

Assistance to School Principals in Designing and Managing Independent Curriculum Programs in Elementary Schools

Sofyan Mustoip^{1*}, Muhammad Iqbal Al Ghozali², Delfia Ikhlasiah Rahman³

Universitas Islam Bunga Bangsa Cirebon, Indonesia^{1,2}, Akdeniz University, Turkey³

Corresponding Author: sofyanmustoip@gmail.com¹

Abstract: The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools requires principals to be active, visionary leaders in designing and managing programs aligned with its principles. This study evaluated the effectiveness of assistance provided to principals in understanding and implementing the curriculum to improve educational quality and holistic student development. A participatory approach was used to support 10 elementary school principals in Kabupaten Sleman through mentoring sessions. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews to identify challenges, document analysis to assess current practices, and direct observations during sessions. This approach revealed the challenges principals faced in curriculum design and management. Collaborative sessions encouraged dialogue and sharing of strategies. Pre- and post-intervention assessments showed that many principals initially struggled with understanding the curriculum, especially integrating Profil Pelajar Pancasila and designing Project-Based Learning (PBL) activities. Post-assistance, significant improvements were noted in strategic planning, curriculum implementation, and outcome evaluation. The study highlighted the importance of continuous training and collaborative forums for principals. The findings confirm that such assistance effectively equips principals with essential skills, suggesting that sustained professional development is vital for the curriculum's success and positive impacts on student learning and character. Future research could focus on programs for teachers to support curriculum integration at the classroom level.

Keyword: Assistance; School Principals; Independent Curriculum; Elementary Schools.

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Introduction

The Independent Curriculum emphasizes a student-centered approach, integrating project-based learning and character development through Profil Pelajar Pancasila. This curriculum aims to foster critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration while grounding students in national values. School principals, as transformative leaders, are tasked with translating these ideals into effective management strategies to ensure alignment with curriculum goals (Anderson et al., 2021; Smith & Brown, 2022; Johnson & Lee, 2021; White & Carter, 2020).

School principals are pivotal in ensuring that curriculum reforms are successfully implemented at the grassroots level. They must act as change agents, capable of designing strategic plans, managing resources, and evaluating outcomes (Brown & White, 2022; Nguyen & Zhou, 2023; Haris & Patel, 2021). However, principals often lack adequate training to navigate the complexities of curriculum

management in dynamic educational environments (Smith et al., 2023; Khan & Ahmed, 2020; Williams & Clarke, 2022).

Despite the ambitious vision of the Independent Curriculum, a gap persists between policy and practice. Many schools' principals struggle to integrate Profil Pelajar Pancasila into day-to-day teaching due to limited training, inadequate resources, and resistance to change among stakeholders (Chung et al., 2023; Martin & Bell, 2024). This highlights the critical need for targeted assistance programs to bridge these gaps and empower school leaders.

Studies indicate that one major barrier to curriculum implementation is the lack of clear guidelines for school leaders (Garcia et al., 2022). Additionally, principals often face difficulties in designing Project-Based Learning (PBL) frameworks and integrating them effectively into existing systems (Johnson & Miller, 2023; Davis & Zhang, 2023). Without proper guidance, these challenges may hinder the curriculum's overall success.

Previous assistance programs have focused on building leadership capacity through workshops and mentorships. For instance, Jones et al. (2021) found that collaborative forums significantly improved principals' ability to manage curriculum transitions. However, these programs often lacked a sustained follow-up mechanism, which limited their long-term impact.

Unlike traditional training programs, holistic assistance models address not only technical aspects but also strategic planning and adaptive leadership. These models, as discussed by Singh and Patel (2022), empower principals to navigate challenges and foster a culture of continuous improvement in schools.

This assistance program introduces an innovative approach by combining hands-on workshops with ongoing mentorship tailored to the unique needs of each school. By focusing on practical skills like strategic planning, PBL design, and stakeholder collaboration, this program aims to provide comprehensive support for principals (Taylor et al., 2023; Davis & Zhang, 2023; Turner & Wells, 2020).

The program is expected to enhance principals' competence in managing the Independent Curriculum, thereby improving educational quality and student outcomes. Specifically, it will enable schools to align with the curriculum's vision of fostering holistic development (Green & Adams, 2023).

This initiative contributes to the growing body of data on curriculum management by offering actionable insights into effective leadership practices. It also addresses a significant gap by providing empirical evidence on the impact of sustained assistance for school principals (Huang et al., 2024; Anderson & Patel, 2021).

this study underscores the importance of empowering school principals to lead curriculum reform. By addressing existing gaps and building on prior research, this program seeks to establish a replicable model for enhancing curriculum management in elementary schools.

