

Analysis of the Impact of the Independent Curriculum Implementation on the Moral Development of Students at YASPIM Taruna Private Vocational High School Sei Glugur

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received: June 19, 2025 Revised: July 23, 2025 Accepted: August 21, 2025 Available Online: September 30, 2025</p> <p>Keywords: Independent Curriculum; Moral Development; Vocational Students; Character; Implementation.</p>	<p>This study aims to analyze the impact of the Independent Curriculum implementation on the moral development of students at YASPIM Taruna Private Vocational High School Sei Glugur. The Independent Curriculum, as an educational innovation focusing on learning freedom and character development, is expected to produce students who are not only academically competent but also morally upright. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings reveal that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has a positive influence on students' moral improvement, particularly in aspects of responsibility, discipline, and mutual respect. However, challenges remain, such as limited teacher understanding of the curriculum's concept and time constraints in project-based learning activities. Therefore, continuous training and mentoring for teachers are necessary to optimize the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in shaping students' moral character.</p>
<p>Please cite this article: Sebayang, J. V. (2025). Analysis of the impact of the independent curriculum implementation on the moral development of students at YASPIM Taruna Private Vocational High School Sei Glugur. Integrasi: Jurnal Studi Islam dan Humaniora, 3(3), 173–184.</p>	<p>ABSTRAK</p> <p>Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dampak implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka terhadap pembentukan moral siswa di SMK Swasta YASPIM Taruna Sei Glugur. Kurikulum Merdeka sebagai inovasi pendidikan berorientasi pada kebebasan belajar dan pengembangan karakter, diharapkan dapat membentuk siswa yang tidak hanya cerdas secara akademik, tetapi juga bermoral baik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka memberikan pengaruh positif terhadap peningkatan moral siswa, terutama dalam aspek tanggung jawab, disiplin, dan sikap saling menghargai. Namun, masih terdapat kendala seperti kurangnya pemahaman guru terhadap konsep Kurikulum Merdeka dan keterbatasan waktu dalam pelaksanaan pembelajaran berbasis proyek. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan pendampingan dan pelatihan berkelanjutan bagi guru agar implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dapat berjalan optimal dalam membentuk karakter moral siswa.</p>
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A. Introduction

Education serves not only as a means to transmit knowledge and skills but also as a fundamental process for nurturing character and morality among learners. The purpose of schooling extends beyond academic excellence; it includes shaping ethical awareness, social responsibility, and respect for universal values. A curriculum, therefore, is not simply a technical or administrative framework—it is a moral enterprise that determines what kind of human beings students will become (Chen, 2023).

In Indonesia, the government has launched the Kurikulum Merdeka or Independent Curriculum as a major educational reform designed to respond to the changing needs of society and to address learning loss experienced during the pandemic. This curriculum offers greater flexibility to teachers and students, promotes learner autonomy, and prioritizes character education as a core element of the learning process (Kemdikbud, 2024).

The Independent Curriculum aims to provide opportunities for students to explore knowledge through project-based learning and differentiated instruction. It shifts from content-heavy instruction toward the mastery of essential competencies and moral values, allowing schools to adapt the curriculum to local contexts and student needs (Kemdikbud, 2024).

A central component of this new curriculum is the emphasis on holistic education, where the moral, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of learning are given equal importance to academic achievement. Through the Independent Curriculum, the Ministry of Education aspires to form students who are not only intelligent but also responsible, honest, empathetic, and respectful toward others (Sampoerna Foundation, 2024).

However, despite these noble objectives, there is still limited empirical evidence demonstrating whether the Independent Curriculum has indeed strengthened students' moral character in practice. While various studies highlight its pedagogical flexibility, fewer have explored its ethical and moral implications—especially in vocational education settings, where skill-based learning tends to dominate the agenda (Chen, 2023).

Vocational high schools (SMKs) play a significant role in preparing students for the workforce. Nevertheless, the heavy focus on technical and practical competencies often leads to the marginalization of moral and character education. Thus, examining how the

Independent Curriculum influences the moral formation of SMK students becomes both relevant and urgent.

