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Problems in Implementing Independent Curriculum in Lower Elementary School Classes and Efforts to Overcome Them: A Literature Study

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ABSTRACT
The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in lower grades (I-III) of elementary schools still faces various systemic and multidimensional challenges. This study aims to identify problems in implementing the Independent Curriculum in lower grades and formulate strategic efforts that can be undertaken by stakeholders. The research method used was a literature study with thematic content analysis of journal articles published between 2022 and 2025. The results indicate that problems in implementing the Independent Curriculum occur at three main stages. At the planning stage, teachers experience difficulties in developing Learning Objective Flows (ATP), designing learning modules according to students' developmental stages, and determining essential materials. At the implementation stage, obstacles encountered include limited understanding of curriculum philosophy, low teacher ICT competency, gaps in facilities, challenges in managing heterogeneous classes, and the dilemma of automatic grade promotion. At the evaluation stage, problems include confusion in implementing assessments, the impact of the elimination of the Minimum Competency Standards (KKM), and the administrative burden of academic reports and P5. Based on these findings, five strategic recommendations were formulated, namely redesigning teacher training based on a community of practitioners, revitalizing the KKG, equalizing digital infrastructure, strengthening instructional leadership, and developing specific implementation guidelines for lower elementary school classes.
Keywords : lower classes; Independent Curriculum; implementation problems; elementary schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is the core of the entire national education process. It is not merely an administrative document, but rather a reflection of the nation's ideals regarding the human

beings it seeks to shape through the educational process. Throughout the history of Indonesian education, the curriculum has undergone significant changes, starting with the 1947 Curriculum, the 1975 Curriculum, the 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK), the 2006 School-Level Curriculum (KTSP), the 2013 Curriculum, and most recently, the Merdeka Curriculum. While each change carries positive intentions to improve the quality of education, it also presents significant implementation challenges (Sumarmi, 2023). This is where studying curriculum implementation issues becomes crucial, because without a thorough understanding of the root causes, any improvement efforts will be partial.

The Independent Curriculum emerged in a very specific context due to the learning crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For more than two years, millions of Indonesian students have been forced to study from home with various limitations, resulting in a phenomenon widely known as learning loss, namely the loss of learning outcomes that students should have achieved (Priyadi et al., 2024). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology responded to this emergency by designing a more flexible curriculum centered on restoring students' basic literacy and numeracy skills. The independent learning philosophy promoted by Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Nadiem Anwar Makarim has become the foundation for a major transformation in the educational approach in Indonesia, from a previously uniform, material-intensive, and exam-oriented approach to contextual and differentiated learning that prioritizes holistic student growth and development.

The Independent Curriculum was officially implemented in stages starting in the 2022/2023 academic year. Within this curriculum framework, several fundamental structural innovations include replacing Basic Competencies (KD) with more flexible Learning Outcomes (CP), replacing the syllabus with a customizable Learning Objectives Flow (ATP), strengthening character through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project across subjects (P5), and the systematic implementation of diagnostic assessments at the beginning of learning. Furthermore, the Independent Curriculum explicitly encourages differentiated learning that accommodates the diverse needs, learning styles, and abilities of students within a single class (Maharani & Helsa, 2025). All of these innovations bring new challenges and burdens for teachers who must implement them in real classrooms.

However, as with any curriculum reform, the gap between policy design and the reality of implementation is often wide. Numerous studies conducted since the initial implementation of the Independent Curriculum have shown that teachers, as the spearheads of implementation, face numerous systemic barriers. These barriers stem not only from within the teachers themselves (competence, experience, and mental readiness to face change), but also from external factors such as limited facilities, frequently changing policies, minimal ongoing mentoring, and increasing administrative pressure (Rusmiati et al., 2023; Solikhah & Wahyuni, 2023). This situation leaves many teachers feeling trapped between the demands of the new curriculum and their limited capacity.

This situation becomes even more complex and requires special attention when the context is lower grades, namely grades I, II, and III of elementary school. Lower grades

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represent the most critical phase in a child's academic development. During this phase, children build the foundation of reading, writing, and arithmetic skills that will form the basis for the entire subsequent learning process. The characteristics of students aged 6-9, who are still very concrete in their thinking, rely heavily on intrinsic motivation and a fun learning environment, and are still transitioning from play to formal learning, demand a different pedagogical approach than higher grades (Maharani & Helsa, 2025). When lower grade teachers must simultaneously understand a new curriculum framework, develop innovative teaching materials, manage heterogeneous classes, and conduct complex assessments, the burden becomes disproportionate.

