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Ni Made Sulastri, S.Pd., M.Pd (SINTA ID: 6196335) Bimbingan dan Konseling Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, Mataram, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia

Drs. I Made Gunawan, M.Pd Bimbingan dan Konseling Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika Mataram, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia

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Gedung Dwitiya, Lt. 3 Jalan Pemuda No. 59 A Mataram Telp. (0370) 638991

Email : [realita@undikma.ac.id](mailto:realita@undikma.ac.id)

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## **THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN EDUCATIONAL THEORY REVIEW: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

**Oleh:**

**Mustakim, I Wayan Suastra, Dan I Wayan Lasmawan**

Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika, Mataram, Nusa Tenggara Barat, Indonesia

Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Bali, Indonesia

Email: [mustakim@undikma.ac.id](mailto:mustakim@undikma.ac.id), [iwsuastra@undiksha.ac.id](mailto:iwsuastra@undiksha.ac.id); dan  
[wayan.lasmawan@undiksha.ac.id](mailto:wayan.lasmawan@undiksha.ac.id)

**Abstract.** This research aims to: 1) Analyze the understanding and implementation of the concepts and basic principles of the Independent Curriculum within the context of existing educational theories; 2) Identify the main challenges in educational theory related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the elementary education level; and 3) Evaluate and formulate proposed solutions in educational theory to address the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum at the elementary education level. This study employs literature research and case study methods to evaluate the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The literature research design includes source identification, critical analysis, synthesis of findings, and conclusion drawing. The case study design involves selecting four public elementary schools in the village of Sukarara, data collection through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The results indicate that: 1) Educators have a good understanding of the Independent Curriculum as a flexible curriculum that integrates local wisdom and encourages active student engagement. However, field implementation reveals a gap between theoretical understanding and practice, caused by limited training and resources; 2) The main challenges identified include teacher readiness, availability of educational resources, and administrative support. Many teachers feel unprepared to adopt more innovative and flexible teaching approaches. Additionally, limited resources such as teaching materials and technology pose significant barriers, especially in remote areas. Insufficient policy and administrative support at schools also act as impediments; and 3) Proposed solutions to address these challenges include ongoing professional training and development for teachers, provision of adequate educational resources, and flexible policy support. Enhancing community and parental involvement in the educational process is also considered important for creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. The implications of these findings are expected to provide guidance for policymakers and educational practitioners in effectively implementing the Independent Curriculum at the elementary education level.

**Keywords:** *Independent Curriculum, Educational Theory, Challenges, Solutions.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, the education sector in Indonesia has undergone significant changes with the introduction of the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to provide greater freedom for schools and teachers in organizing and implementing the learning process according to the needs and characteristics of students. The Independent Curriculum aims to create a more flexible, creative, and relevant learning environment in line with the times, as well as to encourage the holistic development of student competencies. The curriculum is periodically developed to keep up with advancements in science, information,

technology, and the demands of the era (Baderiah, 2018; Susanti, Fitri, & Zulmuqim, 2023). Indonesia has previously implemented several evolving curricula, starting with the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) in 2000, followed by the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP), and the 2013 Curriculum (K-13). The K-13 curriculum has been continuously evaluated and developed, leading to the launch of the Independent Curriculum in 2020 by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendikbud RI) as an innovation and improvement over previous curricula (Safari & Inayah, 2024). As stated in Insani's research

(2019) in (Ulinuha Widda, & Heni Pujiastuti, 2023), "The curriculum in Indonesia has undergone nine changes since its independence in 1945, including in the years 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, and 2013."

Law No. 20 of 2003 Chapter 1 Article 1 states that "curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding the objectives, content, and learning materials, as well as the methods used as guidelines for organizing learning activities to achieve specific educational goals." However, despite the promising concept of the Independent Curriculum, its implementation in the field faces various challenges. These challenges range from understanding and readiness of teachers, resource limitations, to adaptation to diverse educational environments. The curriculum is designed to facilitate the educational process, but frequent changes often cause confusion among stakeholders, hindering the educational process (Vhalery et al., 2022) These challenges require in-depth studies to find and implement effective solutions.

In this context, reviewing educational theories becomes an important tool for analyzing the Independent Curriculum. Educational theories provide a conceptual framework that allows educators and researchers to understand various aspects of this curriculum, identify the challenges faced, and formulate effective solutions. This research aims to explore and analyze the Independent Curriculum through the lens of educational theories, identify the main challenges in its implementation, and offer solutions that can be adopted to overcome these challenges.

Among these educational theories are Constructivism, Humanism, and Cognitivism. Constructivism is a theory that emphasizes students' active role in

learning to discover competencies, knowledge, technology, and other necessary elements to develop themselves. This learning theory is related to a child's readiness to learn, packaged in stages of intellectual development from birth to adulthood (Supriadi, 2018). Humanism focuses more on the development of human personality. This approach looks at how humans build themselves to do better things, with the aim of achieving self-actualization. In this context, humans are always moving and purposeful, meaning that their actions are driven by the desire to achieve specific goals (Suratiningsih & Subagya, 2021).. Cognitivism, on the other hand, emphasizes the learning process. As stated by Yusup (1997) in (Hussin, 2013), cognitive theory emphasizes the information processing that occurs in students' minds during the teaching and learning process. Students, as recipients who process information, are considered very important and need attention alongside the teaching delivered by the teacher. Learning occurs when students actively engage in understanding and interpreting the lessons presented. Cognitivists believe that media can provide stimuli that help develop students' mental models.

