Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum and Deep Learning Approach in Educational Institutions

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Abstract

The implementation of the curriculum at the primary and secondary education levels, namely Elementary School, Junior High School, and Senior High School, has undergone significant transformation through the application of the Freedom of Learning program and the Deep Learning approach. The Freedom of Learning program encourages flexibility in learning, teacher creativity, and student independence in the learning process, while the Deep Learning approach emphasizes in-depth mastery of concepts, critical thinking skills, and the ability to solve complex problems. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the curriculum at various levels of education and evaluate the effectiveness of applying both approaches in improving the quality of learning. The research method used in this study is qualitative descriptive research. Qualitative descriptive is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words about people and observable behaviors to discover truths that are acceptable to human reason. The data collection technique used is a literature study, where data is obtained from books and previous research journals relevant to the topic being discussed. The results of the study show that the implementation of Freedom of Learning provides space for innovation in teaching methods and increases student motivation to learn, while the Deep Learning approach is able to improve students' overall understanding of concepts as well as their analytical and synthesis skills. These findings emphasize the importance of integrating both approaches to create relevant, adaptive, and quality learning in the modern era of education.

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is the core of the entire educational process and serves as a reference for teachers in organizing learning to achieve national educational goals. With the development of the times and technological advances, the Indonesian education system continues to undergo major changes, especially since the introduction of the Freedom of Learning policy by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Marisa, 2021; Rani et al., 2023).

The Freedom Curriculum and the Deep Learning approach, despite originating from different contexts, both aim to provide a more meaningful and relevant learning process for students (Khotimah et al., 2025). However, they use different methods to achieve this. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes freedom and flexibility for schools in designing their curricula. Teachers are given the space to adapt the material to the needs and conditions of their students, while also encouraging character building and 21st-century competencies. Learning is also designed so that students can be actively involved and work together.

In contrast, Deep Learning focuses on a thorough deepening of concepts. This approach requires critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills, as well as linking the material to real-life situations so that students can build their own understanding (Fitriani & Santiani, 2025; Kusnandar & Mirza, 2025; Rizki, 2024; Syayidah & Sodik, 2025). Although the approaches are different, both place students at the center of learning, provide flexibility in the learning process, and strive to connect the material to everyday life in order to encourage student engagement.

The Freedom Curriculum and Deep Learning, although in different contexts, essentially have similar goals, namely to create a more meaningful learning process that is tailored to the needs of students (Irawan et al., 2025; Rosiyati et al., 2025). However, the two use different approaches. The Freedom Curriculum emphasizes flexibility and school autonomy in designing the curriculum. Teachers are given the freedom to determine the material that is most relevant to the conditions and needs of students, while prioritizing character building and 21st-century competencies. This approach also encourages students to be actively involved and work together in the learning process.

Meanwhile, Deep Learning focuses on a deeper understanding of concepts. This approach emphasizes critical, analytical, and creative thinking skills, and relates subject matter to real-life situations so that students can construct their own knowledge. Both approaches place students at the center of the learning process, provide flexibility in the implementation of learning, connect learning to everyday life, and encourage students to be actively involved.

The Freedom Curriculum and Deep Learning complement each other. The Merdeka Curriculum provides a broad framework, while Deep Learning provides a more specific learning approach. By combining the two, it is hoped that learning will be more meaningful, relevant, and effective for students (Kharisma et al., 2025).

METHODS

This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach (Akem et al., 2025; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2022; 2023; Putri et al., 2025; Rosyadi & Athari, 2025). This method was chosen because it is suitable for describing in depth the phenomenon of curriculum implementation at the primary and secondary education levels through the application of the Freedom of Learning program and the Deep Learning approach. The qualitative descriptive approach allows researchers to examine data in the form of written and spoken words sourced from literature, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the process, meaning, and impact of the application of these two approaches on the quality of learning (Armita, 2025; Engkizar et al., 2024; 2025).

