



A Historical Review of Educational Curriculum Development in Indonesia

Siti Safura

English Education Study Program, Universitas Muhammadiyah Aceh, Indonesia

Email: sitisafura11@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: sitisafura11@gmail.com

Abstract. This article presents a historical review of the development of the education curriculum in Indonesia, from the colonial era to contemporary reforms. The discussion highlights major curriculum changes that have shaped the national education system, beginning with post-independence curricula and continuing through reforms designed to respond to political, social, and economic developments. The 1947 Curriculum and the 1968 Curriculum are identified as important milestones in strengthening national identity, promoting unity, and supporting national development goals. The article also explains how global educational paradigms and local socio-cultural contexts have influenced curriculum design in Indonesia. These influences are reflected in the growing emphasis on character education, critical thinking skills, vocational competencies, and the holistic development of students. Recent curriculum reforms, such as the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, aim to create more student-centered learning, provide greater flexibility in the learning process, encourage independent learning, and support the development of 21st-century skills. However, the implementation of these reforms continues to face several challenges, including regional disparities, unequal access to educational resources, and limitations in teacher readiness and professional development. These issues affect the effectiveness of curriculum implementation across various educational contexts in Indonesia. The article concludes that future curriculum development should prioritize inclusiveness, adaptability, sustainability, and technological integration to address the evolving demands of society and improve the quality of national education.

Keywords: Curriculum Development; Educational Curriculum; Educational Policy; Historical Review; Indonesian Education System.

1. INTRODUCTION

A country will progress when its education advances. Advanced education is inseparable from a good educational system or curriculum. Curriculum is a mechanism for transferring all knowledge. This is because curriculum serves everything that is crucial in transmitting knowledge. The curriculum is a plan and arrangement of learning and teaching materials that aim to achieve predetermined educational goals (Syahputra et al., 2022). According to Tyler (1968), the curriculum is all of the learning of students which is planned by and directed by the school to attain its educational goals. The curriculum has a series plan that includes aim, method, subject matter and evaluation. This planning as a primary in education to obtain the national education goals.

In Indonesia, the development of the education curriculum reflects the dynamics of social, cultural, and global needs that continue to develop. The curriculum in Indonesia has undergone major changes along with shifts in national policies, technological developments, and the demands of globalization. Curriculum changes in Indonesia represent learning frameworks with a highly strategic role in all educational activities, shaping both the process and outcomes of the educational experience (Iramdan, I., & Manurung, 2019). Each change

aims to improve the quality of education and equip students with skills that are relevant to the current era. According to Wayan (2019), the education curriculum in Indonesia functions not only as a learning guide, but also as an instrument to shape students' character and prepare them to face future challenges.

Curriculum changes in Indonesia began during the independence era and have gone through several significant reform eras. As stated by Supriadi (2021), initially, the Indonesian curriculum was heavily influenced by Dutch colonial policies that emphasized cognitive learning. After independence, the Indonesian government began designing a curriculum that focused on strengthening national identity and national unity. In 1968, a more nationalistic curriculum was introduced with an emphasis on moral education and national character. The curriculum reform era continued to develop, including the introduction of the 1975, 1984, and 1994 Curriculums. According to Zubaidah (2020), the 1975 curriculum was one of the major changes in which an objective-based approach was introduced. This curriculum focuses on the basic competencies that students need to achieve in each subject. Then, the 1984 Curriculum was known as the “Active Student Learning Method” (CBSA) approach which required students to be more active in participating in the teaching and learning process.

Entering the 21st century, globalization and the development of information technology have brought significant changes to the education curriculum in Indonesia. The introduction of the 2004 Curriculum (Competency-Based Curriculum) emphasized the development of specific skills and student competencies. As stated by Rahman, F., & Iskandar, (2022), this curriculum directs education to not only focus on theoretical knowledge, but also on practical skills that are relevant to the needs of the labor market. The 2013 Curriculum was then launched as a response to criticism of the 2006 Curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes the development of student character, critical thinking skills, and holistic learning. In addition, the 2013 Curriculum emphasizes the importance of digital literacy and instilling Pancasila values in every subject. Research by Kartini (2019) shows that this approach helps students to be better prepared to face global challenges, but also faces several obstacles in its implementation, especially in terms of teacher training and the provision of adequate learning facilities.

