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Assessment Practices in The Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Education: An Observation Study at SDN 7 Panarung

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ABSTRACT
The Independent Curriculum implementation requires a paradigm shift in learning assessment practices from outcome-oriented approaches toward assessment supporting continuous, student-centered learning. Assessment should function not only as a measurement tool but also as a foundation for pedagogical decision-making. However, empirical evidence regarding elementary school assessment practices within the Independent Curriculum context remains limited. This study examined learning assessment practices in Independent Curriculum implementation at SDN 7 Panarung, focusing on diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, and the utilization of assessment results for instructional improvement. This qualitative descriptive observational study involved 12 classroom teachers (grades 1-6), students, and the school principal. Data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, then analyzed using triangulation techniques. Findings indicated that teachers implemented diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments aligned with Independent Curriculum principles. Formative assessment constituted the most prevalent practice, primarily through oral questioning, classroom observation, and daily assignments. However, feedback quality was generally generic rather than specific and constructive. Summative assessment employed various instruments, though written tests remained predominant and higher-order thinking skills assessment was not yet optimized. Assessment results informed remedial and enrichment activities, but implementation lacked systematic documentation. The study concluded that assessment practices at SDN 7 Panarung demonstrated general alignment with Independent Curriculum frameworks. However, continuous professional development, strengthened institutional support, and systematic assessment data utilization are recommended for enhanced implementation quality.

INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia continues to undergo transformation in efforts to improve the quality of learning and produce competent graduates aligned with 21st-century demands. One of the government's initiatives to achieve this goal is the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which was introduced in 2021 on a limited basis and subsequently expanded. The Independent Curriculum was introduced as a response to educational challenges, including suboptimal learning outcomes and disparities in education quality across regions in Indonesia (Rahayu et al., 2022; Suryaman, 2020). This curriculum offers greater flexibility for educational units in developing student-centered learning with an emphasis on competency and character development.

Learning assessment is a crucial component of the education system, serving not only to measure learning outcomes but also to provide constructive feedback for improving the learning process (Black & Wiliam, 2018). The Independent Curriculum represents a significant paradigm shift from summative, grade-oriented assessment to a more holistic and authentic approach that supports continuous learning (Heritage, 2018; Brookhart, 2015). This paradigm shift requires teachers to develop a deep understanding of various assessment techniques and the ability to implement them effectively in daily learning practices.

Elementary school plays a strategic role as the foundation for developing student competencies and character (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Wiliam, 2017). Assessment practices in elementary schools need to be designed to align with children's developmental characteristics and support meaningful learning (Widiastuti & Saksono, 2023; deLuca et al., 2016). In the Independent Curriculum, elementary school assessments measure not only cognitive aspects but also character development, literacy, numeracy, and other 21st-century skills (Heritage, 2018; McMillan et al., 2013). This requires elementary school teachers to master various assessment instruments and integrate them effectively into the learning process (Ikhsan et al., 2017).

Although various guides and training programs have been provided by the government to support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, empirical research exploring how learning assessment practices are actually implemented in elementary schools remains limited (Ikhsan et al., 2017; Widiastuti & Saksono, 2023). Observational studies examining teachers' strategies, the challenges they face, and the factors influencing assessment effectiveness are crucial for understanding real-world practice (Panadero et al., 2017). A comprehensive understanding of assessment practices can inform the development of policies and programs to improve educational quality.

SDN 7 Panarung is one of the schools implementing the Independent Curriculum and provides a relevant context for exploring learning assessment practices. Through an observational study conducted at this school, researchers sought to examine how teachers implement assessment in daily learning, identify the types of assessments used, and analyze how assessment results are utilized to improve student learning. This study aims to contribute to the development of more effective assessment practices within the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools and to serve as a reference for other schools implementing or planning to implement this curriculum.

