

THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL SCHOOLS

KESENJANGAN IMPLEMENTASI KURIKULUM MANDIRI ANTARA SEKOLAH PERKOTAAN DAN PEDESAAN

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ABSTRAK

Pendidikan berperan penting dalam meningkatkan kualitas sumber daya manusia dan mendukung pembangunan nasional. Sebagai upaya meningkatkan mutu pendidikan, pemerintah Indonesia menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka yang menekankan pembelajaran yang fleksibel, berpusat pada peserta didik, serta berorientasi pada pengembangan kompetensi dan karakter. Namun, implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka masih menunjukkan kesenjangan antara sekolah di wilayah perkotaan dan pedesaan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kesenjangan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka antara sekolah perkotaan dan pedesaan serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhinya. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi pustaka dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Data diperoleh dari berbagai artikel ilmiah, buku, dan dokumen pemerintah yang relevan dan diterbitkan pada periode 2021–2025. Data dianalisis secara deskriptif melalui tahapan identifikasi, klasifikasi, perbandingan, dan interpretasi terhadap temuan dari berbagai sumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sekolah di wilayah perkotaan cenderung mampu mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka secara lebih efektif karena didukung oleh infrastruktur yang memadai, akses teknologi yang lebih baik, ketersediaan sumber belajar, serta kesempatan yang lebih luas bagi guru untuk mengikuti pengembangan profesional. Sebaliknya, sekolah di wilayah pedesaan masih menghadapi berbagai kendala, seperti keterbatasan sarana dan prasarana, akses internet yang rendah, minimnya bahan ajar, serta terbatasnya pelatihan bagi guru. Kondisi tersebut menyebabkan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka belum berjalan secara merata. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan komitmen pemerintah melalui pemerataan infrastruktur pendidikan, peningkatan kompetensi guru secara berkelanjutan, serta kolaborasi antara sekolah, masyarakat, dan pemangku kepentingan lainnya untuk mewujudkan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka yang lebih adil dan berkualitas di seluruh wilayah Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Kurikulum Merdeka, Implementasi Kurikulum, Sekolah Perkotaan, Sekolah Pedesaan, Kesenjangan Pendidikan*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation gap of the Independent Curriculum between urban and rural schools and identify the factors contributing to these disparities. This study employed a qualitative library research design by reviewing relevant literature published between 2021 and 2025, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and government reports. The collected data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis through literature identification, classification, comparison, and interpretation. The findings reveal that urban schools generally demonstrate more effective curriculum implementation due to better infrastructure, greater access to digital technology, adequate learning resources, and more extensive opportunities for teacher professional development. In contrast, rural schools continue to face challenges related to inadequate infrastructure, limited internet access, insufficient teaching materials, and restricted access to teacher training, resulting in unequal

curriculum implementation and educational quality. The study concludes that reducing the implementation gap requires stronger government commitment through equitable infrastructure development, continuous teacher capacity building, and collaborative support from schools, communities, and other stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum throughout Indonesia.

Keywords: Independent Curriculum, Curriculum Implementation, Urban Schools, Rural Schools, Educational Gap

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a fundamental role in developing human resources and promoting sustainable national development. As educational demands continue to evolve in response to technological advancement and global challenges, education systems are expected to equip students with the knowledge, competencies, and character required in the twenty-first century. To address these demands, the Indonesian government introduced the Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*), a curriculum reform that emphasizes flexible learning, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the development of students' competencies and character. The curriculum encourages teachers to design learning experiences that accommodate students' diverse needs while fostering critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication skills (Intiana et al., 2023). Consequently, teachers are expected to play a more active role as learning facilitators by adapting instructional strategies to students' characteristics and learning contexts (Prabaningrum & Sayekti, 2023).

Although the Independent Curriculum offers considerable potential for improving educational quality, its implementation remains uneven across different regions of Indonesia. Urban schools generally possess more adequate infrastructure, better access to digital technology, sufficient learning resources, and greater opportunities for teacher professional development. These advantages enable schools to implement the curriculum more effectively. In contrast, many rural schools continue to experience limited internet connectivity, inadequate educational facilities, insufficient teaching

materials, and restricted access to professional training. Such disparities hinder teachers' ability to implement innovative learning practices and consequently affect students' learning experiences (Syaipul Pahru et al., 2022).

Previous studies have consistently reported various challenges associated with implementing the Independent Curriculum, including inadequate teacher preparedness, limited educational infrastructure, and unequal access to learning resources (Stenly et al., 2024; Sari et al., 2022). However, most existing studies primarily examine curriculum implementation within specific schools or regions and focus on individual implementation issues. Comparatively fewer studies have synthesized the disparities between urban and rural schools by examining multiple dimensions simultaneously, including teacher competence, infrastructure, technological access, stakeholder support, and educational resources. Therefore, a comprehensive analysis of the implementation gap remains necessary to provide a broader understanding of educational inequality under the Independent Curriculum.

