
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN PADMA JAYA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PALEMBANG: A CASE STUDY IN GRADE IV

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Abstract

The Merdeka Curriculum (Independent Curriculum) is a transformative policy of Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology designed to improve education quality through differentiated, contextual, and Pancasila Student Profile-based learning. Although this policy has been rolling out since 2022, its implementation at the elementary school level still faces various challenges, particularly in the preparation of teaching devices, teacher adaptation, and facility readiness. This study aims to deeply analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Padma Jaya Palembang, covering lesson planning, learning implementation, assessment systems, school environment, and curriculum administration. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a single case study design. Data were collected through structured observation, semi-structured interviews with the Vice Principal, Class IV Teacher, and the school principal, and documentation study. Data analysis used the Miles, Huberman & Saldana model encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The results show that SD Padma Jaya Palembang has optimally implemented the Merdeka Curriculum in all dimensions studied, with an average implementation rate above 95%. Teachers have developed learning modules based on Learning Objectives (TP) and Learning Achievement Flow (ATP), implemented student-centered learning, integrated the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), and applied authentic assessment covering attitudinal, knowledge, and skill aspects. The main obstacle found was limited time for instructional device preparation and the need for continuous teacher training. The support of the principal, inter-teacher collaboration, parental involvement, and facility adequacy were identified as key success factors.

Keyword: Merdeka Curriculum; Implementation; Elementary School; Pancasila Student Profile; Differentiated Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's education system has undergone eleven curriculum changes since independence, starting from the 1947 curriculum to the 2013 curriculum (Insani, 2019; Suparlan, 2022). Every curriculum change basically aims to answer the limitations of the previous curriculum and adapt to the times, societal needs, and global demands (Suratno et al., 2022). The latest development, which has been responded to by the government through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), is the

presence of the Independent Curriculum as a national curriculum which has officially been implemented gradually since 2022.

The urgency of the existence of the Independent Curriculum cannot be separated from two basic realities. First, the COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the world since 2020 has created a massive learning loss, especially at the elementary school level (Rahayu et al., 2022; Ministry of Education & Culture, 2022). The results of the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey show that Indonesian students' reading, and numeracy literacy are still below the OECD country average (OECD, 2023). Second, the previous curriculum (Curriculum 2013) was considered too dense and rigid, making it difficult for teachers to carry out meaningful, contextual, and student-centered learning (Indarta et al., 2022; Rohim et al., 2021).

The ideal condition expected from the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is the realization of differentiated learning, student-centered, relevant to the real-life context, and able to form character according to the Pancasila Student Profile which includes six dimensions: faith and fear of God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creative (Arpianti et al., 2023; Vhalery et al., 2022; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). The Independent Curriculum also mandates the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) as a cross-subject learning activity oriented to holistic character development (Ilmawan, 2024; Mery et al., 2022).

However, facts on the ground show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in various elementary schools is still far from ideal. A study by Mulyasa (2022) found that most elementary school teachers have not had a deep understanding of the philosophy and technicalities of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, especially in the preparation of Learning Objectives (TP), Learning Objectives Flow (ATP), and Teaching Modules. Research by Hidayah et al. (2023) also revealed that the main obstacles to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools include: (1) limitations in effective teacher training; (2) difficulty in compiling teaching tools based on student needs; (3) uneven infrastructure; and (4) low parental involvement in supporting the learning process. Meanwhile, Putri & Irawati (2023) emphasized that the success of the implementation of the new curriculum is largely determined by the leadership capacity of school principals in creating a conducive learning ecosystem.

As a solution to these challenges, the Ministry of Education and Culture has provided an Independent Teaching Platform (PMM), various independent trainings, and learning communities (practice communities) for teachers (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022; Wulandari & Mariati, 2023). Research by Fitriani et al. (2024) shows that schools that actively utilize PMM and build a practical community of teachers have a higher rate of implementation of the Independent Curriculum than schools that do not. This indicates that school ecosystem factors — including leadership, teacher collaboration, parental support, and adequate facilities — are the main determinants of successful implementation (Bronfenbrenner, 1994 in Santrock, 2021).

