



## Teachers' Reflective Practice in Implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka (Case Study at SMA Negeri 1 KURIPAN)

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### **Abstract**

The independent curriculum is a new breakthrough from the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia that aims to empower education units and teachers in developing students' potential, including 21st century skills (Kemdikbud, 2021). So that we can also formulate the objectives in this study to determine the level of teacher understanding of the concepts and policies of the independent curriculum in their respective schools and the extent to which teachers apply reflection in evaluating planning, processes, and learning outcomes based on the independent curriculum. The benefits of this study, the researcher hopes to provide a comprehensive picture of the extent to which teachers have implemented reflection and a critical approach in implementing the independent curriculum and then identify the obstacles, constraints, and real needs of teachers related to reflective practice in the independent curriculum. The interview results indicate that there are still variations in the level of teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept. Teacher A explained that he had broadly understood that Merdeka Curriculum aims to empower teachers to develop students' potential through the application of 21st century skills and independence values. However, how to translate it into concrete learning activities is still confusing. Meanwhile, Teachers B and C even stated that the socialization provided had not provided adequate understanding, it was still theoretical and difficult to apply. Teachers' understanding of the concept of Merdeka Curriculum is still limited and partial. Most teachers only understand in outline, but have difficulty applying it concretely in learning.

**Keywords:** *Reflective; Merdeka Curriculum; Teacher Reflective; Teacher's Strategis*

### **Introduction**

The independent curriculum is a new breakthrough from the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia that aims to empower education units and teachers in developing students' potential, including 21st century skills (Kemdikbud, 2021). Through this curriculum, teachers are given greater flexibility in designing the learning process according to students' interests and needs. Teachers are also encouraged to integrate independence values such as critical thinking, creativity, courage and diversity in learning activities (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). However, the implementation of this independent curriculum poses many challenges for teachers. Research from Sofwan & Habibi (2021) shows that many teachers are still unprepared and unresponsive to curriculum reform. Teachers' limited

understanding of the implementation of the independent curriculum is often the main barrier. Therefore, Marshall (2020) suggests that teachers carry out reflective practices to evaluate the learning process and improve their knowledge and skills in implementing the independent curriculum.

Reflective practice allows teachers to critically analyze strengths and weaknesses in learning and identify areas for improvement (Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014). Through continuous reflection, teachers can adjust their planning and teaching methods to more effectively facilitate student learning outcomes. Thus, the implementation of the independent curriculum in Indonesia requires efforts to improve teacher competence, especially through strengthening reflective practices in evaluating the learning process. Based on the background of the research above, the researcher tries to formulate a problem which will focus on How is the level of teacher understanding of the concept and implementation of the independent curriculum in schools, secondly, To what extent are teachers prepared to carry out reflective practices to evaluate planning and learning processes based on the independent curriculum. So that we can also formulate the objectives in this study to determine the level of teacher understanding of the concepts and policies of the independent curriculum in their respective schools and the extent to which teachers apply reflection in evaluating planning, processes, and learning outcomes based on the independent curriculum.

The benefits of this study, the researcher hopes to provide a comprehensive picture of the extent to which teachers have implemented reflection and a critical approach in implementing the independent curriculum and then identify the obstacles, constraints, and real needs of teachers related to reflective practice in the independent curriculum. This information can be used as input for policy improvement and explore teachers' perceptions and views on the benefits of reflective practice, which can encourage awareness of teacher professionalism.

Based on the explanation above, several studies are relevant to this research Marshall (2020) in his research entitled "Implementing curriculum reform in Indonesia: The role of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and reflective practice" explored the role of teachers' knowledge, beliefs, and reflective practices in the implementation of curriculum reform in Indonesia. This qualitative study involved 48 elementary school teachers and used interviews and observations. The results showed that teachers' reflective practices were limited and influenced by their knowledge and beliefs about the new curriculum. Teachers need comprehensive training to be able to critically reflect in improving learning.

Meanwhile, Cherrington & Loveridge's (2014) research entitled "Using video to promote early childhood teachers' thinking and reflection" explored the use of video as a reflection tool for kindergarten teachers in New Zealand. Using a qualitative research design and interview and observation methods, the results showed that videos effectively facilitate teachers' reflective thinking processes, which have an impact on improving learning practices. Video is able to capture the complexities of practice that trigger critical reflection of teachers.

Sofwan & Habibi (2021) in their research "Teachers' attitudes towards curriculum change: A case study on curriculum reform in Indonesia" analyzed teachers' attitudes towards curriculum reform in Indonesia through a case study in a junior high school in Papua. This quantitative research used a questionnaire and involved 35 teacher respondents. The findings indicated that teachers tend to be less responsive and less knowledgeable about curriculum change, which has an impact on its implementation in the classroom.

From these three previous studies, we can conclude that, research on the topic "Teacher Reflective Practice in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. No one has discussed it yet. So this is what makes this research topic special.

