

Empowering Learning: The Evolution of the Independent Learning Curriculum in the Era of Technology

Afiful Ihwan¹, Ahmad Barizi², Wahidmurni³

¹ Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia; afifulihwan1@gmail.com

² Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia; abarizi_mdr@uin-malang.ac.id

³ Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim, Malang, Indonesia; wahidmurni@pips.uin-malang.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to critically analyze the evolution and implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Indonesia within the context of rapid technological development. The focus is placed on examining how curriculum autonomy, pedagogical competence, and digital integration interact in shaping contemporary learning practices. This research employs a qualitative library research method by systematically reviewing 32 scholarly sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books published between 2019 and 2024. The data were analyzed using thematic and comparative analysis, guided by constructivist learning theory, curriculum innovation theory, and digital pedagogy as the main analytical frameworks. The findings reveal that the Independent Learning Curriculum represents a significant shift toward learner-centered and flexible education, emphasizing autonomy, character development, and the use of digital technology to expand learning opportunities beyond the classroom. However, the analysis also indicates persistent challenges, particularly disparities in digital infrastructure, uneven teacher readiness, and inconsistencies in policy implementation across educational contexts. These factors limit the transformative potential of curriculum innovation when not supported by adequate institutional capacity and professional development. The study concludes that the successful implementation of independent learning in the digital era requires systemic alignment between pedagogical innovation, technological accessibility, and institutional readiness. By synthesizing existing literature, this article proposes a conceptual framework that integrates learner autonomy, digital facilitation, and teacher capacity building as key components of sustainable curriculum reform. This framework offers practical insights for policymakers and educators in strengthening the effectiveness and equity of independent learning implementation in diverse educational settings.

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Corresponding Author:

Afiful Ihwan

Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia; afifulihwan1@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has brought significant changes to various aspects of life, including education (Jaenudin, Suhendi, Hasbiyallah, & Nasir, 2023; Setiawan, 2018). Learning processes that were previously confined to classrooms can now be conducted in various places and times with the help of digital technology. This phenomenon has transformed how students access knowledge and how teachers deliver educational materials. However, digitalization in education is not without challenges. The digital divide between urban and rural areas remains a significant issue. Additionally, the digital literacy skills of students and teachers are not evenly distributed, hindering the optimization of technology-based learning (T. M. Nasir et al., 2024; Nurfatimah, Hasna, & Rostika, 2022). These challenges need to be addressed promptly to ensure inclusive and effective education. The digital divide between urban and rural areas remains a significant issue. Additionally, the digital literacy skills of students and teachers are not evenly distributed, hindering the optimization of technology-based learning. These challenges need to be addressed promptly to ensure inclusive and effective education.

In response to these challenges, the Indonesian government has launched various innovative education policies. One of them is the implementation of the Independent Learning curriculum, which emphasizes independent learning and the use of technology as a learning resource (Amalia, 2022; Nasir, Tatang Muh, Hasbiyallah, 2024; T. M. Nasir & Karimah, 2023). This curriculum is expected to encourage students to become active learners who are able to adapt to changing times. One of them is the implementation of the Independent Learning curriculum, which emphasizes independent learning and the use of technology as a learning resource. This curriculum is expected to encourage students to become active learners capable of adapting to changing times.

However, the implementation of the Independent Learning curriculum still faces various obstacles. Many teachers do not fully understand the concept and its implementation. On the other hand, technology facilities in schools are still limited, especially in remote areas (Mulyasa, 2020). This underscores the need for more serious efforts to support the implementation of this curriculum. Many teachers do not fully understand its concepts and implementation. On the other hand, technological facilities in schools remain limited, especially in remote areas. This underscores the need for more serious efforts to support the implementation of this curriculum (Nasir, Tatang Muh, Hasbiyallah, 2024; T. M. Nasir, Hasanah, & Hasbiyallah, 2022). The gap between the designed policy and its implementation in the field is an issue that requires further research. This research is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the Independent Learning curriculum in facilitating technology-based learning and identify the factors that hinder its success (Amalia, 2022). This research is important to evaluate the effectiveness of the Merdeka Learning curriculum in facilitating technology-based learning and identify the factors that hinder its success.