Efforts to improve education did not stop there, the government continues with the development of the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to provide more freedom to students and educators in determining learning methods that suit the needs, interests, and potential of each individual. The goal is to create a learning environment that is more inclusive, adaptive, and relevant to the challenges of the times, while encouraging students to develop independently and think critically (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

Each of these reforms aimed to address specific educational challenges and improve the quality of education. The government implements various education systems is to improve the lives of children in the society (Oktavia et al., 2023). Novasyari (2021) mentioned that the new curriculum is expected to improve the quality of learners and is able to be one of the solutions to the moral problems among students. However, the challenges in implementing the curriculum in Indonesia are quite complex, covering various aspects such as teacher quality, infrastructure, and Indonesia's cultural and geographical diversity. As an example, According to (Priyanto, A., & Setiawan (2020), the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum faces many obstacles, especially in remote areas that have limited access to technology. In addition, teachers' adaptation and understanding of the new curriculum often takes a long time. This often has an impact on the effectiveness of the learning process and students' acceptance of the material being taught.

Along with this, the development of the curriculum in the future is expected to be more adaptive and responsive to changes that occur in the world. With the Industrial Revolution 4.0, the curriculum in Indonesia needs to focus on developing digital skills, data literacy, and analytical skills. The future curriculum needs to consider 21st-century skills including critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity (Komalasari, K., & Yulianto, 2021). In addition, the government must also pay attention to the development of human resources who are able to teach and implement technology-based curriculum in all regions, including remote areas. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a search related to curriculum in Indonesia. According to the explanations above, this article is aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the curriculum development that implemented in Indonesia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum Development

Curriculum development refers to the systematic planning, design, and structuring of educational experiences to meet specific learning goals and objectives. It involves the creation, implementation, and evaluation of curricula that foster students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes within a given educational context. Scholars like Tyler (1949) suggest that curriculum development should begin by clearly defining the objectives of education, ensuring that content, instructional methods, and assessments are aligned with these objectives. Curriculum developers must consider cultural, social, and political factors to make learning relevant and impactful for diverse groups of students (Oliva, 2009).

One central framework in curriculum development is the needs-based approach, which emphasizes aligning educational content with the learners' current and future needs, and the demands of society (Ornstein, A. C., & Hunkins, 2018). This approach asserts that curriculum development is a response to identifying and addressing educational gaps and societal demands, thereby enabling students to acquire competencies that are relevant in both local and global contexts. Taba (1962), highlights the importance of actively involving teachers and educational stakeholders in curriculum planning to ensure that the curriculum remains adaptable and reflects the changing demands of society.

Evaluation and revision are essential in curriculum development as they ensure continuous improvement. Through formative and summative evaluations, curriculum developers assess the effectiveness of instructional materials, teaching strategies, and learning outcomes (Marsh, C., & Willis, 2007). This iterative process allows educators to respond to feedback, incorporate new educational research, and adjust the curriculum to enhance student learning. As educational environments continue to evolve, curriculum development remains a dynamic process, continually adapting to better meet learners' needs and educational goals (Posner, 2004).

The Concept of Indonesia Curriculum

Curriculum development in Indonesia is an ongoing and dynamic process influenced by various educational, social, and cultural factors. Since independence, Indonesia has revised its curriculum multiple times, with each change reflecting the country's shifting priorities and developmental goals. The primary purpose of these revisions has been to ensure that education aligns with national goals, including fostering nationalism, moral development, and economic productivity (Suharto et al., 2018). Each curriculum iteration is designed to address contemporary needs and respond to global educational trends while maintaining core Indonesian values. This has resulted in curricula that aim to be both contextually relevant and globally competitive (Bjork, 2005).

A significant challenge in Indonesian curriculum development has been balancing standardization with the flexibility to accommodate diverse regional needs. With over 17,000 islands and hundreds of ethnic groups, Indonesia's education system must address vast cultural and linguistic diversity. Recent developments, such as the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013 or K13), introduced competencies-based learning focused on developing critical thinking, creativity, and collaborative skills (Raihani, 2014). The K13 also emphasizes character education, a move aimed at building students' moral and ethical values, which is seen as essential in the Indonesian cultural context. Teachers play a central role in curriculum delivery,

yet they face challenges, including limited resources and training, which impact the successful implementation of curriculum reforms (Chang, et al., 2013). The effective curriculum implementation remains an ongoing issue due to disparities in educational infrastructure and access across regions. The Indonesian government continues to collaborate with international organizations to support curriculum development and ensure the nation's education system can effectively contribute to sustainable national development (UNESCO, 2019).

