

Analysis of Independent Curriculum Management Methods (*Merdeka*) for Children with Special Needs

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Abstract

This study explores the management methods of the Independent Curriculum (*Merdeka* Curriculum) for children with special needs (CSN) in Indonesia, emphasizing its flexibility and individualized learning approach. The research aims to evaluate the curriculum's effectiveness in supporting CSN's holistic development while addressing key challenges such as limited resources, teacher training, and the need for adaptive instructional strategies. Using a qualitative, descriptive-exploratory design, data were collected from special schools and inclusive schools through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. Participants included teachers, school principals, parents, and supporting professionals. The findings reveal that implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum enhances inclusivity and individual potential by providing tailored educational strategies, particularly through the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). However, challenges such as resource constraints, insufficient training, and limited collaboration with stakeholders were identified as barriers to optimal implementation. The study highlights the importance of adaptive teaching methods, flexible assessment systems, and enhanced coordination among educators, caregivers, and professionals to maximize CSN's development. This research contributes both theoretically and practically by offering insights into inclusive curriculum management and providing actionable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders.

Keywords : Children with special needs, inclusivity, independent curriculum, curriculum management.

1. Introduction

Education for children with special needs presents a unique challenge that requires a specialized approach to ensure that every child can develop optimally. The management of an independent curriculum for children with special needs focuses on designing and implementing individualized learning programs (Suwandari, Trisnamansyah, Hanafiah, & Mudrikah, 2021). This approach tailors the curriculum to the specific needs, potential, and abilities of each child to optimize their development across various aspects, including academics, social skills, and life skills. In this context, the introduction of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) by the Indonesian Ministry of Education (Rosa, Destian, Agustian, & Wahyudin,

2024) represents a transformative step aimed at fostering flexible, student-centered learning and promoting inclusivity.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* offers significant opportunities to enhance the quality of education, including for children with special needs (Siregar, Hanani, Sesmiarni, Ritonga, & Pahutar, 2024). By granting greater autonomy to teachers and schools in adapting learning materials, this curriculum aims to accommodate diverse student needs while encouraging independence and critical thinking skills. However, its implementation in *Sekolah Luar Biasa* (SLB—Special Needs Schools) reveals unique challenges. In conventional education, rigid curriculum standards often overlook the individual learning pace and specific needs of children with disabilities (Atika, 2024). Therefore, comprehensive modifications and adaptations are required to ensure that the curriculum remains accessible and inclusive.

For children with special needs, a flexible curriculum that emphasizes individualized learning goals is essential for supporting holistic development (Juwan, Dwiputri Maharani, & Siswadi, 2024). The primary challenges in managing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* for these students include limited resources (Mutia Sari Sinaga et al., 2024), inadequate infrastructure and facilities (Ragil Nazar, Nasir, Bagea, & Abubakar, 2024), the need for sufficient teacher training, and effective coordination with caregivers and therapists. The necessity for more adaptive teaching strategies, customized learning materials, and flexible assessment methods is becoming increasingly critical in the effort to create a truly inclusive educational system that maximizes the potential of every child (Sumartik, 2024).

This study aims to explore the effectiveness of *Kurikulum Merdeka* management for children with special needs, including identifying key challenges faced by educators in its implementation. Additionally, this research seeks to examine the necessary adaptations to align the curriculum with the capabilities and needs of children with special needs. Furthermore, this study is expected to contribute to enhancing the independence of children with special needs through effective curriculum management while supporting the development of a more inclusive and high-quality education system.

The benefits of this research are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, the findings are expected to enrich the understanding of *Kurikulum Merdeka* management in the context of special needs education. Practically, this study aims to provide actionable recommendations for educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders in creating an adaptive, inclusive, and student-centered educational system for children with special needs. Thus, this research not only contributes to academic literature but also plays a vital role in advancing inclusive education in Indonesia.