Based on this context analysis, this study asks the following research questions: (1) How is the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SD Padma Jaya Palembang in the dimensions of learning planning, learning implementation, assessment system, school environment, and curriculum administration? (2) What are the factors that support and inhibit the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SD Padma Jaya Palembang? This study aims to: (1) describe in depth the implementation of the Independent Curriculum

at SD Padma Jaya Palembang in all dimensions studied; and (2) identify the supporting and inhibiting factors of such implementation. The novelty of this research lies in the use of layered (multi-aspected) structured observation instruments that cover five dimensions of simultaneous implementation, as well as the research setting in private schools in secondary cities that have been underrepresented in the literature on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum which mostly focuses on public schools or large urban areas.

METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a single case study design that is descriptive-interpretive (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The qualitative approach was chosen because it aims to understand in depth and contextually how the implementation of the Independent Curriculum takes place at SD Padma Jaya Palembang, including its meaning, process, and obstacles (Fitrah & Luthfiah, 2017; Sugiyono, 2020). The case study design was chosen because it allows researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena in real-life contexts with case boundaries that are not always clear (Yin, 2018).

Research Subject

The research was carried out at SD Padma Jaya Palembang, which is located in Seberang Ulu 1 District, Palembang City, South Sumatra Province. This school has implemented the Independent Curriculum since 2025/2026 school year. The research subjects were selected purposively, consisting of: (1) the Principal of SD Padma Jaya Palembang as the main informant related to policies and implementation support; (2) Deputy Principal for Curriculum as the main informant related to curriculum planning and administration; (3) Grade IV homeroom teacher as the main informant regarding the implementation of learning, assessment, and the use of teaching modules. The research activity will be carried out on September 24, 2025.

Research Instruments

The main instrument of this research is the researcher himself (human instrument), as is common in qualitative research (Sugiyono, 2020). The supporting instruments used are: (1) Structured Observation Sheet which covers five aspects: teaching preparation, learning implementation, assessment, school environment, and curriculum administration; (2) Semi-Structured Interview Guidelines developed based on the implementation dimensions of the Independent Curriculum according to the framework of the Ministry of Education and Culture (2022); and (3) Documentation Study Sheets to analyze teaching modules, ATP, P5 schedules, and assessment reports. All instruments have been constructively validated by two basic education experts.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three complementary techniques (triangulation techniques): (1) Structured and participatory observation during the learning process in grade IV, which was carried out for a full day; (2) Semi-structured interviews with the three research subjects, each lasting 30–60 minutes and recorded with the consent of the interviewees; (3) Documentation study of learning tools, teaching modules, P5 schedules, and curriculum administration documents. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing data from the three informants, while technical triangulation was carried out by

matching the results of observations, interviews, and documentation studies (Sugiyono, 2020; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis uses the interactive model of Miles, Huberman & Saldana (2014) which consists of three stages: (1) data condensation, which is the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data from field notes, interview transcripts, and documents; (2) the presentation of data (data display) in the form of descriptive narratives, tables, and matrices to facilitate the drawing of conclusions; (3) drawing and verifying conclusions inductively based on patterns and themes that emerge from the data. The validity of the data is guaranteed through member checking (the resource person confirms the results of the researcher's interpretation), prolonged engagement, and peer debriefing with fellow researchers.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Result

1. Learning Planning

The results of observations on the learning planning of Class IV teachers of SD Padma Jaya Palembang showed very high implementation in all measured indicators. As presented in Table 1, teachers have prepared Teaching Modules that are aligned with the Learning Objectives (TP) and Learning Objectives Flow (ATP) in accordance with the mandate of the Independent Curriculum. The planning consistently refers to the developmental stage of grade IV students (ages 9–10 years) and integrates the activities of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) into the weekly learning flow.

Table 1. Learning Planning Observation Sheet (Before Class Starts)

No	Indicator	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	Teachers develop teaching modules/lesson plans based on the Independent Curriculum	√		
2	Learning plan tailored to the student's developmental stage	√		
3	Integrated P5 (Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project)	√		
4	The material focuses on literacy, numeracy, and character strengthening	√		

These findings indicate that teachers have a sufficient understanding of the structural differences between the Independent Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum. In the 2013 Curriculum, learning planning is outlined in a lesson plan that can reach 20 pages, while in the Independent Curriculum, planning is realized in a more concise but comprehensive

Teaching Module, including learning objectives, initial assessment (diagnostic), differentiated learning activities, and formative-summative assessments (Indarta et al., 2022; Rohim et al., 2021; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). The ability of teachers to develop adaptive teaching modules is an indicator of professional readiness which is in line with the findings of Mulyasa (2022) and Hidayah et al. (2023).