The implementation gap between urban and rural schools has important implications for educational equity. Teachers in rural areas often have limited opportunities to participate in workshops, seminars, and professional learning communities, making it more difficult to adopt new pedagogical approaches. Furthermore, disparities in school funding, technological infrastructure, and community support contribute to unequal learning opportunities for students. Without adequate policy intervention, these

differences may widen educational inequality and reduce the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum in achieving its intended objectives.

In addition to school resources and teacher competence, support from parents, local communities, and government institutions plays a significant role in the successful implementation of the curriculum. Strong collaboration among stakeholders contributes to the creation of supportive learning environments and facilitates students' academic and character development. Conversely, limited community involvement and inadequate institutional support may further constrain curriculum implementation, particularly in rural and geographically isolated areas.

Based on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the implementation gap of the Independent Curriculum between urban and rural schools in Indonesia by synthesizing evidence from recent scholarly literature. Specifically, this study seeks to (1) identify the differences in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum between urban and rural schools, (2) examine the factors contributing to the implementation gap, and (3) propose recommendations to promote more equitable curriculum implementation across different educational settings in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative library research design to examine the implementation gap of the Independent Curriculum between urban and rural schools in Indonesia. The study relied on secondary data obtained from scientific journal articles, books, government publications, and other relevant academic sources discussing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and educational disparities in Indonesia. The literature selection focused on publications issued between 2021 and 2025, corresponding to the period following the introduction of the Independent

Curriculum. Sources were identified through academic databases, including Google Scholar, SINTA-indexed journals, and other reputable scientific publications. The keywords used during the literature search included *Independent Curriculum*, *Kurikulum Merdeka*, *urban schools*, *rural schools*, *curriculum implementation*, and *educational inequality*.

The selected literature was analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach. The analysis involved four stages: (1) identifying relevant literature based on the research objectives, (2) classifying the findings according to major themes, including teacher competence, school infrastructure, access to technology, learning resources, and stakeholder support, (3) comparing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in urban and rural schools, and (4) interpreting the findings to identify the major factors contributing to the implementation gap and to formulate recommendations for improving equitable curriculum implementation across different regions in Indonesia. This approach enabled the researcher to synthesize current evidence from previous studies and provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing the Independent Curriculum in diverse educational settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on writer's observation, and study literature, there are clear differences between rural and urban school in implementing Independent Curriculum, in urban areas have facilities support, more access to technology and the teacher who received more training. It is inversely propotional in rural school. And the gap cause inequality in implementation of Independent Curriculum. This is in line with, The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in remote areas presents several major challenges, such as insufficient infrastructure and a lack of educational resources. Access to

technology and appropriate learning materials also remains limited. Therefore, government intervention is necessary to ensure adequate support and resources. Moreover, the participation of local communities plays an important role in the successful application of the Independent Curriculum. Through collaboration with parents and community members, schools can build a more supportive learning environment and strengthen relationships among students, schools, and the community. (Syaipul Pahru et al., 2022). Curriculum renewal is needed to ensure that students are equipped with skills that match current developments, such as problem-solving abilities in various fields of study. Therefore, the Independent Curriculum is not only a concept but also a real effort to give students more space to develop their potential and interests. With proper implementation and support from various related parties, the Independent Curriculum is expected to make a positive contribution to improving the quality of education in Indonesia (Setiyadi et al., 2025). In general, this curriculum has a strong impact on both teachers and students in increasing innovation, motivation, and creativity. It gives freedom in the learning process while still keeping it on the right path. Schools in urban areas experience more benefits from this curriculum because of complete facilities, smooth implementation, and teacher readiness through various teaching methods prepared for classroom learning. However, this situation is different from schools in rural areas, where the implementation of the Independent Curriculum still faces many challenges and creates both positive and negative responses.

This shows that the inequality in implementing the curriculum is caused by the government's lack of firm policy, which has led to many disagreements in its application. Inadequate access is one of the main factors that hinder the implementation of this curriculum in rural areas. The Merdeka Curriculum, a transformative

program in the Indonesian education sector, comes with a noble vision to create a generation that learns independently, is creative, and has strong character. Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in rural schools with all their limitations in infrastructure, internet access, and human resources, face unique challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Herianto & Lestari, 2021). Limited internet access and poor technological support make it difficult to carry out technology-based learning. As a result, schools in rural areas often use simple or improvised teaching methods. In general, this problem is also caused by the lack of human resources and the limited infrastructure and facilities available. The Independent Curriculum, which focuses the learning process on meeting students' needs and characteristics, gives students more freedom to develop according to their potential, interests, and skills (Faiz et al., 2022).

