

Militancy of School Principals in Developing an Independent Curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan

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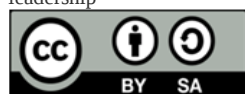
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ABSTRACT

Education is the main foundation in forming a quality generation and able to compete in this era of globalization. As the frontline in the delivery of education, the role of the principal is very strategic in directing, managing, and making a positive contribution to curriculum development. This study aims to analyze the contribution of school principals in the development of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan. Curriculum Merdeka is a curriculum approach that emphasizes 21st century skills development and student empowerment. School principals have a key role in encouraging and implementing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in schools. The research method used is qualitative research with a case study approach. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and analysis of documents related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan. The respondents in this study were 4 people consisting of the Principal, Vice Principal for Curriculum, Vice Principal for ISMUBA and Teachers. The results of this study show that principals

have a significant contribution and impact on schools and students to Drive Curriculum Innovation, Encourage Student Independence and act as a model of change.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation for forming a quality generation that can compete in this era of globalization (S. Hidayat et al., 2023). As the frontline in the delivery of education, the role of the Principal is very strategic in directing, managing, and making a positive contribution to curriculum development (Nasir, 2021). There is a primary foundation in shaping the quality of students, namely curriculum development, learning processes, and the creation of academic traditions in schools. If associated with curriculum theories, all three are included in the anatomy of the curriculum or curriculum components, namely, objectives, content, learning materials, learning methods or strategies, and assessment (Nasir, 2021). One of the educational innovations that is developing in Indonesia is the Merdeka Curriculum. The presence of the Merdeka Curriculum addresses real-world problems and challenges, hoping to prepare students for the practical application of the knowledge and skills acquired (Wegener et al., 2018). The Minister of Education and Culture encourages educational institutions to develop using the Independent Curriculum quickly and precisely.

School is the most critical pillar in the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides opportunities for students to learn calmly, relax, and have fun showing their natural talents (Dra. Isrofah, 2022). SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan, as an educational institution committed to the quality and relevance of education, participates in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum to improve

the quality of education. As the prominent leader in the school environment, the headmaster has a great responsibility to ensure that the Independent Curriculum's implementation runs effectively and positively impacts students (E. Hidayat et al., 2023).

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar program over the previous two years has given a new face to the Indonesian education system (Taridala et al., 2023). However, during the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, many teachers and students were not familiar with it and experienced limitations in dealing with these changes. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum makes schools feel unsupportive and difficult in educational institutions' facilities and human resources. After the Independent Curriculum launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Principal has not received sufficient briefing about it, so it isn't easy to understand and compile the Independent curriculum. The absence of structured evaluation and monitoring from the Ministry of Education and Culture makes the lack of effectiveness in implementing the Merdeka curriculum in schools.

This research is vital because the Principal plays an essential role in developing the curriculum in schools and improving school quality. This research aims to analyze the militancy of school principals in developing the Independent Curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses descriptive research methods using a qualitative research approach. This research method is considered the right choice and by the title being studied in this study. This qualitative research process aims to understand phenomena related to what is being experienced by the research subject, such as behavior, perception, motivation, action, and other aspects. The resulting data is then described in words, using natural language appropriate to the research context. Descriptive qualitative research methods also characterize the nature and employment of a descriptive nature. Therefore, as a researcher, the author is directly involved in the field and tries to collect data comprehensively in accordance with the core problems related to the implementation of the research conducted.

Sample selection using the quota sampling method is based on research needs. The respondents in this study were four people at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan. Data collection techniques in this study are, First, conducting open interviews with respondents who are resource persons regarding the Development of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan. Second, field recordings will be performed from the results of

interviews, and observations on research objects will be made. This recording includes details of activities and descriptions of things observed, such as behavior and actions, as well as documentation related to the focus of research, namely the role of the Principal in the development of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan.

