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THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN INDONESIA: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY

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Abstract

Curriculum development in Indonesia formally relies on a range of philosophical, psychological, social, and theoretical foundations, and adopts various models such as rational approaches, grassroots initiatives, and competency-based frameworks. However, alignment between these theoretical constructs and the actual practices of national curriculum development remains inconsistent. This conceptual article examines the gap between curriculum development theory and its practical implementation within Indonesia's curriculum policy landscape. Through a critical analysis of foundational concepts, established curriculum models, and ideal development stages, the study contrasts theoretical expectations with national practices that tend to be top-down, administrative, and limited in stakeholder participation at the school level. The conceptual findings indicate that this misalignment undermines the curriculum's relevance to learners' needs, restricts school autonomy in curriculum adaptation, and constrains innovation at the classroom level. The article argues that strengthening curriculum development requires a closer integration of theoretical principles with implementation mechanisms through adaptive, participatory, and context-responsive approaches. In conclusion, synchronizing theory and practice is essential for ensuring the effectiveness and long-term sustainability of Indonesia's national curriculum development.

Keywords: Curriculum Development, Curriculum Theory, Curriculum Implementation, Conceptual Analysis, Indonesian Education Policy, Theory Practice Gap

Introduction

Curriculum development is a strategic process that determines the direction, quality, and relevance of education in a country. In Indonesia, various curriculum changes have been made in recent decades, starting from the 1975, 1984, and 1994 Curricula, the 2004 KBK, the 2006 KTSP, the 2013 Curriculum, to the Merdeka Curriculum. These changes reflect the dynamics of social needs, scientific developments, and global demands for student competence. Conceptually, curriculum development is always based on educational theories that cover philosophical, psychological, social, and administrative dimensions, and refers to various approaches such as rational models, competency-based models, and participatory models. However, a fundamental question arises as to how far these theories actually influence curriculum development practices at the national level.

In the context of Indonesian education policy, curriculum development still tends to follow a top-down pattern, where key decisions are formulated by the central government and implemented uniformly across all educational units. This condition poses a serious challenge: the ideal curriculum development theory, which is flexible, adaptive, and based on student needs, is often not accommodated in practice. This disconnect has various consequences, such as limited room for

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adaptation in schools, a lack of learning innovation, and low curriculum relevance to the local context. Although various policy documents emphasize an orientation toward 21st-century competencies, character, and meaningful learning, implementation in the field shows a gap between the concepts formulated and their execution.

A conceptual study of the gap between theory and practice in curriculum development is crucial, especially in understanding the root causes of the problem and determining the direction for future improvements. The literature shows that the success of curriculum development is highly dependent on the integration of theoretical frameworks and concrete and realistic implementation mechanisms. Without such integration, curriculum development will only be normative and administrative in nature, without having a significant impact on the quality of learning. Therefore, critical analysis is needed to evaluate the extent to which curriculum development theory is applied in the Indonesian context and to identify dimensions that still deviate from conceptual principles.

This article aims to analyze this gap through a conceptual approach, by examining the theoretical foundations of curriculum development, frequently used models, and national curriculum development practices. The analysis highlights the inconsistencies between the theoretical framework and policy implementation and provides arguments for the need for a more adaptive, participatory, and school-context-based approach. Thus, this article is expected to contribute conceptually to strengthening curriculum development practices in Indonesia to be more in line with theory and current learning needs.

Method

This study uses a conceptual analysis approach that aims to critically analyze the gap between theory and practice in curriculum development in Indonesia. Conceptual analysis is used because the focus of the study is not on collecting empirical data, but on exploring, interpreting, and synthesizing theories, models, and curriculum development frameworks that have been developed by experts. The research procedure was carried out through a review of relevant literature, including classic curriculum textbooks such as Tyler and Taba, journal articles from the last 5–10 years on the implementation of the national curriculum, and official policy documents such as the Merdeka Curriculum implementation guidelines. Each source was analyzed to identify the principles, epistemological foundations, design approaches, and curriculum implementation mechanisms described in the theory.

Furthermore, the results of this theoretical review were compared with conceptual findings on national curriculum practices through a comparative analysis process. The analysis was carried out by assessing the coherence between the ideal concepts in curriculum development theory and the reality of implementation in Indonesia, such as policy centralization, teacher capacity, infrastructure readiness, and school culture. The analysis techniques included categorizing, mapping, and synthesizing to reveal forms of epistemological, structural, and implementation gaps. This approach enabled the development of a reconstruction model.

Results

The results of this article related to Curriculum Development in Indonesia in improving Teacher Character can be summarized as follows:

Epistemological Foundation and Conceptual Paradigm Model

The epistemological foundation is the basis that determines how a conceptual model is constructed, especially in the study of curriculum development. Without a strong epistemological foundation, the entire argumentative construct risks becoming normative, vague, or merely compilative. Curriculum development is a field that does not rely solely on empirical data, but on layered constructions of knowledge: philosophical, psychological, social, historical, and policy. Therefore, the preparation of a conceptual model must begin with an explanation of how knowledge about the curriculum is understood, interpreted, and validated.

In Indonesia, the discourse on curriculum development tends to position the curriculum as an administrative product rather than an epistemic construction. This view contradicts academic literature that positions the curriculum as a knowledge system that contains values, orientations, and educational paradigms. In contemporary studies, the curriculum is understood as an "epistemic representation of society" or a reflection of how a nation defines knowledge that is worth teaching. Therefore, when the curriculum changes, it is not only the technical document that changes, but also the basic assumptions about what learning is, what knowledge is, and what humans are. This view is emphasized by Susanto (2016), who states that curriculum change always stems from a change in the paradigm of thinking about learners and learning (A. Susanto, 2016).

