

BENCHMARKING

JURNAL MANAJEMEN PENDIDIKAN ISLAM

COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR MADRASAH TEACHERS IN DELI SERDANG REGENCY IN IMPLEMENTING THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM

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Abstract

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This study aims to analyze madrasah teachers' readiness and competence level in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, identify challenges, and formulate effective strategies to improve teacher competence in the Deli Serdang Regency. This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study method. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies, while data were analyzed thematically through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The study results indicate that most madrasah teachers are not yet fully prepared to implement the Merdeka Curriculum due to limited conceptual understanding, insufficient training, and a lack of supporting facilities. Challenges include low digital literacy, limited mentoring, and restricted access to learning resources. Strategies that can be applied include practice-based training, intensive mentoring, the use of technology, strengthening professional learning communities, and supportive policies from school leaders and related institutions. This study recommends the need for synergy among madrasahs, the government, and educational communities to create a supportive learning ecosystem for the optimal implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: Teacher competence, Merdeka curriculum, Learning strategies, Madrasah, Professional development.

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INTRODUCTION

Education has a strategic role in producing superior and competitive human resources. In Indonesia's education context, the government has developed various policies to improve the quality of learning, one of which is through the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to provide flexibility in learning, adapt to the needs of students, and encourage competency-based and character-based learning (Aminah & Sya'bani, 2023). Implementing the Independent Curriculum in madrasahs requires the readiness of teachers to understand, adapt, and develop innovative learning methods.

As agents of change, Madrasah teachers have an important role in successfully implementing the Independent Curriculum. Teacher competence is not only limited to mastery of the material but also includes pedagogic skills, learning innovation, and the ability to use educational technology (Masturoh & Mahmudi, 2023). However, various studies show that there are still obstacles in teacher competency development, such as lack

of training, limited access to learning resources, and lack of sustainable policy support (Aminah & Sya'bani, 2023).

Deli Serdang Regency, one of the areas with many madrasahs, faces challenges in improving teacher competence. The study results show that many teachers still experience difficulties in understanding the concept of the Independent Curriculum and applying it in the learning process (Qolbiyah, 2022). Therefore, an effective strategy is needed to develop madrasah teachers' competence to accomplish their duties optimally.

One strategy that can be applied is to increase practice-based training and intensive mentoring. Training based on real experience and practical reflection has proven effective in improving teachers' skills in implementing the new curriculum (Annastawan, 2023). In addition, mentoring and collaboration programs between teachers can also help overcome the obstacles faced in implementing the Independent Curriculum.

The use of technology in teacher competency development is also an aspect that cannot be ignored. Learning Management Systems (LMS) and other digital platforms can help teachers access learning resources and share experiences with fellow educators (Abdul Fattah Nasution et al., 2023). By utilizing technology, teachers can more easily access training materials and implement more innovative and interesting learning for students.

To develop madrasah teacher competencies, support from various parties, including the government, educational institutions, and the teacher community, is needed. The government needs to design more inclusive and sustainable policies to support the development of teachers' professionalism (Sulistyawati, 2015). In addition, the active participation of the head of madrasah and educational organizations is also an important factor in creating a conducive learning environment for teachers.

With the right competency development strategy, madrasah teachers in Deli Serdang Regency can be better prepared to implement the Independent Curriculum. Improving teacher competence will impact the quality of learning and student learning outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to analyze effective strategies for developing the competence of madrasah teachers in the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method to understand the strategy for developing madrasah teacher competencies in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Deli Serdang Regency (Sugiyono, 2017). The study subjects included madrasah teachers, principals, and related parties involved in the curriculum implementation. Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews to explore the experiences and challenges of teachers and madrasah principals, direct observation in class to see the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and documentation studies of teacher training policies and programs. Data analysis used thematic analysis techniques with data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing stages to identify patterns, themes, and practical strategies for developing teacher competencies (Hariyanti, 2015), while data validity and reliability were maintained through triangulation of sources and methods (Metondang, 2009). With this methodology, the study is expected to provide a comprehensive picture and strategic recommendations for stakeholders in improving the quality of education by developing madrasah teacher competencies in Deli Serdang Regency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of Readiness and Competence of Madrasah Teachers in Deli Serdang Regency in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

The importance of teachers' readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum is the main factor that determines the success of educational transformation in madrasahs. In the context of Deli Serdang Regency, the results of the study show that the level of readiness of madrasah teachers is still diverse and influenced by various aspects, both in terms of knowledge, skills, and professional attitudes. Teachers who have a good understanding of the concept of the Independent Curriculum tend to be better prepared to apply learning principles based on competence and character. This reflects that teachers' readiness is not only determined by knowledge alone, but also by the ability to adapt learning methods to the diverse needs of students (Rumpoko & Diana, 2022).

