Strategy for Improving the Competence of Islamic Religious Education Teachers through Community-Based Independent Curriculum

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ABSTRACT
This study aims to evaluate the strategy for improving the competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers through the implementation of the Community-based Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan. This study was designed to understand how educational management strategies can optimize teacher competence and involve the community in the educational process. The research method used was qualitative with a case study approach. The subjects of the study consisted of the principal, PAI teachers, students, and representatives of the school community. Data collection techniques included observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. The data analysis technique used was thematic analysis, which involved identifying themes and patterns in the data to understand how educational management strategies affect teacher competence and community involvement. The results showed that the implementation of the Community-based Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan had improved the competence of PAI teachers through flexibility in planning and implementing learning. Active community involvement also contributed positively to the educational process, increasing the relevance of teaching materials, and enriching students' learning experiences. However, there are challenges such as the lack of in-depth training for teachers and the need for additional support. This study recommends the need for ongoing training for teachers, ongoing support from school management, and strengthening community involvement to ensure the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the future.

Keywords: Educational strategy, Teacher Competence, Independent Curriculum, Curriculum implementation, Pedagogical Competence

INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation for the progress of a nation (Winangun, 2017) . In this increasingly complex era of globalization, education not only functions as a means of transferring knowledge, but also as an important tool for shaping the character and moral values of students. In the context of Indonesia, where the majority of the population is Muslim, Islamic religious education (PAI) has a strategic role in instilling Islamic values, which are the basis for the formation of the character of the younger generation (Mudlori & Basit, 2019) . The challenges of globalization, such as the rapid flow of information and the influence of foreign cultures, require education to be adaptive and responsive (Hidayat, 2015) . Therefore, the educational curriculum must be designed in such a way as to face these challenges, while still maintaining relevant and useful local values.

Islamic Religious Education as one of the compulsory subjects in schools has a great responsibility in instilling religious values, ethics, and morality in students (Hayatunnisa Hayatunnisa et al., 2024) . However, it is undeniable that in practice, Islamic Religious Education is often faced with various quite complex challenges. These challenges include differences in students' socio-cultural backgrounds, gaps in religious understanding, and rapid changes in social dynamics due to the development of technology and information (Oktavia & Khotimah, 2023) . Therefore, an effective and innovative educational strategy is needed to ensure that Islamic Religious Education can play an optimal role in shaping students' character. In facing the above challenges, the role of Islamic Religious Education teachers is very vital. Teachers not only act as transmitters of subject matter, but also as role models and moral guides for students (Muhajir

et al., 2022) . Teacher competence, which includes pedagogical, professional, personality, and social abilities, is a key factor in the success of religious education in schools. High competence allows teachers to design and implement effective learning processes, so that the goals of religious education can be achieved properly (Hanafi et al., 2024) . The reality in the field shows that there are still many Islamic Religious Education teachers who do not fully have adequate competence (Rahmadhani & Istikomah, 2023) . Several studies have shown that there is still a gap between the ideal expected competence and the actual abilities of teachers in the field. Lack of relevant training, limited resources, and minimal support from educational management are some of the factors that cause low teacher competence (Heryahya et al., 2022) . This condition certainly affects the quality of religious education provided to students.

The dynamic development of the curriculum also requires Islamic Religious Education teachers to continue to develop their competencies (Annisa Alfath et al., 2022) . One of the curriculum innovations currently being implemented in Indonesia is the Independent Curriculum. This curriculum provides more freedom to schools and teachers in designing and implementing learning that is in accordance with the needs and characteristics of students (Harianto & Wibowo, 2023) . In this context, Islamic Religious Education teachers are required to be able to adapt to changes in the curriculum, develop creative and innovative learning methods, and integrate religious values in every aspect of learning.

