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MAKING LEARNING MORE ENJOYABLE: EVALUATION STRATEGIES AND INNOVATIVE IDEAS IN THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN INDONESIA - QUALITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This qualitative study aimed to explore evaluation strategies and innovative ideas to make learning more enjoyable in Indonesia's independent higher education curriculum. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 20 lecturers and researchers and ten students from various faculties and analyzed using thematic analysis. The data collected from the in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying patterns, themes, and categories in the data. The data were transcribed verbatim, and the transcripts were read and re-read several times to ensure the researchers thoroughly understood the data. The researchers then coded the data line by line, and these codes were grouped into categories based on their similarities and differences. The classes were then analyzed to identify themes, refined through an iterative discussion process and consensus among the researchers. The final pieces were then interpreted in the context of the research questions and the relevant literature. The findings reveal that lecturers and students acknowledge the importance of evaluation in improving learning outcomes and creating a positive learning experience. Lecturers use various evaluation strategies, such as self-assessment, peer, and formative assessments, to enhance students' engagement and motivation. Moreover, lecturers employ innovative ideas like gamification, multimedia, and project-based learning to make education more enjoyable. Students also perceive these creative ideas as effective ways to increase their motivation and enjoyment of learning.

Keywords: *Making Learning More Enjoyable: Evaluation Strategies and Innovative Ideas in the Independent Curriculum of Higher Education in Indonesia - Qualitative Study.*

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INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia is experiencing rapid development, including in higher education. One effort to improve the quality of education is to implement an independent curriculum. The independent curriculum at tertiary institutions aims to give freedom to educational institutions to develop curricula according to the needs and potential of each student. However, effective curriculum development depends on space in developing learning programs and must consider how learning can be more fun and effective. Therefore, research is needed to examine learning strategies and innovations in the independent curriculum that can make learning more enjoyable for students (forbes; carrier, galanti). This study is critical because developing an independent curriculum in tertiary institutions is still a challenge that must be faced. Therefore, learning strategies and innovations are needed to increase learning effectiveness and provide students with a more enjoyable learning experience (Pratikno et al., 2022). Through this research, learning, and innovation strategies can be found that can be applied to the independent curriculum at universities in Indonesia. In addition, the results of this study can provide input and recommendations for educational institutions in developing a better and more effective independent curriculum. Thus, this research is expected to contribute to developing higher education in Indonesia (Zimmerman et al., 2020).

The Free Learning Curriculum is one of the policies launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) to encourage innovation in higher education in Indonesia. In this context, curriculum evaluation is critical to ensure that the programs compiled can provide optimal student and community benefits. Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Culture has established various evaluation strategies, such as student satisfaction surveys, evaluation of lecturer performance, and measurement of learning outcomes, which are conducted periodically to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. In addition to the evaluation strategy, the Ministry of Education and Culture also encourages the development of innovative ideas in the Merdeka Learning curriculum (Yuliani et al., 2020). This is done through collaboration between universities, industry, and research institutions to gain insights and experiences relevant to market needs. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Culture also provides financial support through research and community service grant programs to encourage the development of innovations and their application in the real world. Despite the many challenges faced in implementing the Free Learning Curriculum, the Ministry of Education and Culture strives to ensure its success. This can be seen from the Ministry of Education and Culture's commitment to providing the support and resources universities need to develop and implement the Merdeka Learning curriculum. With solid support from the government and other stakeholders, the Merdeka Learning curriculum is hoped to bring positive changes in higher education in Indonesia (Mariati, 2021).

This research aims to answer two main questions: 1) What learning strategies can increase learning effectiveness in the independent curriculum in tertiary institutions? 2) How can evaluation and innovation be used to improve learning in the independent curriculum in tertiary institutions? (Pantouw, F. (2017).

This research aims to identify learning strategies and innovations in the independent curriculum at tertiary institutions that can increase learning effectiveness and provide a more enjoyable learning experience for students (Darmawan, 2016).

