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## Transforming Character Education through the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia

Zainuddin Zainuddin<sup>1</sup>, Ani Nafisah<sup>2</sup>, Muhammad Muttaqin<sup>3</sup>

### Abstract

The transformation of character education has become a crucial agenda in the development of Indonesia's human resources, especially in responding to global challenges and the post-pandemic learning crisis. The Independent Curriculum has emerged as an innovative educational policy that emphasizes flexibility, differentiated learning, and character strengthening through the integration of Pancasila Student Profile values. However, there remains a research gap concerning the extent to which this curriculum effectively fosters students' character holistically and how its implementation faces real challenges in the field. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the transformation of character education in Indonesia by highlighting the strategies, challenges, and its impact on students' motivation and learning quality. The method employed is a qualitative descriptive literature review by analyzing various recent research findings and empirical data. The results show that the Independent Curriculum enhances learning motivation, active student engagement, and the quality of the learning process through a more interactive and student-centered approach. Teachers play a strategic role as facilitators and agents of change, although they still require training and systemic support. The findings underscore the importance of synergy among stakeholders in strengthening the capacity of curriculum implementers, developing comprehensive character evaluation systems, and creating an inclusive and adaptive learning ecosystem. The Independent Curriculum has the potential to become a strong foundation in shaping an Indonesian generation that excels not only academically but also possesses moral integrity, social sensitivity, and adaptability in the global era.

**Keywords:** *Independent Curriculum, Character Education, Pancasila Student Profile, Educational Transformation.*

### A. Introduction

The Indonesian education system has undergone a significant transformation with the introduction of the Independent Curriculum in 2022 as a response to the learning crisis that affected Indonesian education both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Yunita et al., 2023). This policy is an integral part of the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) program initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia to address global challenges and the digital era (Al Fajri & Andarwulan, 2023).

The Independent Curriculum was developed with a flexible approach based on character, competence, and creativity (Fauzan et al., 2023). This new paradigm provides greater autonomy for teachers to design learning programs tailored to the needs of their

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<sup>1</sup>Institut Agama Islam Al-Qur'an Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia, [zainuddin@iaiqi.ac.id](mailto:zainuddin@iaiqi.ac.id)

<sup>2</sup>Institut Agama Islam Al-Qur'an Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia.

<sup>3</sup>Institut Agama Islam Al-Qur'an Al-Ittifaqiah Indralaya, Sumatera Selatan, Indonesia

students (Al Fajri & Andarwulan, 2023). The talent- and interest-based approach aims to produce a young Indonesian generation that is prepared to face the future and global challenges (Fauzan et al., 2023).

The importance of character education in the Indonesian context has become a primary focus in the development of the national curriculum. Previous studies have shown that the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum integrated character development in attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Mulyasa, 2021). However, the urgent condition of education in Indonesia indicates the need for more comprehensive policy innovation, especially since the education reforms and regional autonomy in 2003 (Jazadi, 2015).

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The Independent Curriculum emerges as a strategic solution to address various challenges related to character education in Indonesia. Through a more holistic approach, this curriculum emphasizes not only academic achievement but also the formation of the Pancasila Student Profile, characterized by strong moral values (Maulida, 2023; Sakban & Sundawa, 2023). This aligns with the national education vision, which mandates character development as a top priority in building Indonesia's human resources (Taufiqurokhman et al., 2023).

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of character education strongly resonates with Ki Hadjar Dewantara's philosophy of liberating education (Sukiastini et al., 2024). This philosophy emphasizes the holistic development of students' potential, encompassing intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects integrated into the formation of national character.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in practice faces various challenges and opportunities (Musa & Nurhayati, 2025). Research indicates that although the curriculum provides greater flexibility, obstacles remain, especially concerning human resource readiness and educational infrastructure (Saputra & Stiawan, 2024). Therefore, an in-depth study on the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum's implementation in transforming student character education in Indonesia is essential.

This research is crucial given the need for a comprehensive evaluation of the impact of the Independent Curriculum on strengthening students' character. By understanding the mechanisms of character education transformation through this curriculum's implementation, it is expected to contribute significantly to the development of more effective educational policies in the future.

## **B. Methods**

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method to conduct an in-depth examination of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the transformation of character education in Indonesia (Zed, 2008). Data collection techniques involved tracing and reviewing various literature sources such as scientific journals, books, government policy reports, and the latest relevant research findings related to the study topic (Baker, 2006). The

research focuses on identifying key concepts within the Independent Curriculum, particularly those related to character strengthening through the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile. The data analysis technique is descriptive-analytical, which involves categorizing information into main themes, followed by analyzing to identify patterns, meanings, and relationships among concepts within the context of character education (Walliman, 2021).