In analyzing the data, the authors used a data reduction approach to simplify the information obtained from interviews and observations. This process allows authors to summarize and expose information from the data to conclude the study results (Fauziyyah et al., 2023).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Introduction to the Concept of Independent Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum aims to develop student independence. School principals can promote independent learning, life skills growth, and student empowerment to overcome challenges in the global era. School principals can start their contribution by understanding the concepts and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum. This involves understanding that the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the development of learners' creativity, skills, and character. The introduction of this concept is one of the steps for the Principal to apply the independent curriculum in schools or institutions because initially, at SMP, Muhammadiyah Piyungan did not use a separate curriculum. Therefore, before the curriculum was used, the Principal had to introduce the curriculum and system contained in the curriculum. This was confirmed by Respondent 1, Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan that:

“At first, SMP here did not use an independent curriculum, but there was an appeal from the minister of education related to the independent curriculum, so I had to learn it. After that, I introduced the teaching teachers in the curriculum evaluation event so that all teaching staff at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan replaced the learning system with an independent curriculum. In my opinion, this independent curriculum is more significant in shaping student character because, in an independent curriculum, there must be active students such as on campus.”

The Principal's contribution in introducing the Curriculum Merdeka concept is significant in creating an adaptive, relevant, and innovative learning environment. In leadership roles, principals must be able to inspire, motivate, and guide staff and students in dealing with curriculum changes. Various aspects of leadership, including change management, staff skills development, and community engagement, are vital in realizing the vision of Curriculum

Merdeka. This is applied by the Principal of SMP, Muhammadiyah Piyungan, to adjust and practice comfortable student learning activities that create good conditions for student character development.

The role of the Principal in creating a learning environment is very significant, so the Principal must work more extraordinarily to apply a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of students. This contribution is one of the reasons for providing knowledge so that it can shape students' character well. Likewise, SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan implements an independent curriculum introduced by the Principal as a form of distribution of principals to build student character. This is expected to create in-depth knowledge through an independent curriculum at Muhammadiyah Piyungan Junior High School. This is the result of the impact of the Principal's contribution to an effort to apply the independent curriculum in Muhammadiyah Piyungan Junior High School. The independent curriculum emphasizes student independence in learning; teachers only provide direction and guidance in education, which has an impact on student independence in daily life; besides that, the independent curriculum creates changes in student character related to independence. This was affirmed by Respondent 3 as a curriculum waka that:

“Student independence is formed from the benefits of the independent curriculum applied by the school here, in addition to the role of the Principal who emphasizes independence in accordance with the provisions of the independent curriculum. The benefits that form independence become our common hope”.

The Principal's contribution to student independence at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan is expected to create an educational environment that supports the development of student independence. The implementation of this strategy can have a positive impact on academic achievement and character development of students. The role of the headmaster in encouraging student independence is crucial. Through supportive education policies, teacher development, adequate facilities and facilities, character strengthening, and parental involvement, principals can create a stimulating learning environment and empower students to learn independently.

Student independence is not only about academic ability but also involves aspects of character, social skills, and self-management abilities. With solid support from the Principal, students can grow into individuals who are competitive, innovative, and ready to face various challenges in the future. The importance of student independence is also in line with the demands of educational development in the era of globalization, where students need adaptability, creativity, and initiative to succeed in various life contexts. Therefore, the role of

the Principal as an educational leader is very significant in shaping an educational paradigm oriented toward developing student independence.

This not only has an impact on academic achievement but also shapes character and values that will imprint on students' lives. The headmaster, as a model of change, brings change not only at the operational level but also at the cultural level and the values espoused by the school.

In an era of ever-evolving education, school principals need to be adaptive leaders, open-minded to innovation, and committed to lifelong learning. Thus, the Principal can stimulate sustainable growth and development for all members of the school community. By understanding the role and contribution of principals as models of change, we can see how effective leadership can shape a better future of education. Therefore, the development of school principals as a model of change is not only an investment at the individual level but also an investment in positive and sustainable change in the world of education. Through the positive contribution of the Principal in these various aspects, it is hoped that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Junior High School can achieve the desired goals, namely creating students who are independent, creative, and able to face future challenges.