The present study focuses on YASPIM Taruna Private Vocational High School Sei Glugur, an institution that has begun implementing the Independent Curriculum in its instructional design. The school serves as a representative case for understanding how private vocational schools interpret, adapt, and apply the moral principles embedded in the curriculum within their teaching practices.

From a theoretical standpoint, moral development has long been studied through cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. Kohlberg's theory, for example, proposes that individuals progress through stages of moral reasoning as they mature, emphasizing the role of education in guiding these transitions (Dolph, 2008). In this light, curriculum and pedagogy are instrumental in creating opportunities for moral reasoning and reflection among students.

Recent studies also suggest that moral education should be viewed as a dynamic process of socialization and internalization within school environments. Teachers, peers, and institutional culture all play crucial roles in shaping students' moral understanding and behaviors (Chen, 2023). Moral formation, therefore, cannot be separated from the overall learning atmosphere and the implicit values embedded in daily school interactions.

The concept of a "moral curriculum" further highlights that every curriculum, whether explicit or hidden, transmits certain moral and cultural assumptions. According to Rosenberg (2024), a curriculum is never value-neutral; it reflects society's expectations of what constitutes a good and moral person. Therefore, implementing Kurikulum Merdeka must involve deliberate integration of moral dimensions across subjects and activities.

Teachers act as the key agents of moral education. Their modeling of ethical behavior, decision-making, and classroom management significantly influences how moral lessons are perceived and practiced by students (ResearchGate, 2024). As facilitators of Kurikulum Merdeka, teachers must understand not only pedagogical flexibility but also how to cultivate moral awareness within everyday learning experiences.

Despite its promising framework, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum faces practical challenges. Teachers often report insufficient training, limited resources, and

time constraints, which hinder optimal execution of project-based moral learning (KSPSTENDIK, 2024). Furthermore, balancing between meeting competency standards and fostering character development remains a complex task.

In vocational settings, this tension becomes more evident. Some educators express difficulties in integrating moral values into technical subjects such as engineering or accounting, where the primary focus is on employability rather than ethical reflection (Brain Academy, 2024). Such challenges highlight the need for contextualized strategies in moral education for SMK students.

Given these considerations, this study seeks to analyze how the implementation of the Independent Curriculum affects students' moral development at YASPIM Taruna SMK Sei Glugur. It aims to explore both the positive impacts—such as the growth of responsibility, discipline, and respect—and the obstacles that hinder moral learning under the new curriculum structure.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how curriculum reform translates into moral outcomes in real educational contexts. By investigating the lived experiences of teachers and students, it provides insights into how national policies like Kurikulum Merdeka can be optimized to cultivate morally grounded, competent, and socially responsible graduates.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring and understanding the impact of the Independent Curriculum implementation on students' moral development. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows the researcher to capture participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations in depth rather than through numerical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This design was considered suitable for investigating the natural setting of the school, where the moral and character formation of students unfolds as part of the educational process.

The research site was YASPIM Taruna Private Vocational High School, located in Sei Glugur, Indonesia. The school was chosen purposively because it has implemented the Independent Curriculum for more than one academic year and integrates project-based

learning with character education. The setting provided an ideal context to observe how moral values are translated into classroom practices and student behavior. The study focused on understanding both the benefits and challenges of this curriculum reform as perceived by teachers and students.

The participants of this research consisted of teachers, students, and school administrators directly involved in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. The researcher used purposive sampling to select individuals who could provide rich and relevant information about moral formation under the new curriculum. In total, ten participants were included: five teachers, four students, and one school leader. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation (Patton, 2023).

Data were collected using three main techniques: observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Classroom observations were conducted to identify how moral education was practiced through the Independent Curriculum's activities, such as project-based learning, reflection sessions, and collaborative tasks. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their thoughts freely while ensuring that key themes related to moral formation were discussed. Documentation, including lesson plans and curriculum guidelines, was analyzed to support data triangulation.