Unfortunately, scientific studies specifically addressing the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum, focusing on the context of lower elementary school grades, are still very limited. Most existing research addresses this issue in general terms without differentiating grade-level characteristics. However, targeted solutions must be built on contextual and specific understanding. This gap presents an important academic gap that needs to be addressed. Based on this background, this study formulates two research questions as follows: (1) What are the challenges and problems faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum in lower elementary school grades (grades I, II, and III), particularly in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of learning? (2) What strategic efforts can be undertaken by various educational stakeholders to address the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum in lower elementary school grades effectively and sustainably? Based on this background, this literature review was conducted with two main objectives: first, to systematically identify and classify the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum in lower elementary school grades through a synthesis of various scientific literature; and second, to formulate strategic steps that can be taken by various stakeholders to address these challenges. Therefore, this article is expected to make a significant contribution to the development of basic education policies and practices in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Philosophical Foundation and Architecture of Independent Curriculum Policy

The Independent Curriculum did not emerge from a policy vacuum. It is a continuation of the School Mover program launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2021 as a transformation program for educational units based on intensive coaching and mentoring. Philosophically, the Independent Curriculum is rooted in the tradition of progressive educational thought, which views students as active subjects, not passive objects, in the learning process. The principle of independent learning, at the heart of this curriculum, is based on the belief that every child possesses unique potential that should be facilitated, not standardized (Sumarmi, 2023). Within this framework, teachers are not merely implementers of a rigid curriculum, but also designers of adaptive and creative learning experiences.

Structurally, the Independent Curriculum brings several fundamental changes. First, more flexible Learning Outcomes (KPU) replace the prescriptive Basic Competencies (KD). KPU are formulated in phase units rather than grade levels, giving teachers more room to adapt learning outcomes to their students' learning pace. Second, the Learning Objective Flow (ATP) replaces the previously more normative syllabus. The ATP is designed as a logical guide that shows the sequence of learning objectives within a phase, while still providing teachers with the flexibility to develop it according to their respective school contexts. Third, the teaching modules that replace KD-based lesson plans are designed to be more comprehensive and include an integrated assessment component. Fourth, the time allocation for fifth-grade elementary school students is set proportionally as a share of total learning hours, ensuring that character building is not merely decorative but an integral part of students' learning experiences (Sumarsih et al., 2022).

From a policy perspective, the Independent Curriculum is also accompanied by a supportive environment. The Independent Teaching Platform (PMM) is designed as a digital teaching tool that allows teachers to access, modify, and share teaching modules collaboratively. Furthermore, the parallel Teacher Mover program aims to produce teachers capable of becoming agents of change in their respective educational units. While this supportive environment is well-designed, its reach and effectiveness vary widely across regions, particularly in areas with limited digital infrastructure (Hariani et al., 2023).

History and Dynamics of Curriculum Change in Indonesia

To better understand the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum, it is necessary to examine the historical context of curriculum change in Indonesia. Since independence, Indonesia has experienced numerous curriculum changes, with increasing frequency since the reform era. Each curriculum change always places a significant adaptation burden on teachers, especially those who have taught for a long time and have established relatively stable teaching patterns. This phenomenon has given rise to what is known as "curriculum fatigue," *a* condition in which teachers feel apathetic and unenthusiastic about curriculum change due to repeated experience showing that each new curriculum comes with great promise but lacks concrete implementation support (Sumarsih et al., 2022).

The 2013 Curriculum, the immediate predecessor of the Independent Curriculum, has left a number of problematic records. It has been criticized for being too dense, too thematically integrative, and having a very high assessment burden, which takes teachers' time away from their primary task of teaching. When the Independent Curriculum arrived, offering simplification and flexibility, some teachers welcomed it with optimism, but others reacted with skepticism based on historical experience that every curriculum change ultimately adds new burdens under a different name (Priyadi et al., 2024). These perceptions represent psychological challenges that cannot be ignored in implementation strategies.

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Teachers are the Key to the Successful Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

In any educational environment, teachers occupy an irreplaceable position. They are not only implementers of curriculum policies, but also interpreters, adapters, and even co-creators, actively interpreting curriculum demands and transforming them into meaningful learning experiences for students. Mayangsari et al. (2024) emphasize that the quality of Independent Curriculum implementation is largely determined by the extent to which teachers simultaneously possess three capacities: knowledge of curriculum principles and structures, skills in designing and implementing innovative learning, and an open and reflective attitude toward change.

