



## Teachers' Pedagogical Understanding in the Implementation of Independent Curriculum in the Context of Deep Learning

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received April 15, 2025

Approved May 15, 2025

#### Keywords:

*Pedagogical,  
Independent Curriculum,  
Deep Learning*

#### ABSTRACT

*Frequent curriculum changes can make it difficult for teachers to understand and apply effective pedagogy. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum is a government initiative to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. This article aims to discuss the importance of developing teachers' pedagogical understanding in the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum, especially related to Deep Learning. The main focus of this article is the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in improving their pedagogical understanding. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with literature study and case study methods to describe and explain teachers' teaching competencies in independent learning. The results of the analysis show that a comprehensive understanding of pedagogy is essential to improving the quality of education. Teachers with a good understanding of pedagogy can design a curriculum that suits the needs of students and the community, and improve the quality of learning in the classroom.*

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**How to cite:** Arina, I., & Isyanto, P. (2025). Teachers' Pedagogical Understanding in the Implementation of Independent Curriculum in the Context of Deep Learning. *Jurnal Ilmiah Global Education*, 6(2), 426-435. <https://doi.org/10.55681/jige.v6i2.3778>

### INTRODUCTION

Frequent changes in the curriculum can pose challenges for teachers in grasping and applying effective pedagogy. The introduction of the Independent Curriculum represents a government initiative aimed at enhancing the quality of education in Indonesia. In this context, it is crucial to improve teachers' understanding of pedagogy to elevate classroom learning outcomes. Pedagogical competence refers to an individual's ability to integrate both tangible resources such as teaching materials, software, and hardware and intangible resources, including knowledge, skills, and experiences, to achieve effective learning (Madhavaram & Lavarie in Suci, 2011). As noted by Rahman (2014), this competence encompasses the ability to manage learning through planning, implementation, and evaluation of student performance. Every teacher must possess this competence to succeed in their teaching activities. Furthermore,

pedagogical competence involves understanding students and facilitating engaging, educational interactions (Hakim 2015; Lauerman & Konig, 2016; Nallitawati, 2019). Additionally, it includes managing student learning through understanding their needs, designing and delivering lessons, assessing learning outcomes, and helping students realize their diverse potentials (Lestari and Purwanti, 2018).

Integrated learning is a learning method that can improve the quality of learning by encouraging the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Pedagogical competence is a basic skill that is important for teachers in the learning process. This includes the ability to manage learning, understand students, design and implement content, evaluate learning outcomes, and support the development of student potential. By understanding pedagogical competence, teachers can implement the Independent Curriculum optimally and help students develop their potential. (Hamdi, 2022). (Baihaqi & Utama, 2024).

The curriculum change requires teachers to prepare themselves through training and explore information about the implementation of the independent curriculum so that they can implement it effectively in the teaching and learning process (Nofrianti, et al., 2024). In the independent curriculum, teachers are required to be independent learning activists, teachers are required to be able to be active, enthusiastic, creative, innovative and skilled as facilitators to make changes in schools. A teacher as a driving force in the independent learning curriculum is not only required to master the material and teach effectively in the classroom, but also needs to create a positive learning environment by building closeness with students. In addition, teachers are required to utilize various available technologies to improve the quality of teaching methods. Teachers also need to continue to practice and make improvements to mistakes and shortcomings that occur during the teaching and learning process (Dwi, et al., 2024).

It is increasingly recognized that teachers are key agents in implementing change and innovation. How teachers view their role in relation to innovation determines which reforms are adopted and embedded in classroom routines. International research evidence suggests that, too often, educational innovation fails because the need to make space for teacher learning is not recognized (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008 ). Previous research has shown that instructional change and Innovation in education can be either facilitated or hindered by various aspects of teacher collaboration (Hargreaves, 2007; Stoll et al., 2003). Hargreaves (2019) emphasizes the importance of both the quantity and quality of professional collaboration in the work environment. Several studies highlight the significance of incorporating pedagogical approaches that reflect indigenous knowledge in the classroom, including works by Battise (2000, 2002), Cajete (1994, 2000), Doige (2001, 2003), and McLeod (2003). In Malaysia, Amir Hassan (2006) found that teachers with high competence can foster high achievement levels among their students. Moreover, it is crucial for teachers to receive training on enhancing the motivation, self-confidence, and self-esteem of their students, particularly those from minority backgrounds. Non-Orang Asli teachers, when working with indigenous students, should be trained to implement indigenous pedagogy in their teaching practices. However, many non-indigenous teachers lack familiarity with indigenous cultures, which can result in reduced interaction and increased anxiety between them and their indigenous students (Bishop, 2008; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Salter, 2000a; Ramlee et al., 2009; Ramle & Hood, 2007). Additionally, nearly all teachers assigned to Orang Asli schools do not receive formal training to effectively teach and support Orang Asli students (Ramlee et al., 2009).

