

How Teachers Interpret And Implement Independent Curriculum: Lesson Learnt From The Field

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Abstract. *The aim of the study was to describe the English Teachers interpretation, implementation, and the challenges in implementing independent curriculum. The research used a descriptive design with a qualitative approach. The data was collected using interviews, observation, and document study. The subjects of this study were 3 English teachers in the seventh grade of junior high school in Lombok Island. The results showed that the English teachers participating in the study had right interpretation of the objectives of English learning in the independent curriculum. They were familiar with the content of English materials, the method of implementing differentiated learning, and method of conducting learning evaluation using formative and summative assessments. However, these English teachers did not have proper interpretation of the content of learning the six skills, including the implementation of text-based approach and student centered learning. Results of the study show that these teachers did not implement independent curriculum optimally because they lacked knowledge in interpreting the components of independent curriculum. The study yields that the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing independent curriculum included (1) the lack of time to prepare the material and (2) the lack of time to internalize the concept of independent curriculum. Ultimately, participants of the study found some difficulties to implement the learning methods in differentiated learning because they lacked time allocation for addressing and adjusting to the demand of new English teaching-learning model.*

Keywords: *Challenges, Interpretation, implementation, independent curriculum*

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Independent curriculum is a part of an independent learning program launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology on the 15th episode on Friday, February 11, 2022. The underlying thing for the emergence of the independent curriculum is to overcome the learning loss and learning gap long before the pandemic coupled with the Covid-19 pandemic (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, 2021). Besides, based on the evaluation of the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum it was found that there was a mistake in the teacher's understanding of

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the concept of mastery learning. Most teachers still think that mastery learning is completing all learning materials so that they even override students' understanding; while what is expected for the 2013 Curriculum is the complete understanding of students (Kemendikbud, 2019). Another reason is that teacher's flexibility in developing creativity and innovation is not provided in the 2013 general curriculum due to the large amount of administration that must be completed by teachers.

The independent curriculum demands teachers, as front-liners, to play their important role to restore learning loss. They should focus their teaching on essential materials and the development of students' basic competencies. Thus, they would create changes in students' character and mindset. Besides, the independent curriculum provides soft skills and accommodates the need of international world (Permendikbud 22 of 2020).

The concept of Independent curriculum is therefore referred to as a flexible learning process for teachers to choose various learning tools so that they can lead the learning process in accordance with the students' interests and talents. It emphasizes on student center learning that encourage them to participate more actively in the teaching and learning activities based on the students' needs and abilities. Another characteristic of independent curriculum is that it emphasizes that the learning practice is student-centered and the learning framework is in the form of a continuous cycle from phase to phase. As such, independent curriculum employs project-based learning approach for the development of soft skills and students' characters in accordance with the profile of Pancasila students. According to Kemendikbudristek (2021), this means that the profile of Pancasila students becomes a guiding policy to strengthen the direction for learning and assessment both in intra-curricular learning activities and school projects.

In general, the component of Independent curriculum consists of objectives, content, method, and evaluation. The objectives of learning focuses on strengthening students' spoken English and their written English skills. The content of English learning in independent curriculum is not much different from the 2013 curriculum. However, the material in the independent curriculum is more concise and in-depth. In the decree number 033 of 2022, it is stated that learning English should be more focused on strengthening students' abilities in using English in six language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting. These skills must be presented in an integrated manner with various types of texts. These skills were divided into 3 elements of learning outcomes which are listening-speaking, reading-viewing, and writing-presenting.

Furthermore, the teaching method involves the differentiated learning, i.e. learning that accommodates students' learning needs, abilities, learning styles, and interests of individual students in the classroom. Differentiated learning used by the respondents addresses various individual needs. As teachers differentiate the content, process, products, and the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping are considered essential for this program (Tomlinson, 2000).

According to Richard et al (2015), in the differentiated learning the teacher introduces the text and its goals, as well as its features, and guides students to produce texts through the process of providing assistance (scaffolding). The strategy encompass student-centered learning is making students actively participate in the class based on their abilities and needs. The evaluation of Independent curriculum is more emphasized on formative assessment. Formative assessment at the beginning of learning is called a diagnostic assessment which functions to provide information to educators about students' learning readiness. Formative assessment or assessment of the learning process aims to monitor and improve the learning process, as well as evaluate the achievement of learning objectives. This assessment is carried out to find out the obstacles or difficulties they face, and also to get information on the progress of students. This information is provided as feedback for students as well as educators. To monitor students' learning progress summative assessment formative assessment are applied to the students. This aims to assess the achievement of learning objectives and/or students' CP as a basis for determining grade increases and/or graduation from educational units.

