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Implementation of the Independent Curriculum with Islamic Religious Education to Develop Soft Skills Student

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Abstract

This study explores the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji Kartasura known as "SMP Muhammadiyah Duta", a small school with fewer than 50 students. Despite its limited resources, the school endeavors to optimize the learning goals of the Independent Curriculum introduced by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving the principal, two teachers, and six students across grades 7–9. The findings reveal that the Independent Curriculum is applied progressively, with a focus on aligning educational strategies with local potential and student needs. The curriculum emphasizes adaptable and flexible lesson planning, integrating Islamic values across subjects, and continuous assessments to ensure learning objectives are met. Key outcomes include a learning design that holistically develops student competencies in knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Project-based learning and problem-solving activities enhance critical and creative thinking skills. The research underscores the vital role of parental and community involvement in supporting the learning process. This study contributes valuable insights into the practical implementation of the Independent Curriculum in small schools and provides a reference for other institutions aiming to adopt this model. It highlights the potential of well-designed curricula to foster independent, creative learners equipped to address future challenges effectively.

Keywords: *Learning Outcome Design; Independent Curriculum; Muhammadiyah Junior High School Makamhaji, Indonesia*

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Introduction

An important component in the development of a country is its education system. In the context of education, learning outcomes refer to the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students must master as a result of the learning process [1]. Learning Outcome describes what students expect to know, understand, and be able to do after participating in a program or subject. The term learning outcomes began to be closely associated with the competency-based education approach, which emphasizes the mastery of specific competencies that can be measured and evaluated [2].

The curriculum, which is the main tool in the educational process, sets the goals, directions, and teaching methods that each educational unit must follow. Education and curriculum in Indonesia must be according to the vision and mission as well as the goals of national education in the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003. (Pratiwi et al., 2023). Educational programs in Indonesia have undergone many improvements and modifications in line with the changing times and increasingly complicated societal demands. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia introduced the Independent Curriculum in 2020, one of the most recent changes [4]. Application of Technology in Measuring Learning Outcomes In the late 2010s and early 2020s, technology began to be widely used to measure learning outcomes. Online learning platforms and educational analytics tools help institutions in collecting and analyzing learning outcome data more efficiently [5]. The curriculum needs to pay more attention in the school environment to the fact that the entire environment in which students are embedded teaches them [6]. The biggest curriculum challenge is to acquire skills and competencies [7].

The Independent Curriculum was introduced to provide flexibility to schools and teachers in developing learning according to the needs and potential of students. The learning outcomes in this curriculum focus more on developing basic competencies, attitudes, skills, and knowledge that are relevant to real-life contexts [8]. The purpose of the Independent Curriculum is to provide greater flexibility to educational institutions in creating a curriculum that suits the needs and characteristics of students (Rahma & Hindun, 2023). In addition, this curriculum also aims to overcome some problems faced by the world of education, including gaps in the quality of education, low reading and numeracy skills, and the lack of application of learning materials in the real world (Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022).

The Independent Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning by giving teachers the freedom to set teaching methods that follow the characteristics of students ("Widodo, S.2020.). The learning outcomes in the Independent Curriculum consist of the Pancasila Student Profile, which includes six dimensions: Faith, fear of God Almighty, and noble character; Global diversity; cooperation; Self-sufficient; Critical reasoning; and Creative (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). Therefore, the Independent Curriculum is expected to produce more participatory, contextual, and focused learning to help students improve their competencies [13].

Previous research results show that despite high enthusiasm among teachers, they face challenges in understanding the concepts and teaching skills required for the

Independent Curriculum [14]. There is an urgent need for additional training, especially in project-based learning approaches and the use of technology [15].

Nugraha's research, said the purpose of the Independent Curriculum is to help students recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their education. Through the use of technology and learning communities, this curriculum encourages adaptive and contextual learning, which has a good impact on student engagement and learning outcomes (Nugraha, 2022). According to Fatah's research, vocational schools face problems related to resources and infrastructure, but students' ability to apply in the workplace is increasing. Students can acquire important technical and non-technical competencies with the help of the Independent curriculum[17].