The Independent Curriculum is a response to the need to create a more flexible, innovative, and student-centered learning process. One of the approaches emphasized in the Independent Curriculum is community-based learning (Hattarina et al., 2022) . This approach emphasizes the importance of active involvement of all parties, including teachers, students, parents, and the community, in the education process. Community-based learning allows students to learn from real environments, understand the social and cultural contexts in which they live, and apply the knowledge they gain in their daily lives. The implementation of the community-based Independent Curriculum in schools, including MTsN 1 Pasuruan, has brought significant changes in the way learning is carried out. Teachers no longer only act as transmitters of material, but also as facilitators who help students develop a deep understanding through direct experience and interaction with the surrounding environment (Setiawan & Syifa'ul Fuadiyah Ahla, 2022) . This community-based learning also encourages collaboration between schools and communities, so that the education process becomes more relevant and contextual.

The implementation of the community-based Independent Curriculum is not without challenges, especially Islamic Religious Education teachers, who are faced with the challenge of developing new competencies needed to carry out this approach. They need to have the ability to design contextual learning, involve students in community activities, and integrate religious values in every learning activity (Fatimatuzzahrah Fatimatuzzahrah et al., 2023) . In addition, support from school management and active community involvement are also important factors in the successful implementation of this curriculum. Educational management has a strategic role in ensuring the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum, especially in the context of improving teacher competency. Good management can create a supportive work environment, provide the necessary facilities and resources, and provide ongoing training and supervision for teachers (Haetami et al., 2023) . In the context of MTsN 1 Pasuruan, educational management needs to formulate effective strategies to improve the competency of Islamic Religious Education teachers, so that they are able to implement the community-based Independent Curriculum well.

One approach that can be taken by educational management is through continuous teacher professional development. Training programs that are relevant to teacher needs, structured supervision, and comprehensive evaluation can help teachers improve their competence (Lase & Murniarti, 2024) . In addition, educational management also needs to encourage collaboration between teachers, both internally within schools and with the wider community. This collaboration can enrich teachers' insights and experiences, so that they are better prepared to face existing challenges. Previous research has shown that effective educational management has a positive impact on improving teacher competence (Sholeh, 2023) . For example, research by Sutrisno & Zuhri (2019) shows that structured and continuous training programs can improve teachers' pedagogical and professional competence (Sutrisno & Zuhri, 2019) . Meanwhile, research by Ahmad et al (2023) found that supervision that is carried out regularly and based on the real needs of teachers can improve the quality of learning in the classroom (Ahmad et al., 2023) . These findings indicate that good educational management is the key to success in improving teacher competence.

MTsN 1 Pasuruan is one of the madrasas that has begun implementing the community-based Independent Curriculum. As an educational institution committed to producing a generation with noble character, MTsN 1 Pasuruan sees the Independent Curriculum as an opportunity to improve the quality of religious education provided to students. The implementation of the community-based Independent

Curriculum in this madrasa is supported by proactive educational management in encouraging teachers to continue to develop their competencies (Ibnu, 2023) . The implementation of the community-based Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan is not free from various challenges. Some Islamic Religious Education teachers still find it difficult to adapt to this new learning approach. These challenges include limitations in terms of resources, lack of relevant training, and minimal support from the community. In addition, adapting to technology as part of the Independent Curriculum is also a challenge for some teachers.

To overcome these challenges, the education management at MTsN 1 Pasuruan has designed several strategies. One of them is to increase the intensity and quality of training for Islamic Religious Education teachers, especially those related to the implementation of community-based learning. In addition, management also seeks to establish closer cooperation with local communities, so that learning carried out in schools can be more contextual and relevant to students' daily lives. Various studies have been conducted to examine the effectiveness of education management strategies in improving teacher competence, especially in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Research by Fadhli & Yoenanto (2021) shows that training based on teachers' real needs can significantly improve teachers' pedagogical and professional competence (Fadhli & Yoenanto, 2021) . Another study by Jannati et al (2023) found that active community involvement in the learning process can increase teacher motivation and competence in teaching (Jannati et al., 2023) . Research by Shandi (2023) highlights the importance of supervision that is carried out regularly and based on teacher needs (Shandi, 2023) . The results of this study indicate that supervision carried out with a collaborative approach can help teachers identify and overcome problems faced in the learning process. These studies provide an overview of how good educational management can contribute to improving teacher competence, especially in the context of the Independent Curriculum.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that improving the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers through the community-based Independent Curriculum is an urgent need. The Independent Curriculum provides opportunities for schools and teachers to be more innovative in the learning process, but also demands higher competence from teachers. In this context, educational management plays a very important role in supporting the development of teacher competence. This study aims to examine educational management strategies that can improve the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, with a focus on the implementation of the community-based Independent Curriculum. The results of this study are expected to provide a significant contribution to the development of religious education in Indonesia, as well as provide practical guidance for schools in improving the quality of education by strengthening teacher competence.