The implementation of this curriculum requires readiness in various aspects, including teacher competence, availability of facilities and infrastructure, and support from different stakeholders (Suharno., 2023). Teachers play a central role to determine the success of curriculum implementation, however, not all teachers have enough understanding of the concepts and teaching methods that fit this curriculum (Sari et al., 2022). Teachers need proper preparation, such as seminars about curriculum implementation and learning design, which depend strongly on the curriculum. However, teachers who work in rural areas often do not receive this support. Limited access, poor internet connection, and lack of clear information are serious problems that slow down the curriculum implementation.

As a result, many schools still use the old curriculum, causing inequality between the education system in cities and villages. In teaching 21st-century students, teachers need to adapt their teaching strategies, models, and methods based on the

characteristics of this generation. Teachers can no longer use traditional or standard teaching methods. They must be innovative by improving their knowledge and skills to create engaging and interactive learning activities using technology. 21st-century learning models rely heavily on technology, especially the internet, to support the learning process. Students are expected to be active and independent in developing 4C skills—critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Indarta et al., 2021). Active, innovative, and comfortable learning concepts should help students adapt to the needs of the modern era. Teachers must also act as facilitators to shape students' characters so that they can think critically, creatively, and innovatively, as well as communicate and collaborate effectively. In addition to encouraging students to find their own learning resources, such as through e-books, teachers also need to prepare appropriate learning methods, especially in the Independent Learning Curriculum. One model that teachers can use is the Blended Learning Model (Manalu et al., 2022). Inconsistencies in curriculum implementation between schools in rural and urban areas lead to inequality in the quality of education. Students in urban areas tend to have better learning experiences thanks to comprehensive facilities, trained teachers, and easy access to technology and learning resources. On the other hand, students in rural areas face limitations in facilities, internet access, and teacher training, which makes the learning process less effective.

Schools in less developed areas often do not have enough funds to carry out the Independent Curriculum effectively, which causes differences in education quality. The government has an important role in giving continuous support, such as providing funds for teacher training, developing learning materials, and improving school facilities. The government also needs to do regular supervision and evaluation to make sure the Independent Curriculum is applied

according to national standards in all elementary schools in Indonesia. To make the implementation more equal across the country, the government, schools, teachers, and communities should work together to solve problems like limited resources and economic gaps, and also to help teachers improve their understanding of the curriculum (Stenly et al., 2024).

This situation creates a noticeable difference in how students achieve learning outcomes. Learners in urban schools tend to be better prepared to meet curriculum expectations, while those in rural areas often face more obstacles. If this condition continues, the gap will likely widen and cause greater inequality in the quality of human resources. In the long run, it may also reduce equal opportunities for rural students in higher education and employment. Therefore, improving access to quality education and providing continuous professional support for teachers are essential steps to ensure that learning progress can develop fairly across all regions. The government's initiative plays a crucial role in expanding internet and technology access to underserved communities. By investing in infrastructure development and digital literacy programs, the government can ensure that all students have equal opportunities to access online resources and take part in digital learning activities (Ar & Abbas, 2021). However, several challenges still exist, including the digital divide, limited human resource readiness, and the lack of effective collaboration between educational institutions and related stakeholders.

Despite these challenges, various efforts have been made to address them, such as improving technological infrastructure, strengthening teachers' competencies, and increasing digital literacy within communities. The success of the curriculum implementation largely depends on the active involvement of school principals and all stakeholders in solving these ongoing issues (Setiyadi et al., 2025). All efforts to improve learning

quality need strong support from the government and active involvement from the local community. In carrying out the learning process, cooperation between both sides is very important for success. As technology continues to develop, the education system must also adjust to stay relevant to current needs. The government should take an active role in supporting the implementation of the curriculum in rural and remote areas, where access to the internet, school facilities, and learning materials is still limited. This support can include building better infrastructure, giving training for teachers, and improving digital literacy among the community, so that education in rural areas can grow effectively and be more equal with urban education.

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in rural schools, viewed through a constructivist lens, offers opportunities for more meaningful learning that connects to students' everyday lives. This method motivates students to think more critically and creatively, collaborate with peers, and take charge of their own education. Such abilities are crucial for their personal development and ongoing learning throughout life. However, rural schools encounter significant challenges, including inadequate facilities, inadequate teacher training, and poor infrastructure. To address these issues, collaboration among the government, schools, and local communities is essential to ensure the curriculum is implemented smoothly and provides equal advantages to all students. In comparison, urban schools benefit from greater access to technology, educational resources, and professional development for teachers, making it simpler for them to apply the curriculum successfully. Despite inequality between rural and urban schools, both share the common aim of enhancing educational quality and supporting students' growth in knowledge and character. Through effective cooperation, innovative

approaches, and community backing, the Independent Curriculum can serve as a powerful way to reduce the education gap between areas and give fair chances for every student in Indonesia.

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