

Problems Implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in Elementary School Social Studies Learning

Elza Lutfiani*

Susi Suryani

Nurhaida Rizqi Aulia

Muhammad Rama Patriyas

Affiliation (Elementary School Teacher Education Study Program, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Indonesia)

ABSTRACT

The curriculum serves as a guideline in the teaching and learning process, ensuring that education is directed and aligned with the desired competency targets. This study examines the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum (Kurmer) in Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS) learning in elementary schools. The purpose of this study was to identify the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the new curriculum, particularly in Social Sciences (IPS). The method used was descriptive qualitative, using observation, interviews, and documentation studies of third-grade teachers at SD Negeri 03 Pojok, Mojogedang, Karanganyar. The results revealed various obstacles, such as teachers' poor understanding of curriculum components (CP, TP, ATP), limited resources, and difficulties in developing materials and evaluating social studies learning contextually. In conclusion, ongoing training and support for learning resources are needed to support the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Keywords: Problems; independent curriculum; social sciences; elementary school

Introduction

Education is a deliberate process carried out by adults, designed with the specific goal of guiding or assisting students in developing their physical and mental potential, so they can reach maturity and lead independent lives in accordance with their desired goals (Hidayat et al., 2019). One crucial element in achieving educational goals is the curriculum.

The curriculum is a learning plan encompassing objectives, materials, methods, and assessments, systematically designed to achieve educational goals (Usdarisman, 2024). The curriculum serves as a guideline in the teaching and learning process, ensuring that education is directed and aligned with the desired competency targets. Furthermore, the curriculum can also serve as a reference for teachers in developing strategies that are deemed more effective and appropriate

* Corresponding author: Elza Lutfiani

for students. The curriculum plays a central role in determining the direction, quality, and relevance of education. Therefore, the curriculum must be continuously evaluated and updated to keep pace with the times and meet ever-changing challenges.

In the current era, the curriculum has evolved in accordance with Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 12 of 2024 concerning the Independent Curriculum, which is used at all levels of education, from elementary to secondary school. According to Idris (2023), the Independent Curriculum is a learning approach that provides space for students to deepen their understanding of concepts and optimally develop skills through a variety of intracurricular activities. This curriculum is designed to be more flexible, tailored to students' needs, interests, and talents, and encourages student-centered learning. Thus, the Independent Curriculum is expected to create an educational process that is more meaningful, contextual, and relevant to the challenges of the 21st century.

One innovation in the Independent Curriculum is the integration of Natural Sciences (IPA) and Social Sciences (IPS) into a single integrated subject (IPAS) (Jadidah et al., 2023). Natural Sciences (IPAS) is a discipline that studies various natural phenomena, including living and nonliving things and their interactions, as well as human life, both as individuals and as social beings, in relation to their surroundings (Marsela, 2024).

However, the current implementation of the Merdeka curriculum is facing challenges due to the lack of adaptation of educators in facing the transition from the 2013 curriculum to the Merdeka curriculum. Similar to previous research conducted at a Medan junior high school in 2024 by Islamic religious education teachers, the problem identified was a lack of understanding of the independent curriculum, resulting in less than optimal implementation and impacting the learning process. Another case study revealed that one of the difficulties faced by educators was difficulty in developing lesson plans and analyzing CP, TP, and ATP. Therefore, the researcher was interested in examining the problems.

Based on the arguments above, problems in the implementation of the independent curriculum must be examined to find solutions, especially in elementary school learning, which is the first foundation. This research is very interesting to study, as there has been no previous research on the problems encountered in implementing the independent curriculum, particularly among elementary school teachers in social studies. This study will further examine the problems in learning the independent curriculum at SDN 3 Pojok Karanganyar. The findings of this study can contribute to the development of an educational framework for the independent curriculum that integrates 21st-century learning for future policy solutions. The research questions (RQ) include:

1. RQ1: How is the independent curriculum implemented in social studies learning at the elementary school level?
2. RQ2: What are the problems with the independent curriculum that have emerged in recent years?
3. RQ3: How is the implementation and problems of the independent curriculum at SDN 03 Pojok Karanganyar?

Method

This study the appropriate research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive method, which aims to describe and understand

phenomena in depth based on data collected in the field. This approach allows researchers to explore the meanings, perceptions, and experiences of research subjects through data collection techniques such as observation and interviews. Qualitative descriptive research does not aim to test hypotheses, but rather to present data as it is, thus producing a comprehensive picture of the situation or event being studied. According to Creswell (2016), qualitative research is an approach to exploring and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups consider important to a social issue. Meanwhile, Sugiyono (2019) adds that descriptive research aims to describe phenomena as they occur systematically, factually, and accurately.