Teachers' pedagogical understanding is a major factor in determining the quality of education. Teachers who have a good understanding of pedagogy can improve the curriculum according to the needs of students and society, and can improve the quality of learning in the classroom. However, many teachers still do not have adequate pedagogical understanding to implement the Independent Curriculum effectively in the context of Advanced Learning. This article aims to discuss the importance of developing teachers' pedagogical understanding in implementing the Independent Curriculum, especially in the context of in-depth learning. This article also discusses the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in developing their pedagogical understanding. Thus, this article is expected to contribute to improving the quality of education in Indonesia through the development of better teachers' pedagogical understanding in implementing the Independent Curriculum.

## METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a literature review and case study method to describe and explain teacher teaching competencies in independent learning. Researchers collect data through literature reviews relevant to the research topic, including articles, Scindirect, Google Scholar, and Eric and conduct interviews, observations, and analyze information obtained from respondents. Database searches were conducted starting in March 2025 by identifying English and Indonesian articles that can be downloaded in full versions. The search was carried out by collecting terms to facilitate the search for articles. The keywords used in searching for relevant research articles are Teacher Pedagogy, and Independent Curriculum in the context of Deep learning. The keywords above were selected based on the initial articles found first.

In this study, there is a year limit in the search in order to be able to obtain literature that is closely related to the material to be written. Abstracts from the literature are read to find the purpose of the research being conducted and the research methods used. Articles that have been found and entered as criteria to be used will be analyzed further. In addition to collecting data through literature review, researchers also conducted interviews with several respondents, namely teachers and principals. Interviews are a research method used to collect data through direct conversations between researchers and respondents. Interviews can be used to obtain in-depth and detailed data about the experiences, knowledge, and opinions of respondents. The type of interview used is a structured interview. An interview that uses questions that have been prepared in advance and followed strictly. By using the interview method, researchers can obtain in-depth and detailed data about teachers' pedagogical understanding in implementing the Independent Curriculum in the context of Deep Learning.

Data analysis is very important to do during research, this is because the data will be related to drawing a conclusion. The data analysis used in this study is thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is one way to get results by analyzing data that aims to identify patterns from a study. The results of the analysis are presented in a descriptive form that is in accordance with the topic of discussion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The meaning of the word Pedagogy comes from two words in Greek, namely *paedos* and *agogos* which mean teaching students in their developmental stages (Khasri, 2019 and Ramadhani et al., n.d.). Learning methods are critical sciences and focus on thinking and consideration in education. Pedagogy is a fundamental study that is the basis for various social conditions in education. However, surveys show that ideal learning conditions are often not achieved. To overcome this, the government is strengthening character and developing skills in elementary schools as a preventive effort to improve the quality of education. (Humaeroh et al., 2021).

Pedagogy is the science that studies children's education. A teacher needs pedagogical competence to carry out his duties not only teaching, but also shaping character, developing interests and talents, and fostering independence in each of his students. Thus, pedagogy becomes an important competence for teachers to achieve holistic educational goals. (Nurdin et al., 2023)

Pedagogy is a term commonly used in the world of education, referring to the science of learning or knowledge about education. According to the Big Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), pedagogy is knowledge and skills to educate and carry out education. Pedagogy is an important teaching skill for teachers, as stated in Law Number 14 of 2005 Article 10, which states that pedagogy is a skill to manage student education. Thus, pedagogy is an important competency for teachers in carrying out their duties. (Syafiq et al., 2022).

