life (Yulia & Suryani, 2022). Based on Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere that allows students to develop their potential, spirituality, personality, intelligence, noble morals, and skills needed in the life of society, nation, and state (Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003, Article 1 paragraph 1). Thus, education is the main factor in shaping human beings with character and usefulness for the progress of the nation (Nurfadli et al., 2021).

Since independence, the national education curriculum has undergone several changes, starting in 1947 until the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. These dynamics reflect the government's efforts to adapt the education system to the development of the times and global challenges. The quality of education is highly dependent on the quality of teachers and their understanding of the curriculum, which functions as a guideline in the teaching and learning process and as a tool to achieve educational goals based on Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2023).

Freedom of learning is a policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. The Merdeka Curriculum is applied with the aim of training independence in students' thinking. The most important essence of freedom of thought is addressed to teachers. If teachers are not independent in teaching, of course students are also not independent in thinking. Teachers also have certain targets from the government such as accreditation, administration, and others. Of course, in this situation, students cannot actively develop in learning because only 16 Independent Curriculum Development are fixated on grades. With the existence of independent learning, students can develop their potential according to their talents and interests because students also have different abilities in absorbing knowledge conveyed by teachers.

In the research conducted on the Independent Curriculum applied at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru, it prioritizes the freedom of students so that they can develop themselves and make teachers as learning partners. Learning is also conceptualized through equal relationships between teachers and students to exchange opinions and create a more lively teaching and learning process. One of the main objectives of the Independent Curriculum learning implemented at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru is to form a Pancasila Student Profile, which includes six main dimensions, namely faith and fear of God Almighty, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity.

One of the important values emphasized by SMPN 23 Pekanbaru students in the Pancasila Student Profile is the character of global diversity. The implementation is aimed at making students respect each other's differences, work together, and live in harmony in a diversity of cultures, ethnicities, religions, and opinions. Students are also expected to develop diverse characters through project-based learning activities and collaboration between groups. Thus, the methods in learning the Independent Curriculum that are applied are in accordance with real actions in the learning process at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru. Also, students focus not only on academic knowledge, but also on the formation of positive attitudes, character and social values. However, there are still several challenges faced in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, both in the form of learning methods, inadequate facilities, and a teaching and learning process that is not conducive due to several factors.

The results of the study show that the Independent Curriculum has significant potential in increasing awareness and appreciation of diversity among SMPN 23 Pekanbaru students. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum encourages students to participate more actively

in learning, develop critical thinking skills, and respect opinions. This is supported by data collected through classroom observation and interviews with teachers and students.

Regarding the talk carried out, one of the teachers of SMPN 23 Pekanbaru said that the concept of diversity in the Independent Curriculum refers to the principle of "Bhinneka Tunggal Ika," which emphasizes unity in differences. In the context of learning, teachers apply differentiation to accommodate the differences in students' characters, uniting them in learning activities tailored to their respective characteristics. Tolerance is seen as a crucial element in diversity, considering the diversity of religions and tribes such as Javanese, Minang, Malay, and Batak at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru.

In instilling diversity values, teachers use group or discussion methods. While acknowledging challenges such as cultural differences and student character, teachers strive to facilitate the learning process so that students can internalize and apply diversity values in their daily lives. As a concrete example, the interview project between students on consumerism is designed to train communication skills, independence, and form the attitude of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika.

After the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, teachers observed positive changes in students' attitudes and behaviors. They become more concerned about learning and more open to interacting with friends from other classes, thus improving the quality of social relationships at school. However, teachers also acknowledge that there are some students with tough characters that are difficult to change completely, so it requires a more intensive approach.

The evaluation of students' understanding of diversity is carried out through tests and quizzes using the "Kahoot" application, which is considered effective in fostering students' enthusiasm for learning. The results of the evaluation showed significant differences in students' understanding and attitudes before and after the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Students become more concerned about diversity, better at social interaction, and better understand the tribes in Indonesia.

However, teachers also conveyed their hopes and challenges related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. They hope that students can understand that freedom in this curriculum is the freedom to develop talents and learn according to interests, not irresponsible freedom. In addition, teachers argue that the Independent Curriculum is not fully suitable for conditions in Indonesia because of inadequate school facilities and teacher competence that still needs to be improved. The number of students per class that is too many is also an obstacle. Therefore, teachers suggest that there be special training on how to teach using the Independent Curriculum method to increase the effectiveness of the implementation of this curriculum.

