

# Independent Learning Curriculum Policies and Challenges in Building Children's Character

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## Abstract:

This study aims to analyze the independent learning curriculum policy and its challenges in building children's character. This research was conducted at SMA Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo with a qualitative phenomenological-naturalistic approach. Data was obtained from observation, interviews and documentation. Research data analysis was carried out in stages, starting with collecting, reducing, presenting, and concluding the findings. The study results show that the independent curriculum policy is carried out by analyzing the internal and external environment, networking and building an independent attitude. While the challenges of curriculum policy in building children's character consist of; class ranking, learning internalization principles and technological sophistication. This research contributes to the importance of redesigning local wisdom-based learning curricula so that they can produce good children's character.

**Keywords:** *Policy, Independent Learning Curriculum, Class Ranking*

## Abstrak:

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tentang kebijakan kurikulum merdeka belajar dan tantangannya dalam membangun karakter anak. Penelitian ini dilakukan di SMA Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo dengan pendekatan kualitatif jenis fenomenologik naturalistik. Data didapatkan dari observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi. analisis data penelitian dilakukan secara bertahap, yang dimulai mengumpulkan data, mereduksi data, menyajikan data, dan menyimpulkan data temuan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan kurikulum merdeka dilakukan analisis lingkungan internal dan eksternal, berjejaring dan membangun sikap mandiri. Sedangkan tantangan kebijakan kurikulum dalam membangun karakter anak terdiri dari; perangkingan kelas, prinsip internalisasi pembelajaran dan kecanggihan teknologi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi tentang pentingnya redesain kurikulum pembelajaran berbasis kearifan lokal sehingga dapat menghasilkan karakter anak yang baik.

**Kata Kunci:** *Kebijakan, Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar, Mandiri, Perangkingan Kelas*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendikbud RI) confirmed a few months ago that there was a new policy in the world of education; this policy was "Independent learning" (Faiz & Kurniawaty, 2020). At Nurul Jadid Senior High School, the Independent Learning Curriculum Policy follows the principle of changing the paradigm in education to become more independent with an innovative learning culture. This aims to create a learning culture that is innovative, not restrictive, and to the needs of each school. This also follows the flow of change and the need to link and match with the industry so that each school becomes more adaptive (Prihantoro, 2021). Such government efforts are manifested for students as successors and the nation's young generation who can and can face the challenges of the current development of science and technology. To answer the challenges of the current 4.0 education era, students must also be able to enrich their literacy, such as being proficient in reading, writing, listening, and expressing ideas and opinions (discussion/debate). Of course, skills in listening to information well and expressing creative ideas and opinions according to current developments and language variations will make it easier for students to recognize and absorb new information (Indrianto & Latipah, 2018).

Independent learning policies emphasize creativity, learning orientation on problem-solving, learning based on the demands of society and the world of work, and a comprehensive assessment system (Jalbani, 2022). This impacts the need to develop an evaluation of character learning. Evaluation of Character Education learning includes aspects of 'aliya, inner heart, and 'am aliya and evaluation of character education is carried out to balance thinking, remembrance, and charity (Arifin et al., 2021). With such a policy, it can be considered as an interpersonal relationship between the independent curriculum policy and the challenges of learning character education so that it can cause verbal and non-verbal reactions. Widodo (2021) explains that interpersonal relationships are two-way because they allow both parties to respond to each other as feedback from the messages conveyed. Feedback responses can be in the form of verbal or nonverbal language. When starting learning, the message should be in the form of teachings or education, especially those related to student character. Then using an independent learning curriculum with character learning that is by the character of students will facilitate the delivery of material, messages or information to students.

The fact is that the current situation when researchers observe schools has several problems at Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo High School, related to the USBN being replaced with an assessment exam, it needs new habits because learning Character Education is not included in the formal lesson schedule but is placed in an informal schedule with different hours. If the 2013 curriculum is competency-based, a more holistic assessment is needed to measure children's competencies. With the new policy direction, researchers are trying to make examinations to assess student competency be carried out in the form of written tests or other more comprehensive forms of assessment, such as portfolios and assignments (group assignments, written work, etc.) so that teachers and schools

are more independent in assessing results. Student learning. National Examination becomes a burden for students, teachers and parents because it indicates students' success as individuals. UN only assesses the cognitive aspects of learning outcomes and has not touched students' character. Regarding PPDB regulations, they do not accommodate because the school refers to the Nurul Jadid Islamic Boarding School, differences in regional situations have not been implemented smoothly in all regions, nor have they been accompanied by an even distribution of the number of teachers (Makarim, 2019).