Using a purposive sampling technique, the researcher identified the primary subject or key informant as the data source, namely the educator (grade 3 homeroom teacher) at SD Negeri 03 Pojok, Mojogedang, Karanganyar. The data collection techniques used in this study included observation, interviews, and documentation studies. After all data was collected, the next stage was data analysis. All data was then systematically read, understood, and analyzed. The data analysis process was conducted through four main stages:

Data Collection

This stage was conducted through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation studies. Researchers collected relevant and necessary information using these three techniques. This process continued until the researchers obtained sufficient data to answer the research questions. The questions related to the Merdeka curriculum are summarized below:

Table 1. Observation questions

No	Substance	Observation questions
1	Curriculum Implementation	What is your opinion regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 03 Pojok? Has the Merdeka Curriculum been running well, according to your expectations?
2	Changes in Implementation:	What significant changes have you experienced in the learning process since switching to the Merdeka Curriculum?
3	Problems	Concerning conceptual problems, what difficulties did you encounter when trying to understand the direction of the integration of science and social studies into science in the Merdeka Curriculum?
4	Implementation of Science and Social Studies Integration:	Do you feel you understand the integration of science and social studies into science?
5	Implementation of Science and Social Studies Integration:	Do you feel you understand the integration of science and social studies into science?
6	Learning Environment	What are your thoughts on learning when there are limitations in teaching materials that are perceived as irrelevant to the social and environmental context of the students?

No	Substance	Observation questions
7	Curriculum Training and Support	Did the school provide training or support during the transition from the Curriculum 13 to the Merdeka Curriculum?
8	Implementation of Social Studies:	In your opinion, is the scope of social studies material in the subject of social studies facing a reduction from the Curriculum 13 to the Independent Curriculum?
9	Methods in the Independent Curriculum	Have you ever used project-based learning or social case studies during your social studies lessons? If so, what were the results?
10	Learning Evaluation Instruments:	Did you encounter any obstacles when designing evaluation instruments appropriate for social studies learning?
11	Future Suggestions for Teachers:	What are your suggestions for other teachers implementing social studies learning in the Independent Curriculum?
12	Facilities and Infrastructure:	Are the facilities and infrastructure at SDN 03 Pojok adequate for social studies learning?
13	Government Policy Suggestions	Do you have any suggestions or measures to prevent these problems in social studies learning from occurring again?

Data Reduction

According to Sugiyono (2020), data reduction means summarizing, selecting the main points, focusing on important points, looking for themes and patterns, and discarding irrelevant data. In this study, the researcher reduced data obtained through interviews with the third-grade homeroom teacher of SD Negeri 03 Pojok, Mojogedang, Karanganyar, to obtain the core relevant information.

Presentation

After data reduction, the next step is to present it in an easily understood format. This data presentation aims to organize the collected data in an orderly manner and form a relationship pattern that makes it easier for researchers to understand the situation and develop further steps based on that understanding.

Conclusion

Conclusions are the result of interpretations of the collected and analyzed data. This process includes reviewing field notes and in-depth analysis of the meaning of the data obtained.

Results

RQ1 concerns the development of simulation learning research in elementary schools from 2000-2025. The Independent Curriculum is the latest policy in the Indonesian education system that aims to provide greater freedom in teaching and learning for both students and educators. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered, contextual learning, and integrates projects as part of the learning process to shape the Pancasila Student Profile. In the Independent

Curriculum, the curriculum structure is designed to be more flexible and allows educational units to develop local content and student needs. This makes learning more meaningful and adaptive to the environment and changing times (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022).

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires a shift in the role of educators from mere transmitters of material to facilitators, motivators, and developers of a holistic learning ecosystem. Teachers are not only tasked with designing learning but also guiding students in exploring, reflecting, and constructing knowledge through authentic learning experiences (Yunita & Yeni, 2024). Furthermore, teachers also serve as learning leaders capable of building an inclusive and collaborative school culture. In the context of science and science learning in elementary schools, teachers are expected to integrate science and social science concepts contextually and across disciplines to foster scientific literacy, social skills, and environmental awareness in students.

However, the implementation of educators' duties under the Independent Curriculum faces challenges, such as a lack of training and in-depth understanding of curriculum concepts, limited learning resources, and resistance to change (Putri & Sylvia, 2025). Therefore, strengthening teacher competencies through ongoing training, developing learning communities, and supporting the education system is essential. According to Masruroh (2025), the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum depends heavily on teachers' readiness and willingness to adapt to the new learning paradigm, which is more flexible and oriented toward student needs. Therefore, educators' tasks are not merely technical but also strategic in creating a learning environment that supports the maximum development of students' potential.

