



The implementation of independent curriculum at senior high schools: English teachers' perspectives

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Abstract

In Indonesia, the independent curriculum meets the requirements and desires of a wide range of students, providing an alternative to the government-mandated curriculum without sacrificing educational quality or preparing students for careers or post-secondary education both locally and abroad. The purpose of this research was to explore English teachers' perspectives related to the independent curriculum, its implementation, and its challenges at one of the senior high schools in Cirebon City. This research used a case study approach with qualitative methods and the subjects were two English teachers who taught English with the independent curriculum. Observation, interviews, and documentation were used to collect the data. The results show that regarding the implementation of the independent curriculum, English teachers give their positive (29.2%), negative (29.2%), neutral (33.3%), and unclear (8.3%) perspectives. The Implementation of the independent curriculum in learning English is carried out by strengthening the *Pancasila* student profile project and learning. The implementation of learning English includes three stages: planning, implementing, and evaluating. However, there are several challenges, such as a lack of student motivation and the poor mindset of students towards English.

Keywords: independent curriculum, implementation, teachers' challenges.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the education system has always been changing, which aims to improve the education quality to compete with other countries and support the improvement of the education quality in Indonesia (Prahani et al., 2020; Sabriadi & Wakia, 2021; Nurulaeni & Rahma, 2022; Munif, 2015). A key aspect of education is a curriculum. In addition, one of the elements in education that often undergoes changes

aiming to increase the education quality in Indonesia is the curriculum (Sonzarni et al., 2022). Education cannot be implemented without a curriculum because there are no goals or guidelines that can be used as a basis.

The independent curriculum is the newest in education policy because, since the coronavirus disease spread, the Ministry of Education, through the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 3 of 2020, has taken integrated steps so that students can get their rights to continue learning by releasing the latest curriculum, called the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum has the meaning of freedom in learning and allows students to study comfortably and calmly (Nurulaeni & Rahma, 2022). This policy has the purpose of improving the competence of graduates by creating more flexible programs to learn and develop their potential (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). The possible reason for the newest curriculum change is that the rules and government policies that are implemented are different from what were expected (Susetyo, 2020). Therefore, it is not surprising that its implementation has not been optimal yet, and teachers, especially English teachers, still experience many challenges.

The teaching and learning that are able to go well cannot be separated from the influence of the teacher's perceptions related to the curriculum implementation. The teacher give their perceptions related to the curriculum implementation based on his experience (Mathura, 2019). The teachers, as implementers of the curriculum, should have a good perception of its implementation because a good perception of the curriculum will have a positive impact on learning. On the other hand, a negative perception of the curriculum will have a negative impact and cause problems in learning.

This research found some previous studies which have similar characteristics to this research. The first research conducted by Asmarawati (2022) focuses on the preparation of mathematics teachers in mathematics learning activities in the independent curriculum and the obstacles experienced by the teachers. The second research, conducted by Sonzarni et al. (2022), explores the implementation of the independent curriculum at the driving school. The findings of this research present the existence of adequate facilities and infrastructure that can support successful independent curriculum implementation. Based on the issues above, this study aimed to describe English teachers' perspectives related to the implementation of the independent curriculum. It mainly attempted to investigate the implementation of the independent curriculum and the challenges faced by English teachers at the senior high school in implementing the independent curriculum.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research applied a case study approach with a descriptive method proposed by Creswell & Creswell (2018) aiming to analyze the English teachers' perspectives related to the implementation of the independent curriculum. This research was conducted in one of the senior high schools in Cirebon City.

The data sources of this research were two English teachers who had experiences in applying the independent curriculum. The data were obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation. The observation aimed to obtain and explore data related to the implementation of the independent curriculum in the teaching and learning process. The results of the interviews were categorized into four categories of answers, namely positive, negative, neutral, and not clear based on the contents of the independent curriculum. Furthermore, the information from the documents served as extra supports for the information gleaned from the interviews and observation and was utilized to triangulate the data findings.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data. Thematic analysis is a kind of data analysis that looks for themes or patterns in the information that researchers have collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers described the result of observation, interviews, and documentation with two English teachers in one of the senior high schools in Cirebon. Respondents selected were those who had implemented the independent curriculum in the English teaching and learning process.