Despite its virtue, in implementing the new curriculum, teachers were always faced with pro and contra and it depends on their interpretation on the concept of independent curriculum. If they understand it, they will adopt it and implement it. Currently, a study on this issue is still in its infancy. Thus, little information is known by the public concerning the implementation of the new curriculum. Therefore, this study wants to reveal how the teachers interpret and the implement the independent curriculum in the field.

RESEARCH METHOD

In terms of the research design, this study used descriptive design with a qualitative approach. Descriptive research aims to seek a clear description of the phenomena, both natural phenomena and human engineering. While qualitative research arises from data, not hypotheses. Descriptive qualitative research approach is used to collect rich data or information in the field. It is more concerned with the process than the results.

The participants of this research were three English teachers who taught English in the seventh grade at SMPN 2 Mataram and coded as TA, TB, and TC. The data was collected using two instruments. First, research question was written for a semi-structured interview. It consisted of some questions and developed based on the needs to see the teachers' interpretation, implementation, and the challenges in implementing independent curriculum. Second, an observation was prepared to see how teachers did the implementation of learning activity, including planning, executing English learning in the classroom, and assessment.

To analyze the data, first, the researcher identified the data that were related to the research problems. The activity includes transcribing the recording data and exporting chats that has been saved. Second, the researcher classified which data to be included in the analysis. Then, the researcher described how the subjects of the study interpreted the concept of independent curriculum, how they implemented the independent curriculum, ranging from planning, executing and the assessing the learning activities. Further, upon the completion of the analysis, the researcher explained all of the data displayed and finally a conclusion and verification of the findings were drawn.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a. The English Teachers' Interpretation of Independent Curriculum

Component of Curriculum	TA	TB	TC
Objectives	The aim of English learning is to strengthen the ability in spoken and written English through various texts.		
Content	All three TA, TB, and TC interpreted the English material in Independent curriculum is focus on essential material and deeper.		
	TA interpreted these six skills is combined them in the learning process.	TB interpreted by bringing together these various skills in one meeting.	TC interpreted the 6 skills in English by integrating all these skills in the classroom
Method/ Strategy	Differentiated learning interpreted as a condition where students must be distinguished according to their abilities and needs.		
	Text-based approach interpreted as an approach to learning English using text which students were taught to recognize various kinds of vocabulary and parts of speech from various types of texts until guide students to create texts independently.	TB interpreted the text based approach by introducing the characteristics of the material or important points in the text that are taught, whether in the form of part of speech such as prepositions.	TC interpreted by teaching students various types of text and from there it can be taught such as vocabulary, parts of speech or characteristics of the text.
	Students-centered learning interpreted as the teacher	Student-centered learning interpreted as a condition in	Teacher C interpreted student-centered learning

	functions as a bridge for students to explore and express their abilities, carried out group discussions, and has partnerships for learning.	which students can be separated according to their abilities in learning and the teacher's function is to provide stimulus to students so that students learn according to their stage of development and more active in class.	which students actively participate in class based on their needs and abilities.
Evaluation	Teacher A interpreted formative assessment in the beginning of learning activity for seeing the level of students and their learning style. Besides, formative assessment in the process of learning interpreted as giving feedback for students which good and bad in the learning process in order to grow. While summative assessment interpreted as evaluation material whether students have understood the lesson by giving assignments and tests to students.	TB interpreted formative assessment in the beginning of learning activity for knowing the student learning style and assessment of the learning process to see the progress of students. While summative assessment interpreted as assessment at the end or middle to test the learning objectives have been achieved or not.	TC interpreted formative assessment is the same as TA and TB, namely to see student learning styles and provide an evaluation of developments in the learning process, one of which is in the form of peer-to-peer assessment. While summative assessment interpreted as evaluates whether the learning objectives have been achieved.

Table 1. The English Teachers' Interpretation of Independent Curriculum

From the finding above we can see the English teachers had appropriate interpretation of the learning objective of English in the independent curriculum, namely the strengthening of spoken and written English skills using various kinds of texts. The data show that these teachers also had appropriate interpretation of the content/materials of English subjects contained in the independent curriculum. They found out that those materials were more focused on the deeper understanding of the essence of learning. This is in line with the characteristic of independent curriculum in the Ministry of Education and Culture in BSKAP, i.e. the material in independent curriculum is more focused on the essential material and basic competencies. They showed to have appropriate interpretation of the method of English learning in the differentiated learning. They interpreted differentiated learning as the learning process in accordance with the needs and abilities of students. However, the findings indicate that TA, TB, and TC needed to understand more deeply concerning acknowledging students' needs and abilities, differentiated learning types and diagnostic assessments so that they could find out students' abilities and needs in learning. They seemed to retain their previous teaching practices, which were emphasized more teacher-focused rather than student-focused.