2. Research Method

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive exploratory design to explore in-depth the implementation of Independent Curriculum management in schools serving children with special needs (CSN). The research locations included several special schools (SLB) and inclusive schools implementing the independent curriculum. The locations were purposively selected based on the availability of educational programs for CSN. The research subjects comprised classroom teachers responsible for managing learning for CSN, school principals overseeing curriculum management, parents supporting learning at home, and supporting professionals such as psychologists or therapists, when relevant.

Data was collected using three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis. In-depth interviews aimed to understand the experiences and perspectives of teachers, principals, and parents regarding implementing the Independent Curriculum. Participatory observation involves direct observation of classroom learning processes, including the methods, tools, and interactions between teachers and students. Document analysis included reviewing materials such as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), lesson plans, and student progress records. The data were analyzed using a thematic approach involving data reduction, theme categorization, and data interpretation to understand the challenges, strategies, and outcomes of Independent Curriculum implementation. To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and methods was applied by comparing data from various sources (teachers, principals, parents) and collection techniques (interviews, observations, and documentation).

3. Results and Discussion

The curriculum plays a fundamental role as a guideline and foundation in the implementation of the learning process within educational institutions (Arifa & Agustini, 2025). Curriculum design is carried out to align with the current state of education and to address various challenges faced by schools and educators (Rahmawati, Astuti, & Fadriati, 2024). According to Law No. 20 of 2003, the curriculum is defined as a set of plans and arrangements that include objectives, content, teaching materials, and learning methods, serving as a reference to achieve the goals of national education.

In the context of education in Indonesia, curriculum implementation has undergone various evolutions (Dwi Chairunnisa, Luthfiyah Syam Almazini Tahir, Aulya Ramadhani, & Andi Sadriani, 2024), one of which is the introduction of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) (Rahayu, Rosita, Rahayuningsih, Hernawan, & Prihantini, 2022). This curriculum was designed in response to the need

for learning recovery following the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sumilat & Mochtar, 2024). One of the distinctive features of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is its flexibility, allowing learning to take place in a comfortable, independent, active, meaningful manner and tailored to the characteristics of students. Teachers have the autonomy to determine teaching tools based on students' abilities, characteristics, and learning phases, with the primary aim of supporting learning recovery (Nafi'ah, Faruq, & Mutmainah, 2023).

To determine students' learning phases, assessment becomes a crucial element in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Diagnostic assessments are used to understand students' needs and characteristics, while formative and summative assessments help teachers continuously evaluate learning progress. For children with special needs, the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is adjusted according to the individual characteristics and abilities of each child. Learning is aligned with appropriate learning phases, encompassing six learning phases from elementary to high school levels (phases A to F).

Compared to previous curricula, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* offers several significant innovations. It includes elements such as learning outcomes, teaching tools like the School Operational Framework (KOSP), teaching modules, learning objective pathways, and project modules for the *Pancasila Student Profile*. These elements are designed to provide a more structured, inclusive, and student-centered learning approach, particularly for those with special needs.

3.1 Concept and Implementation of Independent Curriculum for Children with Special Needs (CWSN)

The management of an independent curriculum for children with special needs (CWSN) is a flexible, adaptive, and student-centered approach (Salsabillah, Suwandayani, & Nuro, 2023). This approach enables schools, particularly Special Schools (SLB), to design, implement, and evaluate learning programs tailored to the abilities, interests, potentials, and challenges of students. By implementing this curriculum, every aspect of education is expected to support the development of academic abilities, life skills, and independence, allowing students to actively participate in society. In line with UNESCO (2009), inclusive education implemented in this curriculum aims to provide relevant access for all children, including CWSN, to optimize their development.

The primary principles of the Independent Curriculum (Merdeka) in SLBs are inclusiveness, personalization, and maximizing students' potential. The curriculum focuses on learner-centered education, giving students the opportunity to learn according to their abilities and interests. This perspective is supported by Nadiem Makarim (2021), who emphasized that learner-centered education allows teachers the freedom to design learning programs based on the individual needs of students. In

practice, the Independent Curriculum prioritizes personalization to align learning objectives and methods with students' needs, inclusiveness to provide accessible and accommodating learning materials and activities, and competency-based approaches that focus more on practical skills mastery rather than rigid academic targets.

