



Challenges and Strategies of Senior High School Principals in Facing Curriculum Transition

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to identify the main challenges faced by principals in managing the curriculum transition in senior high schools and the strategies implemented to overcome these obstacles. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires significant adaptation for principals and educators, especially in terms of understanding and implementing changes that include more independent and project-based learning management. The research method used is a qualitative approach with a case study method, where data is collected through in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, and school supervisors. Purposive sampling technique was applied to select informants who have direct experience in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Data analysis was carried out thematically with a source triangulation approach to increase the validity of the research results. The findings of this study indicate that the main challenges lie in teacher understanding and infrastructure readiness, while the strategies implemented include intensive training and clear division of roles between educators. Evaluations and recommendations from school supervisors also provide important contributions in assessing the success of curriculum implementation. The contribution of these findings is expected to be a reference for education policies in optimizing curriculum transition in Indonesia.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation in national development, where the curriculum is an important element that determines the direction of the learning process (Phumphongkhochasorn et al., 2021; Qorib, 2024). Periodic curriculum changes in Indonesia, especially in recent years, reflect the dynamics in the education system that is trying to keep up with the times (Khotimah et al., 2024; Sanjani, 2024; Winoto, 2022). One of the major changes that has occurred is the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes a more flexible, project-based approach and gives teachers the freedom to develop learning methods that suit students' needs (Akrim et al., 2022; Fahmi et al., 2024;

Sukadari & Huda, 2021). The curriculum is designed to improve the quality of education by providing more space for teacher and student creativity (Ataman et al., 2024; Setiawan et al., 2023). However, this change is not free from the challenges faced by schools, especially in terms of infrastructure readiness, teacher understanding, and adequate training.

The phenomenon of curriculum changes in several schools shows significant challenges in the transition from the old curriculum to the Independent Curriculum (Rosser, 2023; Tathahira et al., 2024; Zaini & Fahmi, 2023). Although schools have made various efforts to support the implementation of the new curriculum, such as training for teachers and providing relevant teaching materials, many teachers still find it difficult to adapt to the new, more flexible and project-based approach (Chiu et al., 2021; Faiz et al., 2023; Vinnervik, 2022). In addition, the limited digital facilities that support technology-based learning are another obstacle (Hizqiyah et al., 2022; Purwanto & Wafa, 2023). Most schools in Jambi, including SMAN Titian Teras, are not fully equipped with adequate facilities, such as stable internet access and sufficient digital devices. This makes the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum more difficult to implement optimally. Parents' and community understanding of curriculum changes is also still limited, which requires a more intensive socialization approach to support this transition.

The success of curriculum changes is highly dependent on the role of school principals who can lead these changes effectively. Yeti (2024) emphasized the importance of collaboration between principals, teachers, and the education community to create sustainable change. A successful education system in implementing curriculum changes is characterized by adaptive school leadership and ongoing policy support (Arifin, 2024; Mirata et al., 2022; Suryaningsih & Aisyah, 2024). Daga et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of building a culture of innovation in schools through collaboration and continuous learning. Teacher readiness to utilize educational technology also plays an important role in the success of project-based curricula such as the Merdeka Curriculum (Gurion, 2024; Maisuroh & Aisyah, 2024; Sholeh et al., 2024). However, the success of curriculum implementation is often hampered by the lack of adequate training and the inability of teachers to adapt to new approaches.

Previous studies have highlighted the importance of principal support in managing curriculum change, but the implementation of curriculum change in certain areas. Puad and Ashton (2023) showed that the low involvement of teachers in curriculum development and the lack of adequate training are the main challenges in curriculum change in Indonesia. Supriani et al. (2022) stated that even though teachers have received training, they still need ongoing assistance to understand and implement the Independent Curriculum

effectively. The biggest challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum are limited resources and limited understanding of the concepts in the curriculum (Prasetyono et al., 2021; Rahman, 2021; Zuhdi et al., 2024). This shows a gap in understanding and readiness between national policies and real conditions in the field, especially in areas with limited facilities and infrastructure.

The existing research gap is the limited research that examines the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in areas with limited educational facilities, such as in Jambi. Most previous studies have focused on areas with better educational facilities and technology access. This study fills this gap by focusing on SMAN Titian Teras in Jambi, which faces various challenges in the curriculum transition. The novelty of this study lies in the emphasis on the role of the principal in managing change in schools with limited infrastructure and how strategies are implemented to overcome these obstacles.

