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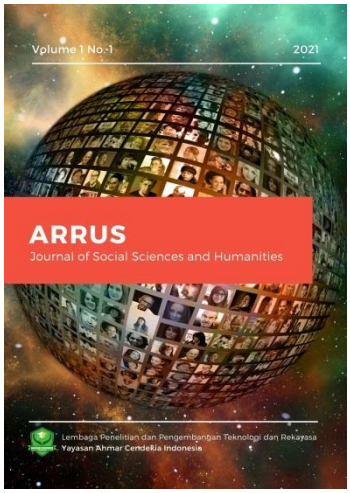

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Elementary School Students' Perceptions on Independent Curriculum Implementation

Rifda Mardian Arif, Rifda Nur Hikmahwati Arif*, & Fitrah Sukmadewi M.

Elementary School Education, Faculty of Education, State University of Gorontalo, Gorontalo, Indonesia.
Science Education, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, State University of Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia.

*Corresponding author: Rifda Nur Hikmahwati Arif, Science Education, Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, Makassar State University, Makassar, Indonesia

E-mail:rifdanha@unm.ac.id

Abstract: This study aims to determine the perception of elementary school students towards the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This type of research is descriptive with a quantitative approach. This research method uses a survey method. The subjects of the study consisted of 162 student respondents from seven elementary schools, namely SD Laboratorium UNG, SDN 27 South City, SDN 30 South City, Gorontalo City, SDN 50 Dumbo Raya, SDN 11 West City, SDN No. 40 Hulontalangi, Gorontalo, SDN 29 South City District. The data collection technique used a questionnaire technique which was distributed directly to students in these schools. The data analysis technique used descriptive statistics by calculating the percentage of each indicator. The results showed that the indicator with the highest positive response was "The teacher provides real examples of easy-to-understand science material" at 78.15%. The indicator with the lowest percentage was found in the statement "I can choose learning activities in learning according to my wishes," with only 44.82%. The positive response results were 63.89%, neutral responses were 21.12% and negative responses were 15.09%.

Keywords: Perceptions1, Elementary Students2, Independent Curriculum3

1. Introduction

The development of the curriculum in Indonesia is always dynamic along with the demands of improving the quality of education. In 2021, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology introduced the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes learning flexibility, differentiation, and project-based learning. This policy is designed so that educational units can adjust the learning process to the characteristics and needs of students, while strengthening the profile of Pancasila students through contextual and collaborative learning ((Amanulloh & Wasila, 2024).

Assessment of student perception is one of the important aspects in measuring the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. Student perceptions not only reflect the extent to which the curriculum is acceptable, but also affect their motivation and involvement in the learning process. Various studies at the secondary level have reported generally positive results, with the majority of students responding well to the Independent Curriculum in subjects such as mathematics and dance. However, these perceptions are also influenced by

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the quality of implementation, teacher readiness, and the availability of learning media (Yanti, Novandari & Iskandar, 2025).

Although research on students' perceptions of the Independent Curriculum at the junior high and senior high school levels has been widely conducted, studies at the elementary school level are still very limited. As a foundation level of education, elementary schools play a crucial role in shaping children's attitudes and learning habits from an early age. The absence of empirical data on how elementary school students interpret flexibility, project-based learning, and strengthening the Pancasila student profile creates a knowledge gap that needs to be filled by this research.

At the elementary school level, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum often faces obstacles such as limited facilities and infrastructure, uneven teacher understanding, and resistance to project-based learning methods (Maranata et al., 2025). Recent research states that the lack of textbooks and teaching materials, to minimal practical assistance, are the main challenges in its implementation. This condition has the potential to affect students' perceptions both in terms of mental readiness and their comfort in participating in learning activities (Anwas et al., 2025).

Thus, descriptive research on "Elementary School Students' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum" is very important. The results will fill the gap in literature at the elementary school level, while providing feedback for teachers, schools, and policy makers to optimize the implementation strategy of the Independent Curriculum that suits the needs of elementary school students.

