Teacher readiness and institutional support in raudatul atfal: descriptive analysis of independent curriculum implementation

Muhiyatul Huliyah[1]✉, Didi Muhtadi [2], Imroatun[3], Abda Billah Faza Muhammadkan Bastian[4]

[1, 3, 4] Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin State Islamic University, Banten, Indonesia
[2] Supervisors of Raudatul Atfal Tangerang Regency, Ministry of Religion, Indonesia
✉*muhiyatul.huliyah@uin banten.ac.id*

Abstract

Background: The Independent Curriculum is a transformative initiative in the Indonesian education system, emphasizing flexibility, contextual teaching, and holistic child development. However, its implementation is a challenge for PAUD teachers, especially in Raudatul Lembaga Atfal (RA). To effectively address these challenges, a comprehensive understanding of teacher readiness and institutional support is needed.

Objective: This study aims to analyze the readiness of RA teachers and institutional factors that support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Tangerang Regency, Indonesia. This study identifies key gaps in teacher competency and systemic drivers that are important for improving curriculum implementation.

Methods: This study used a descriptive research design and involved 103 RA teachers from various locations. Data were collected through structured surveys and semi-structured interviews, focusing on various dimensions of teacher readiness, such as pedagogical competence, curriculum knowledge, technology proficiency, and adaptive capacity.

Results: The findings highlight strong pedagogical skills but also reveal significant curriculum knowledge and technology gaps, especially in rural areas. The study's novelty lies in its integration of teacher readiness and institutional support, offering fresh insights into improving curriculum implementation.

Conclusion: This study fills a research gap by examining individual and institutional factors influencing PAUD teacher readiness. Theoretically, it integrates readiness with institutional support, enhancing educational frameworks. Practically, it provides strategies for policymakers and leaders to improve PAUD through robust support systems

INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum brings significant changes to Indonesian education. It focuses on adaptability, teaching methods that fit different contexts, and supporting the overall development of children. This program creates a learning environment that helps students think critically, be creative, and grow personally, addressing their diverse needs (Samsudi et al., 2024; Harun et al., 2021; Munawar, 2022). Early childhood education institutions, like Raudatul Atfal (RA), play a crucial role in developing foundational skills, social-emotional growth, and values-based education. The success of this curriculum largely depends on how prepared the educators are and the strength of the supporting institutional frameworks (Danylchenko et al., 2023; Padmadewi et al., 2023; Yasa, 2023).

Implementing the Independent Curriculum has several advantages, but it also comes with challenges. Educators' skills, training, and school operations significantly affect their

preparedness. These factors are important when discussing how to improve teaching quality. Research has shown that while 98% of early childhood education (PAUD) teachers are familiar with the curriculum, many still need help to grasp its practical aspects and details fully (Sutinah et al., 2024; Sulchaniya & Waluyo, 2024; Rahman et al., 2020). Institutional support enables successful curriculum implementation, including leadership, stakeholder collaboration, and resource allocation. For example, limited access to teaching materials and digital devices, especially in rural areas, has been identified as a significant barrier (Taufik & Rindaningsih, 2024; Ndari et al., 2023; Huliyah et al., 2024).

In Tangerang Regency, located in Banten Province, there are significant challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum. The challenges are intensified by the disproportionate distribution of resources and the limited opportunities for educators to improve their professional skills. Teachers often require more training opportunities aligned with curriculum objectives, resulting in consistent readiness levels (Azizah et al., 2023; Harun et al., 2021; Khairi et al., 2024; Nurisman et al., 2023). In addition, socioeconomic diversity requires a culturally and locally responsive curriculum delivery approach. Institutional factors also significantly influence the success of curriculum implementation, with proactive leadership and community engagement driving teacher readiness and curriculum alignment. Conversely, fragmented governance and limited stakeholder collaboration hinder progress (Puspitasari & Utami, 2023; Suhelayanti et al., 2023; Munawar, 2022; Wiyani et al., 2023; Imamah et al., 2023; Baene et al., 2023).

To address these problems, professional development programs emphasizing integrated learning, thematic learning, and technological integration are vital in building teacher competency. Collaborative learning platforms, such as professional learning communities, can further support teachers in sharing best practices and adapting to curriculum demands (Jamhari et al., 2023; Romlan & Danim, 2024; Nurisman et al., 2023; Hadiati & Fidrayani, 2019). Equally important is the equitable allocation of resources to underserved areas to ensure that all teachers can access the tools needed for effective curriculum implementation. In addition, integrating spiritual and moral principles, such as *Rahmatan Lil Alamin*, can enrich the curriculum by meeting the holistic developmental needs of students (Padmadewi et al., 2023; Lisdawati, 2024; Imamah et al., 2023; Sutinah et al., 2024).