This study aims to identify the main challenges principals face in managing the curriculum transition at SMAN Titian Teras, Jambi, and the strategies implemented to overcome these obstacles. The primary focus of this study is to understand how principals manage change in the face of limited facilities and infrastructure and how the role of teachers and school supervisors supports the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. It is hoped that this study can provide valuable recommendations for policymakers in supporting the success of the curriculum transition in areas with similar conditions and provide practical insights for education stakeholders in dealing with complex curriculum changes.

RESEARCH METHODS

The study used a qualitative approach with a case study method to explore the phenomenon of curriculum transition at SMAN Titian Teras, Jambi. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by principals, teachers, and school supervisors in implementing the Independent Curriculum in the school environment. This study is descriptive in nature with a focus on the efforts made by the school to overcome the obstacles that arise during the curriculum transition process (Nasri, 2023). The research location was chosen at SMAN Titian Teras because this school is one of the educational institutions that is currently undergoing the process of implementing the Independent Curriculum and facing challenges related to limited facilities and infrastructure that support the implementation of a technology-based curriculum. Through a case study approach, it is hoped that more specific and detailed information can be obtained regarding the strategies implemented to overcome these obstacles.

In collecting data, this study used several techniques, namely in-depth interviews, field observations, and documentation. In-depth interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and school supervisors who were directly involved in the implementation process of the Independent Curriculum. This technique was used to explore their experiences and views regarding the challenges faced and the strategies implemented (Pregoner et al., 2024). In addition, field observations were conducted to obtain clearer contextual information regarding school conditions and curriculum implementation. Direct observations in the classroom and school environment provided data that could complement the information obtained from interviews. Documentation, such as activity reports and notes on teacher training, was also collected to enrich the research data. By using these techniques, it is expected that the data obtained can cover various perspectives and provide a more comprehensive picture of the curriculum transition process at SMAN Titian Teras.

To analyze the data, this study used thematic analysis with a data triangulation approach. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify the main patterns that emerged from the interviews, observations, and documentation that had been collected (Clarke & Braun, 2018). The data obtained will be grouped into relevant themes, such as challenges in curriculum transition, principal strategies, and the roles of teachers and school supervisors. Data triangulation is used to increase the validity of the research results by comparing findings obtained from various different data sources. This process involves examining data from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure consistency and credibility of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges in Curriculum Transition

This study found that the transition to the Independent Curriculum at SMAN Titian Teras faced several challenges that affected the effectiveness of its implementation. The three main aspects that became obstacles were teacher readiness, limited facilities and infrastructure, and responses from students and parents. Although the Independent Curriculum offers teachers more freedom in managing learning, major challenges arise in terms of adapting to more flexible and project-based learning methods. In addition, the lack of adequate digital facilities also hampers the learning process, especially in areas that are still limited in terms of access to technology. In addition, the response of students and parents who do not fully understand this change also becomes an obstacle in the implementation of the curriculum. Therefore, collaboration between the government, schools, and the community is very important to ensure the success of the curriculum transition.

The results of interviews with several teachers at SMAN Titian Teras showed that most teachers found it difficult to adapt to more flexible learning methods. Many of them are still accustomed to traditional approaches, such as lectures and textbook-based teaching, and feel less prepared to design project-based learning that involves students more actively. Several teachers expressed that even though they had attended training provided by the government, they felt they still needed further guidance and additional materials to deepen their understanding of the Independent Curriculum. This emphasizes the importance of more intensive ongoing training so that teachers can be better prepared to face these challenges.

Most schools in Jambi, including SMAN Titian Teras, face limited digital facilities such as unstable internet access and inadequate computer devices. This greatly hinders the implementation of the curriculum that emphasizes the use of technology in the learning process. In addition, limited classroom space also makes it difficult to implement project-based learning methods, which require more space and adequate facilities to support collaboration between students. This condition adds to the challenges that schools must face in implementing the Independent Curriculum optimally.

Although some teachers have realized the importance of changes in learning methods, they find it difficult to implement them without adequate support. Many teachers stated that they need more in-depth training on the project-based approach, as well as practical guidance that can help them implement this curriculum in the classroom. Most teachers also feel that even though there has been training, it is not enough to help them fully understand how the Independent Curriculum can be applied in their context with limited facilities and resources. They also want more structured and easy-to-understand learning materials to facilitate the teaching process.

The biggest challenge in implementing the Independent Curriculum at SMAN Titian Teras is the gap between curriculum expectations and real conditions in the field. Teachers' readiness to adapt new learning methods depends heavily on adequate training, as well as ongoing support from the school and government. Limited facilities, especially in terms of access to technology, exacerbate this situation, hampering the school's ability to implement the curriculum as expected. This indicates the need for more equitable education infrastructure improvements across regions, as well as improved communication between schools and parents to ensure a better understanding of curriculum changes.

