


The Influence of the Independent Curriculum on the Learning Motivation of SMA Negeri 1 Pematang Siantar Students

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A B S T R A C T

Education is a systematic process in helping individuals develop their potential, where the Independent Curriculum presents as an innovation that emphasizes flexibility and student-centered learning. This study aims to understand in depth how the implementation of the Independent Curriculum affects student learning motivation at SMA Negeri 1 Pematang Siantar. This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive study method and in-depth interviews with ten students in grades 10 and 11 selected using a purposive sampling technique. In addition to interviews, data collection techniques also involved participant observation and documentation to explore the subjects' experiences comprehensively. The results show that the Independent Curriculum has a positive impact on student learning motivation, where students feel more enthusiastic and responsible because they have the freedom to choose activities that suit their interests. The collaborative and project-based learning environment has been shown to foster intrinsic motivation and self-confidence. In conclusion, this study provides a theoretical contribution to the development of the concept of learning motivation in the context of Indonesian education and serves as a practical reference for teachers and schools that the Independent Curriculum is effective in increasing motivation by fulfilling psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and social connectedness.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a deliberate and systematic process in helping individuals develop all their potential. In Indonesia, changes and improvements to the curriculum have taken place since the early days of independence until now, in line with the demands of the times and the development of science and technology. The curriculum is not just an administrative document, but a fundamental guide in designing a meaningful learning experience for students. In this context, the Independent Curriculum was born as a national education innovation that focuses on *student-centered learning*. This curriculum emphasizes flexibility, freedom to determine learning interests, and character strengthening through real projects to form the profile of Pancasila Students.

The success of this curriculum is highly dependent on student response and participation, which is largely determined by learning motivation. Students with high motivation show consistent enthusiasm and tenacity, while low motivation has a detrimental impact on academic achievement. Despite a number of previous studies (Mawarni, 2023; Puspita, 2024; Rizqi et al., 2023) show the potential of the Independent Curriculum in increasing motivation, there is still a significant research gap.

The first research gap relates to methodology; Most previous studies tend to use a quantitative approach that only captures the success rate without delving into the psychological processes behind it. The second gap is the limitation of the local context; The dynamics of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in schools with specific characteristics such as SMA Negeri 1 Pematang Siantar require an in-depth analysis to understand how the social and cultural interaction of schools uniquely affects students' intrinsic motivations. Without a deep qualitative understanding, the inhibiting and supporting factors of motivation in real practice in the field will not be fully revealed.

Therefore, this research is important to fill this gap by comprehensively understanding the influence of the Independent Curriculum on learning motivation through an in-depth interview approach. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of the concept of learning motivation in the context of Indonesian education, as well as a practical reference for teachers and schools in optimizing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the field.

Independent Curriculum Concept

The Independent Curriculum is a policy that provides flexibility to educational units and students to determine the direction of learning. According to Mulyasa (2022), the essence of the Independent Curriculum is to provide space for students to learn according to their developmental stages, needs, and interests through intracurricular learning and *the Pancasila Student Profile* project. In this approach, teachers act as facilitators who guide students to find the meaning of learning independently.

The main characteristics of the Independent Curriculum include: (1) Learning flexibility: teachers and students can adjust learning outcomes according to the context and characteristics of students. (2) Project-based: students learn through cross-disciplinary projects that emphasize creativity and collaboration. (3) Character-oriented: the formation of Pancasila values is the core of the entire learning process.

Through this structure, students are expected to not only acquire cognitive knowledge, but also develop intrinsic motivation that comes from curiosity and personal responsibility for the learning process.

Learning Motivation Theory

Learning motivation can be understood as internal and external motivations that move individuals to actively participate in learning activities (Uno, 2019). Some of the key theories on which this study is based include:

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

Maslow (in Sudjana, 2017) explained that humans have five levels of needs: physiological, security, love and belonging, reward, and self-actualization. In the context of learning, the Independent Curriculum helps meet the needs of students' self-actualization by providing space for creativity and self-expression. When basic and social needs are met in school, students are encouraged to reach their highest potential in learning.

