

IMPLEMENTATION INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN INCREASE 21ST CENTURY COMPETENCIES OF STUDENTS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Diterima: 02 Mei 2026 Direvisi: 21 Mei 2026 Disetujui: 14 Juni 2026 Tersedia Daring: 20 Juli 2026 Keywords: <i>Curriculum, Independence, Competence, 21st Century</i>	This research is motivated by the demands of 21st-century education, which requires students to possess various essential skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (4Cs). However, in reality, the learning process in elementary schools still tends to be teacher-centered, thus not being able to fully develop these competencies optimally. Therefore, the presence of the Independent Curriculum is a strategic effort to encourage more flexible, student-centered, and contextual learning according to student needs. The purpose of this study is to determine how the implementation of the Independent Curriculum improves the 21st-century competencies of elementary school students and to identify supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type. The research subjects included teachers and students in elementary schools that have implemented the Independent Curriculum. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation of learning activities, in-depth interviews with teachers, and documentation studies of learning materials. Data analysis was carried out interactively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has a significant impact on improving students' 21st-century competencies. In the learning process, teachers have begun to implement various innovative learning models such as Project-Based Learning (PjBL), problem-based learning, and differentiated learning tailored to student characteristics. This encourages students to be more active, independent, and directly involved in the learning process. Students demonstrate improvements in critical thinking skills through problem-solving activities, increased creativity through learning projects, communication skills through presentations of work results, and collaboration skills through group work. In addition, the Independent Curriculum also provides space for teachers to integrate real-life contexts and the surrounding environment into learning, so that learning becomes more meaningful and relevant for students. Implementation. The Pancasila Student Profile also helps strengthen the formation of student character that aligns with 21st-century competencies. However, this study also found several obstacles in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, including teachers' limited understanding in designing and implementing project-based learning, limited supporting facilities and infrastructure, and the persistence of students who are not accustomed to learning patterns that require activeness and independence. In addition, the administrative burden on teachers and limited training are also inhibiting factors in optimizing the implementation of this curriculum. Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is effective in improving 21st-century competencies in elementary school students, particularly in critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. To support optimal

success, teacher competency improvement is needed through ongoing training, adequate facilities and infrastructure, and support from various parties.

ABSTRAK

Kata Kunci:
*Kurikulum; Merdeka;
Kompetensi; Abad; 21*

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh tuntutan pendidikan abad ke-21 yang mengharuskan siswa memiliki berbagai keterampilan esensial, seperti kemampuan berpikir kritis, kreativitas, komunikasi, dan kolaborasi (4C). Namun, pada kenyataannya, proses pembelajaran di sekolah dasar masih cenderung berpusat pada guru (teacher-centered) sehingga belum sepenuhnya mampu mengembangkan kompetensi tersebut secara optimal. Oleh karena itu, hadirnya Kurikulum Merdeka menjadi salah satu upaya strategis dalam mendorong pembelajaran yang lebih fleksibel, berpusat pada siswa, serta kontekstual sesuai kebutuhan peserta didik. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui bagaimana implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam meningkatkan kompetensi abad ke-21 siswa sekolah dasar, serta mengidentifikasi faktor pendukung dan penghambat dalam pelaksanaannya. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis deskriptif. Subjek penelitian meliputi guru dan siswa di sekolah dasar yang telah menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi kegiatan pembelajaran, wawancara mendalam dengan guru, serta studi dokumentasi terhadap perangkat pembelajaran. Analisis data dilakukan secara interaktif melalui tahap reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka memberikan dampak yang signifikan terhadap peningkatan kompetensi abad ke-21 siswa. Dalam proses pembelajaran, guru mulai menerapkan berbagai model pembelajaran inovatif seperti Project-Based Learning (PjBL), pembelajaran berbasis masalah, serta pembelajaran berdiferensiasi yang disesuaikan dengan karakteristik siswa. Hal ini mendorong siswa untuk lebih aktif, mandiri, serta terlibat langsung dalam proses pembelajaran. Siswa menunjukkan peningkatan dalam kemampuan berpikir kritis melalui kegiatan pemecahan masalah, peningkatan kreativitas melalui proyek-proyek pembelajaran, kemampuan komunikasi melalui presentasi hasil kerja, serta kemampuan kolaborasi melalui kerja kelompok. Selain itu, Kurikulum Merdeka juga memberikan ruang bagi guru untuk mengintegrasikan konteks kehidupan nyata dan lingkungan sekitar ke dalam pembelajaran, sehingga pembelajaran menjadi lebih bermakna dan relevan bagi siswa. Implementasi Profil Pelajar Pancasila juga turut memperkuat pembentukan karakter siswa yang selaras dengan kompetensi abad ke-21. Namun demikian, penelitian ini juga menemukan beberapa kendala dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, antara lain keterbatasan pemahaman guru dalam merancang dan melaksanakan pembelajaran berbasis proyek, keterbatasan sarana dan prasarana pendukung, serta masih adanya siswa yang belum terbiasa dengan pola pembelajaran yang menuntut keaktifan dan kemandirian. Selain itu, beban administrasi guru dan keterbatasan pelatihan juga menjadi faktor penghambat dalam optimalisasi implementasi kurikulum ini. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka efektif dalam meningkatkan kompetensi abad ke-21 siswa sekolah dasar, khususnya dalam aspek berpikir kritis, kreativitas, komunikasi, dan kolaborasi. Untuk mendukung keberhasilan yang lebih optimal, diperlukan peningkatan kompetensi guru melalui pelatihan berkelanjutan, penyediaan sarana dan prasarana yang memadai, serta dukungan dari berbagai pihak.

