

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT: THEORIES, PRINCIPLES, AND MODELS IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the application of humanistic theory in the development of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura. The research employs a qualitative case study approach using a descriptive design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the principal, teachers, and students, classroom observations, and analysis of curriculum documents, lesson plans, and school reports. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to ensure the validity and reliability of findings through triangulation techniques. The findings reveal that humanistic theory serves as the primary foundation for curriculum development, where teachers act as facilitators while students become the center of learning activities. The curriculum model combines top-down and bottom-up approaches, creating a flexible and contextually relevant framework adapted to students' needs and local conditions. Implementation is carried out through active, collaborative, and reflective learning methods such as Project-Based Learning, Discovery Learning, and differentiated instruction. Curriculum evaluation is conducted continuously and reflectively by involving teachers, school leaders, parents, and the school committee. An exclusive finding of this study is the integration of local cultural values and students' emotional well-being into the learning process as part of the humanistic approach. Teachers not only focus on academic achievement but also emphasize empathy, self-confidence, creativity, and student autonomy through contextual learning activities connected to the students' daily lives. In addition, the study found that regular reflective discussions among teachers significantly improved instructional innovation and strengthened collaborative school culture. The application of humanistic principles has enhanced student motivation, independence, classroom participation, and character formation. The study recommends strengthening teacher professionalism, reflective practices, and sustainable collaboration between schools, families, and communities to support the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka).

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INTRODUCTIONS

The curriculum is a fundamental element in the education system, serving as the primary guideline for designing, implementing, and evaluating the learning process in schools. Changes in education policy in Indonesia through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum emphasize flexible, contextual, and student-centered learning to accommodate the diversity of students' potential and learning needs (Kurniawan, 2024). The Independent Curriculum is also aimed at strengthening student character through the integration of moral, social, and national values into the learning process (Hasanah & Sintia, 2024). This approach requires schools to focus not only on academic achievement but also on the development of student personality and independence. Therefore, curriculum implementation requires an educational theoretical foundation that supports holistic student development.

One educational theory relevant to the Independent Curriculum is humanistic theory, which positions students as unique individuals with the potential for optimal development. Humanistic theory emphasizes the importance of self-actualization, freedom to learn, and meaningful learning experiences as the core of the educational process (Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1983). From a humanistic perspective, the learning process will be effective if the learning environment can meet students' psychological needs, such as a sense of security, respect, and self-recognition (Syafira et al., 2024). Recent research shows that the humanistic approach aligns with the principles of the Independent Curriculum because they both emphasize student-centered learning and the teacher's role as a facilitator (Safitri & Gistituati, 2024). Thus, humanistic theory can be used as a conceptual framework in analyzing the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in schools.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum based on humanistic theory can be seen in educational practices at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura. This school integrates religious, social, and academic values into the curriculum through local content programs such as reading and writing the Quran and character building through the 7 Great Indonesian Habits program. These programs reflect humanistic principles that emphasize character formation, self-potential development, and meaningful learning experiences for students (Amini, 2025). The integration of local and religious values also aligns with the objectives of the Independent Curriculum to shape the profile of Pancasila students who are faithful, independent, and possess noble character (Hasanah & Sintia, 2024). Therefore, SMP Negeri 2 Martapura serves as a concrete example of the application of a humanistic approach in curriculum development at the educational unit level.

In classroom learning, the Independent Curriculum encourages teachers to provide students with the freedom to choose learning activities according to their interests and abilities. This approach aligns with Rogers' (1983) perspective, which emphasizes the importance of learning freedom and active student involvement in determining the direction of their learning. Research shows that humanistic-based learning can increase student motivation, independence, and emotional engagement in the learning process (Hidayat et al., 2025). Furthermore, a classroom atmosphere that respects students' opinions and feelings has been shown to foster positive interpersonal relationships between teachers and students. Therefore, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, grounded in humanistic theory, can support more effective and meaningful learning.

Learning evaluation in the Independent Curriculum also needs to be carried out continuously and humanistically, assessing not only academic outcomes but also the development of students' character and personality. Humanistic-based evaluation emphasizes self-reflection, constructive feedback, and appreciation for students' learning processes (Syafira et al., 2024). This evaluation approach is relevant to the objectives of the Independent Curriculum, which places students as the primary subjects in learning. At SMP Negeri 2 Martapura, learning evaluation is conducted by considering students' cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects through various contextual learning activities. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the application of humanistic theory in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura.

