

Meaningful Learning in the Independent Curriculum: An Analysis of the Readiness of High School English Teachers in Bone Regency

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ABSTRACT

The Merdeka curriculum requires teachers to design learning that is flexible, contextual, and student-centered. In English subjects, these demands are important because learning is not only oriented towards mastering vocabulary and grammar, but also on students' ability to use language meaningfully in real communication situations. This study analyzes the readiness of high school English teachers in Bone Regency in designing meaningful learning based on the Independent Curriculum. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. Data was obtained through interviews, observations, and study of teaching device documents. The research informants consisted of high school English teachers who had implemented the Independent Curriculum. Data is analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The findings of the study show that high school English teachers in Bone Regency have understood the basic principles of the Independent Curriculum, especially in the aspects of learning flexibility, strengthening the learning context, and adjusting learning to the needs of students. However, the readiness of teachers is not completely evenly distributed. Some teachers still face obstacles in developing learning objectives, developing materials that are appropriate to the local context, implementing reflective learning strategies, and designing assessments that assess students' learning processes and outcomes as a whole. This study confirms that teacher readiness is an important factor in the success of meaningful learning in the Independent Curriculum. Strengthening teachers' competencies needs to be directed at the ability to design English learning that is relevant to students' lives, encourage active engagement, and provide space for reflection in the learning process.

Keywords: *Independent Curriculum, meaningful learning, readiness guru*

INTRODUCTION

The Independent Curriculum Library is one of the important directions in the renewal of secondary education in Indonesia. This curriculum emphasizes more flexible, student-centered learning, and provides space for teachers to tailor learning to the needs of the classroom. In the academic study document of the Independent Curriculum, the government emphasized that the scope of material was made slimmer so that teachers had time to use more student-centered learning methods. This policy shows that curriculum

changes not only touch the structure of subjects, but also the way teachers design more meaningful learning experiences¹.

At the high school level, the Independent Curriculum requires teachers to not only deliver material, but also design learning that helps students understand the relationship between knowledge, experience, and real life. This kind of learning is in line with the idea of meaningful learning, which is a learning process that connects new concepts with the knowledge structure that students already have². In the context of schools, meaningful learning is not enough to be marked by the completion of teaching materials. Learning must be seen from the ability of students to understand, use, and reflect on knowledge in relevant situations³.

English subjects have a strategic position in the Independent Curriculum because they are directly related to communication skills, literacy, and cross-cultural understanding. In Phase E, students are expected to be able to use English to communicate with teachers, peers, and others in various situations and purposes⁴. They are also directed to understand the main ideas and relevant details of discussions or presentations on topics close to adolescent life. This direction suggests that English learning in high school needs to move from mechanical language practice to the use of language in a real context⁵.

Meaningful English learning in the Independent Curriculum needs to contain contextual and reflective elements. Contextual elements help students relate the material to social, cultural, environmental, and everyday communication experiences⁶. Reflective elements help students assess their learning process, recognize difficulties, and improve learning strategies⁷. In learning English, these two elements are important because language skills are not only formed through memorization of vocabulary and grammar, but

¹ Mark Priestley, "Schools, Teachers, and Curriculum Change: A Balancing Act?," *Journal of educational change* 12, no. 1 (2011): 1–23.

² Charles M Reigeluth, "Meaningfulness and Instruction: Relating What Is Being Learned to What a Student Knows," *Instructional Science* 12, no. 3 (1983): 197–218.

³ Joseph D Novak, "Meaningful Learning: The Essential Factor for Conceptual Change in Limited or Inappropriate Propositional Hierarchies Leading to Empowerment of Learners," *Science education* 86, no. 4 (2002): 548–571.

⁴ Sandra J Savignon, "Teaching English as Communication: A Global Perspective.," *World Englishes* 22, no. 1 (2003).

⁵ Karsten Rincke, "It's Rather like Learning a Language: Development of Talk and Conceptual Understanding in Mechanics Lessons," *International Journal of Science Education* 33, no. 2 (2011): 229–258.