1. INTRODUCTION

Education in the 21st century requires students not only to master knowledge but also to possess various skills relevant to current developments. These skills include critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration, known as the 4Cs. These skills are crucial in facing the challenges of globalization, technological development, and the increasingly complex dynamics of social life (Susilawati, 2021). Therefore, the learning process in elementary schools needs to be designed in such a way as to develop 21st-century competencies from an early age (Anjarwati, 2024). However, in reality, learning in elementary schools still tends to be teacher-centered, with a dominant lecture method. This condition results in students being less active in the learning process, less trained in critical thinking, and minimal opportunities to develop creativity and collaboration skills. Furthermore, student learning outcomes still show gaps, particularly in literacy and numeracy skills, which are essential foundations for learning (Harahap & Sos, 2022).

In an effort to address these challenges, the government introduced the Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) as an innovation in the Indonesian education system. This curriculum provides teachers with the freedom to design more flexible, student-centered learning, and adapt it to the needs and characteristics of students. The Independent Curriculum also emphasizes the importance of project-based learning, differentiated learning, and strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, which aligns with the development of 21st-century competencies (Diana et al., 2025). The implementation of the Independent Curriculum is expected to create a more active, creative, and enjoyable learning environment, allowing students to optimally develop their potential. Through a contextual and experiential learning approach, students not only understand the subject matter but are also able to apply it in their daily lives. This will undoubtedly have a positive impact on improving the quality of student learning outcomes (Astuti, 2023).

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum still faces various challenges. Some of these include teachers' limited understanding of developing appropriate learning tools, a lack of ongoing training, and limited supporting facilities and infrastructure. Furthermore, the shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered learning paradigm requires a challenging adaptation process for both teachers and students. Based on these challenges, research is needed to more deeply examine the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in improving 21st-century competencies in elementary school students (Wahyudi et al., 2023). This research is expected to provide a concrete picture of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the field, as well as serve as evaluation material and recommendations for improving the quality of education in elementary schools.

Problem Solving Approach

The problem-solving approach in this study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Sugiyono (Pratikno et al., 2022) qualitative research is used to understand social phenomena in depth by emphasizing the meaning, processes, and contexts that occur in the field. This approach is appropriate for examining the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary school learning. Furthermore, according to Lexy J. Moleong (2018), qualitative research aims to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, such as behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions, holistically. This is relevant to examining how teachers and students implement learning within the Independent Curriculum. According to John

W. Creswell (Alhayat et al., 2023) states that a qualitative approach is carried out through data collection processes such as observation, interviews, and documentation, which are then analyzed inductively to discover the meaning of the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, this study uses these data collection techniques to obtain comprehensive data.