Meanwhile, the results of Susanto's research show that through the successful development of their social skills and character, students' awareness of the ideals of Pancasila is increased through initiatives to strengthen the Pancasila student profile. The students showed increased involvement and interest in project-related activities [18] Then teachers can also effectively get resources and training through the "Merdeka Mengajar" platform, which better equips them to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. In terms of getting instructional methodologies and learning resources, teachers feel more helped [19].

This research combines contemporary educational theories, including competency-based learning as described by Lyle M. Spencer & Spencer, (1993), and constructivism as proposed by Piaget, (1954) and Vygotsky, (1978). Competency-based learning emphasizes more on helping students develop abilities that can be applied to real-world situations. Independent. Competency-based learning, according to Lyle M. Spencer & Spencer, (1993) concentrates on the acquisition of information and abilities that can be applied in a practical environment.

One of the schools that has implemented the Independent Curriculum is SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji Surakarta. The school aims to create learning objectives that emphasize character development and life skills in addition to academics [23]. The school implements the Independent Curriculum in several ways, including project-based learning, customized teaching, and strengthening the Pancasila student profile. Research on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in various schools is still limited, especially in the context of faith-based private schools such as Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji Junior High School. Therefore, this study aims to explore how the Independent Curriculum is adopted and implemented in this school, as well as its impact on the teaching and learning process.

Method

This research uses a qualitative methodology and a case study approach (H. Mundir, 2013). This study investigates how the Independent Curriculum is implemented in "SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji Kartasura" Specifically, the research techniques used are as follows: This research was conducted in junior high schools that adopted the Independent Curriculum, namely "SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji Kartasura". The participants of one principal, two teachers, and six students at "SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji" became the subjects of research, a discipline

that was chosen with a specific purpose, namely because they directly contributed to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

This research tool includes observation sheets, document templates, and interview protocols. The data collection procedure is conducted with in-depth interviews, conducted on teachers, principals, and students to get their perspectives on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Classroom observation is carried out to directly observe the learning process in the classroom. The documents analyzed include lesson plans, evaluation notes, and student project results. These documents are obtained from school archives and used to support interview and observation data [25]

The data analysis method with data reduction to find important themes related to the research objectives, information from observations, interviews, and document analysis is filtered and coded with the Nvivo application. The presentation of data is to provide a clear picture of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, then the data that has been summarized is presented narratively. The main conclusions from the data analysis are used to conclude. The practice of comparing data from various sources (documents, observations, and interviews) to verify the validity of conclusions and ensure consistency of findings is known as triangulation [26].

Data validity with data triangulation is the process of verifying the validity and dependability of conclusions by comparing data from observations, interviews, and documents. To verify the validity and accuracy of the data interpretation, the participants were asked to validate the results of the interviews once again, guaranteeing openness, every step in the data collection and analysis process was carefully documented.

Result and Discussion

History of the Development of the Term Learning Outcomes

The evolution of education and pedagogy has led to an important shift in the meaning and application of the phrase "learning outcomes". The phrase "learning outcomes" gained widespread recognition in the second half of the 20th century as a result of educational reforms that prioritized learning outcomes over the learning process. When it first appeared, this phrase was used to describe the information and abilities that students should have after completing a course or program [27].

In the 1990s, the concept of learning outcomes became more structured and widely adopted in higher education, especially after the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework in various countries. This allows for the alignment of learning outcomes with national and international standards. [28] In the 2000s, the competency-based education approach – which emphasizes the mastery of certain competencies that are easy to test and evaluate – became strongly associated with the term "learning outcomes" [2].

In the 2010s, learning outcomes were further integrated into the curriculum through a reverse curriculum design process, where the end goal of learning is determined first before designing teaching and evaluation methods (Wiggins, G., & McTighe, 2005). Measurement and Evaluation of learning outcomes has also developed

in terms of measurement and evaluation methods. Various evaluation tools and techniques were developed to measure learning achievement effectively and reliably, including the use of authentic assessment and continuous evaluation [29].