Unfortunately, the distribution of these three capacities among Indonesian teachers remains highly uneven. Surveys and various field studies indicate that teachers who have participated in the Teacher Leader program or have served in leader schools tend to have a much better understanding and preparedness than teachers in regular schools, especially in remote areas (Rahmadhani et al., 2023). This gap has the potential to widen the gap in education quality, which is actually one of the main problems the Independent Curriculum itself aims to address—a policy irony that requires serious attention.

The shift in the teacher's role from teacher-centered to facilitator of learning, as required by the Independent Curriculum, is not an overnight change. Research on teacher professional development consistently shows that changing teaching paradigms requires significant time, consistent mentoring, and a psychologically safe environment for teachers to experiment and make mistakes (Rusmiati et al., 2023). Without a supportive environment for this change, most teachers tend to revert to old, more familiar teaching patterns, even under the guise of a new curriculum.

Characteristics of Elementary School-Age Children's Development and Their Pedagogical Implications

Early grades (I-III) are the most critical phase in the formation of a child's learning identity. Psychologically, children aged 6-9 years are in the concrete operational stage according to Piaget's cognitive development theory, where they still need direct experience and concrete objects to understand abstract concepts. This means that a learning approach that is too theoretical or abstraction-based will be very inappropriate for their cognitive development. Maharani & Helsa (2025) emphasize that the implementation of P5 and differentiated learning in early grades requires high pedagogical creativity from teachers, because an approach that is successful in grades IV or V may not be applicable in grade I.

In addition to the cognitive dimension, the social and emotional development of children in the lower grades also has special characteristics that need to be considered. Children at this age greatly need a sense of security, trust, and consistency in their learning environment. The transition from preschool to formal education, known in educational psychology as the school readiness transition, is a crucial moment for the long-term development of children's learning dispositions. When lower grade teachers face the

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pressure of implementing a high curriculum without adequate guidance, the risk is not only a decline in the quality of learning but also a disruption of children's first learning experiences, which should be enjoyable and build confidence (Maharani & Helsa, 2025).

METHOD

This research uses a literature review approach. This method was chosen because of its ability to comprehensively integrate findings from various relevant studies, resulting in a more robust understanding of a phenomenon than a single study could (Hariani et al., 2023). A literature review is also particularly appropriate when the research objective is to map and synthesize existing knowledge, rather than to collect new empirical data.

The research procedure was conducted in three stages. The first stage was literature identification and search, which was conducted by searching for scientific journal articles. The second stage was literature selection based on inclusion criteria, including (1) national journals published between 2022 and 2025 (2) focusing on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the elementary school level (3) substantively discussing teacher issues or challenges. The third stage was analysis, which began with a thorough and careful reading of each article to understand the context, objectives, methods, and findings produced by each researcher. After that, the researcher identified and recorded the problems mentioned explicitly and implicitly in each article, then grouped them. In the data synthesis stage, the researcher did not simply summarize each article separately, but rather constructed a narrative that united various perspectives into a complete and coherent understanding. Conclusions were drawn based on the strength and consistency of patterns found within and between the sources reviewed, so that the final results of this study were interpretive but still grounded in evidence written in the literature.

FINDINGS

Analysis of primary literature sources yielded a comprehensive, multi-layered problem map. These findings are organized around three stages of curriculum implementation: planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Problems in the Curriculum Implementation Planning Stage

The planning stage is the foundation for the entire curriculum implementation process. If this foundation is weak, the entire learning process built upon it will easily collapse. Findings from various literature consistently indicate that lower-grade teachers face serious obstacles at this stage, stemming from three main, interrelated issues.

First, the difficulty in developing a Learning Objective Flow (ATP). Solikhah & Wahyuni (2023) specifically found that the ATP developed by most teachers participating in their study still contained substantive weaknesses. The formulated learning objectives did not truly reflect students' actual needs, the sequence of materials was illogical, and there was little connection between one learning objective and the next. This occurred because

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the ATP in the Independent Curriculum used a completely different framework than the syllabus in the 2013 Curriculum. Teachers were required to understand the concept of phases in Learning Outcomes, where grades I and II fall into the same Phase A, and then reduce this to a logical and measurable flow of objectives. This process requires a deep conceptual understanding of the curriculum, which many teachers lack.

