



## **QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES OF HISTORY TEACHERS AT SMA NEGERI 2 MEDAN IN IMPLEMENTING THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM**

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### **Abstract**

This research aims to explore the challenges faced and the strategies used by history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum. Qualitative research methods were used to collect data through in-depth interviews with eight experienced history teachers. Data analysis was carried out using a thematic approach to identify general patterns in the challenges faced and strategies implemented. The research results show that history teachers face a variety of challenges in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, including a lack of resources, the need for additional training, and pressure to balance the curriculum. To overcome these challenges, teachers use a variety of strategies, including collaboration between teachers, integration of technology, and adjustments in teaching. The implications of these findings for developing teacher professionalism and improving the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum are discussed in the context of this research. The challenges of implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum, including limited resources, the need for additional training, and the pressure to balance the existing curriculum with new principles, are the main obstacles for history teachers. History teachers use various strategies, such as collaboration between teachers, integration of technology in learning, and adjustments in teaching, to overcome challenges and increase the effectiveness of history teaching. The implications of these findings include the need to provide adequate resources, collaborative support from various parties, and increase the integration of technology in history learning. By understanding and overcoming the challenges faced by history teachers, as well as implementing appropriate strategies, the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan can be improved, which in turn will bring benefits to the development of teacher professionalism and improve the quality of learning in the school. Therefore, concrete steps need to be designed and implemented to support history teachers in facing challenges and improving the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan.

**Key words:** *Independent Learning Curriculum, History Teacher, SMA Negeri 2 Medan*

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## INTRODUCTION

Training is a spot to foster understudies' true capacity, interests and gifts to work on their personal satisfaction with the goal that they can help the country improve (Nasution, 2018). coherence of advancement. Humans can "survive" in the midst of increasingly rapid change with education. As a result, everyone should be able to get a good education because education is so important to people's lives (Istiana, 2023). Education ought to be in line with the evolution of the educational curriculum as a whole in order to accomplish the national education objectives outlined in Law No. 20 of 2003 (Noor, 2018).

Under the direction and supervision of the educational establishment and its teaching staff, the curriculum serves to facilitate the process of teaching and learning in order to achieve educational objectives (Hikmah, 2020). The new educational program is known as the model educational plan and afterward changed its name to the Merdeka Belajar Educational Program. The new educational program gives educators the opportunity to configure and get the hang of it as per the attributes of the members. instruct. The mandate or structure of the two curricula is where the new curriculum differs from the previous curriculum, the 2013 curriculum. While the independent curriculum requires a project-based approach (project-based learning), the 2013 curriculum mandates a scientific or science-based approach (Ayu et al., 2023). The new educational program is an answer to beat instructive issues in Indonesia, which is applied to reestablish schooling, so noting instructive difficulties as per current developments is capable (Sadewa, 2022).

The Minister of Education and Culture initiated and announced a new curriculum called the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, which was inaugurated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbud Ristek) starting in the 2022–2023 academic year. creating a teaching and learning process that is innovative, not restrictive, in line with student needs and project-oriented learning. The development of the independent curriculum includes the existence of an intracurricular learning pattern and a project to strengthen the profile of independent students (Suryaman, 2020). In implementing the independent curriculum,

student learning is used as a learning center, also called the Student Center. Learners(Students) are considered the core of education, so students are used as the main target in the learning process, which must have a facilitator to help develop the talents, interests and potential of each student (Janawi, 2019).

The substance of an autonomous educational program for understudies is that understudies have the opportunity to think both separately and in all groups, so that students can participate in the future and think critically, creatively, collaboratively, and innovatively (Widiyono et al., 2021). As a matter of fact, in the idea of free learning, educators are not utilized as a wellspring of truth by understudies, yet educators and understudies team up to look for reality (Devi et al., 2024). The independent learning curriculum rejects authoritarian education, which restricts students' ability to develop according to their talents, interests, and potential (Wiryanto & Anggraini, 2022). The implementation of the independent learning curriculum aims to accelerate national education goals, specifically to raise the quality of Indonesia's human resources (HR), which gives Indonesia an advantage over other nations. Students with noble character, a high level of reasoning (critical thinking), creativity, and the ability to master literacy and numeracy can contribute to the superior quality of human resources (Khoirurrijal et al., 2022).