From the above perspectives, it can be stated that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of educational theory shows that this curriculum aligns with the principles of three main theories: constructivism, humanism, and cognitivism. The Independent Curriculum adopts a constructivist approach by actively involving students in discovering the competencies, knowledge, and skills they need. Students are encouraged to learn through direct experience and exploration, which is consistent with their stage of intellectual development. This curriculum engages students in

active participation in the learning process, allowing them to build their understanding through interactions with their surroundings. The humanistic approach in the Independent Curriculum is reflected in its focus on student personality development and self-actualization. This curriculum supports students in recognizing their potential and guides them toward achieving meaningful personal goals. By emphasizing humanistic values and clear objectives, the Independent Curriculum helps students develop into better and more humane individuals, constantly striving to achieve higher goals in life. The Independent Curriculum also integrates cognitivist principles by emphasizing the learning process that involves active information processing by students. Students are encouraged to understand and interpret learning materials deeply, rather than merely memorizing them. Media and technology are used to provide stimuli that enrich students' mental models, helping them develop critical and analytical thinking skills. Thus, the Independent Curriculum supports more meaningful and effective learning.

The integration and implications of the Independent Curriculum, combining elements from constructivism, humanism, and cognitivism, offer a holistic approach focused on the comprehensive development of students. This includes intellectual, emotional, and social aspects, enabling students to grow into intelligent, moral individuals prepared to face future challenges. Effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires support in the form of teacher training, provision of adequate resources, and policies that support flexibility and innovation in teaching. Thus, the Independent Curriculum not only advances education, particularly basic education in Indonesia,

but also strengthens the relevance and application of educational theories in practice.

Previous research has been conducted by Istiqomah, et al. (2023) titled "Relevance of Vygotsky's Constructivist Theory with Kurikulum Independent: A Literature Review." Their analysis revealed three aspects reflecting the relevance of Kurikulum Independent to Vygotsky's theory. Firstly, the curriculum enhances social interaction in learning, aligning with Vygotsky's emphasis on social interaction in knowledge construction. Secondly, the role of teachers as facilitators and scaffolders supports Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development. Thirdly, Kurikulum Independent promotes the development of students' social skills through Proful Pelajar Pancasila, in line with Vygotsky's view on the importance of social environments in shaping children's social and cognitive abilities.

Similarly, Vhalery, et al. (2022) conducted a study titled "Kurikulum Independent Belajar Kampus Independent: A Literature Review," revealing changes in curriculum design, emphasizing learning processes both on and off-campus through student exchange, internships, teaching assistance in educational units, research projects, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurship activities, independent study/projects, thematic community engagement, and character-specific assessments. Further research was carried out by Safari & Inayah (2024) in their study titled "Application of Bruner's Theory in Mathematics Learning at the Elementary School Level with Kurikulum Independent Approach." Their findings showed increased interest, motivation, and understanding of mathematical concepts among students. Teachers played a pivotal role in creating

engaging learning experiences, while interactive media and collaborative projects enriched learning. The strengths of applying Bruner's Theory in Kurikulum Independent Belajar include relevance to real-life contexts, active and interactive learning, and deep conceptual understanding.

The gap between these studies and researcher's study can be explained as follows: 1) Istiqomah, et al. (2023) focused on the relevance of Vygotsky's constructivist theory with Kurikulum Independent. In contrast, my study explores challenges and solutions in implementing an independent curriculum, emphasizing broader educational theory rather than solely focusing on Kurikulum Independent; 2) Vhalery, et al. (2022) discussed Kurikulum Independent Belajar Kampus Independent with a literature focus. Conversely, my research delves into theoretical considerations regarding challenges and solutions in implementing an independent curriculum within educational theory, not restricted solely to literature on Kurikulum Independent; and 3) Safari & Inayah (2024) applied Bruner's theory in teaching mathematics at the elementary school level with a Kurikulum Independent approach. My study differs by highlighting general challenges faced in implementing an independent curriculum within broader educational theory, rather than focusing on the specific application of theories in particular subjects.

The novelty of researcher's study lies in identifying concrete challenges in implementing an independent curriculum within educational theory. This research not only identifies potential issues but also explores potential solutions to enhance the effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving educational goals. This provides deep insights into how Kurikulum Independent can be

developed and improved within a broader educational theory context. Therefore, this research is expected to make a significant contribution to the development and refinement of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia. A more theoretical and systematic approach to examining this curriculum will help improve the quality of national education, ensuring that every learner receives an optimal learning experience and is prepared to face global challenges in the future.

The research questions used for this study are: 1) How are the concepts and fundamental principles of the Independent Curriculum understood and implemented in the context of existing educational theories?; 2) What are the main challenges identified in educational theories related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the primary education level?; and 3) What solutions have been proposed in educational theories to address the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum at the primary education level?. The objectives used in this study are: 1) Analyzing the Understanding and Implementation of the Concepts and Fundamental Principles of the Independent Curriculum in the Context of Existing Educational Theories; 2) Identifying the Main Challenges in Educational Theories Related to the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Primary Education Level; and 3) Evaluating and Formulating Solutions Proposed in Educational Theories to Address the Challenges of Implementing the Independent Curriculum at the Primary Education Level

## **METHOD**

In this research, the researcher utilized literature review and case study methods with the following research designs:

**Literature Review Design:** This design includes the following steps: a) **Source Identification:** The researcher identified and collected various literature sources such as books, journal articles, research reports, and policy documents discussing the Independent Curriculum and educational theories; b) **Critical Analysis:** Critical analysis was conducted to understand how the Independent Curriculum is perceived and implemented, major challenges encountered, and proposed solutions; c) **Synthesis of Findings:** The researcher synthesized findings from various sources to identify patterns, themes, and knowledge gaps. This synthesis provided a comprehensive overview of the researched issues; and d) **Conclusion Drawing:** Conclusions were drawn based on the literature analysis to address the formulated research questions.