English Teachers' Perspectives on the Independent Curriculum for Senior High Schools

English teachers' perspectives on the independent curriculum for senior high schools were divided into three aspects including the concept, characteristics, and programs in the independent curriculum. There were twenty-four questions and each of the English teachers gave their answers with many kinds of perspectives related to the independent curriculum. The results show 14 (29.2%), 14 (29.2%), 16 (33.3%), and 4 (8.3%) answers belonging to positive, negative, neutral, and not clear categories of teachers' perspectives respectively. The results can be seen in Figure 1 below.

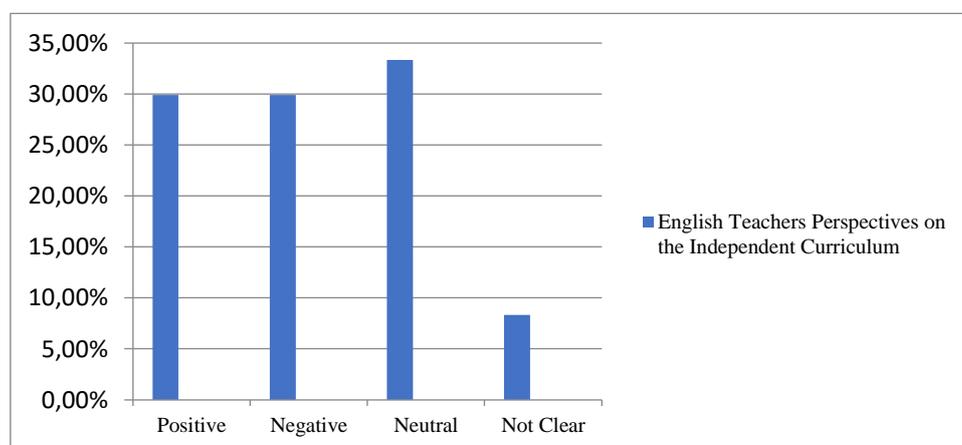


Figure 1. English Teachers' Perspectives on the Independent Curriculum at the Senior High School

Figure 1 above presents the teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the independent curriculum at the senior high school. The figure indicates that most of the teachers' perspectives are neutral. Teachers' positive and negative perspectives are in the same percentage, while the 'not clear' category of perspectives has the lowest percentage.

The data from the teachers' teaching module showed that teachers followed the structure and content that were recommended in the independent curriculum starting from planning up to evaluation, but they sometimes skipped some steps of teaching activities in the classroom such as connecting teaching materials to the *Pancasila* profile and doing evaluation or assessment at the end of the teaching activities. It is in line with the result of observation showing that the teaching activities in the classroom did not always follow the teaching module. The teachers sometimes skipped explaining the *Pancasila* profile which related to the learning objectives and the materials in the teaching and learning process. Moreover, the assessment process also was not always implemented at the end of the teaching process because of the unprepared assessment instrument and limited time. This condition relates to teachers' perspectives about the independent curriculum and its implementation in the teaching and learning process which are categorized into positives (29.2%), negatives (29.2%), neutrals (33.3%), and not clear answers (8.3%).

The English teachers at the school have given their perspectives related to the concept of an independent curriculum. They have positive perspectives about the concept of the independent curriculum, which is a curriculum that has various extracurricular activities and does not only focus on learning. This curriculum aims to improve and optimize the competencies possessed by students. It follows the curriculum's name, "*Merdeka*," which means "free" so both students and teachers have been given the freedom to manage learning. In sum, each of the students has a different character and this curriculum aims to give students the freedom to learn without any pressure or coercion so that they can learn according to their potential. As Aini (2023) said, with the implementation of an independent curriculum, students can be expected to continue developing abilities that support their talents and potential. Therefore, apart from intra-curricular learning, the independent curriculum also has a project-based learning program, as explained in Sari & Amini's research (as cited in Sonzarni et al., 2022). They suggested that the realization of the independent curriculum requires cooperation, strong commitment, and seriousness from all parties which aims to instill the values of *Pancasila* students contained in the independent curriculum.

Regarding the characteristics of the independent curriculum, English teachers had various perspectives. Their perspectives were positive, negative, neutral, and not clear depending on the aspects described. The first characteristic of an independent curriculum is a focus on project-based learning, which aims to develop characters and soft skills based on the values of the *Pancasila* student profile. English teachers had positive perspectives related to the *Pancasila* profile project because this program aims to help students strengthen their *Pancasila* values.

Related to the second characteristic, English teachers did not give positive or negative perspectives. Their perspectives were not clear because they only gave

responses that they did not agree or disagree with the statements. It has been known that the independent curriculum's purpose is to improve student's literacy levels in Indonesia. In the research of Muliantara & Suarni (2022), it is stated that literacy skills in Indonesia keep decreasing from year to year. Hence, the existence of this independent curriculum has the goal of increasing students' reading skills in Indonesia.