METHOD
Research Approach
This study uses a qualitative approach, which aims to understand the phenomenon in depth in a particular context (Creswell, 2009) . This approach was chosen because this study focuses on exploring meaning, understanding experiences, and analyzing social processes in the context of improving the competence of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers through the implementation of the Community-based Merdeka Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan.

Research Design
The research design used in this study is a case study (Stake, 1995) . The case study was chosen because it allows researchers to explore educational management strategies in depth in a specific and limited context, namely at MTsN 1 Pasuruan. This case study will examine in detail various aspects related to the implementation of the community-based Merdeka Curriculum, as well as its impact on the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers.

Location and Subject of Research
This research was conducted at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, a madrasah that has implemented a community-based Merdeka Curriculum. The subjects of this study included the principal, PAI teachers, students, and representatives from the school community involved in implementing the curriculum. The selection of these subjects was based on their roles and contributions in the implementation and evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum at this madrasa.

Data collection techniques
Data collection in this study was carried out using the following techniques (Creswell, 2007) :

- In-depth Interview: In-depth interviews were conducted with school principals, Islamic Religious Education teachers, and community representatives to gain a deeper understanding of the educational management strategies implemented, their experiences in implementing the Independent Curriculum, and its impact on improving teacher competency . Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner, allowing researchers to explore relevant topics more broadly.
- Participatory Observation: Observation is conducted to directly observe the learning process and community activities related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This observation aims to see how the strategies applied in educational management affect teacher competence in real situations.
- Documentation: Documentation techniques are used to collect data from various documents related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, such as the school curriculum, lesson implementation plans (RPP), program implementation reports, and evaluation records. These documents will provide additional context and assist researchers in understanding the process and results of curriculum implementation.

Data Analysis Techniques
Data analysis in this qualitative research uses the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006) . The data analysis steps that will be carried out include:
- Transcription and Data Organization: Data obtained from interviews and observations will be transcribed and organized systematically. Each interview will be identified and grouped based on emerging themes.
- Data Coding: Organized data will be coded to identify key themes related to teacher competency improvement strategies, implementation of the Independent Curriculum, and the role of the community. These codes will then be analyzed to find patterns and relationships between themes.
- Organizing Themes and Categories: The codes that have been identified will be grouped into broader themes and categories, which will then serve as the basis for analyzing and interpreting the data.
- Interpretation and Conclusion: After the themes and categories are compiled, the researcher will interpret the data to understand how educational management strategies contribute to improving the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers in the context of the Community-based Independent Curriculum. This interpretation will be compared with relevant theories and findings from previous studies.

Validity of Data
To ensure the validity of the data in this study, researchers used several techniques, namely (Maxfield & Babbie, 2017) :
- Triangulation: Researchers use triangulation of sources, methods, and theories to validate findings. By comparing data from various sources (interviews, observations, documentation) and using various analysis techniques, researchers try to ensure that the findings obtained are accurate and reliable.
- Member Checking: After the data is analyzed, the researcher will conduct member checking by asking for feedback from the research subjects about the interpretation results that have been made. This aims to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is in accordance with the subject's experience and views.
- Audit Trail: Researchers will document all research processes, from data collection to analysis and interpretation, so that the entire research process can be audited by other researchers if necessary.

