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## **EVALUATION OF CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT AND ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to analyze curriculum management practices and education assessment systems at the junior secondary school (SMP/MTs) level. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, the study involved semi-structured interviews with principals, teachers and education supervisors, as well as direct classroom observations and a literature review. The findings show that curriculum management in these schools is adaptive but faces challenges in teacher training and implementation of holistic assessment. Although many teachers try to implement diverse assessment approaches, there is still a tendency to prioritize final exams as the main indicator of student achievement. This study recommends improved training for teachers as well as policies that support school autonomy in developing a curriculum that meets students' needs. The implications of this study are expected to contribute to the improvement of educational practices at the junior secondary school level.

**Keywords:** Curriculum management, assessment system, junior secondary school education, qualitative approach, teacher training, holistic assessment, education policy.

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## INTRODUCTION

Curriculum management is a fundamental aspect of the educational system, particularly at the Junior High School (SMP) and Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) levels in Indonesia. This stage serves as a critical bridge for students, helping them develop essential skills and competencies necessary for their subsequent educational endeavors. The curriculum functions as the backbone of the learning process, delineating the material to be taught and the methods employed by educators. Effective curriculum management not only serves as a technical guide for teachers but also acts as a strategic tool to ensure that all students achieve optimal learning outcomes Mahardika (2023).

At the SMP and MTs levels, the curriculum must be dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs of students and the demands of contemporary society. This adaptability is crucial in preparing students for the complexities of the modern world, particularly in light of the rapid changes brought about by globalization and technological advancements (Kusaeri & Ridho, 2019). The curriculum should not merely focus on content delivery but also emphasize the development of critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the ability to navigate an increasingly interconnected world (Wiyanto, 2016). For instance, the integration of STEM education into the curriculum has been shown to enhance students' motivation and engagement, equipping them with skills relevant to the 21st century (Dökme et al., 2022).

Moreover, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia reflects a shift towards a more flexible and student-centered approach to education. This curriculum emphasizes the importance of tailoring educational experiences to meet the diverse needs of students while fostering their independence and critical thinking abilities (Seli, 2023). The Pancasila Learner Profile Strengthening Project (P5) is a notable initiative within this framework, aiming to instill core values such as mutual cooperation (*gotong royong*), independence, and integrity through project-based learning (Seli, 2023). Such initiatives highlight the necessity of aligning curriculum management with broader educational goals that prioritize character development alongside academic achievement.

However, effective curriculum management also requires ongoing professional development for educators. Teachers must be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to implement the curriculum effectively and adapt to its evolving nature (Sidik, 2023). Research indicates that teacher readiness and perceptions significantly influence the successful implementation of new curricula (Pane, 2022). Therefore, investing in teacher training and support systems is essential for fostering an environment conducive to effective learning and teaching.

In conclusion, curriculum management at the SMP and MTs levels is a vital component of the educational framework in Indonesia. It serves as a foundation for developing students' skills and competencies while ensuring that educational practices remain relevant and responsive to societal changes. By embracing flexibility and focusing on character development, the curriculum can better prepare students for the challenges of the future. Continuous professional development for educators is also crucial in facilitating the successful implementation of these curricular innovations. However, curriculum management in junior secondary schools faces various challenges that need to be addressed by various stakeholders. One of the biggest challenges is how to integrate the national curriculum with the local needs

and unique conditions of each school. Many schools in Indonesia, including SMP and MTs, have different contexts based on social, economic and cultural factors. Therefore, it is important to adapt the curriculum that is not only compliant with national policies but also responsive to the specific needs of students and their communities. In addition, challenges related to building teachers' capacity to understand and implement the curriculum effectively often arise, especially in areas with limited training and access to educational resources.