This method was chosen because it is considered effective for comprehensively examining educational phenomena based on theoretical frameworks and previous research findings. Additionally, the library research method can explain the dynamics of curriculum implementation within both the macro-policy framework and the micro-level teaching practices in schools. Data validity is strengthened through source triangulation, by comparing various academic literatures and empirical data from official institutions such as the Ministry of Education and Culture and other scientific publications (Clark & Creswell, 2008). Through this approach, the study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to educational policy development, particularly in strengthening character education in the era of the Independent Curriculum.

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **1. Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the Context of Character Education**

The Independent Curriculum is an educational policy initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia as an effort to transform the national education system. The concept of "independence" in this curriculum refers to the freedom to learn, providing students with greater space to explore their interests and talents according to their individual needs and characteristics (Sherly et al., 2021). This curriculum is designed with a more flexible approach, reducing the administrative burden on teachers and granting greater autonomy to educational units in managing learning processes (Lembong et al., 2023). The implementation of the Independent Curriculum focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also emphasizes the importance of developing students' character through the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile, which encompasses six main dimensions: faith and devotion to God Almighty and noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity (Octavia & Tirtoni, 2024; Ratnawati et al., 2024).

Character education within the context of the Independent Curriculum is defined as the process of shaping students' personalities, which includes moral, ethical, and noble national values integrated into all learning activities (Arifin, 2024). This concept of character education is no longer viewed as a separate subject but as the spirit that permeates the entire educational process at school (Osman, 2024). The Independent Curriculum adopts a holistic approach to character education, wherein character formation is achieved not only through classroom learning but also through extracurricular activities, daily habituation, and a supportive school culture (Armini, 2024). This approach aligns with character education theory, which emphasizes that character formation requires consistency among moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action, applied continuously within the educational environment (Althof & Berkowitz\*, 2006).

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has shown significant impact on the transformation of character education in Indonesia, although challenges remain in several learning aspects. According to the 2024 Education Report released by the Ministry of Education and Culture, schools implementing the Independent Curriculum have demonstrated substantial improvements in literacy achievements, where junior high schools applying this curriculum for three years reached an average score of 7.15, while schools still using the 2013 Curriculum only

achieved a score of 2.68 (Detik.com, 2024). This disparity indicates that curriculum implementation requires more specific strategies for each learning domain, particularly in integrating character education with mastery of academic competencies. The findings also suggest that despite positive achievements in some areas, ongoing refinement is necessary, especially in developing evaluation instruments that measure not only cognitive aspects but also students' character development.

Positive student responses to the Independent Curriculum serve as an important indicator of the success of this transformation and demonstrate great potential for creating a learning environment conducive to character development. Research shows that Indonesian students welcome the presence of the Independent Curriculum, expecting innovation from this new curriculum, and are enthusiastic about a more interactive, student-centered learning approach (Amiruddin et al., 2023). This enthusiasm reflects the effectiveness of learning approaches that provide greater room for creativity and self-exploration, which are foundational to strong character development. Active student engagement in the learning process further indicates that the Independent Curriculum successfully creates a motivating environment for students to optimally develop their potential in both academic and non-academic aspects.

The success of the Independent Curriculum implementation in character education cannot be separated from the strategic role of teachers as learning facilitators and change agents within the school environment (Priestley et al., 2013). Teachers in the context of the Independent Curriculum are required to develop pedagogical competencies that not only enable them to transfer knowledge but also to serve as role models in shaping students' character (Utami et al., 2025). This aligns with the concept of the "teacher as a mover" promoted within the Independent Curriculum ecosystem, where teachers act as learning leaders who mobilize the school community to create a positive learning environment that supports character development (Ramadhan et al., 2024). To ensure sustainable effective implementation, systemic support in the form of ongoing teacher training, provision of adequate learning resources, and a comprehensive evaluation system capable of measuring both academic achievements and students' long-term character development is necessary.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of character education has proven its effectiveness as an instrument of national educational transformation, enhancing not only academic achievements but also strengthening students' character formation. Through a holistic approach integrating the Pancasila Student Profile into all learning activities, this curriculum has succeeded in creating an educational environment conducive to the development of moral values, ethics, and noble national ideals. Empirical data indicate that schools implementing the Independent Curriculum for a longer period experience significant improvements in literacy achievements, while positive student responses to a more interactive, student-centered learning approach reflect the curriculum's great potential in shaping a generation of strong character. Nevertheless, the success of this implementation is inseparable from the strategic role of teachers as change agents and learning facilitators, who require systemic support in the form of continuous training, sufficient resource provision, and the development of comprehensive evaluation systems to ensure the sustainability of character education transformation in the long term.