In data analysis, this study refers to the opinion of Miles and Huberman (2014), who stated that qualitative data analysis consists of three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. These stages assist researchers in processing data systematically and in a structured manner. Furthermore, according to Richard I. Arends (2012), student-centered and problem-based learning can improve critical thinking skills and 21st-century skills. This opinion supports the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes active learning and the development of comprehensive student competencies (Nova Berliana, 2021).

In the context of educational problem-solving, this approach is also supported by Arends's opinion that problem-based learning and hands-on experience can improve students' critical thinking and 21st-century skills. This aligns with the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes active, creative, and student-centered learning (Habibah, 2022). Therefore, the problem-solving approach in this study was carried out systematically through problem identification, data collection, in-depth analysis, and drawing conclusions based on expert theories. This approach is expected to provide appropriate solutions to improve 21st-century competencies in elementary school students through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Pracilia et al., 2023).

State Of The Art And New

The state of the art in this study examines the latest developments related to curriculum implementation and the development of 21st-century competencies in primary education. 21st-century competencies, which include critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (the 4Cs), have become a primary focus in various modern educational studies. According to Trilling and Fadel (Jufriadi et al., 2022) 21st-century skills are a combination of learning and innovation skills, technological skills, and life and career skills that are essential for facing global challenges. This

demonstrates that education must transform from merely transferring knowledge to developing competencies.

In line with this, the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (2015) emphasized that learning must integrate the 4C skills into every learning process so that students can adapt to current developments. This approach requires a more flexible and innovative curriculum change. In the Indonesian context, the implementation of the 21st Century Curriculum

Independence is a form of educational transformation. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (2022), the Independence Curriculum is designed to give teachers the freedom to develop student-centered learning and emphasize character building through the Pancasila Student Profile.

Research by Sugiyono (Wafiroh et al., 2024) shows that active and contextual learning can increase student engagement in the learning process. This aligns with the approach in the Independent Curriculum, which encourages the use of project-based learning models and differentiated learning. Furthermore, research by John W. Creswell (Gusteti & Neviyarni, 2022) emphasizes the importance of a qualitative research approach in understanding the implementation of education policies in depth, particularly in examining the process and impact of classroom learning (Daimah & Suparni, 2023). Furthermore, Hattie (Hutabarat et al., 2022) states that learning effectiveness is greatly influenced by the teaching strategies used by teachers. Learning that actively engages students has a greater impact on improving learning outcomes than conventional methods.

Based on this study, it can be concluded that research on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in improving 21st-century competencies is still relevant and important. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the elementary school level, specifically in integrating project-based learning and a differentiated approach to improve students' 4C competencies. Therefore, this research is expected to contribute to the development of educational theory and practice, particularly in the effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum in improving 21st-century competencies in elementary school students (Gifari & Arifin, 2024).



Figure 1. Roadmap

2. METHOD

Research process This started with stage identification related issues with low competence 21st century students school basic, especially in aspect think critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Furthermore, researchers formulate problems and do study library For strengthen runway relevant theories with implementation Independent Curriculum. After that, it was carried out determination method study with approach qualitative descriptive. Data collection was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation at school the basis that has been apply Independent Curriculum (Masfufah et al., 2022). Data obtained Then analyzed through stages data reduction, data presentation, and data extraction conclusion For get valid and systematic findings.

External from study This in the form of description comprehensive about implementation Independent Curriculum in increase competence 21st century students school basis. In addition, research this also produces recommendation strategic for teachers and schools in optimize learning based Independent Curriculum, such as application of learning models innovative (Project-Based Learning and learning differentiated), as well as improvement teacher competence through training. Output other can in the form of publication scientific in journal education and report research that can made into reference for development education at the level school base.

Indicator achievements study This marked with existence improvement competence 21st century students which includes ability think critical in finish problems, increasing creativity in produce work, ability more communication Good in convey ideas, as well as ability collaboration in Work The same with friends. In addition, the indicators other is increasing activity student in the learning process, there is changes in teachers ' teaching strategies more innovative and student - centered, as well as composition recommendations that can be implemented For increase quality learning at school base.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research held at State Elementary School 6 Saitnihuta Pangururan School This is one of the school the basis that has been apply Independent Curriculum in the learning process. School own environment enough study conducive as well as supported by manpower active educator in carry out learning based Independent Curriculum (Cholilah et al., 2023). Facilities available at the school covering room classes, libraries, learning media, and means supporters others that help the learning process teaching. In the application Independent Curriculum, teachers are given freedom For develop appropriate learning strategies with characteristics and needs students. Subject study is student class V with a total of 30 students consisting of from student men and women. The research focused on the implementation Independent Curriculum in increase competence 21st century students which includes ability think critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration.