A number of things need more attention, such as the school developing an Independent learning curriculum by combining Educational Learning with Madrasah Diniyah (MaDin). Madrasah Diniyah is an educational institution providing classical education and teaching, which aims to provide students with additional knowledge of the Islamic religion. who feel they need to receive Islamic religious lessons at their school (Thoha & Taufikurrahmna, 2021). A different policy was made; the two differences were combined into a single unit that will continue to be based on the Independent Learning Curriculum. So in implementing an independent learning curriculum to shape children's character, education is needed to develop all aspects of personality and human abilities in terms of knowledge, competence, and skills and is supported by modern literacy (Sari & Noor, 2022).

The curriculum was created to facilitate the educational process. The curriculum is often changed, which confuses various parties which results in the educational process needing to be improved. Until now, curriculum changes in Indonesia often occur. Starting from 1947 to 2013. This gave rise to many pros and cons, even the phrase "change ministers change curricula" (Vhalery et al., 2022).

As Arifin (2021) and his friends have said, based on the results of several previous studies, it is said that what is focused on disclosing independent learning policies for the development of character education learning evaluations is a model for developing character education learning evaluations so that the school places hours of education subjects character outside of formal subject hours and this requires new habits because they are used to the habits of the previous curriculum. Other research was also conducted by Anwar, explaining that the Independent Learning Policy has characteristics that emphasize creativity, learning orientation on problem-solving, learning based on the demands of the needs of society and the world of work, as well as a comprehensive assessment system. This impacts the need to develop an evaluation of character education learning. Related to the methodology used, such as implementing technology adaptation on the teaching campus of Muhammadiyah 1 Padas Elementary School, namely assisting teachers in making teaching media and teaching materials by the curriculum. School administration with administrative arrangements related to accreditation and assisting teachers in preparing learning tools as administrative completeness (Anwar, 2021). The presence of researchers here will have its differences and characteristics from previous research that has been done. This research will be the only one that discusses independent learning curriculum policies with the

challenges of learning Character Education in building children's character, which can be overcome by applying three models such as class ranking changes, the principle of internalizing character education in schools, and management of technological sophistication regularly (Romly, 2021). This research will be a discovery for previous research because applying these three models will positively respond to new habits for all school members, especially for SMA Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo.

The Independent Learning Curriculum Policy, which was previously implemented at Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo High School, is to assist teachers in making teaching media and teaching materials by the curriculum. Assist teachers in preparing learning tools as intermediaries, carry out projects to strengthen the Pancasila profile, which is implemented with extra-curricular activities as much as 30% and intra-curricular projects as much as 70% so that the learning system will be designed in such a way that student character is formed, so with this it will be in line with the application of the three models which has been mentioned by researchers so that the application of technological sophistication will be more implemented, the principle of internalizing character education will be by the system that is already running in schools, and the ranking system will undergo changes which according to some studies are just troubling.

In addition, with the ranking later, there will also appear discrimination where there is labelling between the smart and the stupid. This is, of course, very wrong if applied in the world of education, especially at Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo High School because, in essence, children have multiple intelligences (Eriyanti et al., 2022). The potential that even the most minor child has must be respected, many children have obstacles or difficulties in learning, but if their intelligence is valued and continues to be developed, the child will become a superior child in his field. Later a competent person will be formed and have a character embedded in him (Baro'ah, 2020).

Based on the phenomenon that has occurred, the Independent Learning Curriculum policy implemented by the government is a policy that must be implemented by schools, especially Nurul Jadid High School, which is a pesantren-based educational institution. Therefore, this study aims to analyze independent learning policies and curricula and their challenges in building children's character at school.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research uses qualitative research with a naturalistic phenomenological approach (Daga, 2021). Researchers also want to examine a phenomenon that discusses independent learning curriculum policies and the challenges of learning character education in building children's character. This study implemented the Islamic boarding school-based independent learning curriculum policy at Nurul Jadid High School, Paiton, Probolinggo, East Java, to build children's character. This research occurred at Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo High School and was conducted in July-December 2022. The data was obtained from the observation process and interviews with eight informants:

the Principal, Deputy Principal, teachers and students. To strengthen the data, researchers also use documentation.