Research Ethics
In carrying out this research, the researcher is committed to maintaining research ethics by means of (Neuman, 2014) :
- Confidentiality: All data obtained from research subjects will be kept confidential, and personal information will not be disclosed without permission.
- Informed Consent : Before collecting data, researchers will ask for consent from all research subjects, explain the purpose of the research, and their rights as participants.
- Avoiding Bias: Researchers will strive to avoid bias in data collection and analysis while maintaining objectivity and transparency throughout the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Observation Results

During the observation period at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, the implementation of the community-based Independent Curriculum showed significant progress in the learning process. The focus of the observation included curriculum implementation, student engagement, and collaboration between schools and communities. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan succeeded in providing flexibility that allows for the adjustment of teaching materials to local needs. The Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) designed by teachers reflects an effort to integrate community-based activities with subject matter. The RPP document includes various activities related to social and religious values, making it more contextual and relevant to students. Teachers actively adapt learning content, making it more appropriate to the environment and students' needs.

Student engagement in the learning process also showed significant improvement. During the observation, students appeared more enthusiastic and actively participated in the lessons. Community-based activities, such as social projects and group discussions, encouraged active student participation and strengthened their understanding of the learning materials. Students often engage in in-depth discussions and ask questions, demonstrating a stronger connection to the lessons through practical applications of what they learned. Collaboration between the school and the community also showed positive results. Activities such as religious studies and social services involving community members created synergies that supported the learning process. Students appeared very enthusiastic in participating in community activities, which not only enriched the learning materials but also provided a real context for the application of knowledge.

Several challenges in curriculum implementation were also identified. Some teachers faced difficulties in adapting teaching methods to the new community-based approach. Additional support, including further training and technical guidance, is needed to overcome these difficulties. Although community engagement provides many benefits, there is a need to improve coordination between schools and communities so that the support provided is more in line with students' needs. The results of observations indicate that the implementation of the community-based Merdeka Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan has brought positive changes in the learning process. Student engagement has increased, and the relationship between the school and the community has become stronger. Additional support and better coordination between schools and communities will further strengthen the success of this curriculum implementation in the future.

The Role of Independent Curriculum in Improving Teacher Competence

The Role of Independent Curriculum in Improving Teacher Competence at MTsN 1 Pasuruan shows a significant impact on the way teachers design and implement learning. The principal of MTsN 1 Pasuruan stated, "Independent Curriculum provides great flexibility for teachers in designing learning. This gives us the opportunity to be more creative and innovative, especially in Islamic Religious Education. We can adjust the methods to the needs of students, so that the learning process becomes more relevant and effective." This statement illustrates how Independent Curriculum allows teachers to adapt to local needs and student contexts, making the teaching and learning process more dynamic and connected to students' daily lives.

The results of interviews with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at the school reinforced this view. One of the teachers, Mrs. IJ, said, "I feel free to choose the most appropriate method for my students. Previously, the rigid curriculum made it difficult for us to innovate. Now, I can use a more personal and contextual approach." This statement shows that the curriculum changes provide more space for teachers to adapt teaching methods according to the individual needs of students. On the other hand, Mr. MT added, "The training we received was very helpful, although there are still some things that need to be improved, especially in terms of deepening the PAI material that is adjusted to the local context." This shows that despite progress, there is a need for further training to optimize the implementation of the curriculum in the local context.

The documentation of the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) reviewed during the observation also supports this finding. The RPP designed by the teachers reflects an effort to replace a rigid curriculum approach with a more flexible and contextual one. The new RPP shows the integration of teaching methods tailored to students' needs and activities relevant to their surroundings. This reflects a transition from a uniform curriculum approach to a more adaptive and responsive approach to students' local needs and contexts.

Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum has a positive impact on improving teacher competency at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, by enabling teachers to develop and implement more appropriate and innovative learning

methods. However, there needs to be ongoing support in the form of additional training to ensure that all teachers can fully utilize the flexibility offered by this curriculum.