Existing literature underscores the interplay between teacher readiness and institutional support in education reform. Differentiated learning, equitable resource distribution, and leadership influence curriculum implementation (Azizah et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2020; Huliyah et al., 2024). However, a focused analysis of how these factors interact within the context of Raudatul Early Childhood Education Institutions, particularly in the socioeconomic setting of the Tangerang Regency, still needs to be explored. To address this gap, the present study investigates the Independent Curriculum, examining how teacher readiness and institutional dynamics interact to provide a nuanced understanding of these factors. By analyzing both individual and systemic influences, this study offers actionable recommendations for addressing the challenges of early childhood education reform.

This study is guided by two central research questions (RQs) that have the potential to impact curriculum implementation at Raudatul Atfal significantly. RQ1: What is the level of readiness among Raudatul Atfal teachers to implement the Independent Curriculum, and what factors influence their readiness? RQ2: How do institutional support systems—such as leadership, resource allocation, and community collaboration—impact the implementation process within Raudatul Atfal institutions?

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive exploration of teacher readiness and institutional dynamics within the context of Tangerang Regency. Unlike previous studies

that have examined these factors in isolation, this research adopts a unique approach by integrating both dimensions to uncover their interactions. This approach offers a deeper understanding of the barriers and opportunities associated with implementing the Independent Curriculum.

METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive research design, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative approaches, to explore teacher readiness and institutional support systems at Raudatul Atfal in implementing the Independent Curriculum in Tangerang Regency, Indonesia. Conducted over six months, from June to November 2023, the research involved 103 Raudatul Atfal educational institutions spanning urban, semi-urban, and rural areas in Tangerang Regency, Banten Province. A descriptive approach was chosen for its ability to systematically characterize teacher readiness and institutional support dynamics without attempting to establish causal relationships (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This methodology aligns closely with the research objectives, as it provides a detailed overview of the current state of teacher readiness and institutional support, facilitating the identification of areas for improvement without the complexities of experimental designs.

The population for this study consists of all teachers and educational staff involved in implementing the Independent Curriculum across 103 Raudatul Atfal institutions in Tangerang Regency. From this population, 103 RA teachers with at least one year of teaching experience were purposively selected as the sample. This sampling method was chosen to ensure the inclusion of participants with sufficient exposure to the Independent Curriculum, yielding meaningful insights into the research questions. The selection of 103 teachers was intentionally designed to reflect the geographic diversity of the study locations, which include urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. This approach ensures that the sample captures the socioeconomic variations within Tangerang Regency, enabling a nuanced exploration of how geographic and institutional contexts shape teacher readiness and institutional support.

The study employed a structured questionnaire to evaluate two key dimensions: teacher readiness and institutional support. Teacher readiness was measured through pedagogical competence, curriculum knowledge, technological proficiency, and adaptive capacity. Institutional support was assessed regarding leadership quality, resource availability, and stakeholder collaboration. The questionnaire comprised 64 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). As a supplement to the quantitative data, semi-structured interview guides were developed to gather qualitative insights into the contextual challenges and opportunities associated with curriculum implementation. The questionnaire underwent pilot testing with 20 participants to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, indicating high internal consistency.

