

CURRICULUM REFORM 2023: BETWEEN ADAPTATION AND CONTROVERSY

Loso Judijanto *¹

IPOSS Jakarta, Indonesia

losojudijantobumn@gmail.com

Mustopa

IAI Nusantara Batanghari Jambi

mustopasaja2020@gmail.com

Yadi Suryadi

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia

ayadi.suryadi@upi.edu

Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the impact of the 2023 curriculum reform on the quality of learning in Indonesian schools. By adopting this reform, an improvement in the quality of learning covering students' cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects is expected. This study critically examines how the implementation of the new curriculum may affect teachers' teaching methods, student participation, as well as overall learning outcomes. The study takes a multi-stakeholder perspective that includes opinions from teachers, students and parents to gain a comprehensive view of the reform. This study uses the literature research method, where data is collected through analyzing documents, journal articles and previous research reports related to the curriculum implemented in Indonesia and other countries for comparison. The results show that the 2023 curriculum reform has positive potential in improving the quality of learning in schools, both at primary and tertiary levels. The new curriculum learning system supports a more active and student-oriented learning style and enhances students' critical and creative skills. However, the biggest challenges relate to the readiness of school infrastructure and the professional development of teachers in implementing innovative teaching methods. In addition, student participation in the learning process is reported to be increasing, although there are concerns regarding access gaps especially in remote areas.

Keywords: Reform, Curriculum 2023, Adaptation and Controversy.

Introduction

In the era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, the challenges faced by the education system are becoming increasingly complex. The need for competent and adaptive human resources to the changing times urges every country to continuously evaluate and have a responsive and relevant education curriculum. In this context, the 2023

¹ Correspondence author

curriculum reform in several countries, including Indonesia, emerged as an answer to the need to prepare a generation that is able to compete in the global and domestic arena.

The 2023 curriculum reform is an important initiative that reflects the urgent need for the education system to adapt to the challenges and needs of the 21st century (Luo, S. 2023). In the global context, the world is facing rapid changes triggered by technological advances, economic globalization, and complex social and environmental issues. This initiative aims to prepare learners to be adaptable, think critically, creatively and collaboratively, which are essential for success in an ever-changing global environment (Sitopu et al., 2024; Guna et al., 2024). These reforms also try to address the need for a more inclusive and relevant education that can support social equality and economic empowerment for all.

At the national level, curriculum reforms are often rooted in the desire to improve the quality of education and ensure that the curriculum reflects local values, needs and priorities. This becomes even more relevant in countries that continue to struggle with educational disparities and seek ways to utilize education as a unifying tool and a tool for socio-economic advancement (Mitchell, B., & Buntic, C. G. 2023). By adopting a more dynamic and flexible curriculum, these countries aim to create an education system that is not only capable of producing job-ready and competitive graduates, but also responsible citizens, aware of their rights and obligations (Hairiyanto et al., 2024; Iswadi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, at the level of objectives to be achieved, the 2023 curriculum reform aims not only for changes in content and teaching methods, but also in assessment and learning strategies. The holistic and integrated approach is expected to promote the all-round development of students' competencies, connect academic knowledge with life skills, and prepare them for future possibilities. Central to this goal is to create an education system that reflects and encourages excellence, diversity and inclusiveness, while recognizing and responding effectively to the changing needs of society (Ningrum et al., 2023).

Curriculum reform, then, is not only about revising content or teaching methods, but also about how the curriculum can integrate 21st century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration and communication (Egido, I. 2023). Moreover, issues such as equity in education, the importance of paying attention to local diversity, and adaptation to scientific and technological developments are some of the aspects that need to be addressed in curriculum reform (Tubagus et al., 2023).

Thus, the 2023 curriculum reform is a proactive and responsive step towards future challenges and needs in the global and national contexts. This change is expected to prepare future generations with relevant skills, knowledge, attitudes and values, which will not only make them globally competitive but also enrich society locally (Egido, I. 2023). Through aligning education goals with the needs of the times, the reform aims to create a more inclusive, dynamic, and sustainable education system, which is essential for equitable and sustainable socio-economic progress (Pham et al., 2023).