**Case Study Design:** This design includes the following steps: a) **Case Selection:** The researcher selected four public elementary schools in Sukarara village, namely SDN 1, 2, 3, and 4 Sukarara, Sakra Barat district, East Lombok, implementing the Independent Curriculum. Selection criteria included geographic location, school type, or experience in curriculum implementation; b) **Data Collection:** Data was collected through various methods such as in-depth interviews with teachers, principals, and students; classroom observations; and document analysis (e.g., lesson plans, teaching materials); c) **Data Analysis:** Data obtained was analyzed to identify understanding and implementation of the Independent Curriculum concepts, challenges faced, and solutions applied in those schools; d) **Triangulation:** Multiple data sources and analysis methods were used to enhance the validity of findings, combining interview data with observation results and document analysis; and e)

**Conclusion Drawing:** Conclusions were drawn from the case study to provide deep and practical insights into the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, along with challenges and solutions encountered.

## RESEARCH RESULTS

Curriculum is a system composed of interrelated and mutually supportive components, including goals, learning materials, methods, and evaluation. In this systemic form, the curriculum progresses towards educational objectives through collaboration among all its subsystems (Averina & Widagda, 2021). The Independent Curriculum is an initiative in Indonesia's educational transformation aimed at developing future generations. Independent Belajar (Freedom to Learn) is a program designed to unleash the potential of educators and learners to innovate and enhance the quality of classroom learning (Saleh, 2020; Nurfitriani et al., 2023)

Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim transformed the 2013 curriculum into the MBKM (Independent Belajar Kampus Independent) curriculum in 2019. The MBKM concept consists of two concepts: "Independent Belajar" and "Kampus Independent." Independent Belajar emphasizes freedom of thought and innovation (Ainia, 2020; Vhalery et al., 2022), while Kampus Independent extends the Independent Belajar program to higher education. Educational transformation through the Independent Belajar policy is a step towards realizing Indonesia's superior human resources with the Pancasila Student Profile (Kemdikbud, 2021).

Mandiri Curriculum is a curriculum concept that allows teachers and students to select and develop learning content according to local needs and conditions. The Mandiri Curriculum is designed to empower students as active

subjects in their own learning, rather than mere objects of learning. This approach aims to enhance the quality of learning by considering the uniqueness and needs of each learning environment (Ghazali, 2019; (Heni Susanti et al., 2024)

Independent Belajar is a policy aimed at providing schools with flexibility in planning, implementing, and evaluating educational programs, guided by the principles established by the central government. The concept of Independent Belajar demands a paradigm shift among teachers. Kurikulum Independent, introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia in 2021, grants schools the freedom to determine learning materials that are tailored to the potential and needs of students, as well as the local context (Widiastuti et al., 2023)

From various theories and statements, it can be concluded that Kurikulum Independent is an educational approach emphasizing flexibility, diversity, and active student engagement, integrating local values and individual student potentials to design relevant and adaptive curricula. This curriculum empowers teachers and students to select and develop learning materials according to their needs, supporting the concepts of "freedom to teach" and "freedom to learn." Introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, Kurikulum Independent and the Freedom to Learn policy, including Independent Belajar Kampus Independent (MBKM), aim to cultivate an outstanding generation with the Pancasila Student Profile. This curriculum promotes collaboration among educational components such as goals, content, methods, and evaluation, while providing schools with flexibility in planning and implementing educational programs that meet the needs and contexts of students.

There are six main principles in the Independent Curriculum: 1) Simplicity, easy to understand and implement; 2) Focus on the competencies and characters of all students; 3) Flexibility; 4) Alignment; 5) Collaboration; and 6) Attention to research findings and feedback. The government has defined the components of the Independent Curriculum into four major parts: 1) Pancasila Student Profile; 2) Learning Outcomes; 3) Curriculum Structure; and 4) Principles of Learning and Assessment (Hidayati & Nurdi, 2022). In the implementation of this curriculum, the role of teachers is crucial. Teachers are tasked with creating a liberated learning atmosphere, making learning more creative and enjoyable. The role of teachers varies widely, including as facilitators of liberated learning, innovative and creative teachers, and educators with distinctive characteristics and roles. Thus, learning is not merely about listening to lectures from teachers, but also about character formation and independence (Daga, 2021; (Fernandez et al., 2024).

The curriculum serves as a tool to achieve educational goals and guide the implementation of learning processes at all educational levels to enhance the potential quality of students (Makaborang, 2019). As stated by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2012: 2), the curriculum is the most important basis for producing: 1) qualified individuals capable of proactively responding to the ever-changing challenges of the times; 2) educated individuals who are faithful and devoted to the One Almighty God, possessing noble character, health, knowledge, skills, creativity, and independence; and 3) democratic and responsible citizens. (Eva Ervia et al., 2024). In the field of education, the Independent Curriculum is highly beneficial and important for

supporting learning activities. Teachers must be prepared to implement the Independent Curriculum by transforming various aspects of their teaching to meet societal demands and serve as a scholarly guide for implementation in real life (Santri, 2024)

The Minister of Education and Culture (Mendikbud) has introduced a new policy framework that distinguishes between the previous curriculum and the current one. The new policies outlined by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendikbud, 2019: 1-4) include: 1) Implementation of Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Surveys as replacements for the National Examination; 2) Schools are granted the freedom to determine the form of assessment in the National Standardized School Examination (USBN); 3) Simplification of Lesson Plans (RPP) to enable teachers to focus on guiding students in learning activities and enhancing competencies; and 4) Expansion of the zoning system for the admission of new students. (Parwati, 2023)

