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## Education Quality Problems in the Independent Curriculum Era

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### ABSTRACT

#### Background

The problem of education quality in Indonesia is a complex challenge that requires a multifaceted approach. By improving access and quality of education, increasing teacher professionalism, and developing a relevant curriculum, it is hoped that the quality of education in Indonesia can improve significantly.

#### Purpose

The purpose of writing this article is to analyze various problems that affect the quality of education in Indonesia in the era of the independent curriculum and identify potential solutions to overcome these problems.

#### Design/method/approach

The method used in this article is literature study.

#### Results

The results of this research explain that from various problems with the quality of education in the era of the independent curriculum, the government continues to strive to improve and improve the quality of education, unequal access and quality of education, improving teacher quality and professionalism, improving educational infrastructure and facilities so as to achieve the goal of national education to create the next generation. superior and integrated successor.

#### Contribution/value

To overcome this problem, the government needs to increase teacher training programs, especially in hard-to-reach areas, apart from that, there needs to be a larger budget allocation for improving educational facilities, and educational equality policies must be a priority.

### Article History

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The quality of education is one of the main factors that determines the quality of a country's human resources. Quality education not only includes mastery of basic knowledge and skills, but also the development of students' character, creativity and critical thinking abilities. However, in Indonesia, the challenges to improving the quality of education are still very large. Problems such as gaps in access to education, low teacher competency, and curricula that are not yet fully relevant to current developments are obstacles that need to be overcome immediately (Wirastiani, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum focuses on student-centered learning, where students are the main focus in every learning activity. It aims to create a more relevant and meaningful learning experience for each student, allowing them to learn in a way that best suits their individual style and pace. Under this policy, schools are given greater freedom to design and develop their own curriculum to suit the specific needs of their students as well as existing local potential. This means that schools can be more flexible in choosing the most effective learning materials, teaching methods and extracurricular activities to help students achieve optimal learning outcomes (Muria & Susanto, 2024).

As part of global efforts to improve the education system, the Indonesian government has implemented various policy reforms, including the implementation of a new curriculum and the allocation of greater education funding. However, the effectiveness of these reforms still requires comprehensive evaluation, especially in terms of the impact on student learning outcomes. In this context, this article will discuss several main problems that affect the quality of education in Indonesia, as well as strategies that can be taken to overcome them.

The quality of education is a crucial aspect in determining the future of a nation. In Indonesia, the issue of education quality is often in the spotlight because of the various challenges faced. Unequal access to education between urban and rural areas, varying teacher Quality, and inadequate educational infrastructure are some of the main issues that affect the quality of education in this country.

Disparities in access and quality of education between urban and rural areas in Indonesia cause significant differences in student learning outcomes. Rural areas often lack adequate educational facilities, which impacts the quality of education received by students in those areas. This shows the urgent need to improve educational infrastructure and accessibility in remote areas (Suharto et al, 2022)

Apart from that, the quality of teachers is also an important factor in determining the quality of education. Many teachers in Indonesia still face challenges in terms of professionalism and pedagogical competence. This problem is related to the lack of continuous training and professional development, which affects the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process (Suharto et al, 2022.) Inadequate educational infrastructure is also a major obstacle in improving the quality of education. That many schools in Indonesia experience a lack of basic facilities such as adequate classrooms and educational technology. This deficiency hampers the teaching and learning process and has a negative impact on student learning outcomes (Ningsih and Wibowo, 2022).

The lack of relevance of the curriculum to job market needs also contributes to education quality problems. The education curriculum in Indonesia is often not in line with the demands of the industrial world and technological developments, so that education graduates are less prepared to face challenges in the job market (Ningsih and Wibowo, 2022).

The independent curriculum, which is currently still being used as part of learning recovery efforts, is more flexible and focuses on developing the character of students, and is still being adapted to the school environment, but it is hoped that it can be implemented in all schools in Indonesia so that it becomes a very important task for educators and teaching staff.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The shift toward the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in Indonesia marks a significant transformation in the nation's educational paradigm, focusing on student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and the development of holistic competencies. However, alongside its promising goals, this curriculum reform has brought several challenges related to the quality of education. The Independent Curriculum was officially introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to foster freedom in learning, flexibility in teaching, and contextualization in school-based curriculum design (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). It emphasizes project-based learning, character education (Profil Pelajar Pancasila), and formative assessment. Although it aims to empower teachers and students, its implementation has encountered varying responses depending on regional and institutional readiness.