2. Research Methods and Materials

This study uses a descriptive statistical approach that aims to quantitatively describe data regarding students' perceptions of science learning in the Independent Curriculum. Descriptive statistics were chosen to provide a clear picture of the distribution of student responses based on the data obtained. The research subjects consisted of 162 student respondents from seven elementary schools, namelyUNG Laboratory Elementary School, SDN 27 South City, SDN 30 South City, Gorontalo City, SDN 50 Dumbo Raya, SDN 11 West City, SDN No. 40 Hulontalangi, Gorontalo, SDN 29 South City District.Data were collected using a questionnaire technique that was distributed directly to students in these schools. This questionnaire was used to collect information about students' perceptions of various aspects of science learning in the Independent Curriculum. The research instrument was a closed questionnaire with a Likert scale that measured several indicators, such as freedom to choose learning activities, learning motivation, use of learning media, and other aspects relevant to the Independent Curriculum. The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive percentage statistics to determine the proportion and level of student agreement with each indicator measured. The results of this analysis provide a quantitative picture of students' overall perceptions.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Results

The results of student response data can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Data on the Results of Elementary School Students' Responses to the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

No.	Indikator Question	STS (%)	TS (%)	N (%)	S (%)	SS (%)
1	I understand the learning objectives before the activity begins.	8.64	12.35	22.84	38.27	17.9
2	Science learning suits my interests.	5.62	8.12	28.75	39.38	18.12
3	I can choose learning activities in Learning according to my wishes.	16.05	15.43	20.37	29.63	18.52

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4	The teacher provides real examples of science material that are easy to understand.	9.88	3.09	8.02	38.27	40.74
5	I enjoy learning science through projects or practical assignments.	6.17	3.09	16.67	36.42	37.65
6	I get feedback from teachers regularly.	4.32	8.64	32.72	40.12	14.2
7	I can collaborate with friends in group assignments in science learning.	4.94	6.79	17.28	40.12	30.86
8	Science media and teaching materials (videos, pictures, teaching aids) are interesting to me.	8.02	2.47	19.75	35.19	34.57
9	I became more independent in completing science assignments.	5.56	7.41	25.31	41.36	20.37
10	My science assignment grades or results are explained how to improve them.	3.09	9.88	22.84	40.74	23.46
11	I feel my opinion is valued by teachers and friends.	6.17	8.02	10.49	37.65	37.65
12	I am motivated to study science more deeply at home.	7.41	9.88	28.4	27.78	26.54

Based on the data in Table 1, the indicator with the highest combined score is "I enjoy learning science through projects or practical assignments," which received a total of 78.07% positive responses (Agree 36.21% and Strongly Agree 40.74%). This indicates that the project-based learning approach is very well received by students. This is in line with research from Wirda et al., (2018) which shows that PjBL can increase student engagement and in-depth understanding of scientific concepts. In addition, other high indicators are "The teacher provides real examples of science material" (total 78.15%) and "Interesting science media and teaching materials" (total 75.92%), indicating that the contextual approach and the use of appropriate media contribute greatly to student satisfaction.

However, the indicator with the lowest percentage was found in the statement "I can choose learning activities in learning according to my wishes," with only 44.82% positive responses (Agree 26.93% and Strongly Agree 18.52%). This shows that the aspects of independence and learning choices have not been fully realized as per the spirit of the Independent Curriculum. This is supported by research by Butarbutar et al., (2025) which emphasizes that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum still faces challenges in providing learning autonomy to students. This limitation shows that teachers need further training to create a more flexible learning space that suits students' interests.

Finally, although many students enjoy the process of learning science, the motivation to learn further outside the classroom is still relatively low. The indicator "I am motivated to learn science more deeply at home" only recorded 54.32% positive responses. This shows the importance of strengthening intrinsic motivation through interest-based learning strategies and personal challenges. Research by Rahma, Akib & Rukli, (2023) in self-determination theory also emphasizes the importance of supporting autonomy, competence, and social relations in increasing learning motivation. Therefore, the development of interest-based learning programs and the integration of digital technology such as video, gamification, or independent exploration can be relevant strategies.