Application of Technology in Measuring Learning Outcomes In the late 2010s and early 2020s, technology began to be widely used to measure learning outcomes. Online learning platforms and educational analytics tools help institutions in collecting and analysing learning outcome data more efficiently (Ifenthaler, D., & Yau, 2020). The learning outcomes in the curriculum that applies in Indonesia today, namely the Independent Curriculum.

This study explores the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at “SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji Surakarta”, with a focus on the design of learning outcomes, challenges, and impacts on the teaching and learning process. The location of the research is in SMP Muhammadiyah 2 now SMP Muh Duta which is located in Makamhaji Kartasura Sukoharjo Solo Village, Central Java, exactly east of the Hajjah Nuriyah Shabran hut. Muhammadiyah 2 Junior High School was established in 1977 and obtained an operational license as an educational institution in 1978. Initially, the location where SMP Muh Duta was established was in the Podok Shabran complex south of the Syarif mosque, in the 1980s because there was an interest in the development of the Shaburan campus, finally, “SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Kartasura” was moved to its current location. The current principal is Mujibuddadah, who was previously held by Mrs. Siti Marhamah [30].

3.2 School Members Overview

In this study, data was taken from several respondents, namely one principal, two teachers, and six students in grades 7, 8, and 9.

Table 1. List of Respondent

No	Initiation name	Age	Gender	Education	Position	Experience
1.	R1. MD	38 Years	Man	S1 FKIP Mathematics S2 MAP UMS	Principal	Person in charge All schools of Muhammadiyah 2 Junior High School
2.	R2. ISA	25 years	Woman	S1 Islamic Religious Education UMS	Teacher	Islamic Religious Education Teacher
3.	R3. ARI	27 Years	Man	S1 FKIP UMS	Teacher	Mathematics teachers and students

4.	R4. KN	14 Years	Woman	Grade 7	student	Participating in new student activities
5.	R5. MUA	13 Years	Man	Grade 7	Student	Participating in new student activities
6.	R6. AR	13 Years	Woman	8th grade	Student	Participating in learning activities of independent curriculum projects
7.	R7. IP	13 Years	Man	8th grade	Student	Participating in learning activities of independent curriculum projects
8.	R8. AF	14 Years	Woman	Grade 9	Student	Participating in learning activities of independent curriculum projects
9.	R9. RMS	14 Years	Man	Grade 9	Student	Participating in learning activities of independent curriculum projects

Source: SMP Muhammadiyah 2 makamhaji kartasura

Design of Learning Outcomes of the Independent Curriculum at "SMP Muhammadiyah 2 makamhaji kartasura".

Core and Basic Competencies (KID): The Independent Curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji establishes core and basic competencies that include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. These competencies are designed to develop students' critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills. The independent curriculum implemented at "SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji Kartasura" as the result of an interview with the principal of "SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Makamhaji Kartasura" stated that on July 22, 2024, said that:

The school complies with the government's policy on instructions in supporting the independent curriculum as well as the ability of this Muh Duta school. Steps taken by schools to implement the independent curriculum by upgrading the knowledge of teachers, including school principals, through house training activities or seminars related to the independent curriculum both organized by the government and

independently. Comparative study gathering to schools that have previously implemented the independent curriculum as a reference.

Evaluation of the implementation is carried out at the end of semesters, semesters one and two, related to what has been tried by teachers in the implementation of the independent curriculum. However, every week every Friday there is an evaluation related to the implementation of Pancasila student profile activities. Which implementation is modified with Islamic educational values?

The school also collaborates with parents and the community in the implementation of the independent curriculum, socialization of the curriculum, and things that can be implemented, and the committee also participates in planning this independent curriculum. Because often activities from the independent curriculum such as the "Pancasila" student profile project, require financing. Schools communicate the goals and benefits of the Independent Curriculum appreciated, to parents and the community, providing an understanding of the programs that will be implemented, several programs are modified and engineered to meet the needs of students. Parents or guardians of students are very enthusiastic and support what is carried out by the school.

The readiness of infrastructure and resources to support the independent curriculum is very minimal because Muh Duta school is a small school category with less than 50 students. So it cannot be as ideal as the government expects. And relation to infrastructure and resources, the independent curriculum is more active, and the school is running as much as possible. The condition of the infrastructure and resources of Muh Duta Junior High School is limited, so the school engineers the curriculum itself, the infrastructure owned by many is heavily damaged, and the learning room, the back lab room has not been revitalized, only part of it has been repaired, namely the front, due to financial limitations, even though it is very important for student services.