The Independent Curriculum introduces the subject of Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS) as a form of integration between science and social studies at the elementary school level. This integration aims to provide a holistic, contextual learning experience that aligns with the cognitive development of students who are still thinking concretely and holistically. This integrated approach facilitates students' understanding of the relationship between natural and social phenomena and enhances critical and reflective thinking skills. Natural Sciences (IPAS) also encourages inquiry-based learning, exploration, and direct observation of the students' surroundings.

Within the social studies curriculum, IPAS learning provides ample scope for developing students' understanding of social, cultural, and community values. Topics such as cultural diversity, simple economic life, the role of individuals in society, and social norms are presented contextually and based on students' life experiences (Zakarina et al., 2024). Thus, social studies learning serves not only as a transfer of knowledge but also as an effort to shape students' character and social skills. This learning is highly relevant in building students' awareness as part of the broader social community.

RQ2: Problems in the independent curriculum that have emerged in recent years. The researcher also conducted a literature review to determine the extent of the problems encountered in the implementation of the independent curriculum.

Problem Analysis

Conceptual Problems of the Curriculum

One of the fundamental problems in this article is the gap between the ideal understanding of the curriculum as a set of holistic learning experiences and its implementation in the field, which remains material-centric. Many teachers do not yet understand the curriculum in its four dimensions (ideas, written plans, implementation, and outcomes), so in social studies lessons they tend to only convey rote material, without addressing the real social context of the students' environments (Usdarisman et al., 2024).

Problems in Planning and Implementation

In this article, one of the main problems is teachers' limited understanding of the structure and philosophy of the curriculum. Teachers experience confusion in developing relevant assessments and lack clear guidelines for developing contextual social material. This results in social studies lessons being less meaningful and inconsistent with the principles of independent learning (Jadidah et al., 2023).

Problems of Limited Resources

Research at SD Inpres Baomekot shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, particularly in social studies, is hampered by limited facilities, infrastructure, and adequate teaching materials. Teachers struggle to find contextual and interactive learning resources to explain social concepts such as cultural diversity, social interaction, and national values. This results in social studies learning becoming less engaging and relevant to students (Marsela Rinielda et al., 2024).

Problems of Educator Readiness

A study at SD Xaverius 1 Palembang highlighted the low level of educator readiness to implement the Independent Curriculum, including in social studies learning. Teachers still struggle to integrate character and national values into social studies learning and are unfamiliar with project-based approaches and the Pancasila student profile. This impacts the low effectiveness of social studies learning in instilling social values in students (Setiahati et al., 2023).

Problems with Learning Evaluation

The problem of learning evaluation also presents an obstacle in implementing the Independent Curriculum in social studies, where the material is sometimes poorly linked. Teachers experience confusion in designing assessments

that align with social studies learning objectives and student character. Evaluations tend to overlook social skills and participatory aspects, even though social studies learning emphasizes active student involvement in understanding social phenomena. Inaccurate assessments make it difficult to fully achieve curriculum objectives (Mutia & Admawati, 2024).

Problems with Developing Overly Broad Modules and Materials

Teachers at Lambheu 1 Elementary School experienced difficulties in developing social studies teaching modules that align with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. The modules often did not include appropriate Learning Objectives (ATP), and the scope of social studies material was considered too broad. This made it difficult for teachers to determine effective methods and media, as well as to develop worksheets (LKPD) and reading materials that support the achievement of social studies learning objectives (Fitriani et al., 2025).

Problems with Learning Strategies and Material Adaptation

At Jeumpet 1 Public Elementary School, teachers face challenges in determining appropriate social studies learning strategies and methods. The contextual and diverse nature of social studies material requires an adaptive approach, but teachers are not yet prepared to design project-based learning that aligns with students' characteristics and the social values surrounding them. Limited references and teaching materials further exacerbate this situation (Balía et al., 2025).

RQ3: Implementation and challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDN 03 Pojok Karanganyar. In addition to conducting a literature review, the author also interviewed a teacher to obtain more valid results on the issues in Indonesia. Based on the interview with a third-grade homeroom teacher at SDN 03 Pojok Mojogedang Karanganyar, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces various challenges, particularly in terms of teachers' understanding of basic concepts such as CP, TP, and ATP. Although teachers feel the Merdeka Curriculum's subject matter is more structured and in-depth than the 2013 Curriculum, this presents a challenge for students who still think concretely, particularly in the science subject, which covers both science and social studies. Teachers feel the integration of science and social studies is still nominal, as the material is still taught separately each semester. Furthermore, time constraints and suboptimal training implementation have prevented the implementation of project-based learning and social case studies. Teaching materials are abundant, but limited time and the lack of resources, such as projectors, in each classroom hinder innovative learning.