METHOD

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This study employed a qualitative approach with descriptive observational design (Creswell, 2018) and was conducted at SDN 7 Panarung, Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan, for three mounths in 2024. Researchers purposively selected this location because the school had implemented the Independent Curriculum and exhibited characteristics representative of public elementary schools in urban areas (Sugiyono, 2019). The study involved 12 teachers from grades 1 to 6, selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: (1) having implemented the Independent Curriculum for at least one semester, (2) willingness to participate in the research, and (3) active engagement in learning activities. In addition to teachers, students were observed to assess their responses to and involvement in the learning assessment process. The school principal served as the key informant, providing information regarding school policies and support for assessment implementation within the Independent Curriculum.

Data collection employed methodological triangulation, encompassing three primary methods: (1) participant observation of classroom assessment practices, (2) semi-structured interviews with teachers (ranging from 45 to 60 minutes each), and (3) document analysis of learning materials, assessment instruments, student work samples, and related school documents. As is typical in qualitative research, the researcher served as the primary research instrument, utilizing observation protocols, semi-structured interview guides, and document analysis frameworks. These data collection instruments were validated through expert review by two education assessment specialists and three experienced elementary school practitioners to ensure content validity and appropriateness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1.1 Diagnostic Assessment Practices at the Commencement of Instruction

Data from classroom observations and teacher interviews indicated universal implementation of diagnostic assessments at SDN 7 Panarung during the initial semester period, consistent with Independent Curriculum mandates. These assessments served to establish baseline measures of student competency across cognitive and non-cognitive dimensions. The majority of participating teachers (n=10, 83.3%) administered structured cognitive diagnostic instruments aligned with prerequisite grade-level learning standards, whereas two teachers (16.7%) employed informal observational methods. Non-cognitive diagnostic procedures were utilized by eight teachers (66.7%) through triangulated approaches including written questionnaires, individual student interviews, and behavioral observations of learning disposition.

The implementation of diagnostic assessments varied in both timing and follow-up procedures. First- and second-grade teachers conducted diagnostic assessments during the first week of instruction, focusing on students' reading, writing, and numeracy readiness, as well as social-emotional development. One first-grade teacher explained the rationale: *"I need to know how well the children have recognized letters and numbers, because their backgrounds from early childhood education vary. Some are already fluent, while others still need intensive guidance."* In contrast, teachers in grades 3 through 6 tended to conduct more structured diagnostic assessments using written questions to measure conceptual understanding in specific subject areas. Document analysis revealed that only half of the teachers (n=6, 50%) systematically documented their diagnostic assessment results and utilized them to develop differentiated lesson plans.

Diagnostic assessment implementation demonstrated variation in both temporal administration and pedagogical application. Lower elementary teachers (grades 1-2) conducted assessments within the first instructional week, prioritizing foundational literacy, numeracy competencies, and social-emotional preparedness. Interview protocols revealed that primary-grade educators emphasized baseline assessment of symbolic recognition skills (letters, numerals) given heterogeneous pre-primary educational experiences, with reported student proficiency ranging from independent mastery to requiring substantial scaffolding. Upper elementary educators (grades 3-6) implemented more formalized diagnostic protocols incorporating written assessment instruments targeting domain-specific conceptual understanding. Documentary evidence indicated that 50% of participants (n=6)

maintained systematic diagnostic assessment records and demonstrated evidence-based differentiation in subsequent instructional planning, while the remaining participants exhibited inconsistent documentation and utilization practices.

1.2 Formative Assessment Implementation During Instructional Practice

Formative assessment constituted the predominant assessment paradigm employed across all participating teachers at SDN 7 Panarung. Systematic observation of 48 discrete instructional sessions (N=48) revealed heterogeneous implementation of formative assessment techniques with considerable variance in methodological sophistication and pedagogical quality. Universal practices (100%, n=12) included oral questioning protocols during direct instruction, while near-universal practices encompassed systematic behavioral observation (91.7%, n=11) and daily formative task administration (83.3%, n=10). Frequency analysis indicated teachers deployed 15-25 oral comprehension checks per instructional session (M=20, estimated range).