Then related to differentiated learning, English teachers had positive perspectives on it, even though the implementation is still not optimal yet, and it is still difficult for them to apply various methods and learning styles. Therefore, teachers need helps in understanding the characteristics, talents, interests, and needs of students. In sum, teachers must be able to design learning that focuses on the differences students possess. As explained by Gesteti & Neviyarni (2022) in their research, differentiated learning views students differently and dynamically, where the teacher sees learning from various perspectives.

There are four programs initiated in the independent curriculum, namely the AKM (Minimum Competency Assessment) to replace the National Examination, USBN (National-based School Examination), RPP (Lesson Plan), and PPDB (Student Admission) zoning system (Makarim as cited in Yuhastina et al., 2020; Yaelasari & Astuti, 2022; Manik et al., 2022). Related to those programs, English teachers at the senior high school had positive perspectives and those programs have been implemented.

The Implementation of Independent Curriculum at Senior High School

The researchers aimed to explore how an independent curriculum was implemented at senior high schools. Rusdiana & Nasihudin (2019) mention that the initial steps used in curriculum development include planning, implementation, and evaluation. Therefore, the researchers intended to know how English teachers prepared, implemented, and evaluated the teaching and learning with the independent curriculum.

Planning

In terms of curriculum, planning is a context of learning preparation, in which learning must encourage teachers to be better prepared to carry out learning activities. Before the independent curriculum was implemented at the senior high school, all teachers were given knowledge and instructions on the independent curriculum first.

T1: "I joined IHT and discussed with the teachers about independent curriculum and how to do projects. After that, I did IHT again regarding projects that have to be structured in such a way."

In this case, long before the implementation, the senior high school conducted IHT (In-House Training) with the school principal. All teachers were given instructions starting from the explanations regarding the structure of the independent curriculum, the teacher's understanding of the course of the curriculum, and the project preparation. In designing the independent curriculum for learning English, the first thing to do is to make

an ATP (Learning Objective Flow) and teaching modules as substitutes for the syllabus and lesson plans. However, before compiling learning tools, the teacher must first know the characters of each student so that what is arranged in learning tools can match the reality, potential, and needs of students. As stated by Lutfiana (2022) in her research, before making learning tools at the beginning, students must first be assessed to determine the potential, nature, needs, stages of development, levels of academic achievement, and other fundamental factors. Thus, if the teacher designs teaching modules, they must consider the breadth of the materials, students' abilities and needs, students' interests, and teaching facilities and media.

The planning carried out by English teachers in learning English included teaching materials and assessment rubrics. The material that will be delivered must cover several elements, such as listening-speaking elements, reading-viewing, and writing-presenting. Students are also expected to be able to present information using various presentation modes to suit the readers/ viewers.

Implementation

The independent curriculum at the senior high school is implemented with 30% project-based learning and 70% learning. Study hours in the independent curriculum are determined annually. In one year of study, 70% is for intra-curricular (learning), and 30% is allocated to projects. The independent curriculum divides learning into phases. Phase E is for grade 10 and phase F is for grade 11 and grade 12. Students' majors are determined in grade 11 according to their interests, talents, and potential so that students no longer feel pressured because they must study subjects that do not match their abilities.

Implementing the teaching and learning English with the independent curriculum at a senior high school has the meaning that students are active in learning and English teachers have the freedom to select teaching methods, places, and time (Pertwi & Pusparini, 2021). Besides the teacher's role as a facilitator, the English teacher in the independent curriculum is expected to innovate in setting goals, designing learning methods and media, and evaluating learning in class (Hasanah & Haryadi, 2022). Based on the document analysis, all six English skills must be conveyed in class, so this learning focuses on strengthening the ability to use English in six language skills (listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting) in an integrated manner in various types of texts. In line with the Decree of the Head of the Educational Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education and Culture Number /008/H/KR/2022 concerning Learning Achievements in PAUD, Basic Education Levels, and Secondary Education Levels in the Independent Curriculum, the minimum learning outcomes for these six English skills refer to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and are equivalent to the B1 level. Therefore, in learning English, these six skills must be implemented. However, in its implementation, it still needs to be improved. All the skills written in the lesson plan have not been fully conveyed to students yet. It can be seen from the second English teacher's (T2) explanation below.