Discussion

Effective implementation of science and natural sciences learning requires teachers to employ innovative strategies, such as project-based learning, social case studies, and integration with civics and environmental activities (Husnah et al., 2023). Teachers are required not only to deliver material but also to facilitate student exploration and reflection on social issues around them. Furthermore, teachers need to adapt learning to the local context so that students feel connected and directly involved with the material being studied. With these strategies, science and natural sciences can become an important tool in developing social literacy and national attitudes in students from an early age.

Literature research revealed that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, while actually offering a holistic, contextual, and student-centered learning process (Kemdikbudristek 2022), is hampered by teachers' lack of understanding of the curriculum's focus. This is as noted by Usdarisman et al. (2024) and Jadidah et al. (2023), many teachers still view the curriculum solely as a written plan containing a collection of materials. There remains a gap between theory and practice in the learning process. In fact, social studies education is not merely about memorization but also about developing life skills and active social participation (Banks, 2015; Sapriya, 2016). Teachers' inability to transform the curriculum from "text" to "action" is the root of further problems, such as planning and evaluation, which still need to be improved. Furthermore, there are limited resources and uneven teacher preparedness. Studies at SD Inpres Baomekot (Marsela Rinielda et al., 2024) and SD Xaverius 1 Palembang (Setiahati et al., 2023) highlight how the lack of infrastructure and contextual teaching materials is closely related to teachers' low capacity to integrate character values and design project-based learning. This aligns with curriculum change theory, which emphasizes that the success of curriculum innovation is highly dependent on supporting factors such as resource availability and teacher capacity (Fullan, 2007). When teachers lack a thorough understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum philosophy and the Pancasila Student Profile, and are not supported by structured learning modules and student worksheets (as experienced by teachers at SD Negeri 1 Lambheu [Fitriani et al., 2025]), they tend to revert to conventional methods that are safe and easy. As a result, social studies learning loses its spirit as a lively subject relevant to students' social realities.

The impact of all these problems is most evident in the evaluation aspect. As Mutia & Admawati (2024) found, social studies learning evaluations tend to neglect social and participatory skills, which are primary objectives. Teachers struggle to design authentic assessments to measure complex skills such as critical thinking about social phenomena or collaboration in collaborative projects. Difficulties in adapting learning strategies (Balía et al., 2025) further complicate the assessment process. Yet, assessment for learning and authentic assessment are at the core of the Independent Curriculum (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Without

adequate evaluation skills, it is impossible for teachers to know to what extent the curriculum's goal—to develop competent Pancasila students—is truly being achieved. Therefore, improvement efforts must be comprehensive, starting with developing an understanding of change, pedagogy, providing resources, and evaluating learning that aligns with the intent of the Independent Curriculum.

Findings from interviews at SDN 03 Pojok show that the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum lie not only at the philosophical level but have also extended to the crucial technical-operational level. The main obstacle teachers face is understanding curriculum planning tools such as Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), and Learning Objective Flow (ATP). A comprehensive understanding of all three is a prerequisite for designing differentiated, student-centered learning (Maghfiroh & Sari, 2023).

This lack of understanding makes it difficult for teachers to translate CP into operational TP and ATP, ultimately hindering the planning and assessment process in accordance with curriculum principles. This reinforces the findings of Jadidah et al. (2023) that a lack of understanding of curriculum structure is a major cause of failure in developing relevant assessments and materials.

On the other hand, the integration of Natural and Social Sciences (IPAS) in the Independent Curriculum, which is intended to provide contextual and integrated learning, in practice remains nominal and fragmented. Teachers admit that science and social studies materials are taught alternately each semester, rather than in an integrated thematic format. This situation indicates a gap between curriculum design and its implementation in the classroom. According to Fogarty (1991), the simplest integration model is a connected model within a single discipline, while what is expected in the Independent Curriculum may be closer to a webbed model that uses cross-disciplinary themes. Teachers' unpreparedness in designing this integration model, coupled with the concrete thinking characteristics of third-grade elementary school students (Piaget, 1954), makes "structured and in-depth" material become too much of a cognitive burden for students.

The implementation of the Merdeka Guru curriculum also suggests increasing face-to-face training and developing active learning methods such as discussions and presentations to improve the quality of science learning in schools. This aligns with the theory of Vygotsky (1978), which emphasizes the importance of emphasizing social interactions, such as discussions, in enhancing students' cognitive development. Through social interaction in group discussions, students not only learn to express their opinions but also to listen, consider others' perspectives, and build shared understanding. These activities encourage them to think critically and reflect on emerging ideas, making the learning process more meaningful and collaborative.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary school science learning faces various challenges, such as teachers' poor understanding of curriculum concepts, limited resources, and difficulties in developing strategies and evaluating contextual social studies learning. Therefore, it is recommended that the government and schools increase face-to-face training for teachers and provide adequate learning support facilities to ensure optimal and meaningful implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

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