Taxonomic analysis of observed formative assessment practices yielded three distinct implementation patterns. Pattern One comprised spontaneous formative assessment characterized by emergent, non-scripted pedagogical moves including: (a) impromptu comprehension verification through targeted questioning, (b) immediate clarification responsive to student output, and (c) concurrent behavioral monitoring during independent work periods. Pattern Two encompassed planned formative assessment systematically integrated within instructional architecture through structured mechanisms: brief formative quizzes, collaborative presentations with peer evaluation components, and scaffolded assignments incorporating immediate collective debriefing protocols. Pattern Three manifested as extended formative assessment via mini-project implementations (1-2 week duration) predominantly observed in upper elementary contexts (grades 4-6, n=6), featuring iterative feedback cycles throughout project development phases.

Qualitative analysis of feedback practices revealed significant variation in pedagogical effectiveness. While direct teacher-student feedback occurred in 72.9% of observed sessions (n=35/48), only 37.5% (n=18/48) demonstrated feedback meeting criteria for specificity, constructiveness, and actionability aligned with formative assessment principles (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Modal feedback patterns consisted of evaluative but descriptively limited utterances (exemplars: "good," "needs improvement," "incorrect") absent identification of specific performance strengths or targeted developmental pathways. Qualitative interview data illuminated systemic constraints, with participants articulating tensions between individualized feedback provision and structural limitations including classroom size (M=28 students) and temporal constraints. Diverging from modal practice, one-third of participants (33.3%, n=4) demonstrated consistent provision of criterion-referenced written feedback on formal student submissions, suggesting within-school variation in feedback quality and commitment.

1.3 Summative Assessment Implementation and Learning Outcome Reporting Practices

Summative assessment administration at SDN 7 Panarung followed a biannual assessment cycle (mid-semester, end-of-semester) designed to evaluate student competency attainment vis-à-vis curriculum-mandated learning outcomes. Systematic documentary analysis of assessment instruments revealed multimodal assessment deployment: universal utilization of written examinations (n=12, 100%), substantial implementation of performance-based practical assessments (n=9, 75%), moderate adoption of project-based evaluation (n=7, 58.3%), and limited portfolio assessment usage (n=5, 41.7%). Written examination modalities maintained predominance, particularly within STEM and language arts domains (Mathematics, Indonesian Language, Natural Sciences), characteristically incorporating heterogeneous item typologies: selected-response formats (multiple-choice), brief constructed-response items, and extended written discourse.

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Psychometric quality analysis of summative instruments demonstrated moderate content validity and outcome alignment. Comprehensive examination of 36 discrete assessment instruments (sampling density: three instruments per educator across differentiated curricular domains) revealed 75% (n=27) exhibited explicit test blueprints demonstrating item-outcome congruence per established learning indicators. However, 25% (n=9) manifested substantive construct misalignment, characterized by incongruence between item cognitive demand levels and targeted learning outcomes. Taxonomic analysis following Bloom's revised framework indicated disproportionate emphasis on lower-order cognitive dimensions (remembering, understanding) with insufficient representation of higher-order competencies (analyzing, evaluating, creating). Qualitative interview data corroborated teachers' metacognitive awareness of item construction challenges, particularly regarding calibration of cognitive complexity to developmental appropriateness parameters.

Learning outcome reporting protocols adhered to Independent Curriculum descriptive assessment paradigms, prioritizing qualitative competency narratives over conventional numerical grading schema. Structured interview protocols (N=12) indicated 75% of participants (n=9) demonstrated conceptual mastery of narrative reporting frameworks and generated individualized, criterion-referenced competency descriptions across curricular domains. Conversely, 25% (n=3) articulated challenges in composing substantively differentiated descriptive feedback, exhibiting patterns of standardized, formulaic narrative construction. Administrative data revealed systematic institutional capacity-building initiatives including: (a) intensive professional development in descriptive assessment literacy, (b) dissemination of criterion-exemplar competency narratives, and (c) structured collaborative calibration protocols to establish inter-rater reliability and shared interpretive frameworks for competency description.