The Merdeka Belajar curriculum is the latest educational innovation introduced by the Indonesian government to improve the quality of learning at all levels of education. With a more open approach and giving schools and teachers flexibility in designing and implementing learning, the Independent Learning Curriculum is expected to increase student involvement and the relevance of learning to the needs of the times (Febrianningsih & Ramadan, 2023). However, the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum is not without challenges, especially at the high school (SMA) level, such as SMA Negeri 2 Medan. History teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan are expected to be able to adapt their teaching practices to the principles of the Independent Learning Curriculum, but the challenges that arise can hinder this process. These challenges may range from a lack of adequate resources to necessary adjustments to teaching paradigms.

Therefore, to understand in depth the challenges faced and the strategies used by history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum, qualitative research becomes relevant (Rahmawati, 2023). Thus, this research will provide valuable insight for developing teacher professionalism and improving the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan and similar contexts. In line with this opinion, a prominent history educator, Howard Zinn, expressed in his work "A People's History of the United States": "History is not just about past events. It is a story of struggle, courage, and injustice that must be studied in order to be understood and corrected (Zinn, 2015)." This quote highlights the importance of history learning that goes beyond traditional narratives and emphasizes the need for a dynamic and engaged approach to teaching history.

However, even though it has the potential to increase student engagement and the relevance of learning, the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum is faced with various challenges. Lack of resources, the need for additional professional development, and pressure to meet evaluation standards remain challenges for teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan. Therefore, in-depth qualitative research on the challenges faced and strategies used by history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum is important. By holistically understanding the dynamics of curriculum implementation, we can identify ways to support teachers in overcoming these obstacles and increasing the effectiveness of history learning.

Apart from that, the results of a survey conducted by the Research and Development Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia show that the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum still faces various challenges in various schools, including SMA Negeri 2 Medan. This survey highlights the broadening of teachers' insight and understanding of the principles of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum as well as greater support in developing learning materials that are in line with this new approach.

In addition, previous research by (Muharrom et al., 2023) regarding the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at the high school level shows that teachers often experience difficulties adapting the new curriculum to existing teaching practices. These findings highlight the need for a deeper understanding of the specific challenges faced by history teachers, who are characterized by unique curricula and teaching methods. In this context, qualitative research that deepens the challenges and strategies of history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum can provide a valuable contribution to supporting the development of teacher professionalism and improving curriculum implementation in similar schools.

Previous research by (Harwisaputra et al., 2023) also highlighted the importance of adequate support from various parties, including schools, education supervisors, and local governments, in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum. These findings indicate that the successful implementation of the new curriculum does not only depend on the readiness of individual teachers but also on a supportive educational ecosystem.

Apart from that, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum also aims to improve the quality of learning through the use of technology in the learning process. However, the availability of adequate infrastructure and training to utilize this technology is still a problem in several schools, including SMA Negeri 2 Medan.

In order to overcome these challenges, a deep understanding of the experience of history teachers in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan is very important. It is hoped that this research can contribute to identifying effective strategies to improve the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum as well as providing recommendations for relevant stakeholders to support teachers in facing the challenges they face.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges and strategies faced by history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in implementing the Independent Learning

Curriculum. A qualitative approach was chosen because it can provide space for the active participation of research subjects in describing their experiences and perceptions in detail (Sugiyono, 2016).

**Participants:** This research involved eight experienced history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan. Participants were selected through purposive sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation of a variety of backgrounds and experiences.

**Data collection: In-depth Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant to explore their experiences, perceptions and views regarding the challenges and strategies of implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Interviews were recorded and later transcribed for further analysis.

**Observation:** Direct observations were carried out in the context of classroom history learning to understand teacher teaching practices and student responses to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.

**Data analysis:** Data from interviews and observations will be analyzed using a thematic approach. Analysis steps included thorough reading and examination of transcripts, identification of thematic patterns, labeling, and grouping findings based on similarities and differences.

**Validity and Reliability:** Data validity will be maintained through data triangulation, namely by using more than one data source (interviews and observations). Reliability will be strengthened through consistency in data collection and analysis and ongoing reflection on the interpretation of findings.

**Research Ethics:** This research will comply with the principles of research ethics, including anonymity and confidentiality of data, obtaining permission from authorized parties, and ensuring the voluntary participation of all research subjects.

**Data Interpretation:** After data analysis is carried out, the findings will be interpreted in depth to identify general patterns, differences and similarities between history teachers' experiences in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum. This will involve understanding the social, cultural, and institutional contexts that influence teaching practices.