The research procedure began with the planning and development of research instruments, followed by data collection through the distribution of questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). The questionnaires were administered to all 103 selected teachers, while interviews were conducted with 20 teachers to delve deeper into contextual challenges and opportunities associated with the Independent Curriculum implementation. FGDs were held with groups of 5-7 participants, including principals and community stakeholders, to gather diverse perspectives on institutional support. The interview and FGD protocols were designed to identify barriers to curriculum implementation, the role of institutional support in overcoming these barriers, and recommendations for enhancing teacher preparedness and support systems. The questionnaire was validated through a pilot test, and experts reviewed the qualitative instruments to ensure their reliability and validity.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize levels of teacher readiness and institutional support. Measures of central tendency (mean, median) and distribution (frequency, percentage) were calculated to depict the data. Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis following the (Braun & Clarke, 2006) framework. The analysis involved five steps (Figure 1): (1) Familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding; (2) Initial coding to highlight recurring ideas or themes; (3) Theme development by grouping codes into broader themes such as "resource constraints" and "leadership dynamics"; (4) Review and refinement of themes to ensure alignment with research objectives; and (5) Finalization of themes by defining key themes and linking them to the research findings. Integrating quantitative and qualitative data allows for a comprehensive understanding of teacher readiness and institutional support in implementing the Independent Curriculum.
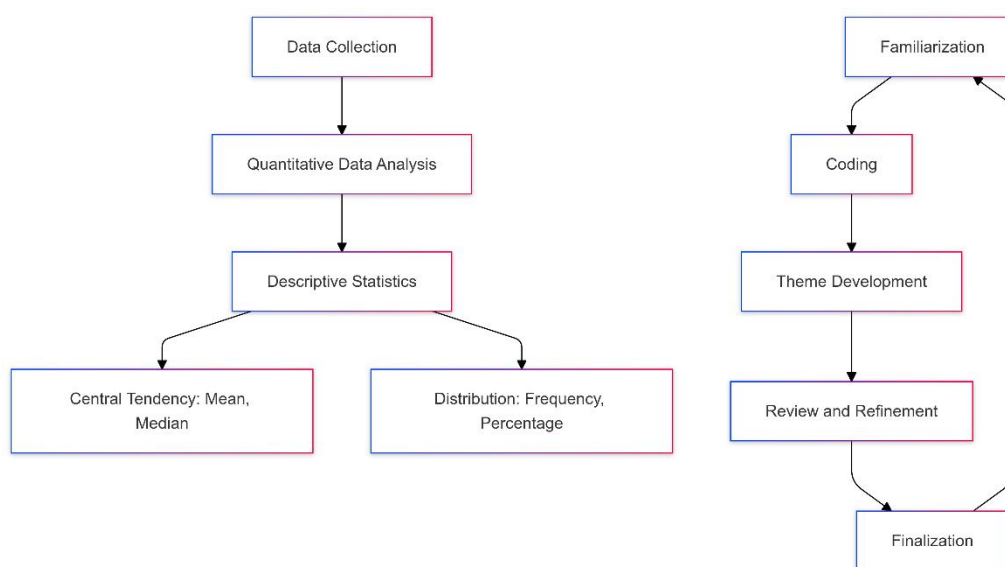

Figure 1. Flow chart of research methodology

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
A. Results
The readiness of Raudatul Atfal's teacher to implement the Independent Curriculum reflects a combination of strengths and challenges. The study revealed that 98% of teachers were familiar with the curriculum, indicating high initial exposure and motivation. However, only 35% of teachers reported a strong understanding of the curriculum guidebook, indicating a substantial gap in comprehensive curriculum knowledge. This finding aligns with previous research that underscores the importance of targeted professional development to bridge the knowledge gap among educators (Harun et al., 2021; Samsudi et al., 2024).

Table 1 presents the teacher readiness scores based on dimensions. It indicates that 40% of Raudatul Atfal teachers rated their pedagogical competence as "high," demonstrating strong capabilities in employing effective teaching strategies such as blended learning and project-based approaches. Curriculum knowledge was rated highly by 35% of teachers, reflecting a solid understanding of the Independent Curriculum necessary for effective curriculum design and delivery. However, technological proficiency was identified as a significant concern, with

only 25% of teachers reporting strong skills in incorporating digital tools into their classrooms. Additionally, adaptive capacity scored 30%, suggesting that while teachers are competent in established teaching methods, there is a need for improvement in adapting to new curricular demands and educational innovations.

Table 1: Teacher Readiness Scores Based on Dimensions

Dimensions	High (%)	Currently (%)	Low (%)
Pedagogical Competence	40	50	10
Curriculum Knowledge	35	45	20
Technology Skills	25	40	35
Adaptive Capacity	30	50	20