Data collection techniques were carried out through literature studies, namely reviewing books, journals, and previous research results relevant to the topic. The data obtained was then analyzed systematically by identifying the main themes, comparing findings between sources, and drawing logical and reasonable conclusions. This analysis aims to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing Freedom of Learning and Deep Learning in increasing learning flexibility, teacher creativity, student independence, and critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

Thus, this study is expected to provide a clear picture of the importance of integrating these two approaches in creating relevant and adaptive learning in the era of modern education (Engkizar et al., 2023; 2025; Ikhlas et al., 2025).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
The Freedom Curriculum Concept

The Freedom of Learning Curriculum is a new policy launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia under the leadership of Minister Nadiem Anwar Makarim (Hasim, 2020; Sa'adah et al., 2023). The Freedom of Learning Independent Campus program combines two main ideas, namely "Freedom of Learning" and "Independent Campus," into one policy framework. Educational transformation through this program is a strategic step to develop Indonesia's human resources to be superior with characteristics in line with the Pancasila Student Profile. The implementation of the Freedom of Learning Curriculum is intended for educational units at the elementary and secondary levels, including junior high schools, senior high schools, vocational high schools, and equivalent schools (Aegustinawati & Sunarya, 2023; Nugraheny et al., 2023).

Freedom of Learning provides educational institutions with the freedom to exercise their autonomy without being bound by complicated bureaucracy. This program also allows educators to work more freely without complex administrative obstacles, and gives students the opportunity to choose fields or subjects according to their interests (Suhartono, 2021). The Freedom of Learning program emerged as a response to various complaints within the education system, particularly regarding the excessive emphasis on achieving specific grades for students (Rahmafitri et al., 2024). Through this program, it is hoped that both students and teachers will have more space to learn freely and creatively. Freedom of Learning essentially emphasizes freedom of thought, and this freedom must first be possessed by teachers before it can be instilled in students. Freedom of Learning is freedom of thought, and this freedom of thought must first exist in teachers.

Students will not be able to become independent if their teachers have not achieved independence first. The concept of independence itself is not simply a matter of obedience or resistance, but something that must be pursued, not simply given. One of the concerning realities in the development of the teaching profession is that teachers often feel blamed rather than listened to. In fact, in every situation, teachers are at the center of the educational process. The burden of change is almost always placed on teachers, as if the future of education rests entirely in their hands. Teachers do indeed play a major role in the success of a nation, but this can trap them in an unbalanced responsibility. This important role cannot be fulfilled to the fullest if teachers do not have the fundamental thing they should have, namely independence.

The independence granted to teachers in the long term will be a key factor in fostering independent learning among students and supporting the realization of the nation's democratic ideals (Pangestu & Rochmat, 2021). The existence of long-term independence for teachers will play a central role in fostering student independence in learning and achieving the nation's democratic ideals (Srihandayani et al., 2024).

Advantages and Disadvantages of the Freedom Curriculum

Every curriculum used in Indonesia certainly has its positive and negative sides. When compared to the 2013 Curriculum, the Freedom Curriculum shows a number of advantages, including a more concise curriculum structure, but even though it is concise, the material presented still has depth. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes core material and student development tailored to their stage of development and learning process. The learning process becomes more meaningful because it is not rushed in order to cover the material, making the learning atmosphere more

enjoyable. Students have greater freedom; for example, at the high school level, specializations are no longer enforced. They can choose subjects according to their interests, talents, and goals. One of the advantages of the Freedom Curriculum for teachers is the opportunity to teach based on the assessment results of the achievement level and development of each student (Cholilah et al., 2023; Pratycia et al., 2023; Purnawanto, 2022).

After explaining the various advantages of the Freedom Curriculum introduced by the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, here are some of its weaknesses, including the fact that the implementation of the Freedom Curriculum is still not fully developed. The designed education and teaching system has not been properly realized. There is a lack of human resources (HR), as well as an unstructured system (Amanda et al., 2024; Kasmawati et al., 2025).