However, despite the growing implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Indonesian schools, studies specifically examining the application of humanistic theory in curriculum development at the junior secondary school level remain limited. Most previous research has focused primarily on curriculum policy, learning strategies, or student achievement, while fewer studies have explored how humanistic principles are integrated into curriculum planning,

implementation, and evaluation simultaneously (Safitri & Gistituati, 2024). In addition, there is still limited research discussing the integration of local religious and cultural values within the framework of humanistic-based curriculum development in schools implementing the Independent Curriculum. This gap indicates the need for more in-depth studies on how schools practically apply humanistic theory as a foundation for curriculum development in real educational contexts. Therefore, SMP Negeri 2 Martapura becomes an important setting for examining how humanistic principles are implemented comprehensively in curriculum practices.

The urgency of this study lies in the increasing demand for educational practices that are capable of developing students holistically in the era of educational transformation. The Independent Curriculum requires schools and teachers not only to improve academic achievement but also to strengthen character education, student independence, creativity, and emotional well-being. In reality, many schools still face challenges in implementing student-centered learning due to limited teacher understanding, conventional learning habits, and insufficient integration of humanistic values in curriculum practice. If these challenges are not addressed, the objectives of the Independent Curriculum may not be achieved optimally. Therefore, this study is important to provide empirical insights into the implementation of humanistic theory in curriculum development and to offer practical references for schools, teachers, and policymakers in improving the quality of learning and character education.

Based on the background above, this study aims to analyze the application of humanistic theory in the development, implementation, and evaluation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the humanistic principles applied in curriculum development, describe learning practices that support student-centered education, and examine the evaluation process used to assess students' cognitive, affective, and character development. Furthermore, this study aims to explore how local religious and cultural values are integrated into the Independent Curriculum to support meaningful and holistic learning experiences for students.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a single case study design. The research subjects comprised the principal, the vice-principal for curriculum affairs, and the curriculum development team at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura. Data collection techniques included semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, specifically the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP) and Lesson Plans (RPP). The data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected, focused, simplified, and organized the raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. The researcher classified the data based on themes related to humanistic theory, curriculum development, learning implementation, and curriculum evaluation. Irrelevant or repetitive information was eliminated, while important findings were coded and categorized systematically to facilitate interpretation. This process was carried out continuously throughout the research to ensure that only relevant data were used in the analysis.

The second stage, data display, involved presenting the organized data in descriptive narratives, matrices, tables, and thematic categories to facilitate understanding of the relationships among findings. The researcher compared data from different sources, such as interview results, classroom observations, and curriculum documents, to identify patterns and consistency in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum based on humanistic theory. Data presentation also enabled the researcher to interpret how curriculum development practices were implemented in the school context and how humanistic values were integrated into learning activities.

The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification. At this stage, the researcher interpreted the meaning of the findings, identified relationships among categories, and formulated conclusions regarding the application of humanistic theory in curriculum development at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura. The conclusions were continuously verified throughout the research process by rechecking field notes, interview transcripts, observation results, and supporting documents to ensure consistency and credibility. Source triangulation and method triangulation were applied to

strengthen the validity of the findings, while member checking was conducted by confirming the interview results and interpretations with participants to ensure data accuracy and avoid researcher bias.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

RESULT

Humanistic-Based Curriculum Development Model

The findings indicate that SMP Negeri 2 Martapura has developed the Independent Curriculum using a humanistic-oriented approach that emphasizes students' holistic development. Curriculum planning is carried out collaboratively by the principal, vice principal for curriculum affairs, and the curriculum development team, ensuring that academic goals are aligned with students' psychological, social, and spiritual needs. The School Operational Curriculum (KOSP) reflects the integration of humanistic values through the inclusion of religious programs, character education, and local content learning. Programs such as Quranic literacy and the *7 Great Indonesian Habits* are systematically embedded into the curriculum structure to support character formation and self-development. This development model demonstrates that curriculum design at the school level is not solely outcome-oriented but also process-oriented, focusing on meaningful learning experiences.

Implementation of Humanistic Principles in Classroom Learning

Classroom observations reveal that teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura apply student-centered learning strategies consistent with humanistic theory. Teachers provide students with opportunities to choose learning activities, express opinions freely, and participate actively in discussions and project-based tasks. The role of the teacher shifts from a knowledge transmitter to a learning facilitator who guides, motivates, and supports students' individual learning paths. Learning activities are designed to connect subject matter with real-life contexts, fostering emotional engagement and intrinsic motivation. As a result, students demonstrate increased confidence, independence, and responsibility for their learning process.