Data analysis techniques were carried out through primary data collection in this study related to the challenges of character education in building children's character in the era of independent learning curriculum policies. Through descriptive analysis, the stages used are gathering information. Data sources are then reduced related to the topic of discussion, presenting the results of information reduction, exploring and providing arguments related to the challenges of independent learning curriculum policies in building children's character, and concluding the findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Independent Learning Curriculum Policy

Nurul Jadid High School uses opportunities to build children's character in the independent learning curriculum policy, namely independent learning, independent sharing, and independent change. In this regard, the principal of SMA, Nurul Jadid, said, "With the existence of a new policy, namely an independent learning curriculum, we are creating new learning opportunities so that students are more independent in dealing with all matters, especially in learning" (W\_KS.1) then the WaKa Curriculum also emphasized "I strongly agree with the school principal's thoughts because with this it will be able to make student learning more fun and more innovative" (W\_KS.4)

Independent learning is learning with initiative, with or without the help of others, in learning (Tampubolon, 2020). According to one SMA teacher Nurul Jadid said, "To be able to do independent learning requires learning motivation" (W\_G.6). Learning motivation is encouragement that arises from within (intrinsic) and from outside (extrinsic) to do something. Independent learning provides opportunities to learn freely and comfortably for students to study in a calm, relaxed and happy way without stress and pressure by paying attention to their natural talents, without forcing them to study or master a field of knowledge beyond their hobbies and abilities. Thus each individual grows and develops according to their potential and abilities. Giving a burden to children beyond their ability is a disgraceful act contrary to the spirit of independent learning. This is impossible for a wise teacher to do. It is like a blind student, and then the teacher asks him to tell his friends about the beauty of the scenery. If the independence of learning is fulfilled, "independent learning" will be created, and the school can be called an independent or liberating school. All components involved in providing education must create this feeling of comfort at school, at home, and in the community (Suryaman, 2020).

In independent sharing, the Education Unit uses the Merdeka curriculum structure to develop its education unit curriculum. It applies the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum in carrying out learning and assessment, with a commitment to share its good practices with other educational units. As emphasized by the WaKa of public relations, "There are some opinions from certain parties who question the concept of "independent learning" as if it has the effect of eliminating character education. This model will further enhance children's character, especially in the three independent concepts put forward by

the school principal" (W\_WK.3). Character education is a form of human activity in which an educational activity is intended for the next generation. Furthermore, character education aims to form continuous individual self-improvement and train self-abilities towards a better life.

Through character education, children are educated and trained in various orders and values of life, for example, honesty, intelligence, responsibility, truth and faith. The freedom of learning in a class that tends to be active learning between teachers and students will train students to have the courage to speak and express their opinions. This includes building the character and character of students in the class. The learning process in schools must create a climate that motivates students' thoughts and interests. In the future, dedicated, integrity, honest, creative and productive people will be created (Putry, 2018).

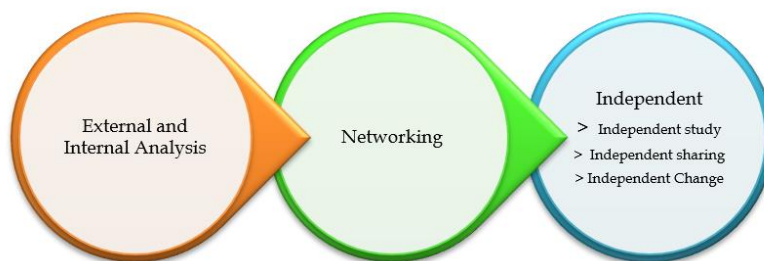
The last one is Mandiri Changing, which means it has fully utilized the Merdeka Teaching platform prepared by the Ministry of Education and Culture and Research and Technology. In line with this explanation, as stated by the WaKa for infrastructure, "with the platform developed by the curriculum, independent curriculum learning, teaching and learning activities, self-development, seeking and sharing inspiration can increase independence for all aspects in school" (W\_KS. 2) then character education will go according to the wishes of the government. Character is the principal capital and essential for the progress of individuals and nations. Renowned historian Arnold Toynbee once said, "Of the twenty recorded world civilizations, nineteen were destroyed not because of conquest from the outside, but because of moral decay from within" (Ifadah & Utomo, 2019)

