

Exploring the Potential of Independent Curriculum Implementation for Madrasah: An In-depth SWOT Analysis.

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Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Al-Ishlah Integrated Ibtidaiyah (MIT) Madrasah in Gorontalo City. Through a SWOT analysis, the study aims to identify the curriculum's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. This research is essential as it can provide valuable insights for schools and madrasas to enhance their implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The study utilized a qualitative approach, with key informants and documents serving as sources of primary and secondary data, respectively. The collected data was analyzed through descriptive qualitative analysis to describe the Independent Curriculum's implementation based on the SWOT aspect of the Madrasah. The findings revealed that the successful implementation of the curriculum is interdependent on human and non-human resources, partnerships, cooperation, and the competitiveness of MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo City.

Keywords: Implementation of independent curriculum, SWOT, madrasas, policies

1. Introduction

Over the past few years, the education system in Indonesia has undergone significant changes as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. To aid in the learning recovery process, the Ministry of Education and Culture has introduced the Independent Learning Curriculum (1), which has garnered support from the Ministry of Religion, responsible for overseeing madrasas across all levels. However, it is worth noting that the Ministry of Religion's directive for implementing the Independent Curriculum in madrasas (Keputusan Menteri Agama No. 347 of 2022) only provides a framework for adaptation based on the unique circumstances of each madrasa (2). As such, while the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in madrasas generally aligns with the policies set by the Ministry of Education and Culture, madrasas have the flexibility to creatively and innovatively tailor the curriculum to meet their specific needs (2).

The curriculum that has been implemented by the government emphasizes the freedom of both educators and students in the learning process (3,4). From the perspective of students, this curriculum is designed to foster creativity, innovation, and character (5,6) by allowing them to explore different concepts and strengthen their competencies. The Merdeka Curriculum facilitates this process (7). On the other hand, from the perspective of educators, this curriculum provides them with the freedom to adapt learning tools to meet the needs of their students and their interests and to fulfill their competencies (7-9). Although the Ministry of Education and Culture facilitated the learning tools at the initial stage of implementation, each educational unit, including madrasas, independently developed them. Unlike previous policies, the current implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not mandatory. It is being gradually implemented and adapted to the readiness of schools and madrasas at all levels of education.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum within the madrasah environment is a testament to the institution's willingness to adapt to dynamic changes while still maintaining a strong focus on religiosity (2,10). Isom (2023) suggests that this approach to curriculum implementation leads to more effective education and learning management, which ultimately helps the madrasah achieve its vision, mission, and goals (2). What is more, the Al-Ishlah Integrated Ibtidaiyah Madrasah (MIT) in Gorontalo City has been granted the freedom to be creative and innovative in developing curriculum operations, which is in line with current conditions (10,11). Research studies have shown that this madrasah excels at managing its curriculum and learning. Prior to implementing the Independent Curriculum, the madrasah had already combined the national curriculum (2013

Curriculum) with the foundation curriculum based on the Integrated Islamic School Network Curriculum (JSIT).

It is worth noting that the Al-Ishlah Integrated Ibtidaiyah Madrasah (MIT) in Gorontalo City has adopted a unique blend of curricula - the 2013 Curriculum, the JSIT Curriculum, and the Merdeka Curriculum. While the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in madrasas is still ongoing, this study aims to examine the readiness of MIT Al-Ishlah in Gorontalo City to implement the Independent Curriculum, using SWOT analysis as a guide to assess and enhance the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MIT Al-Ishlah and other madrasas seeking to adopt this curriculum independently.

Method

The present study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing a case study research design. It was conducted at the Al-Ishlah Integrated Islamic Madrasah (MIT) in Gorontalo City, with a specific focus on examining the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum from a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) perspective. Primary data was obtained from the madrasah leaders as key informants, in addition to interviews with the madrasah teachers. Data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation studies, then analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques. Credibility and data confirmation tests were performed to establish the validity of this research.

Result

Implementasi Kebijakan Kurikulum Merdeka di MIT Al-Ishlah Kota Gorontalo

MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo is an Islamic school that combines the Madrasah Curriculum from the Integrated Islamic School Network (JSIT) and the National Curriculum. The school is gradually implementing the Independent Curriculum policy, with the foundation as the central party. The policy is only implemented after a decision from the foundation and after being reviewed by a special curriculum modification team from the Internal Quality Assurance Institute (LPMI). The Al-Ishlah Gorontalo Foundation is committed to adapting to government policies and supporting their implementation without compromising the Ministry of Religion's policies.