McClelland's Achievement Motivation Theory

McClelland (in Uno, 2019) emphasizes three basic needs in motivation: *need for achievement*, *need for affiliation*, and *need for power*. The Independent curriculum allows students to meet all three needs through group projects, presentations of learning outcomes, and opportunities to demonstrate individual abilities in front of peers.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan)

Deci and Ryan (2000) stated that learning motivation will increase if three basic psychological needs are met: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The Merdeka Curriculum gives autonomy to students to choose learning topics, grow competence through challenging activities, and build social connections through teamwork in learning projects.

Overall, these three theories illustrate that learning motivation is not just the result of external factors such as rewards or grades, but rather grows from within when students have the opportunity to feel capable, role-played, and valued in the learning environment.

Research Conceptual Model

Based on the synthesis of theory and the results of previous studies, the relationship between the Independent Curriculum and learning motivation can be described as follows:

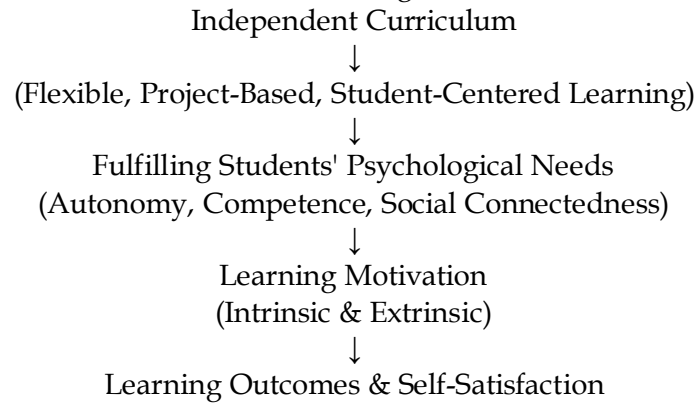


Figure 1. Model of the Relationship between Independent Curriculum and Learning Motivation

This model shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum facilitates the fulfillment of students' psychological needs as described in modern motivation theory, which ultimately improves motivation and learning outcomes in a sustainable manner.

METHODS

Research Approach and Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive study type. The use of this qualitative descriptive design aims to deeply understand students' experiences and views regarding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and its influence on learning motivation. This design was chosen because it focuses on providing a comprehensive picture of the events or phenomena experienced by the subject in its natural setting without manipulating variables. This approach is considered relevant because it allows researchers to explore subjective meanings and social contexts that cannot be quantitatively measured.

Location and Research Subject

The research was carried out at SMA Negeri 1 Pematang Siantar, one of the schools that has implemented the Independent Curriculum at the high school level. The research subjects consisted of 10 students in grades X and XI from various majors. The determination of subjects was carried out using purposive sampling techniques based on their involvement in project-based learning activities and the diversity of academic backgrounds.

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected using three main techniques, namely: (1) In-depth interview: conducted in a semi-structured manner to provide space for students to explain their experiences. (2) Participatory observation: carried out during the project learning process and class discussions to see student expression, participation, and interaction. (3) Documentation: in the form of photos of activities, student project results, and notes of learning reflections.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using an interactive model from Miles and Huberman (1994) which includes three main stages:

1. Data reduction: curate and group data by theme.
2. Data presentation: writing the results of the interview into a thematic narrative.
3. Conclusion drawing and verification: identifying the pattern of the relationship between the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and learning motivation.

Data Validity

The validity of the data is maintained by triangulation of sources, triangulation of techniques, and member checks. Students are asked to confirm the results of the researcher's interpretation to ensure the compatibility of the meaning with their experience.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Participant Profiles and Findings Overview

The students who became participants came from the Social and Natural Sciences majors with an age range of 15–17 years. The majority of students stated that the Independent Curriculum provides a more varied and interactive learning experience than the previous curriculum. In general, the results of the study show that the Independent Curriculum has a positive impact on students' motivation to learn.