Description of Research Data

This research aim For know How implementation Independent Curriculum in increase competence 21st century students at SD Negeri 6 Saitnihuta Pangururan. Research data obtained through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and documentation during the learning process ongoing. Based on results research that has been done, implementation The Independent Curriculum shows existence change positive to activities and abilities student in the learning process (Riani, 2023).

Observation Results

Based on results observation during the learning process took place at State Elementary School 6 Saitnihuta Pangururan, it is known that the teacher has apply student - centered learning in accordance with characteristics Independent Curriculum. Teachers use various learning models like discussion group, learning based project (Project Based Learning), ask answer, and presentation group. During the learning process ongoing, students seen active follow activity learning. Students start brave ask to the teacher, put forward opinion, and capable Work The same with Friend his group in finish the assigned tasks. In addition, teachers also utilize learning media simple and engaging material learning with life daily so that student more easy understand material lesson. Learning carried out No only focus on mastery material, but also develop skills student in think critical and creative (Destiana et al., 2024). Observation results show that implementation Independent Curriculum is capable increase participation active student in the learning process.

Interview Results

Teacher Interview Results

Based on results interview with the fifth grade teacher at Saitnihuta 6th State Elementary School Pangururan, obtained information that implementation The Independent Curriculum provides impact positive towards the learning process (Setyawan, 2023). The teacher stated that student become more active, creative, and enthusiastic in follow learning. The teacher also explained that use learning based project help student in develop ability think critical and skills Work same. In addition, the activities presentation group make student more believe self in convey opinion in front class. However Thus, teachers still experience a number of constraint in implementation Independent Curriculum, such as limitations means supporters learning, preparation teaching tools, as well as use technology in learning (Guru et al., 2022).

Interview Results Student

Based on results interview with student class V, it is known that part big student feel like follow learning with Independent Curriculum. Students state that learning become more interesting Because done through discussion, work groups, and practices directly. Students also feel more believe self when requested For presenting results discussion in front class. In addition, students confess more easy understand material because the teacher explained learning with linking examples that exist in the environment around.

Questionnaire Results

Results of the questionnaire given to student show that implementation The Independent Curriculum provides influence positive to competence 21st century

students at SD Negeri 6 Saitnihuta Pangururan. Questionnaire results show that : Most of the student more active in follow learning. Students more brave convey opinions and ask questions to the teacher. Students capable Work The same with Good in group. Learning become more creative and fun. Students capable finish task based project in a way together (LUTFIANA, 2022). Based on results said, can known that implementation Independent Curriculum helps increase ability communication, collaboration, creativity, and thinking critical student.

Documentation Results

Documentation results obtained from mark results Study students and documentation activity learning during study ongoing. Based on the value data students, seen existence improvement results Study after implementation Independent Curriculum. Before implementation Independent Curriculum, still there is a number of students who get value below Criteria Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM). However after implemented active and student - centered learning, number students who achieve completeness Study experience improvement. In addition, the documentation activity learning show that student more active in activity discussion, presentation, and learning based project.

Discussion

Research result show that implementation Independent Curriculum at Saitnihuta 6th Elementary School Pangururan capable increase competence 21st century students school basic. Student - centered learning give chance to student For more active in the learning process.

Ability think critical student increase through activity solution problems and discussions group. Creativity student develop through tasks projects that provide freedom to student For produce work according to each person's ideas (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). Ability communication student seen increase through activity presentation and discussion class. In addition, the ability collaboration students also develop Because student used to Work The same in group during the learning process ongoing. Although implementation The Independent Curriculum provides impact positive, still there is a number of constraint like limitations facility learning and teacher abilities in use technology. However school Keep going make an effort increase quality learning through teacher training and development of learning media (Rengga Aprilia et al., 2024).

With Thus, the implementation Independent Curriculum can be one of effort in increase competence 21st century students school base so that student capable face development knowledge knowledge and technology in the modern era.