## **2. The Pancasila Student Profile as a Framework for Character Formation**

The Pancasila Student Profile serves as the foundational framework for character education transformation through the Independent Curriculum, designed in response to the need for cultivating a qualified and characterful generation of Indonesians aligned with the nation's core values (Andana & Hendroto, 2025). The Pancasila Student Profile depicts an ideal Indonesian student characterized by six main dimensions: faith and devotion to God Almighty alongside

noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity, which comprehensively shape a holistic student character (Soleha, 2025). This concept is not merely a theoretical formulation but also a practical guideline for designing all educational activities within learning institutions. Each dimension includes specific and measurable sub-elements, enabling educators to systematically and integratively implement character development across various subjects and school activities.

The dimension of "faith and devotion to God Almighty alongside noble character" constitutes a fundamental pillar underlying all aspects of character formation within the Pancasila Student Profile (Handayani & Putra, n.d.). This dimension encompasses the spiritual development of students through understanding and internalizing religious values and applying them in daily life via behaviors that reflect noble character. Implementation of this dimension extends beyond religious studies alone; it is integrated into all educational activities, ranging from habituation in worship, practicing religious tolerance, to developing empathy and social care. This holistic approach ensures that spiritual character formation does not stand alone but becomes the soul that animates the development of other dimensions within the Pancasila Student Profile, thereby creating a balance between intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence.

The dimensions of global diversity and mutual cooperation within the Pancasila Student Profile reflect a commitment to fostering character that respects diversity while strengthening the spirit of collaboration (Adiyono et al., 2025; Martawijaya et al., 2025). Global diversity develops students' abilities to understand, appreciate, and positively interact with diverse cultures both locally and globally, while maintaining Indonesian cultural identity. Meanwhile, the mutual cooperation dimension emphasizes the importance of teamwork, solidarity, and care for others, values deeply rooted in Indonesian culture. These two dimensions reinforce each other in shaping a generation capable of adapting to global dynamics without losing national identity, and possessing the capacity to contribute positively toward building a harmonious and sustainable society.

The independence and critical thinking dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile are designed to develop students' capabilities in facing increasingly complex and dynamic future challenges (Yumarna et al., 2025). Independence is understood not only as the ability to act individually but also encompasses responsibility toward oneself, family, and society, as well as the capacity to make wise decisions based on moral and ethical considerations. Critical thinking develops students' skills to objectively analyze information, evaluate multiple perspectives, and draw logical conclusions based on valid evidence. The integration of these two dimensions in learning encourages students to become active and reflective learners, able to identify problems, seek alternative solutions, and take constructive actions in various life situations.

The creativity dimension within the Pancasila Student Profile acts as a catalyst integrating all other dimensions to form students with innovative and adaptive character traits suitable for the changing times (Bhoki et al., 2025). Creativity is understood not only as artistic ability but also includes the capacity to think outside the box, generate original ideas, and find new ways to solve problems (Zare Rameshti, 2025). The implementation of the Independent Curriculum aims to shape students into individuals who are devout, independent, cooperative, globally diverse, critical thinkers, and creative. This approach demonstrates that character transformation does not focus on a single aspect but integrates multiple interrelated dimensions in shaping students' personalities. Successful implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile requires synergy among all educational components, including curriculum, learning approaches, assessment, and school culture that supports sustainable and comprehensive character development.

The Pancasila Student Profile has proven to be an effective and comprehensive framework for character formation in Indonesia's educational transformation through the Independent Curriculum. The six dimensions—faith and devotion to God Almighty with noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity—function not only as individual achievement targets but also as an integrated system that mutually reinforces the holistic development of student character. This approach successfully addresses the challenges of 21st-century education, which requires a balance between academic competence development and strong character formation, resulting in a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally integrative, socially sensitive, and adaptive to global changes. The success of implementing the Pancasila Student Profile demonstrates that character education based on Pancasila values can create a strong foundation for developing quality, characterful human resources in Indonesia, ready to face future challenges while upholding the nation's identity.