3. RESEARCH METHODE

This study employed a qualitative research design using a document analysis approach to examine the historical development of the educational curriculum in Indonesia. Qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex educational phenomena and enables the researcher to interpret policy changes, historical contexts, and curriculum reforms over time (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

For collecting the data, document analysis was utilized as a part of qualitative method. Document analysis is a form of qualitative research in which the researcher interprets documents to give voice and meaning to an assessment topic (Bowe, 2009). The use of this method was chosen to collect a data from a number articles and studies that related to curriculum development in Indonesia.

The analysis process involved organizing and reviewing documents chronologically to identify key curriculum phases, major policy shifts, and underlying educational objectives. The documents were then examined thematically to identify recurring patterns related to curriculum orientation, educational goals, instructional approaches, and implementation challenges. This analytical process enabled the researcher to synthesize historical developments and critically interpret how curriculum reforms responded to social, political, and global educational changes. The findings from the document analysis formed the basis for discussing curriculum development trends and drawing conclusions regarding future directions for Indonesia's educational curriculum.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Curriculum development refers to the process of designing, organizing, and implementing educational content, strategies, and materials to meet the goals of educational institutions and align with national standards (Pratt, 1994). The development of Curriculum will reflect a better understanding of effective learning methods and individual student needs (Machali, 1970).

In Indonesia, curriculum development has played a pivotal role in ensuring that education adapts to societal needs, cultural values, and global trends. The Indonesia curriculum has a rich history, influenced by various cultural, political, and social changes. From the colonial era to post-independence, the curriculum has evolved significantly. During the Dutch colonial period, education was limited and primarily aimed at creating a class of bureaucrats (Anderson, 2016). After gaining independence in 1945, Indonesia began to develop a national curriculum to promote unity and national identity (Crib, 2010). The national educational curriculum has experienced changes in the year 1947, 1952, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, and 2013(Jannah, 2023). Latest is Merdeka curriculum (freedom curriculum) that implemented in 2020 by the Minister Mr. Nadiem Anwar Makarim (Baro'ah, 2020). The historical of Indonesia curriculum are elaborated as follows:

1947 Curriculum /Lesson Plan

This was Indonesia's first curriculum following independence, designed to eradicate colonial influences. It was designed to accommodate the needs of a newly independent Indonesia. Also known as the Leer Plan, it was deeply influenced by the revolutionary spirit and aimed to instill national character, patriotism, and social responsibility, emphasizing moral and physical education. This curriculum did not provide specific details for each subject but instead set broad guidelines, focusing on practical knowledge and values, which reflected Indonesia's desire to strengthen its own cultural and national identity at the time (Fadhilah Putri, Z., & Maula, 2024). This curriculum had a strong focus on humanities and emphasized civic education to instill loyalty to the nation. Lessons were often thematic, integrating subjects like history, language, and moral education to promote a cohesive understanding of Indonesia's identity. Although the curriculum was simple and intended to foster unity, its thematic approach marked a pioneering effort to shape Indonesian education with clear national goals (Wahyudi, 2019).

1952 Curriculum

Building upon the foundations laid by the 1947 curriculum, the 1952 curriculum introduced more structure in content delivery and teaching methodologies. This curriculum was a step forward in formalizing educational standards and placing a stronger emphasis on the subjects necessary for a modernizing nation. This curriculum introduced the idea of subject specialization, where teachers were assigned to specific subjects, allowing for more focused learning. It also included vocational elements to address the economic realities of the period, such as classes in agriculture and craftsmanship for students unable to continue to secondary school (Diniarty puluhulawa et al., 2023).

In this period, the government began standardizing content across regions to create a more uniform educational experience, which was crucial in a nation with diverse ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. This curriculum also aimed to improve practical skills, especially at the secondary level, as Indonesia was gradually shifting toward building a workforce that could contribute to national development (Suryadarma, D., & Jones, 2013). Novasyari, (2021) added that the most prominent characteristic feature of this curriculum is that each lesson plan must consider the content associated with everyday life.

1964 Curriculum

The 1964 curriculum marked another pivotal shift as it sought to incorporate Sukarno's ideology of "Pancawardhana," or "five basic principles," into the education system. This curriculum aimed to develop students in five core areas: creativity, moral development, intelligence, emotional development, and physical development. By categorizing subjects into these areas, it sought to provide a holistic education that aligned with national development goals, moving away from solely academic learning toward practical competencies needed for Indonesia's growth. (Juniardi, 2020).

The 1964 curriculum emphasized the development of well-rounded individuals by integrating moral and ethical values within academic subjects. In contrast to previous curricula, it introduced hands-on learning and practical skills training to prepare students for real-world tasks and challenges. This practical approach aligned with Sukarno's vision of transforming education into a means for achieving economic and social development. The curriculum was short-lived due to political changes following the fall of Sukarno in 1965 (Bjork, 2005). However, This 1964 curriculum was a curriculum that adopted a leadership of the community method (Rani Oktavia et al., 2023).