Implementation Constraints

In implementation study about implementation Independent Curriculum in increase competence 21st century students at SD Negeri 6 Saitnihuta Pangururan, researcher find a number of constraints that affect the research process. One of them obstacles faced is limitations time research. The data collection process must be customized with timetable learning at school so that researchers own limited time in do observation in a way deep in every activity learning (Nurfata & Pujiastuti, 2023). In addition, there are still there is

a number of less students believe self when follow interview and fill in questionnaire research. Some students need directions and explanations more continue to be able to understand questions given. Conditions the causes the data collection process to require longer time. Other constraints that is limitations facilities and infrastructure supporters learning, especially in use of media and technology learning digital- based. Not all facility learning can used in a way maximum so that a number of activity learning must done with simple media (Heriyati, 2023). This is A little influence implementation innovative learning in accordance with characteristics Independent Curriculum (Lenny Kurniati & Ratih Kusumawati, 2023). In the research process, researchers also found that teacher's ability in implement The Independent Curriculum is still need improved, especially in compilation teaching tools and application of learning models based project. Some teachers still need adjustment to change system learning so that implementation learning Not yet completely optimal. Although there is a number of constraints, research still can implemented with Good Because existence Work The same between party schools, teachers, and students. Researchers also attempted adapt timetable research and use a more approach communicative so that the data collection process runs smoothly fluent (Yaelasari & Yuni Astuti, 2022).

Plan Stages Next

Based on results research that has been conducted at State Elementary School 6 Saitnihuta Pangururan, research furthermore planned For more develop study about implementation Independent Curriculum in increase competence 21st century students school basic. Stages furthermore will focused on developing more effective learning models innovative and appropriate with characteristics student school base so that the ability think critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration student can develop optimally. The next stage done with expand subject research on several class and school base other so that results study can compared and obtain more data wide as well as more accurate. Further research is also planned use more time long for development competence 21st century students can observed in a way more in-depth and sustainable. In addition, research furthermore will focused on the use of learning media based technology in implementation Independent Curriculum. Use of digital media and learning interactive expected capable increase motivation Study as well as skills student in face development technology in the 21st century. Researchers also plan For conducting training and mentoring to the relevant teachers compilation teaching tools, application of learning models innovative, as well as use technology in learning (Maulidia et al., 2023). Activities the expected can assist teachers in optimize implementation Independent Curriculum in schools basic. Stages next thing that will happen done is compile results study in form report scientific and articles journal education as form publication scientific publications the expected can become reference for teachers, researchers and other parties school in increase quality learning through implementation Independent Curriculum in schools base

4. CONCLUSION

Based on results research that has been conducted at State Elementary School 6 Saitnihuta Pangururan, can concluded that implementation Independent Curriculum is capable increase competence 21st century students school basic. Implementation student - centered learning give impact positive to ability think critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration student in the learning process. Research results show that student become more active in follow learning through activity discussion, work groups, presentations, and learning based projects. In addition, students are also more brave put forward opinions, ask questions, and capable Work The same with Friend in finish task learning. More learning flexible and innovative make student more easy understand material and improve results Study students. Implementation The Independent Curriculum also provides chance to the teacher to more creative in choose appropriate learning methods and media with need students. However Thus, the implementation The Independent Curriculum is still face a number of obstacles, such as limitations means infrastructure, use technology learning that has not been done maximum, and teacher's ability in compile device learning that is still ongoing need improved. In overall, implementation Independent Curriculum in schools base can be one of effective efforts in increase competence 21st century students to be able to face development knowledge knowledge and technology in the modern era.

Suggestion

Based on results research that has been done, there is some suggestions that can given, namely : For schools, it is hoped that can Keep going support implementation Independent Curriculum with provide facilities and infrastructure more learning adequate, especially media and technology learning For support the process Study teaching. For teachers, it is hoped that can Keep going increase ability in implementing learning models innovative, creative, and student - centered so that competence 21st century students can develop optimally. For students, it is hoped that more active and confident self in follow the learning process, and capable Work same and think critical in finish various task learning. For researchers next, it is hoped can develop further research wide with involving more Lots school and use time further research long for results study become more in-depth and accurate. For the government and other parties related, expected can give training as well as mentoring to the teacher regarding implementation Merdeka Curriculum and its use technology in learning so that implementation curriculum can walk more optimal at school base.

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