From the results of the interviews conducted by the researchers with the Deputy Student Affairs Officer, it can be concluded from our conversation that "with this three independence, the school cooperates with the student's guardians. In general, Nurul Jadid High School will improve the quality of the school itself, especially in managing student character. Because that will greatly minimize mistakes and minimize character discrimination." (W\_KS.5). The researcher also interviewed one of the student's guardians "we feel we are considered part of the development of school curriculum policies because the system of cooperation with student guardians is becoming more and more in good contact" (W\_M.8) With the application of collaboration with student guardians in the management system Through this education, all stored information will be safer and tidier and can be accessed easily anytime and anywhere (Zakia, 2019).

Besides that, the role of parents is no less critical in the application of Human Resources (HR) to improve the quality of education. Cooperation between school management and parents of students must be well established. Seeing the development of students' academic values is growing. From day to day, it shows changes for the better. So the researcher is interested in interviewing one of the students regarding his response to improving academic grades "With this independent learning curriculum policy, we feel more comfortable so that the learning process that occurs in the classroom becomes more enjoyable. Therefore our academic grades show more and more good

change" (W\_S.7). Schools also conduct internal evaluations to develop strengths and weaknesses after using the independent learning curriculum policy. Usually, curriculum evaluation is held every three months.

From the explanation above, the implementation of the learning curriculum policy at Nurul Jadid Senior High School can be described as follows;



**Figure 1. Independent Learning Curriculum Policy In School**

## **Challenges of Character Education in Independent Learning Curriculum Policies**

### ***Class Ranking***

Class ranking is a ranking that is carried out to find out the highest and lowest ratings of a class or school. In education, ranking means ranking a person's abilities from those who have intelligence above average to intelligence below average (Adha et al., 2019). At this time, the students will feel that the class ranking reform will reduce the learning enthusiasm of students at Nurul Jadid High School because there needs to be evidence of the quality of student thinking. Although, in essence, the class ranking system is only sometimes detrimental.

According to some studies, class ranking is only troubling for teachers and children and their parents (Cruz et al., 2020). In addition, with ranking later, there will also be discrimination where there is labelling between the smart and the stupid. This is, of course, very wrong if applied in the world of education, especially at Nurul Jadid Paiton Probolinggo High School because, in essence, children have fathers' intelligence within them or what is often called multiple intelligences.

Multiple intelligence is a theory developed by Howard Gardner, a modern psychologist at Harvard University; where according to Gardner, intelligence is defined as the capacity to solve problems and to create products in a conducive and natural environment. The potential possessed by even the most minor child must be respected, many children have obstacles or difficulties in learning, but if their intelligence is valued and continues to be developed, the child will become an excellent child in his field. So that later a competent person will be formed and has a character embedded in him (Baro'ah, 2020). With this learning program, it is hoped to create a happy learning atmosphere, both for students, teachers and parents.

Ki Hajar Dewantara focuses on learning independence or freedom of learning; according to him, learning independence is about ways of thinking, students must be trained to seek all knowledge using their minds, and the

meaning of independence, according to him, is divided into three types, namely standing alone which means children as a master in learning, then the second is not dependent on other people, which means that children do not depend on teachers or parents. Even though there is neither, children are expected to be able to learn on their own. The third is being able to self-regulate, which means that children must choose a suitable learning method and organize their activities to achieve learning goals (Sasikirana & Herlambang, 2020). Nadiem Anwar Makariem, Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, not without reason, wants to create a happy learning atmosphere between educators and students without having to be burdened by gains that are only seen from a value or number.

According to Alfred Binet and Theodore Simon, the intelligence of each father is the ability to direct thoughts and actions, the ability to change the direction of action when an action has been taken, and also the ability to self-criticize (Ifadah & Utomo, 2019).

### *The Principle of Internalization of Character Education in Schools*

Internalization of character education in schools instils character values into a person so that these values become part of him, animating his mindset, attitude patterns and behaviour and building self-awareness to apply these values (Baro' ah, 2020).