Figure 2 visualizes the distribution of teachers rating their readiness in pedagogical competence, curriculum knowledge, technological proficiency, and adaptive capacity, highlighting the relative strengths and challenges within each dimension.
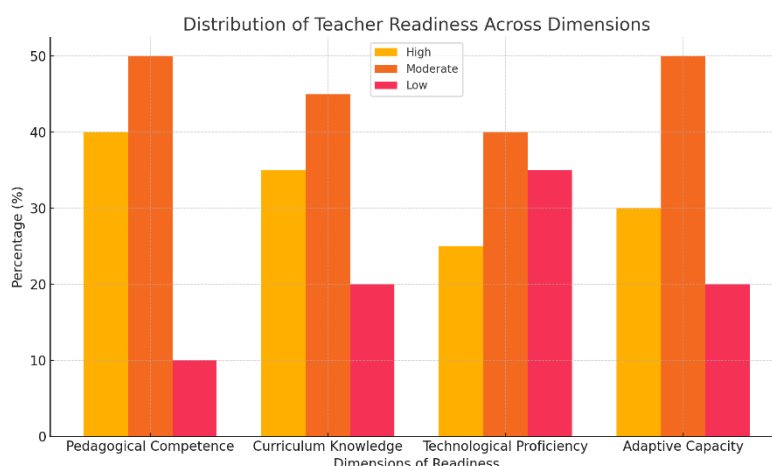

Figure 2. Distribution of Teacher Readiness Based on Dimensions

These findings address RQ1, indicating that while pedagogical skills and curriculum knowledge are strengths among Raudatul Atfal teachers, technological skills and adaptability are critical factors that require targeted professional development and institutional support to enhance overall teacher readiness for implementing the Independent Curriculum.

Institutional support systems were evaluated to understand their impact on the implementation process of the Independent Curriculum within Raudatul Atfal institutions, directly addressing RQ2. The analysis revealed that 85% of respondents perceived leadership quality and community collaboration as strong, and 80% viewed resource allocation positively. Table 2 details the perceptions of various institutional support factors, demonstrating high levels of leadership quality, resource allocation and community collaboration. These results suggest that effective leadership and strong community collaboration significantly support curriculum changes. However, there is a need for enhanced resource management to fully facilitate the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Raudatul Atfal institutions. Strengthening resource allocation and maintaining robust leadership and

community partnerships are essential strategies to bolster institutional support, thereby facilitating the effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Table 2: Perceptions of Institutional Support Factors

Support Factors	Percentage (%)
Leadership Quality	85
Resource Allocation	80
Community Collaboration	85

Interviews revealed that teachers felt confident in their pedagogical approaches but needed more understanding in integrating thematic curriculum learning objectives. One respondent stated, *"We need clearer guidelines and more hands-on training to align our teaching strategies with curriculum objectives."* This finding mirrors observations by (Samsudi et al., 2024), who highlighted the important role of direct, context-specific training.

Most teachers demonstrated high or moderate levels of pedagogical competence, with 40% rated as "high." This suggests that many RA teachers are proficient in implementing child-centered methodologies and differentiated instruction, critical to fostering holistic development in young learners. This finding is consistent with previous research emphasizing the alignment of pedagogical practices with the principles of the Independent Curriculum (Padmadewi et al., 2023; Munawar, 2022).

Key themes from the qualitative interviews offer a deeper understanding of teachers' challenges and opportunities in their professional environments. These themes include difficulties understanding the curriculum objectives, limited resources, and a strong need for continuous professional development. Direct quotes from the interviews reinforce these themes, providing rich, contextual insights that complement and enrich the quantitative findings, making them more relatable and tangible. Teachers consistently reported significant challenges in interpreting and applying the curriculum's thematic objectives, which often led to confusion and a need for more clarity in their teaching approach. Many teachers emphasized the need for ongoing professional development, recognizing that such training is crucial for enhancing their teaching skills and staying updated with evolving educational strategies and methodologies. Furthermore, teachers highlighted the need for more essential teaching materials and digital devices, which they identified as significant barriers that hinder the effective implementation of curriculum objectives and limit the quality of education they can provide to their students.

In addition to these challenges, teachers stressed the importance of effective school leadership. They indicated that strong leadership is a motivating factor that provides clear guidance, creates a supportive teaching environment, and fosters a culture of continuous improvement. Teachers also pointed out that collaboration among peers is vital in overcoming challenges, as sharing ideas and experiences with colleagues can help them innovate and find creative solutions. By working together, teachers can tackle obstacles more effectively and inspire and support one another, ultimately driving innovation within the school system. These insights are further elaborated in Table 3, which presents a detailed overview of the key themes and their implications for educational practice.