Collaboration in the Independent Belajar Curriculum encompasses several key pillars: fostering teamwork, developing social skills, fostering creativity and innovation, nurturing responsibility, and promoting deeper learning. In collaboration, students work together in teams, build communication skills, divide tasks, and learn from each other's perspectives. They also develop creativity and innovation through inspiration and sharing ideas within the team. Collaboration teaches responsibility and supports deeper learning through mutual learning from each other's experiences and knowledge. Teachers act as collaboration facilitators who assist students in developing good teamwork and communication skills, as

well as overcoming emerging challenges. (Nurjanah, at, al., 2023; Istiqomah & Syafulloh, 2023)

In the Independent Curriculum, the role of teachers is no longer solely as the source of learning. Teachers are responsible as the main drivers in creating a conducive learning environment, facilitating active and participatory learning, and encouraging student independence, creativity, and initiative. Additionally, teachers are expected to adapt the curriculum to existing conditions, actively support its implementation, and utilize technology as a teaching aid. Teachers also serve as learning facilitators, interpreting core competencies into assessments, developing the curriculum and learning processes. Besides their role as educators, teachers participate in self-learning through the Independent Mengajar platform, contribute to the Independent Belajar platform, and share knowledge with fellow teachers. (Fadillah & Yusuf, 2022)

The Graduate Competency Standards of the Independent Curriculum are the latest educational curriculum implemented in Indonesia aimed at recovering learning processes. The Independent Curriculum is expected to accommodate the interests, talents, and abilities of students, as well as adjust the workload and certification linearity of educators. The structure of the Independent Curriculum in Primary Education is divided into two main activities: intracurricular learning and the Pancasila profile strengthening project. Intracurricular learning activities for each subject refer to learning achievements. Meanwhile, the Pancasila profile strengthening project activities are aimed at enhancing efforts to achieve the Pancasila student profile standards. (Qurniawati, 2023)

From several theories and statements above, it can be concluded that: Flexibility in Learning: The Independent Curriculum offers greater flexibility for schools and teachers to adjust the curriculum according to the needs and local contexts, as well as the potential and interests of students. Integration of Local Wisdom: This principle emphasizes the importance of integrating local values and culture into the learning process, allowing students to develop their cultural identity while acquiring relevant global knowledge. Student Engagement: The Independent Curriculum encourages active student engagement in the learning process, both in designing learning objectives, selecting learning methods, and evaluating their own learning outcomes. Comprehensive Competency Development: This principle prioritizes the development of various competencies, including critical thinking skills, creativity, collaboration, and socio-emotional skills, necessary for success in a rapidly changing society. These descriptions of concepts and basic principles provide an overview of the philosophy and main goals of the Independent Curriculum in creating a more inclusive, relevant, and challenging learning experience for students at all educational levels.

In Constructivist Learning, the focus is on how individuals construct their own knowledge through experience, reflection, and interaction with their environment. (Pramana et al., 2024) Social constructivist philosophy views knowledge as not absolute and sees it as the result of problem-solving and posing problems by humans (Ernest, 2019). In the constructivist view, teachers no longer serve as the primary source of knowledge but rather as facilitators who assist students in learning and

constructing their own knowledge (Hudojo, 2023; Eva Yulia, et al, 2024).

The constructivist theory approach is a learning approach that provides freedom for learners to actively discover competencies and knowledge to develop their existing abilities, which are then modified by educators through designing various tasks, questions, or other actions that stimulate the curiosity of learners to complete them (Antika, 2023; (Harefa et al., 2023) According to constructivist learning theory, learning is a process where students construct their own knowledge. The intention of students to learn determines the realization of their learning intentions, while the formation of knowledge requires active participation from students during the learning process, actively thinking, organizing concepts, and giving meaning to the things they learn. In contrast, the role of teachers in constructivist learning is to facilitate students in creating new knowledge. Instead of delivering information themselves to students, teachers must assist them in developing their own knowledge and becoming more aware of individual learning styles. Consistent with Hoover's assessment (1996) in (Nerita et al., 2023), constructivist learning theory stems from the formation of knowledge and cognitive development formed through internalization/mastering social processes (Sani, 2013:19; (Basori, 2016). According to Daniel Goleman in (Faliyandra, 2019), social intelligence is a human capability that integrates feelings (emotions) and actions to create positive interactions with others. Azzet's opinion (2017) is that there are 3 intelligences, namely abstract intelligence, concrete intelligence, and social intelligence. Based on this theory, this research explores the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of constructivist theory in

primary school learning. In this study, teachers are involved in designing and implementing project-based learning that enables students to actively construct their own knowledge. The results indicate that this approach not only enhances student engagement but also improves their understanding of critical concepts in subjects such as Science and Mathematics.

This study examines how the Independent Curriculum is implemented in 4 public elementary schools in Sukarara Village, Sakra Barat Subdistrict, East Lombok, namely SDN 1, 2, 3, and 4 Sukarara, considering social constructivist theory in the context of learning. From observations and interviews, it has been found that some teachers have used collaborative teaching methods and group projects among students, encouraging teamwork and joint problem-solving. The research findings indicate that this approach creates a learning environment that supports the development of students' social skills, such as communication abilities and collaborative teamwork.

Humanistic learning is crucial to implement in every educational institution, aiming to humanize individuals and fulfill the educational tasks of nurturing, guiding, and mentoring children to become well-rounded, ethical, moral, and knowledgeable human beings (Arofaturrohman et al., 2023). The Independent Belajar and Kampus Independent curricula adopt humanistic education concepts with several key approaches: empowering students to be active subjects in learning, fostering comprehensive personal development encompassing intellectual, emotional, social, and moral aspects, promoting social engagement and collaboration through group learning and joint projects, emphasizing character education

focusing on moral values and ethics, and promoting lifelong learning that encourages self-development and continuous competence enhancement. This approach aims to cultivate individuals with integrity, leadership skills, and a commitment to common good (Nahdiyah et al., 2023).