Internet access is adequate, but laboratories and libraries need to be upgraded, and literacy needs new books and tools that have been damaged. And the way to overcome the limitations of school infrastructure so far is to form fundraising for fundraising, fundraising for school repairs because it is rather difficult to ask for financial assistance from the government. And the school has plans to increase resources in the future with massive construction (third-floor buildings, and facilities for students), of course, it requires funds and a long process.

Muh Duta School urgently needs technology in the process of learning activities, to interact in learning, laptop, audiovisual, for IT-based learning media. And this is very effective for supporting and improving student learning. It's just that the obstacle is still lacking these technological tools, such as Chrome books and laptops. The impact of the implementation of the independent curriculum on student learning outcomes has increased but has not been significant, but the impact on their students is very happy using technology.

Students can develop creative critical thinking skills with Pancasila student profile Project activities. They collaborate to communicate with their teammates and then creativity emerges to create certain products. The activities to strengthen the values of Pancasila have an impact on the character of students such as neatness in clothing, politeness in speaking, and learning discipline.

The influence of the Pancasila strengthening project on students' daily behaviour appears to be familiarity because they often work together, and respect each other. Bullying activities are no longer visible among students in grades 7, 8, and 9, and politeness towards teachers and parents is increasing. According to the evaluation of the school principal after the implementation of the independent curriculum, there was a significant improvement in attitudes and ethics. Discipline of learning, reciting, and politeness according to Islamic values (Mujibuddakwah, 2024).

The results of interviews with Muh Duta Junior High School teachers about the readiness to implement the independent curriculum said that; Teachers are ready to implement the independent curriculum, by participating in the independent curriculum workshop, where learning is designed flexibly according to the needs of students. The guidelines for the independent curriculum are also clear, teachers do not feel confused because they also support the government. It's just that the main challenge is the lack of infrastructure and resources [31], [32], [33].

The learning outcomes at SMP Duta are the core and basic potentials set out in the Merdeka curriculum using core and basic competencies in the form of student-centered learning or student-centered learning so that students are actively seeking information. The school designed a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students for the project in junior high school We use a weekly block system held every Friday by implementing the themes that have been agreed upon by teachers Dian (Irfani, 2024).

The core competencies at Muh Duta school are first, numeracy literacy, communication, being able to think critically, and creatively, collaborating with others, then having the nature of initiative and being able to collaborate on basic competencies, the first of which is being able to master 3 applied languages, namely Indonesia, United Kingdom, and Javanese then be able to master the maple at Junior High School Muh Duta in accordance with the teacher who is in charge of the design of the Pancasila Profile Strengthening Project, which is to identify the learning objectives, then choose a topic or theme, then design the learning with the predetermined KD KI and choose the method and strategy used, then is to evaluate it, reflect for better learning [31], [33], [34], [35].

According to Irfani's teacher in 2024. Teachers are ready to implement an independent curriculum. However, I personally believe that the Merdeka curriculum is still too complicated to understand because of the many components that must be implemented. The challenges faced by teachers about the independent curriculum are that the costs used are too much, and at this time students are still not ready.

Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project: Students are involved in projects that aim to develop Pancasila values, such as cooperation, independence, and integrity. This project helps students apply these values in their daily lives.

Differentiated Learning: Teachers are given the freedom to develop learning strategies that suit the characteristics and needs of students. This approach helps students learn according to their respective styles and pace. According to the students who participated in these projects, they felt happy and motivated to learn. [31], [36], [37], [38], [39], [40], [41].

Student Engagement: Students show high enthusiasm in participating in more interactive and contextual learning. However, the difference in ability between students is a challenge in implementing differentiated learning. Some students need additional support to achieve the expected competencies

The results of the interviews with the students said that: their experience in working on projects was very fun and gained new knowledge. And it has a positive impact on students, who participate in “entrepreneurship and Bhineka tunggal Ika (Diverse but still united)”.