Table 3. Qualitative Themes from Interviews

Theme	Information	Illustration Quotes
Challenges in Understanding the Curriculum	Teachers expressed difficulty in interpreting thematic objectives	*"We had difficulty aligning our teaching with curriculum goals."*
Need for Continuous Training	Teachers emphasize the importance of continuing professional development	*"Training needs to be more practical and regular to help us develop."*
Limited Resources	Limited teaching materials and digital devices hamper implementation efforts	*"Access to digital devices is very minimal, especially in rural areas."*
Leadership Support	Effective leadership motivates teachers and provides clear guidance.	*"Our principal encouraged and guided us through the changes."*
Teacher Collaboration	Collaboration between peers helps overcome challenges and drives innovation	*"Sharing experiences helps us solve common problems."*

Resource availability varies significantly across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. Urban schools exhibit higher resource adequacy, with 80% categorized as "adequate," compared to only 40% in rural areas. This disparity underscores the structural inequities that hinder effective curriculum implementation in underserved areas (Yasa et al., 2023).
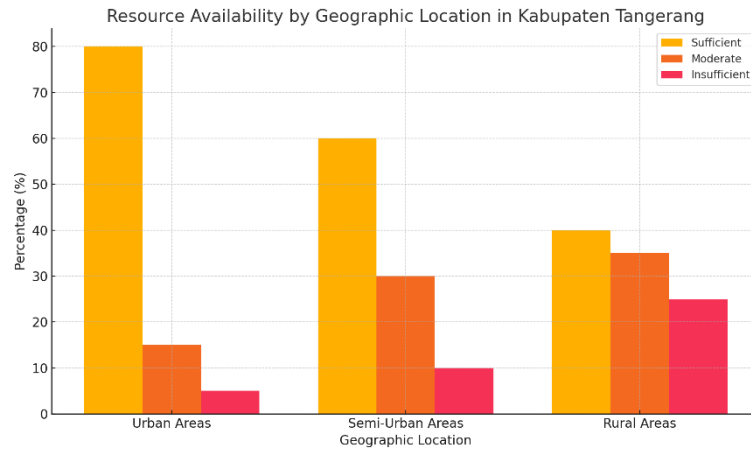

Figure 3. Resource Availability Based on Geographical Location in Tangerang Regency

Simulation of resource availability distribution across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas in Tangerang District. This simulation is based on general trends observed in related literature (Harun et al., 2021; Munawar, 2022) and insights synthesized from this study. It is intended to illustrate potential inequities in resource allocation and highlight challenges faced by teachers in rural areas. Future research or access to more detailed geographic data could refine these findings to provide precise numerical insights. Only 25% of teachers rated the availability of resources as "adequate," while 40% described it as "insufficient." This is in line with research

by (Yasa et al., 2023), which highlighted resource gaps as a significant barrier to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

B. Discussion

Leadership emerged as a critical factor in fostering teacher readiness. Seventy percent of teachers reported moderate to strong support from their principals, highlighting the role of leadership in motivating teachers and facilitating collaboration. Principals who actively engaged with teachers and provided clear guidance on curriculum implementation were consistently praised, consistent with findings from (Munawar, 2022). However, 15% of respondents identified gaps in leadership support, particularly in providing actionable strategies for curriculum adoption.

Institutional support emerged as a critical determinant of successful curriculum implementation. Seventy percent of teachers reported that school leaders provided moderate to firm support, particularly in facilitating educator collaboration. However, resource constraints, including inadequate teaching materials and limited access to technology, continued to be reported. Leadership was identified as a critical enabler of teacher preparedness, with effective principals fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. This is in line with findings from (Munawar, 2022), who emphasized the role of leadership in enabling education reform. However, 15% of respondents reported needing more proactive leadership, citing inadequate support in navigating curriculum requirements.

In contrast, curriculum knowledge emerged as a significant challenge. Only 35% of teachers reported a high level of understanding, while 20% rated their knowledge as "low." Teachers expressed difficulty interpreting the curriculum's thematic learning objectives, as evidenced by qualitative responses such as: *"We struggle to align our teaching strategies with the curriculum's thematic objectives."* These findings reinforce the need for comprehensive training programs to improve curriculum familiarity and instructional alignment (Harun et al., 2021).

Technology integration remains a pressing challenge, with 35% of teachers rating their technological proficiency as low. Limited access to digital devices further exacerbates this problem, especially in rural areas. These findings support the assertion by (Sutinah et al., 2024) that the technological gap disproportionately impacts teachers in underserved areas.

Collaboration among teachers was often cited as an effective strategy for overcoming challenges. Focus group discussions revealed that sharing experiences and best practices with colleagues significantly increased teacher confidence and preparedness. One participant stated: *"Collaborating with fellow teachers helps us address common issues and improve our approaches."* This highlights the potential of professional learning communities (PLCs) to support ongoing professional development, as (Samsudi et al., 2024) advocate.