Internalizing character education in schools can take time and effort but must go through many processes. Therefore, internalizing character education in schools must consider several principles (Anam et al., 2019). Within the scope of the independent learning curriculum, students are more independent in learning because it matches their interests, talents and aspirations because there is no specialization program. Development of student competence according to the phase so that learning is more in-depth. As well as teachers can also become more independent in teaching because, according to the stages and development of students, schools are more independent because they have the authority to develop and manage curriculum and learning according to the characteristics of the educational unit and students. However, students need a broader learning experience because they only focus on essential learning (Anwar, 2021).

The objective of the Nurul Jadid High School is to strengthen the Pancasila profile, which aligns with the objectives of the independent learning curriculum in forming children's character. There are six main characteristics of Pancasila students: fear of God Almighty and noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity (Supriyono, 2021). what Nadiem Makarim once said in his speech, inviting teachers to make small changes in class without waiting for orders, Nadiem also said that small changes could be made in the following ways: Invite the class to discuss, not just listen, allow students to teach in class, Spark community service projects that involve the whole class, spot talent in a student who lacks self-confidence, offer help to a teacher who is having a hard time. Education in the era of independent learning can run smoothly if educators, students, learning places, learning programs, and leaders exist. Of these five elements, one more element is the core of all the existing elements. This core element is coordination (Muhajir et al., 2021).



In implementing the strengthening of the Pancasila profile at Nurul Jadid High School, students must have attitudes and behaviours that reflect the profile of Pancasila students, which are reflected in curiosity, adaptability, leadership skills and social and cultural concern (Anggreini & Priyojadmiko Eko, 2022) Strengthening the Pancasila profile implemented with as much as 30% extra-curricular activities and 70% intra-curricular projects can make the goals of the Pancasila profile come true.

### *Technology Sophistication*

Information technology sophistication is a construction that refers to the use of nature, the use of well-established human resources, the complexity and interdependence of information technology and management that is capable of producing a variety of system technologies designed to assist human work in educational design (Sasikirana & Herlambang, 2020).

In this versatile and sophisticated era, humans are increasingly spoiled by technology; humans think more and more instantaneously. Thus, the human character is increasingly eroded by the times (Lapatinas, 2019). With easy access to the internet, many inappropriate shows become so disruptive in living life, as explained above, that moral degradation occurs more and more. Character building is an effort that involves various parties, both parents, schools, the school environment, and the wider community (Pratama, 2019).

The challenge of globalization is a current condition as a result of modernization. These conditions must be faced and passed in order to achieve success. Challenges can be interpreted as something other than something that makes it difficult or sometimes hinders something from being achieved. However, challenges amplify the determination to improve the ability to complete fathers (Pewangi, 2019). During the industrial era of 4.0, humans were increasingly spoiled by increasingly sophisticated technology. Continuously changing roles and perspectives of humans in living life as social beings. Along with this phenomenon, moral degradation is increasingly widespread. That way, humans are increasingly slipping into the momentary truth.

In the micro domain, schools, as the leading sector, seek to utilize and empower all existing learning environments to initiate, improve, strengthen, and continuously perfect the character education process in schools. In this micro context, the development of character values is divided into four pillars, namely learning activities in class, daily activities in the form of school culture, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, as well as daily activities at home and parents (Setiawan et al., 2021) Educational Challenges The characteristics of the Industrial Revolution Era 4.0 consist of reduced direct interaction between teachers and students, the role of teachers who are shifted by technology, students lose the attitude of *tawadhu'* and the concept of the blessing of knowledge to teachers, the increasingly eroded value of spirituality in learning, teachers must be able to become role models for students so that students do not lose role models in the reality of their lives, the more obscure the scientific traditions of references obtained through digital media (Ifadah & Utomo, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

By the findings in the field, it can be concluded that the independent learning curriculum policies at Nurul Jadid High School are carried out through internal and external environmental analysis, building networks between educational institutions and their partners, and carrying out independent activities, which include independent learning, independent sharing, and independently change. Meanwhile, the challenges of independent learning curriculum policies in building children's character in schools include; class ranking, learning internalization and integration, and technological sophistication. This research contributes to redesigning independent learning curriculum policies based on local wisdom so that they can produce good children's character by expectations.

Of course, this research has limitations on independent learning curriculum policies in building children's character that is developed and implemented in Islamic boarding schools, which have different characteristics and demographics from other educational institutions in general, so through the limitations of this research, it provides opportunities for future researchers. To examine different aspects and dimensions in different backgrounds and contexts.

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