Table 2. Perception of Elementary School Students' Responses to the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Strongly Disagree(%)	Don't agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly agree (%)
7.16	7.93	21.12	37.18	26.71

Based on the data in Table 2, the majority of students have a positive perception of science learning within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The categories Agree (37.18%) and Strongly Agree (26.71%) cumulatively reached 63.89%, indicating that most students felt the benefits of a more flexible and contextual learning approach. This high number reflects the successful implementation of important elements of the Merdeka Curriculum, such as differentiated learning, student autonomy, and a project-based approach. A study by Pasaribu et al., (2025) stated that students are more actively involved when given space to explore and

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express themselves in the learning process, which is in accordance with the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The percentage of the Neutral category (21.12%) is also significant, indicating that there is a group of students who are not fully convinced or are still in the adjustment stage to the new approach. This condition can occur due to variations in teacher readiness, availability of learning media, or diverse student learning backgrounds. Research by Sumilat & Harun (2024) emphasizes that curriculum changes require adaptation time for both educators and students, so a neutral response is a natural symptom during the transition period of education policy.

Meanwhile, although relatively small, there were also students who responded Disagree (7.93%) and Strongly Disagree (7.16%), totaling 15.09%. This indicates that there are challenges in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum that need to be considered in more depth. It is possible that the learning approach has not been fully personalized or has not optimally touched the students' learning styles. According toAriyanti, Hazin & Supriyanto (2024), teacher support in guiding, motivating, and providing constructive feedback is very important so that the Independent Curriculum is not only a policy on paper, but its benefits are also felt by all students as a whole.

3.2. Results

The results of the study showed that science learning within the Merdeka Curriculum framework received a fairly positive response from students, with a high combination of Agree and Strongly Agree categories, reaching 63.89%. The highest response was found in project-based learning indicators, the use of interesting media, and contextual delivery of materials. This study is in line with constructivism theory and the student-centered learning approach, where students understand concepts better when they are actively involved (Julia, Fitriani, & Setiawan, 2024).In addition, the self-determination theory of Deci & Ryan (2008) also confirms that student autonomy and involvement greatly influence learning motivation. However, the lower response to the indicators of freedom to choose learning activities and learning motivation outside the classroom indicates that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum values has not been fully optimal in all aspects.

This study has several important implications for teaching practices in elementary schools (SD). First, teachers need to integrate more project-based and contextual activities into science learning to increase student engagement and understanding. Second, learning strategies that provide space for students to choose learning methods according to their interests need to be developed so that the value of autonomy in the Independent Curriculum can be applied in real terms. For curriculum development, these data show the importance of strengthening structural support and teacher training so that they are able to facilitate differentiated learning. In addition, it is necessary to develop teaching and assessment tools that are more flexible and responsive to students' diverse learning styles (Damanik, Lubis & Darmayanti, 2024).

4. Conclusion

The results of the study showed that the indicators with the highest positive responses were "I enjoy learning science through projects or practical assignments" which reached 78.07%, and "The teacher provides real examples of science material that is easy to understand" at 78.15%. In addition, 75.92% of students stated that science media and teaching materials were interesting, and 70.98% stated that they were able to collaborate with friends in group assignments.In addition, other high indicators are "Teachers provide real examples on science material" at 78.15% and "Interesting science media and teaching materials" at 75.92%). The indicator with the lowest percentage was found in the statement "I can choose learning activities in learning according to my wishes," with only 44.82%. The positive response results were 63.89%, neutral responses were 21.12% and negative responses were 15.09%.

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Science learning in the Independent Curriculum received a positive response from students, especially in the use of project-based learning, interesting media, and contextual materials that increase active involvement and understanding, in accordance with constructivism and self-determination theories. However, the low freedom to choose learning activities and motivation to learn outside the classroom indicate the need to improve the implementation of student autonomy. Therefore, teachers need to develop learning strategies that provide more space for student choice and are supported by training and flexible teaching tools so that learning can be more effective and in accordance with the needs of diverse students.

This study has limitations in the scope of data that only covers student perceptions without incorporating teacher perspectives, classroom observations, or more in-depth qualitative data. In addition, the relationship between student characteristics (e.g. socioeconomic background or academic ability) and their perceptions of the Independent Curriculum has not been thoroughly analyzed. For further research, it is recommended to use mixed methods to gain a more comprehensive understanding. The study can also be expanded to other levels such as junior high or high school and compare the results between regions to see the consistency of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum nationally.

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