Pedagogy is the science that studies children's education. A teacher needs pedagogical competence to carry out his duties not only teaching, but also shaping character, developing interests and talents, and fostering independence in each of his students. Thus, pedagogy is an important competence for teachers to achieve holistic educational goals (Nurdin et al., 2023). Pedagogy is founded on essential elements that include (1) imagination in education, (2) spirituality in education, and (3) holistic education. Understanding these concepts goes beyond mere lexical definitions or terminology and is free from philosophical interpretations (Herlambang, 2018; Herlambang & Abidin, 2023). Research indicates a strong correlation between pedagogical approaches and students' academic performance. Bishop (2008) emphasized the need for teachers and schools to have a solid grasp of pedagogical theories and principles to enhance teaching effectiveness. Implementing teaching methods that align with the interests and needs of Orang Asli students is crucial, as it represents an innovative strategy to boost their engagement with schoolwork (Wahab & Mustapha, 2015).

Additionally, studies highlight the historical influence of progressive pedagogy in Sweden, showcasing its relevance in contemporary educational practices (Simola, 2005; Heller Sahlgren, 2015; Heller Sahlgren & Sanandaji, 2019). This progressive tradition, combined with market-based and accountability-driven school reforms (Muench et al., 2023) and conservative political demands for measurable outcomes and early grading, has contributed to a landscape of divergent perspectives on educational goals in Sweden. Accordingly, we noticed partly conflicting views on knowledge in the Swedish curriculum between a focus on knowledge as personal development and knowledge in relation to fixed goals. (Hillbom et al., 2025)

Pedagogical competence is a unique skill that distinguishes teachers from other professions. Mastery of these teaching skills is very important for teacher professionalism and determines the success of the student learning process in the classroom. Therefore, pedagogical ability is considered a mandatory ability for every teacher, including the ability to manage learning. Teaching ability is one of the important subjects that need to be studied to achieve national education goals. According to Jannah (2020: 109), teaching competence is the strength of

teachers in mastering their learning. Competence is the object of a teacher's teaching ability that can be linked to academic qualification standards and teaching competencies." (Apriyantika & Mustika, 2023).

Pedagogical ability has a very big influence in the world of education and we can say that pedagogical ability is very important for a teacher to improve the quality of his teaching (Melani et al., 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum was developed as an effort by the government to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. Teachers need to improve their pedagogical competence to implement this curriculum optimally. Some of the abilities that need to be improved include understanding constructivist learning theory, compiling projects appropriately, using a socio-scientific approach in the Pancasila Student Profile, and implementing formative assessments in learning. Thus, teachers can improve the quality of learning and achieve the expected educational goals. (Hamdi et al., 2022).

The independent learning curriculum is a concept that demands independence for both students (Baharuddin, 2021; Manalu, Sihotang, Henrika, 2022). Independence in this case, where students are given the freedom to choose and access the knowledge they gain from formal education, in addition, this independent curriculum does not limit learning that is carried out in schools only, but can be done outside school hours and systems. Therefore, this independent curriculum directs educators and students to be as creative as possible in implementing learning both in schools and outside of school. The presence of this independent curriculum aims to answer and the possibility of future education, so that in its manifestation it must form critical thinking, creative thinking, imaginative thinking, holistic thinking, communication and collaboration for students (Risdianto, 2019). (Hadiansyah & Muhtar, 2023).

The Independent Curriculum offers flexibility in learning, allowing students to have enough time to understand concepts and strengthen competencies. Teachers also have the freedom to choose learning media that suit students' needs. In addition, the Pancasila Student Profile project was developed based on a specific theme with flexibility in its implementation, not tied to certain learning outcomes. (Anggraini et al., 2022).

The deep learning model focuses on developing a deeper understanding of the subject matter through a holistic learning experience, where students become more emotionally and cognitively involved in their learning process. This approach seeks to change the traditional learning paradigm that often focuses on memorizing and repeating information into more constructive and reflective learning. In line with this concept, mindful learning, as proposed by (Ragoonaden, 2015), plays an important role in ensuring that students not only understand the material in theory, but also relate it to their personal experiences and real-life contexts. (Putri, 2024).

Based on an interview study of six respondents (4 teachers & 2 principals) regarding understanding of pedagogical science in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in the context of Deep learning, including: This study involved 6 informants, namely 2 Principals and 4 Teachers at one of the Elementary Schools in Karawang Regency.