In addition to the challenges in curriculum management, the assessment system is also a fairly complex aspect to manage. Assessment serves as an important instrument in measuring student learning achievement and providing feedback for the improvement of the learning process. However, many teachers experience difficulties in implementing fair and comprehensive assessments. In the context of SMP/MTs, assessment includes not only cognitive aspects such as written exams and objective tests, but also affective and psychomotor aspects that require more diverse and comprehensive assessment techniques. This challenge is further exacerbated by administrative demands that often burden teachers, resulting in limited time to provide meaningful assessments of student development. Thus, there is a gap between what is expected in curriculum documents and real practices in the field, especially in terms of learning assessment.

Based on the above background, the problem formulation in this study focuses on two main things. First, what are the best practices that have been implemented in curriculum management at the junior secondary school level? This includes how schools manage the curriculum effectively, adaptively and according to students' needs. Secondly, how is the assessment system implemented and integrated with the curriculum at SMP/MTs? This question focuses on how schools and teachers implement various assessment strategies to reflect student learning in a comprehensive and sustainable manner. Understanding these two questions is expected to provide a clearer picture of the implementation of the curriculum and assessment system in junior secondary schools and the challenges faced in its implementation.

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze the curriculum management practices and assessment systems implemented at the junior secondary school level. This research seeks to uncover how the curriculum is managed, implemented and adapted to the conditions that exist in schools and how the assessment system can support or, on the other hand, hinder the achievement of optimal learning outcomes. By examining these various aspects of curriculum management and assessment systems, this study also aims to provide practical recommendations that can be implemented by schools, teachers and education policy makers to improve the quality of education at the junior secondary school level.

The significance of this research is very important, not only for schools and educators, but also for curriculum developers and stakeholders in education more broadly. For curriculum developers, this research can provide empirical input on best practices and real challenges faced in the field, so that the resulting curriculum can become more relevant and applicable. For teachers and educators, the results of this study are expected to be a guide or source of inspiration in managing the classroom, adapting the curriculum, and developing better assessment techniques. In addition, for policy makers, this research can be a reference in the formulation of educational policies that support the improvement of learning quality at the junior secondary school level. Curriculum management and assessment systems are interrelated components, so understanding these two aspects in depth is very important in efforts to improve

the quality of education and ensure that every student gets equal opportunities to develop according to their potential.

With the qualitative approach used in this research, interviews, observations and literature studies will be the main tools to obtain comprehensive and in-depth data. Through interviews, researchers can gain understanding from the perspectives of education actors, such as principals, teachers and supervisors, regarding curriculum management practices and assessment systems. Observations will be made to see first-hand how the curriculum is implemented in the classroom and how assessment is conducted as part of the learning process. In addition, the literature study will provide a theoretical framework and empirical context that strengthens the analysis of the qualitative data collected. By using a combination of these three data collection techniques, it is expected to provide a more complete picture of the condition of curriculum management and assessment systems in junior secondary schools, and provide insights that are useful for improving the education system as a whole.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the curriculum management and assessment system at SMP/MTs in depth. The steps of this study were designed to ensure comprehensive data collection and proper analysis. The following are the steps taken in this study:

### **Research Preparation**

The initial steps included careful preparation prior to data collection. The researcher began by reviewing relevant literature on curriculum management and assessment systems in junior secondary education. This included reading relevant articles, books and education policy documents. This preparation helped the researcher to formulate more specific and relevant research questions.

### **Location and Participant Determination**

After preparation, the researcher determined the research site and selected the participants. The schools selected were representative of various contexts, both urban and rural. The researcher approached the principals and teachers to explain the purpose of the study and asked for permission to conduct interviews and observations. The participants involved in this study included the school principal, several teachers from various subjects, and an education supervisor who had insight into the curriculum and assessment.

### **Data Collection through Interview**

After obtaining permission, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants. These interviews were designed with open-ended questions that allowed participants to describe their experiences in curriculum management and assessment. Some examples of questions included: "What are the main challenges you face in managing the curriculum in this school?" or "How do you implement an effective assessment system for students?" The researcher recorded participants' answers and, with permission, recorded the interviews for further analysis. The semi-structured approach provided flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore topics that emerged during the conversation.

