

An In-Depth Exploration of Elementary Teachers' Views on Assessing Learning Within the Independent Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Education plays a vital role in the entire learning journey, every teaching and learning activity is directed toward fulfilling the goals established in the educational program. The merdeka curriculum emphasizes individualized assessments to address the diverse needs of students. however, its effectiveness in fully accommodating the varying characteristics of each student remains uncertain. Underlining the importance of ongoing assessment and refinement. this qualitative descriptive study integrates a literature review and in-depth interviews to examine the implementation of the independent curriculum from the perspectives of elementary school teachers. five participants were purposively selected—experienced teachers from public and private elementary schools in north sumatra—based on their enrollment in a learning evaluation course during their master’s program. through in-depth interviews, the study captures their reflections, experiences, and challenges in applying the curriculum in classroom settings. this study found that learning evaluation is an indispensable element of effective education. it is not only used to assess student achievement but also to improve the quality of the teaching process. since each evaluation method has its own advantages and limitations, teachers must wisely combine and balance different strategies to create a more inclusive, fair, and continuous learning experience for all students.

Keywords : Independent Curriculum, Assessment, Elementary Students

INTRODUCTION

Education is fundamental to the overall learning process, with all teaching and learning activities aimed at achieving the objectives outlined in the educational program. In this context, the educational program acts as the guiding framework for all educational efforts (Yuni, et al, 2022). Since its introduction in 2021, the Independent Curriculum has been adopted across Indonesia; however, its implementation, particularly in regions such as North Sumatra, reveals notable obstacles. These challenges highlight a disconnect between the intended objectives of the curriculum and the realities of its execution at the local level, suggesting that regional disparities may obstruct its effective integration (Sitorus & Ratnawati, 2024). Key issues include inadequate infrastructure, limited digital proficiency among teachers, and ongoing difficulties in applying assessment methods that reflect the curriculum’s core principles. In addition, external influences—such as students’ socioeconomic backgrounds, varying levels of parental involvement, and differing

community environments—further impact the curriculum’s success. Finally, inconsistencies in policy implementation between central and local governments pose a significant barrier to achieving equitable educational outcomes nationwide (Sucipto, 2024).

Although the curriculum's implementation includes offering guidance to teachers, administrators, and school principals to ensure a clear understanding, and encourages parental involvement in discussions, significant challenges continue to persist. These challenges include issues like inadequate facilities, a shortage of teaching materials within the curriculum (Ulfa, 2024), limited teacher competency in assessments (Safitri & Rokhimawan, 2024) who need to learn more about the curriculum (Putri., et al, 2023) and students' lack of preparedness to actively participate in the learning process (Saragih & Marpaung, 2024); (Muliawan, 2024). Despite efforts to promote understanding and collaboration, these ongoing obstacles indicate that the implementation is still not fully equipped to achieve its intended goals effectively.

The Independent Curriculum holds significant potential in fostering the development of 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration (Muliawan, 2024). By emphasizing these skills, the curriculum aims to equip students with the necessary competencies to navigate and thrive in an increasingly complex and fast-changing world. Through its flexible and student-centered approach, the curriculum encourages active engagement, problem-solving, and innovative thinking, all of which are essential for success in modern society.

In the Independent Curriculum, principals and educators are granted the autonomy to design lesson plans (Zulinto, 2024), implement teaching methods, and create curricula tailored to the needs of their students (Prastowo, 2022). Indeed, teachers, as skilled professionals, have a significant responsibility in guiding, inspiring, and educating students in ways that align with the evolving needs and challenges of the revolution 4.0 (Ruaya, et al, 2022) Therefore, Assessment plays a crucial role as the first step in evaluating student progress and guiding future learning. Its primary goal is to assess the learning outcomes of students. Within the Independent Curriculum, assessment is fully managed by educators, who divide it into two types: formative and summative assessments.

In the implementation of assessments within the context of the Independent Curriculum, there is a deliberate focus on providing individualized attention to students. While this approach aims to positively impact students' ability to master learning material, it also raises concerns about its effectiveness across diverse student populations. The success of this method largely depends on how well it addresses the varying needs and learning paces of students, and whether it can be consistently applied in different educational settings to ensure equitable outcome. Based on the description above, the purpose of this article is to explore teachers’ perspectives on the implementation of assessment within the context of the Independent Curriculum. Accordingly, the research question addressed is: *How is learning assessment conducted to support the achievement of learning objectives under the implementation of the Independent Curriculum?*

METHODS

Research Design

This research is a type of qualitative descriptive study that combines a literature review and interview results. Qualitative research aims to explore and analyze social issues encountered by individuals and groups, based on real-world data and conveyed through descriptive information (Fadli, 2021). The literature review design entails a critical examination and evaluation of existing knowledge, concepts, or findings in academic literature, contributing theoretical and methodological insights to specific subjects. This study uses two data collection methods: a literature review and in-depth interviews. The literature review involves gathering data from various sources, such as books, articles, and images, to support the research. Relevant materials were obtained from platforms like Research Gate, Google Scholar, and ERIC.