However, such sweeping changes often bring controversy. Debates about teaching materials, teaching methods, and assessment are rife ahead of the implementation of the new curriculum. Criticism and support from various parties, which may be due to different views, interests, or unprepared resources, affect the process and quality of the curriculum reform itself (Salonen-Hakomäki, S. M., & Soini, T. 2023).

Given the importance of education to the development of a nation and the controversies that have arisen, this study was conducted to evaluate the 2023 curriculum reform from various perspectives. The study aimed to understand the adaptations required by various education stakeholders and the policies surrounding them, as well as to identify and discuss the controversies or challenges faced during the transition period to the new curriculum.

The courage to move to a new curriculum must be supported by strong scientific evidence and must be done with careful consideration. Therefore, systematic literature analysis is important in supporting decisions made around curriculum reform. As such, this research has strategic value as it provides an opportunity to document, understand and critically reflect on proposed changes in education.

Research Method

The research method used in this study is literature. The literature research method is a research process that utilizes published data to find other research references from various trusted sources. This includes sources such as books, scientific journals, reports, articles from the internet, and others (Bungin, 2001; Moleong, 2007). There are various ways that can be done in conducting literature studies, one of which is searching for relevant keywords in catalogs, indexes, and search engines to obtain the necessary information. This method allows the researcher to get an in-depth overview of the research topic without having to collect primary data themselves. In addition, literature studies have the advantage of enriching the researcher's analysis with diverse perspectives and previous research results related to the topic being researched (Zed, 2004).

Result and Discussion

Curriculum in Educational Perspective

A curriculum is a learning plan prepared by an educational institution with the aim of providing direction and structure in the educational process of students. This concept encompasses many elements, including educational objectives, content or learning materials, teaching methods, and assessment methods to be used (Moha, 2021). The purpose of the curriculum is to ensure that the learning that takes place is purposeful, systematic, and achieves the desired results. It is concerned with preparing learners not only in terms of academics but also in the development of social, emotional, and cognitive skills (Marliana, 2013). Basically, the curriculum is the foundation that helps students to prepare

themselves for their future lives, both inside and outside the academic environment (Aslan, 2018).

Within the curriculum framework, there are main components such as subjects, themes, or units of learning that are planned to cover various disciplines of knowledge and expertise (Muharrom et al., 2023). The structure of the curriculum is usually organized into structured programs ranging from basic education to higher education, and is adjusted to the level of difficulty and depth of the material according to the age and capacity of the students. Determination of curriculum content is often based on conformity with national and international education standards, relevance to community needs, and potential for developing learners' character and skills. In addition to the subject matter, the curriculum also includes other important aspects such as innovative teaching methods, the use of technology, and various learning activities that support a holistic learning experience (Aslan, 2017).

The curriculum implementation process involves various stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers, students, parents and communities. Teachers play a central role in implementing the curriculum in the classroom, where they are not only teachers but also facilitators in the learning process (Aslan & Wahyudin, 2020). Curriculum evaluation is an important part of the education cycle; this process not only assesses the effectiveness of the curriculum on student learning outcomes, but also provides information on areas that require adjustment or improvement. This evaluation can be done through a variety of methods, including formative and summative assessments, student feedback, and analysis of current policies and practices. This reflective and iterative process ensures that the curriculum remains relevant, responsive to change, and contributes to the overall growth and development of learners (Hasan et al., 2021).

Principles of curriculum design

The principles of curriculum design consist of;

First, Relevance and Flexibility. Curriculum design principles should ensure that the content taught remains relevant to the needs of students and the ever-changing dynamics of society. The curriculum should be designed flexibly in order to adapt to developments in science, technology, and the economic and social challenges faced by local and global communities. Relevance is also influenced by the needs of the labor market, where students need to be equipped with skills and knowledge that are appropriate for their future. Flexibility in curriculum design refers to the ability of teaching institutions to modify or replace course content to reflect such changes, as well as adjust teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning styles and individual student needs (Aslan, 2023).