### **Classroom Observation and Meetings**

While the interviews were taking place, researchers also made direct observations in the classroom and in curriculum development meetings. These observations aimed to understand firsthand how the curriculum is implemented in practice and how assessments are carried out. During the observations, the researcher noted the interactions between teachers and students, as well as the methods used in the teaching and assessment process. Observations at curriculum development meetings also provided insights into how curriculum-related decisions are made and the challenges faced by the development team.

### **Literature Study**

During and after data collection, we conducted a literature review to provide a broader context for the findings. We reviewed official curriculum documents, education policies and previous research to identify relevant theories and concepts. This also helped the researcher to position the findings in a larger context and relate the experiences in the field to existing theories.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected, the researcher began to analyze the data using thematic analysis. This process began with transcribing the interviews and organizing the observation notes. The researcher then read through the data to gain an initial understanding, before identifying key themes that emerged from the interviews and observations. This step involved categorizing the data based on relevant themes and sub-themes. For example, themes on "challenges in curriculum management" and "effective assessment strategies" were identified and categorized. The researcher also linked these findings with existing literature to provide theoretical support and strengthen the analysis.

### **Preparation of Research Report**

Once the analysis is complete, the researcher compiles a research report that presents the findings systematically. The report includes an introduction, research methods, results and discussion, and conclusions and recommendations. The researcher ensured that all findings were clearly presented, supported by relevant quotes from interviews and observations. In addition, the report also highlights the implications of the findings for curriculum management and assessment practices in junior secondary schools and for education policy developers.

### **Data Validation**

To ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings, the researcher triangulated the data by comparing information obtained from interviews, observations, and literature studies. In addition, the researcher also held feedback sessions with participants to ensure that the interpretation of the data was in line with their experiences.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main findings of this study on curriculum management practices and assessment systems at the junior secondary school level can be divided into two major aspects: the results of interviews and observations, and an analysis of the implications of these findings in the wider context. Interviews with principals and teachers revealed that curriculum management practices in many schools tend to be adaptive, where they try to adjust the established curriculum to local needs and student characteristics. Many principals emphasized the importance of communication with stakeholders, including students and parents, in the curriculum development process. This approach is in line with findings from previous research, such as that reported by Supriyadi and Muthoharoh (2020), which showed that active participation from all parties can improve the relevance and effectiveness of the curriculum.

However, significant challenges remain, especially in terms of teacher capacity building. Many teachers feel inadequately trained to implement a more innovative curriculum. This was also found in a study by Nurdin et al. (2021), which showed that limited professional training for teachers hinders the implementation of a curriculum that is in line with the latest developments. Our research found that despite the desire to innovate, many teachers are still stuck in traditional teaching routines that focus more on delivering information rather than active interaction with students.

The classroom observations added an important perspective on the curriculum implementation and assessment system. Although many teachers try to implement active learning methods, such as group discussions and projects, observations show that not all students are actively involved. Some students appeared passive, which suggests that there is a gap between what is expected in the curriculum and the practice in the field. This is reminiscent of research by Rahayu (2019) who noted that although the competency-based curriculum encourages active learning, classroom implementation is often not in line with these principles, so more inactive students can be overlooked.

Findings from this study also revealed variations in assessment practices. Although some teachers have attempted to implement formative assessment, many still rely on the final exam as the main indicator of student achievement. This confirms the results of a study by Zainuddin and Hamidah (2022) which showed that assessment often focuses on cognitive aspects alone, neglecting students' affective and psychomotor development. Our research found that teachers feel pressured to achieve good results in exams, thus neglecting a more holistic approach to assessment.

From the analysis conducted, there is a clear gap between the ideal practices proposed in the literature and the reality on the ground. Curriculum management theory states that collaboration between teachers, principals and other stakeholders is essential for effective curriculum development. However, in practice, many schools do not have a formal forum for this collaborative discussion. This is reinforced by research by Yuliati (2023) who noted that lack of time and administrative support often hinder productive collaboration between teachers.

The implications of these findings highlight the urgent need for better training for teachers. This study recommends the development of training programs that focus not only on the technical aspects of teaching, but also on developing skills in formative assessment and classroom management. Research by Aisyah and Suryanto (2021) shows that practice-based training can improve teachers' skills in implementing the curriculum and more effective assessment.