T2: “*The lesson plan is realized with the implementation in the class. It has been known that the independent curriculum has many items, so discrepancies still occur between what is written in the lesson plan and the reality that occurs in the class.*”

Based on the explanation above, in implementing the independent curriculum, many items must be conveyed, so there often needs to be more clarity between what is written in the lesson plan and the reality that is happening. Some English skills listed in the lesson plan often change in practice. Thus, in the implementation of learning English with the independent curriculum, teachers must be required to be more creative and collaborative with other subject teachers to find out what material is being delivered in the same phase so they can adjust the materials that will be delivered in class. Moreover, the teacher must be able to recognize students' characters because every year he will deal with different students and characters.

In the independent curriculum, the activities focus not only on learning but also on project-based learning. This project-based learning must be implemented with various themes determined by the government, in which each project refers to the aim of strengthening the profile of *Pancasila*. This is in line with the research conducted by Zainuri (2022) showing that the profile of *Pancasila* students is a character that must be embedded in students through a program to strengthen the *Pancasila* profile project initiated by the government, in which there are six dimensions of *Pancasila* namely belief, fear of God Almighty, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity.

Evaluation

The success of implementing the independent curriculum is not only seen from the planning and implementation stages. It needs to be seen from the evaluation carried out. Evaluations conducted by English teachers in learning English with the independent curriculum at the senior high school used formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment was carried out to recognize and know each student's character and potential before learning was carried out so that the teacher could adjust teaching materials and methods to be applied. As for several other assessments conducted by English teachers to assess the skills involved in learning English for phase E, such as listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting, teachers made assessment rubric criteria and gave written, oral, presentation, project, and portfolio assignments.

Additionally, the English teachers also conducted assessments such as daily assessments, midterm assessments, and end-of-semester assessments. It is also in line with the research conducted by Lutfiana (2022) stating that the assessment carried out by teachers with the independent curriculum applies a comprehensive assessment that encourages students to have competencies that match their interests and talents without burdening students with achieving a minimum score that must be taken by students. Accordingly, the assessment in the independent curriculum has no such thing as KKM

(Minimum Mastery Criterion), so English teachers in the independent curriculum are given freedom in designing assessments. For the assessment of the *Pancasila* profile project itself, the product is a form of the result achieved in an educational process. It is usually adjusted to the agreed theme or dimension for one semester.

Challenges in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Senior High School and their Possible Solutions

The researchers intended to find out the challenges faced by English teachers in the implementation of the independent curriculum in English learning at the senior high. After obtaining this information, the researchers expected that the curriculum implementers would be able to find solutions and improve the curriculum system.

Planning

The implementation of the independent curriculum at the senior high school has not been fully implemented. It can be seen from the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages. There were still various kinds of challenges that English teachers experienced in the planning stage. The challenges experienced by English teachers included difficulties in analyzing the CP (Learning Outcomes), formulating them into TP (Learning Objectives), and arranging them in the form of ATP (Learning Objective Flow).

Other challenges in planning arose in determining learning methods and strategies. Thus, unexpectedly, changes can always occur and often lead to discrepancies in the methods and strategies that have been formulated in the lesson plan with those that occur in practice and adapt to the conditions and circumstances of the students in the class. The research by Susanti et al. (2023) indicates that teachers still need help to apply differentiated learning methods and styles that adapt to students. Therefore, teachers must be required to understand the character and condition of students in class before designing learning so that what has been formulated in the lesson plan can be realized in practice. The same thing was also expressed by Zulaiha et al. (2022) stating that in designing learning, the teacher has the task of designing learning programs, including organizing teaching materials, presentations, and evaluations. However, the essence of lesson planning is to determine optimal learning methods to create classroom learning as expected.

Based on the challenges above, several solutions can be offered, such as the teacher carrying out a formative assessment before learning. It can be done in the form of a written test that aims to recognize each student's character so the teacher can develop learning tools that are adapted to their abilities and interests.

Implementation

There were still several challenges teachers faced in the implementation stages. They can be seen in the explanation from the English teachers (T1 and T2) below.

T1: "The challenge is from human resources. Many students are not enthusiastic about learning."

T2: "The challenge is in the material. The materials are piled up in one phase so more time is needed, and the teacher must be able to manage the time to make sure that the material can be delivered with the right time allocation because, in the independent curriculum, there are many items but less time."