Second, the complexity of developing learning modules. Mayangsari et al. (2024) explained that the change in learning design from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum created multiple layers of confusion. Learning modules in the Independent Curriculum have much more complex components than previous learning plans, encompassing student profiles (including diagnostic assessment results), CP-based learning objectives, necessary tools and materials, differentiated learning activities, and assessments aligned with objectives. In lower grades, this complexity is compounded by the need to integrate elements of play and physical activity into the learning design, given the developmental characteristics of children aged 6-8 years who still greatly require movement and exploration (Maharani & Helsa, 2025). Many teachers end up downloading learning modules available on the Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) Platform without modifying them to suit their context, resulting in modules that do not truly reflect the needs of the students in their classes.

Third, confusion in selecting and compiling learning materials. The flexibility of CP, which is an advantage of the Independent Curriculum, turns out to have a dark side for some teachers. When there are no specific material limitations per class, teachers feel confused in determining the scale of priorities. Mayangsari et al. (2024) found that some teachers tend to teach all the material in the textbook because they are not sure which material is most important according to CP, so that the student learning load is not much different from the previous curriculum. In the lower grades, Maharani & Helsa (2025) added that the inability of teachers to determine the right material directly impacts the quality of P5 design, because the P5 theme chosen must be contextual and meaningful to the daily lives of lower elementary school-aged children.

Problems in the Implementation Stage

Problems at the implementation stage encompass five key interrelated dimensions that cumulatively create extremely challenging conditions for lower-grade teachers. These dimensions need to be analyzed separately but also understood in their interconnectedness.

Limitations of Conceptual Understanding of Curriculum

The most fundamental obstacle to implementing the Independent Curriculum is teachers' lack of understanding of the curriculum's philosophical essence and operational framework. Rusmiati et al. (2023) noted that many schools implemented the Independent Curriculum procedurally, following the required format and administration without

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significantly changing the pedagogical approach used. As a result, classroom learning remained very similar to the 2013 Curriculum era: teacher-centered, lecture-based, and heavily reliant on textbooks. Mayangsari et al. (2024) corroborated these findings by reporting that most teachers participated in Independent Curriculum training through the Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) platform independently and asynchronously, but felt that this training mode was insufficient to foster true implementation competency. Training based on short videos and online quizzes failed to bridge the gap between theoretical understanding and the practice of pedagogical transformation.

Low Competence in Information and Communication Technology

The Independent Curriculum is structurally highly dependent on the digital environment, including the PMM as a repository of teaching tools, various innovative assessment applications, and technology-based interactive learning media. Priyadi et al. (2024) found that inadequate mastery of learning technology prevents most teachers from optimally utilizing available digital resources. Teachers tend to be trapped in the use of the most familiar technologies, such as WhatsApp groups for communication with parents, without being able to utilize more substantial platforms to support learning. Maharani & Helsa (2025) added that the gap in ICT competency between teachers in the same school can even create fragmentation in the quality of learning, where classes led by technology-literate teachers receive very different learning experiences than classes led by teachers who are not tech-savvy.

Limited Facilities, Infrastructure, and Resources

Hariani et al. (2023) identified limited infrastructure as the most difficult structural barrier for individual teachers to overcome. These deficiencies included a limited library collection of books relevant to the Independent Curriculum, a lack of dedicated space for fifth-grade activities, limited technological devices such as laptops and projectors, and unstable internet connectivity. In schools located in remote or island areas, this problem is even more acute, with the availability of even basic stationery and textbooks remaining a problem (Maharani & Helsa, 2025). This situation creates clear inequalities: in well-resourced urban schools, the Independent Curriculum can be implemented relatively well, while in marginalized schools, limited facilities create insurmountable barriers. Ironically, the Independent Curriculum is most needed in the most disadvantaged schools, yet it is also the most difficult to implement there.

Managing Heterogeneous Classes with a Differentiated Approach

One of the most challenging demands of the Independent Curriculum is the implementation of differentiated learning, an approach that recognizes that students within a class differ in their learning readiness, interests, and learning styles, and therefore require different learning strategies. In lower grades, this challenge is particularly evident.

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For example, in the same class, a teacher might encounter students who are already fluent readers and those who are not yet literate, or students who can count to hundreds and those who still struggle with single-digit number concepts. Maharani & Helsa (2025) specifically highlight that designing differentiated learning for lower grades requires a high level of creativity and flexibility from teachers, especially when the number of students per class is quite large. The cognitive and administrative burdens borne by teachers in managing differentiation often exceed the capacity of each teacher.