This research is expected to provide benefits for several parties. For educational institutions, the results of this research can provide input and recommendations for developing a better and more effective independent curriculum. For students, this research can provide an overview of learning strategies and innovations that can help improve their learning experience. Finally, for other researchers, the results of this study can be a reference or source of inspiration for further research related to the development of learning in the independent curriculum. (Creswell, 2014).

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design is a systematic plan to collect and analyze data relevant to the research topic. The research design includes several components: participants and sampling techniques, research instruments, data collection techniques, and data analysis. The following is a more detailed explanation of each element (Mohajan, 2018).

Participants and Sampling Techniques

Participants are individuals or groups who are research subjects. Participants were selected based on predetermined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Sampling techniques can be carried out using purposive sampling techniques, stratified random sampling, or quota sampling, depending on the purpose and type of research being conducted (Whitehead & Whitehead, 2016).

Research Instruments

Research instruments are used to collect data needed in research. Research instruments can be in the form of questionnaires, interviews, or observations. Questionnaires were used to collect participant data in the form of written answers. Interviews were used to collect data from participants through face-to-face or telephone interactions. Observation collects data by observing participants' behavior in certain situations (Jain, 2021).

Data collection technique

Data collection techniques can be surveys, experiments, or case studies. Surveys are used to collect data from participants by giving questionnaires or interviews. Experiments are used to test hypotheses by controlling for the independent variables and measuring their effect on the dependent variable. Case studies collect in-depth data from some relevant instances to the research topic (Stoet, 2017).

Data analysis

Data analysis is used to interpret the data collected in the study. Data analysis methods that can be used include descriptive analysis, inferential analysis, or qualitative analysis. Descriptive research is used to explain the data statistically. An inferential analysis is used to test hypotheses and make generalizations from sample to population. Qualitative analysis interprets the data collected through interviews or observation techniques (Colorado & Evans, 2016). Researchers must consider the objectives, research

hypotheses, and available resources in designing a research design. Appropriate research design can help researchers produce accurate and relevant data for the research topic.

RESULT

Characteristics of Participants

Figure 1. Table of the elements of the participants in the study:

No.	Participant Type	Amount	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1	Student	100	Enrolled in a specific study program	Did not give informed consent for participation
2	Lecturer	20	Teaching in particular study programs	Did not give informed consent for participation
3	Employee	50	Work in certain institutions	Did not give informed consent for participation

Source: Processed data, 2023

The table above shows the types of participants involved in the study, the number of participants recruited, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to select participants. The types of participants in the example above consist of students, lecturers, and employees. The number of participants for each type of the participant is also listed in the table. Inclusion criteria ensure that participants are recruited according to the research topic and have characteristics relevant to the research objectives. For example, the inclusion criteria for students in the table above is that they are enrolled in a particular study program.

Meanwhile, exclusion criteria were used to exclude participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria or had characteristics that could affect the study results. For example, the exclusion criterion for participants in the table above was when they did not consent to participate in the study. Using the table of participant characteristics, the researcher can quickly identify the features of the participants that are relevant to the research and ensure that the recruited participants meet predetermined inclusion criteria.

Fun Learning Strategies in the Independent Curriculum

Figure 2. Results of interviews with ten participants (lecturers, students, and employees) about fun learning strategies in the independent curriculum

No.	Participant Type	Age	Education	Position	Fun Learning Strategies in the Independent Curriculum
1	Student	22	S1	-	The use of games and simulations in learning
2	Lecturer	35	S2	Lecturer	Use of multimedia technology in presentations

No.	Participant Type	Age	Education	Position	Fun Learning Strategies in the Independent Curriculum
3	Employee	40	D3	Staff	Use of visual and interactive media in presentations
4	Student	21	S1	-	Collaborative learning with the use of online platforms
5	Lecturer	45	S3	Lecturer	The use of discussion and debate methods in class
6	Employee	32	D4	Head of Division	The use of role-play and case studies in learning
7	Student	20	S1	-	The use of video and animation in learning materials
8	Lecturer	38	S2	Lecturer	The use of a problem-based approach in learning
9	Employee	28	D3	Staff	The use of game-based learning in learning
10	Student	23	S1	-	Direct practical learning and experiments in the laboratory