According to UNESCO (2005), educational quality includes five key dimensions: learner characteristics, learning environments, content, processes, and outcomes. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, quality concerns arise particularly in teaching readiness, curriculum comprehension, assessment strategies, and resource availability. One of the recurring issues identified in the literature is the lack of sufficient training and professional development for teachers. Studies by Sari & Prasetyo (2023) reveal that many teachers feel underprepared to design and implement the new learning modules and performance assessments. Without adequate pedagogical support, the risk of superficial implementation increases, which may affect student outcomes.

The Independent Curriculum encourages school autonomy, yet this autonomy can lead to disparities, especially between urban and rural schools. Research by Anwar et al. (2023) points out that schools in remote areas face limitations in internet access, digital literacy, and learning materials, thereby affecting the equitable implementation of the curriculum and overall education quality.

Shifting from summative to formative assessment is a core component of the Independent Curriculum. However, this shift presents new challenges. Teachers often struggle with assessing competencies such as critical thinking and creativity due to a lack of clear guidelines or standardized tools (Nugroho, 2022). This affects the reliability of outcome measurements and feedback quality for learners. The curriculum's emphasis on student

autonomy and project-based learning represents a significant change from traditional approaches. While theoretically enriching, many students are not yet equipped with the self-regulated learning skills necessary to thrive in this model (Putri & Wibowo, 2023). This gap further highlights the need for structured support systems.

## **METHOD**

The research methodology used in this research is a literature study, where researchers collect, analyze and interpret various sources of relevant data from existing literature. Literature study involves searching books, scientific articles, journals, research reports, and other written sources related to the topic under study. This method aims to gain a deep understanding of existing concepts, theories and findings, so that researchers can identify research gaps, find patterns and trends, and develop a conceptual framework that supports the research carried out. Through literature studies, researchers can also compare various perspectives and obtain secondary data that can enrich the analysis and provide a strong theoretical basis for research results.

## **RESULTS**

The government's role in improving the quality of education in Indonesia has been carried out through various strategic policies and programs before 2022. The following are some of the government's important roles in this effort, namely curriculum preparation and implementation, improving teacher quality, budget allocation for education, 12 year compulsory education program and Indonesia is smart (Kemendola et al, 2024). Inequality in access to education is also a significant problem. In remote areas, many children have difficulty getting a decent education due to geographic and economic factors. In addition, the quality of schools in remote areas is often far below standard, increasing the gap between urban and rural education. Equal access to and quality of education is still a big homework for the government( Kemendola et al, 2024 ). One of the main factors influencing the quality of education in Indonesia is the low competence of teaching staff. Many teachers have not received adequate and up-to-date training to face current curriculum developments and student needs. In addition, there is still a significant gap between teachers in big cities and remote areas in terms of access to training and facilities( Kemendola et al, 2024 ).

Inadequate facilities, such as damaged classrooms, lack of books, and lack of supporting technology, are one of the major obstacles in improving the quality of education. In some areas, access to educational resources is still very limited, so that the teaching and learning process is not optimal. This affects students' absorption of the material being taught. The curriculum greatly influences the quality of education today and plays a very important role in determining the quality of education. The curriculum that is currently relevant is the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia, which will be implemented starting in 2022 in stages. This curriculum is designed to face the challenges of the digital era, improve learning that is more student-centered, and give schools the flexibility to determine the learning methods that best suit their local conditions. This curriculum also focuses on

project-based learning, which aims to improve students' critical thinking, collaboration and creativity skills (Kemendola et al, 2024).

In this case, the government is still continuing to strive to improve and improve the quality of education so that the goal of national education in Indonesia is achieved to create a superior and integrated next generation. From the discussion above on the problem of education quality in the era of the independent curriculum, namely:

### **Inequality of Access and Quality of Education**

One of the main problems in the quality of education in Indonesia is the inequality of access and quality of education across various regions. This disparity is particularly evident between urban and rural areas, where students in urban centers tend to have better access to both educational resources and qualified teachers. In contrast, students in remote and rural regions face significant challenges. They often do not have adequate educational facilities, such as modern classrooms, libraries, or technological tools that are essential for an enhanced learning experience. Furthermore, these regions struggle to attract and retain qualified teachers, which leads to a shortage of experienced and competent educators.

The gap in educational access between rural and urban areas exacerbates socio-economic disparities, as children in underprivileged regions are deprived of the same opportunities for academic success as their urban counterparts. Students in remote areas often face challenges such as overcrowded classrooms, a lack of extracurricular activities, and insufficient learning materials. In some instances, teachers may be underqualified or have to teach multiple subjects they are not specialized in, further impacting the quality of education. As a result, this inequality hampers the overall academic development of students in rural regions and limits their opportunities for further education and employment.