Meanwhile, according to the interviews conducted for students of SMPN 23 Pekanbaru, the Independent Curriculum requires them to be more active in the learning process. They feel that they are no longer just passive listeners, but are also required to actively ask questions, give opinions, and participate in class discussions. The curriculum also encourages students to develop creativity and be more innovative.

The students also expressed their views on the importance of mutual respect. They argue that mutual respect can prevent conflict, respect differences, help each other regardless of religious, ethnic, and racial differences, and think more of others than themselves.

Nayla Alfarofasya, a student of SMPN 23 Pekanbaru, gave a real example of the importance of diversity through group work activities. According to her, group work teaches them to unite opinions, respect other people's perspectives, and not just think about their own opinions. Other students gave an example of reading the Quran every morning as a form of tolerance for religious differences at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru. This activity teaches students to respect

opinions and not impose personal opinions, as well as foster tolerance towards religious differences without discriminating against friends.

After the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, students experience a change in attitude towards friends of different ethnicities, religions, and cultures. One student argued that, in contrast to the 2013 Curriculum which tends to foster individual creativity, the Independent Curriculum requires students to be more open to other students. They become more active in sharing experiences, understanding, and working together in groups. Arya, another student, stated that the Independent Curriculum has changed her from a quiet person to a more active person because teachers always provide opportunities to ask questions and emphasize the importance of interaction between students in the learning process.

Cita Afriza Adiguna, a grade IX student, explained the action taken when she saw a friend who was still discriminating against other friends. He will tell or advise that such actions are not allowed because they may cause disputes and create an uncomfortable classroom atmosphere. Cita also hopes that students will be more diligent in group work so that they can develop a cooperative attitude, accept the strengths and weaknesses of others, and share experiences. He also hopes that teachers will be more sensitive to the condition of students who find it difficult to socialize and prepare creative learning methods so that students are more enthusiastic and enthusiastic in learning.

However, students also submitted several notes related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Arya Madani argues that this curriculum requires students to think critically, and teachers have high hopes for students to study more actively at home. However, he also criticized teachers who were too quick to pursue the material so that students' understanding was immature. Ahmad Saidi added that there are teachers who are less creative in providing learning methods, so that students become lazy and indifferent to learning. He also regretted that there were teachers who did not understand the condition of lazy students and allowed students to study on their own without supervision.

Overall, the students of SMPN 23 Pekanbaru appreciated the Independent Curriculum because it encouraged them to be more active, creative, and tolerant. However, they also highlight the importance of the role of teachers in facilitating effective learning and paying attention to the individual needs of students.

The results of interviews with teachers and students consistently show that the Independent Curriculum has a positive influence on the formation of diverse character of students at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru. The Merdeka curriculum encourages students to appreciate differences more, interact positively with other students from various backgrounds, and develop tolerance and empathy. However, the implementation of this curriculum also faces various challenges, such as limited resources, teacher competencies that need to be improved, and diverse student characteristics. To overcome these challenges, collaborative efforts are needed from schools, teachers, students, and the government in providing adequate resources, improving teacher competence through continuous training, and developing learning strategies that are more personalized and responsive to individual student needs. Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented more effectively and make a greater contribution to shaping Indonesia's young generation who are characterful, tolerant, and ready to face global challenges.

This has important implications for the development and implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the future. Greater investment in teacher resources and professional development is needed to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to benefit from the Independent Curriculum. In addition, a student-centered learning approach, which takes into account the diversity of students' needs and learning styles, needs to be prioritized.

CONCLUSION

The Independent Curriculum basically provides a great opportunity to improve the quality of learning while growing student character, especially in terms of respecting diversity. Its implementation at SMPN 23 Pekanbaru shows that students have become more active, more open, and more able to work together and appreciate differences. Teachers also act as learning partners so that the classroom atmosphere is livelier and encourages students to think independently and creatively. However, the success of this curriculum is greatly influenced by the support of facilities, the number of students, and the readiness of teachers. Challenges such as limited facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of training for teachers are still obstacles in implementation in the field. Therefore, strengthening resources, improving teacher competence, and implementing truly student-centered learning are the keys for the Independent Curriculum to be able to achieve its goals. If these obstacles can be overcome, the Independent Curriculum has great potential to grow a generation that is not only intelligent, but also has character, tolerance, and is able to live in diversity.

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