1.4 Assessment Data Utilization for Pedagogical Enhancement

Assessment-informed instructional improvement constitutes a foundational tenet of the Independent Curriculum evaluation paradigm. Empirical findings demonstrated that 66.7% of participants (n=8/12) engaged in assessment-driven instructional modification practices, though with substantial inter-teacher variation in implementation fidelity and systematicity. Predominant assessment utilization modalities encompassed: (a) remedial intervention for students demonstrating incomplete criterion attainment (91.7%, n=11/12), and (b) enrichment programming for students achieving performance standards (50%, n=6/12). Remedial pedagogical interventions characteristically incorporated targeted content reteaching protocols, supplementary deliberate practice opportunities, and individualized or small-group instructional configurations implemented beyond conventional time-on-task parameters.

Assessment-responsive differentiated instruction manifested among 41.7% of participants (n=5/12). Implementing educators deployed data-driven ability grouping frameworks, synthesizing diagnostic and formative assessment evidence to establish homogeneous instructional clusters, subsequently delivering pedagogically differentiated interventions calibrated to cluster-specific learning trajectories and developmental zones of proximal development. Exemplar implementation included stratified reading instruction wherein one third-grade educator established three-tiered proficiency groups (advanced, proficient, emergent) with correspondingly differentiated textual complexity gradients and instructional scaffolding intensity parameters. Qualitative interview data illuminated implementation barriers among non-adopting educators, predominantly centering on: (1) increased temporal demands for differentiated lesson architecture, and (2) elevated cognitive load associated with simultaneous multi-level classroom orchestration, collectively constraining universal differentiation implementation across instructional episodes.

Systematic documentary analysis of longitudinal assessment record-keeping revealed bifurcated practices. Seven participants (58.3%, n=7/12) demonstrated systematic progress documentation protocols utilizing multimodal recording systems: analog logbooks, structured progress journals, and digital learning management platforms. These documentation systems captured longitudinal performance trajectories, identified persistent learning obstacles, and chronicled implemented

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pedagogical interventions. Conversely, five participants (41.7%, n=5/12) exhibited absence of formalized documentation architectures, characterized by informal, episodic, non-systematic progress monitoring practices lacking longitudinal coherence. Administrative data indicated ongoing institutional development of standardized assessment documentation frameworks designed to reduce teacher cognitive load while facilitating systematic, efficient data capture and utilization protocols.

1.5 Systemic Implementation Barriers and Organizational Constraints

Systematic qualitative interview protocols with instructional personnel and administrative leadership revealed three substantive implementation barriers:

a. Temporal resource constraints limiting comprehensive assessment enactment. Predominant participant consensus (83.3%, n=10/12) identified insufficient temporal allocation as the primary structural impediment to rigorous assessment implementation and individualized formative feedback provision, particularly within high-density instructional contexts (classroom enrollment: 25-30 students). Participants characterized assessment-related professional responsibilities encompassing multimodal assessment administration, systematic longitudinal documentation, and differentiated instructional responsiveness as generating substantial temporal demands incompatible with existing curricular coverage mandates and instructional time constraints.

b. Constrained assessment literacy regarding psychometrically sound instrument construction. Seven participants (58.3%, n=7/12) articulated challenges in designing methodologically rigorous authentic and performance-based assessment protocols, specifically regarding development of criterion-referenced analytical scoring rubrics for complex performance tasks and extended project-based assessments. Interview data indicated conceptual recognition of assessment paradigm limitations inherent in conventional selected-response formats, yet revealed operational incapacity to systematically operationalize alternative assessment constructs through explicit criterion articulation and performance level differentiation for multidimensional tasks (e.g., oral presentations, portfolio artifacts). These developmental constraints precipitated reversion to traditional assessment modalities characterized by perceived operational efficiency and psychometric objectivity, despite recognized pedagogical limitations.

c. Inadequate technological and material resource infrastructure. Despite sufficient general institutional facilities, participants encountered substantive resource-mediated implementation barriers for technology-enhanced and materials-intensive assessment protocols. Half of participants (50%, n=6/12) expressed pedagogical interest in digital assessment platform integration for streamlined administration and documentation processes, yet identified critical infrastructural constraints: (1) insufficient one-to-one student device provisioning, and (2) inconsistent network connectivity reliability precluding consistent digital assessment deployment. Additionally, domain-specific curricular areas (natural sciences, arts education) manifested material resource deficits, with specialized performance assessment equipment institutionally unavailable, necessitating either pedagogical modification or student-funded material procurement, thereby potentially introducing socioeconomic equity concerns.