The design and implementation of the Independent Curriculum for CWSN require a holistic approach that includes several key elements. First, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) becomes a central component in ensuring that learning is specifically tailored to students' needs. Second, learning content must be adapted or modified to make it more understandable and relevant to students. Moreover, a multi-sensory approach, such as incorporating visual, auditory, and tactile methods, is applied to accommodate diverse learning styles, making the learning process more effective.

The success of the Independent Curriculum implementation heavily relies on the roles of teachers and other stakeholders (Bukaryo, 2023). Teachers must possess specialized skills, including training in inclusive teaching strategies and behavior management. Collaboration among teachers, parents, therapists, and specialists is also essential to create a cohesive learning experience for students. Additionally, formative and summative assessments need to be designed to align with students' abilities, ensuring that evaluations are more relevant and meaningful.

3.2 Benefits, Challenges, and Complexities of Independent Curriculum

Despite its many benefits, the management of the Independent Curriculum for CWSN faces several challenges (Melati Ansa Purri, Andini Andini, Ulfa Zahra Tunnur, & Opi Andriani, 2024). One major obstacle is the lack of resources, such as limited teaching aids and specialized facilities. Furthermore, many teachers have not received adequate training in inclusive education. Another challenge lies in policy adaptation, where national education frameworks are often insufficiently flexible to support the local adjustments needed in SLBs.

The benefits of implementing the Independent Curriculum are significant, particularly in improving student learning outcomes (Purnama & Pawiro, 2023), promoting inclusiveness, and fostering independence. This curriculum enables teaching tailored to students' needs, allowing them to achieve meaningful progress. As Paulo Freire (1970) noted, traditional education approaches, which are rigid and non-dialogical, often create gaps between students who "know" and those who "do not know." This underscores the importance of a more dialogical and participatory approach, as offered by the Independent Curriculum, which values individual progress rather than comparing it against uniform standards.

In addition to its benefits, the Independent Curriculum presents complexities in its implementation. Sukmadinata (2011) explained that the main challenge lies in the

numerous elements that must be considered, such as adjusting learning materials, project-based learning, and the use of technology. Teachers are required to manage learning independently and flexibly, which is not always easy in heterogeneous classrooms. Evaluating students' success is also challenging because this curriculum prioritizes individual achievements over standardized assessments.

In the context of education for CWSN, the success of the Independent Curriculum also requires the support of assistive technologies, sensory-friendly classrooms, and innovative teaching strategies. Moreover, cross-sector collaboration among schools, parents, therapists, and the broader community is an essential element that must not be overlooked. With a student-centered approach and synergy from various stakeholders, the Independent Curriculum holds great potential to enhance the quality of education for children with special needs in Indonesia.

3.3 Managing the Independent Curriculum in Special Needs Schools (SLB)

Managing the Independent Curriculum in Special Needs Schools (SLB) presents significant challenges, particularly in terms of differentiated instruction. According to Suyanto, differentiation is at the core of these challenges as SLBs cater to students with various types of disabilities, such as intellectual, physical, or sensory impairments. The Independent Curriculum allows for learning designs that are more tailored to each student's needs. However, its implementation requires teachers to possess advanced skills in creating highly individualized and relevant teaching materials. Ongoing teacher training is a pressing need to ensure inclusive education can be effectively implemented. Additionally, schools must be adequately prepared with sufficient facilities to support the diverse needs of their students.