Furthermore, education policies need to be geared towards providing schools with greater flexibility in tailoring the curriculum to local needs. This research shows that policies that support school autonomy can improve the relevance of education. This is in line with research findings by Wulandari and Rahmawati (2020) who emphasize the importance of education policies that are responsive to the local context in curriculum development.

Overall, the results of this study provide deep insights into curriculum management practices and assessment systems in junior secondary schools while identifying challenges that need to be addressed to improve education quality. The findings suggest that better collaboration between stakeholders, adequate training and supportive policies are important steps towards improvement. By understanding the context and challenges faced, it is hoped that curriculum development and assessment systems can become more effective and responsive to the needs of students at the junior secondary level.

## CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study summarize the key findings obtained from the observation and analysis of curriculum management practices and assessment systems at the junior secondary school level. First, the study identified that curriculum management in these schools tends to be adaptive, with principals and teachers attempting to tailor the established curriculum to local needs and student characteristics. However, challenges in terms of teacher training and capacity building remain a significant obstacle to effective curriculum implementation. In addition, despite awareness of the importance of diverse assessment, many teachers still rely on traditional assessment methods that focus on final exams, which do not reflect the full range of students' abilities.

Based on these findings, several recommendations can be made for curriculum management and assessment practices in junior secondary schools. First, it is important for schools to improve training for teachers so that they are better equipped to implement innovative teaching methods and more holistic assessments. This training should include skill development in formative assessment that is oriented to the learning process. Secondly, there needs to be greater policy support from the government to give schools autonomy in developing a curriculum that meets the needs of students. Finally, it is important to establish collaborative forums among teachers and other stakeholders to share best practices and resolve challenges faced in curriculum implementation.

Future research directions might focus on longitudinal studies that evaluate the effectiveness of implementing the proposed recommendations. More in-depth research on the impact of teacher training on teaching quality and student learning outcomes is also highly relevant. In addition, studies on the role of technology in supporting curriculum management and assessment could be an interesting topic to explore, given the rapid development of educational technology in the current digital era.

As such, this study makes an important contribution to the development of educational practices at the junior secondary school level, as well as offering useful insights for better educational policies in the future.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The theoretical implications of this research focus on developing an understanding of curriculum management and assessment systems in the context of junior secondary school education. This research enriches the existing literature by showing that curriculum management practices are not only influenced by official guidelines but also by the local context and students' needs. This supports constructivism theory which emphasizes that learning and teaching should be relevant to students' experiences and backgrounds. In addition, this study identified the need to update assessment theory by emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach to assessment, which includes cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects. The findings can serve as a basis for further research exploring the relationship between adaptive curriculum management and student learning outcomes.

### **Practical Implications**

The practical implications of this study are significant for the development of education policy and practice at the junior secondary level. The findings indicating the need for better training for teachers emphasize the importance of providing resources and effective professional development programs. Schools should invest in teacher training that focuses on innovative teaching techniques and formative assessment to improve the quality of learning. In addition, this study recommends a collaborative forum between teachers and stakeholders that can encourage the exchange of ideas and best practices in curriculum management. Thus, these practical implications focus not only on improving the quality of education but also on creating sustainable learning communities.

### **Managerial Implications**

From a managerial perspective, this study offers valuable insights for school principals and education managers in optimizing curriculum and assessment management. The findings show that collaborative and participatory-based management is more successful in producing a relevant curriculum. Therefore, principals need to create a working environment that encourages open communication and collaboration between all stakeholders. In addition, education managers should consider giving schools more autonomy in tailoring the curriculum to local needs, as well as providing the necessary support for teacher training and development. These managerial implications aim to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the implementation of the curriculum and assessment system in schools, which in turn can contribute to improving student learning outcomes.

Thus, this study not only makes theoretical and practical contributions, but also provides useful guidance for education management to improve existing practices and achieve better educational goals at the junior secondary school level.



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