Participants

The participant selection method employed in this study is purposive sampling. Participants were specifically selected based on their enrollment in a course on learning evaluation during their master's degree program in a Private University North Sumatra, Indonesia. Additionally, the author of this study served as the instructor for this course, which adds an important layer of context in terms of the participants' prior exposure to the subject matter. This selection process ensures that the participants possess relevant experience and knowledge. In-depth interviews collect qualitative data through one-on-one conversations, there are five participants answer open-ended questions to share their thoughts and experiences. They are teachers from both private and public elementary schools in a major city in North Sumatra, Indonesia, with teaching experience ranging from five to fifteen years. They have been teaching with the implementation of the independent curriculum for approximately three years. Tabel 1 describes partisipants' backgorund.

Table 1. Partisipants Information

No	Name (Pseudonym)	Length of Teaching (Years)	Working Place
1	P1	15 (fifteen)	Private School
2	P2	5 (five)	Private School
3	P3	15 (fifteen)	Public School
4	P4	11 (Eleven)	Private School
5	P5	13 (Thirteen)	Public School

Data analysis

This method helps researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of the research topic by exploring participants' personal perspectives. The data collected through interviews are then transcribed, analyzed, and interpreted to identify key themes and patterns that offer insights into the research questions (Raco, 2010) dikutip dari (Fadli, 2021). In-depth interviews are particularly valuable when the goal is to capture rich, nuanced data that cannot be easily obtained through quantitative methods.

RESULTS

The crucial role of learning evaluation in enhancing educational outcomes

Learning evaluation is indispensable in the educational process as it serves as a critical tool for measuring the effectiveness of teaching and learning, both from the perspectives of teachers and students (Hilmi & Hapsari, 2023). It allows educators to determine whether learning objectives are met, provides valuable feedback to students on their strengths and weaknesses, and offers guidance to teachers for improving their teaching methods (Kristiyan & Mujiatun, 2023). Furthermore, evaluation helps to adapt the curriculum and learning materials to enhance their effectiveness (Samin, 2023), assess students' critical thinking abilities, and boost their motivation and confidence in learning.

In the same way that a skilled chef constantly adjusts recipes to improve dishes, evaluation in the teaching process enables educators to assess what works, what needs improvement, and what should be revised. Evaluation is essential for tailoring teaching methods to meet the needs of students, deepening their understanding of the material, and offering teachers opportunities for professional growth. It also provides feedback for students to recognize their weaknesses, while giving teachers insights to offer more precise guidance.

Moreover, learning evaluation is pivotal because it allows students to gauge their understanding of the subject matter, while helping educators assess whether the teaching methods are effective and whether learning objectives have been achieved. Through evaluation, educators gain a chance to analyze areas for improvement, fostering more innovative and creative learning strategies in the future. It functions as a mirror reflecting the progress of the learning process and as a compass guiding teaching efforts to ensure the educational goals are met.

“For example, after finishing a lesson on poetry, I give a test. From the results, I notice that many students still have difficulty distinguishing between different types of poetry. From this, I realize that I need to provide additional practice to help them differentiate the types of poetry, perhaps through fun games or quizzes. As a teacher, I always strive to conduct regular evaluations, whether through tests, assignments, class discussions, or direct observations. The goal is simple: to ensure that all students can learn effectively and reach their maximum potential” P3.

In conclusion, learning evaluation is a crucial instrument in designing learning programs and assessing the success of teaching processes. It enables teachers to reflect on their methods, understand the diverse learning styles of students, and use appropriate evaluation models to obtain accurate information on students' capabilities. A comprehensive and fair evaluation ensures no student is disadvantaged while offering insights into the right stimulus and motivation for each learner. Through evaluation, teachers can continually improve their practice and enhance the quality of learning for all students.

Classroom Assessment Practices

Learning evaluation in the independent curriculum typically includes several types, such as diagnostic, formative, and summative evaluations, each serving a different purpose (Ulfa, 2024). Each assessment has its own strengths in developing students' skills and competencies. Diagnostic evaluations at the start of the semester are helpful for understanding students'

initial knowledge and skills. They give instructors a sense of students' strengths and weaknesses, allowing for targeted teaching (Prastowo, 2022). However, these evaluations don't always predict how well a student will do in the future. A student might perform poorly because of test anxiety or unfamiliarity with the test, but that doesn't mean they won't improve later. Learning is not always a straight path—some students may struggle at first but get better over time, while others may do well early on but face challenges later. External factors, like personal issues, can also affect performance. Since diagnostic tests usually only check basic knowledge, they might miss deeper understanding or skills that are important for long-term success. So, while diagnostic evaluations are useful, they should be seen as just one tool. Continuous assessment throughout the semester gives a better picture of a student's progress and potential.