1.6 Institutional Capacity-Building Mechanisms and Professional Development Infrastructure

SDN 7 Panarung operationalized systematic institutional support architectures designed to facilitate assessment practice alignment with Independent Curriculum pedagogical frameworks. Administrative qualitative data indicated that throughout the 2023/2024 academic year, the institution implemented four targeted professional development interventions addressing multidimensional assessment competencies: (a) theoretical conceptual foundations, (b) psychometrically sound instrument construction protocols, and (c) evidence-based assessment data utilization for instructional optimization. Workshop pedagogical delivery integrated expertise from educational supervisory

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authorities and veteran Independent Curriculum practitioners demonstrating sustained implementation fidelity. Supplementing formal professional development structures, institutional leadership established a Communities of Practice framework with biweekly collaborative inquiry sessions facilitating horizontal knowledge transfer and collective troubleshooting of context-specific implementation obstacles.

Fig 1. Administrative Leadership Interview Regarding Systemic Assessment Support Infrastructure (SDN 7 Panarung)

Documentary artifact analysis revealed institutional development of a contextualized, pragmatic assessment resource compendium incorporating: (1) standardized instrument construction templates, (2) criterion-referenced analytical scoring rubric exemplars, and (3) structured outcome reporting protocols aligned with regulatory requirements. Cross-functional curriculum development teams collaboratively generated this resource through participatory design processes incorporating senior faculty pedagogical content knowledge, subsequently contextualizing content to institution-specific demographic characteristics and stakeholder requirements. Participant perceptions (75%, n=9/12) characterized the resource as substantively enhancing assessment design efficiency and implementation quality, while simultaneously articulating ongoing refinement needs and expanded exemplar diversity across heterogeneous assessment paradigms.

Institutional support infrastructure extended beyond knowledge resources to temporal capital allocation for data-informed instructional decision-making. Monthly professional time allocations (120 minutes) enabled educators to engage in: (a) systematic assessment outcome analysis, (b) identification of students necessitating differentiated pedagogical interventions, and (c) evidence-responsive instructional strategy formulation for subsequent instructional cycles. However, 41.7% of participants (n=5/12) characterized temporal allocations as insufficient for comprehensive data interrogation, particularly among educators managing multiple curricular domains or instructional cohorts generating multiplicative assessment data streams requiring analytical attention.

Findings indicated that learning assessment practices at SDN 7 Panarung generally aligned with Independent Curriculum assessment principles, particularly through implementation of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. Most teachers' implementation of diagnostic assessments at the semester's commencement reflects efforts to map students' initial competencies and learning readiness, consistent with research emphasizing diagnostic assessment as foundational for student-centered instructional planning and adaptive pedagogy (Rahayu et al., 2022; Heritage, 2018). However, suboptimal documentation and utilization of diagnostic assessment results suggest persistent implementation challenges in leveraging assessment data for differentiated instruction. This pattern corroborates previous research indicating that elementary school teachers tend to conduct initial assessments as administrative requirements without fully integrating results into pedagogical decision-making (Ikhsan et al., 2017; deLuca et al., 2016).

Formative assessment constituted the predominant pedagogical evaluation modality operationalized during instructional practice. High-frequency deployment of oral comprehension verification protocols, systematic learner engagement observation, and routine low-stakes formative task administration documented in this empirical investigation signaled paradigmatic reorientation: assessment reconceptualized as pedagogically intrinsic rather than terminally summative.