Furthermore, the automatic grade promotion policy that accompanies the Independent Curriculum also adds to the complexity of managing heterogeneous classrooms. Mayangsari et al. (2024) noted that teachers feel caught in a dilemma: on the one hand, they must comply with a policy that requires all students to advance to the next grade regardless of their competency attainment. On the other hand, they know that students who have not yet mastered basic competencies in lower grades will fall further behind in the next grade if they do not receive appropriate intervention. This dilemma is not only an administrative issue but also an ethical one, placing teachers in a highly uncomfortable position.

Excessive Administrative Burden

One of the paradoxes of the Independent Curriculum is that, despite claims to simplify teachers' administrative burdens, the reality on the ground actually shows a significant increase in documentation. Hariani et al. (2023) and Priyadi et al. (2024) note that teachers are required to document every stage of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment; prepare student portfolios; document the P5 process and products; and complete various reporting forms in the PMM. This administrative burden takes teachers' time and energy away from their primary task of designing and implementing meaningful learning. This situation creates an irony where teachers are more busy managing the Independent Curriculum than actually realizing the essence of the 'independence' it promises.

Problems in the Evaluation Stage

Evaluation or assessment in the Independent Curriculum has undergone the most fundamental changes compared to other aspects. These changes are designed to make assessments more meaningful, holistic, and truly reflective of student development. However, its implementation in practice faces several significant obstacles, particularly in lower-grade contexts.

The removal of the Minimum Completion Criteria (KKM) was the most widely discussed and impactful change. For teachers who had for years used the KKM as an objective benchmark for determining student learning completion, this removal created a significant reference gap. Priyadi et al. (2024) found that without the KKM, teachers lacked clear guidance on when a student was considered to have "sufficiently" mastered a competency to move on to the next material. Hariani et al. (2023) added that this confusion

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became most evident when teachers had to fill out student report cards, as they did not know what standards to use as assessment references.

The three-stage assessment system—diagnostic, formative, and summative—recommended by the Independent Curriculum is essentially a sound pedagogical approach. However, its implementation requires a thorough understanding of the objectives and technicalities of each type of assessment. Solikhah & Wahyuni (2023) found that many teachers still struggle to operationally differentiate between initial diagnostic assessments (which aim to map students' learning profiles before learning begins), formative assessments (which aim to monitor progress during the learning process), and summative assessments (which aim to measure achievement at the end of a specific period). As a result, assessments are often conducted mechanically, following the required format without truly serving as information to improve learning.

The dual burden of assessment reports, academic reports, and P5 reports also poses significant obstacles. Hariani et al. (2023) noted that the process of preparing both reports simultaneously requires significant time, particularly because the P5 report requires a descriptive narrative about the development of each student's Pancasila Student Profile dimensions, which must be written individually. In lower grades, where teachers are the classroom teacher responsible for almost all subjects as well as P5 coordination, this burden becomes especially disproportionate. Mayangsari et al. (2024) added that confusion in choosing the appropriate assessment format for project-based learning presentations, portfolios, observations, products, or tests further complicates the evaluation process for untrained teachers.

DISCUSSION

Problems as a System in the Relationship Between Stages and Root Causes

Reading the overall findings of the eight literature reviews, one important conclusion immediately becomes clear: the challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum in lower grades are not a collection of isolated problems. Rather, these problems form an interconnected system, where weaknesses at one stage directly exacerbate challenges at the next. Teachers who fail to develop a sound Implementation Plan (ATP) during the planning stage will experience confusion in organizing learning experiences during the implementation stage. Poorly structured implementation, in turn, will result in invalid and unreliable assessment data for instructional improvement. Therefore, viewing these problems in isolation and seeking solutions to each one in isolation will not lead to meaningful and sustainable improvement.

When examined to their root causes, most of these problems can be traced to the same source: a mismatch between the pace of change demanded by curriculum policies and the capacity of the education system to keep pace with those changes. Rusmiati et al. (2023) rightly note that the gradual but relatively short transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum did not provide sufficient space for teachers, especially

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those in remote areas, to truly internalize the required changes. Sumarmi (2023) reinforces this analysis by emphasizing that the good intentions of a curriculum do not automatically materialize in the classroom without a solid supporting environment, namely consistent and unchanging policies, equitable and adequate resources, and intensive and ongoing mentoring.