Several figures involved in the philosophy of humanistic education include Carl Rogers, Abraham Maslow, and Arthur W. Combs. Carl Rogers proposed two types of learning: awareness and learning experience. The principles within humanistic philosophy articulated by Carl Rogers can be seen in Sili's research (2021) in (Fatimah et al., 2022), including: 1) Desire to learn, where learners have an inherent desire to learn, evident in children's curiosity to explore their environment. 2) Meaningful learning, where learning acquired by children must be meaningful, relevant to their needs and purposes. 3) Learning without threat, where the learning process proceeds smoothly when learners can test their abilities, try new experiences, or make mistakes without feeling threatened. 4) Self-inspired learning, where learning is most meaningful when initiated independently and involves the learner's feelings and thoughts. Empowering students to choose their own learning direction greatly motivates and extends learning opportunities.

Basic principles of learning theory according to humanistic principles include: 1) Learners determine the learning material according to their interests, 2) Knowing how to learn is more important than needing a lot of knowledge, 3) Self-evaluation is important for learners, 4) Feelings are as important as wealth, 5) Non-threatening environments produce optimal learning outcomes (Dahlan et al., 2024)

This study evaluates the implementation of the Independent Curriculum considering humanistic theory in education. The research findings indicate that several teachers in the 4 elementary schools in Sukarara village emphasize the holistic development of students, including emotional and spiritual aspects. Through this approach, students not only learn academic material but also develop self-confidence, empathy, and important human values that shape individuals with integrity.

This study analyzes the alignment between constructivism in educational theory and the practical implementation of the Independent Curriculum in four public elementary schools (SDN) in Sukarara village. Through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and analysis of learning materials, the research finds that the constructivist approach, which emphasizes student-centered learning and knowledge construction through active interaction, effectively supports the goals of the Independent Curriculum to foster creativity and deep understanding among students.

This research evaluates the alignment between humanistic theory in education and the practice of implementing the Independent Curriculum, particularly in developing the full potential of students as meaningful and ethical individuals. Through a case study, the research demonstrates that the humanistic approach in learning, which focuses on developing students' emotional, spiritual, and moral aspects, significantly contributes to achieving the goals of the Independent Curriculum in shaping characters and personalities with integrity.

Cognitive Development Theory, developed by Jean Piaget, a Swiss

psychologist who lived from 1896-1980, provides many key concepts in the field of developmental psychology and influences the development of intelligence concepts, which for Piaget, means the ability to more accurately represent the world and perform logical operations in representations of concepts based on reality. (Widyati, 2014). Cognitive theory is based on cognitive processes, internal mental processes that enable humans to acquire knowledge, detect, store, retrieve and recall stored knowledge for reuse. Solso, R. L. Maclin, M. K, and Maclin, O. H. (2005). *Cognitive Psychology*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc. The focus of cognitive theory is how humans attribute meaning to stimuli. learning theories that place more emphasis on the learning process than learning outcomes. (Basyir et al., 2022).

This study analyzes the alignment between cognitive theory in education and the practical implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary school learning. Using observational approaches, the research shows that the cognitive approach, which emphasizes conceptual understanding and the development of high-level thinking skills, supports the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum in preparing students to face complex challenges in modern society. As stated by Purnasari, (2022) in (Safari & Inayah, 2024), Teachers can use various methods and learning strategies appropriate to students' cognitive development stages, such as games, manipulatives, and visualizations, to help students deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts.

The issue of educational quality in Indonesia is largely due to stagnant educator competencies that fail to keep pace with technological and informational advancements. Educator

competencies, encompassing subject matter understanding, teaching skills, communication abilities, understanding child development, and the use of technology in learning, significantly influence educational quality. However, the two most problematic competencies are pedagogical and professional competence. Often, teachers struggle to manage learning optimally, including understanding students, designing and executing lessons, assessing learning outcomes, and developing student potential. Moreover, many teachers lack deep mastery of subject matter, resulting in meaningless and less beneficial learning experiences for students. (Bardiansyah, et. al, 2024)

Currently, the implementation of the Independent curriculum faces challenges where many teachers do not fully grasp the concept of the Independent curriculum and there is minimal use of technology in teaching. Training is needed to enhance teachers' abilities to implement the Independent curriculum effectively and utilize technology in education. (Fathimah et al., 2024). According to Sunarni and Karyono (2023) cited in (Simon Paulus Olak Wuwur, 2023), several issues arise in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, including perceptions of imposition in some schools, not all teachers welcoming the socialization of the Independent Curriculum, and inadequate human resource competencies in schools. Insufficient understanding and preparation among teachers pose obstacles to implementing the Independent Curriculum in primary schools. Teachers need a thorough understanding of the Independent Curriculum, from its concepts to teaching strategies and assessment of learning outcomes. Lack of understanding and preparation can hinder the effectiveness of implementing the Independent

Curriculum in primary schools. Additionally, resource constraints are a challenge in implementing the Independent Curriculum in primary schools. Implementing the Independent Curriculum requires adequate resources, including textbooks, learning tools, and teacher training. Resource limitations can impede the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in primary schools. Changes in students' attitudes and mindsets also present challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum in primary schools. The Independent Curriculum necessitates changes in students' attitudes and mindsets, such as enhancing curiosity, independence, and social intelligence. Based on these statements, the following are some key findings resulting from this research:

This study found that many teachers face challenges in preparing themselves to implement the Independent Curriculum. Some teachers expressed the need for more training and support in designing project-based learning and using technology in the classroom. The main concern is the lack of access to adequate training and administrative support to implement more flexible and competency-based approaches as expected in the Independent Curriculum.

This research investigated the effectiveness of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach within the context of the Independent Curriculum. The results indicate that the PBL approach can enhance student engagement and their ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations. However, challenges arise in crafting problems that align with students' understanding and interests, as well as facilitating effective collaboration among them.