Theoretically, differentiated learning aims to accommodate students' learning needs, abilities, learning styles, and interests of individual students in the classroom. It allows teachers to provide different treatment or actions to each student to distinguish their needs. The data of this study show that the English teachers had appropriate interpretation of the evaluation of English learning in formative assessment and summative assessment. They considered formative assessment only to provide feedback to students, but also for teachers to evaluate the strategy for learning activity and the students learning needs. Whether teachers differentiated content, process, and products, or the learning environment, the use of ongoing assessment and flexible grouping would make this approach successful to run the English language instruction (Tomlinson, 2000). Differentiated learning will prevent us from the pitfalls of the adoption of one-size-fits-all curriculum (McBride, 2004).

The findings show that the participants of the study did not have appropriate interpretation of the content of English six skills. For example, they considered that the whole six skills could be applied and evaluated in one meeting. This is quite misleading. The data obtained from the participants show that they also did not have adequate knowledge to interpret the method of undertaking text-based approach. They admitted that they were not familiar fully of how to deliver various types of text to learn.

In this relation, Richard (2015) suggest that in the differentiated learning the teacher should be familiar with the new system because he or she will introduce the text and its goals, as well as its features, and guides students to produce texts through the process of providing assistance (scaffolding). Text based approach also involves reading comprehension, vocabulary expansion, grammar and syntax, writing practice, cultural insight, and supplemental activities. The facts show that at present many teachers in the field did not have appropriate method of delivering learning activities that are student-centered in nature. They were still doubtful with the new learning paradigm.

Relevant the findings aforementioned, results of observations in the classrooms of the three teachers show that these teachers did not have appropriate interpretation of the learning evaluation in the independent curriculum especially in the diagnostic assessment. For instance, TA interpreted formative assessment in the beginning of learning activity for knowing the level of students and their learning style. While TB and TC interpreted with only seeing their learning style. Based on the concept of assessment diagnostic in BSKAP (2022), Diagnostic assessment functioned to provide information to educators about students' learning readiness. And there were two kinds of diagnostic assessments employed by the teachers, namely cognitive related

to abilities or levels in subject and non-cognitive related to learning styles and student backgrounds. Therefore, TA, TB, and TC needed to understand again the concepts of cognitive diagnostic assessment in the independent curriculum.

b. The Implementation of Independent Curriculum from Planning until Assessment by English Teachers

Implementation of Independent curriculum	TA	TB	TC
Planning the Learning Activity	All the three TA, TB, and TC adopted the flow of learning objectives and teaching module from the file that is already in the link given by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. Then, It was modified related to the student's condition.		
Text Based Approach	All The three TA, TB, and TC showed the material to be studied, explains the purpose of the material, the way it is written, and the language elements. After that, TB guided students to make sentences.		
Student Centered-Learning	Both TA and TC placed students who have studied and prepared the day's material in the middle of other students to conduct group discussions. So, they became friends to discuss and ask questions about the difficulties they face. While TB provided more stimulus to students in the form of asking questions to get students active in the class.		
Differentiated Learning	TA gave freedom to students to learn according to their abilities. TA performed process-based differentiation learning when there were children who understand quickly and were slow to understand the material like students who cannot write to make a sentence or text, TA emphasized the students' understanding of the points in the material.	TB does not use media such as film and music in teaching but only shows videos related to telling time material	TC implemented students who had learning preparation participate in listening or directly doing exercises. Besides, TC also utilized these students to be able to help their friends by teaching accordingly to their language. Differentiation learning was also carried out based on the products made, such as students being asked to make wall clocks from cardboard and manila paper.
Six skills	TC implemented listening-spekaing, Reading-viewing in the second meeting, and writing-presenting in the third meeting.		
Pancasila of student Profile	All the three teachers, TA, TB and TC tried to choose which themes are suitable for application in accordance with the material. for example, TA applied independent aspects when making presentations, working together during discussions and working together to see the spirit of unity in the various characters in the class. While TB, students were asked to make wall clocks from cardboard or manila paper so that they can hone students' independence and creativity. TC implemented early learning to start by praying together, then to look at morals. Then, creativity, mutual cooperation, global diversity from the learning process in doing individual and group assignments in the form of projects to students so they can train their competence and character.		
Assessment	All the three teachers, TA, TB, and TC conducted assessment before the learning activity was a diagnostic assessment in which they worked together with guidance and counseling teacher for seeing the level of students' ability to do differentiated learning in the class. TA and TB applied formative assessments in the learning		

process, for example by giving assessments to children in the form of developments where they were good and where they were lacking in the learning process. While TC conducted formative assessments in the form of peer-to-peer assessments. For summative assessment, TA, TB, and TC provided assignments and daily tests, midterm tests, and final semester tests to test whether the learning objectives have been achieved or not.