The Madrasah units under JSIT are approaching the implementation of the Independent Curriculum thoughtfully and proactively. They are taking steps to prepare themselves for the changes ahead by focusing on provision, strengthening, and evaluation. It is encouraging to see that the Madrasahs are being adaptable and responsive in incorporating the Independent Curriculum into their existing curriculum. Additionally, the fact that they are prioritizing evaluation from the perspectives of both teachers and students rather than just from an administrative standpoint demonstrates their commitment to ensuring that the curriculum is compelling and engaging for all parties involved.

It is noteworthy that the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religion are working in harmony to implement the Al-Ishlah Student Profile into the Independent Curriculum for Madrasahs. This collaboration is a positive indication of the ministries' shared goal to enhance the education system and offer a comprehensive education to students. The Al-Ishlah Student Profile, detailed in Table 1, marks a significant stride towards realizing this objective.

Table 1. Al-Ishlah Student Profile

AL-ISHLAH STUDENT PROFILE	7 SKL SIT	P5/PPRA
QUR'ANI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Maintain unwavering faith (1) - Performing worship in the correct manner (2) - Being able to read, memorize and comprehend the Al-Quran proficiently (3) 	<p>P5 Believing in God, showing devotion, and having good character are important qualities to uphold.</p>

AL-ISHLAH STUDENT PROFILE	7 SKL SIT	P5/PPRA
		PPRA - Civilized (Taaddub) - Harmony (Tawazun)
LEADERSHIP	- Exhibiting mature and honorable characteristics (3) - Developing self-discipline and the ability to exercise self-control (4) - Memiliki wawasan yang luas (6)	P5 - Believing in God, showing devotion, and having good character are important qualities to uphold. - Global diversity - Worked together - Independent - Critical reasoning - Creative PPRA - Civilized (Taaddub) - Exemplary (Qudwah) - Citizenship and Nationality (Muwatanah) - Taking the Middle Way (Tawassut) - Balanced (Tawazun) - Fair and consistent (I'tidal) - Equality (Musawah) - Council (Shura) - Tolerance (Tasamuh) - Dynamic and innovative (Tathawur wa Ibtikar)
PROFESSIONAL	Have life skills (7)	P5 - Independent - Critical reasoning - Creative PPRA - Harmony (Tawazun) - Fair and consistent (I'tidal) - Equality (Musawah) - Council (Shura) - Dynamic and innovative (Tathawur wa Ibtikar)

Based on Table 1, the Independent Curriculum is commonly referred to as P5 (Kemendikbud) and is recognized as Rahmatan Lil'alamin in the Ministry of Religion. P5 comprises six dimensions, which include (1) Faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble character, (2) Global diversity, (3) Working together, (4) Independence, (5) Critical reasoning, and (6) Creativity. On the other hand, Rahmatan Lil'alamin consists of ten dimensions, namely (1) Civilization (Discipline), (2) Exemplary (Kudwah), (3) Citizenship and Nationality (Mutawanah), (4) Taking the middle path (Fourth), (5) Balanced (Tawazun), (6) Fair and consistent (I'tidal), (7) Equality (Musawah), (8) Deliberation (Shura), (9) Tolerance (Tasamuh), and (10) Dynamic and innovative (Tathawwur wa Ibtikar).

Al-Ishlah Integrated Ibtidaiyah Madrasah has updated its curriculum to include the Merdeka and JSIT Curriculums. Within the Al-Ishlah Student Profile, there are three distinct characteristics and seven Graduate Competency Standard (SKL) points that are tailored to fit the P5 and PPRA dimensions. For example, to achieve the Qur'ani characteristic, students must complete 3 SKL SIT, which involves demonstrating a strong aqidah, accurate worship, and proficient understanding of the Qur'an. These SKL points align with P5's emphasis on faith, devotion to God Almighty, and having a noble character, as well as PPRA's focus on civility (Discipline) and harmony (Tawazun).

It appears that MIT AL-Ishlah is in the initial stages of implementing its curriculum, with Phase A and Phase B being introduced in lower and higher grades, respectively. The Independent Curriculum is customized to match each student's characteristics, potential, and requirements, with implementation adjusted accordingly. It is worth noting that while the curriculum is established by the Government, its execution in madrasas follows the Ministry of Religion's guidelines, ensuring that the curriculum is tailored to the potential and distinctiveness of each madrasah. Before the curriculum is rolled out across all levels, madrasas must concentrate on developing and preparing teachers based on evaluation results.