School and Student Needs Mapping

Principals can serve as models of change, demonstrating a willingness to be actively involved in the curriculum change process. The headmaster needs to conduct an in-depth analysis of the needs of the school and learners. This includes identifying students' potential, local needs, and challenges faced by the local educational environment. The role of the Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan is to participate in mapping schools and students, because this mapping is done so that students' interests and talents can be developed through an independent curriculum. This serves to instruct the Principal to other teaching staff, so that the Muhammadiyah Piyungan Junior High School is able to apply the independent curriculum as an attempt at student character building. Therefore, the Principal must play a role as a form of the Principal's contribution in mapping student needs through an independent curriculum. This was confirmed by Respondent 2 teaching staff at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan that:

“This school initially did not use the independent curriculum, but when there was an appeal from the education meter, the Principal here introduced us to the independent curriculum; not only that, the Principal also participated in mapping student needs so that students could

understand and understand quickly through the independent curriculum. This mapping is an effort by the Principal in the teaching and learning system.”

This mapping is a form of the Principal's effort to shape students' character at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan. Besides that, this mapping is the Principal's contribution to applying the independent curriculum. Mapping the needs of schools and students is a critical step in improving the quality of education. The Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan, has a very important role in this process, as he is responsible for leading, managing, and directing the school towards achieving educational goals. Mapping the needs of schools and students is a crucial foundation for developing successful educational strategies. The Principal's contribution to this process cannot be ignored, as the role of a strategic leader and resource manager is decisive in achieving the desired educational goals.

The Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan's contribution is the driving sector in determining the learning system in schools. The contribution of the Principal is needed to map student needs. Kelapa Sekolah holds meetings with teaching staff and receives opinions from teaching staff so that the Principal knows about the needs of students in the learning process. Participating the Principal in mapping student needs that are applied using an independent curriculum is a good character-building strategy that is relevant to student needs.

Participation in Curriculum Preparation

The headmaster, as a model of change, has a great responsibility in shaping the direction and identity of the school. By integrating the principles of effective leadership and being a positive role model, principals can bring a profound positive impact on the entire educational environment. Through this role, principals can create an atmosphere that supports collaboration, creativity, and high achievement. (Suteja, 2017). School principals can contribute to developing a curriculum that is in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. This happened at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan, whose Principal participated in the preparation of the curriculum, especially the independent curriculum, which was relatively newly applied at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan. The participation of the Principal in preparing the curriculum is a form of contribution to advancing existing education. Therefore, this participation is expected to foster student and teaching staff stimulus in understanding lessons in accordance with student interests and talents by applying the independent curriculum by holding meetings or deliberations between the principal and teaching staff at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan. This is in accordance with the statement of Respondent 3, Vice Principal Curriculum of SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan:

“The determination of the curriculum or lesson that must be emphasized to students must undergo several stages, both the curriculum to be applied, the analysis of student needs, and the possibilities that will be produced. Therefore, we must ensure the benefits of the curriculum so that it becomes a school policy in the learning system. It must involve the participation of the Principal as a leader, as well as the independent curriculum that has just been implemented in junior high school here”.

The Principal's participation in the preparation of the curriculum can give an idea of the extent of his or her contribution to the process. The participation of the Principal in the preparation of the curriculum can have an impact on the success of curriculum implementation, increase the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the school and students, and motivate teaching staff to be more actively involved in the learning process. Likewise, the Principal of SMP, Muhammadiyah Pinyungan, actively participates in compiling the curriculum as a form of learning system in schools, especially in the classroom.