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Contemporary scholarship in assessment sciences establishes formative evaluation as foundational to instructional optimization through iterative, developmentally-responsive feedback architectures (Black & Wiliam, 2018; Wiliam, 2017). However, qualitative and quantitative evidence revealed persistent feedback quality deficits, characterized by predominance of globally evaluative yet descriptively impoverished commentary lacking criterion-specificity and actionable developmental guidance. Research-validated feedback frameworks emphasize pedagogical necessity of explicit, multi-dimensional communication addressing: (a) demonstrated competency strengths, (b) targeted developmental domains, and (c) concrete, scaffolded improvement trajectories (Brookhart, 2015). Ecological constraints temporal resource scarcity (class contact hours), elevated student-teacher ratio parameters (25-30:1), and administrative compliance burdens emerged as principal systemic impediments to high-fidelity formative assessment enactment, corroborating constraint patterns documented across international educational contexts (McMillan et al., 2013; Widiastuti & Saksono, 2023).

Summative assessment practices demonstrated methodological heterogeneity, incorporating written examination protocols, performance-based assessment frameworks, extended project evaluation, and portfolio assessment methodologies, though conventional psychometric testing maintained modal predominance. This diversification pattern suggested incipient paradigmatic evolution toward authentic assessment modalities, yet simultaneously revealed persistent implementation challenges in systematically operationalizing assessments targeting higher-order cognitive competencies per revised Bloom's taxonomic frameworks. Empirical patterns align with Suryaman's (2020) theoretical proposition that Independent Curriculum assessment transformation necessitates substantive pedagogical content knowledge enhancement, specifically regarding psychometrically defensible construction of performance-based instruments and cognitively complex item generation addressing analytical, evaluative, and creative thinking dimensions. Such assessment architectures facilitate critical analytical reasoning, evidence-based evaluation, inferential conclusion formulation, and knowledge generalization across heterogeneous contextual applications (Rahmawati et al., 2022).

While empirical evidence documented selective educator utilization of assessment data streams for differentiated pedagogical responses remedial intervention protocols, cognitive enrichment programming, ability-responsive differentiated instruction implementation exhibited substantial variance and lacked systematic, institutionalized integration. Organizational capacity-building mechanisms including structured professional development interventions, Communities of Practice frameworks, and contextualized assessment resource provisioning emerged as critical mediating variables in educator assessment literacy development trajectories. Synthesis of empirical findings suggests effective assessment system implementation constitutes a multivariate function integrating: (1) individual educator pedagogical content knowledge and assessment competencies, (2) systemic organizational support infrastructures, and (3) collaborative professional inquiry cultures enabling horizontal knowledge transfer and collective problem-solving (Panadero et al., 2017). This ecological perspective underscores assessment quality as organizationally distributed rather than individually localized, necessitating coordinated intervention across individual, institutional, and cultural dimensions.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Learning assessment practices at SDN 7 Panarung demonstrated general alignment with assessment principles outlined in the Merdeka Curriculum framework. Teachers implemented diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments utilizing diverse techniques and instruments. Formative assessment constituted the predominant practice, reflecting a paradigm shift from outcome-oriented assessment toward process-supportive evaluation. However, findings revealed persistent limitations in assessment result utilization, particularly regarding provision of specific feedback, development of higher-order thinking skills-based instruments, and systematic assessment documentation. These findings indicate that Merdeka Curriculum assessment implementation at the elementary level requires continued strengthening in both teacher competency development and institutional support systems.

These findings suggest several recommendations for practice and research. First, continuous professional development is essential for enhancing teacher capacity in assessment development and utilization, particularly in authentic assessment design, rubric construction, and constructive feedback provision. Second, schools should strengthen professional learning communities, develop contextualized and practical assessment guidelines, and allocate sufficient time for teachers to analyze and respond to assessment results. Third, future research should examine learning assessment practices across multiple schools and grade levels, incorporate student perspectives, and employ longitudinal designs to provide comprehensive understanding of assessment effectiveness within Merdeka Curriculum implementation in elementary education contexts.

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