1968 Curriculum

The 1968 curriculum in Indonesia was deeply influenced by the country's political climate following independence and was primarily structured to instill national ideals. With

the rise of the New Order regime, the curriculum aimed to consolidate a sense of nationalism and promote the five foundational principles of Pancasila (the Indonesian state ideology). The 1968 curriculum is a concrete manifestation of the implementation of the 1945 Constitution (Syahputra et al., 2022). This approach reflected the government's emphasis on developing citizens who were loyal to the state and supportive of national unity. Education during this period focused heavily on moral values, character building, and social responsibility (Fadhilah, 2017).

The 1968 curriculum emphasized teacher-centered methods, with rote learning as a dominant practice. Teachers were expected to deliver knowledge to students in a way that left little room for critical thinking or personal interpretation, as these aspects were seen as secondary to the need for national cohesion. As a result, the 1968 curriculum established a foundation for a centralized, value-driven approach to education, which was a recurring theme in later reforms (Suryadi, 2000).

1975 Curriculum

The 1975 curriculum reform marked a shift towards a more structured and efficient educational system. Influenced by a global trend favoring productivity and performance, the curriculum's objectives were shaped around clear, measurable outcomes. This period saw the introduction of the Instructional Systems Design (ISD) model, which prioritized systematic instruction with explicit learning objectives, materials, methods, and evaluation processes (Raharjo, 2020). By implementing ISD, the curriculum introduced the concept of learning modules, which allowed for step-by-step instruction and assessment (Firman, H., & Tola, 2008).

One significant aspect of the 1975 curriculum was its focus on preparing students with practical skills needed for economic development. This shift reflected Indonesia's ambition to develop a workforce that could contribute to industrial and technological growth. Consequently, the curriculum placed a greater emphasis on science, mathematics, and practical subjects. However, this structured, goal-oriented approach received criticism for limiting creativity and reducing student autonomy, as it was heavily centered on standardization and efficiency over flexible learning experiences (Usman, 2003).

1984 Curriculum

The curriculum introduced in 1984 brought about a significant shift toward student-centered learning. Known as the "Active Student Learning Method" (Cara Belajar Siswa Aktif or CBSA), this curriculum aimed to encourage critical thinking, problem-solving, and active student participation. The government, influenced by educational trends favoring

constructivism, sought to move away from rote learning and encourage an environment where students could actively engage in the learning process (Kosasih, 2009). The 1984 curriculum was heavily influenced by the Humanistic school, which views students as individuals who can and want to actively search for themselves, explore and research their environment (Abidin et al., 2023).

Under the 1984 curriculum, students were encouraged to work collaboratively, participate in discussions, and engage in problem-solving activities. Teachers acted as facilitators rather than sole knowledge providers, creating a more dynamic classroom environment. This reform was seen as a progressive step toward modernizing Indonesian education, allowing students to develop skills that would be useful in an increasingly complex, globalized world. However, implementing CBSA posed challenges, as teachers were not always adequately trained to shift from traditional to active learning methods, and some schools lacked the resources necessary to support this approach fully (Retnawati, H., 2016).

1994 Curriculum

The 1994 curriculum in Indonesia was grounded in content-based learning, with a focus on achieving comprehensive knowledge in a structured, subject-centered format. This curriculum mandated a standardized approach to ensure all students received a uniform education (Nasution, 2019). Teachers delivered information-heavy lessons, requiring students to memorize facts rather than engage in critical thinking or application. This model was largely influenced by the New Order era, emphasizing stability and conformity in the educational sphere.

This curriculum aimed to balance knowledge and moral development, implementing a communicative and meaningful learning approach. It operated on a quarterly system, but its extensive subject matter and content-heavy approach placed considerable strain on students and teachers. Critics pointed out that the curriculum's complexity sometimes hindered deep learning due to the breadth of content covered in a limited timeframe, in which highlighting the passive role of students and lack of opportunities for creative expression (Subandi, 2014).

2004 Curriculum

The introduction of the 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) marked a significant shift toward learner-centered education. This new model prioritized core competencies and practical skills, addressing a need for adaptable, globally aware graduates. As described by (Yusuf, 2021), this shift reflected Indonesia's broader efforts to integrate with global education standards and prepare its workforce for economic challenges and technological advancement. The CBC model introduced a broader perspective, encouraging

students to develop essential competencies that could adapt to various life scenarios, and paved the way for thematic and integrated learning approaches. This curriculum emphasized active learning, with teachers acting as facilitators rather than mere instructors (Mukminin et al., 2019).