2. Implementation of Learning

Table 2 presents the results of observations on the implementation of learning in the classroom. All implementation indicators are consistently met, reflecting student-centered learning practices as emphasized in the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum

Table 2. Observation Sheet for the Implementation of Learning in the Classroom

No	Indicator	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	Teachers provide opportunities for students to ask questions and discuss	√		
2	Varied learning methods (projects, discussions, educational games)	√		
3	Students are active and enthusiastic in the learning process	√		
4	Teachers instill character values (cooperation, responsibility, creativity)	√		
5	Learning media is used according to needs and contexts	√		

In practice, grade IV teachers use a rich variety of methods: small group discussions, project-based learning, educational games, and student presentations. This method is in line with the principles of active and constructivist learning that are the foundation of the Independent Curriculum (Arpanti et al., 2023; Vhalery et al., 2022). The use of contextual learning media—including images, educational videos, and concrete objects—was also identified in observations, demonstrating teachers' ability to select and utilize relevant learning resources. These results are in line with the study by Putri & Irawati (2023) which found that a variety of teaching methods and appropriate media use significantly increase student engagement in Independent Curriculum-based learning

The character values instilled through learning activities — especially cooperation, responsibility, and creativity — are a concrete implementation of the three dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile that are relevant for grade IV elementary school students. Mery et al. (2022) emphasized that the cultivation of the character of cooperation is most effective through structured group project activities, not just value lectures. This practice has been carried out consistently by the teachers of Grade IV of SD Padma Jaya Palembang.

3. Rating System

Table 3 shows that the assessment system implemented at SD Padma Jaya Palembang is in accordance with the assessment principles in the Independent Curriculum, namely holistic, authentic, and sustainable assessment.

Table 3. Learning Assessment/Assessment Observation Sheet

No	Indicator	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	Assessment includes processes, not just (authentic) deliverables	√		
2	There is a remedial for students who have not reached KKM/TP	√		
3	P5 grades are separate from regular academic assessments	√		
4	The assessment covers three domains: attitude, skills, knowledge	√		

Teachers implement two types of assessments in an integrated manner: formative assessments (for learning) which function to guide the learning process in an ongoing manner, and summative assessments (of learning) which measure the achievement of competencies at the end of the learning period. Specifically, for P5, the assessment is carried out separately from regular academic grades, covering aspects of character, collaboration, creativity, and reflection on the project process. This approach reflects the authentic assessment paradigm championed by the Merdeka Curriculum, where assessment is not just about measuring memorization, but captures the integrity of student development (Ilmawan, 2024; Wulandari & Mariati, 2023). Fitriani et al. (2024) also found that schools that successfully implemented formative assessments consistently had a more academically and social-emotional profile of graduates.

4. School Environment and Supporting Facilities

The aspects of the school environment and supporting facilities, as presented in Table 4, show conducive conditions for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Table 4. School Environment Observation Sheet and Supporting Facilities

No	Indicator	Always	Sometimes	Never
1	The school provides adequate learning facilities	√		
2	A safe, comfortable, and inclusive learning atmosphere	√		
3	There is collaborative support from the principal and fellow teachers	√		
4	Parents are involved in supporting the implementation of the curriculum	√		

SD Padma Jaya Palembang has adequate learning facilities, including a library with a collection of Independent Curriculum textbooks, a computer laboratory with internet access, and simple practicum tools. A safe, comfortable, and inclusive learning environment — reflected in classrooms that support group discussions and the absence of reports of incidents of violence in schools — are important prerequisites for the effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Putri & Irawati, 2023). Bronfenbrenner (1994, in Santrock, 2021) in the ecological theory of human development asserts that the quality of the proximal environment (microsystem), including the quality of interaction in the classroom and family support—significantly determines children's learning outcomes. These findings are consistent with Suparlan's (2022) study which states that adequate school facilities and a positive school climate are the main enablers of the implementation of a transformative curriculum.