Analysis of Field Findings (Interview Results)

From the results of in-depth interviews, four main themes were obtained that reflect changes in students' motivation to learn:

Table 1. Interview Themes Regarding the Influence of the Independent Curriculum on Learning Motivation

Yes	Tema Utama	Narrative Description of Field Findings
1	Freedom and Responsibility	Students feel freer to choose project topics and learning methods that suit their interests, so that a sense of responsibility arises for their learning outcomes. Students feel more excited because they have this freedom.
2	Collaboration and Confidence	Project-based learning encourages group cooperation and active communication; Students feel more confident to express their opinions. The learning environment becomes more collaborative and fun.
3	Contextual Relevance	Students claim to be more motivated because project assignments are often associated with real situations, such as the school environment or the surrounding community.
4	Intrinsic Satisfaction	Success in a project gives personal satisfaction, not just value, but pride because of the real work.

Theoretical Review of Learning Motivation

The results of the study show that there is a compatibility with the theory of learning motivation used as a theoretical basis:

Maslow's Theory

Students' basic needs such as a sense of security, appreciation, and self-actualization are met through a positive learning experience. When students are given the opportunity to be creative and express their opinions without pressure, they feel satisfaction and pride in their achievements.

McClelland theory

The Independent Curriculum provides a great opportunity to meet the need for achievement because the learning project is competitive and challenging. Students feel strong personal achievements, while the need for affiliation is met through group collaboration.

Theories by Ryan and Ryan

Student autonomy meets the needs of autonomy, feedback builds competence, and group activities strengthen relatedness. These three factors encourage the emergence of stronger intrinsic motivations.

Conceptual Visualization of Research Findings

Here is a dynamic flow of how the implementation of this policy works psychologically on students:

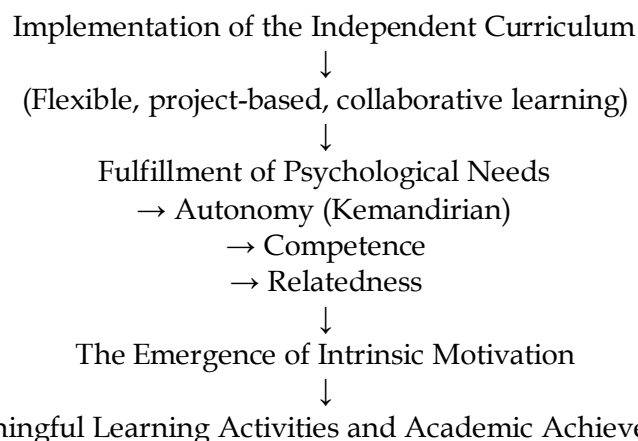


Figure 2. Dynamic Scheme of the Influence of the Independent Curriculum on Learning Motivation

This scheme illustrates that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum builds a learning ecosystem that meets the three aspects of students' psychological needs as described in the theory of self-determination. The result is an increase in intrinsic motivation, which then affects engagement and learning achievement.

Discussion and Synthesis of Findings

These findings are in line with the results of research by Mawarni (2023) and Puspita (2024) which affirm that freedom in learning can increase interest and enthusiasm for learning. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, students become active subjects who build knowledge through direct experience.

The form of teachers' appreciation for the learning process has a big impact; When teachers value the process, not just the results, students become more enthusiastic about trying new things. This shows that motivation that grows is not just due to external motivations, but because of personal satisfaction. Overall, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum builds a learning ecosystem that meets three aspects of students' psychological needs – autonomy, competence, and social connectedness – which then affects engagement and learning achievement.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has a significant positive influence on increasing student learning motivation at SMA Negeri 1 Pematang Siantar. This curriculum fosters a sense of responsibility and independence by providing a space of freedom for students to determine their learning direction and strategies. Through materials relevant to daily life and collaborative projects, students feel more actively involved and have a higher sense of confidence. These findings reinforce the motivational theories of Maslow, McClelland, and Deci and Ryan, that motivation grows when the needs for autonomy, competence, and connectedness are met. In summary, the Independent Curriculum serves as a strategic forum in building students' intrinsic motivation through freedom of learning, collaborative environments, and meaningful learning experiences.

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