According to Informant LK (Teacher)

"The pedagogical concept in the Independent Curriculum in the context of Deep Learning is about how we as teachers can develop students' critical and creative thinking skills through student-centered learning."

The Independent Curriculum requires learning to be tailored to the needs of students. Teachers need to adjust learning strategies to students' learning styles, which can be divided into three types: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. Each student has a unique learning style, so

teachers need to understand each student's learning style to optimize the learning process (Lestari et al., 2023).

Informant 2 RY (Teacher).

"In the implementation of the Independent Curriculum with the Deep Learning approach, the role of the teacher is as a facilitator who helps students develop critical and creative thinking skills through student-centered learning. The teacher plays a role in facilitating the student's learning process, not just as a transmitter of information."

Critical thinking involves students' ability to connect knowledge with information or problems faced, and make decisions based on in-depth analysis. This process involves reflection and logic to determine what to believe or do. By thinking critically, students can develop the ability to analyze information, evaluate evidence, and make the right decisions. (Juraidah & Hartoyo, 2022).

Meanwhile, NR (Teacher) as the 3rd Informant said that:

"Student-centered learning in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of Deep Learning is about how we can develop learning that is relevant to the needs and interests of students, as well as promote students' critical and creative thinking skills."

Research conducted by Suparlan (2020) shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can increase student engagement and motivation in their learning experiences. A curriculum that is designed to better meet the needs and interests of students, while giving them the autonomy to explore their potential, can inspire students to actively participate in their education. (Tuerah & Tuerah, 2023)

YP (Teacher) as the 4th Informant said that:

"The pedagogical concept in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of Deep Learning is about how we can develop a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of students and society, as well as promote students' critical and creative thinking skills."

The Independent Curriculum, as explained by Fahlevi (2022), effectively highlights the importance of critical thinking skills. Students are encouraged to hone their analytical, evaluative, and judgmental skills regarding the information they encounter. This allows them to make better decisions, see problems from multiple perspectives, and create innovative solutions. Furthermore, this curriculum encourages student creativity by providing space for imagination, creativity, and innovation throughout the learning experience. (Nelisma 2022)

SG as the Principal concluded that:

"The benefits of applying the pedagogical concept in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of Deep Learning are that it can help improve the quality of education by promoting students' critical and creative thinking skills, as well as developing a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of students and society."

Curriculum adaptability is a sustainable approach to creating programs that meet the demands of the 21st century. This idea relies on the capacity of the curriculum to respond to the rapid advances of the digital era and the fourth industrial revolution. This flexibility allows for modification of educational content and teaching techniques to align with contemporary needs, allowing students to fully develop their 21st century skills. (Irawan, 2023)

In every curriculum change, there are definitely obstacles. The obstacles experienced in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of Deep Learning according to informant SG as the principal said that:

"The obstacles experienced are the lack of resources and teacher skills in developing a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of students and society. In addition, there is the difficulty of how to promote changes in the culture and organizational structure of the school to support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the Context of Deep Learning."

Based on the Literature Review "The challenges faced by elementary school teachers at the research location include the lack of teacher expertise in adapting materials, as well as the abilities, skills, and characteristics of students who are not in accordance with the old curriculum, even though they have to implement the new curriculum. In addition, considering the diverse potential of teaching staff, all educator must adhere to the principle of an independent curriculum without first receiving training from the district or ministry, facing demands for curriculum management, inadequate school facilities and infrastructure, and limited education funds. Therefore, the role of the principal is very important in overcoming the obstacles faced by teachers and ensuring that the independent curriculum can be implemented and developed effectively. (Muzaini, 2023)

As a solution to overcome these obstacles, according to SG as the Principal, he said that "I conduct training and development of teacher skills to improve their ability to develop a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of students and the community. In addition, I make changes to the culture and organizational structure of the school to support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of Deep Learning, as well as promoting cooperation between teachers and students."

## CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis of pedagogical understanding in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of Deep Learning, it can be concluded that a deep pedagogical understanding of teachers is very important to improve the quality of education. Teachers who have a good pedagogical understanding can develop a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of students and society, and can improve the quality of learning in the classroom.

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