Second, Integration and Consistency. Curriculum design should integrate different areas of knowledge and skills in a coherent and interrelated way. Curriculum development needs to reflect a coherent unity between vision, educational goals, content, and teaching methods. Consistently, the curriculum should provide a logical progression in material

difficulty and concept complexity from year to year, thus helping students build their knowledge systematically. An interdisciplinary approach is also emphasized in this principle, by creating learning that allows students to make connections between the subject and the real world, and encourages critical thinking and problem solving (Aslan et al., 2020).

Third, Accommodating Individual Needs and Diversity. Curriculum design must take into account the uniqueness and individual needs of each student. Inclusive education that recognizes diversity in the classroom is a key aspect of an effective curriculum. A curriculum designed with this principle in mind will support the provision of equal learning opportunities for all students, including those with special needs, different cultures, languages or socio-economic backgrounds. A differentiated approach to teaching and assessment, as well as the provision of diverse and adaptive learning resources, is essential to create an inclusive learning environment that stimulates the potential of each individual. Providing alternative learning options and pathways is also important so that all students have the opportunity to successfully pursue education at their own pace and interest (Muluk et al., 2019).

Fourth, Sustainability and Continuity. When designing the curriculum, consideration should be given to the continuity aspect of education, where the lessons and skills provided build gradually and logically from one level to the next. This allows students to develop a deeper and more deeply rooted understanding of the subject matter. Curriculum design should allow existing knowledge to be integrated with new information and skills in a seamless process, avoiding unnecessary repetition or gaps in knowledge. Curriculum design should also be sustainable, not only in an environmental sense but also for the long-term maintenance and improvement of education quality, including ongoing teacher training and periodic curriculum review (Astuti et al., 2023).

Fifth, Integrated and Learning-Oriented Assessment. The principle of assessment is a core component of curriculum design. Assessment should serve not only to measure student achievement but also as a tool to improve the overall learning process. This means that assessment should be designed to evaluate the student learning process in depth and provide constructive feedback. Assessments that are tightly integrated with the curriculum will guide students in their learning and give an idea of the effectiveness of teaching strategies. In addition, assessments should include various forms, including formative and summative assessments, to thoroughly assess students' learning outcomes and their progress towards curriculum goals (Nisa et al., 2021).

Sixth, Collaboration and Community Links. An efficient curriculum design should include possibilities for collaboration between teachers, between teachers and students, and between the school and the wider community. The curriculum can be enriched by creating partnerships with experts from different fields, local businesses and social organizations. This helps introduce students to real contexts where the knowledge and skills they learn in the classroom can be applied. Such collaborations support project-based learning and real-world experiences, which make learning more relevant and engaging for

students. Community connections can also increase students' awareness of social, economic, and environmental issues, and promote social responsibility and active citizenship (Cave, P. 2023).

Curriculum Reform in Various Countries

Curriculum reforms in various education systems are often triggered by the need to adapt to global developments, such as advances in technology, changing labor market dynamics, as well as the drive to create more informed and responsible citizens (Li, X. 2023). An interesting example can be seen in the comparison between curriculum reform in Finland and Singapore. Finland, known for its educational approach that emphasizes interest-based student learning and creative exploration, implemented reforms with a focus on interdisciplinary learning and a reduction in the number of exams. On the other hand, Singapore, known for its more traditional and achievement-oriented educational approach, adapted its curriculum to include more elements of creative and critical problem solving, as well as entrepreneurship without sacrificing academic flexibility (Salam et al., 2022).

One of the main challenges in curriculum reform is finding a balance between meeting high academic standards and developing students' competencies for the world outside school. In the Finnish context, this challenge is addressed by involving teachers extensively in the curriculum development process, utilizing their expertise to create learning materials that are not only intellectually challenging but also relevant to students' real lives (Hutagaluh, O. 2022). In Singapore, the government addresses this challenge by investing in teacher training and the development of technology-rich learning resources, ensuring that teachers support the intent of the curriculum reform (binti Subpei et al., 2022).