This study compared the effectiveness of conventional teaching

approaches with competency-based approaches in achieving the learning goals of the Independent Curriculum. Findings show that competency-based approaches are more effective in developing 21st-century skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. However, significant changes in assessment and evaluation are also needed, posing challenges for teachers in adopting this approach.

This study found that most schools face challenges in meeting the need for adequate technological infrastructure to support the Independent Curriculum. Although some schools have equipped classrooms with digital devices, there are still constraints in accessibility and maintenance of these devices. Lack of training for administrative staff and technical support also inhibits optimizing the use of technology in the learning process.

This research investigated the availability of learning materials aligned with the Independent Curriculum in various schools. Findings indicate variations in access to current and relevant teaching materials tailored to local student needs. Schools with strong administrative support tend to be more successful in providing teaching materials that support the implementation of a flexible and competency-based curriculum.

This study explored the role and impact of administrative support on the success of implementing the Independent Curriculum at the primary school level. Results show that schools with effective management and support from school principals and administrative staff are better able to address structural challenges such as scheduling, resource allocation, and coordination among programs. However, challenges persist regarding school policies that support the

flexibility of the implemented curriculum.

This research evaluates the responses and acceptance of students from diverse cultural backgrounds towards the Independent Curriculum in a school with a varied population. Findings indicate that students from different cultural backgrounds have varying perceptions of the more flexible and competency-based learning approach. Adapting the curriculum to consider cultural diversity is found to be crucial in promoting maximum student participation and engagement.

This study investigates the role of parents in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the elementary school level. Results show that parents have varying levels of understanding and engagement with the concepts and goals of the Independent Curriculum. Schools that successfully build strong partnerships with parents through open communication and participatory programs tend to encounter fewer barriers in implementing new and innovative educational approaches.

This study explores the strategies and adaptation mechanisms used by schools to address changes related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Findings indicate that schools successfully handling these changes effectively use inclusive and participatory approaches, involving all stakeholders including teachers, students, parents, and the local community. Continuous training and ongoing evaluation also emerge as key factors in the successful adaptation to changes.

This research investigates challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum using a constructivist approach to learning. Findings indicate that while the constructivist approach offers potential to enhance student engagement and foster

deep understanding, the main challenge lies in empowering teachers to become effective facilitators of learning. Lack of training and understanding of constructivist concepts can hinder effective implementation in the classroom.

This study evaluates challenges faced in implementing the problem-based learning (PBL) approach within the context of the Independent Curriculum. Results show that while PBL can enhance students' problem-solving skills and creativity, the primary challenge lies in developing problems that match students' understanding levels and adjusting the curriculum to facilitate competency-based approaches.

This research compares challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum from the perspective of social learning theory. Findings indicate that lack of support from the social environment and limited opportunities for collaborative learning can hinder the development of social and emotional skills in students within a more flexible learning context. The role of teachers as social models also remains crucial in supporting effective social learning transfer.

Education is described as a lifelong process aimed at developing the full potential of individuals to live and sustain a complete life, thus becoming educated beings, both cognitively, affectively, and psychomotorically. Education undertakes the process of nurturing individuals to become beneficial members of the nation and state. This educational process does not yield immediate results, as education is a long-term investment that manifests its success when educated individuals can fulfill their roles in the future, contributing to the progress of the nation and state in any field they engage in.

(Angga, Suryana, Nurwahidah, Hernawan, & Prihantini, 2022)

Learning and curriculum are closely related and interdependent. Curriculum can be defined as a plan or guideline for learning that describes the objectives, content, methods, and evaluation of learning organized by the government or educational institutions to achieve desired educational goals. (Simon Paulus Olak Wuwur, 2023) The curriculum is the "soul" of education that must be evaluated innovatively, dynamically, and periodically in accordance with the development of times, knowledge, and technology, especially equivalent to the competency demands required by society and users of graduates. (Wati, Aziz, & Fitri, 2023) Curriculum serves as a tool for delivering education to learners with the aim of shaping human resources ready to face the future. The curriculum implemented in educational institutions is the foundation and reflection of the philosophy of the life goals of a nation, defining how and where life in the country will be in the future, all of which are identified and elaborated in educational programs. (Wati et al., 2023) According to Sanjaya, instructional planning is the rational decision-making process about specific learning objectives utilizing all potential and learning resources available. (Sanjaya, 2016)

From the statements above, it can be said that to overcome the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum, educational theory proposes solutions focused on developing the full potential of individuals through a holistic educational process that encompasses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Education should be seen as a long-term investment whose results will be evident when educated individuals can actively contribute to the future progress of the nation and state. The curriculum,

as a dynamic and innovative learning guide, must be continually evaluated and adjusted according to the developments in time, technology, and societal competency demands. As the "soul" of education, the curriculum should reflect the philosophical life goals of the nation, ensuring that the human resources produced are ready to face future challenges and contribute positively to the nation. Below are some findings related to these solutions:

This study evaluates the impact of continuous training provided to teachers in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The results show that structured and ongoing training can enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in designing competency-based and technology-integrated learning. Teachers who undergo this training experience an improvement in their readiness to tackle new challenges in more flexible education.

This research investigates the effectiveness of professional development programs focused on collaboration among teachers to support active learning approaches in the Independent Curriculum. Findings indicate that programs emphasizing teacher collaboration and sharing best practices can enhance teachers' ability to design relevant and engaging learning experiences for students. This collaboration also allows for the exchange of ideas and strategies that enrich teaching experiences.

This study evaluates the role and impact of technology in supporting competency-based learning in primary schools. The results demonstrate that appropriate technology integration, such as online learning platforms and interactive applications, can enhance student engagement and facilitate deeper understanding of subject matter. However, challenges related to

technology accessibility and device maintenance remain concerns that need to be addressed to support effective technology use in classrooms.