Table 1. Challenges in Managing the Independent Curriculum in SLBs

Challenges	Description	Possible Solutions
Differentiated instruction	Requires highly individualized and student-centered teaching materials	Continuous professional development for teachers
Resource limitations	Lack of funding for assistive technologies, adaptive materials, and facilities	Fundraising efforts or partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations
Stakeholder collaboration	Difficulties in maintaining communication among schools, therapists, and families	Strengthening communication networks and providing clear information
Assessment and evaluation	Traditional methods are ineffective for measuring student progress	Developing assessment methods based on individual growth

Another challenge is the limitation of resources. Education for children with special needs often requires assistive technologies, adaptive materials, and smaller

class sizes. However, many SLBs face budget constraints that hinder the fulfillment of these needs. The involvement of stakeholders, such as therapists, caregivers, and specialists, also plays a crucial role in successfully managing the Independent Curriculum. Effective collaboration between schools and families can help students reach their full potential. However, maintaining consistent communication remains a significant challenge.

3.4 The Evolution of Special Needs Education in Indonesia

According to Suyanto (2020), special needs education in Indonesia has undergone significant transformations. Initially, children with disabilities were placed in specialized institutions, separate from mainstream schools. However, as awareness of inclusive education grew, educational approaches shifted to focus more on developing students' potential. The paradigm that was once exclusive has gradually prioritized participation and empowerment.

Table 2. Development of Special Needs Education in Indonesia

Period	Key Characteristics	Changes
Before 2000	Segregated model; students were placed in special schools	Focused on specific needs but isolated from the broader community
After 2000	Inclusive approach began to be implemented	Special needs students studied alongside their peers in general schools with adequate support
Present	Emphasis on inclusiveness	Education based on individual potential, supported by policies like the Independent Curriculum

Following the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 and the enactment of Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, the government's commitment to inclusive education became increasingly evident. These changes marked a shift from a care-based education model toward an approach that emphasizes active participation. In the early 21st century, inclusive approaches began to be implemented, allowing children with special needs to study alongside their peers in general schools, supported by adequate facilities and assistance.

3.5 Core Principles of the Independent Curriculum

The Independent Curriculum is designed to support learning that is relevant, flexible, and student-centered. Its core principles include a holistic approach, flexibility in teaching, and an emphasis on achieving basic competencies. This approach allows teachers to adapt teaching methods, materials, and learning pace according to students' needs.

For instance, project-based learning provides opportunities for students to actively engage in the learning process. It also enhances critical and creative thinking skills, aligned with the Profile of Pancasila Students. Moreover, the curriculum supports

growth-based assessments, focusing on individual development rather than universal standards.

3.6 Impact of the Independent Curriculum on Special Needs Students

The Independent Curriculum has brought positive impacts on students with special needs. One notable benefit is the ability to create individualized learning plans tailored to each student's unique needs. This approach enhances students' confidence, motivation, and engagement in learning. Additionally, the curriculum emphasizes holistic development, including social skills, emotional regulation, and independence.

Teachers also benefit from the curriculum's flexibility, as it allows them to implement innovative teaching methods suitable for their students' needs. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also encourages active involvement from parents and communities in the education process.

Overall, The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in SLBs offers a significant opportunity to create more inclusive and adaptive education. Despite facing various challenges, this approach demonstrates that with adequate support, students with special needs can optimally develop in various aspects of their lives.

4. Conclusion

The results of the study show that the central bank has a crucial role in maintaining inflation and exchange rate stability through monetary policy. In the Indonesian context, implementing the inflation-targeting framework by Bank Indonesia (BI) is the main instrument for achieving price and exchange rate stability while supporting sustainable economic growth. This strategy allows BI to adapt to global and domestic economic challenges while increasing the credibility of monetary policy. Overall, the combination of inflation control, exchange rate management, and flexible monetary policy implementation demonstrates the importance of the central bank's multifaceted role in ensuring economic resilience amidst global dynamics.

Central banks are advised to strengthen transparency and monetary policy communication to be more effective in increasing market confidence. In addition, strategic collaboration between central banks, governments, and international institutions must be improved to face global economic challenges in an integrated manner. Further research can be focused on monetary policy innovations that are more adaptive to digital disruption and structural changes in the global economy so that they can support long-term economic stability more comprehensively.

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