One key feature was the adaptation of the curriculum to local needs, allowing regions to contextualize content according to regional cultures and economic activities. Although this flexibility was beneficial, some educators found it challenging to implement due to a lack of resources and the required shift in teaching styles (Suryadi et al., 2006). The 2004 CBC laid the groundwork for a more modern, skills-oriented curriculum, but its implementation challenges led to further revisions.

2006 Curriculum

In 2006, Indonesia introduced the Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP), or School-Based Curriculum. This curriculum extended the principles of the CBC but allowed schools greater autonomy in designing their specific programs. This curriculum applies entirely to schools, with the intention that there is no intervention from the Education Office or the National Education Department (Iramdan, I., & Manurung, 2019). It encouraged schools to develop curricula suited to their students' local contexts, promoting a bottom-up approach where schools could tailor learning objectives and materials (Utomo, 2009). Under KTSP, teachers could exercise more flexibility in lesson planning, utilizing resources and methods that catered to their students' unique needs. Studies indicated that KTSP facilitated greater student engagement and better alignment with local economic and social realities (Sutrisno et al., 2012). However, disparities in school resources, teacher training, and administrative support continued to impact the quality and consistency of KTSP implementation nationwide.

2013 Curriculum

The 2013 Curriculum, known as Kurikulum 2013 (K-13), is one of Indonesia's most recent curriculum reforms and serves as a response to the perceived limitations of earlier competency-based models. The K-13 curriculum was implemented to foster holistic student development, emphasizing character education, creativity, and critical thinking. It represents a shift from rote learning to a student-centered approach, aligning with international educational trends (Putra et al., 2018).

K-13's content integrates the "Pancasila" values, a set of foundational Indonesian principles, and incorporates aspects of 21st-century skills, like digital literacy and collaboration (Nurhadi et al., 2020). The curriculum also integrates local wisdom within a global context, with the government mandating subjects such as environmental education and anti-corruption

education as part of character-building efforts (Setiawan, et al., 2021). While widely praised, the K-13 curriculum faced critiques regarding its practical implementation, with challenges in teacher training and resource allocation impeding its effectiveness in some regions (Putra, F. A., & Nurbaya, 2018).

Merdeka Curriculum

Indonesia has introduced the “Merdeka Curriculum,” which aligns with the “Freedom of Learning” initiative launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This curriculum aims to reduce rigidity, providing educators with greater autonomy to tailor lesson plans and assessments based on students’ needs and regional characteristics. The Merdeka Curriculum encourages a more flexible, adaptive educational model, empowering teachers and schools to be innovative in developing their pedagogical methods (Widyaningrum, 2023). A significant element of the Merdeka Curriculum is its emphasis on project-based learning (PBL), which helps students apply knowledge practically.

The program is designed to nurture problem-solving skills, creativity, and independence among students (Widodo, P. & Santoso, 2022). The focus on flexibility also supports students’ unique strengths and passions, promoting a personalized educational experience. The Merdeka curriculum is one of the curriculum concepts that demands independence for students that each student is given the freedom to access knowledge obtained from formal and non-formal education (Abidin et al., 2023). With this approach, this Curriculum gives schools and teachers the freedom to adapt learning according to local contexts and needs, while still ensuring the reinforcement of Pancasila values (Syahputra et al., 2022).

5. CONCLUSION

This historical review shows that the development of Indonesia’s educational curriculum has been a dynamic and adaptive process influenced by historical, political, social, and cultural contexts. From early post-independence curricula focused on strengthening national identity to recent reforms emphasizing student-centered learning, curriculum changes in Indonesia reflect continuous efforts to align education with national development goals and global educational trends. The shift toward competency-based learning, character education, and the development of 21st-century skills is particularly evident in recent initiatives such as the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, which aim to promote learner autonomy, flexibility, and holistic student development.

Despite these progressive reforms, significant challenges remain in curriculum implementation. Regional disparities, unequal access to educational resources, and limitations

in teacher readiness and professional development continue to affect the effectiveness of curriculum policies across diverse educational contexts. Therefore, future curriculum development should prioritize inclusivity, adaptability, and sustainability by strengthening teacher capacity, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and integrating technology to support meaningful learning. Addressing these challenges is essential to enhance the impact of curriculum reforms and improve the overall quality of education in Indonesia.

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