The participation of the Principal of SMP, Muhammadiyah Piyungan, in the preparation of the curriculum, has a significant impact on the quality of education in the school. An actively engaged headmaster can ensure that the curriculum not only reflects the school's vision and mission but is also responsive to student's needs and development. Good collaboration between principals and teaching staff can also increase the motivation and involvement of educators in the learning process. In addition, the Principal's contribution in providing the necessary resources and infrastructure shows commitment to the successful implementation of the independent curriculum. Therefore, it is essential for the Principal to actively participate in curriculum development in schools.

Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation

To evaluate the curriculum, various methods can be used, including curriculum analysis, quality evaluation, and bibliometric analysis. Curriculum analysis involves contrasting different curricula to identify theoretical and practical considerations in the development process (Ariav, 1986). The headmaster is responsible for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the independent curriculum in schools. Quality evaluation, on the other hand, assesses the effectiveness and suitability of a curriculum, often using specific criteria to measure its quality (Ariav, 1986). The contribution of the Principal at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan is not only limited to implementing the independent curriculum that has been agreed upon together with other teaching staff, but the Principal also has the responsibility to monitor student development after the implementation of the independent curriculum in schools. This

monitoring serves to determine the effectiveness of the independent curriculum at SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan, because this curriculum is relatively new to be applied, so it requires extra effort to get maximum in the teaching and learning process.

The Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan, carries out this monitoring to ensure that students can adapt to the new curriculum that emphasizes student activity. Therefore, the Principal always communicates with the teachers so that the Principal can analyze the ability of students and students' readiness to learn based on an independent curriculum. Not only that, but the Principal also provides monitoring to teachers. There is synergy between students and teachers so that the independent curriculum is able to create changes in students' learning process. This was confirmed by Respondent 4 teachers at SMP Muhammadiyah Pinyungan that:

“We have recently used the independent curriculum system, so we have to learn a lot and understand the independent curriculum learning system in the classroom. I always get monitoring from the Principal related to the application of the independent curriculum in the classroom. This monitoring makes me have to communicate often with the Principal, that the Principal always gives an appeal to all teachers so that the implementation of the independent curriculum in schools is a new form of system that Must be slow in applying to the teaching system”.

In addition to monitoring, the Principal also conducts continuous evaluations related to the independent curriculum applied to SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan. Continuous evaluation is an important component of effective education management. The Principal, as the main leader in the educational environment, has a crucial role in ensuring the success of this evaluation process. The Principal's contribution in designing, implementing, and interpreting continuous evaluation forms the basis for constant improvement in the quality of education. Therefore, evaluation is always applied by the Principal of SMP Muhammadiyah Piyungan to maximize the implementation of an independent curriculum in schools. This is confirmed by Respondent 1 that:

“I always evaluate the development of students in applying the independent curriculum because this curriculum has only been implemented in this school. The worry is that not all teachers understand the independent curriculum system in the learning process; therefore, always communicate with all teachers and hold deliberations related to the shortcomings of the curriculum so we look for solutions together.”

The Principal of SMP, Muhammadiyah Piyungan, implements continuous evaluation that involves the active contribution of teaching staff so the school can progressively improve the quality of education and achieve better learning goals. Ongoing evaluation also creates an environment where continuous improvement becomes an integral part of the school culture. By actively involving principals in constant evaluation, schools can achieve excellence in providing high-quality education and responding to changing dynamics in education. This is a hope for all school institutions because impacts like this can change the mindset of students to hone their abilities.

Continuous monitoring and evaluation related to the Principal's contribution ensures accountability and encourages constant renewal and improvement in the education system. By identifying and evaluating key aspects, effective principals can be produced to lead and improve the quality of education in schools. Through the Principal's active contribution in all these aspects, the school can achieve curriculum development that is in line with the spirit of the independent curriculum, supports the holistic growth of learners, and prepares students to face global challenges better.

CONCLUSION

The contribution of the principal has a significant impact on the school and students such as Encouraging Curriculum Innovation, Encouraging Student Independence and acting as a model of change. This has a positive impact on students in the learning process and so that it can shape the character of students in facing the future. The contribution of this research is that it can be a reference to school principals in developing the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in schools.

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