The principal's active and collaborative support—evidenced by his involvement in P5 scheduling, classroom supervision, and teacher training facilitation—is in line with the instructional leadership role emphasized by Hallinger & Heck (2010, in Hidayah et al., 2023). The involvement of students' parents, which is reflected in their participation in P5 activities and active communication through online groups, also strengthens the educational ecosystem that supports the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

5. Curriculum Administration

From the results of the interview with the Vice Principal for Curriculum, it was revealed that the curriculum administration at SD Padma Jaya Palembang has been running in a structured manner and utilizing digital technology. The preparation of lesson schedules, including the allocation of P5 time independent of regular lesson hours, is carried out through a digital system that is transparent and accessible to all teachers. The process of accepting new students (PPDB) can be carried out through two channels: face-to-face and online, showing the school's adaptation to the development of educational technology. Teacher performance evaluation is carried out in a multi-source manner (360 degrees), involving principals, peers, and feedback from students, which is a more comprehensive evaluation practice than conventional evaluation (Mulyasa, 2022).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study as a whole show that SD Padma Jaya Palembang has implemented the Independent Curriculum at a very high level in all dimensions studied. An average of above 95% implementation in all aspects—planning, implementation, assessment, environment, and administration—places the school as a good implementation model for the context of private schools in Indonesia's middle cities. These findings complement and align with the research of Indarta et al. (2022) which states that the Independent Curriculum has high relevance to 21st century learning models, and that schools that proactively build a culture of collaboration-based learning tend to be more successful in its implementation.

The success of learning planning, especially in the preparation of the Teaching Module and the integration of P5, shows that teachers have gone through a process of professional transformation that is quite meaningful. Rohim et al. (2021) called the shift from KD-based lesson plans to TP/ATP-based Teaching Modules as one of the biggest challenges for teachers who are familiar with the 2013 Curriculum. The fact that Grade IV teachers of SD Padma Jaya Palembang have successfully passed this challenge indicates the effectiveness of internal mentoring by the principal and Deputy Head of Curriculum, as well as the use of independent learning resources from the Independent Teaching Platform (Wulandari & Mariati, 2023).

In the dimension of learning implementation, the use of differentiated learning — although still in the early stages of development — is a significant achievement. Differentiated learning in the Independent Curriculum requires teachers to respond to the diversity of students' learning styles, readiness, and interests (Rachman et al., 2021; Sumarsih et al., 2022). Tomlinson (2014, in Hidayah et al., 2023) asserts that effective differentiation requires time, competence, and adequate systemic support. The time constraints reported by teachers — especially to prepare truly differentiated teaching modules — are findings that are consistent with the research of Hidayah et al. (2023) and Fitriani et al. (2024) and are a sustainable professional development agenda that needs to be prioritized.

The authentic assessment system that has been implemented—including process assessments, separate P5 assessments, and remedial-enrichment programs—is an assessment practice that is in line with the modern formative assessment paradigm (Black & Wiliam, 2018, in Scientist, 2024). Teachers who believe that character-based assessment scores over test-based assessments alone reflect an epistemological shift that is in line with the goals of the Independent Curriculum. However, Baro'ah (2020) reminded that the transformation of the assessment system takes longer to be truly internalized in the daily practice of teachers and requires consistent monitoring from school supervisors.

Conducive school environment factors—particularly supportive principals' leadership, teacher-to-teacher collaboration, and parental involvement—are findings that strengthen Bronfenbrenner's ecological argument about the importance of the systems that surround children in determining the quality of their education (Santrock, 2021). Suparlan (2022) and Putri & Irawati (2023) explicitly state that without proactive leadership of school principals and a supportive school ecosystem, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum will be significantly hampered even if teachers individually have adequate

competence. The findings of this study confirm this proposition from an empirical perspective in the field.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and discussion, it can be concluded that SD Padma Jaya Palembang has implemented the Independent Curriculum optimally and comprehensively in the 2025/2026 school year, with an average implementation of above 95% in all dimensions studied: learning planning, learning implementation, assessment system, school environment, and curriculum administration. Key factors for successful implementation include: (1) proactive and supportive leadership of the principal; (2) structured and sustainable teacher collaboration; (3) parental involvement in school activities, especially P5; (4) adequacy of learning facilities and infrastructure; and (5) the use of the Independent Teaching Platform as a source of teacher professional development. The main obstacles identified are the limited time of teachers in the preparation of truly differentiated teaching modules and the need for more intensive and systematic continuous training.

The implication of this research is the need to strengthen mentoring programs for teachers in the preparation of teaching tools based on the Independent Curriculum, increasing the frequency and quality of training facilitated by the Education Office, and developing a more structured monitoring system for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at school and cluster levels. Further research is recommended to examine the impact of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum on student learning outcomes — both academic and character — longitudinally, as well as compare implementation patterns between public and private schools in various geographical contexts.

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