Entrepreneurship where students directly learn marketing, make regional specialties/snacks or traditional cuisine, the products are then sold and also students are taught how to calculate profits from existing capital. Meanwhile, the Bhineka Tunggal Ika (Diverse but still united) project, which has been carried out, is socialization related to the Anti-bullying program. Students make anti-bullying writings, about the diversity of differences and mutual respect by making digital posters throughout the printing process, from the results of the posters students discuss what advice should be conveyed about anti-violence and anti-bullying. (pictures/posters for peace), then put up in public places and mosques, and write about the invitation to be kind. All students are excited about the new experience [42].

Then the response of students in differentiated learning applied in school is very objective, students feel that learning becomes more interesting, and easy to understand, with different learning is very interesting because it also uses fun teaching aids. However, the challenges faced by students in differentiated learning are drowsiness and dizziness [31], [36], [37], [38], [39], [40], [41].

Infrastructure and Resources: Limited educational facilities and resources are an obstacle in the implementation of several technology-based projects and learning activities. Schools still need to improve infrastructure, such as laboratories, libraries, and adequate internet access (Arifin, 2024), (Irfani, 2024), [30].

Moving Forward: Strategies for Long-Term Success

1. Core and Basic Competencies

The design of the core and basic discussion focuses on three key aspects of education. First, “Core and Basic Competencies” are designed to encompass cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, adhering to competency-based learning theory. This approach emphasizes practical skills applicable to real-life situations, as highlighted by Spencer and Spencer (1993), making it effective for preparing students to face future challenges. Second, the “Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project” aims to help students internalize the values of Pancasila. This initiative aligns with Vygotsky's constructivist theory (1978), which underscores the role of social interaction in learning. By engaging in collaborative and hands-on experiences, students deepen their understanding of these foundational values. Lastly, “Differentiated Learning” provides teachers with strategies to tailor their teaching methods to the unique needs of each student. This method not only enhances student engagement and academic outcomes but also fosters well-being and social inclusion, as demonstrated by Pozas et al. (2021).

Together, these approaches create a comprehensive framework for effective and inclusive education.

2. Implementation Challenges

Teachers' readiness is a key factor in the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Intensive training and ongoing support are needed to help teachers adapt innovative learning methods. In addition, the involvement of different students requires more flexible and adaptive teaching strategies. Implementation and Challenges are still found in the adaptation of innovative teaching methods, especially for teachers who are used to conventional methods (Sukarno, A., 2019).

Limited infrastructure and resources hinder the implementation of some learning activities. This study shows the importance of support from the government and the private sector in providing the necessary facilities and technology to support the effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

3. Suggestion

- **Teacher Training:** Continuous and intensive training is needed to improve teachers' understanding and skills in implementing the Independent Curriculum.
- **Infrastructure Support:** Improving educational facilities and resources, including internet access and technology, is essential to support the learning process.
- **Collaborative Approach:** Strengthening collaboration between schools, governments, and local communities to support various project-based learning projects and activities oriented to Pancasila values.

Conclusion

SMP Muhammadiyah 2 (Muh Duta) implements the Independent Curriculum which includes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects to develop students' critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills. The school adheres to government policies and seeks to improve teachers' knowledge through training and seminars. The evaluation of the implementation is carried out every week and at the end of the semester, focusing on Pancasila student profile activities modified with Islamic values. Collaboration with parents and communities is also carried out to support the curriculum, even though school infrastructure and resources are limited. To overcome this limitation, the school is raising funds and plans to increase resources in the future. Technology is urgently needed in the learning process, although currently there is still a shortage of technological tools such as laptops and Chromebooks. The Pancasila student profile strengthening project helps students develop Pancasila values, and differentiated learning allows the adjustment of teaching methods according to student needs. Students show high enthusiasm in interactive and contextual learning, despite challenges such as differences in abilities between students.

Author Contributions

Siti Rahmawati: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. **Fauziyah Qurrota A'yun Tamamie:** Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation. **Mahmudulhassan:** Conceptualization, Methodology. **Sabrina Failasufa Tamami:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation.

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Conflict of Interest

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