Based on the explanations T1 and T2 above, challenges in the implementation of the independent curriculum, such as a lack of student motivation in learning, cause students to find it challenging to understand the materials, especially English. Ibrahim's research (2022) shows that regarding the challenges related to student motivation, there is a need for more concentration and focus of students in learning. Limited vocabulary and difficulties in pronunciation also make students passive in the learning process and the skills written in the lesson plans were not implemented optimally. Teachers still need help to implement differentiated learning because of the large number of students, so it is difficult for teachers to implement various methods and learning styles that suit each student's character. Consequently, there is often a discrepancy between what has been written in the lesson plans and the reality in class.

However, some of these challenges can be overcome with several solutions for teachers to be more creative and innovative in creating fun learning using various interesting methods and media. Besides that, teachers also need to dig deeper into the information to recognize the character of each student because it can relate to the purpose of the independent curriculum proposed by Deni et al. (2022) which is to encourage educational institutions to become more independent with free and innovative learning so the learning process becomes more flexible and can be adapted to the conditions of students. In this case, English teachers are also expected to be able to innovate learning to increase students' learning motivation.

Besides students' motivation, other challenges arise in implementing the independent curriculum, such as the need for more time allocation. It is known that there is various intra-curricular learning in the independent curriculum, but there is no additional time allocation. Even for learning English, there are only two hours of lessons in one week, so often, many materials need to be fully conveyed. Similar research by Susanti et al. (2023) mentions that in the independent curriculum, the amount of time in learning is reduced because some of the remainder is allocated to projects. Teachers also have challenges in designing project-based activities, which must be adjusted to the dimensions following the *Pancasila* profile.

The teacher must be able to manage time by selecting some materials that are considered essential to convey, so the teacher must be able to determine what to convey and reflect the materials into students' real lives to overcome those challenges. Regarding project implementation, it is essential to hold discussions and collaborate with teachers of other subjects to formulate project activities to be carried out. It must take advantage of

several *Merdeka Mengajar* platforms that can help and provide support. It is similar to the research of Marisana et al. (2023), who found that teachers can get aspirations, references, literacy, and understanding to implement the independent curriculum with the help of the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform. With this platform, teachers can teach as mover teachers in the development of *Pancasila* students.

Evaluation

In the evaluation stage, the English teachers experienced a few challenges. They carried out assessments that adapted the evaluations to the previous curriculum. The difference is in the assessment of the project. English teachers used formative and summative assessments in English learning with the independent curriculum. The challenges that arose were in formative assessment. It was difficult for the teacher to understand each student's character, so the teacher could not carry out individual assessments in detail. The large number of students from each class caused the teachers to become overwhelmed in assessing each student's English skills. Additionally, students' unfamiliarity with English also affected the effectiveness of the assessment process because students often became passive, and they were reluctant to speak in English.

Challenges occurred in the evaluation of project-based learning for *Pancasila* students. Teachers still needed clarification about conducting project-based evaluation, as seen from the explanation of English teacher 1 or T1 below.

T1: *"The challenges occurred in how to evaluate a project because, in project-based assessment, there are lots of rubrics."*

Based on the explanation above, the *Pancasila* profile project is the main program of the independent curriculum and a differentiator from previous curricula, so this program is still new, and teachers need to adapt to its implementation. Susanti et al. (2023) reveal that project-based learning still needs to be clarified because often the themes raised only integrate some subjects. It requires discussion and collaboration among all subject teachers to discuss and design project activities. It can be implemented with discussion, collaboration, and creativity of independent curriculum teachers.

CONCLUSION

The independent curriculum at a senior high school in Cirebon City has not been fully implemented yet. English teachers show their positive, negative, neutral, and unclear perspectives related to the concepts, characteristics, and programs in the independent curriculum. The implementation of the independent curriculum in learning English has been carried out optimally, starting from planning, implementation, and evaluation. For the planning, the English teachers began by preparing learning tools and initial activities carried out in class, which were to prepare teaching materials, teaching tools, and assessment rubrics. English teachers also need to develop themes for project-based learning. Related to the evaluation, the English teachers conducted formative and

summative evaluations of learning. However, in analyzing the implementation of an independent curriculum, some issues should be deeply analyzed, such as differentiated learning and the integration of the *Pancasila* profile. Thus, a solution for the challenges is teachers must be creative and innovative and able to explore the independent curriculum more deeply. This study is limited to figuring out the perspectives of English teachers in general. Therefore, other researchers are suggested to explore deeper about other aspects of the implementation of the independent curriculum to get a more comprehensive understanding of the independent curriculum implementation by involving more participants.

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