The lower grade context adds a unique layer of complexity. As analyzed by Maharani & Helsa (2025), the demands of the Independent Curriculum designed for elementary education generally do not always align with the developmental characteristics of lower grade students, who require a more playful, concrete approach and greater consideration of children's social-emotional readiness. When lower grade teachers are forced to implement a curriculum framework that lacks adequate contextual guidance for their level, improvisations occur that are not always effective and, in some cases, cause unnecessary stress for students.

Deepening Regional Disparities

One of the most concerning findings from this literature review is the indication that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has the potential to exacerbate the gap in education quality between regions, rather than narrow it. In large cities with good internet access, schools with teachers skilled in ICT, and proactive principals, the Independent Curriculum can be implemented with great creativity and relatively satisfactory results. However, in remote, island, or border areas with limited infrastructure, teachers who have not received adequate training, and schools with very few resources, the Independent Curriculum becomes an additional burden that further exacerbates already difficult conditions (Maharani & Helsa, 2025; Hariani et al., 2023). Rahmadhani et al. (2023) firmly state that without serious and affirmative government intervention to ensure equitable implementation capacity, the Independent Curriculum risks becoming an instrument that widens the gap in educational inequality.

This gap exists not only between regions, but also between schools within the same region, and even between teachers within the same school. Teachers who are active in online professional communities, regularly attend webinars, and have access to extensive networks tend to have significantly better understanding and preparedness than teachers who are professionally isolated (Mayangsari et al., 2024). This situation emphasizes that access to quality professional development must be treated as a teacher right, not simply an optional perk.

Strategic Efforts Needed in Evidence-Based Recommendations

Based on a comprehensive synthesis of the various findings in the reviewed literature, at least five strategic efforts have been consistently identified as relevant and potentially effective solutions. These five efforts are not hierarchical, but rather complementary and need to be implemented simultaneously.

First, redesign teacher training programs toward a contextual, multilevel, and sustainable model. Solikhah & Wahyuni (2023) and Mayangsari et al. (2024) consistently emphasize that one-off online teacher training is incapable of generating real pedagogical change. Training should be designed using models proven effective in teacher professional development, such as learning studies or professional learning communities, which emphasize collaborative planning cycles, real-life classroom observations, and data-driven reflection. Furthermore, training must be contextualized, meaning that training materials and approaches for first-grade teachers differ from those for fourth-grade teachers, and training for teachers in Papua differs from that for teachers in Java. Priyadi et al. (2024) also emphasize that PMM should be seen as a tool, not a substitute for intensive face-to-face mentoring.

Second, reinvigorate Teacher Working Groups (KKGs) as meaningful professional learning environments. Rusmiati et al. (2023) and Mayangsari et al. (2024) found that active and structured KKGs are one of the most effective and affordable mechanisms to help teachers collaboratively address implementation challenges. In KKGs, teachers can share teaching modules, discuss assessment challenges, conduct peer observations, and collectively develop solutions to problems. However, the effectiveness of KKGs depends heavily on the quality of facilitation and the availability of competent resource persons. The government needs to allocate resources to ensure that KKGs run regularly and substantively, not simply as administrative meetings.

Third, affirmative action to ensure equal access to facilities, infrastructure, and digital resources. Hariani et al. (2023) and Maharani & Helsa (2025) firmly state that without equal access to learning support facilities, all efforts to improve teacher capacity will be ineffective. Procurement of textbooks and teaching materials aligned with the Independent Curriculum, provision of technological devices, and improvement of internet connectivity in remote schools must be prioritized as urgent infrastructure investments. The School Operational Assistance (BOS) Fund and various other assistance schemes need to be directed in a more measured manner to ensure that infrastructure gaps do not continue to hamper the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Fourth, strengthen the principal's instructional leadership and synergy within the educational environment. Rahmadhani et al. (2023) and Hariani et al. (2023) emphasize that the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum cannot solely depend on the capacity of individual teachers. Principals need to play an active role as instructional leaders who go beyond managing school administration to actively engage in teacher capacity development and foster a culture of learning within the educational unit. Furthermore, parental involvement through planned and meaningful outreach activities is crucial to ensure that changes in learning approaches do not create confusion or resistance at home. Synergy between schools, families, communities, and local governments is the foundation of an educational ecosystem that is truly conducive to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

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Fifth, develop implementation guidelines specific to the lower grade context. One of the most glaring gaps in this study is the lack of implementation guidelines specifically designed for grades I, II, and III of elementary school. Current guidelines are still general and do not adequately consider the developmental characteristics of children aged 6-9 years. Maharani & Helsa (2025) and Sumarmi (2023) both recommend that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, in collaboration with early childhood education experts, curriculum experts, and experienced lower grade teachers, develop teaching module guidelines, examples of age-appropriate assessments, strategies for managing lower grade 5 elementary school students, and contextual assessment rubrics. Without these specific guidelines, lower grade teachers will continue to improvise in ways that are not always on target.