The curriculum is an important component in the education system because it guides the implementation of learning activities. The independent curriculum is the latest curriculum released by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2021 which provides greater flexibility for teachers to develop

learning according to the needs and characteristics of students. However, implementing the new curriculum is not easy, teachers need the ability and readiness to implement it (Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023). One of the important competencies that teachers need to master is reflective practice.

Several studies show that teachers still have challenges and obstacles in implementing an independent curriculum. Tricahyati & Zaim's research (2023) found that most junior high school English teachers in Padang were still not ready to implement the independent curriculum in terms of lesson planning, methods, and assessment. Ningsih & Adnan (2023) also identified several challenges faced by prospective English teachers during the teaching practice program, such as difficulties in designing student-centered learning and conducting authentic assessment. Similar problems are also experienced by teachers of other subjects, such as a lack of understanding of concepts to the readiness of infrastructure (Zulaiha et al., 2022).

To overcome the challenges of implementing an independent curriculum, teachers need to master reflective practices (Aryzona et al., 2023). Reflection allows teachers to periodically evaluate the learning process to improve the gap between planning and practice in the field. Teachers need to reflect both at the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of learning. Teachers' reflective ability will help them gradually improve the quality of learning according to the demands of the independent curriculum (Mustika, 2022). Therefore, research on the implementation of teachers' reflective practices in the independent curriculum is important to analyze the level of implementation and the need to improve teacher competencies.

Overall, some initial research indicates that there are still various obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the independent curriculum. One of the solutions offered is to improve teachers' reflective abilities in order to evaluate and improve learning in a sustainable manner.

Further research with a focus on teachers' reflective practices is needed to get a more comprehensive picture of the actual conditions and needs for improving teacher competencies in implementing the independent curriculum.

In this study, there are several urgencies of research on teachers' reflective practices in implementing the independent curriculum. Namely, the independent curriculum as a new policy of the Ministry of Education and Culture requires teacher readiness in its implementation, one of which is through strengthening reflective practices. This research is important to analyze the extent of teacher readiness, then the results of the research can identify gaps between the ideal concept of an independent curriculum and the reality of implementation in the field, so that it becomes valuable input for policy improvement. And the research is useful as an initial diagnosis of teachers' reflective abilities in implementing the new curriculum policy in Indonesia.

## ***Methodology***

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Qualitative research was chosen to understand and describe the phenomenon of teachers' reflective practices in implementing the independent curriculum thoroughly and in depth. Case studies are used to limit cases to specific situations/conditions of implementing an independent curriculum in a school. The participants in this study were teachers of SMAN 1 KURIPAN who were directly involved in the implementation of the independent curriculum. The number of participants was 3 people who were selected purposively based on certain criteria. Data was collected through: In-depth interviews to explore teachers' understanding, attitudes, and reflective practices related to the independent curriculum. Observation of learning activities in the classroom to observe how teachers implement the independent curriculum. Documentation study of learning tools such as lesson plans and teaching materials. The collected data were analyzed using content

analysis techniques, including: Data reduction, coding, organization into patterns/themes/categories. Presentation of data in the form of narrative descriptions. Drawing conclusions/verification.

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Findings**

#### **1. Teachers' Understanding of the Independent Curriculum Concept**

The interview results indicate that there are still variations in the level of teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept. Teacher A stated:

*"I understand the outline of the independent curriculum concept, but there are many things that are still confusing regarding how to implement it in the classroom."*

Similar statements were also expressed by Teachers B and C:

*"We were given socialization about the independent curriculum but it was not enough to really understand the concept." (Teacher B)*

*"It needs more deepening so that our understanding of the independent curriculum is not just theoretical, but can be applied." (Teacher C)*

Teacher A explained that he had broadly understood that Merdeka Curriculum aims to empower teachers to develop students' potential through the application of 21st century skills and independence values. However, how to translate it into concrete learning activities is still confusing. Meanwhile, Teachers B and C even stated that the socialization provided had not provided adequate understanding, it was still theoretical and difficult to apply. They need more intensive assistance so that the concept of Merdeka Curriculum can be understood and implemented properly. Observation findings also show that most teachers still apply conventional learning, have not integrated activities or assessments that encourage 21st century skills and learning independence. This is also supported by analyzing documentation of lesson plans and teacher learning evaluations that do not reflect the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum. Overall, it can be concluded that most teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum is still limited and partial. They need intensive assistance to really be able to apply the concept in daily learning and assessment.

#### **2. Lesson Preparation and Planning**

The results show that most teachers have not optimally reflected on the preparation and planning of learning based on the independent curriculum. From the results of in-depth interviews, Teacher A admitted:

*"I haven't really thought about how to design lessons that really reflect the independent curriculum. I usually use the old lesson plan format and just change the method a little." (Teacher A)*

Teacher B also expressed the same thing:

*"It must be admitted that I have not redesigned the learning from scratch based on the independent curriculum. I still adapt a lot of old lesson plans with small improvisations."*

In addition, Teacher C also added:

*"We still need to learn and practice a lot in designing independent curriculum learning. We need discussion and sharing between teachers so that we can complement each other."*

Classroom observation findings also confirm that teachers' learning activities are mostly conventional, not yet reflecting the independent curriculum approach. Teachers mostly dominate the class with lecture, question and answer, and assignment methods. Students are less encouraged to develop 21st century skills and independent values. Furthermore, the results of the documentation study of teacher lesson plans show that most of them still use the old format with limited adjustments. Activities and assessment indicators have not shown efforts to develop 21st century skills and independence values. Overall, it can be concluded that teachers' reflection in the preparation and planning of independent curriculum learning is still weak. They need intensive assistance and special training to be able to design learning that is truly aligned with the independent curriculum.