⁶ Kenneth Silseth and Ola Erstad, "Connecting to the Outside: Cultural Resources Teachers Use When Contextualizing Instruction," *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction* 17 (2018): 56–68.

⁷ Danielle S McNamara, "Measuring Deep, Reflective Comprehension and Learning Strategies: Challenges and Successes," *Metacognition and Learning* 6, no. 2 (2011): 195–203.

also through communication practices, understanding meaning, and awareness of the purpose of using language⁸.

Teacher readiness is the main factor in the success of meaningful learning. Teachers need to understand learning outcomes, develop learning objectives, develop learning objectives, select relevant materials, use active strategies, and design appropriate assessments⁹. The Independent Curriculum Learning and Assessment Guide emphasizes the importance of flexibility for educators and students in achieving the learning goals that have been set. Thus, teacher readiness is not only related to administrative knowledge of the curriculum, but also to pedagogical ability to translate the curriculum into classroom learning practices¹⁰.

The problem is that curriculum changes are often not directly followed by changes in learning practices. Some teachers may still have difficulty in crafting truly meaningful, contextual, and reflective learning. These difficulties can arise in the form of an uneven understanding of the Independent Curriculum, limitations in compiling teaching modules, the use of assessments that are not oriented to competency development, or the tendency to maintain old learning patterns. This condition needs to be studied empirically so that the discussion of the Independent Curriculum does not stop at the policy level¹¹.

The context of Bone Regency is important because each region has different social, cultural, and school conditions. English learning at Bone Regency High School can be developed by linking teaching materials to students' local lives, such as communication in the school environment, community culture, regional potential, economic activities, tourism, and social experiences of adolescents. However, these opportunities require teachers' readiness to choose the right context and turn it into a relevant learning experience. Without adequate readiness, contextual learning is only a term in the teaching tool, not a practice that students feel.

The study of the readiness of high school English teachers in designing meaningful learning still needs to be strengthened. Many discussions about the Independent Curriculum focus on implementation in general, while studies that place teacher readiness,

⁸ Onco Rumbouw, "The Communicative Language Teaching and Students' Vocabulary Memorizing Improvement," *Lingua: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Language Education* 4, no. 1 (2021): 43–83.

⁹ Julie Hauer and Timothy Quill, "Educational Needs Assessment, Development of Learning Objectives, and Choosing a Teaching Approach," *Journal of palliative medicine* 14, no. 4 (2011): 503–508.

¹⁰ Olga I Vaganova et al., "Increasing the Level of Teachers' Readiness for Pedagogical Project," *Revista Amazonia Investiga* 8, no. 22 (2019): 286–294.

¹¹ Michael Moore, "On a Theory of Independent Study," in *Distance Education* (Routledge, 2020), 68–94.

meaningful learning, and English subjects in one focus still have room for development. The value of the novelty of this research lies in the analysis of teachers' readiness in designing learning that is not only in accordance with the curriculum document, but also able to present a meaningful, contextual, and reflective learning experience for high school students.

Based on this description, research on "Meaningful Learning in the Independent Curriculum: An Analysis of the Readiness of High School English Teachers in Bone Regency" is important. This research can provide an empirical picture of the extent to which English teachers understand, design, and prepare learning in accordance with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum. The results of the research can also be the basis for improving teacher coaching, developing teaching tools, and strengthening English learning practices in high schools. With this focus, this research is not only academically relevant, but also has a practical contribution to improving the quality of learning in Bone Regency.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the understanding, experience, and readiness of high school English teachers in designing meaningful learning based on the Independent Curriculum. The research is not directed to test the relationship between variables statistically, but to describe in depth the condition of teachers' readiness in understanding the curriculum, compiling teaching tools, choosing learning strategies, and designing assessments that are in accordance with the characteristics of meaningful learning.