This research aims to provide a more comprehensive insight into the challenges and opportunities for the implementation of the Independent Learning curriculum in the digital era (Nurfatimah et al., 2022; Sabarudin, Erihadiana, Nasir, Wulan, & Ridwan, 2025; Supriatna, Fachriyah, & Nasir, 2023). Thus, it is expected to offer useful recommendations for policymakers and education practitioners in improving the quality of education in Indonesia. Thus, it is expected to offer useful recommendations for policymakers and education practitioners in improving the quality of education in Indonesia. By gaining a deeper understanding of the implementation of the Independent Learning curriculum, this research contributes to strengthening the national education system that is adaptive to technological developments. Education transformation based on character and technology is a strategic step in preparing an excellent generation ready to face global challenges.

This article contributes a novel analytical perspective by synthesizing recent literature to identify a critical gap between the conceptual design of the Independent Learning Curriculum and its practical realization in technology-mediated contexts. Unlike previous studies that primarily describe policy intentions, this study highlights the interaction between curriculum autonomy, teacher readiness, and digital infrastructure as a decisive factor shaping implementation outcomes. By addressing this gap, the article proposes an integrative conceptual framework that positions independent learning not

merely as a policy reform, but as a systemic educational transformation requiring alignment between pedagogical practice, institutional capacity, and technological support.

2. METHODS

This study uses library research methods to explore the development and implementation of the Independent Learning curriculum in the digital era (Sugiyono, 2019). Sources were selected based on criteria such as novelty, relevance to the research topic, credibility, and peer-reviewed status. The literature analyzed spans academic journals, books, and research reports published within the last five years to ensure updated and accurate insights. These sources are particularly relevant due to their focus on educational innovation and digital learning environments. These sources are particularly relevant due to their focus on educational innovation and digital learning environments.

To interpret the literature, thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring themes in educational policies and digital learning practices. Comparative analysis was also applied to contrast perspectives from various studies, highlighting differences and similarities in their findings. Content analysis was used to detect patterns and trends related to curriculum development and educational technology integration. Library research was chosen because it provides a comprehensive and cost-effective approach to gathering diverse perspectives on educational transformations without the logistical complexities of fieldwork.

To strengthen methodological clarity, this study applied a structured literature selection and analysis process. A total of 32 sources (25 peer-reviewed journal articles and 7 academic books) published between 2019 and 2024 were selected based on relevance, credibility, and focus on curriculum innovation and digital learning. Data analysis was guided by a theoretical framework combining constructivist learning theory, curriculum innovation, and digital pedagogy to interpret policy and practice. Thematic analysis was conducted through systematic coding to identify key themes such as learning autonomy, teacher readiness, and technology integration, while comparative analysis was used to examine similarities and differences across studies, particularly in varied implementation contexts. These procedures confirm that the analytical methods were explicitly and consistently applied throughout the study.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Curriculum changes and education policies in Indonesia, particularly the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum, reflect efforts to adapt to the evolving demands of the modern era. The shift from the National Examination (UN) to the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM), along with granting greater autonomy to schools in designing their learning methods, demonstrates a significant reform in the education system. These changes aim to provide a more flexible, student-centered learning experience tailored to individual needs and potential. However, major challenges remain in implementing these policies, including teachers' readiness, disparities in educational resources, and unequal access to technology across different regions.

Several factors influence these policy changes, including political dynamics, societal needs, and global educational trends. Over the past decades, political transitions in Indonesia have often led to curriculum reforms, as seen in the shift from the Competency Based Curriculum (KBK) to the 2013 Curriculum (K-13), and ultimately to the Independent Learning Curriculum (Kamaludin, Purnama, & Zirmansyah, 2021; Safkolam, Nuangchalerm, Ahmad Zaky El Islami, & Saleah, 2022). Additionally, the growing societal demand for a more adaptive education system, one that equips students with the necessary skills to thrive in the digital age and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, has been a driving force behind these reforms (Supriatna et al., 2023). As awareness increases regarding the importance of competency-based and character-based education, policies are continuously updated to ensure their relevance in addressing global challenges.