The competence of madrasah teachers is also a benchmark for readiness. In general, madrasah teachers in Deli Serdang have adequate academic competence, but mastery of pedagogic competencies and educational technology is still a challenge. Pedagogic competencies that include the ability to design, implement, and evaluate the learning process need to be continuously developed in accordance with the Independent Curriculum paradigm which demands a more flexible and contextual approach (Widodo & El-Yunusi, 2023). In addition, the skill of using learning technology is crucial considering that visual and digital media are an important part of modern learning.

Another factor that affects a teacher's readiness is the professional experience and training they have attended. Teachers with higher education backgrounds and continuing education show better readiness to implement the new curriculum. On the other hand, teachers with minimal training and experience face difficulties in understanding and implementing learning changes. These findings are in line with previous research that states that continuous and relevant training can significantly improve teacher readiness and competence (Marengke, 2019).

Furthermore, teachers' readiness is also influenced by attitudes and motivations in dealing with curriculum changes. Teachers who have high motivation tend to be more enthusiastic in participating in training and innovating in learning. On the contrary, resistance to change can be an obstacle that slows down teachers' adaptation to the Independent Curriculum. Therefore, the development of an open and adaptive professional attitude needs to be part of the strategy to improve teacher competence (Nelis & Nuraini, 2023).

The use of educational technology is one of the indicators of readiness that is quite decisive. In today's digital era, teachers' ability to utilize the Learning Management System (LMS) and digital-based learning media is a must. Teachers who are able to integrate technology in learning are better prepared to face the demands of a curriculum that emphasizes active and creative learning. However, there are still many madrasah teachers in Deli Serdang who do not have adequate technological skills so they need special training.

The readiness of madrasah teachers is also influenced by the conditions of the work environment and institutional support (Rumpoko & Diana, 2022). Madrasahs that provide supportive facilities and a conducive work atmosphere encourage teachers to be more prepared and creative in learning. Madrasah heads who are proactive in facilitating training and providing moral and material support play a very important role in increasing teacher readiness. On the other hand, limited facilities and lack of support can reduce the enthusiasm and readiness of teachers.

In addition, the role of the educational community and teacher professional organizations also helps build teacher readiness. Discussion forums, workshops, and collaborative activities between teachers provide a space for teachers to exchange

experiences and enrich knowledge. Active participation in the professional community can speed up the learning process and adaptation to the new curriculum.

Overall, the level of readiness and competence of madrasah teachers in Deli Serdang Regency shows that even though there are teachers who are ready and competent, there are still many who need to be coached and strengthened. Teacher readiness cannot be seen partially, but must be understood as the result of the integration of knowledge, skills, professional attitudes, and adequate environmental support.

Therefore, increasing the readiness of madrasah teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum must be carried out comprehensively and continuously, with a focus on relevant training, intensive mentoring, strengthening technological competence, and establishing a conducive work environment. This effort is key to ensuring that learning transformation can run effectively and have a positive impact on the quality of madrasah education.

Obstacles Faced by Madrasah Teachers in Deli Serdang Regency in Developing Competencies to Implement the Independent Curriculum

Obstacles in developing the competence of madrasah teachers are a central issue in the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The results of this study show that madrasah teachers in Deli Serdang Regency face various structural and cultural challenges that hinder the process of strengthening competence. One of the most fundamental obstacles is limited access to quality and sustainable training. Many teachers state that the training they take has not fully answered the practical needs of the classroom and tends to be theoretically oriented. This condition creates a gap between the knowledge gained in training and the skills needed in daily learning (Chan & Budiono, 2020).