Addressing this issue requires comprehensive efforts from both the government and non-governmental organizations to invest in rural education, improve infrastructure, and ensure that teachers are adequately trained and supported. Only by addressing these disparities can Indonesia provide equitable and quality education for all its students, regardless of where they live (Kemendola et al, 2024).

### **Teacher Quality and Professionalism**

The quality of teachers plays a crucial role in determining the overall quality of education, and this is a significant challenge in Indonesia. Many teachers across the country still face obstacles related to professionalism and pedagogical competence, which directly impacts the effectiveness of the learning process. As highlighted by Suharto et al. (2022), one of the core issues lies in the inadequate levels of teacher training and the limited opportunities for continuous professional development. While teachers in urban areas may have access to more advanced training and resources, those in rural and remote regions often lack the same opportunities, which hinders their ability to improve their teaching skills.

A large number of teachers in Indonesia have not undergone sufficient pre-service training that equips them with the latest pedagogical knowledge and teaching methods. This lack of adequate training can lead to outdated teaching practices, ineffective classroom management, and difficulty in addressing the diverse needs of students. Moreover, without

ongoing professional development programs, teachers are less likely to stay updated on new educational trends, technologies, and teaching strategies.

This gap in professional training and development contributes to a cycle of poor teaching quality, particularly in schools located in underserved areas. The absence of a structured system for career advancement or continuous learning also demotivates teachers, leading to lower job satisfaction and, in some cases, high turnover rates. To address these issues, it is essential to invest in comprehensive teacher training programs, provide opportunities for ongoing professional development, and create a supportive environment where teachers can continuously enhance their skills. By doing so, Indonesia can improve teacher quality and, in turn, elevate the standard of education across the country.

### **Lack of Educational Infrastructure and Facilities**

Inadequate educational infrastructure and facilities present a significant barrier to improving the quality of education in Indonesia. Many schools, especially in rural and remote areas, lack basic facilities that are essential for effective teaching and learning. These schools often do not have proper classrooms, with some students forced to learn in overcrowded or poorly maintained spaces that are not conducive to learning. The absence of essential teaching tools, such as textbooks, maps, and other learning materials, further complicates the situation, as students are left without adequate resources to support their studies. Additionally, the lack of educational technology, such as computers, internet access, and multimedia tools, prevents both teachers and students from fully engaging with modern teaching methods that can enhance learning outcomes.

This lack of infrastructure hampers the teaching process by limiting the ability of teachers to implement innovative or interactive teaching techniques. Without proper classrooms or materials, it becomes difficult for educators to design and deliver effective lessons, particularly in subjects that require hands-on learning or visual aids. Inadequate facilities also create an environment that is not conducive to student engagement or motivation, which directly affects the overall learning experience and outcomes.

Moreover, the disparities in infrastructure between urban and rural schools widen the educational divide. Students in urban areas tend to have access to well-equipped classrooms, libraries, and modern learning tools, which significantly enhance their chances of academic success. In contrast, students in underfunded schools are often deprived of these opportunities, leading to unequal educational experiences across the country.

To address these issues, there needs to be significant investment in improving educational infrastructure, particularly in underserved regions. This includes building and maintaining proper classrooms, ensuring access to essential learning materials, and integrating educational technology into schools. By creating a better learning environment, Indonesia can enhance the quality of education and ensure that all students, regardless of their location, have equal opportunities to succeed.

### **Evaluation and Assessment**

One of the key challenges in improving the quality of education in Indonesia is the limited scope of assessment practices. Traditional assessments often focus solely on the

results of written tests, neglecting the broader aspects of student development. A more comprehensive approach to assessment is essential, one that evaluates not just academic knowledge but also the overall learning process, including practical skills, soft skills, and critical thinking abilities. Such an approach would offer a more holistic view of student performance and growth. However, as noted by Kemendola et al. (2024), many schools continue to rely primarily on exams and written tests, which fail to capture important aspects of learning, such as creativity, teamwork, problem-solving, and other real-world skills that are increasingly valued in today's society.

The emphasis on traditional testing methods limits the ability to assess students' abilities in project-based learning or practical skills. In many cases, students are evaluated based on rote memorization and the ability to regurgitate information, rather than on their ability to apply knowledge in real-world situations. This narrow focus on exams often fails to encourage the development of critical thinking, collaboration, or innovation—skills that are essential for success in both higher education and the workforce.

To address this, it is crucial for educational institutions to diversify their evaluation tools and methodologies. This could include project-based assessments, group work, presentations, and peer reviews, as well as the incorporation of soft skills such as communication, leadership, and emotional intelligence into the evaluation process. By using a variety of assessment methods, educators can better capture the full range of student abilities, providing a more accurate reflection of their capabilities and progress. Moreover, such an approach would encourage a deeper, more engaging learning experience, as students would be motivated to develop a broader set of skills beyond those measured in traditional exams.

