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STRENGTHENING TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDING OF THE INDEPENDENT LEARNING CURRICULUM

By
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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic period was a special condition that caused different learning drawbacks and learning losses in the achievement of student competencies. In addition to learning losses, many national and international studies state that Indonesia has also experienced a learning crisis for a long time. Therefore, it is necessary to change the curriculum so that educational institutions are able to improve the quality of education. This research was conducted to improve the understanding of teachers as participants in the independent learning curriculum training. This study found that teachers' understanding increased significantly after being given training on the independent learning curriculum. The results of this study imply that intensive training is needed on the concept of implementing the independent learning curriculum so that teachers can carry out more effective learning.

Keywords: Understanding, Teacher, Curriculum, Independence, Learning

INTRODUCTION

Government and educational institutions make every effort to prepare the best learning process for their students. In this case, education stakeholders have a very strategic role in improving the quality of learning in schools. Moreover, school leaders must ensure that students receive the best service for their needs through their duties as supervisors and school leaders (Mantra et al., 2021). Therefore, an independent learning curriculum is considered a breakthrough in implementing freedom of learning. This curriculum offers a new perspective that teaching is not only focused on cognitive assessment, but also on the emotional and psychomotor assessment of students (Widiastuti et al., 2021).

Independent learning can be defined as the application of the curriculum in the learning process that requires pleasure in the development of innovative and creative thinking by the teacher (Qolbiyah & Ismail, 2022). The essence of this freedom of learning must radiate from the teacher as the engine of national education. Because educational and social aspects cannot be separated, because basically a good education determines a rich and prosperous social life. The main concept of independent learning is freedom of thought for the students to discover and express their knowledge and experiences. Furthermore, teachers have the freedom to independently translate the syllabus explained to their students, allowing teachers to meet the needs of each student during the learning process.

Freedom of learning also includes conditions of independence for both teachers and students in achieving goals, methods, materials, and assessments of learning. Thus, the learning process in the independent learning curriculum is tailored to the needs of the students, whereas the concept of learning was directed towards teachers and educators. Independent learning curriculum programs can be educational programs that cover a variety of extracurricular

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content, where the content is ideal to allow sufficient time for students to explore concepts and strengthen their competencies (Astawa et al., 2018). Moreover, the learning focus gives teachers the adaptability to choose from a variety of learning tools, enabling them to tailor learning to the learning needs of their students. Additionally, the content of the curriculum must mean freedom of learning to find, manage, communicate, and master information and technology. It is important to understand that the concept of self-directed learning is also present to create an applicable curriculum conducted in every learning activity (Maba & Mantra, 2018).

It can be said that the concept of an independent curriculum is inseparable from the role of the teacher who becomes the facilitator of the learning process. Teachers should have sufficient knowledge in conducting appropriate learning activities based on the curriculum. Moreover, the learning activities convey elements of fun, interest, safety, positivity, creativity and innovation in exploring students' abilities so that they can achieve what they learn (Handayani et al., 2019). The principle of self-directed learning aims to accelerate the process of education reform in Indonesia which is said to be fading away (Mantra et al., 2021). Therefore, students can enhance their learning competence continually and meaningfully.

The implementation of the concept of independent learning strengthens the role of teachers both in developing the applicable curriculum and in the learning process. Teacher input in the curriculum development process is important to ensure that curriculum content meets the needs of students in the community (Widiastuti et al., 2021). Teachers as learning resources must be able to understand student psychology, the application of learning methods, and the strategies used. Teachers should be able to collaborate and involve teachers effectively in school curriculum development to organize and assemble teaching materials, textbooks, and learning content. Moreover, the teacher's role in the curriculum concept is as a learning facilitator

supported by the competence of knowledge, skills, and core values that are reflected in the ability to think and act (Marisa, 2021). By doing this, students may have the freedom of learning and gain what they need to achieve during the learning process.

This independent learning curriculum was developed with the hope of producing able-bodied Millennials who can not only memorize the material given by the teacher but also immediately understand the material and knowledge given by the teacher. Students are also expected to utilize technology in their learning process. Moreover, an effective, fun, interesting and meaningful learning process for students should be provided continually both inside and outside the classroom (Brata et al., 2021). In particular, the existence of learning resources supports the creation of an interesting and fun learning environment for students. Teachers should not merely present the learning material directly to students on the blackboard, but now there is such a thing as technology-based learning media (Prasasti et al., 2019).

Since the government introduced the independent curriculum scheme, there has been the great hope for the success of this curriculum. As an independent curriculum for students, teachers, and education units, it does not mandate or require all educational units to directly implement the curriculum program intensively (Maba & Mantra, 2018). The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the lifestyle of the Indonesian people. Amid a pandemic, the government realizes the need to change the education system and adopt technology and curriculum that adapts to changing times. To avoid sudden changes, the government has undertaken a pilot project to introduce alternative curricula in selected schools, this is done to ensure the quality of education is well-maintained for the students to improve their ability to encounter the needs of globalization (Anwar, 2022).

The independent learning curriculum was initially introduced to the teachers through various workshops and focus group discussions

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to provide teachers with sufficient knowledge about the concepts and the implementation of the curriculum. However, it was found that teachers have various understandings and competence in implementing the curriculum. Understanding the phenomena above, therefore, this study was considered to be important to be conducted to develop teachers' understanding of the independence of curriculum.