Based on the previous explanation, it can be concluded that the Merdeka Curriculum has a more concise concept than previous curricula, such as the 2004, 2006, 2013, and others. In its implementation, this curriculum provides more space for students to be creative during the learning process (Maskur, 2023).

Implementation of the Freedom Curriculum in Educational Institutions
Elementary School Level

The implementation of the Freedom Curriculum in Indonesian elementary schools has brought about various improvements in efforts to enhance the quality of education and provide flexibility for educational units in managing learning (Barlian & Solekah, 2022). However, its implementation still faces a number of challenges, including limited resources and inadequate technological facilities. To overcome these obstacles, the government and schools need to ensure sufficient funding to support the implementation of the Freedom Curriculum, including improving the competence of educators and optimizing the use of technology in teaching and learning activities (Ni'mah et al., 2025). In addition, teachers also need guidance and training to be able to adapt to a more flexible learning pattern in accordance with the curriculum requirements. With improved education quality and flexible school management, the implementation of the Freedom Curriculum at the elementary school level is expected to strengthen students' abilities to face various challenges.

Junior High School Level

The implementation of the Freedom of Learning Curriculum emphasizes the importance of effective curriculum design involving various stakeholders in order to achieve learning objectives at the junior high school level. With the Freedom Curriculum, learning activities are more relevant and participatory, particularly through project-based learning that encourages students to actively explore current issues. In addition, schools are given the freedom to choose one of three forms of Merdeka Curriculum implementation according to their respective conditions and levels of readiness (Nelliraharti, 2024; Rofi'ah et al., 2024). Adopting several components and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum without making changes to the current school curriculum. Implementing the Freedom Curriculum by utilizing the learning tools that have been provided. Implementing the Freedom Curriculum by compiling and developing their own teaching materials.

The advantage of the Freedom Curriculum lies in its more concise yet in-depth presentation, as it focuses on essential material and the development of student competencies in accordance with their stage of development. Thus, the implementation of the Freedom of Learning Curriculum at the junior high school level is more directed towards fostering critical thinking skills, exploring scientific concepts, and improving cooperation. Learning models such as Project-Based Learning and Discovery Learning are also widely used (Lestari, 2024).

Senior High School/Vocational High School Level

The Freedom Curriculum for the Senior High School/Vocational High School

level is a curriculum that provides flexibility in the learning process, both in terms of time management and material selection, while still emphasizing mastery of core material, character building, and the development of student competencies. In this curriculum, students are given the space to explore and develop their talents, interests, and abilities. In addition, teachers also have the freedom to determine teaching tools so that they can be tailored to the needs and interests of students.

The independent curriculum has several characteristics, namely the development of soft skills and character through projects that strengthen the Pancasila student profile (Utami et al., 2025). Students are expected to have problem-solving skills. Another characteristic is a focus on essential, relevant, and in-depth material so that there is enough time to build creativity and innovation. It is hoped that students will be able to achieve basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy. Flexible learning gives teachers the freedom to deliver material in accordance with the developmental stage of each student.

The Concept of Deep Learning in Education

Amidst the rapid pace of global transformation and technological advancement, Indonesia's education system is required to produce students who are not only academically intelligent, but also emotionally resilient, adaptable to change, and possess strong character. One approach that is currently gaining attention in efforts to improve the quality of education is deep learning.

Deep learning is an approach that focuses on creating a conscious, meaningful, and enjoyable learning experience through the development of thinking skills, emotional processing, and physical activities in a comprehensive and integrated manner (Della et al., 2025; Fatmawati, 2025). Deep learning emphasizes that learning is not merely a transfer of knowledge, but rather the creation of an atmosphere that honors learners. This philosophy is based on a holistic view of education that prioritizes balance between intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and physical aspects.

