Change Management in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Sekadau District Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools in Sekadau Regency, represents advancement in addressing globalization and technological progress, with the objective of fostering a more flexible, student-centered education that enhances student competency and engagement. This study seeks to examine change management during the introduction of the Independent Curriculum in secondary schools within Sekadau Regency. This study employs qualitative methodologies, using data gathering via semi-structured interviews and direct observation. Interviews were performed with school principals, educators, and administrative personnel to understand the problems and tactics employed in the curriculum modification process. Field observations were conducted to assess the implementation of the curriculum in classroom activities. The findings identify five principal barriers: the necessity for teacher retraining, technological and infrastructure constraints, cultural resistance, teacher fatigue during the shift, and insufficient training. This study underscores the significance of ongoing training, enhancement of technology infrastructure, and systematic change management within context. Proactive support from government and educational leadership is crucial for the effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the enhancement of educational quality in Sekadau Regency.

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the development of information technology have drastically changed the world, including in the education sector. Information and communication technology now allows for the rapid exchange of information without limitations of space and time. In this information era, educational institutions, including secondary schools, as agents of change in cultural transformation, cannot ignore the changes that occur around them. Education, which functions as a means of transmitting knowledge, technology,

and values, must adapt to technological advances. In this context, technology plays an important role from planning, the learning process, to evaluation. One of the significant steps taken by the Indonesian government to face this challenge is the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek).

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in secondary schools, including in Sekadau Regency, is an effort to create more flexible and student-centered education. This curriculum allows for a more diverse learning experience, encouraging students to explore subjects according to their interests, thereby increasing student engagement and competency development (Iskandar & Masruri, 2023). The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is an important initiative of the Ministry of Education and Culture to address educational challenges, especially in secondary schools in Sekadau Regency. This curriculum seeks to build a more adaptable and student-centered educational framework, characterized by student-centered pedagogy, active involvement in the learning process, and an emphasis on essential content. The Merdeka Curriculum offers teachers the flexibility to adjust teaching to student needs and facilitate learning that is of interest to increase engagement and foster competence. The implementation in Sekadau Regency aims to increase the relevance and contextuality of education according to local conditions, by utilizing technology to mitigate barriers to accessing learning resources, especially in areas with inadequate infrastructure. This initiative aims to improve the quality of education and adequately equip students to face future challenges.

However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is not without challenges. Teachers, who are accustomed to using traditional learning methods, are faced with the need to change their teaching approaches. Reliance on conventional learning resources often hinders the effectiveness of the implementation of the new curriculum (Iskandar & Masruri, 2023). This challenge is further compounded by the need for changes in assessment strategies, which now focus more on independent learning and actively involving students in the evaluation process (Adawiyah, 2023). Modifying pedagogical strategies in the Independent Curriculum requires educators to transition from traditional methodologies to a more dynamic and autonomous approach, which often causes anxiety and confusion among them. Many educators still rely on conventional learning materials, thus hampering the effectiveness of the implementation of the new curriculum.

Modifying the evaluation system in education presents significant challenges, particularly as the focus shifts from prioritizing end results to emphasizing individual learning and student development. Infrastructure deficiencies, especially in remote areas, and limited access to technology further hinder the effective implementation of curricula. Collaborative approaches, such as mentorship programs where novice teachers work closely with experienced educators, offer valuable solutions. By observing and learning from experienced professionals, novice teachers can improve their teaching effectiveness and reduce challenges in curriculum implementation (Karakuş, 2021). Furthermore, professional training plays a critical role in enhancing teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical skills, enabling them to deliver richer and more meaningful learning experiences (Karakuş, 2021). Continuous professional development, particularly in educational technology and innovative teaching methodologies, is essential for equipping educators to meet the evolving demands of modern education. Additionally, the active involvement of parents and the community is crucial to ensuring the successful implementation of progressive curricula. However, resistance to change within educational institutions, often driven by deeply entrenched traditional norms among teachers and administrators, poses a significant barrier. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that integrates professional development, technological advancements, and active collaboration with stakeholders to foster sustainable improvements in education.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum faces cultural barriers related to long-standing practices. Educators and administrative personnel often resist abandoning traditional teaching methods, while students, accustomed to passive learning, may feel uncomfortable with active learning approaches. As Recabarren et al. (2015) noted, "Many students come from traditional and passive learning environments, which causes discomfort with active learning methods that demand greater participation and responsibility." This resistance from both educators and students can hinder the curriculum's effectiveness. To address these challenges, schools must adopt a contextual, adaptive approach tailored to their specific needs. Providing professional development for educators, fostering inclusive leadership, and encouraging active student participation can help reduce resistance and ensure the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

