

TEACHER QUALIFICATION STANDARDS IN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM AT SMP NEGERI 27 MEDAN

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ABSTRACT

The Independent Curriculum is an educational reform that emphasizes learning freedom and character strengthening of students. Teachers play a key role in the successful implementation of this curriculum. This study aims to examine the extent to which teacher qualification standards influence the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 27 Medan. The research method used is descriptive qualitative through interviews and observations involving teachers and students. The results show that teacher qualifications, which include pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies, significantly affect the success of the curriculum's implementation. Although some teachers welcome the Independent Curriculum and find its flexibility helpful, there are still implementation obstacles due to inadequate qualifications and understanding. Meanwhile, the majority of students struggle to adapt to the new learning model. This study emphasizes the importance of strengthening teacher qualifications to support the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum; Teacher; Qualification Standards.

INTRODUCTION

Changes in Indonesia's education system have given rise to the Independent Curriculum as an innovative step to respond to the challenges of the times. This curriculum strongly demands flexibility, project-based learning, and a student-centered approach. In this context, the role of teachers becomes highly strategic. Teachers are no longer merely transmitters of knowledge but also act as facilitators, innovators, and drivers in creating meaningful learning environments. Therefore, teacher qualification standards must be re-evaluated to ensure their readiness to implement this curriculum. However, in several schools, including SMP Negeri 27 Medan, many teachers still do not fully meet the established qualification standards.

This affects the success of learning and the application of the core values of the Independent Curriculum. For this reason, it is important to examine the relationship between teacher qualifications and the effectiveness of the curriculum's implementation.

Education is the fundamental foundation for a nation's development. In the era of globalization and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, education systems are required to produce human resources that are adaptive, creative, and highly competitive. Therefore, Indonesia, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, launched the Merdeka Curriculum as an effort to transform education by emphasizing more flexible learning, student-centered approaches, and the development of 21st-century character and competencies (Kemendikbudristek, 2022)

The Merdeka Curriculum is fundamentally different from previous curricula. One of its key characteristics is the differentiated approach, which allows teachers to tailor learning to the needs, interests, and learning styles of students. Additionally, project-based learning and inquiry-based learning are prioritized methods aimed at enhancing students' critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills (OECD, Talis 2018 Results). In this new paradigm, the role of the teacher is no longer limited to delivering content, but has shifted to being a facilitator and mentor who creates an inspiring and meaningful learning environment.

However, curriculum innovation will not succeed without the readiness of human resources, especially teachers. Teachers are the key drivers in the successful implementation of the curriculum in the classroom. Therefore, teacher qualification standards and competencies are crucial factors. According to the Ministerial Regulation (Permendiknas) Number 16 of 2007, teachers must possess four core competencies: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social. These competencies are essential for teachers to effectively manage learning processes in line with the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum (Permendiknas, 2007).

Unfortunately, various challenges are still found in the field. Many teachers have not fully understood the philosophy of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn), and some have never participated in training for implementing the latest curriculum. This situation is worsened by limited facilities, lack of managerial support from schools, and minimal ongoing academic supervision (Sagala, 2021). These issues undoubtedly affect the quality of learning and student achievement.

A study conducted at SMP Negeri 27 Medan aims to examine how teacher qualification standards influence the effectiveness of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the school. This school represents the real challenges faced by educational institutions during the curriculum transition. In practice, some teachers welcomed the change positively and felt more freedom in teaching. However, others experienced confusion, particularly in developing independent teaching modules, conducting formative assessments, and understanding student-centered learning orientations.

Therefore, this research is important to illustrate the realities in the field and provide strategic input for policymakers at school, regional, and national levels. By strengthening teacher qualifications through continuous training, consistent academic supervision, and concrete policy support, the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum can truly be realized in classrooms.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 27 Medan. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews with one teacher and several Grade VIII students, as well as direct observation of the classroom learning process. The instruments used were interview guidelines and observation sheets. Data analysis was carried out using discourse and narrative analysis techniques to interpret participants' responses. The interview data were coded and categorized based on emerging themes, then analyzed to uncover meanings and their relevance to the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview results indicate that most teachers responded positively to the Independent Curriculum, as it provides flexibility in designing learning activities. Teachers felt they could be more creative and innovative, especially in developing projects and building more active interactions with students. However, some teachers encountered difficulties, particularly in designing teaching modules, conducting formative assessments, and understanding the philosophy of independent learning. These challenges were mainly experienced by teachers who had not received adequate training or did not have an educational background relevant to the subject they were teaching.

From classroom observations, it was found that teachers with appropriate qualifications tended to manage the class well, motivate students, and apply varied teaching approaches. In contrast, teachers with lower qualifications were observed to still use traditional methods and were less interactive.

From the students' perspective, the majority reported difficulty in understanding the material under the Independent Curriculum system. Some students felt the learning model was too unstructured and lacked clear direction, while a small number appreciated its flexibility.

The findings of this study show that teachers have diverse opinions regarding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Most teachers felt supported by the flexibility offered in this curriculum. They stated that the Independent Curriculum allows for innovation and autonomy in designing teaching modules and adapting learning strategies to students' individual characteristics.

According to the Ministry of National Education Regulation (Permendiknas) Number 16 of 2007 concerning the Standards of Academic Qualifications and Teacher Competencies (2007, p. Permendiknas). According to the Ministry of National Education Regulation (Permendiknas, 2007), teachers must possess pedagogical, professional, personal, and social competencies. Findings at SMP Negeri 27 Medan confirm that teachers who meet these four aspects tend to be more successful in implementing the curriculum.

However, the greatest challenge lies in teachers' unpreparedness to adapt to the paradigm shift in learning. Many teachers still do not fully understand the philosophy of "Merdeka Belajar" (Independent Learning), which emphasizes differentiation, project-based learning, and formative assessment. This lack of understanding has led to inconsistent quality between classes, largely depending on the qualifications of the respective teachers.

These findings are in line with the statement from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), which states that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires professional competence and sufficient training support. Teachers are expected not only to master subject content but also to design flexible, engaging, and contextual learning experiences.

From the students' perspective, most admitted to struggling with the more independent and open learning flow. They are more accustomed to classical approaches and direct instruction from teachers. This indicates that curriculum transformation should also be accompanied by a shift in teachers' approaches to students, especially in communication, guidance, and learning motivation. Theoretically, these findings reinforce the concept that teacher qualification is a key determinant in the success of educational policies. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, teachers who lack strong pedagogical and social skills tend to struggle in building meaningful relationships with students and in applying differentiated instruction.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the research on teacher qualification standards in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 27 Medan, it is evident that teacher qualification standards greatly influence the success of the curriculum. Teachers with appropriate academic qualifications and competencies are able to translate the philosophy of independent learning into active, reflective, and student-centered classroom practices. Conversely, a lack of qualifications becomes a barrier to curriculum implementation, both technically and pedagogically. Therefore, training, continuous professional development, and supportive policies are essential to ensure teachers' readiness in facing the challenges of the new curriculum.

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