

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM AND CRITICAL PEDAGOGIC APPROACHES IN OVERCOMING POST-PANDEMIC EDUCATION CHALLENGES: AN ANALYSIS ON MI MA'ARIF NU 09 KETING

Abdul Latif Khotami¹, Mar'atus Sholihah²

¹Teacher Education of Madrasah Ibtida'iyah, Al-Falah As-Sunniah University

² Madrasah Ibtida'iyah Teacher Education, Al-Falah As-Sunniah University

201744260074@inaifas.ac.id

Abstract

This study examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum integrated with a critical pedagogical approach in addressing educational challenges at MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting in the post-COVID-19 pandemic era. The transition toward the Merdeka Curriculum, implemented for selected grade levels during the 2024/2025 academic year, represents an effort to restore learning quality through flexible, contextual, and student-centered learning practices. However, its implementation faces several challenges, including limited teacher preparedness, insufficient training opportunities, and unequal availability of learning resources. This study also explores how critical pedagogical principles, emphasizing dialogue, student participation, and critical engagement with learning materials, contribute to improving classroom interactions and learning experiences.

Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research collected data through interviews, classroom observations, and documentation involving teachers and school stakeholders. The findings reveal that the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater flexibility for teachers in designing contextual learning activities and responding to students' diverse needs. Nevertheless, effective implementation requires continuous professional development and adequate learning infrastructure. Furthermore, the integration of critical pedagogy strengthens student engagement, encourages active participation, and promotes deeper understanding of learning materials. This study highlights that post-pandemic educational recovery requires not only curriculum reform but also transformative pedagogical practices that position students as active subjects in the learning process.

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A. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on various sectors of life, including education. The change in the learning system from face-to-face to distance learning during the pandemic has caused various problems, such as declining student learning engagement, educational access gaps, and the emergence of the learning loss phenomenon. This condition encourages the Indonesian government to carry out various learning recovery strategies, one of which is through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to provide flexibility to educational units and educators in developing learning that suits the needs, characteristics, and context of students (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021).

The Independent Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning through competency strengthening, differentiated learning, and character development. In contrast to the previous curriculum approach which was more oriented towards achieving uniform content, the Independent Curriculum provides space for teachers to make adjustments to strategies, materials, and assessments based on the real conditions of

students. In the post-pandemic context, this flexibility is important because each student experiences a different impact of the pandemic, both in academic and social-emotional aspects.

MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting is one of the basic education institutions that seeks to adapt to the changes in curriculum policies. The madrasah which has been established since 1933 has begun to implement the Independent Curriculum at several grade levels, while other classes are still using the 2013 Curriculum. This situation presents its own dynamics in the implementation process, especially related to teacher readiness, the provision of learning tools, and adjustments to teaching strategies. This condition makes MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting a relevant context to examine how the transformation of the curriculum takes place at the madrasah ibtidaiyah level.

In addition to the curriculum aspect, the success of post-pandemic learning recovery is also greatly influenced by the pedagogic approach used by teachers. One relevant perspective is critical pedagogics developed by Paulo Freire. Critical pedagogics views education not just as a process of knowledge transfer, but as a dialogue space that allows students to become active subjects in understanding, reflecting, and giving meaning to their learning experiences (Freire, 2005). This approach is related to the spirit of the Independent Curriculum which places students as the center of learning and encourages active involvement in the educational process.

In practice, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and critical pedagogic approaches are inseparable from various challenges. Several studies show that teacher readiness, the availability of learning resources, and understanding of new learning paradigms are important factors that determine the success of curriculum implementation (Mulyasa, 2022). In the context of MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting, these challenges can be seen through the need to improve teacher competence, the limitations of teaching materials, and the process of adapting to changes in learning approaches. Therefore, a study is needed that not only sees the curriculum as a policy document, but also understands how the curriculum is translated in daily learning practices.

A number of previous studies have discussed the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the application of critical pedagogic in education. However, studies on how the two approaches interact with each other in the context of post-pandemic madrasah ibtidaiyah are still relatively limited. This research seeks to fill this space by analyzing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and critical pedagogic approaches at MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting, especially in relation to efforts to face post-pandemic educational challenges.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in supporting post-pandemic learning recovery, identify the application of critical pedagogic principles in the learning process, and examine the various challenges and strategies carried out by MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting in integrating the two approaches.

B. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to gain a deep understanding of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the application

of critical pedagogic at MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting. The qualitative approach was chosen because this research focuses on the meaning of experiences, views, and practices carried out by school principals, teachers, and students in the learning process.