Management Challenges and Strategies

Challenges and management strategies in implementing the Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan reflect the complexity of adaptation and adjustment required in the learning process. The principal identified the main challenges, stating, "Teachers' readiness in adopting new approaches and the lack of in-depth training are major challenges. We need to ensure that all teachers feel prepared and receive sufficient support." This statement underscores the urgent need to prepare teachers more comprehensively in facing significant curriculum changes.

Teachers also acknowledged the challenges in the adaptation process. Mr MS said, "The biggest challenge was getting students used to this new approach. However, we saw an increase in their engagement, thanks to the training and mentoring we received." This statement shows that, despite the initial difficulties in integrating the new approach, there was an improvement in student engagement that can be attributed to the support and training provided.

To overcome these challenges, the school has implemented various management strategies. One of the main strategies is regular training and mentoring conducted by supervisors. Supervision and Evaluation Records show that the principal and supervisors actively conduct evaluation sessions and provide constructive feedback. This approach is appreciated by teachers, as expressed by Mrs. MDR, "The support from the principal and supervisor means a lot to us. They provide useful feedback and help us overcome difficulties in implementing the curriculum." This support not only helps teachers overcome the difficulties they face but also contributes to the adjustment and refinement of more effective teaching methods.

Challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan require continuous attention to teacher readiness and training. The management strategies implemented, such as regular training and feedback from principals and supervisors, play a crucial role in overcoming these challenges and increasing the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.

Community Engagement in Learning

Community involvement plays an important role in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan. Community representatives, including parents and community leaders, reported their active participation in various religious and learning activities at school.

One parent stated, "We as parents feel more involved in the educational process. We fully support this program because we see the positive impact on our children." This statement shows the synergy between the school and the community in supporting the learning process, which helps create a more inclusive and community-oriented educational environment.

The Community Collaborative Activity Report shows the active involvement of the community in various activities that support learning. Activities such as religious studies and social services involve community members in direct interaction with students. A community leader added, "We are often invited to give lectures or participate in religious activities at school. This helps children learn directly from practice and see real examples in the community." This community participation not only enriches students' learning experiences but also provides a practical context that deepens their understanding of the learning material.

Community involvement in the learning process at MTsN 1 Pasuruan shows that synergy between schools and communities can strengthen the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum. Active support from parents and community leaders in school activities creates broader and more relevant learning opportunities, facilitating the implementation of a curriculum that is more integrated with local values and student needs.

Impact on Students

The impact of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum on students at MTsN 1 Pasuruan showed significant and positive results. The results of interviews with students revealed that they felt a beneficial change in their Islamic Religious Education learning experience. MA students shared, "Religious lessons are now more interesting because they often discuss issues that are close to our lives. I am also more involved in discussions, so I understand what is being taught better." This statement highlights how teaching materials that are relevant to students' daily lives increase their engagement and deepen their understanding of the lessons.

Student RA reported, "I like activities that involve the community, such as religious studies or community service. This makes religious studies more alive and real." Community-based activities such as religious

studies and community service provide a practical context for students to apply what they learn in class, making learning feel more relevant and applicable in their daily lives.

Documentation of Learning and Extracurricular Activities supports these findings by providing concrete evidence of students' active participation in community-based activities. Photos and videos taken during these activities show how students apply the theories learned in class in real-life contexts. For example, photos from community service activities and videos from group discussions show students' involvement in practical situations that are relevant to their learning materials, reinforcing students what expressed in interviews.

From the results of observations, interviews, and documentation, it is emphasized that the implementation of the Community-based Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan has a significant impact on improving the competence of Islamic Religious Education teachers and community involvement. Although there are challenges in its implementation, the management strategies applied and community involvement support the success of this curriculum. The data obtained shows that the community-based approach not only improves teacher competence but also provides a richer and more relevant learning experience for students.