Methods

A participatory approach is used in this service to support school principals in Sleman Regency through guidance sessions. The main goal of this approach is to build collaborative relationships that encourage the development of school leaders' capacity in curriculum design. This process prioritizes active dialogue and sharing strategies, allowing school principals to learn from each other and improve their understanding of curriculum management (Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020). This approach also facilitates identification of specific challenges faced by principals, as well as hands-on, practice-based learning focused on professional development.

The number of participants in this research included 10 school principals from various elementary schools in Cirebon Regency. Data collection techniques involve semi-structured interviews aimed at identifying challenges faced by school principals in curriculum design, as well as document analysis to assess the practices that have been implemented in each school. Direct observation during guidance sessions is also used to observe interactions and implementation of the strategies taught (Clayton, Sanzo, & Myran, 2013).

This data collection technique is aimed at finding out the difficulties experienced by school principals in understanding the curriculum, especially in integrating the Pancasila Student Profile and designing Project Based Learning (PBL) activities. Data analysis was carried out by comparing the results before and after the intervention, showing significant improvements in strategic planning, curriculum implementation, and evaluation of results. These results reflect the importance of collaborative learning and ongoing support for school principals (Boerema, 2021).

Guidance sessions are conducted using a format that supports participatory learning, where school principals are encouraged to share their challenges and the solutions they have tried. This group discussion enriched the participants' experience by providing different insights regarding curriculum management. This guidance also uses case studies and simulations, which allow school principals to test their ideas in a controlled environment (Gettys, Martin, & Bigby, 2020).

The importance of strengthening the role of school principals in curriculum design and management is not only for academic effectiveness but also for improving student character. A deeper understanding of the curriculum allows school principals to direct the implementation of character education values in their schools. Based on the results of post-intervention evaluations, many school principals reported increased ability to design learning activities that emphasize the development of 21st century skills, such as creativity and collaboration (Duncan & Stock, 2020).

This strengthening through mentoring can provide sustainable benefits. School principals are more confident in developing curriculum programs that suit their school's needs. This creates a learning environment that is not only adaptive but also facilitates holistic, values-based learning (Anderson & Wasonga, 2017).

Result and Discussion

Result

The service team carries out a series of activities aimed at supporting school principals in designing and managing independent curriculum programs. This service involves direct observation, interviews with school principals and teachers, as well as documentation of various plans and reports related to curriculum management. Through this method, a comprehensive picture is obtained regarding the readiness and ability of school principals to implement an independent curriculum.

Initial observation results show that the majority of school principals have a good understanding of the importance of a curriculum that is integrated with student needs, but face challenges in designing effective and sustainable programs. Several school principals involved in this service program admitted that they were often limited by resources, including time and existing teaching staff. With mentoring, they showed improvement in identifying specific curriculum needs for students in their schools.

Interviews with school principals revealed that this service support helped them develop clearer strategies in designing curricula that were relevant and in line with school characteristics. School principals feel more confident in making decisions about curriculum development, integrating local values, and optimizing creative learning methods. The new knowledge gained through training sessions and consultations with service experts enables them to design a curriculum that not only

meets educational standards but also creates a comprehensive learning experience. This can be seen in the following image:



Figure 1. Interview with School Principals in Sleman Regency

Documentation of the results of the service notes that the training and guidance provided intensively contributed to increasing the school principal's ability to manage aspects of the curriculum, starting from determining teaching materials to evaluating program success. For example, principals are trained to use tools of needs analysis and educational program evaluation, which enable them to adapt curricula to students' academic and social needs.

In this service process, it was also found that collaboration between school principals and teachers was an important factor in the successful implementation of the curriculum. Group discussion activities and professional development sessions are held to facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices. This helps build a spirit of teamwork and improve understanding between the various parties involved in education management.

Through this service, it can be seen that there has been an increase in the ability of school principals to design a curriculum that is more adaptive and responsive to developments in educational needs. Principals who take part in this program report that they are better able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the curriculum they administer, and make necessary adjustments to improve the quality of teaching.

Observational data shows that schools involved in this program have experienced an increase in the use of more innovative learning methods, such as project-based learning and collaborative approaches. This approach not only makes students more active in the learning process but also supports the development of better student character. With an independent curriculum, students are given the

opportunity to explore their interests and talents, which positively influences motivation and learning outcomes.

Based on the results of interviews, several school principals revealed that this service program encouraged them to involve the school community more actively. This approach has proven effective in creating a more inclusive and participatory learning environment. In this way, schools that adopt this program can create an educational atmosphere that is not only oriented towards academics, but also towards building strong character.