One of the main challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum is the additional workload for teachers, leading to burnout and low morale, which complicates adoption. Studies show that teachers who experience high administrative burdens often report lower levels of psychological well-being,

contributing to feelings of burnout (Tsang, et al., 2022). Integrating technology into curriculum management also raises concerns about academic freedom and intellectual property rights (Hasibuan & Kardena, 2024). Saerang et al. (2023) shows that developing teacher professionalism in the digital era requires a significant change in mindset. They emphasized that without adequate support and encouragement, many teachers will have difficulty adapting to new technologies. Successful technology integration depends on curriculum management, teacher professionalism, and educational technology. Research shows technology improves student outcomes by offering adaptable learning materials, but this depends on infrastructure, policies, and ongoing teacher training. Challenges include inadequate infrastructure and skills. Improving teacher competency, infrastructure, and policies is crucial for effective integration. Training and workshops are key to helping educators apply the curriculum. The success of the Independent Curriculum relies on overcoming resistance and ensuring teachers are prepared for the change.

Change management in education is essential in the current context of educational transformation. Simionescu (Savu) (2019) highlights that achieving a balance between specialized and general training in the personnel training process facilitates effective educational activities, while education must also be well-sized, rationally organized, and adaptable to societal needs. The curriculum, as a learning framework, not only delivers subject matter but also fosters personality development, skills, and values aligned with societal demands. Effective curriculum management requires systematic planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating to ensure meaningful learning experiences. In Indonesia, initiatives such as Project Learning have significantly influenced secondary education by focusing on teacher development and promoting student-centered learning approaches. By equipping teachers with active and interactive teaching methods, student engagement and learning outcomes are expected to improve. Furthermore, change management enhances school capacity to adopt innovative methodologies and educational technologies, ensuring continuous improvements in the quality of learning.

The role of principals, teachers, and educators is crucial in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum, requiring collaboration in planning, execution, and evaluation. Effective leadership by principals plays a pivotal role in managing collaboration between teachers and stakeholders, motivating continuous improvement, and ensuring the successful implementation of innovative programs despite challenges posed by traditional structures and resistance to change (Putri & Kalstum, 2022). Principals are essential in guiding and motivating teachers to adopt high-quality, innovative teaching practices.

Effective leadership strategies are critical in overcoming resistance and ensuring the successful adoption of the curriculum in schools (Mas & Zulystiawati, 2022). Continuous supervision is necessary to maintain alignment with the curriculum's objectives, while strategic leadership fosters the integration of new practices into the school culture. With well-structured change management, schools can create innovative learning environments capable of addressing 21st-century challenges. However, the sustainability of innovation faces obstacles such as resistance from teachers accustomed to traditional methods, as well as limitations in resources and training, which may hinder the curriculum's effectiveness.