In addition, curriculum change often requires a change in mindset and habits among teachers and parents. In Finland, this was done through public awareness campaigns and open discussions on the benefits of holistic education that focuses more on individual student development rather than test performance alone (Arifin, M. H. 2023). While in Singapore, the government encourages collaboration between schools and parents through parent education programs and workshops that inform about the intentions and implementation of the new curriculum, strengthening a shared commitment to comprehensive educational outcomes (Putra, A. 2017).

Adaptation to technology is another important aspect of many curriculum reforms. Both Finland and Singapore integrate the use of digital tools in learning, but they also face the challenge of maintaining a balance between the use of technology and the development of social interaction and in-person human communication skills (Wahyudi, M. A., & Lutfi, A. 2019). Solutions to these challenges involve integrating technology in ways that enhance student collaboration and direct interaction, avoiding the use of technology as a substitute for traditional classroom interaction. In both cases, this success depends on adequate

training and resources for teachers, as well as curricula designed to promote students' active engagement in both the digital and physical worlds (Sulistyo, L., & Dwidayati, N. K. 2021).

The success of curriculum reform in different countries also depends on the ability to adjust to external challenges, such as economic changes and labor market needs (Leni, N. 2019). Countries such as Finland and Singapore have taken proactive steps to ensure their curricula remain relevant by embedding the skills required in the 21st century, such as critical thinking, creativity, teamwork and digital literacy. However, achieving this relevance requires close collaboration between government, industry and educational institutions to continuously update curricula based on the latest developments in science and technology and labor market trends (Yuliyanti, Y., Damayanti, E., & Nulhakim, L. 2022).

In addition, equitable access to quality education is a challenge encountered in many education systems and a major focus of the reform process. Finland, for example, prioritizes inclusive education that ensures every student, regardless of background or special needs, has access to high-quality education (Hatip, A., & Setiawan, W. 2022). This is achieved through individualized approaches to learning and the allocation of significant resources to special education. In Singapore, scholarship and financial aid programs are provided to support students from underprivileged families, ensuring that every child has an equal opportunity to succeed in a highly competitive education system (Lestari et al., 2023).

Curriculum reform must also face the challenges of globalization and cultural diversity. The incorporation of multicultural and global understanding in the curriculum helps prepare students to work and live in an increasingly connected and diverse society. In Finland, global education and cultural awareness are emphasized as part of the country's commitment to peace and sustainability. Singapore, with its multiethnic population, integrates the values of diversity and harmony in its curriculum, teaching students to appreciate differences and build mutual respect (Muslim et al., 2021).

Ultimately, the success of curriculum reform in any country depends on the ability of the education system to adapt to changing socio-economic, technological and cultural needs while maintaining a commitment to basic education principles such as affordability, inclusiveness and relevance. With continued emphasis on improving teacher quality, innovative teaching methodologies and community engagement, education systems can move towards creating learning environments that prepare students not only to succeed in exams, but also in life.

Controversies in Curriculum Reform

Curriculum reform often touches on controversial political, social and economic issues that vary depending on the country context. Political issues, for example, often arise because the curriculum is not only a pedagogical document but also a reflection of the values prioritized by the government in power. Curriculum changes can lead to debates over the representation of national history, civic education, or even broader issues such as acceptance of pluralism or education about LGBTQ rights (Misco, T. 2010). Different

viewpoints between political parties in power, education experts and the public often cause tensions, especially when sensitive issues are addressed in the learning materials suggested by curriculum reforms (Misco, T. 2021).

Meanwhile, in the social and economic area, challenges often relate to how education can be a tool to achieve equality and social mobility. Discussions about equitable access to education are often a hot topic, with certain groups feeling that the new curriculum may not take into account their needs or backgrounds (Fu, G. 2020). For example, underrepresented communities may feel the curriculum does not reflect cultural diversity or is not sensitive enough to socioeconomic discrimination. From an economic standpoint, there are concerns regarding the extent to which curriculum reforms will prepare students for the future of work, with some arguing that the focus on the highest academic skill sets may not align with the practical skills required by industry. These concerns are often compounded by global economic uncertainty and rapid shifts in skill requirements due to automation and digitization of the economy (Rasmussen et al., 2022).