Despite the promising goals of the Independent Learning Curriculum in fostering self-directed and innovative learning, its implementation still faces numerous obstacles. Studies indicate that schools struggle with limited teacher comprehension of the independent learning concept, inadequate technological infrastructure, and a lack of comprehensive evaluation of the curriculum's effectiveness. Furthermore, while initial reports suggest improvements in student motivation and learning flexibility, empirical evidence regarding the long-term impact of these policies on student outcomes remains limited. More research is needed to assess the extent to which these changes positively affect the quality of education in Indonesia and how well educators at various levels perceive and adapt to the new system.

3.1 Indonesian Curriculum Development

The existing curriculum in Indonesia continues to develop as part of an effort to be able to answer the challenges of the times in the future. The curriculum is a mirror for the formation of character education within students, so that they can contribute to the nation in the future. The dynamism of thought patterns that have been integrated in human life also requires the education sector to continue to follow the flow of dynamism, as being too far behind can lead to underdevelopment of the realm of education of a nation, so it is not surprising that there will always be updates and innovations in the future related to education. The main point of an education does not lie in the curriculum, but in the policy in the curriculum so that it can be aligned and planned for national-scale development.

Education is not an entity that can stand alone, because education is an important pillar in development that is closely related to the many other sectors that exist in the surrounding environment, so that it can get many learning resources (Nurfatimah et al., 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to determine a curriculum that is adaptive and flexible to various conditions so that it can develop through various approaches that can be implemented to achieve appropriate and appropriate policy-making patterns. The general objectives of national education have alignment and relevance to the development of the country, as contained in the *sisdiknas* legislation, which revealed the relevance of general education goals as follows: 1) Academic criteria, the curriculum can be a standard of national education. 2) Religious-moral criteria, the curriculum can be a reference in *membenetuk* character of students who are devout and have high morals with Pancasila character. 3) Labour criteria, the curriculum can make students competent in the field of work as learned (Sari, Sari, Syafwita, & Setiawati, 2022).

Table 1. Patterns of Indonesian Curriculum Development

Year	Period	Curriculum	Educational Foundation
1945 - 1949	Physical revolution	1947 lesson plan	
1949 - 1950	RIS		Education Law 1950
1950 - 1959	Parliamentary democracy	Elaborated lesson plan 1952	Education Law 1950
1959 - 1966	Old Orde	Education plan 1964	Presidential Decree No. 19 of 1965 related to the National Education System Pancasila
1966 - 1968	New Orde	1968 Curriculum 1975 Curriculum 1984 Curriculum 1994 Curriculum	Curriculum Law No.2 of 1989 related to the National Education System
1998 - Now	Reform era	Curriculum 1994 - Supplement 1999 Competency-based curriculum (KBK) 2004 Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP)	Law No.2 of 2003 related to the National Education System PP. No. 19 Year 2005

National Curriculum (K-13) Independent Learning Curriculum 2019	PP. No. 32 Year 2013
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Table 1 illustrates the progression of Indonesia's curriculum from 1947 to the present, highlighting how political changes and societal needs have shaped education policies. The 2019 Independent Learning Curriculum aims to foster student autonomy and adaptability, with a strong emphasis on digital integration. However, its implementation faces significant disparities between urban and rural schools.

Despite the push for digital learning, many schools struggle with limited infrastructure. Urban schools are increasingly using AI-assisted learning tools, online platforms such as Teacher's Room, and digital textbooks, while rural areas are facing internet connectivity issues and a lack of trained educators in digital teaching. While the curriculum promotes innovation, challenges such as excessive teacher workloads, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and inconsistent policy execution hinder its effectiveness. Addressing these gaps requires targeted digital investments, structured teacher training, and clearer implementation guidelines.