In analyzing these findings, another study conducted by Rosser (2023) on the challenges of implementing a new curriculum also showed that limited facilities and infrastructure are the main obstacles in implementing a technology-

based curriculum. The success of the curriculum transition is highly dependent on teacher readiness and the support provided by the principal (Akrim et al., 2022; Setiawan et al., 2023; Zain & Mustofa, 2024). The findings of this study are in line with the results of previous studies that emphasize the importance of ongoing support for teachers, as well as adequate investment in educational facilities so that the new curriculum can be implemented effectively. Despite the major challenges, close collaboration between all parties involved is expected to minimize these obstacles and support the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Principal's Strategy in Overcoming Challenges

This study found that principals play a crucial role in overcoming the various challenges that arise during the transition to the Independent Curriculum. To ensure effective implementation of the curriculum, principals need to implement strategies that include training and mentoring for teachers, optimal facility management, and increased communication and socialization to parents and students. Regular training for teachers is carried out to improve their readiness to implement more flexible and project-based learning methods. In addition, the management of existing facilities must be considered by maximizing available resources and collaborating with external parties to meet educational infrastructure needs. No less important, principals must also ensure that parents and students understand the goals and benefits of curriculum changes, through structured socialization. With these strategic steps, it is hoped that the transition to the Independent Curriculum can run smoothly and have a positive impact on the quality of education in Indonesia.

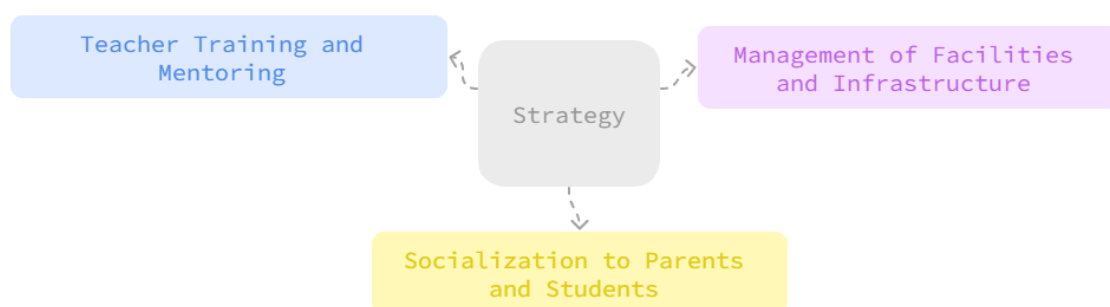


Figure 1. Key Strategies for Education

Figure 1 shows that the principal at SMAN Titian Teras faces a number of challenges that require a quick and appropriate response. One of the main strategies implemented is regular teacher training and mentoring. The principal organizes intensive training so that teachers can master the concept of the Independent Curriculum and the application of project-based learning methods.

This training is not only to improve pedagogical skills, but also to provide insight into how to adapt technology in learning. In addition, the principal also focuses on managing existing facilities by collaborating with external parties, such as technology companies and other educational institutions, to meet the needs of digital infrastructure that supports the teaching and learning process. Socialization to parents and students is carried out routinely to ensure that they understand the curriculum changes and can provide the necessary support during the transition process.

The results of the observation show that they are aware of the importance of ongoing support in dealing with the curriculum transition. Most principals at SMAN Titian Teras said that they actively hold meetings with teachers to facilitate the exchange of experiences and provide direct mentoring in class. The results of the interview also showed that although the training that had been provided was quite useful, teachers still needed further guidance in terms of project-based classroom management and the use of technology in learning. Principals emphasized the importance of maintaining intense communication with parents, as their support greatly influences the success of the implementation of the new curriculum.

The main challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum can be overcome with a comprehensive and coordinated approach. Principals who are actively involved in the transition process can create a supportive atmosphere for teachers to develop and adapt to the new curriculum. Better facility management and collaboration with external parties help schools overcome existing infrastructure limitations. Meanwhile, effective socialization to parents and students can minimize misunderstandings and increase their support for the ongoing changes. These findings underscore the importance of effective leadership in bridging existing challenges and ensuring the success of the curriculum transition.