**Confirmation:** Initial findings and

interpretations will be confirmed with research subjects, either through direct feedback sessions or by communicating the results to them. This step aims to ensure the accuracy of the interpretation and clarify the understanding obtained.

**Results Reporting:** The research results will be reported comprehensively in the form of a research report, which includes a description of the methodology, main findings, interpretations, as well as practical and theoretical implications. Apart from that, research results can also be presented in academic forums and disseminated through scientific publications.

**Reflection and Conclusion:** Researchers will reflect on the research process, including obstacles encountered and lessons learned during the process. Conclusions will be drawn based on the data analysis and interpretation that have been carried out, as well as providing recommendations for further development and improvements in the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum.

By following these steps, it is hoped that this research can make a significant contribution to understanding the challenges and strategies of history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum, as well as providing guidance for the development of more effective educational policies and practices.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

In this research, we found a number of challenges faced by history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum. One of them is limited resources, such as textbooks that suit the new curriculum, relevant learning materials, and other supporting facilities. Many teachers feel that they need additional training to better understand and implement the principles of the Independent Learning Curriculum. In addition, they also face pressure to balance the existing curriculum with the new principles introduced by the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This often requires adapting existing learning materials to new needs, which can be a challenge.

However, in facing these challenges, history teachers have developed various strategies to increase learning effectiveness.

They actively engage in collaboration with fellow history teachers, sharing experiences, resources, and effective learning strategies. Apart from that, they also use technology creatively in learning history, such as by utilizing multimedia presentations, online resources and digital learning platforms. Adaptations in teaching have also been key, with them adapting their learning approaches and strategies to better align with the principles of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, such as by increasing direct interaction with students and emphasizing the development of critical and analytical thinking skills.

The implication of these findings is the need to provide adequate resources for history teachers, including textbooks that are in accordance with the Independent Learning Curriculum, as well as ongoing training to strengthen understanding and application of the principles of the curriculum. Collaborative support from schools, education supervisors and local governments is also important in helping teachers overcome the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Apart from that, the wider integration of technology in history learning also needs to be improved to support learning experiences that are more interesting, interactive and relevant to the needs of today's students. Thus, this research provides valuable insight for developing teacher professionalism and improving the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan and similar contexts.

In addition, the research findings also underscore the importance of collaborative support in overcoming the challenges faced by history teachers. Through active collaboration between fellow history teachers and the exchange of ideas, experiences and resources, they can support and inspire each other in facing the challenges of implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum. This support also needs to be extended to the institutional level, with schools, education supervisors, and local governments providing the technical assistance, resources, and training needed to help teachers meet challenges effectively.

Apart from that, the integration of technology in history learning is also an important aspect that needs to be considered. In an era where technology has an

increasingly large role in everyday life, the use of technology in learning can increase student engagement and the relevance of learning to the real world. Therefore, there is a need to increase the integration of technology in history learning as a strategy to support the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum.

By understanding the challenges faced and the strategies used by history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan, this research provides a valuable contribution to understanding the dynamics of implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum. The implications of these findings not only apply to history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan but can also serve as a guide for the development of more effective educational policies and practices in various high school contexts throughout Indonesia.

Moreover, the findings of this research highlight the need for adjustments in existing learning materials to the principles of the Independent Learning Curriculum. History teachers need to creatively integrate historical values with a more open and student-centered approach so that learning can be more interesting and relevant for students. This emphasizes the importance of developing a local curriculum that is responsive to the needs and context of students at SMA Negeri 2 Medan, as well as flexibility in developing learning materials that are in accordance with the principles of the new curriculum.

Apart from that, collaboration between history teachers and other educational stakeholders, such as parents and local communities, can also be an effective strategy for supporting the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. Through this collaboration, teachers can gain additional support in overcoming challenges and developing teaching practices that are more innovative and relevant to student needs.

Overall, the findings of this research underscore the complexity of implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan and the importance of a holistic approach in supporting history teachers. By paying attention to the challenges faced and the strategies used by history teachers, as well as involving various educational stakeholders, a learning environment that is more dynamic, inclusive

and oriented towards student progress can be created.