### **3. Challenges and Opportunities in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum faces various challenges that require serious attention within the context of Indonesia's educational transformation. Factors influencing teachers' readiness to implement the Independent Curriculum include a deep understanding of its concepts and principles, the ability to design and conduct student-centered learning, and proficiency in modern educational technology (Muslimah & Sukartono, 2025). Human resource readiness, particularly teachers, is a key factor in the success of character education transformation, as they are at the forefront of the learning process shaping the nation's future generation.

Challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum extend beyond technical aspects and involve fundamental paradigm shifts in teaching approaches requiring comprehensive transformation (Ihsan et al., 2025). Teachers are confronted with the need to transition from teacher-centered to student-centered methods, necessitating significant adaptation in learning strategies, assessment techniques, and student interactions (Mawaddah et al., 2025; Satar et al., 2025). Limitations in infrastructure, disparities in educational quality across regions, and differences in institutional readiness present structural barriers that must be addressed systematically (Dewi et al., 2025). This adaptation process demands time, adequate resources, and sustained commitment from all educational stakeholders, from the ministry level to the smallest school units. Resistance to change is also a psychological challenge that cannot be overlooked, as some educators are comfortable with long-established methods. The curriculum's complexity, which includes components such as the Pancasila Student Profile, project-based learning, and authentic assessment, requires thorough understanding and proper application in everyday teaching contexts.

Despite these complex challenges, the curriculum implementation also offers significant opportunities that should be optimized for Indonesia's educational advancement. Teachers generally view the Independent Curriculum positively, considering it an improvement over previous curricula, particularly regarding the space for creativity and innovation in learning that had been limited (Ihsan et al., 2025). This positive perception reflects educators' enthusiasm to develop more meaningful and relevant learning practices aligned with contemporary needs, alongside aspirations to contribute optimally to student character development. Teachers' support as the primary curriculum implementers is a valuable asset for realizing a more comprehensive and globally adaptive educational goal. The majority appreciate the curriculum's learning concept that provides freedom in determining strategies and methods tailored to student characteristics and learning contexts. Teachers' enthusiasm in participating in various training

programs and workshops related to the Independent Curriculum demonstrates their commitment to improving learning quality and optimism about the future of Indonesian education (Nurhairunnisah et al., 2025).

Teachers value the flexibility of the Independent Curriculum as a main advantage distinguishing it from previous curricula, although they also emphasize the importance of adequate training and collaboration among educators to maximize its potential (Azzahra & Rahmadhani, 2025). This flexibility allows a more adaptive approach in developing student character according to local contexts and individual needs, enabling learning to be adjusted to the socio-cultural characteristics of the community (Syafei, 2025). Freedom in determining learning strategies and assessments provides opportunities for teachers to explore innovative methods that can increase student engagement and optimize their potential according to individual interests and talents (Haryono et al., 2025). The curriculum's emphasis on differentiated learning concepts enables teachers to deliver more personalized education services suited to the specific needs of each student. Integrating local wisdom and regional culture values into learning processes becomes easier with curricular adaptation freedom. Ultimately, this flexibility contributes to forming more authentic student character aligned with values developed in their daily life contexts.

To maximize the opportunities within the Independent Curriculum implementation, comprehensive strategies are needed, including strengthening teacher capacity through ongoing training programs, developing supporting infrastructure, and creating a collaborative learning ecosystem (Azzahra & Rahmadhani, 2025). The Independent Curriculum implementation also opens opportunities to integrate local wisdom values into learning, develop 21st-century competencies, and prepare students to face global challenges while maintaining national identity (Utami et al., 2025). The success of this implementation heavily depends on a collective commitment to continuous evaluation, improvement, and adaptation in line with evolving educational needs and societal dynamics (Situmorang et al., 2025). Collaboration among central and regional governments, educational institutions, and communities needs to be strengthened to create optimal synergy in supporting educational transformation. Developing effective monitoring and evaluation systems is key to ensuring curriculum implementation aligns with set goals and produces measurable positive impacts. The sustainability of the Independent Curriculum implementation requires long-term commitment and high adaptability to various changes and challenges that may arise in the future.

#### **4. Impact on Motivation and Quality of Learning**

The transformation of character education through the Independent Curriculum has shown significant positive impacts on students' learning motivation across various educational levels in Indonesia. Several relevant studies reveal an increase in student motivation following the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, demonstrating the effectiveness of a more student-centered learning approach (Alfath et al., 2023; Novelita, 2022; Suhartono et al., 2025). This increase in motivation is reflected not only quantitatively but also in behavioral changes, where students become more active, participative, and enthusiastic in the learning process. Students exhibit a higher tendency to independently explore learning materials and pose more critical and reflective questions. The learning approach, which allows students the freedom to express creativity and think outside the box, has created a more enjoyable and meaningful learning environment (Al-Amin & Wulandari, 2024). This positive impact is also evident in increased student engagement in class discussions, collaborative projects, and learning activities involving real-world problem-solving within their communities.