In addition, the lack of a systematic mentoring program is also a significant obstacle. Teachers need direct guidance and discussion rooms with mentors to apply the principles of the Independent Curriculum concretely. However, there is no adequate mentoring or coaching mechanism in many madrasahs. The learning process of adults, including teachers, is greatly influenced by hands-on practice and reflective experiences gained from ongoing mentoring. The absence of this mechanism makes teachers struggle alone in interpreting and implementing new curriculums, ultimately leading to inconsistent learning quality (Satiri, 2023).

The next obstacle concerns the limited facilities and infrastructure to support learning. Technology-based learning devices like computers, projectors, and internet networks are minimal in many madrasahs, mainly suburban areas. The Independent Curriculum requires teachers to use visual and digital media in learning. When the facilities are unsupportive, teachers become less optimal in implementing creative and interactive learning. This also strengthens the gap in education quality between madrasahs in urban and rural areas.

Another challenge lies in teachers' ability to manage differentiation-based learning (Yuniarsih, 2019). One of the characteristics of the Independent Curriculum is to provide space for students to learn according to their respective needs and learning styles. However, many madrasah teachers do not have sufficient understanding and skills to develop differential learning strategies. Teachers still use conventional methods that are uniform for all students. This contradicts the curriculum's spirit, emphasizing a student-centred learning approach (Sutrisno et al., 2022).

Regarding policies and institutional support, teachers face obstacles in the form of repeatedly uncertain policy direction. Some teachers stated that curriculum changes that occurred relatively quickly without thorough socialization confused implementation. In addition, the lack of support from the head of the madrasah and the absence of constructive performance evaluation also hinder teachers' motivation to develop themselves. Madrasah

heads should be the main driving force in creating a learning climate that supports teachers' professional development (Ali Mahmudi, 2009).

Psychological obstacles also appear in the form of resistance to change. Not all teachers are mentally ready to face the demands of more flexible and innovative learning. Some teachers are comfortable with the old learning pattern that is more structured and does not demand high exploration. Fear of failure, lack of confidence, and the perception that the Independent Curriculum is too complex hinder teachers from getting out of their comfort zone and trying new approaches.

Furthermore, the high administrative burden is also a serious obstacle. Madrasah teachers are burdened with teaching tasks and have to complete various administrative reports that take up time and energy. As a result, the time that should be spent designing, learning, evaluating processes, and attending professional training is minimal. This burden reduces teachers' productivity in developing their competencies and makes it difficult for them to focus on meaningful learning.

Some teachers find it challenging to use technology, which is supposed to be a learning tool. Not all teachers have basic skills in using learning software, digital evaluation applications, or LMS. The lack of digital literacy makes it difficult for many teachers to utilize technology to the fullest in the learning process. One of the Independent Curriculum orientations is the creative and effective use of technology in learning.

The next obstacle is the lack of support from the teacher community and professional organizations. In many madrasahs, collaboration between teachers is still weak. Forums for sharing good practices have not been systematically formed, so successful learning innovations are not spread and cannot be replicated by other teachers. Peer collaboration, which should be a means of community-based competency development, has not developed optimally. As a result, the teacher's learning process is individual and lacks reinforcement from the social environment.

Finally, obstacles to teacher competency development are also related to the limited education budget at the madrasah level. Due to limited operational funds, some teacher development programs cannot be carried out optimally. This condition shows the importance of government intervention and related institutions in providing sufficient resources to support the professional development of teachers. It is challenging to implement without adequate financial support, training, learning media provision, and technological device procurement. Therefore, solutions to these constraints must be comprehensive, structured, and involve collaboration from various stakeholders.

Strategies That Can Be Applied to Improve the Competence of Madrasah Teachers in Deli Serdang Regency to be More Effective in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

The strategy to increase the competence of madrasah teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum must be systematically designed and oriented to the real needs of teachers. Based on the study's results, one of the most effective strategies is implementing practice-based training relevant to the learning context in madrasahs. Training like this provides theoretical knowledge and emphasizes practical skills that can be directly applied in the classroom. The in-service and on-the-job training models have proven more effective than classical one-way training. Teachers need to be involved in learning simulations, designing differentiated lesson plans, and practising using visual and digital media to have confidence in applying them (Aditiya & Fatonah, 2023).