This research was carried out in several high schools in Bone Regency that have implemented the Independent Curriculum. The research subject is a high school English teacher who has experience teaching in classes that use the Independent Curriculum. The selection of informants is carried out purposively, which is based on certain criteria that are in accordance with research needs. These criteria include active English teachers, involved in the preparation of teaching tools, understanding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in schools, and willing to provide information related to the learning planning process.

Research data was collected through interviews, observations, and document review. The interview was used to explore teachers' understanding of the Independent Curriculum, the concept of meaningful learning, readiness in developing learning

objectives, and the obstacles faced in planning English learning. Observations were made to see the suitability between planning and learning practices in the classroom. Document analysis is carried out on teaching tools, such as learning outcomes, learning objectives, learning objectives, teaching modules, teaching materials, and assessment instruments used by teachers.

Data is analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Data reduction is carried out by selecting data that is relevant to the focus of the research, namely the readiness of teachers in designing meaningful learning. The presentation of data is carried out in the form of a descriptive description so that the relationship between findings can be seen clearly. Conclusions are drawn by interpreting interview data, observations, and documents in an integrated manner. To maintain the validity of the data, this study uses triangulation techniques by comparing the results of interviews, observation results, and learning documents used by teachers.

RESEARCH RESULTS

The results of the study show that high school English teachers in Bone Regency already have a basic understanding of the Independent Curriculum. Teachers understand that the Independent Curriculum provides a wider space to adapt learning to the needs of students. Teachers also see this curriculum as an opportunity to reduce learning patterns that are too textbook-centered. However, this understanding is not completely evenly distributed. Some teachers still understand the Independent Curriculum as a change in the administration of teaching tools, not as a change in the way of designing learning experiences.

Teachers' readiness is seen in their ability to identify learning outcomes and organize them into learning goals. Teachers began to reduce learning outcomes into more operational goals. In English subjects, learning objectives are directed at the ability to listen, speak, read, write, and present ideas. However, some teachers still have difficulty in developing learning objectives that are specific, measurable, and in accordance with the needs of students. This difficulty appears in learning objectives that are still too general and have not clearly described learning activities.

From the aspect of preparing the flow of learning objectives, teachers have tried to arrange the order of material based on the level of difficulty and needs of students. Teachers no longer fully follow the order of books rigidly. They begin to consider the

student's initial abilities, time availability, and classroom context. However, some teachers still need assistance in compiling a systematic learning flow. The flow that is created sometimes does not show a strong relationship between objectives, materials, activities, and assessments.

The research findings also show that teachers have tried to present more meaningful English learning. Teachers not only ask students to memorize vocabulary or sentence structures, but also involve students in communication activities. The activities used include simple dialogues, short presentations, group discussions, reading contextual texts, and writing based on personal experiences. These activities help students see the function of English in daily life. However, its implementation still depends on the creativity of each teacher.

In the aspect of contextualizing the material, teachers began to associate English learning with the social and cultural environment of students in Bone Regency. Some teachers use topics about school, family, youth activities, local food, tourist attractions, and community habits as learning materials. This approach makes it easier for students to understand the material because the topics used are close to their experiences. However, not all teachers are able to develop local teaching materials independently. Some teachers still use more examples from textbooks without adapting them to the regional context.

Reflective learning is starting to emerge, but it hasn't been a consistent part of every meeting. Some teachers give students the opportunity to communicate learning difficulties, assess self-understanding, and improve assignment results. Reflection is usually done through oral questions at the end of the lesson or brief notes on the material that has been understood. However, reflection activities have not always been designed in a structured way. Teachers still tend to place reflection as an additional activity, rather than an important part of the English learning process.

From the assessment aspect, teachers have used several forms of assessment, such as individual assignments, group work, presentations, speaking practice, and written tests. Teachers are also beginning to understand the importance of formative assessments in the Independent Curriculum. Assessments are not only used to give final grades, but also to see the progress of students' learning. However, some teachers still experience obstacles in compiling assessment rubrics that are in accordance with learning objectives. Assessment of speaking and writing skills is still often done in general without detailed indicators.