The Principles of Deep Learning

Deep learning adopts the principles of conscious learning, meaningful learning, and joyful learning. These three principles complement each other in creating a holistic and profound learning experience. The first is mindful learning. Mindful learning is a learning experience that occurs when students realize their role as active learners and are able to regulate themselves. They understand the learning objectives, have intrinsic motivation to learn, and take the initiative to develop learning strategies to achieve the set targets. With this awareness, students can acquire the knowledge and skills that support them in becoming lifelong learners.

Self-awareness is a learning process experienced by students when they understand the importance of being active learners and being able to manage themselves. Students know the learning objectives, are driven by internal motivation, and play an active role in designing learning strategies to achieve the desired results. With this awareness, they will acquire knowledge and skills that support their development as lifelong learners (Oktayani et al., 2025).

Secondly, it is meaningful (Meaningful Learning). Learning becomes meaningful when students are able to relate and apply the knowledge they have acquired in real-life situations. The learning process does not stop at understanding the material or mastering information, but is directed at the ability to apply these concepts. This ability helps strengthen long-term memory. When learning is connected to students' lives, they can understand their identity, know how to play a role, and understand how to contribute. Meaningful learning also involves students with real issues at the personal, local, national, and global levels. In addition, the learning process needs to involve parents, society, or the community as sources of practical experience while fostering a sense of responsibility and social awareness (Ramadhani et al., 2025).

Third is joyful learning. Joyful learning is a positive, challenging, enjoyable, and motivating learning environment. Enjoyment in learning helps students connect emotionally so that they better understand, remember, and apply knowledge. When students feel joy in the learning process, their intrinsic motivation will develop. This triggers curiosity, creativity, and active engagement in learning. As a result, the learning process becomes a meaningful and memorable experience. Joy in learning is also created when each student feels comfortable and their basic needs are met, such as physical needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem, and the need for self-actualization (Affandi & Megawati, 2024; Aminah, 2024; Hermini, 2025).

Implementation of Deep Learning in Freedom of Learning

The Freedom Curriculum was developed to address the need for more flexible, contextually relevant, and learner-centered learning. One of the approaches applied in this curriculum is Deep Learning, which emphasizes deep understanding through concept exploration, reflection, and application in real-life situations. This approach aims to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent learning skills in students. However, although this theory offers many advantages in improving the quality of learning, its implementation in the field still faces various obstacles, such as teacher readiness, limited resources, and a learning culture that still focuses on memorization (Agung, 2025).

Deep learning is a learning approach that emphasizes deep understanding, in which students are actively engaged with the material, connecting various ideas, and understanding them thoroughly (Manalu et al., 2025). Through the connections between ideas that they acquire, students can integrate learning in the cognitive, social, and affective domains. Thus, they not only understand the content, but also participate in more meaningful social and emotional interactions. In addition, students are able to utilize the knowledge gained in one context and apply it to different situations or conditions.

Deep learning is a learning approach that is in-depth and aims to produce better understanding through active student involvement in discussions, presentations, and projects (Mubarok et al., 2025). This approach is designed to foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. This is different from traditional learning methods, which usually emphasize the direct delivery of theoretical material. The main objective of this approach is to improve the quality of learning through social interaction, the development of higher-order thinking skills, and the application of knowledge in various contexts. In addition, deep learning also trains independence and the ability to work together. Students are given space to build confidence through various learning activities and to reflect on their shortcomings. Through this reflection process, students can improve their competence to achieve the expected learning objectives.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the curriculum at the elementary, junior high, and senior high school or vocational school levels through the Freedom of Learning policy requires a shift in perspective from rote learning to more meaningful and in-depth learning (deep learning). In this case, teachers play an important role as facilitators, not just as providers of material. The Deep Learning approach helps shape students who are able to think critically, be creative, and have characters in accordance with the Pancasila student profile. Although there are still various obstacles, collaboration between policies, educators, and the use of technology can strengthen the optimal implementation of the curriculum.

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