### 3. Reflection on the Teaching and Learning Process

The results indicate that teachers' reflective practices on the teaching and learning process based on the independent curriculum are still limited. From the in-depth interview, Teacher A's statement was obtained as follows:

*"I sometimes reflect on my learning but focus more on whether the material is delivered, not on whether independent values have been applied."*

Teacher B also admitted:

*"The reflections I do are usually fleeting, more on time management and class mastery, not yet touching on the implementation of the independent curriculum."*

Meanwhile, Teacher C explained:

*"We need special training so that we can conduct a truly comprehensive reflection on the implementation of the independent curriculum in learning."*

Classroom observation findings support the results of this interview, where teachers have not optimally reflected and adjusted learning activities to encourage 21st century skills and independent values. Teachers have also not conducted authentic assessments in accordance with the independent curriculum. Furthermore, the results of the documentation study show that teacher reflections in learning notes still focus on technical aspects and material delivery, not yet touching on the substantive implementation of the independent curriculum. Overall, it can be concluded that teachers' reflections on the teaching and learning process based on the independent curriculum are still weak and not comprehensive. There is a need for special assistance and training so that teachers are able to conduct comprehensive reflections.

### Discussion

The findings of this study are in line with previous theories and research results that emphasize the important role of reflective practice for teachers in implementing curriculum change and reform (Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014; Marshall, 2020). The independent curriculum rolled out by the government in 2021 is a new breakthrough of the Ministry of Education and Culture that gives greater autonomy to education units and teachers to develop the potential of students. For the implementation of this new curriculum to be successful, teacher readiness is needed, one of which is through strengthening reflective abilities (Marshall, 2020).

The results of the study indicate that most teachers still have limited understanding of the ideal concept of an independent curriculum. Teachers feel that they have been given socialization, but it is not enough to really understand and implement the concept of an independent curriculum concretely in the classroom. This is in line with Sofwan & Habibi's research (2021) which found that many teachers were less responsive and lacked a deep understanding of the new curriculum. It is necessary to deepen

teachers' understanding so that they do not just understand theoretically but are able to apply the concept of an independent curriculum in learning activities. Research by Marshall (2020) and Cherrington & Loveridge (2014) also emphasizes the need for more comprehensive training so that teachers are able to carry out critical reflection to improve the quality of curriculum implementation in the field.

In addition, teachers' reflective practices in preparing and planning, implementing the process, and evaluating learning based on the independent curriculum are still limited and not optimal. Most teachers admit that they have not done a total re-planning based on the independent curriculum, tending to adapt the old format with limited improvisation. In the implementation of learning, teachers' reflections also still dwell on technical aspects and material delivery, not yet touching on the implementation of substantive independence values. These findings support the importance of an in-depth diagnosis of teachers' reflective abilities in implementing the new curriculum (Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014). The results of the diagnosis can be valuable input for policy makers to design targeted teacher competency improvement programs, especially related to strengthening reflective capacity (Marshall, 2020).

Thus, the results of this study reinforce the arguments of Cherrington & Loveridge (2014), Marshall (2020), and Sofwan & Habibi (2021) regarding the urgency of improving teacher competence through strengthening reflective practices so that the implementation of the new curriculum can be optimally successful. Further research with a quantitative approach and experimental design is highly recommended to test the effectiveness of training models or interventions that can improve teachers' reflective capacity.

Overall, this study has provided an important picture of teachers' reflective practices in implementing the independent curriculum, which is still rarely researched. The results contribute to the development of literature related to the role of reflection in curriculum reform in Indonesia. Further research using various methodological approaches is highly recommended to enrich the understanding of this relevant and significant topic, so that policies to strengthen teacher competencies can be designed more effectively and on target.

## **Conclusion**

Teachers' understanding of the concept of Merdeka Curriculum is still limited and partial. Most teachers only understand in outline, but have difficulty applying it concretely in learning. Teachers need intensive assistance to really be able to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Teacher reflection in preparing and planning lessons based on the Merdeka Curriculum is still weak. Most teachers have not totally redesigned and still adapt the old format. Special training is needed so that teachers are able to design lessons that are aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers' reflective practices on the learning process based on the Merdeka Curriculum are also still limited and not optimal. Teacher reflections still dwell on technical aspects, not yet touching the implementation of substantive independence values. Overall, teachers' reflective abilities in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum need to be improved through more intensive and comprehensive assistance and training. Further research with a quantitative approach is recommended to test the effectiveness of training models that can increase teachers' reflective capacity in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

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