Final evaluation of the documentation and feedback indicated that the success of this service program depended on a continued commitment to the professional development of principals. Counseling about the importance of continuous training, updating teaching materials, and adapting teaching methods are key in ensuring the continuity of a quality curriculum. Therefore, the results of this service underscore the importance of long-term investment in principal development programs to create a sustainable positive impact for students.

Overall, the results of this service confirm that intensive assistance involving observation, interviews and documentation is able to improve the skills of school principals in designing and managing an independent curriculum. The impact is clearly visible in improving the quality of learning and developing better student character. This program emphasizes the importance of continuing education for educators to ensure that the curriculum developed can meet students' needs and strengthen their character in the future.

Discussion

The service program carried out aims to support school principals in designing and managing an independent curriculum that can adapt to student needs. Through a series of activities including direct observation, interviews, and analysis of planning documentation and curriculum management reports, the service team succeeded in collecting data that provides a comprehensive picture of the school principal's readiness to implement the curriculum. Initial observation results indicate that many school principals understand the importance of a curriculum that is integrated with student needs, but they face challenges in designing effective and sustainable programs.

Interviews with school principals show that the assistance provided facilitates the development of more structured strategies in designing curricula that are relevant to the characteristics of each school. School principals said they felt more confident in making decisions related to curriculum development, including the integration of local values and the selection of creative learning methods. This is in line with previous research which shows that educational leaders who receive intensive training tend to

be better able to adapt the curriculum to meet students' specific needs (Tahir & Rahman, 2021).

Documentation from this program also notes that intensive training and guidance helps school principals improve their abilities in managing aspects of the curriculum, from planning teaching materials to evaluating program effectiveness. The use of needs analysis and program evaluation tools trained by the service team allows school principals to adapt the curriculum to students' academic and social needs. Kumar et al. (2022) also underlined that developing the competence of school principals in designing the curriculum is directly related to improving student learning outcomes.

During the service, collaboration between school principals and teachers emerged as an important factor in successful curriculum implementation. Group discussion activities and professional development sessions help facilitate the exchange of ideas and best practices, which in turn strengthens teamwork in the school environment. This supports the findings of Azad et al. (2020), who emphasize that strengthening the relationship between school principals and teachers can improve the overall quality of education.

Observation data shows that schools participating in this program are starting to adopt innovative learning methods such as project-based learning and collaborative approaches. This method makes students more active in the learning process, which supports the development of positive character and learning motivation. This is in line with findings by Sari and Wijayanto (2023) who stated that the active learning approach is very influential in increasing student engagement.

Interview results revealed that support in the form of training and consultation encouraged school principals to involve the school community more actively in curriculum development. This approach has proven effective in creating an inclusive and participatory learning environment, where students not only receive academic learning but also experiences that support character formation. This is consistent with Barus et al. (2021) which highlights the importance of community participation in the education process.

Evaluation of documentation and feedback shows that the success of this service program is highly dependent on ongoing commitment to the professional development of school principals. Education regarding the importance of updating teaching materials, continuous training, and adapting teaching methods is the key to ensuring the continuity of a quality curriculum. Ramli (2022) also emphasized that continuous professional development can strengthen school principals' abilities in designing adaptive and responsive curricula.

Overall, the results of this service program confirm that intensive mentoring involving observation, interviews and documentation can improve school principals' skills in designing and managing an independent curriculum. This program not only

focuses on improving the quality of learning but also supports the development of better student character. These results are in line with the study by Hasan et al. (2023), which shows that an adaptively designed curriculum can encourage students' academic and character growth.

It is important to note that these service results demonstrate that long-term investment in principal development programs is necessary to ensure sustainable impact. This program underscores the need to provide ongoing training and support school principals to develop curricula that meet students' needs and strengthen their character.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the Assistance to School Principals in Designing and Managing Independent Curriculum Programs in Elementary Schools service shows that success in designing and managing independent curriculum programs is very dependent on the effective leadership role of the school principal. School principals who have the ability to facilitate comprehensive curriculum integration can create a learning environment that is more adaptive and responsive to student needs.

However, to strengthen the results of this service, future research should focus on developing training programs for teachers. This training aims to support curriculum integration at class level, so that each teaching can optimally reflect the curriculum vision that has been designed. With this training program, teachers will be better prepared to implement the curriculum effectively, integrate various subjects, and implement a project-based approach or multidisciplinary approach that supports holistic learning.

Through this approach, it is hoped that schools can further develop students' potential, improve the quality of education, and create learning spaces that support the development of 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity and collaborative abilities. It is hoped that the emphasis on strengthening teacher capacity will deepen their understanding of the material, improve classroom management, and maximize student involvement in the learning process.

In the future, collaboration between school principals, educational supervisors, and curriculum development teams is very important in building synergies that facilitate the achievement of broader educational goals.

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