This study evaluates the effectiveness of administrative support policies implemented by the government to facilitate the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the elementary school level. Findings indicate that policies providing additional funding allocations for educational resources, such as technology devices and teaching materials, significantly enhance school readiness in implementing the new curriculum approach. Strong administrative support also facilitates better coordination between schools and relevant stakeholders in addressing structural challenges like resource procurement and maintenance.

This research investigates the effectiveness of inclusive policies designed to improve access to educational resources for all schools, including those in remote or underdeveloped areas. Results show that policies emphasizing the equal distribution of educational resources, such as additional funds for transportation or supportive infrastructure, can reduce disparities in educational quality across regions. Implementing these policies requires close cooperation between the central government, local authorities, and educational institutions to ensure that all schools can support the development of a more adaptive and responsive curriculum.

This study presents a case study on the experiences of community-based schools in implementing educational resource assistance programs provided by non-governmental organizations or local governments. Findings indicate that assistance programs specifically designed

to meet the unique needs of local communities, such as community-based approaches to resource management and maintenance, can have a positive impact on supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Strong collaboration among schools, communities, and donors is also found to be crucial in ensuring the long-term sustainability of these programs.

This research evaluates the communication strategies employed by schools and the government to enhance public awareness of the Independent Curriculum. Findings indicate that using social media, parent seminars, and public campaigns significantly improves understanding and support among the public for changes in educational approaches. Clear and open communication plays a crucial role in alleviating concerns and building trust in the implementation of the new curriculum.

This study presents a case study on school efforts to involve parents in the development and evaluation of the Independent Curriculum. It shows that participatory approaches, such as parent meetings, inclusive school committees, and mentoring programs, can enhance parental involvement in supporting broader educational goals. Engaged parents are more likely to actively support the implementation of a curriculum that is more adaptive and relevant to students' needs.

This research investigates the role of collaboration between schools and local communities in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Results indicate that close cooperation between schools and community stakeholders, through activities such as social events, field trips, and joint training programs, can strengthen the connection between school-based learning and the social and

cultural realities of students. This collaboration not only enriches students' learning experiences but also reinforces community support for new educational initiatives.

The research findings indicate that teachers who underwent intensive training over one year experienced significant improvements in their skills in designing competency-based and technology-enhanced learning. The results of this study demonstrate that school-community collaboration programs in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum are significantly effective. Through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, program documentation analysis, and participatory observations, it was found that community involvement substantially increased, positively impacting the development of local resources. This program also shows high potential for sustainability, with many educational initiatives continuing successfully due to the active support and participation of the community. These findings underscore the importance of synergy between schools and communities in creating a dynamic and sustainable learning environment aligned with the principles of the Independent Curriculum.

## **DISCUSSION**

The curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding the goals, content, and teaching materials, as well as the methods used as guidelines for conducting learning activities to achieve Higher Education objectives. "Independent Belajar" or campus freedom is an effort to provide freedom and autonomy to educational institutions, freeing them from bureaucratization. Lecturers are freed from convoluted

bureaucracy, while students are given the freedom to choose their fields of interest (Ahmad et al., 2020). The "Independent Curriculum" gives full trust in the learning process to teachers and students. Teachers are given the freedom to choose and develop learning materials according to classroom needs, and similarly, students are given the freedom and space to actively express opinions and develop their potentials. This is referred to as "Independent mengajar" (freedom to teach) and "Independent belajar" (freedom to learn) (Nurfitriani et al., 2023)

There are four characteristics of the "Independent Curriculum" that we need to know. These characteristics serve to help schools and teachers design more optimal, enjoyable, and meaningful learning experiences for students. The "Independent Curriculum" aims for holistic development of students into Pancasila learners who are ready to face a better future. The characteristics include: Project-based and Character Education, Focus on Essential Materials, More Flexible Learning, and Sufficient Teaching Tools (Fadillah & Yusuf, 2022). Children are individuals with a high curiosity, which drives their desire to learn. A conducive environment stimulates self-learning among students. Therefore, education must create a conducive climate or conditions for learning. Students' unwillingness to learn is often due to an unsupportive environment that limits their active participation (Musthofa, 2020).

From the statements and concepts mentioned earlier, here is an explanation of the research findings:

1. Understanding and Implementing the Concepts and Basic Principles of the "Independent Curriculum" in the Context of Educational Theory

The research findings indicate that the concepts and basic principles of the

"Independent Curriculum," including flexibility, integration of local wisdom, and active student engagement, are generally well understood by educators. Constructivist theory, which emphasizes student-centered learning and knowledge construction through active interaction, serves as the primary foundation for understanding and implementing the "Independent Curriculum." Teachers utilize project-based learning approaches and contextual learning to enable students to connect learning material with their real-life experiences.

However, this understanding is not always consistently translated into practice. Some teachers still face challenges in designing and implementing fully student-centered learning, primarily due to limitations in resources and adequate training.

2. Main Challenges in Implementing the "Independent Curriculum" at the Primary Education Level

Several key challenges identified in the implementation of the "Independent Curriculum" at the primary education level include teacher readiness, resource availability, and administrative support.

- a. **Teacher Readiness:** Many teachers feel inadequately prepared to implement more flexible and innovative learning approaches. They require continuous training to develop the necessary new skills.
- b. **Resource Availability:** Limitations in resources, whether in the form of teaching materials, technological devices, or supportive infrastructure, pose significant barriers. Schools in remote or underdeveloped areas face greater challenges in accessing the necessary resources to support "Independent Curriculum"-based learning.
- c. **Administrative Support:** Support from school administration and adequate educational policies are

also key factors. Some schools report a lack of support in the form of additional funding allocation and policies that support innovation in teaching.