Formative assessment is helpful for improving teaching and spotting student difficulties, but it has its limits. Daily quizzes and Question & Answer sessions may not always cover all skills or may be too simple, so they don't always give a full picture of a student's abilities. Without timely and clear feedback, students might not understand their mistakes or how to improve. If used too often, these assessments can lose their value and fail to provide new insights. To be most effective, formative assessments need to be well-designed, balanced with other assessments, and include useful feedback to help students improve. Summative evaluation, typically conducted at the end of the learning process, measures the overall achievement of learning goals and determines final grades. However, it has limitations. It often focuses on final outcomes, neglecting the learning journey, and may not reflect students' true abilities, especially if they improve over time. The high-stakes nature of summative assessments can create anxiety, and they provide no opportunity for students to improve based on feedback. Additionally, they overlook important skills like creativity and critical thinking. While useful for summarizing achievement, summative assessments should be paired with ongoing feedback to support continuous student growth.

Learning evaluation can be conducted both in written and oral forms, and each has its own unique characteristics. Oral exams encourage speaking skills but may not show long-term understanding. Projects and group work promote creativity and teamwork, but results can be affected by group dynamics. Portfolios give a broader view of progress but can be time-consuming and subjective.

“In my teaching, I use a mix of multiple-choice questions, essays, projects, and quizzes to evaluate different aspects of learning. However, each of these methods has limitations. Multiple-choice questions may oversimplify concepts, while projects might not always reflect individual skills. Oral questioning can provide insights into understanding but is not always a reliable measure of overall knowledge” P1.

Other participants added,

“In my class, I frequently use two types of evaluations: formative and summative evaluations. Formative evaluation is conducted during the learning process to provide feedback that helps both students and teachers improve the learning experience. Examples include short quizzes, class discussions, and individual or group assignments. On the other hand, summative evaluation is carried out at the

end of a learning unit or semester to measure students' overall achievement, such as through mid-term exams or final exams” P5.

In conclusion, while evaluation is necessary for measuring student progress, it's important to understand the limitations of each method. A balanced approach, using a mix of evaluations, is key to getting a more accurate picture of student learning and improving teaching practices. As Safitri & Rokhimawan (2024) suggest, there is a need for ongoing curriculum evaluation and teacher support to maintain consistent educational quality and effectiveness.

DISCUSSION

Learning evaluation plays a central role in education. The evaluation is not just a measurement tool but also a reflective guide for both teachers and students to understand how effective the teaching and learning process has been. Evaluation helps teachers determine whether learning objectives are achieved, provides constructive feedback to students, and creates opportunities for improving teaching methods (Kristiyan, et al, 2023). Additionally, evaluation acts as both a compass and a mirror—guiding educators in the right direction and reflecting on the progress of learning. It also drives innovation in teaching strategies, supports the adjustment of teaching materials, and enhances students' motivation and confidence. Through the example of teacher P3, we see that regular and adaptive evaluation can be an effective tool for identifying student difficulties and modifying teaching strategies accordingly—such as using engaging activities to help students better understand types of poetry.

The types of learning evaluation in the independent curriculum, including: Diagnostic Evaluation: Conducted at the beginning of a course to assess students' prior knowledge. While helpful, it may not always accurately predict future performance due to factors like anxiety or unfamiliarity. Formative Evaluation: Performed during the learning process to improve instruction and learning. However, its effectiveness depends on well-designed tools and timely, meaningful feedback. Summative Evaluation: Conducted at the end of a learning unit to assess overall achievement. Though essential for grading, it often overlooks students' growth and critical skills, and can cause stress due to its high-stakes nature.

Various forms of evaluation—such as written tests, oral exams, projects, group work, and portfolios—each have strengths and limitations. No single method captures the full picture, so a balanced and blended approach is necessary to truly understand student progress. Statements from educators like P1 and P5 emphasize the importance of balancing formative and summative evaluations. While formative assessments provide ongoing feedback during the process, summative assessments measure final outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Learning evaluation plays a vital role in education as it serves as a tool to assess the effectiveness of teaching and the achievement of learning objectives. Through evaluation, both teachers and students gain valuable feedback that can enhance teaching methods, student engagement, and understanding, while also fostering motivation and critical thinking. Within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, various types of assessments—diagnostic, formative, and summative—each carry their own functions and challenges. Diagnostic assessments help

identify students' prior knowledge but may be influenced by external factors; formative assessments are effective for monitoring learning progress but can be less meaningful without high-quality feedback; and summative assessments measure final learning outcomes, though they often overlook students' overall development. Assessments can take written, oral, or project-based forms, each with distinct strengths and limitations. Therefore, employing a diverse and balanced assessment strategy is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of student progress and to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning practices.

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