It is worth noting that the Ministry of Religion's Independent Curriculum implementation guide grants madrasas the autonomy to design and tailor their curricula to suit their distinct characteristics, requirements, vision, and mission. Given this flexibility, numerous schools have organized diverse training programs, workshops, and internal initiatives, including teacher development programs, to equip themselves for implementing the Independent Curriculum. Since implementing this curriculum depends on each madrasa's willingness, they must emphasize such programs to ensure seamless execution.

Strengths Aspect

According to the informants, there are several strengths to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MIT Al-Ishlah in Gorontalo City. These include:

1. Quick adaptation of human resources: Schools provide training and workshops related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum before the new school year begins. This facilitates the speed of adaptation of human resources.
2. Supporting the capacity of the Al-Ishlah Foundation: The supporting capacity of the foundation is reflected in the study of the curriculum before it is implemented in all madrasah units under its care, including MIT Al-Ishlah.
3. Special Team for changing the curriculum: A special team from the Internal Quality Assurance Institute is in place to change the curriculum.
4. Collaboration with other institutions, work partners, and/or students' parents: The school has established collaborations with institutions and committees such as the students' parents. This is reflected in the madrasa programs, which involve committees for implementing the Independent Curriculum, some of which are Karisma (Al-Ishlah Family Reciting the Koran), parents teaching, the movement parents reciting the Koran, and so on. These collaborations are intended to strengthen the Al-Ishlah Student Profile.

Weakness Aspects

As reported by an informant, MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo City encounters two challenges in executing the Independent Curriculum: teacher preparedness and textbook availability. Insufficient teacher numbers are a worry for teacher preparedness, as some have been reassigned as Al-Qur'an instructors to fortify the distinctive features of MIT Al-Ishlah under the Independent Curriculum. Additionally, the adequacy of textbooks pertains to the required quantity that needs to be procured. In response to this predicament, teachers have devised their teaching modules.

Opportunities Aspects

Based on the interview results, MIT Al-Ishlah Madrasah has identified internal and external opportunities for implementing the Independent Curriculum. Internal opportunities are related to JSIT's role in facilitating madrasahs to implement the Independent Curriculum, making it easier for them to make curricular adjustments. Additionally, continuing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum into the following phases, specifically in classes II, III, V, and VI, is another internal opportunity, provided the initial stages in class I and class IV are successful.

On the other hand, external opportunities are related to the ease of partnerships madrasahs can establish with institutions and/or parents of students. Such partnerships positively impact the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which is realized through madrasah programs with the involvement of partners.

Threats Aspects

Based on the information provided, it appears that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MIT Al-Ishlah is facing challenges due to the presence of several private Islamic schools that prioritize the Quran. In order to ensure that Al-Ishlah students have a strong Quranic foundation, teachers may need to adjust their teaching methods and prioritize Quranic teachings. While this could be viewed as a positive development from a public perspective, it is crucial to consider the competition posed by private Islamic schools. Moving forward, consider parents' feedback alongside other improvement opportunities.

Discussion

Strengths Aspect

The strength of MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo City in implementing the Independent Curriculum is highlighted in the following manner. Firstly, the institution boasts a highly adaptable HR. This adaptability extends beyond just teaching materials and learning tools and encompasses differentiated learning and teaching materials as well. Moreover, teachers must also possess proficiency in digital literacy and be able to adeptly navigate the use of technology (12-14). Given that a lack of technological knowledge and skills can hinder the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, madrasahs and other educational institutions must prioritize adapting their teachers to the use of technology in learning (15-17).

The Independent Curriculum's effectiveness hinges on educators' ability to adapt swiftly. To ensure the successful implementation of this autonomous program, Madrasahs must take an active role in providing their teachers with ample training and workshops (13,18). MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo City's commendable effort to offer supplementary training and workshops is a promising step in proactively identifying and addressing potential hurdles (19). Studies indicate insufficient teacher comprehension and training with the Independent Curriculum can impede its execution (16,20-23).

Based on the provided details, it is clear that teacher readiness is a critical element that can present obstacles when implementing the Independent Curriculum. Ardianti and Amalia (2022) emphasize the importance of enhancing teacher readiness to adapt to new approaches (24), considering their role as agents of change in the classroom (25). To achieve this, the school should offer both material and non-material support (25). Furthermore, the school principal can play a pivotal role in motivating teachers to participate in curriculum training, attending frequent meetings, discussions, and overseeing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (24, 26, 27).