These findings call for targeted interventions to address gaps in teacher preparedness and institutional support:

Equitable resource allocation: Policymakers should prioritize allocating resources to underserved areas, ensuring all schools have access to instructional materials and technology (Yasa et al., 2023).

Professional development: Training programs should focus on practical, hands-on approaches to enhance curriculum knowledge and technology proficiency (Harun et al., 2021).

Leadership development: Specific training for principals can strengthen their ability to support teachers effectively, fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation (Munawar, 2022).

Technological literacy among RA teachers was low, with only 25% rating it as "high." Limited access to digital devices and inadequate training in technology integration were commonly cited barriers, particularly in rural areas. One respondent stated: *"Access to digital devices is very minimal, particularly in rural schools."* This finding is consistent with research by (Sutinah et al., 2024), which highlights the disproportionate impact of the technology gap on teachers in underserved areas.

Resource availability in urban, semi-urban, and rural settings. Urban schools showed higher resource adequacy, with 80% categorized as "adequate," compared to only 40% in rural areas. This disparity underscores the structural inequalities that hinder effective curriculum implementation in underprivileged areas (Yasa et al., 2023).

This study contributes to the literature by providing an integrated analysis of teacher readiness and institutional dynamics in the context of early childhood education reform. The findings highlight the interplay between individual competencies and systemic support, offering a holistic perspective on curriculum implementation. While this study provides valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:

Geographic coverage: The findings are limited to Tangerang Regency and may not be fully generalizable to other areas with different socio-economic contexts.

Cross-sectional design: The study's cross-sectional nature limits the ability to assess changes in teacher readiness over time. A longitudinal approach could provide deeper insights into the development of teacher preparedness.

Self-reported data: Reliance on self-reported responses introduces potential bias, although triangulation with qualitative data helps mitigate this issue.

Future research should investigate:

A comparative analysis of teacher preparedness across different geographic and socio-economic environments., the role of parental involvement in supporting the implementation of the curriculum, the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching models in early childhood education.

CONCLUSION

This study comprehensively analyzes teacher readiness and institutional support in Raudatul Lembaga Atfal (RA) for implementing the Independent Curriculum. RQ1 sought to determine the level of readiness among RA teachers and the factors influencing their readiness. The findings indicate that while RA teachers generally exhibit strong pedagogical competence (40% high), significant challenges persist in curriculum knowledge (35% high) and technological proficiency (25% high). Additionally, adaptive capacity is moderate (30% high), suggesting that teachers require further support to adapt to new curricular demands effectively. These results highlight that, although teachers possess robust teaching skills, gaps in curriculum understanding and technology integration impede the full realization of the Independent Curriculum. Factors influencing readiness include access to professional development, availability of technological resources, and the ability to adapt to curricular changes.

RQ2 explored how institutional support systems—precisely leadership quality (85% strong), resource allocation (70% adequate), and community collaboration (80% positive)—impact the implementation process. The study reveals that strong leadership and active community collaboration significantly enhance teacher preparedness and facilitate successful curriculum implementation. In contrast, inadequate resource allocation poses a substantial barrier, particularly in rural areas with limited access to training and resources. Institutions with proactive leadership and cohesive governance structures demonstrated higher levels of teacher

readiness, whereas those with fragmented governance struggled to meet curriculum demands effectively.

This study highlights the urgent need to address resource inequities and strengthen institutional support for effective curriculum implementation in Raudatul Atfal institutions. Policymakers and educational leaders should ensure equitable distribution of educational resources, particularly in underserved rural areas, by providing adequate technological tools and essential teaching materials. Establishing dedicated funding streams for technology infrastructure is crucial. Additionally, implementing practice-based professional development programs to enhance curriculum knowledge and technological proficiency, alongside leadership training to guide teachers through curriculum changes, is essential. Promoting peer collaboration and strengthening community partnerships will foster adaptive capacity and continuous improvement. These measures will create a supportive, equitable environment, empowering RA teachers to effectively implement the Independent Curriculum, ensuring sustainable educational reform and improved education quality.

CONFESSION

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

MH, DM, IM, AB conceptualized the study, designed the methodology, and was responsible for the overall administration of the project. MH, DM, IM, and AB also led the data curation process, performed the data analysis, and drafted the original manuscript. MH, DM, IM, and AB reviewed and edited the final manuscript before submission.

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