The success of curriculum implementation is highly dependent on leadership that focuses on collaboration and continuous learning. Principals who can manage change well and support teachers in their professional development will increase the success of the new curriculum (Gurion, 2024; Mirata et al., 2022; Tathahira et al., 2024). Continuous training and mentoring are essential to improve teachers' skills in adopting more innovative learning methods. Education supported by adequate infrastructure and collaboration between external parties can overcome many obstacles in implementing a technology-based curriculum. These findings reinforce the understanding that the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum is highly dependent on strategies that involve all stakeholders, including principals, teachers, parents, and external parties.

Evaluation and Recommendation from School Supervisor

This study found that the evaluation conducted by school supervisors on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum provided important insights into teacher readiness, student responses, and the use of existing resources. The evaluations were aimed at identifying the extent to which teachers understood and were ready to implement the new curriculum, how students responded to these changes, and how resources such as educational technology and learning platforms were used to support curriculum implementation. The evaluation results showed that although some aspects had shown progress, there were still shortcomings in terms of teacher readiness and optimal use of digital infrastructure. Therefore, recommendations from school supervisors focused on improving ongoing teacher training, improving infrastructure, and providing more intensive support for students so that they could adapt more quickly to curriculum changes.

Table 1. Evaluation Aspects

Evaluation Aspects	Findings	Recommendations
Teacher Readiness and Understanding	There is still a gap in understanding and implementing the Independent Curriculum among teachers.	Improving continuous training for teachers to be able to implement the curriculum effectively.
Student Readiness and Response	Students who receive assistance are more likely to adapt more quickly to curriculum changes.	Increased support to students through more intensive guidance and mentoring.
Resource Utilization	Schools that use platforms such as Merdeka Mengajar tend to be more effective in implementation.	Expanding the use of educational technology and digital platforms to support learning.

Table 1 shows that school supervisors have a very important role in assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on the results of classroom observations and interviews with teachers, it was found that there were still gaps in terms of understanding and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum-based learning method. Most teachers admitted that they did not fully understand the concepts and principles behind this curriculum, even though they had attended several training sessions. In addition, students who received additional guidance and support from the school adapted to curriculum changes more quickly than those who did not receive sufficient support. The use of educational technology and platforms such as Merdeka Mengajar has also been shown to increase the effectiveness of curriculum implementation, with schools that utilize these resources showing better results.

Many teachers wanted more intensive and in-depth ongoing training to help them understand how best to implement this curriculum in the classroom.

In addition, students who received stronger support from the school showed a faster rate of adaptation to curriculum changes, which emphasizes the importance of school intervention in helping students adapt. These results suggest that more structured training and more intensive support are needed to ensure the success of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation.

The success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum does not only depend on the readiness of teachers and students, but also on the utilization of adequate educational infrastructure. The use of appropriate technology can increase the effectiveness of project-based learning and accelerate the curriculum transition. However, without ongoing training for teachers and appropriate support for students, the success of this curriculum implementation will be limited. This shows the importance of a holistic approach involving teacher training, improving facilities, and social support for students so that they can adapt to the changes.

The success of the curriculum implementation is highly dependent on ongoing support for teachers and students. The use of technology in learning can increase the effectiveness of the curriculum, but only if supported by adequate training for teachers (Hizqiyah et al., 2022; Prasetyono et al., 2021; Supriani et al., 2022). Adequate infrastructure and the use of educational technology can accelerate the success of the curriculum transition. These findings reinforce the importance of ongoing training, improving infrastructure, and supporting students in achieving the success of the Independent Curriculum implementation.

To ensure the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN Titian Teras, Jambi, an integrated approach is needed between teacher training, adequate facility management, and effective socialization to parents and students. Teacher readiness in implementing more flexible and project-based learning methods is highly dependent on continuous training and intensive mentoring, so schools need to provide routine and in-depth training programs. In addition, the management of facilities and infrastructure that support technology-based learning must be a priority, including collaborating with external parties to improve digital access and existing devices. No less importantly, more intensive communication with parents and students is needed so that they can better understand the goals and benefits of curriculum changes, which in turn will increase their support for curriculum implementation.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMAN Titian Teras faces several major challenges including teacher readiness, limited facilities, and student and parent responses to curriculum changes. The principal

plays a central role in addressing these challenges through strategies such as ongoing teacher training and mentoring, optimal facility management, and effective socialization to parents and students. Evaluations conducted by school supervisors revealed that although some aspects have shown progress, there are still gaps in terms of teacher understanding and utilization of existing educational resources. Therefore, a more holistic and sustainable approach is needed to address these challenges, including strengthening teacher training, improving infrastructure, and intensive support for students and parents. With these steps, the transition to the Independent Curriculum can be more effective and have a positive impact on the quality of education in Indonesia.

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