The crucial role of collaboration in implementing the Independent Curriculum is worth noting. Schools are encouraged to design exceptional and creative programs involving students, teachers, principals, supervisors, and parents (28,29). The objective is not only to implement student profiles but also to increase participation. In this regard, MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo City has developed programs that engage parents, including the Parent Teaching Movement (Gentar), Karisma (Al-Ishlah Family Reciting the Koran), and Inspiration Class. These programs are inventive and unique and promote active parental involvement.

The collaboration between schools and parents fosters teamwork and harmonizes the various educational initiatives. This is especially vital for madrasah programs, which emphasize the family setting in accomplishing their objectives. MIT Al-Ishlah has implemented the Karisma program to address this need, which seeks to cultivate the recitation of the Quran not just within the madrasah but also within the family context. Participating in this program empowers parents to take an active role in bolstering their children's education and reinforcing the principles instilled in the madrasah.

It cannot be overstated how crucial it is for parents to participate in school programs to bolster the P5 Program and attain the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum (30). At MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo City, parental involvement fortifies the P5 Program and bolsters PPRA and the Al-Ishlah Student Profile - the distinguishing features of this madrasa. By working together, parents can actively contribute to their children's education and reinforce the values taught at the madrasa.

Collaborating with the community, especially parents, can significantly enhance the effectiveness of madrasahs and facilitate the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (31). According to Hidayati (2023), strengthening these partnerships is a crucial strategy towards this objective (32). Emphasizing trust, mutual respect, and the sharing of responsibilities between schools and parents is essential for the success of this collaboration. Furthermore, the leadership's role in nurturing this partnership should also be a key consideration (33-36).

Weakness Aspects

Based on research, it has been identified that MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo City faces two challenges when it comes to implementing the Independent Curriculum. These challenges pertain to human resources and textbook readiness. The Independent Curriculum is still in its early stages and often lacks the necessary preparation in terms of human resources (37). This lack of preparation can be divided into two categories: a reluctance to adopt a new mindset and insufficient staffing (37-41). The reluctance to embrace a new mindset significantly impacts teachers, who are essential to the learning process (42). Changing or repairing this mindset takes time (43).

If the teacher's mindset remains unchanged, it can lead to a lack of motivation or effort when implementing the curriculum, potentially failing (43-45). This notion is supported by Kaya & Yuksel's (2022) research, which reveals that as the level of change in a teacher's mindset increases, so does the level of effort they put in (44). Therefore, by altering their mindset, teachers can improve student interactions and minimize the risk of curriculum implementation failures (45).

The situation at MIT Al-Ishlah in Gorontalo City differed from others. The focus was on the quantity of human resources rather than their preparedness. To enhance the Al-Ishlah Student profile, the madrasa must provide adequate human resources to support their pupils. This required reallocating Quran teachers who initially taught various subjects to focus on teaching the Quran instead. By aligning teachers' academic qualifications with the subjects, they taught, the madrasa hoped to strengthen Al-Ishlah's characteristics and improve education quality (46,47). These adjustments also served as preventive measures to avoid obstacles or problems in implementing the independent curriculum due to teacher competence (48).

The second area of concern relates to the availability of textbooks. To support learning, textbooks are commonly used by teachers and students in particular subject areas. However, they must be compatible with teaching tools and easy to understand for school users (49). When implementing an independent curriculum, the selection and use of textbooks and teaching materials are tailored to the school's and student's needs (50). As a result, teachers have the flexibility to use government-approved textbooks or create their own. While the Ministry has made it easier to obtain independent curriculum books, some schools may still require teachers to develop their materials. For instance, this was the case at MIT Al-Ishlah in Gorontalo City, where a lack of textbooks prompted teachers to create their following regulations.

To successfully implement an independent curriculum, teachers must comprehensively understand the primary role that textbooks and teaching modules play in achieving learning objectives. A thorough grasp of the curriculum's structure and unique characteristics is also essential (50,51). It is recommended that teachers themselves are adequately prepared to ensure that textbooks and teaching modules are well-prepared and

effective. This can be achieved through various activities such as participating in seminars, training on teaching module preparation, and conducting research on teaching material development. With these measures in place, teachers can confidently execute effective independent curriculums that achieve the desired learning outcomes (50,52).