Based on the data table, it can be seen that there are factors that can influence curriculum innovation or development as follows: 1) Political changes, it cannot be denied that there is a change or development of the existing curriculum due to the change of the government cabinet. 2) Community development, the occurrence of curriculum development caused by community factors, namely as an effort to be able to meet or answer the problems faced by the community, so that the existence of the curriculum requires revision and various innovations, and adaptation to the circumstances and needs of the surrounding community.

Based on these various factors, it can be concluded that the development of the existing curriculum in the education sector is relatively orderly. The matter is due to differences in the political situation, which tends to be stable in the government of President Soeharto. Then, the 1975 curriculum is more oriented towards specific objectives and general objectives. Then the 1984 curriculum focused on the essence of learning objectives and the elaboration of the teacher's work program as contained in the 1994 curriculum.

According to (Asyafah, 2019) there are four important elements related to instructional activities as follows; 1) Identifying the meaning and purpose of education. 2) Determining experiences in the learning process that are in accordance with educational goals and expectations. 3) Managing the learning process systematically based on innovation. 4) Evaluating the learning process that has been implemented.

3.2 Independent Learning Curriculum Policy

Independent learning is one of the many new policy factors that have been determined by the government, this matter is an alternative for the academic community before conveying various new things to students, therefore it requires educators to be able to increase competence beyond anything so that they can translate the basic competencies contained in the learning module, if this cannot be implemented, the learning success rate is relatively smaller (Amalia, 2022).

Hopefully in the future, if with the implementation of the independent learning system, there are more options that can be chosen so that it is not only fixated on monotonous learning in the classroom alone, but can receive learning in all circumstances and learning environments while still adhering to student character education, this matter is done as an effort to be able to communicate well through a fun learning process but still foster character by not overriding the competencies contained in the learning module.

Moreover, in the implementation of character cultivation, it is not only fixated on the limitations of ranking, but more in bridging students to be able to develop knowledge intelligence, spiritual intelligence and emotional intelligence and talents, because it needs to be realised that in each

individual student there are different talents and abilities in dealing with everything faced, so the government applies a new system contained in the independent learning curriculum as an effort to be able to provide assistance to students to be better prepared to navigate future life with the same competence, morals and character (Mulyasa, 2020; T. M. H. Nasir, 2023).

Table 1. Independent Learning Innovation

The concept of independent learning	The motto of independent learning
In 2020 USBN is returned to the school In 2021 UN is replaced with AKM Preparing students to be able to have self-competence with high morals and improve the nation's human resources	"Independent Learning Driving Teachers"

Based on the data from these results, it can be seen that the government seeks innovation in the learning process of students so that it can create a pleasant learning atmosphere, related to this, it is hoped that students can continue to feel happy in learning without remembering the scores that will be obtained, but not ruling out the competencies contained in the learning process.

The following are the main policies implemented by the government: 1) Replacing the UN National Exam with the AKM Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey. 2) The policy contained in (USBS) is fully entrusted to the school as the implementing institution. 3) Simplifying the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) into a teaching module. 4) Implementing a zoning system in the (PPDB) New Student Admission, so that it is expected to provide equal distribution of education to every student (Aisah, Zaqiah, & Supiana, 2021).

The existence of policies implemented by the government in the independent learning curriculum refers to the 2019 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which indicates the level of literacy and mathematics for Indonesian students, who are in position 74 out of 79 countries. Based on this, it is considered necessary to be able to assess students' minimum standard abilities which include literacy, numeracy and character (Hasim, 2020).

3.3 Independent Learning Innovation

The Independent Learning Curriculum has undergone an extensive developmental process prior to its implementation in educational institutions, supported by various education stakeholders as a response to the need for innovation in learning practices. This reform particularly addresses fundamental changes in the national assessment system, including the abolition of the National Examination (UN), the reorientation of the School-Based National Examination (USBN), the simplification of lesson planning (RPP), and the restructuring of student admission policies (PPDB). Beyond procedural adjustments, independent learning reflects a broader educational vision rooted in the foundational ideals of the Indonesian nation, aiming to cultivate holistic competencies, character, and autonomy among learners. Through this approach, the curriculum aspires to prepare a future generation capable of contributing meaningfully to national development in an increasingly complex and dynamic global context (Putra, 2019).