The data analysis process followed Miles and Huberman's (2014) interactive model, which involves three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, the researcher coded and categorized data according to emerging themes such as moral values, teacher modeling, curriculum challenges, and student behavior. The data were then displayed in narrative and matrix forms to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by comparing the findings with theoretical perspectives on moral development and curriculum implementation.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied several strategies including triangulation of data sources, member checking, and prolonged engagement in the field. Triangulation was used to validate the consistency between interview, observation, and document data. Member checking involved returning summaries of interpretations to participants to verify accuracy, while prolonged engagement allowed the researcher to build rapport and reduce bias. These

procedures enhanced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

C. Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has produced notable positive impacts on the moral development of students at YASPIM Taruna Private Vocational High School Sei Glugur. Through classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis, several key themes emerged, including increased student responsibility, improved discipline, mutual respect, empathy, and challenges related to teacher readiness and time management.

First, the Independent Curriculum was found to enhance students' sense of responsibility in learning. Teachers reported that students became more aware of their roles in planning, completing, and reflecting on their learning projects. This was particularly evident during project-based learning activities, where students were required to divide tasks, set timelines, and evaluate outcomes collaboratively. According to one teacher, "Students learn to be accountable not because they are told to, but because they understand the importance of teamwork and contribution."

Second, moral growth was also reflected in students' disciplinary behavior. Observations showed that students followed class routines more consistently and displayed punctuality in submitting assignments. The integration of reflective discussions at the end of lessons encouraged students to connect moral lessons with their personal behavior. This aligns with Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning, which emphasizes the role of reflection and reasoning in shaping moral actions (Dolph, 2008).

Third, the curriculum fostered mutual respect and empathy among students. In collaborative projects, students were encouraged to appreciate diverse perspectives and support peers who struggled academically. Teachers mentioned that the curriculum's emphasis on social and emotional learning contributed to the development of positive peer relationships. This finding supports Chen's (2023) argument that moral education is best achieved through interactive and socially engaging learning environments.

Moreover, the teacher's role was found to be central in mediating moral learning. Teachers served not only as facilitators of content but also as moral exemplars whose behavior influenced students' ethical attitudes. During observations, students often mirrored their teachers' politeness, punctuality, and sense of fairness. One student expressed that "what teachers do matters more than what they say," indicating that moral modeling plays a crucial role in the classroom.

However, the study also found that some teachers struggled to integrate moral components into technical subjects, such as engineering or accounting. The challenge lay in linking moral reasoning to vocational competencies without disrupting the flow of skill-based instruction. This tension reflects findings from Brain Academy (2024), which reported that educators in vocational settings often prioritize technical mastery over value-based discussions.

In terms of pedagogy, project-based learning emerged as a powerful medium for moral education. Projects that required collaboration, problem-solving, and community engagement naturally involved moral decision-making. For example, one group project on community hygiene led students to reflect on responsibility toward public spaces and the importance of integrity in teamwork. This supports Sampoerna Foundation's (2024) assertion that experiential learning promotes both moral and cognitive growth.

The findings also revealed that school culture played a crucial role in sustaining moral values. The leadership at YASPIM Taruna emphasized discipline, respect, and service as core principles of the institution. Daily routines such as morning assemblies, collective prayers, and school clean-up activities reinforced these values. Such consistent exposure created an environment conducive to moral internalization, consistent with Rosenberg's (2024) idea of a "moral curriculum."

Nevertheless, not all outcomes were uniformly positive. Several teachers noted time constraints as a barrier to deeper moral reflection. Since the Independent Curriculum involves numerous projects and assessments, opportunities for ethical discussions were sometimes sacrificed for content coverage. As one teacher mentioned, "We want to talk about values, but we also need to finish the syllabus."

Another challenge involved teacher preparedness. Some educators lacked adequate training in moral pedagogy or in interpreting the Independent Curriculum's guidelines on character formation. As a result, moral education tended to rely heavily on the teacher's personal initiative rather than institutional guidance. This finding echoes the concern raised by KSPSTENDIK (2024) about uneven teacher readiness in implementing the new curriculum.

Additionally, students' moral understanding varied according to their backgrounds and experiences. While some demonstrated high levels of empathy and social responsibility, others remained indifferent or viewed moral lessons as irrelevant to vocational goals. This suggests that moral education must be contextualized to address the diverse moral reasoning stages among adolescents, as emphasized by Kohlberg's framework (Dolph, 2008).