The research subjects consisted of school principals, grade VI teachers, and grade VI students of MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting as informants who provided information related to the application of the Independent Curriculum and critical pedagogics in learning activities. Data collection was carried out through three main techniques, namely in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis.

In-depth interviews were conducted with principals, teachers, and several students to obtain information about their understanding and experience of the application of critical pedagogics. An interview with the Principal of MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting on August 8, 2024 showed that the application of critical pedagogics is directed to build students' critical thinking skills, especially in understanding social and cultural issues related to their lives. The principal explained that the approach is not only oriented towards improving academic abilities, but also aims to form students' social awareness of the surrounding environment.

Interviews with grade VI teachers showed that the application of critical pedagogics is carried out through discussion activities, problem-based learning, and group activities that encourage students to analyze learning materials and social phenomena. The teacher said that this approach makes students more active in the learning process because they are given space to express opinions, ask questions, and build understanding based on their own experiences.

In addition, interviews with grade VI students showed that the application of a critical pedagogic approach provides a more open and meaningful learning experience. Students feel more confident in expressing their opinions and are more motivated because the learning material is associated with daily living conditions. This shows that critical pedagogic-based learning is able to increase student involvement in the learning process.

The class observation was carried out on August 10, 2024 in Social Sciences (IPS) class VI MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting. The observation was carried out to see firsthand the application of critical pedagogic principles in teaching and learning activities. The results of the observation showed that teachers implemented learning oriented to dialogue and reflection through group discussions about social issues in the form of economic disparities in the surrounding community.

In these activities, students are given the opportunity to identify social problems, express their opinions, and discuss various alternative solutions. Teachers act as facilitators who direct students to question social phenomena and connect them with real-life experiences. The learning process shows active interaction between teachers and students and increases students' courage in expressing ideas.

The last data collection technique was carried out through document analysis, including an examination of learning tools, curriculum materials, learning implementation plans, and social studies learning evaluation reports for class VI. Document analysis was carried out on August 11, 2024 to determine the suitability between learning planning and the principles of the Independent Curriculum and critical pedagogics.

The results of the document analysis show that the learning tools have integrated the local social context in the learning materials. The learning plan shows the use of group discussion strategies, case studies, and reflective activities aimed at developing students' critical thinking skills. In addition, learning evaluation not only assesses the ability to remember concepts, but also emphasizes students' ability to analyze social problems, provide arguments, and offer solutions based on the context of their lives.

The research data was analyzed using thematic analysis techniques through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The validity of the data was obtained through triangulation of sources and techniques, namely comparing information from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Through this process, the research obtained a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the application of critical pedagogics in learning at MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results and discussion should be presented in the same section, clearly and concisely. The discussion section must contain the implications of the research findings, rather than repeating the results section. The results and discussion can be written in the same part to avoid extensive citations.

Figure 1. Bar Chart

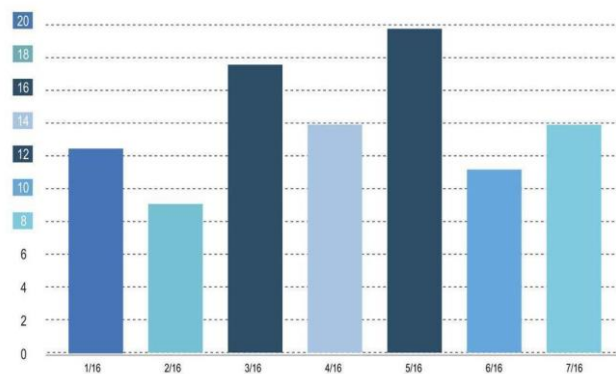


Table 1. Example Format for Writing or Presenting Data in a Table

Name of the Section	Description
Abstract	Abstract
Research Methodology	Research Methodology
Results and Discussion	Results and Discussion
Conclusion and Recommendations	Conclusion and Recommendations
References	References

D. CONCLUSION

1. Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting will begin to be implemented in the 2024/2025 school year in grade VI. Based on the results of observations and interviews with principals and teachers, the implementation of this curriculum provides flexibility for teachers to design learning that suits the needs, characteristics, and abilities of students.

The Independent Curriculum provides flexibility to educators in determining strategies, methods, and learning materials that are relevant to the context of students. The results of the study show that grade VI teachers take advantage of this flexibility by applying various learning methods, such as group discussions, project-based learning, and studies of social problems in the environment around students.