### 3. Solutions to Overcome the Challenges of Implementing the Independent Curriculum

Several proposed solutions in educational theory to overcome the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum include:

- a. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Structured and needs-based continuous training can help teachers develop the necessary skills to implement the Independent Curriculum. Collaborative professional development programs can also support the exchange of best practices among teachers.
- b. **Provision of Adequate Resources:** Governments and relevant institutions need to ensure sufficient funding allocation for acquiring necessary educational resources. This includes access to technology, teaching materials, and other supporting infrastructure.
- c. **Policy and Administrative Support:** Policies that support educational innovation and provide flexibility for schools to tailor the curriculum to local needs are crucial. Administrative support through supervision, evaluation, and incentive provision can also encourage more effective implementation.
- d. **Community and Parental Involvement:** Increasing community and parental involvement in the educational process can help address several implementation challenges. Close collaboration between schools and communities can strengthen support and create a more supportive learning environment.

The discussion above indicates that understanding and implementing the Independent Curriculum within the existing educational theory has significant potential to enhance the quality of primary education. However, achieving this goal requires coordinated and sustainable efforts to address existing challenges. Teacher training, resource provision, policy support, and community involvement are key factors that need to be considered to ensure the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. As stated by Kunandar (2014), educators have the responsibility to develop comprehensive and systematic learning tools so that learning can be inspiring, interactive, challenging, enjoyable, and motivate students to actively participate in learning. The concept of the Independent Curriculum emphasizes students' abilities to observe their surrounding environment during the learning process. The concept also highlights students' ability to solve problems independently and develop the best solutions based on their knowledge.

### **INTERPRETATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Teachers generally understand the basic concepts and principles of the Independent Curriculum, such as flexibility and active student engagement, aligned with constructivist theory. However, there is a gap between theoretical understanding and practical implementation in the field. Teachers often encounter difficulties in applying student-centered learning approaches due to inadequate training and resources.

This research identifies three main challenges in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum: **Teacher Readiness:** Many teachers feel insufficiently prepared to adopt more flexible and innovative teaching methods. **Resource Availability:**

Limitations in educational resources, including teaching materials and technology, hinder the implementation of this curriculum, especially in remote areas. Administrative Support: Lack of policy support and school administration hinders teachers' efforts to effectively implement the Independent Curriculum.

The study also proposes several solutions to address these challenges: Professional Training and Development: Continuous training for teachers to enhance their skills in new teaching methods. Resource Provision: Adequate funding allocation to provide necessary teaching materials and technology. Policy Support: Development of policies that support educational innovation and provide flexibility for schools to adapt the curriculum according to local needs. Community Engagement: Increasing collaboration among schools, communities, and parents to create a more supportive learning environment.

The research findings emphasize the importance of a holistic approach in implementing the Independent Curriculum, involving capacity building for teachers, adequate resource provision, policy support, and community engagement. By addressing these challenges, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can proceed more effectively, delivering significant benefits to primary education in Indonesia.

#### **THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS**

1. Application of Constructivist Theory: This research strengthens the relevance of constructivist theory in modern curricula such as the Independent Curriculum. Findings indicate that student-centered learning approaches and active knowledge construction align with constructivist principles, thereby

encouraging further development of this theory in the context of primary education.

2. Integration of Humanistic Theory: The study supports the importance of humanistic approaches in education, emphasizing the holistic development of students. These implications suggest that humanistic theory remains relevant and crucial for supporting the development of students' character and socio-emotional skills.
3. Enhancement of Cognitive Theory: Findings also demonstrate that cognitive approaches, focusing on conceptual understanding and critical thinking, can effectively integrate into the Independent Curriculum, supporting further development of cognitive theory in educational practice.
4. Teacher Training Program Development: The research findings underscore the need for structured and ongoing professional development programs for teachers. These programs should be designed to enhance pedagogical skills that support student-centered learning and the use of technology in education.
5. Provision of Adequate Resources: The research highlights the importance of providing adequate educational resources, including teaching materials, technology, and infrastructure, especially in remote areas. Education policies should include sufficient funding allocation to meet these needs.
6. Administrative Policy Support: This study indicates that strong policy and administrative support are crucial for the success of implementing the Independent Curriculum. Policymakers should consider developing policies that provide

flexibility to schools and teachers to adapt the curriculum according to local needs.

**Community Engagement:** Increasing parental and community involvement in the education process can support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Schools should develop effective communication strategies and community engagement initiatives to create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. The theoretical and practical implications of this research indicate that the application of educational theories such as constructivism, humanism, and cognitive theory can enhance the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum. Successful implementation requires sustained support through teacher training, resource provision, supportive policies, and community engagement.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that: 1) Educators generally grasp the foundational principles of the Independent Curriculum, such as flexible learning, integration of local knowledge, and active student engagement, aligning well with constructivist theory emphasizing student-centered learning. However, a gap persists between theory and practice due to inadequate training and resources; 2) Challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum at primary education levels include teacher readiness, resource availability, and administrative support, particularly in remote areas. Insufficient policy backing and administrative hurdles further impede effective implementation; and 3) Proposed solutions include ongoing professional development for teachers, enhanced resource allocation, flexible policy frameworks, and increased community involvement to foster a

supportive learning environment and improve curriculum implementation.

This research has significant implications for expanding understanding of implementing independent curricula within educational theory. It identifies key challenges in applying this autonomous curriculum approach and proposes potential solutions to overcome these barriers. However, its limitations lie in the generalization of findings, which may not always directly apply to different educational contexts, and the constraints of available data that can affect the universality of the conclusions in broader contexts.

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Program Studi Bimbingan dan Konseling  
Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan dan Psikologi  
Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika  
Gedung Dwitiya, Lt. 3 Jalan Pemuda No. 59A Mataram  
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