To overcome these challenges, continuous support through training and resources is essential for sustaining the transformation. This will ensure effective education, relevant to students' needs, and produce quality graduates ready for the global world. The purpose of this study is to analyze change management in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This research aims to understand how to manage obstacles teachers face in adopting the curriculum. With proper leadership, training, and resources, schools can overcome resistance and ensure the curriculum's success.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative method with an interview and observation approach to understand change management in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools in Sekadau Regency. Sugiyono (2015) stated, "Qualitative research is a research method based on the philosophy of post-positivism, used to research natural object conditions (as opposed to experiments) where the researcher is the key instrument, data source sampling is carried out purposively and snowball, data collection techniques are triangulation (combined), data analysis is inductive/qualitative and the results of qualitative research emphasize meaning more than generalization". This approach aims to obtain data directly from informants involved in the implementation of the curriculum, such as principals, teachers, and other education personnel. Through interviews and observations, researchers can obtain in-depth information about the challenges faced and the strategies implemented in the change process.

Primary data in this study were collected through semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in secondary schools in Sekadau Regency. These interviews allowed researchers to explore the views and experiences of principals, teachers, and education personnel about the process of change that occurred in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, direct

observations were conducted in schools to observe how the implementation of the curriculum took place in the field, including interactions between teachers and students and the use of new learning methods in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum.

The data collection process through interviews was carried out with a guideline of questions that were prepared to explore information about the school's readiness to adopt the Merdeka Curriculum, the challenges faced, and the support needed in the change process. Observations were carried out by recording daily activities at school, the teaching methods used, and student responses to changes in learning methods.

After the data is obtained, the data analysis technique used is data reduction, which is summarizing and selecting the most relevant data with the focus of the research. The summarized data is then presented in narrative form to provide a systematic overview of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This process ends with drawing conclusions, which present the results of the analysis of how change management is implemented in secondary schools in Sekadau Regency and the factors that influence the success or obstacles in the process. Independent Curriculum and the strategies used to manage the change.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Results

This study identified five major barriers to change management related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in secondary schools in Sekadau Regency. It is important for educators and personnel to receive retraining to comply with the Independent Learning Curriculum policy. Discussions with school principals indicated that the need for teacher retraining was a major barrier. The Independent Curriculum requires a more collaborative and inventive approach; however, many instructors continue to follow existing techniques," said the principal. Classroom observations revealed that some educators faced difficulties in implementing student-centered and project-based learning approaches. This indicates that teaching staff have not fully understood the knowledge and skills related to the new methodology.

The main obstacle to the implementation of this curriculum is the lack of technology and infrastructure in schools. The absence of digital devices and adequate internet connectivity will hinder the effectiveness of implementation. The main challenge faced by schools in Sekadau is the lack of supporting infrastructure, especially technology. One teacher commented, "Technology resources in our school are still very limited, and internet connectivity is not

always reliable." Further observations showed that some courses still continue to use outdated technology, thus hampering the implementation of digital learning, which is an important component of the Merdeka Curriculum. These obstacles ultimately hamper innovative learning initiatives in schools.

Third, cultural resistance in the educational environment is still strong, including instructors, administrative personnel, and students.. The Independent Learning Curriculum requires collaboration between educational institutions, the industrial sector, and the community to facilitate project-based learning. However, the principal expressed that interacting with these entities requires a lot of time and effort. "We are currently in the early stages of fostering collaboration with local industry, and there is currently no definite agreement," he said. Observations showed that, despite efforts to involve other partners, the structure of the collaboration was inadequate.

The increased effort faced by instructors during the transition phase resulted in burnout and decreased motivationGaps in communication regarding climate change were a major barrier. Several educators stated that they often did not receive sufficient information about the new policies. One teacher stated, "Information about the changes was not consistently disseminated to all parties at the same time, which created confusion about the new regulations for many of us." Observations indicated a lack of understanding by teachers regarding the concept and implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, highlighting the need for improvement in internal communication management.

Fifth, current training and workshops are still inadequate in helping instructors effectively adapt to the new curriculum. Findings from interviews and observations indicate that changes in culture and pedagogical practices take time. A senior educator stated, "We are used to the previous system, and although we recognize the importance of change, adapting to the new methodology has proven challenging." Observational studies indicate that more experienced teachers show greater reluctance in adopting innovative methodologies, such as project-based learning, resulting in a slow transition to the Merdeka Curriculum.