Table 2: The Implementation of Independent Curriculum from Planning until Assessment by English Teachers

Based on the findings above, we can conclude that the English teachers had not implemented the independent curriculum optimally. It started from the planning, the English teachers applied independent changes in an independent curriculum with adopting the teaching modules from examples provided by the government, and adapting to needs. The component of teaching modules have already in the teaching module which contained general information consist of module author identity, initial competence, Pancasila student profile, facilities and infrastructure, students target, learning model; core component consist of learning goal, assessment, meaningful understanding, lighter question, learning activity, and student's and teacher's-reflection; and attachment consist of student worksheets, enrichment and remedial, reading materials for educators and students, glossary, and references (Kemendikbudrsitek, 2021).

However, the findings reveal that the components of the teaching module were not fully in accordance with those mandated by the government. The learning objectives in the teaching module did not reach the desired competency yet and some of the activities carried out in class were not included in the teaching module. The participants indeed had included characteristics of English learning such as text based approach, student centered-learning, six skills, the profile of Pancasila student in the classroom. Nevertheless, they did not maximize the implementation of differentiated learning, student-centered learning, and the dimensions in the profile of Pancasila in the learning process. These English teachers needed to have professional development in order to maximize their ability to apply assessments related to cognitive development. In addition, non-cognitive assessments such as understanding the learning style, and background of students were also crucial to learn (Kemendikburistek, 2021).

c. The Challenges Faced by English Teachers in Implementing Independent Curriculum

Challenges in implementing independent curriculum	TA	TB	TC
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Internal Factor	<p>-Some problems in adjusting time allocation such as lack of time to prepare the material and lack of time to understand the concept of independent curriculum.</p>	<p>-Some problems in adjusting time allocation such as lack of time to prepare the material and lack of time to understand the concept of independent curriculum like differentiated learning in the class.</p>	<p>-Some problems in adjusting time allocation such as lack of time to prepare the material and lack of time to understand the concept of independent curriculum.</p> <p>-The lack of time allocation for the English teaching-learning process, they had difficulties in managing the class because of the decrease in time in teaching English.</p>
	<p>- Difficulties in implementing learning method, especially in the independent curriculum like differentiated learning in the class</p>	<p>-The lack of time allocation for the English teaching-learning process, they had difficulties in managing the class because of the decrease in time in teaching English.</p>	
	<p>-The lack of time allocation for the English teaching-learning process, they had difficulties in managing the class because of the decrease in time in teaching English.</p>		
	<p>- Difficulties in assessing the students based on their ability and their learning style.</p>		
Exsternal Factor			Lack of facilities that given by the

government, there was lack of textbooks for teaching in the classroom.

Table 3. The Challenges Faced by English Teachers in Implementing Independent Curriculum

The finding shows that English teacher faced some challenges in implementing Independent curriculum. First was related to some problems in adjusting time allocation so that they experienced the lack of time to prepare the material and lack of time to understand the concept of independent curriculum. Second was dealt with the difficulties in implementing learning method, for example conducting differentiated learning in the classroom. Third was concerning the lack of time allocation for the English teaching-learning process. The participants showed to have difficulties in managing the class. Fourth was related to the difficulties in assessing the students using the guidelines of Implementation of Independent Curriculum, Most teachers faced challenges in assessing the students' learning outcomes based on their ability and their learning style (Rizki et al, 2021). Finally, the finding informs that schools lack facilities and textbooks for teaching in the classroom

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, it can be concluded that the English teachers had appropriate interpretation the objectives of English learning in independent curriculum, the content of English learning in the material, the method of English learning in differentiated learning, and the evaluation of English learning in formative and summative assessment. However, the English teacher did not have appropriate interpretation with content of English learning in six skills, method of English learning in text based approach and student centered learning, and evaluation of English learning especially in diagnostic assessment.

In implementing independent curriculum, the English teachers had not implemented independent curriculum optimally because these teachers had not been able to correctly interpret the component in independent curriculum. They needed to maximize to prepare the lesson plan because they only focused on teaching rather than preparing the lesson plan. Besides, they needed to maximize the implementation of differentiated learning, student-centered learning, and the dimensions in the profile of Pancasila students in the learning process. The English teachers also needed to maximize applying assessments, especially in

diagnostic assessment. Therefore, they still needed more time to learn and adapt to the implementation of independent curriculum as suggested by the government.

Finally, the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the independent curriculum appeared due to some problems in adjusting time allocation such as lack of time to prepare the material and lack of time to understand the concept of independent curriculum. They also faced difficulties in implementing learning methods especially in the independent curriculum like differentiated learning in the classroom. Generally, they lacked allocation of time for the English teaching-learning process. As such, they had difficulties in assessing their students in accordance with the guidelines of implementing the independent curriculum. Finally, the study indicate that the lack of facilities caused the implementation of independent curriculum experienced hurdles.

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