The second essential strategy is to strengthen mentoring and ongoing mentoring programs. In the context of madrasahs, assistance from senior teachers, madrasah supervisors, and professional facilitators is invaluable in bridging the understanding of the concept of the Independent Curriculum with practice in the field. The coaching and lesson

study model is highly recommended, in which teachers plan together, teach collaboratively, and reflect on learning practices. This kind of mentoring creates a reflective culture that can accelerate the professional growth of teachers and foster collective awareness of the importance of innovation in learning (Nurtanto, 2016).

The use of digital technology is a key strategy in accelerating the development of teacher competence. Learning Management System (LMS) platforms like Moodle, Google Classroom, or video-based learning apps can help teachers access training materials, share best practices, and design interactive learning. The government and madrasahs must facilitate digital literacy training to equip teachers with 21st-century skills. This strategy is very relevant in the Deli Serdang Regency, considering that technological developments are starting to penetrate madrasah-based education units even though they are not evenly distributed.

Another strategy is strengthening the teacher-learning community (KBG) (Aliyyah et al., 2020). Teachers need to be encouraged to participate in teacher working groups, madrasah forums, and professional learning communities that allow them to share experiences, discuss learning challenges, and develop solutions. This community can be a collaborative space to develop teaching tools, evaluate learning outcomes, and build networks between madrasahs. In the Independent Curriculum, the role of the learning community is crucial as a source of collective learning based on real practice in the field.

The leadership of madrasah heads also plays an important role in teacher development strategies. Madrasah heads need to play the role of instructional leaders who can facilitate the improvement of teacher competence through supportive internal policies, such as the preparation of academic supervision programs, incentives for outstanding teachers, and the allocation of time for self-development. Transformative leadership favouring teachers' professional advancement will encourage the birth of a work culture that is adaptive to changes in curriculum and learning (Abdullah et al., 2019).

In addition, integration between national and local policies must be pursued so that teacher competency development strategies are not sporadic. The local government and the Ministry of Religious Affairs office at the district level need to develop a teacher development roadmap that is in sync with the direction of the Independent Curriculum. For example, the preparation of specific training modules for madrasah teachers, the provision of special allowances for teachers who actively participate in professional development programs, and cooperation with universities in providing resource persons and training facilitators.

The following strategy applies a blended learning-based training model. Online and offline learning allow teachers to learn according to their time and rhythm. Blended learning also allows teachers to access learning resources from various regions, including good practices from madrasahs that have successfully implemented the Independent Curriculum. Platforms such as Rumah Belajar, Pintar Kemenag, and education YouTube channels can be additional learning media that support the competency development process independently.

Building a continuous evaluation system for teacher competency development is also important. This evaluation assesses not only the administrative aspect but also the extent to which teachers can apply the principles of the Independent Curriculum in learning practice. Classroom observations, video recordings of learning, and teacher individual reflections can be informative evaluation instruments. The results of this evaluation must be used as a basis for designing further development programs that are more targeted and based on authentic data.

Competency improvement can also be done through collaboration with external parties, such as LPTK (Education Personnel Education Institute), educational NGOs, and industry partners with curriculum development and learning expertise. This collaboration

opens access to a broader range of resources and enriches teachers' insights into global education trends and best practices from various contexts.

Finally, an equally important strategy is to strengthen teachers' intrinsic motivation. Teachers must be given appreciation, recognition, and room for actualization to feel valued in educational transformation. Award programs for innovative teachers, learning media competitions, and publication of scientific papers can spur teachers' enthusiasm to continue to develop themselves. When teachers feel valued and supported, they will be more motivated to become agents of change and realise a practical and characterful independent curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in madrasahs in Deli Serdang Regency is highly dependent on the level of readiness and competence of teachers who still need to be significantly improved. Despite the desire to change, teachers face various obstacles, such as limited training, lack of mentoring, lack of supporting facilities, and low digital literacy and institutional support. Therefore, the strategy for developing teacher competencies must be designed holistically through practice-based training, continuous mentoring, technology utilization, strengthening learning communities, and policy support from madrasah heads and the government. These strategies not only strengthen the professional capacity of teachers but also create an adaptive, collaborative, and transformative educational ecosystem in the spirit of the Independent Curriculum.

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