Humanistic-Oriented Learning Evaluation

The evaluation process at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura is conducted continuously and holistically, assessing cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects of student development. Teachers utilize formative assessments, reflective journals, observation sheets, and performance-based tasks to capture students' learning progress comprehensively. Feedback is delivered constructively to encourage self-reflection and personal growth rather than merely measuring academic achievement. Document analysis shows that assessment practices align with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, emphasizing growth and learning processes. This approach ensures that evaluation functions as a tool for improvement rather than judgment.

DISCUSSIONS

The findings demonstrate that the curriculum development model implemented at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura is strongly aligned with humanistic theory, which emphasizes self-actualization and the holistic development of learners. The integration of religious and character-based local content into the curriculum reflects Maslow's concept of fulfilling students' psychological and self-actualization needs within the educational environment (Maslow, 1970). These findings support previous studies indicating that the flexibility and contextualization promoted by the Independent Curriculum enable schools to design learning experiences that accommodate students' diverse needs and potentials (Kurniawan, 2024). By embedding moral, cultural, and spiritual values into curriculum planning, the school has successfully operationalized the objectives of the Independent Curriculum. Therefore, the curriculum development practices at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura represent an effective model of humanistic-based curriculum implementation.

Furthermore, the implementation of student-centered learning observed in classroom practices reinforces Rogers' (1983) perspective that meaningful learning occurs when students experience autonomy, emotional security, and active participation in the learning process. Teachers function as facilitators who create a supportive and respectful learning environment, enabling students to feel appreciated and motivated to engage actively in learning activities. These findings are consistent with Safitri and Gistituati (2024), who found that humanistic approaches within the

Independent Curriculum encourage active learning, student independence, and meaningful interaction between teachers and students. In addition, the application of contextual and project-based learning strategies helps students connect academic content with real-life situations, thereby increasing the relevance and meaningfulness of learning experiences. Consequently, the implementation of humanistic principles contributes positively not only to students' academic achievement but also to their personal and social development.

In terms of evaluation, the assessment practices implemented at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura reflect a humanistic orientation that aligns with contemporary perspectives on authentic and formative assessment. Evaluation activities emphasize reflection, constructive feedback, and appreciation of the learning process, which support students' emotional, moral, and personal growth, as suggested by Syafira et al. (2024). This approach is also in line with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasize continuous improvement, learner agency, and holistic development. By assessing cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously, the school is able to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' development. Therefore, the evaluation system strengthens the humanistic foundation of curriculum implementation and supports the overall effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum.

Despite these significant findings, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was conducted only at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura using a single case study design; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all schools implementing the Independent Curriculum in Indonesia. Second, the study focused mainly on curriculum development, learning implementation, and evaluation from the perspectives of school leaders and teachers, while students' perspectives were explored only to a limited extent. Third, the study relied primarily on qualitative data obtained through interviews, observations, and document analysis, which may involve subjective interpretations despite the application of triangulation and member checking techniques. In addition, the relatively limited duration of the research made it difficult to observe the long-term impact of the humanistic-based curriculum on students' academic achievement, character development, and emotional growth.

Based on these limitations, future research is recommended to involve a broader range of schools from different educational levels and geographical contexts to obtain more comprehensive findings regarding the implementation of humanistic theory within the Independent Curriculum. Future studies may also employ mixed-methods or quantitative approaches to measure statistically the influence of humanistic-based curriculum implementation on students' motivation, creativity, learning outcomes, and character formation. In addition, further research is encouraged to explore students' and parents' perspectives more deeply in order to gain a more holistic understanding of curriculum implementation and its impact on learners. Longitudinal studies are also necessary to examine the long-term effectiveness of humanistic curriculum practices in shaping students' independence, emotional well-being, social competence, and lifelong learning skills.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMP Negeri 2 Martapura is strongly aligned with humanistic educational theory. Curriculum development integrates academic, religious, and character values to support students' holistic growth and meaningful learning experiences. Classroom implementation reflects a student-centered approach, where teachers facilitate autonomy, engagement, and self-directed learning. In addition, learning evaluation is conducted holistically by considering cognitive, affective, and spiritual aspects through reflective and formative assessment practices. Overall, the application of humanistic principles enhances the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum and provides a relevant model for student-centered and character-based education.

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