Based on this discussion, it can be concluded that education must embrace a degree of autonomy within the teaching and learning process. The core concept of independent learning innovation emphasizes learner freedom while remaining grounded in critical reflection and structured boundaries. This approach ensures that educational freedom does not disregard ethical values, professional responsibility, or the foundational ideals of the nation, but instead functions as a principled framework for developing intellectual capacity, character, and moral integrity among all participants in the educational process (Putra, 2019). However, over time, there are not a few educational personnel who are less appropriate in interpreting the objectives and methods applied in the independent learning curriculum so that it has an impact on the bureaucratic and administrative system, such as the

accreditation or assessment of educational institutions whose original intention was to be part of a method but instead turned into a priority (Sari et al., 2022).

The presence of the concept contained in the independent learning curriculum feels easy when heard, but this matter is inversely proportional to its implementation in the field. Meanwhile, on the other hand, the concept created in independent learning is closely related to commitment, ability and independence which must be implemented and become sustainable and related (Herlambang, 2018; Saekan, 2017; Zuhri, Wahyudi, & Hamid, 2021). Commitment means the beginning of the formation of ideals that go hand in hand with the goals as neatly stated in the national education legislation. Independent means the basis or foundation for achieving goals that are widely misinterpreted so that positions and provisions hinder the teaching and learning process. Meanwhile, ability means being able to carry out all forms of programs that have been launched properly.

The concept contained in independent learning is interpreted as a concept that does not impose a specific target in achieving it, because a learning process requires a grace period so that it can innovate. So it is not strange if students need something different from what they have felt before, then this focus is more focused on the role of educators to be able to optimise the hidden potential contained in each student, because learning is not only found in the classroom, more than that, learning can be obtained in the surrounding environment, so it must avoid individualism and apply socialism (Siskawati, Chandra, & Tri Novita Irawati, 2020).

Like an independent person with biodiversity, with various roles performed. So independent learning is related to the system and methods used so that it can create an effective and efficient learning environment for students so that educators and parents participate in obtaining a pleasant learning atmosphere, this matter is in line with the principle of independent learning which seeks to create pleasant learning conditions so as to avoid boredom and away from the burden that must be achieved after studying with high academic scores.

The national exam (UN), which in its time has always been the main reference for educational institutions to be able to accept students who want to continue their schooling to a higher level of education, is no longer used, and has been replaced by the Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey (AKM-SK). The matter was implemented because of the assumption that in the UN there are policies that have an inappropriate impact on the realm of student education, because it tends to be only in cognitive skills, with the achievement of high academic scores, without regard to other domains. (PGRI) as the parent of the Indonesian teachers' union revealed that UN activities did not have a high effectiveness value, so 70% of the social community agreed to eliminate the UN.

The analysis of the reviewed literature indicates that innovation within the Independent Learning Curriculum is theoretically aligned with constructivist learning theory and educational innovation frameworks, which emphasize learner autonomy, reflective learning, and the development of individual potential. Empirical evidence from previous studies suggests that increased instructional flexibility and reduced administrative burdens can enhance student engagement and creativity. Nevertheless, when examined through the lens of educational change theory, the impact of these innovations remains uneven, as many educators experience difficulties in translating policy directives into effective pedagogical practices. This finding underscores that curriculum innovation alone is insufficient and must be accompanied by sustained professional development and institutional support to ensure meaningful and long-term transformation in learning practices.

3.4 Free Learning in the Age of Technology

Changes in societal innovation that are increasingly intensive with the help of technology have an impact on the educational environment, demanding that the realm of education continue to develop in such a way. The thin dividing space that occurs in virtual life and the flicker of reality can transform life into one in which the role of technology becomes a primary need in every activity carried out by society in interacting or transacting (Putra, 2019; Rosidi et al., 2024).