DISCUSSION
Implementation of Independent Curriculum
The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan has shown significant impacts in improving the teaching approach and relevance of teaching materials. This curriculum, which is designed to give teachers more freedom to adapt materials to students' needs and local contexts, allows for more appropriate and contextual adjustments. Classroom observations show that teachers use this flexibility well, such as in designing Learning Implementation Plans (RPP) that integrate local issues and local cultural elements. This not only makes the teaching materials more interesting but also more relevant to students, which in turn increases their engagement and understanding of the lessons.

Further explanation can be seen from the interview with the principal, which revealed that the Independent Curriculum provides room for innovation in the teaching and learning process. The principal highlighted that the freedom in designing the curriculum allows teachers to adapt teaching methods according to the needs and backgrounds of their students. This is consistent with the findings of Alfaeni et al (2023), which identified that a curriculum adapted to the local context can increase student engagement and the quality of their learning outcomes (Alfaeni et al., 2023) . By using a more contextual approach, teachers at MTsN 1 Pasuruan can be more effective in delivering teaching materials and increasing students' interest in learning.

Although curriculum flexibility offers many benefits, some challenges remain. One of the main challenges identified is the need for more in-depth training and ongoing support for teachers. Research by Rosyada & Harapan (2021) shows that although a flexible curriculum allows for adjustments to teaching methods, its successful implementation is highly dependent on adequate support and training (Rosyada & Harapan, 2021) . At MTsN 1 Pasuruan, this challenge is evident from the need for further training that can help teachers overcome obstacles in implementing the curriculum.

Documentation and observation also revealed that while teachers have utilized curriculum flexibility well, there is a need for ongoing evaluation and additional support. Research by Utama (2023) underlines the importance of ongoing training and strong support in implementing contextual curriculum (Utama, 2023) . This is important to ensure that teachers not only understand the theory behind the curriculum but also have the practical skills needed to implement it effectively. Research by Rosa et al., (2024) emphasizes that ongoing support and structured training can help overcome challenges in curriculum implementation (Rosa et al., 2024) . This is in line with the needs identified at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, where there is a need to develop a better support system for teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum.

Although the Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan has provided significant benefits in improving the relevance of teaching materials and the quality of teaching, the success of its implementation depends on the ability to overcome existing challenges. The flexibility of the curriculum offers opportunities for teachers to innovate and adjust teaching to students' needs, but challenges such as the need for additional training and ongoing support need to be addressed to ensure the long-term success of this curriculum. Periodic evaluation and adjustment of educational management strategies will be essential in optimizing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the future.

Teacher Competency Improvement
The improvement of teacher competency in the context of the Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan showed significant progress, as seen from the results of interviews and documentation. Teachers reported that they felt more skilled and confident in carrying out their teaching duties after

participating in the training provided. This training provided them with new skills and a better understanding of how to implement the Independent Curriculum in the teaching and learning process. Support from the school also played an important role in improving their competency, with guidance and additional resources that helped them adjust their teaching methods to a more flexible curriculum.

Interviews with teachers revealed that they felt more prepared to adapt teaching materials and design more contextual and student-oriented Learning Implementation Plans (RPP). They appreciated the opportunity to innovate in teaching and felt that the training had given them the tools needed to achieve this. Research by Tulak et al., (2024) also supports this finding by showing that professional training and ongoing support are essential for the successful implementation of the Community-Based Merdeka curriculum (Tulak et al., 2024) . Despite these positive feelings, some teachers also mentioned the need for further training to overcome the difficulties they still face in implementing this new curriculum. This is in line with research by Melani & Gani (2023) which underlines the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and the importance of solutions in the form of additional training and support from the school (Melani & Gani, 2023) .