The main obstacles faced by teachers are related to time, technical understanding, and the availability of teaching materials. Teachers need more time to develop teaching modules, select contextual materials, and design appropriate assessments. In addition, not all teachers receive in-depth training on the Independent Curriculum. Some teachers learn independently through the Independent Teaching Platform, discussions with peers, and MGMP activities. This condition shows that the readiness of teachers is not only determined by personal will, but also by the support of the school and the professional environment.

The results of the study show that high school English teachers in Bone Regency are at the stage of readiness to develop in designing meaningful learning based on the Independent Curriculum. Teachers have understood the general direction of the Independent Curriculum and have begun to apply it in English learning. However, this readiness still needs to be strengthened in the aspects of preparing learning objectives, developing contextual materials, designing reflective activities, and preparing authentic assessments. These findings confirm that the success of meaningful learning is not so much dependent on curriculum changes, but also on teachers' readiness to translate the curriculum into real classroom practice.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study show that the readiness of high school English teachers in Bone Regency in designing meaningful learning based on the Independent Curriculum is at a developing stage. Teachers have understood the basic direction of the Independent Curriculum, especially in the aspects of flexibility, learning adjustment to student needs, and strengthening the learning context. However, this understanding has not yet fully become a mature pedagogical practice. This condition is in line with Fullan's theory of educational change which emphasizes that curriculum changes do not only occur through the change of documents, but through changes in teachers' understanding, beliefs, and actions in the classroom. Thus, teacher readiness needs to be seen as a gradual process, not as a condition that is immediately completed after the school implements the new curriculum.

The finding that some teachers still understand the Independent Curriculum as an administrative change shows that there is a gap between conceptual understanding and learning practice. Teachers are familiar with the terms learning outcomes, learning objectives, learning objectives, teaching modules, and formative assessments. However,

some teachers do not fully understand the pedagogical function of the device. In the pedagogical content knowledge perspective developed by Shulman, it is not enough for teachers to only master English material or curriculum formats. Teachers also need to be able to turn the material into a form of learning that can be understood, experienced, and used by students. This means that teaching tools must not stop as administrative documents. Teaching tools should be tools to organize students' learning experiences.

The readiness of teachers in compiling learning objectives is an important finding because learning objectives determine the direction of the entire learning process. The results of the study show that teachers are starting to reduce learning outcomes to more operational goals, but some goals are still too general. In learning design theory, good goals should describe clear learning behaviors, learning conditions, and success criteria. This principle is in line with Bloom's taxonomy which places learning objectives as the basis for directing students' cognitive activities. If the learning objectives are not specific, it will be difficult for teachers to choose appropriate strategies, materials, and assessments. In English learning, the goal needs to show the intended language skills, the context of communication, and the form of student performance.

The findings on the preparation of the flow of learning objectives show that teachers have tried to adjust the order of the material to the students' initial abilities. This effort is in line with the theory of constructivism which places students as active subjects in building knowledge. Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of the proximal developmental zone, which is the distance between the actual abilities of the student and the abilities that can be achieved with the help of the teacher. In this context, the flow of learning objectives needs to be arranged gradually so that students can move from basic abilities to more complex abilities. If the learning flow has not shown a strong relationship between objectives, materials, activities, and assessments, then the student learning experience is likely to be interrupted. Meaningful learning requires continuity between what is learned, how students learn, and how learning success is assessed.

Other findings suggest that teachers are starting to present English learning through communication activities, such as dialogue, discussion, presentation, reading contextual texts, and writing based on personal experiences. This finding can be explained through Ausubel's theory of meaningful learning. According to Ausubel, learning becomes meaningful when new information is connected to the knowledge structure that students already have. In learning English, students will have an easier time understanding

vocabulary, expressions, and language structures when the material is related to their life experiences. Therefore, communication activities that are close to students' lives are stronger than language exercises that are only mechanical. Teachers who are ready to design meaningful learning need to choose activities that encourage students to use language to convey ideas, not just answer questions.