In the economic context too, the pressure to prepare students for the modern job market often raises questions about the relevance of the material taught in schools. Criticisms have been raised against an education system that is too theoretical and not practical enough, with curricula sometimes perceived as out of sync with the actual needs of the changing job sector. This can trigger lengthy discussions on the importance of vocational education and technical training as an integral part of the curriculum, as well as how general education and vocational education can collaborate to create viable pathways for students in the future (Hung, C. Y. 2020).

On the other hand, there are deep social concerns related to how the curriculum affects children's social interactions and identity formation. The question of how social values such as gender equality, racial tolerance, and acceptance of diversity are communicated through the curriculum is a highly sensitive and frequently discussed topic (Jinyu, Z. 2009). In some places, there is a fear that curriculum reform may go too far in advocating certain ideas, which may not be in line with the traditional values or beliefs of certain social groups. This often leads to resistance, with certain groups feeling that education is becoming too political and less focused on fundamental scientific development. These differences of opinion can lead to significant polarization in society, challenging harmony and wider social integration (Pinar, W. F., & Bowers, C. A. 1992).

This controversy surrounding curriculum reform represents a fundamental challenge in trying to update education to reflect contemporary needs while still maintaining basic values and accounting for the diversity of views in society. Dialogue and collaboration among various stakeholders continue to be key in formulating inclusive and effective educational strategies.

Adaptation to the New Curriculum

Adapting educational institutions to the new curriculum is a complex process that requires intensive coordination between various parties. Institutions must conduct a thorough evaluation of their existing learning infrastructure, including human resources (teachers and teaching staff), learning materials, supporting technology and teaching methods. They also need to develop training programs for teachers to master the new content and teaching techniques required. In addition, institutions should actively communicate with students, parents and the community to ensure a smooth transition and to address any concerns or questions that may arise (Shihab et al., 2023). This adaptation process often requires significant time and investment, but is crucial to ensure that curriculum changes are successfully implemented and provide maximum benefit to the teaching and learning process (Maskur, M. 2023).

In addition, educational institutions need to adopt a flexible and adaptive approach to new curriculum implementation. In many cases, pilot testing and ongoing evaluation are required to ensure that new curriculum elements are truly effective in the local learning context and meet students' needs (Aisyah et al., 2023). The active involvement of the school community, including students, in this evaluation and improvement process can provide valuable insights that help improve the effectiveness of the curriculum. Institutions should also be prepared to modify and adjust their implementation plans based on feedback and find creative solutions to challenges faced, such as resource limitations or resistance to change (Prehanto, A. 2021). Thus, the process of adapting the new curriculum becomes not only about adopting updated learning content, but also about developing responsive and inclusive learning environments, capable of supporting all learners in reaching their full potential.

Conclusion

The 2023 curriculum reform reflects the education system's efforts to adapt to contemporary needs and challenges, while also being a source of controversy in society. The reform process requires educational institutions to make comprehensive adjustments in learning infrastructure, teacher capacity building and the use of technology, with the aim of preparing students more effectively for the modern job market and the formation of an inclusive social identity. However, debates have emerged around the relevance of materials, teaching approaches and how social values are integrated in the curriculum, suggesting a shift in values that may go against the traditional views of some groups. The process of adapting the new curriculum marks a long journey towards creating a responsive and inclusive learning environment, demanding flexibility, open communication and cooperation between all stakeholders.

In moving forward with the 2023 curriculum reforms and addressing the challenges, it is imperative that there is continuous dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, parents and students. Empathy and openness to diverse perspectives will help identify the specific concerns and needs of different communities,

ensuring that the reforms improve access and quality of education for all students. In implementing curriculum adaptations, a student-centered approach that emphasizes relevant and competency-based learning will be key. Investments in teacher professional development and the use of innovative learning technologies must also be accelerated to support effective and engaging teaching. As such, these reforms will require long-term commitment from all parties, as well as a readiness to evolve based on feedback and emerging challenges, with the aim of realizing an education system that prepares students holistically for their future.

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