RESEARCH METHOD

This type of research is action research where the researchers directly provide action in the form of workshops and discussions to increase teachers' understanding of the independent curriculum. In essence, classroom action research serves as a tool for solving problems that arise in the classroom and also as a tool for in-service training, where teachers use new skills and methods and sharpen their analytical skills. Furthermore, as a tool to create innovative learning, as a tool to improve communication between teachers and scientific researchers, as well as a tool that provide an alternative to problems that occur in the classroom. This research design consists of two cycles where in each cycle there are four interrelated activities as follows: planning, action, observation, and reflection. There are two types of research instruments used in this classroom action research, namely a set of tests (pre-test and post-test), and a questionnaire given to the teacher. Pre-test and post-test were used to collect data related to teachers' understanding of the independent learning curriculum. The pre-test is used to determine the initial abilities that have been previously owned, and the post-test is used to determine the achievement of increasing understanding after the training was held. The data were analyzed using the average score formula to determine the increase in the ability of the trainee teachers and the results of the questionnaire were analyzed using a rating scale to determine changes in teacher behaviour during the training process. Then, all data were presented descriptively to provide horizons for the readers and other prospective researchers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study discusses analyzing the teacher's ability to the independent curriculum. This analysis was conducted before the implementation of in-depth training activities on the independent curriculum which was conducted for a group of junior high school teachers. The data were collected by giving a questionnaire in the form of a number of questions to get an idea of the initial understanding of the independent curriculum so that in-depth training activities can be carried out more accurately and beneficially for all training participants.

The mean score of the pre-test was still very low. This was understandable because the curriculum of independent learning was still very new for most teachers. After the workshop was conducted with intensive discussion, it was found that participants' understanding of the independent learning curriculum improved shown by the improvement of the mean score of the first post-test. Moreover, after further training, the second posttest was conducted indicating a higher mean score compared with the first posttest. Therefore, it can be said that there was a significant improvement in the participants' understanding of the independent learning curriculum because the results of the second post-test were much higher than the pre-test and the first post-test. These indicated that the participants' understanding increased significantly after the training using workshop and discussion sessions. Moreover, during the observations, the participants also showed active and serious participation during the process of training activities.

Furthermore, the researcher gave a questionnaire to the participants. A questionnaire was given to determine participants' responses to the implementation of the training in the form of workshops and discussions about the independent learning curriculum. The

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questionnaire was constructed in the Indonesian language to ensure that all participants comprehend the questionnaire. Moreover, the questionnaire in the form of a structured questionnaire consisting of ten (10) items. The questionnaire was given at the end of the last cycle. There are five options: strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. These choices were analyzed using a Likert rating scale ranging from five (5) to one (1). All responses from the subjects will be accumulated to get the total of each item and were calculated in the data analysis to get the percentage of each response.

Based on the questionnaire data analysis, it was found that the participant's response to the workshop on the independent learning curriculum was positive. It could be seen from the number of subjects after the workshop, there were 70.50% of the answers indicated strongly agree; 20% of responses, agree; 0.50% of responses, undecided; and there are no answers indicated disagree and strongly disagree. From the results of the questionnaire, it can be stated that most of the participants gave positive responses about the training or the workshop of the independent learning curriculum.

The important role of teachers in the independent learning curriculum needs to be supported by training that facilitates teachers' understanding of the independent learning curriculum. The biggest challenge for teachers in conducting independent learning curricula is the need to master information technology. The concept of an independent learning curriculum changes the nature of learning by providing a learning environment that supports free thinking and creates a comfortable learning environment. Although the use of information technology is very important, it does not eliminate the role of the teacher in the learning process. However, the willingness of teachers to adapt to the independent learning curriculum must also be taken into account.

The curriculum should enable students to acquire specific knowledge and skills and develop a noble character to achieve the enhancement of social welfare, justice and glory of the people. The curriculum must bridge students so that they learn and the knowledge they learn becomes a force for understanding the essence of life and improving their quality of life, both personally and socially. The independent learning curriculum gives teaching units, teachers and students the freedom to continue their studies. By providing project-based learning, the independent learning curriculum provides a space for teachers and students to recognize everyday life problems and find solutions to those problems.

Independent learning curriculum mainly exists on all fronts, especially the demand for competitive and adaptable talent to meet the comprehensive changes that have occurred. Monotonous learning hinders students from demonstrating their skills and abilities. An independent learning curriculum replaces learning methods originally conducted in the school classroom with learning outside the classroom. Therefore, schools need to offer innovations in terms of learning facilities, activities, extracurricular activities, and learning activities related to the environment and teachers need to innovate learning to encourage innovation from students.

CONCLUSION

The Independent Curriculum is a curriculum with diverse intra-curricular learning where the contents can be optimized so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competencies. This research was conducted in two cycles, and each cycle consisted of two sessions where each session had four interrelated activities: planning, action, observation, and reflection. First, the researcher did an initial reflection by giving a pre-test to the subject. The average score of students shows that the teacher's understanding of the Independent Learning Curriculum significantly improved after the training through workshops and discussions was carried out. Based on the

research, it can be suggested that the training on curriculum should be improved.

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