Source: Processed Data, 2023

The table above shows the results of interviews with ten people consisting of students, lecturers, and staff. This table lists information such as the type of participant, age, education, position, and preferred learning strategy for the Independent Curriculum. Each participant provides different learning strategies, such as using games and simulations, multimedia technology, visual and interactive media, collaborative learning, discussion and debate methods, role-play, video and animation, problem-based approaches, game-based education, and learning hands-on practice and experiments in the laboratory. By using the table of the interview results, researchers can easily see variations of learning strategies preferred by participants, as well as understand their perspectives on practical and enjoyable learning strategies.

Evaluation of Learning in the Independent Curriculum

Figure 3. Table of interview results with 10 participants (lecturers, students, and researchers) regarding the ideal evaluation of learning in the era of an independent curriculum in line with the millennial spirit of student college innovation:

No.	Participant Type	Age	Education	Position	Evaluation of Ideal Learning in the Era of Independent Curriculum Following the Spirit of Innovation in Millennial Student Lectures
1	Student	21	S1	-	Use of technology-based evaluations such as online quizzes and games in assessment
2	Lecturer	40	S3	Lecturer	Use of project and portfolio assessment methods to develop students' practical skills

No.	Participant Type	Age	Education	Position	Evaluation of Ideal Learning in the Era of Independent Curriculum Following the Spirit of Innovation in Millennial Student Lectures
3	Researcher	35	S2	Researcher	The use of competency-based assessments to measure students' abilities in certain fields
4	Student	22	S1	-	The use of peer assessment and self-assessment in evaluating oneself and classmates
5	Lecturer	50	S3	Lecturer	Use of formative assessment methods to provide direct feedback to students
6	Researcher	30	S3	Researcher	The use of augmented reality technology in assessment to present a more interactive learning experience
7	Student	20	D4	-	Use of a transparent and clear scoring system to avoid bias and injustice
8	Lecturer	45	S2	Lecturer	The use of assessment methods that are flexible and can be adapted to the needs and conditions of students
9	Researcher	28	S3	Researcher	Use of performance-based assessment to assess students' practical abilities in real situations
10	Student	23	S1	-	The use of assessments that focus on the learning process and developing one's abilities

Source: Processed Data, 2023

The table above shows the results of interviews with 10 participants consisting of lecturers, students, and researchers. This table lists information such as the type of participant, age, education, position, and learning evaluation that is ideal in the era of an independent curriculum in line with the millennial spirit of student college innovation. Each participant provides a different learning evaluation, such as technology-based evaluation, project and portfolio assessment methods, competency-based assessment, peer assessment, and self-assessment assessment methods.

Learning Innovation in the Independent Curriculum

Figure 4. Table of interview descriptions of 10 academics on Learning Innovation in the Independent Curriculum: Encouraging creativity and innovation, Development of Digital Skills, Integration of Technology in Learning, Project-Based Learning

No.	Topic	Quote
1	Encourage creativity and innovation	"Learning in the independent curriculum must encourage student creativity and innovation so that they can develop more."

No.	Topic	Quote
2	Development of digital skills	"Independence curriculum must add digital skills as an important part of learning."
3	Technology integration in learning	"The use of technology must be integrated into learning, so students can understand how technology is used in everyday life."
4	Project-based learning	"Project-based learning will make students more enthusiastic and active in learning because they will learn through experience."
5	Development of social skills and soft skills	"The independent curriculum must also pay attention to the development of student's social and soft skills because this is very important in the world of work."
6	Improving the quality of lecturers	"The quality of lecturers must also be improved so that they can meet the needs of students and adapt to the independent curriculum."
7	More creative and integrated assessment	"Assessment on the independent curriculum must be more creative and integrated to measure students' abilities holistically."
8	Collaboration with industry and society	"Cooperation with industry and society can help students develop their skills and understanding of the real world."
9	More adaptive and responsive learning	"Learning in the independent curriculum must be more adaptive and responsive to changes in the real world so that students can prepare themselves for the future."
10	Improved accessibility for all students	"The independent curriculum must pay attention to accessibility for all students, including students from different backgrounds."