Implications for Future Research

This literature review also identified several important research gaps that need to be filled. First, primary data-driven empirical research on the experiences of lower-grade teachers in remote areas is urgently needed, given that most existing research focuses on urban or semi-urban areas. Second, longitudinal research that follows teachers from the beginning of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum over the next few years would be invaluable for understanding the development of teacher competencies in adapting to the new curriculum. Third, research using a participatory action research approach, in which teachers are actively involved not only as research subjects but also as agents of change developing solutions to their own problems, has the potential to produce much more applicable and useful knowledge. Fourth, comparative studies between regions that have successfully implemented the Independent Curriculum and regions that have faced significant obstacles could provide valuable insights into the most critical factors.

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CONCLUSION

This literature review has developed a comprehensive, multi-layered, and systemic map of the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum in lower elementary school classrooms. Based on a synthesis of selected national literature sources, three main conclusions can be drawn. First, the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum in lower elementary school classrooms are multidimensional and encompass three simultaneous implementation stages. At the planning stage, teachers face serious difficulties in developing ATP (Analytical Learning Outcomes), designing contextual teaching modules, and selecting truly essential materials in accordance with the Independent Curriculum. At the implementation stage, five dimensions of obstacles—limited conceptual understanding, low ICT competency, limited infrastructure, challenges in managing heterogeneous classes, and excessive administrative burdens—cumulatively create highly challenging conditions for teachers. At the evaluation stage, the elimination of the Minimum Competency Standards (KKM), the complexity of the three-stage assessment system, and the dual burden of assessment reports add significant pressure. Second, the lower grade context adds a unique layer of complexity that is often overlooked in implementation policies. The developmental characteristics of students aged 6-9, which require different pedagogical approaches, wide ability gaps within a single grade, and the lack of specific implementation guidelines for this level, mean that lower grade teachers face disproportionate challenges compared to teachers in upper grades. Third, addressing these challenges requires a holistic, systemic, and synergistic approach from all stakeholders. The five identified strategies include redesigning teacher training, revitalizing Teacher Working Groups (KKG), equitable infrastructure, strengthening instructional leadership and environmental synergy, and developing contextual guidance for lower grades. These strategies must be implemented simultaneously and reinforce each other. No single strategy is effective in isolation. More broadly, the study's findings emphasize that the success of curriculum reform is determined not only by the quality of curriculum design, but by the commitment and consistency of the entire education system, from policymakers at the central level to teachers in the classroom, in realizing the spirit and objectives of the curriculum in the realities of everyday learning. The Independent Curriculum has significant potential to improve the quality and relevance of basic education in Indonesia. However, this potential will only be realized when every component of the educational environment works synergistically and supports each other, not when teachers are left to struggle alone in front of their classes with a new curriculum that they do not fully understand and that is not fully supported by the surrounding system.

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RECOGNITION OF THE USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

In the process of compiling this manuscript, the author used an artificial intelligence (AI) tool, namely Claude (Anthropic), for limited purposes as described below.

1. Edit and improve the language.

AI was used to help check sentence coherence, consistent use of scientific terminology, and smooth flow between paragraphs to make the writing easier for readers to understand. However, all ideas, arguments, and scientific statements in this manuscript are entirely the author's own and were not automatically generated by AI.

2. Check grammar and spelling.

AI is used as a spell checker tool to detect grammatical, punctuation, and spelling errors based on good and correct Indonesian language rules in accordance with the General Guidelines for Indonesian Spelling (PUEBI).

3. Improved readability.

AI is used to suggest variations in sentence structure to avoid repetition of monotonous sentence patterns, so that the manuscript becomes more comfortable to read without changing the substance or meaning intended by the author.

4. Organize the writing structure.

AI is used as an aid in compiling the initial writing framework and ensuring consistency of structure between sections of the article in accordance with the Widyagogik journal writing guidelines.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT :
The author declares no conflict of interest.