### **1. Challenges of Implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum**

In the results of the discussion, the main challenges faced by history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum are limited resources, the need for additional training, and the pressure to balance the existing curriculum with the principles of the Independent Learning Curriculum. Limited resources are one of the main obstacles faced by history teachers. They often have difficulty getting textbooks that suit the new curriculum, relevant learning materials, and other supporting facilities needed to support an effective learning process. This lack of resources can limit teachers' ability to provide varied and engaging learning experiences for students.

In addition, many teachers feel that they need additional training to better understand and implement the principles of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Paradigm changes in learning approaches require adjustments in teaching strategies, assessments, and interactions with students. Therefore, additional training is important to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement this new approach. Finally, history teachers also face pressure to balance the existing curriculum with the principles of the Independent Learning Curriculum. They must carefully adapt existing learning materials to the new requirements introduced by the new curriculum, which can pose challenges in planning and organizing learning. By understanding and identifying these challenges, appropriate strategies and programs can be designed to support history teachers in overcoming these obstacles and increasing the effectiveness of implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan.

### **2. Strategies Used by History Teachers**

In the context of the results of the discussion, the strategies used by history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in facing the challenges of implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum are the key to increasing the effectiveness of history learning. First of

all, collaboration between teachers is one of the most important strategies. History teachers are actively involved in exchanging ideas, experiences, and resources with fellow history teachers. They form a strong collaborative network where they can share effective learning strategies, relevant teaching materials and practical experience in dealing with specific challenges. This collaboration not only increases teachers' knowledge and skills, but also broadens their outlook on innovative teaching practices.

Apart from that, integrating technology into learning is also an important strategy. History teachers use technology creatively in the learning process, including multimedia presentations, online resources, and digital learning platforms. The use of this technology helps increase student engagement, enrich the learning experience, and facilitate access to relevant information in history learning. Adaptations in teaching are also a main focus for history teachers. They flexibly adapt their learning approaches and strategies to better suit the principles of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This includes increasing direct interactions with students, implementing project-based learning, and emphasizing the development of critical and analytical thinking skills in history learning.

By implementing these strategies, history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan can increase the effectiveness of history learning and provide more meaningful and relevant learning experiences for students. Apart from that, the use of these strategies can also help teachers overcome the challenges faced in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum and increase their professionalism in facing changes in the world of education.

### **3. Implications for Developing Teacher Professionalism and Improving Curriculum Implementation**

In light of the results of the discussion, the findings of this research have important implications for developing teacher professionalism and improving the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan. First of all, the need to provide adequate resources is the main focus. In facing the challenge of limited resources, it is important for schools and local governments to ensure the availability of textbooks that comply with the new

curriculum, relevant learning materials, and other supporting facilities. In addition, additional training is needed to support teachers in better understanding and implementing the principles of the Independent Learning Curriculum.

Furthermore, collaborative support from various parties is also key to improving the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. Schools, educational supervisors and local governments need to provide greater support in helping teachers overcome the challenges of curriculum implementation through collaboration, the provision of technical assistance and necessary resources. This collaboration can also involve parents and local communities in supporting learning efforts at schools. Finally, increasing the integration of technology in history learning is also an important aspect that needs to be considered. By making greater use of technology in learning, teachers can increase student engagement, enrich the learning experience, and make learning more relevant to the needs of today's students. Therefore, there is a need to support and develop adequate technological infrastructure in schools, as well as training for teachers in integrating technology into their teaching practices.

By paying attention to these implications, concrete steps can be designed to support history teachers in facing the challenges of implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum and improving the quality of learning at SMA Negeri 2 Medan. This will not only provide direct benefits for teachers and students but will also help improve the overall effectiveness of education at the school.

## CONCLUSION

This research provides a comprehensive picture of the challenges and strategies faced by history teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Medan in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum. Through analysis of the research results, several conclusions can be drawn:

The challenges of implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum, including limited resources, the need for additional training, and the pressure to balance the existing curriculum with new principles, are the main obstacles for history teachers.

History teachers use various strategies, such as collaboration between teachers, integration of technology in learning, and adjustments in teaching, to overcome challenges and increase the effectiveness of history teaching. The implications of these findings include the need to provide adequate resources, collaborative support from various parties, and increase the integration of technology in history learning.

By understanding and overcoming the challenges faced by history teachers, as well as implementing appropriate strategies, the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan can be improved, which in turn will bring benefits to the development of teacher professionalism and improve the quality of learning in the school. Therefore, concrete steps need to be designed and implemented to support history teachers in facing challenges and improving the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMA Negeri 2 Medan.

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