In terms of contextualizing the material, the results of the study show that some teachers have associated English material with the social and cultural environment of students in Bone Regency. Teachers use the topics of family, school, youth activities, local food, tourist attractions, and community habits as learning materials. These findings are in line with a contextual teaching and learning approach that emphasizes the relationship between the subject matter and the student's real situation. Johnson explains that contextual learning helps students find meaning because the material is not present as separate information from life. In the context of Bone Regency, teachers can utilize local culture, tourism potential, economic activities, and social life of the community as a source of learning English. However, the results of the study also show that not all teachers are able to develop local teaching materials independently. This shows that contextualization still requires the support of teacher training and collaboration.

Findings on reflective learning suggest that teachers have provided space for students to communicate learning difficulties, assess self-understanding, and improve on assignments. However, reflection activities have not taken place in a structured and consistent manner. These findings can be discussed through Schön's theory of reflective practice and Kolb's theory of experiential learning. Schön views reflection as an important process for a person to assess actions and improve practice. Kolb also places reflection as an important stage after the learning experience. In English language learning, reflection helps students recognize difficulties in speaking, writing, reading, listening, and using vocabulary. If reflection is only done spontaneously at the end of learning, it is difficult for teachers to obtain complete data on student development. Therefore, reflection needs to be designed in the form of a learning journal, reflective questions, self-feedback, or a record of learning progress.

In the assessment aspect, the results showed that teachers had used individual assignments, group work, presentations, speaking practices, and written tests. This shows a shift from judgments that are only oriented towards the final result to a more diverse assessment. These findings are in line with Black and Wiliam's formative assessment

theory which emphasizes that assessment should help teachers and students understand learning positions, learning goals, and next steps for improvement. However, obstacles still arise in the preparation of the assessment rubric. In learning English, rubrics are very important because each skill has different indicators. Speaking, writing, reading, and listening cannot be judged by the same measure. Without a clear rubric, the assessment will be too general and the feedback to students becomes less meaningful.

This discussion confirms that the readiness of high school English teachers in Bone Regency in designing meaningful learning based on the Independent Curriculum has shown a positive direction, but it is not completely even. The findings of the study show that teachers have understood the basic principles of the curriculum, started to develop learning objectives, try communication activities, relate the material to the local context, provide room for reflection, and use more varied assessments. However, the theory of meaningful learning, constructivism, contextual learning, reflective practice, and formative assessment suggest that all of these aspects need to be designed systematically. Teacher readiness is not only determined by the ability to make teaching devices. Teachers' readiness can be seen from their ability to connect objectives, materials, activities, contexts, reflections, and assessments into one complete learning experience. Therefore, teacher strengthening needs to be directed to practice-based training, MGMP mentoring, development of local teaching materials, and the preparation of English assessment rubrics in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research, the readiness of high school English teachers in Bone Regency in designing meaningful learning based on the Independent Curriculum is at a developing stage. Teachers have understood the basic principles of the Independent Curriculum, especially in the aspects of learning flexibility, adjustment to student needs, and the importance of context in the learning process. Teachers also begin to reduce learning outcomes into learning objectives, develop learning flows, and use communication activities that are more relevant to students' lives.

Teachers' readiness is not completely evenly distributed. Some teachers still face obstacles in developing specific learning objectives, developing teaching materials based on local contexts, designing reflective activities, and compiling assessments that are appropriate to English language skills. This condition shows that the implementation of the

Independent Curriculum is not enough only marked by changes in teaching equipment. Teachers need to have a strong pedagogical understanding in order to be able to connect objectives, materials, activities, reflections, and assessments in a systematic manner.

Meaningful learning in the Independent Curriculum in English requires teacher readiness conceptually and practically. Teachers need to be strengthened through training, MGMP mentoring, development of local teaching materials, and the preparation of clear assessment rubrics. This reinforcement is important so that English learning at Bone Regency High School not only meets the demands of the curriculum, but also helps students use English in a meaningful, contextual, and reflective way.

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