Discussion

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Sekadau Regency faces critical challenges in pedagogical adaptation, technological infrastructure, cultural resistance, and teacher workload. These barriers impede the adoption of a more flexible and student-centered education system. As Iskandar and Masruri (2023) noted, educators require training in interactive teaching techniques, such as project-based learning and the integration of technology, to

meet curriculum demands. However, teachers accustomed to traditional methods often struggle to transition to these approaches, limiting the curriculum's effectiveness.

Inadequate technological infrastructure further hampers implementation. Poor internet connectivity and limited technological resources restrict access to technology-based learning, diminishing the potential of the Independent Curriculum to facilitate student-centered education (Iskandar & Masruri, 2023). Reliable infrastructure is essential not only for instructional delivery but also for planning and assessment processes. Addressing this issue requires targeted investments in technology and infrastructure, particularly in remote areas of Sekadau Regency, where disparities in access remain pronounced.

Cultural resistance within schools presents another significant challenge. Teachers and administrative staff entrenched in traditional norms often resist adopting dynamic, collaborative teaching methods. Students from passive learning environments similarly struggle to adapt to active learning approaches that demand greater participation (Recabarren et al., 2015). Overcoming these cultural barriers necessitates tailored, context-sensitive strategies. Benvenuti (2011) highlighted the importance of contextual solutions that align with local school environments. Professional development programs, inclusive leadership practices, and open communication channels are essential to drive cultural shifts.

Teacher workload, exacerbated by differentiated learning requirements and evolving assessment strategies, also presents a major obstacle. Shah et al. (2024) identified excessive workloads and unsupportive work environments as primary contributors to teacher burnout. Their findings emphasize that a positive organizational climate can alleviate these pressures. Napitupulu et al. (2023) further suggest that tailored training, sustained mentorship, and collaborative teacher networks can enhance teachers' capacity to manage differentiated instruction. Incorporating technology in professional development and providing access to resources are critical to reducing the strain of curriculum implementation. Additionally, the shift toward independent learning and active student involvement in assessments requires substantial adjustments in evaluation practices (Adawiyah, 2023), which intensify teachers' workload.

To address these multifaceted challenges, a comprehensive and localized approach is necessary. Enhancing teacher training, improving infrastructure, and fostering collaboration among educators, students, and the community are pivotal to ensuring successful curriculum implementation. Collaborative teacher networks and consistent mentorship, as highlighted by Iskandar and

Masruri (2023), can support the adoption of new teaching practices and technological integration. Moreover, government support, particularly from local authorities in Sekadau Regency, is critical for bridging resource gaps and providing consistent guidance to schools.

In conclusion, while the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Sekadau Regency is fraught with challenges, these obstacles are surmountable with targeted support, strategic investments, and effective change management. By fostering collaboration, providing tailored professional development, and improving access to infrastructure, the curriculum can achieve its goal of delivering high-quality, student-centered education. These efforts will ensure that students are better prepared to navigate the demands of the 21st century and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

CONCLUSION

This study identified five major challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum in secondary schools in Sekadau District: the need for teacher retraining, inadequate technological infrastructure, cultural resistance, teacher burnout during the transition phase, and inadequate provision of training. Educators accustomed to conventional teaching methodologies must shift to a more participatory and project-based approach; however, the lack of technology and accompanying infrastructure in schools poses significant barriers. In addition, many educators face resistance in abandoning existing practices, while the increased effort during the transition period reduces their desire. To address these issues, it is important to provide comprehensive and ongoing training and support for educators, enabling them to implement teaching strategies that are aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum well. The government and stakeholders must provide adequate technological infrastructure to facilitate technology-based education. A contextual and organized change management strategy is essential to reduce cultural resistance and improve internal communication within educational institutions. Increased support for educators during the transition phase and aggressive leadership from schools are essential to ensure effective and appropriate implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for students

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