In addition to the impact on students, teacher quality has significantly improved as educators transform according to the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which demands a more

innovative and adaptive learning approach (Mulyasa, 2021). Teachers develop more comprehensive pedagogical competencies through a deeper understanding of differentiated instruction, authentic assessment, and holistic character development. This transformation encourages teachers to adopt the role of facilitators who guide students in constructing their own knowledge rather than merely delivering information. The improvement in teacher quality is observed in their ability to design more contextual, relevant, and meaningful learning experiences for students (Situmorang et al., 2025). Teachers also show progress in integrating educational technology, developing interactive learning media, and applying diverse teaching strategies tailored to individual student needs.

The observed increase in learning motivation serves as an important indicator that the learning approach within the Independent Curriculum better aligns with the diverse characteristics and needs of Indonesian students in terms of culture, social background, and individual potential (Darmawan et al., 2024; Purwowidodo & Zaini, 2023). This alignment is reflected in positive student responses to learning that integrates local wisdom, regional culture, and the context of their daily lives. Students feel more connected to the learning materials due to their relevance to life experiences and social environments, making the learning process more meaningful and easier to comprehend. This approach, which respects diversity, also enables students to develop a positive self-identity while honoring differences and uniqueness in others. Flexibility in learning methods allows teachers to adjust teaching strategies to various learning styles, ensuring equal opportunities for all students to reach their maximum potential (Ainissyifa et al., 2024). The integration of academic learning with character development reflects the harmony with Indonesian cultural values, emphasizing the balance between intellectual and moral intelligence.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum also positively impacts the overall quality of the learning process, as evidenced by enhanced educational interactions between teachers and students and among students themselves (Rahmafitri et al., 2024). The learning process becomes more dialogic, interactive, and collaborative, with active student participation in discussions, presentations, and project-based learning activities. The quality of students' questions improves from factual inquiries to analytical and evaluative questions, demonstrating higher-order thinking skills. Various learning strategies such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, and inquiry-based learning create a more dynamic and challenging learning atmosphere. Holistic and authentic assessments provide a more comprehensive picture of student development, covering cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. The integration of technology enhances the effectiveness of content delivery and provides broader access to diverse and up-to-date learning resources.

These positive impacts on motivation and learning quality have significant long-term implications for the development of Indonesia's education system (Ihsan et al., 2025; Rahmafitri et al., 2024). Increased student motivation potentially fosters a generation with a love of learning and the capacity for lifelong learning, which is key to facing future dynamic challenges. The transformation in teacher quality contributes to the enhancement of Indonesian educators' professionalism, ultimately improving the nation's competitiveness on the global stage (Satria et al., 2025). Motivated students with strong character will become highly qualified human resources capable of innovation and making positive contributions to national development. Curriculum alignment with the characteristics of Indonesian students also has the potential to reduce educational disparities and promote equity in educational quality across the archipelago. This systemic impact will ultimately contribute to achieving national educational goals of enlightening the nation and preparing generations ready to face 21st-century challenges while upholding Pancasila values.

In summary, character education transformation through the Independent Curriculum has significantly enhanced student motivation and learning quality in Indonesia. The curriculum's student-centered approach fosters active, participative, and critical learners. Concurrently, teacher quality has improved through comprehensive pedagogical competency development, differentiated learning capabilities, and effective technology integration. The curriculum's relevance to the diverse characteristics of Indonesian students enables more contextual and meaningful learning, while its dialogic and collaborative approach creates a dynamic learning environment. The long-term impacts include cultivating lifelong learners, enhancing educator professionalism, and contributing to national education goals by preparing high-quality human resources grounded in Pancasila values.

#### D. Conclusion

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has driven a transformation in character education in Indonesia through a holistic, flexible, and student-centered approach, emphasizing the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile values across all learning activities. This curriculum has proven to enhance student learning motivation, improve the quality of learning, and increase teacher competencies in applying contextual and innovative methods. Despite challenges such as limited resources and the readiness of educators, the Independent Curriculum offers significant opportunities to create learning experiences that are relevant to contemporary needs and local characteristics. Synergy among all stakeholders is essential to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of this curriculum in shaping an intelligent, characterful generation of Indonesians who are prepared to face global challenges while upholding Pancasila values.

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