Principals acknowledged that while initial training was helpful, challenges in implementing the curriculum often required ongoing support to address issues that emerged over time. Documentation also notes the need for increased support for teachers, particularly in terms of access to additional resources and ongoing professional guidance. Research by Andryani et al., (2024) assessed the effectiveness of training in improving teacher competency in secondary schools, providing insight into how training can impact teacher readiness to implement a new curriculum (Andryani et al., 2024) . This mirrors findings from research by Indriawati et al., (2023) which discussed teacher professional development in implementing the Independent Curriculum and aspects of training needed to improve teacher skills and confidence (Indriawati et al., 2023) . Overall, while there has been progress in improving teacher competency through the Independent Curriculum, it is important to continue to provide additional support and training so that teachers can address emerging challenges and ensure successful curriculum implementation. Regular evaluation and adjustment of support strategies will be critical in ensuring that teacher competency is maintained and teaching can continue to develop well. Research by Heryahya et al., (2022) also emphasizes the importance of managerial support in teacher readiness to implement the Independent Curriculum, including aspects of support from school leaders and the necessary training (Heryahya et al., 2022) .

Challenges in Implementation

Challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan can be seen from various aspects, including the lack of in-depth training and teacher readiness. Although there has been significant progress in this process, there are still a number of obstacles that affect the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. One of the main challenges is the need for comprehensive additional training. Teachers reported that although initial training had improved their basic skills, there were still many aspects of the Independent Curriculum that required deeper understanding and application in everyday teaching contexts. Research by Aransyah (2023) shows that initial training often does not cover all the technical aspects needed for full implementation of the curriculum. Aransyah identified that additional training and ongoing support are essential to help teachers face challenges that arise during curriculum implementation (Aransyah et al., 2023) . This is in line with the results of interviews at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, where teachers expressed the need for further guidance to understand and implement new elements in the curriculum.

Teacher readiness is also an important factor in this challenge. Heryahya (2022) in Analysis of Elementary School Teacher Readiness in Implementing the Independent Curriculum highlighted that teacher readiness in facing curriculum changes often depends on the support they receive from the school (Heryahya et al., 2022) . Heryahya found that inadequate managerial support could hinder the process of adapting and implementing the new curriculum. At MTsN 1 Pasuruan, documentation shows that despite efforts by the school to provide support, sometimes the support is not enough to overcome all the problems faced by teachers. Observations also revealed that some teachers had difficulty adjusting their teaching methods to the new Independent Curriculum guidelines. Nasution (2023) in Obstacles and Challenges to Implementing the Independent Curriculum at MTS Raudlatul Uluum Aek Nabara Labuhanbatu emphasized that lack of experience and in-depth training can cause difficulties in adjusting teaching methods to a more flexible curriculum (Nasution, 2023) . The study concluded that to overcome these difficulties, additional training and ongoing support are needed.

The challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan reflect the fundamental need to strengthen teacher training and managerial support. Without adequate additional support, difficulties in curriculum implementation cannot be fully addressed, which impacts the effectiveness and

success of curriculum implementation. In-depth references such as those presented by Hendriana, Yuliana, and Prasetyo provide important insights to understand and address these challenges more effectively.

Community Engagement

Community involvement in education has been shown to play a significant role in supporting the learning process at MTsN 1 Pasuruan. Collaboration between schools and communities, through various activities such as Islamic studies and social services, has had a significant positive impact on students' learning experiences and the relevance of teaching materials. These activities not only enrich students' learning experiences but also increase the connectivity between theories learned in class and practices in everyday life. In interviews with community representatives, they revealed that their involvement in school activities provided great benefits, both for students and the community itself. Santoso (2023) in The meaning of community leader involvement in the elementary school community movement program in Mappi Regency, South Papua Province: A phenomenological study. noted that community involvement can increase students' motivation and support their social development and practical skills (Santoso et al., 2023) . Through collaborative activities such as recitation of the Koran, students not only gain academic knowledge but also deepen their understanding of religious and social values that are relevant to their lives.

Community service conducted outside of school hours also provides an opportunity for students to apply their knowledge in a real context. This supports the results of interviews that show that students feel more connected to their subject matter when they can see the real impact of their learning. Vioreza (2023) in his research found that activities involving the community can make learning more relevant and contextual, increase student engagement and facilitate the application of knowledge in real situations (Vioreza et al., 2023) . Support from the community not only helps students understand and apply knowledge but also provides opportunities for them to actively contribute to their community. Community involvement, as exemplified by the study and community service programs, provides practical experiences that enrich the learning process and encourage the development of social skills and civic engagement. Rahmania & Ali emphasize that community involvement can strengthen the relationship between education and society, supporting students in developing a deeper understanding of their role in society (Rahmania & Ali, 2024) . Community engagement at MTsN 1 Pasuruan shows how collaboration between schools and communities can enrich students' learning experiences, make learning more relevant and contextual, and support the application of knowledge in real life. The support and active participation of the community has been shown to improve the quality of education and student learning outcomes, in line with findings from relevant research.