Opportunities Aspects

The term "chance aspect" in this context refers to external factors that affect a school's ability to implement an independent curriculum. At MIT Al-Ishlah, these opportunities are identified by looking at both internal and external conditions. This discussion will focus only on external opportunities, specifically partnerships the school has established with other institutions. This topic is closely related to the discussion of strengths at MIT Al-Ishlah in Gorontalo City. However, in the discussion of the strengths, the emphasis is on parents as partners in implementing the curriculum, while in the opportunity discussion, the focus is on partnerships with institutions beyond the parents, although former students may be involved in these partnerships.

To enhance the quality and effectiveness of schools, it is crucial to prioritize the establishment of partnerships in school management (53,54). According to Winarti et al.'s (2021) research, partnerships have become integral to educational activities (55). Susila & Tyas (2022) further elaborate that school management related to partnerships involves three stages: planning (culminating in a partnership memorandum of understanding), implementation (including managing the partnership organizational structure and executing the partnership program), and evaluation (providing feedback on the achievements of partnership activities for development) (56). The essence of partnerships between schools and organizations lies in mutual benefits for both parties (57,58), fostering trust, a drive for progress, and a culture of continual improvement (59).

Despite the potential benefits outlined in literature (54, 60, 61), the implementation of partnerships in Islamic-based schools has yet to reach its full potential. This is particularly urgent given the limited studies conducted in this area (55). However, MIT Al-Ishlah in Gorontalo City stands out as an example of a private Islamic school actively increasing its partnerships with government and private organizations. This aligns with the recommended approach of establishing partnerships with various institutions, including government bodies, professional organizations, corporate entities, non-profits, and the business/industrial world.

Partnerships with MIT Al-Ishlah in Gorontalo City are established through mandatory and incidental programs organized by the madrasah during each stage of implementation (56). However, the partnership program's success also hinges on the madrasah's capacity (62). Therefore, when creating a partnership program, the madrasah must consider the holistic impact on the school ecosystem (62) in addition to the immediate benefits.

The collaboration between madrasas is a strategic effort to enhance learning outcomes (63, 64), ultimately improving the quality of education provided. Nevertheless, according to Sastramayani (2021), the significance of partnerships goes beyond just enhancing school quality (65). This implies that schools are intertwined with society and the professional world as they are consumers of educational services; hence, the focus should not solely be on implementing strategies but also on attaining technical competence in executing them (62, 65, 66).

Threat Aspects

MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo City faces a significant challenge from private Islamic schools that prioritize the Qur'an. While this poses a threat to the institution's competitiveness (67), it is worth noting that the public still shows interest in sending their children to MIT Al-Ishlah. Competition is an inevitable aspect of any organization, including educational institutions, as it speaks to the organization's existence. Education administrators must possess a competitive mindset when carrying out their institutional duties, considering student needs, competitive tendencies, and environmental trends (68). In other words, madrasas need to develop strategies to boost their competitiveness (69).

The distinct qualities of a madrasa, such as its emphasis on the Qur'an, are indicative of its approach to implementing an independent curriculum. As detailed earlier, the role of the madrasa head as an organizational leader is crucial in developing strategies to enhance competitiveness (69-72). Madrasas have adopted a competitive

approach by focusing on reinforcing the Al-Ishlah Student Profile, particularly the Qur'anic profile, which serves as a distinctive characteristic and a strategic advantage for the institution (73-74).

Along with improving quality (73, 75, 76) to enhance the distinctiveness of madrasas, branding strategies (77-80) are also necessary to boost the competitiveness of MIT Al-Ishlah Gorontalo City. This is particularly important as other private schools may share similar characteristics with madrasas. According to research by Anisa (2022), determining the unique features of an Islamic-based school (81) is a critical aspect of branding, as it enables the school to stand out and distinguish itself from other madrasas (82). It is essential to note that branding efforts must be continuous, consistent, and accompanied by quality evaluations and improvements (83).

Conclusion

This study explores the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MIT Al-Ishlah in Gorontalo City, focusing on the SWOT analysis. The findings suggest that the identified SWOT aspects are closely linked to the availability of human and non-human resources and partnerships and competitiveness of the madrasah. In addition to thoroughly describing the SWOT aspects, this research also reveals the strategies adopted by madrasas about each aspect. Future researchers should consider examining strategies by analyzing SWOT aspects through the matrix.

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