The findings of the study show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has an impact on increasing student involvement in the learning process. Students are seen to be more active in expressing opinions, discussing, and connecting learning materials with daily life experiences. This condition shows that learning is no longer completely teacher-centered learning, but is starting to lead to student-centered learning.

The flexibility of the Independent Curriculum also provides opportunities for teachers to provide assistance that is more appropriate to students' learning needs. Students who experience difficulties can receive additional attention, while students who have more ability can be given space to explore the material more deeply. This shows that the Independent Curriculum supports the implementation of more adaptive and personalized learning.

These findings are in line with the concept of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes learning according to the development stage of students and provides freedom to teachers in developing contextual learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021).

2. Application of Critical Pedagogic in Social Studies Learning

In addition to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, this study also found that MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting began to implement a critical pedagogic approach in Social Sciences (IPS) learning. This approach refers to Paulo Freire's idea of placing students as active subjects in the learning process through dialogue, reflection, and analysis of social reality.

The results of the observation of social studies learning in class VI show that teachers not only convey material theoretically, but also invite students to study various social problems related to their lives. One of the learning activities is carried out through discussions about economic disparities in the surrounding community.

In this activity, students are directed to identify the causes of social problems, express opinions, and discuss possible solutions that can be applied. This learning process shows the teacher's efforts in building students' critical thinking skills through analysis and reflection activities.

Based on the results of interviews with teachers, the application of critical pedagogics helps students to be more courageous in asking questions and expressing opinions. Teachers no longer only act as the main source of information, but as facilitators who help students build understanding through social experiences and interactions.

The application shows the compatibility between critical pedagogics and the principles of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes meaningful learning, character development, and high-level thinking skills.

3. The Impact of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum and Critical Pedagogic on Student Learning

The combination of the Independent Curriculum with a critical pedagogic approach provides a change in the learning pattern in class VI MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting. Students are not only directed to understand concepts or memorize information, but also involved in the process of analyzing, questioning, and responding to various social phenomena.

The results of the study showed an increase in student participation during learning. Students were more active in discussions, able to provide simple arguments based

on their understanding, and showed the ability to connect social studies material with real conditions in the surrounding environment.

This approach also helps to create a more open learning atmosphere. Students feel that they have the opportunity to convey ideas without fear of being wrong, making the learning process more interactive. Teachers play a role in creating dialogue spaces that allow students to develop reflective and critical thinking skills.

Thus, the application of the Independent Curriculum and critical pedagogics at MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting shows that social studies learning can be developed not only as a process of knowledge transfer, but also as a means of building social awareness and students' critical thinking skills.

4. Challenges of Implementing the Independent Curriculum and Efforts to Solve It

Although it provides various benefits, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting also faces several challenges. Based on the results of the interviews, the obstacles found include differences in characteristics between the Independent Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum, the need to improve teacher competence, and the limited availability of teaching materials.

Teachers need to adapt to changes in the learning system, especially in the preparation of teaching tools and the application of more flexible learning methods. In addition, the limitation of learning resources is one of the factors that need attention so that the implementation of the curriculum runs optimally.

Efforts made by schools to overcome these challenges are through teacher training, internal discussions between educators, and the development of learning materials that are tailored to the conditions of the school environment. These strategies help teachers in understanding the concept of the Independent Curriculum and applying it more effectively.

5. Results of Student Perception Questionnaire on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum and Critical Pedagogic

In addition to interviews and observations, this study also uses questionnaires to find out students' perceptions of the application of the Independent Curriculum and critical pedagogic approaches in social studies learning. The questionnaire was given to grade VI students of MI Ma'arif NU 09 Keting with several indicators, namely student involvement in learning, freedom of expression, relevance of the material to daily life, and critical thinking skills.

Based on the results of the questionnaire processing of 30 grade VI students, the following data was obtained:

No.	Statement Indicators	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	Social studies learning with the Independent Curriculum made me more interested in taking lessons.	18 students (60%)	10 students (33.3%)	2 students (6.7%)	0 students (0%)
2	I am more courageous to express my opinion during group discussions.	17 students (56.7%)	11 students (36.7%)	2 students (6.6%)	0 students (0%)
3	Social studies learning materials are related to my daily life.	19 students (63.3%)	9 students (30%)	2 students (6.7%)	0 students (0%)

4	Learning with discussion helps me understand social issues.	16 students (53.3%)	12 students (40%)	2 students (6.7%)	0 students (0%)
5	I am able to provide opinions or solutions to the social problems discussed.	15 students (50%)	13 students (43.3%)	2 students (6.7%)	0 students (0%)

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