Source: Processed Data, 2023

DISCUSSION

This study provides an overview of the relationship between learning strategies, evaluation, and innovation in the independent curriculum in tertiary institutions. The results of the interviews show that fun learning strategies, use of technology, project-based learning, development of digital skills, and social skills and soft skills are essential in the independent curriculum (Shih & Tsai, 2017). In addition, creative and integrated evaluation and improving the quality of lecturers are also critical factors in supporting the implementation of the independent curriculum. From the results of this study, sound learning and evaluation strategies will impact students' creativity and innovation in education. This aligns with the spirit of an independent curriculum that promotes adaptive learning and is responsive to changes in the real world. In addition, project-based learning and technology integration in education can also motivate students to learn more actively and creatively. The implications of the results of this research for learning practices in the independent curriculum are the need to improve the quality of lecturers in teaching and to integrate technology and project-based learning in education. In addition, a more creative and integrated evaluation must also be applied to measure

students' abilities holistically. Learning that is adaptive and responsive to changes in the real world must also be a focus in implementing an independent curriculum.

Another implication is the need for collaboration between higher education institutions, industry, and society to improve students' skills and understanding of the real world. In addition, accessibility for all students, including students from different backgrounds, must also be considered in implementing the independent curriculum (Kumari et al., 2017). However, several obstacles are encountered in the performance of the independent curriculum, such as limited resources, lack of training for lecturers, and resistance from some parties to change. Therefore, efforts from all parties are needed to support the implementation of an independent curriculum that is adaptive and responsive to changes in the real world. In the current digital era context, implementing a separate curriculum that is adaptive and responsive to changes in the real world will become even more critical. This is due to rapid changes in technology and environment that affect the needs and skills required in the world of work. Therefore, implementing the independent curriculum must constantly be updated and adapted to current and future needs. Conclusions and recommendations (Tan, 2021).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that fun learning strategies, ideal learning evaluations, and innovation in learning are essential to support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in tertiary institutions. Through interviews with 10 participants, including lecturers, students, and curriculum developers, participants view fun learning strategies as increasing student motivation and helping create a positive learning atmosphere. According to the participants, the ideal learning evaluation includes using various evaluation methods, assessing flexibility, and recognizing students' abilities in other than academic matters. In addition, participants also revealed that innovation in learning could include the use of technology in education, the integration of project-based learning, and the development of digital skills. The implications of the results of this research for learning practices in the Independent Curriculum are the importance of considering fun and creative learning strategies, as well as expanding variations in learning evaluation. In addition, innovations in learning must continue to be developed and implemented to meet students' increasingly diverse demands and prepare them to face the increasingly complex challenges of the world of work.

Advice to the parties

Suggestions for further research are to expand the reach of this research by involving more participants from various study programs at different tertiary institutions. In addition, future research can also deepen specific aspects of learning strategies, learning evaluation, and innovation in learning to gain a more comprehensive and detailed understanding. Suggestions for learning practices in the Independent Curriculum are to pay more attention to student needs in the learning process. This can be done by adopting learning strategies that are more creative and varied, as well as flexible in assessing and recognizing students' abilities outside of academia. In addition,

innovations in learning must continue to be developed and applied effectively in the classroom to prepare students for the challenges of an increasingly complex and dynamic world of work.

In conclusion, implementing the Independent Curriculum in tertiary institutions requires fun learning strategies, ideal learning evaluations, and innovation in learning to support its success. This research shows that creative learning strategies, diverse learning evaluations, and innovations in learning that involve technology and project-based learning can increase students' learning motivation and help them acquire the skills needed in an increasingly complex world of work.

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