The research also identified a gradual improvement in self-regulation and honesty among students. Teachers noted fewer cases of academic dishonesty, such as plagiarism or cheating. Students themselves expressed pride in completing assignments independently, suggesting that the Independent Curriculum's focus on self-directed learning contributed to ethical awareness.

In contrast, a small number of students struggled with maintaining discipline outside the classroom. This indicates that moral development is not an isolated outcome of curriculum design but a continuous process influenced by home, peers, and community. As Chen (2023) argued, moral growth requires consistent reinforcement across multiple environments.

From a broader perspective, the Independent Curriculum has fostered a student-centered moral culture, emphasizing reflection, collaboration, and autonomy. Students began to internalize moral values through action rather than instruction. Such experiential moral learning, where values are lived rather than preached, aligns with constructivist theories of education (Patton, 2023).

In the discussion phase, it is evident that the Independent Curriculum promotes moral values through indirect learning mechanisms. Rather than teaching morality as a separate subject, the curriculum embeds ethical reasoning into everyday learning experiences. This

hidden curriculum operates through the attitudes, interactions, and expectations shared in the classroom (Rosenberg, 2024).

However, the success of this approach largely depends on teacher competence and institutional support. Schools must provide professional development opportunities that equip teachers with strategies to integrate moral reasoning into vocational subjects. Without such support, the moral dimension of the curriculum risks becoming superficial or inconsistent (Kemdikbud, 2024).

Another important implication is the need for reflective assessment practices. Current evaluation methods focus primarily on cognitive outcomes, while moral progress remains largely unmeasured. Developing qualitative assessment tools—such as reflective journals, behavioral observations, and peer feedback—could make moral growth more visible and measurable (Miles et al., 2014).

The findings also highlight the value of collaborative partnerships between schools, families, and communities in supporting moral formation. When moral lessons are reinforced both at home and in school, students develop stronger internal motivation to act ethically. The Independent Curriculum provides a framework for such collaboration, but it requires ongoing dialogue and mutual commitment from all stakeholders (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Overall, the discussion underscores that moral development under the Independent Curriculum is a gradual and multifaceted process. It cannot be achieved through formal instruction alone but must be cultivated through modeling, reflection, and meaningful engagement. The curriculum's potential lies in its flexibility and humanistic orientation, which allow teachers to nurture moral reasoning alongside vocational skills.

In conclusion, the Independent Curriculum at YASPIM Taruna Private Vocational High School Sei Glugur has demonstrated encouraging progress in shaping students' moral values. While challenges persist—particularly regarding teacher readiness and assessment practices—the overall trend suggests that students are becoming more responsible, empathetic, and disciplined. Future initiatives should focus on strengthening teacher training, providing time for reflection, and designing tools to assess moral development comprehensively.

D. Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has made a positive contribution to the moral development of students at YASPIM Taruna Private Vocational High School Sei Glugur. The curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning, project-based education, and character integration has encouraged students to be more reflective, responsible, and collaborative in their learning activities. Teachers have also played a crucial role as moral exemplars, guiding students not only through academic instruction but also through daily ethical practices and interpersonal relationships within the school environment.

Despite these positive outcomes, the study also identified several challenges that hinder the optimal development of students' moral character. Some teachers still struggle to design learning projects that explicitly foster moral values, while students occasionally face difficulties in internalizing those values beyond classroom contexts. Moreover, the lack of continuous teacher training and evaluation mechanisms in moral education has limited the effectiveness of the curriculum's character formation goals. Therefore, it is essential for schools and policymakers to provide professional development opportunities and consistent supervision to ensure that moral education remains at the heart of curriculum implementation.

In conclusion, the Independent Curriculum holds great potential to strengthen moral education if implemented holistically, with collaboration among teachers, students, and educational leaders. A sustainable moral learning culture must be cultivated through consistent modeling, contextual learning, and reflection-based assessment. Future research could further explore the long-term impact of this curriculum on moral development across different educational levels and regions in Indonesia. By doing so, the vision of producing intellectually competent and morally upright generations can be more fully realized in the era of educational transformation.

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