Society in the era of digital technology is part of the scope of independent learning by balancing, integrating various social problems that are integrated in the real and digital worlds, because the advancement of digital technology which can be a source of information must be applied in the world of education so that it becomes a bridge of knowledge distribution for each student, especially with the existence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the realm of education with the role that is presented can have an impact on changing the quality of life higher (Amalia, 2022). Society 5.0 is an innovation carried out as a series of technologies and sciences initiated by the government as an effort to be able to face a brighter future so that it can realize what it aspires to. The existence of this technology has experienced significant developments so that it cannot be stopped with certain restrictions and affects various sectors of social life (Juhari & Zulfadli, 2019; Sakinah & Dewi, 2021). So, as educated people, we should not reject this presence, but how can we maximize these facilities so that we can learn more and better?

From a critical analytical perspective, the findings indicate that the Independent Learning Curriculum represents a paradigm shift aligned with constructivist and student-centered learning theories, which emphasize autonomy, contextual learning, and active knowledge construction. However, when evaluated against theories of educational change and policy implementation, particularly Fullan's framework on educational reform, the effectiveness of this curriculum remains uneven due to gaps in teacher capacity, institutional readiness, and digital infrastructure. Empirical studies reviewed in this article consistently show that technology-enhanced learning improves flexibility and engagement, yet its impact is significantly moderated by access, pedagogical competence, and systemic support. This suggests that curriculum innovation alone is insufficient without parallel investment in professional development and governance mechanisms, reinforcing the theoretical view that sustainable educational reform requires coherence between policy design, implementation processes, and learning ecology.

In the technological context, the findings demonstrate that digitally supported learning practices correspond with principles of digital pedagogy and social learning theory, particularly in expanding learning access beyond conventional classroom boundaries. The literature reviewed reveals that digital platforms and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, can improve learning effectiveness and flexibility when supported by adequate digital literacy. However, persistent disparities in infrastructure and human resource readiness limit the optimal implementation of technology-based learning, as consistently reported in prior empirical studies. Therefore, the realization of free learning in the technological era requires an integrated approach that combines digital innovation, teacher capacity building, and responsive education policies to address structural inequalities and promote inclusive learning outcomes.

The synthesized findings generate a new insight that the success of the Independent Learning Curriculum is contingent upon the coherence between instructional innovation and systemic support mechanisms. Drawing on constructivist learning theory and digital pedagogy, this study proposes a conceptual innovation model consisting of three interrelated dimensions: pedagogical autonomy, technological facilitation, and professional capacity building. The analysis demonstrates that when these dimensions operate in isolation, curriculum innovation remains symbolic rather than transformative. Therefore, a concrete solution lies in integrating teacher professional development, adaptive digital learning environments, and flexible curriculum governance into a unified implementation strategy to ensure sustainable educational change.

4. CONCLUSION

The evolution of Indonesia's curriculum, particularly the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum, reflects a shift towards student-centered and technology-integrated education. However, significant disparities in digital infrastructure, teacher readiness, and policy execution highlight the need for more strategic investments in education. Future policies should focus on bridging the digital divide, enhancing teacher training in digital pedagogy, and streamlining bureaucratic processes to ensure the curriculum's effective implementation across diverse educational settings. For

educational practice and research, these findings emphasize the importance of evaluating the real-world impact of curriculum innovations. Further studies should assess how digital tools, AI-assisted learning, and flexible teaching methods influence student outcomes in different school environments. Addressing these gaps through data-driven policies and targeted interventions will be crucial in shaping a more inclusive and effective education system in Indonesia.

Based on the synthesis of theory and empirical literature, this study concludes by offering an innovative framework for implementing independent learning in the digital era. The proposed model emphasizes the alignment of learner-centered pedagogy, digital accessibility, and institutional readiness as a practical response to existing implementation challenges. This framework provides actionable guidance for policymakers, school leaders, and educators by clarifying how curriculum autonomy can be operationalized without compromising educational quality or equity. As a result, the findings extend existing scholarship by transforming independent learning from a normative policy concept into an applicable and context-sensitive educational model adaptable to diverse learning environments.

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