Impact on Students

The positive impact on students at MTsN 1 Pasuruan in the context of implementing the Community-based Independent Curriculum is very clear from their reports regarding increased interest and engagement in Islamic Religious Education lessons. Students reported that the subject matter became more relevant and interesting thanks to the integration of community-based activities into the learning process. These activities not only provide a real context for the teaching material but also encourage students' active involvement in the learning process. Reports from students indicate that they felt a significant increase in their motivation and enthusiasm for Islamic Religious Education lessons. Izzah & Mulyana (2021) in their research found that involvement in community-based activities can increase students' interest in learning by providing more contextual and relevant experiences (Izzah & Mulyana, 2021) . This is in accordance with observations at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, where students feel more connected to the subject matter when they can see practical applications of what they learn in everyday life.

Documentation of community-based activities, such as religious studies and social services, shows that students are actively involved in these activities. Jayanti & Umar (2024) stated that student involvement in community activities can strengthen the learning process by providing direct experiences that support their understanding of the teaching material (Jayanti & Umar, 2024) . This is clearly seen in the documentation of activities at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, which shows active student participation in every activity carried out. Findings from interviews with students also strengthen the results of observations and documentation. Students reported that community-based activities not only made learning more interesting but also helped them understand and apply knowledge better. Khana (2024) noted that the integration of community activities into the curriculum can increase student engagement by creating a closer relationship between theory and practice (Khana et al., 2024) . The positive impact on students at MTsN 1 Pasuruan shows that the integration of community-based activities into the Islamic Religious Education curriculum has succeeded in increasing student interest and engagement. Students feel that the

subject matter is more relevant and interesting, thanks to the application of a contextual and participatory approach in the learning process. Documentation and interview results support these findings, indicating that community activities play an important role in enriching students' learning experiences and supporting better learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

In a study on the Strategy for Improving the Competence of Islamic Religious Education Teachers through Community-Based Independent Curriculum at MTsN 1 Pasuruan, it was found that the implementation of the Community-Based Independent Curriculum had a significant positive impact on the development of teacher competence and community involvement. This curriculum, which offers flexibility in designing and implementing learning, allows teachers to adapt teaching materials to the local context and student needs. The results of interviews with teachers showed that they felt more skilled and confident in teaching thanks to the training and support provided. However, despite the progress, there are still challenges such as the lack of in-depth training and teacher readiness that require more attention. These difficulties indicate the need for better education management strategies, including further training and ongoing support to ensure effective curriculum implementation.

Community involvement plays a vital role in supporting curriculum implementation. Collaboration between schools, parents, and community leaders, who are actively involved in religious and learning activities, enriches students' learning experiences and increases the relevance of the teaching materials. This creates a positive synergy that strengthens the educational process and helps students understand and apply their knowledge. The positive impact on students is evident from their reports of increased interest and engagement in Islamic Religious Education lessons, which are due to the integration of community-based activities into learning.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be suggested. First, there needs to be ongoing training for teachers to improve their readiness in implementing the community-based Independent Curriculum. Second, additional support such as mentoring and regular evaluations are important to help teachers overcome the challenges faced. Third, strengthening community involvement in educational activities must be increased to enrich students' learning experiences. Finally, regular evaluation of curriculum implementation and adjustment of management strategies based on feedback from teachers, students, and the community will help ensure the success of this curriculum in the future. Overall, the community-based Independent Curriculum shows great potential in improving teacher competence and community involvement, which in turn has a positive impact on student learning.

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