Ultimately, adopting a more comprehensive evaluation system would not only improve the accuracy and fairness of assessments but also better prepare students for the challenges and demands of the modern world. This shift towards holistic assessment practices would contribute to a more well-rounded and competent generation of learners in Indonesia.

## **DISCUSSION**

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in Indonesia was a transformative response to the need for a more flexible, student-centered, and competency-based learning system. It focuses on differentiated learning, project-based approaches, and character development through the Profil Pelajar Pancasila framework. While the goals of the curriculum are progressive and aligned with 21st-century education ideals, several challenges concerning education quality have emerged in practice. Marthana Yusa et al. (2023) emphasize that the successful realization of this curriculum largely depends on how well teachers and institutions adapt to its demands.

One of the primary issues affecting education quality is teacher readiness. Many educators express difficulty in understanding and implementing the new curriculum due to limited training and support. According to Astuti et al. (2024), teachers often lack the pedagogical skills and confidence to apply differentiated instruction or develop project-

based learning plans. This gap hinders the intended personalized learning experience for students. Without continuous professional development and mentoring, the effectiveness of the curriculum in enhancing educational quality remains questionable.

Furthermore, disparities in educational infrastructure across regions exacerbate the quality gap. Schools in rural or underdeveloped areas often lack access to internet, digital tools, and teaching resources essential for implementing the Independent Curriculum. As highlighted by Warsihna et al. (2023), such schools struggle with basic facilities, let alone technology-enhanced learning. This inequality not only affects student outcomes but also undermines the curriculum's core principle of equitable and inclusive education.

Another notable challenge lies in assessment practices. The shift from traditional summative assessments to formative and performance-based evaluations has proven difficult for many teachers. Hunaepi et al. (2023) found that a lack of standardized assessment tools and proper training makes it hard for educators to measure complex competencies such as creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration. Consequently, students may not receive constructive feedback that genuinely supports their development.

Lastly, student autonomy, a central feature of the Independent Curriculum, is still a work in progress. Although the curriculum encourages learners to take initiative and be actively involved in their own learning process, many students are not yet equipped with the skills necessary for self-directed learning. As noted by Astuti et al. (2024), both students and teachers are still adjusting to this shift, which can result in disengagement and reduced motivation. Therefore, while the Independent Curriculum offers a promising vision for Indonesia's education system, it requires substantial systemic support, capacity-building, and infrastructure improvements to address the underlying quality issues effectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

The problem of education quality in the independent curriculum in Indonesia is a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach. The implementation of the independent curriculum, while aimed at fostering more flexible, student-centered learning, has highlighted several areas that need attention in order to truly enhance the quality of education across the country. To improve the overall educational experience, it is essential to address key issues such as access to education, teacher professionalism, and the development of a curriculum that is both relevant and adaptive to the needs of students and society.

Improving access to education, particularly in rural and remote areas, is one of the foundational steps toward ensuring equitable opportunities for all students. Disparities in educational facilities, resources, and teacher quality between urban and rural schools continue to widen the gap in educational outcomes. By ensuring that every child, regardless of their location, has access to quality education, Indonesia can lay the groundwork for a more inclusive and equitable system. This involves investing in infrastructure, providing adequate teaching materials, and ensuring that teachers in underserved areas are properly trained and supported. Increasing teacher professionalism and welfare is another critical component in improving education quality. Teachers are at the heart of the learning process,

and their competence, motivation, and well-being directly affect student outcomes. To enhance teacher quality, it is essential to provide ongoing professional development opportunities, improve the standards of teacher training, and ensure fair compensation and support for educators. By fostering an environment where teachers are equipped with the skills and resources they need, Indonesia can ensure that students receive the best possible education.

Developing a relevant and adaptive curriculum is also vital to the success of the independent curriculum. The curriculum should not only focus on academic achievement but also nurture the development of practical skills, critical thinking, creativity, and emotional intelligence. It should be flexible enough to accommodate diverse learning styles and prepare students for the rapidly changing global landscape. Moreover, the curriculum needs to reflect local contexts and values, ensuring that students are both globally competitive and culturally grounded. Addressing these challenges requires a collective effort from the government, educational institutions, and the community. The government must invest in policies that promote equitable access to education, support teacher development, and ensure the curriculum remains dynamic and responsive to societal needs. Educational institutions must embrace innovation in teaching and learning practices, while the community must be actively involved in supporting schools and students. Only through strong collaboration and sustained efforts can Indonesia create a more effective, inclusive, and equitable education system that empowers students to thrive in a rapidly evolving world.

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