In constructing a conceptual model to analyze curriculum development practices in Indonesia, a pluralistic-critical epistemological position is required. A single approach often fails to explain the complexity of the Indonesian curriculum, because the reality of education is not shaped by a single factor, but by the interaction between policy, institutions, culture, teacher competence, socio-economic conditions, and local dynamics that vary from region to region. The model developed needs to be able to bridge two main domains: structure (policy and system) and praxis (implementation in the field). This is in line with Aulia's (2020) finding that the success of curriculum implementation depends on the interaction between policy design and implementer readiness, not on the strength of the curriculum document itself (A. Aulia, 2020).

From an epistemological perspective, two paradigms are simultaneously used in this conceptual model: the structural paradigm and the interpretive paradigm. The structural paradigm views the curriculum as a product of policy shaped by power, bureaucracy, and regulation. This approach highlights how top-down policies in Indonesia influence how the curriculum is designed and distributed to schools. Many studies show that the Indonesian education system is strongly influenced by bureaucracy, so that the curriculum tends to be politicized and not based on the real needs of schools. Mulyasa (2018) shows that every change in the curriculum in Indonesia always happens faster than the structural readiness of regions and schools (Mulyasa, 2018).

Meanwhile, the interpretive paradigm views the curriculum as a social practice, something that is "created" every day by teachers and students in the classroom. In this paradigm, the curriculum is not only an official document, but also the teacher's interpretation of that document. This means that two schools with the same curriculum can produce very different learning practices due to differences in teacher interpretation, school culture, and local context. This concept is reinforced by the findings of Yamin's (2019) research, which emphasizes that teachers' understanding of the curriculum document is far more decisive for the success of its implementation than the quality of the document itself (Yamin, 2019). Combining these two paradigms is important because curriculum development problems in Indonesia generally lie at the point of conflict between structure and interpretation. Structure is often too rigid, while interpretation is too free. As a result, the curriculum does not

function as intended. For example, the scientific approach in the 2013 Curriculum is actually based on the epistemological foundation of constructivism, but its implementation in schools tends to be mechanical and formalistic, lacking the pedagogical spirit of constructivism itself. This is evidenced by Lestari's (2021) study, which found that most teachers implement the scientific approach only as procedural steps, not as a learning approach that builds active knowledge construction (Dewi Lestari, 2021).

This pluralistic-critical epistemological position allows the conceptual model to read the curriculum not only textually, but also contextually. It is not enough to assess what is written in the curriculum document; it is necessary to analyze how the document was formed, for whose benefit, in what context, and how it is translated into action. This is why the conceptual model places the curriculum as a "knowledge ecosystem." The curriculum is not merely a set of competencies and methods, but a network of knowledge, values, actors, and contexts that interact.

The epistemological foundation also influences how this model interprets the core problem of Indonesian education, namely the gap between theory and practice. Much of the national curriculum discourse is based on global theories (e.g., constructivism, 21st-century competencies, project-based learning), but its implementation never reaches the true depth of its theoretical meaning. In research by Hidayat (2022), schools in areas with minimal resources were unable to implement a project-based learning approach due to limitations in facilities, training, and management culture (Hidayat, 2022). At this point, it is clear that conceptual models must be constructed with the epistemological awareness that knowledge does not exist in a vacuum. Knowledge about curriculum exists in a tension between theoretical ideals and practical realities. Therefore, the conceptual model in this study is designed not merely to explain, but to reveal the structures that conceal the root causes of curriculum implementation problems in Indonesia.

Thus, the epistemological foundation and conceptual paradigm used shape a more critical and in-depth analytical orientation: the curriculum is viewed as a layered, complex system of knowledge that is influenced by many factors. This conceptual model is designed to explore the relationships between these factors, assess whether these relationships are consistent, and identify which parts are the source of the gap between theory and practice. This approach allows for analysis that is not only descriptive but also diagnostic, making it more relevant to curriculum development in Indonesia.

Structural Problems in Curriculum Implementation in Indonesia

The problem of curriculum implementation in Indonesia is structural, not merely technical. This means that the main obstacle does not lie with teachers who "do not yet understand the curriculum," but with an education system that does not provide the epistemic and institutional conditions that enable the curriculum to work as designed. The hierarchical bureaucratic structure, top-down policy mechanisms, administrative school culture, and uneven institutional capacity create a permanent gap between the curriculum document and the reality of the classroom. It is in this context that the curriculum often changes but learning outcomes remain stagnant.

First, the problem arises from the nature of curriculum change in Indonesia, which is highly dependent on central political decisions. Every change of minister almost always results in a repositioning of policy, including changes in nomenclature, orientation, and implementation instruments. This instability creates a phenomenon of "policy fatigue," namely the exhaustion of school actors due to constantly changing policies before they have had a chance to be thoroughly understood. This phenomenon has been noted by many Indonesian education policy analysts as a major obstacle to school readiness for implementation, especially in low-resource areas. Prihantoro (2021) notes that national curriculum changes often "exceed the operational capacity of educational units" so that their implementation never reaches a stable phase of institutionalization (Prihantoro, 2021).

Second, the gap in teacher capacity is another structural problem. This issue is not only a matter of pedagogical competence, but also working conditions that undermine teachers' ability to innovate. Administrative burdens, document-based assessment systems, and accreditation pressures shift teachers' work orientation from the learning process to report fulfillment. Mulyasa (2018) shows that the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum is hampered by the dominance of administrative work over pedagogical assistance (Mulyasa, 2018). In many schools, teachers' understanding of the curriculum is not low due to incompetence, but because regulatory designs place teachers as administrative implementers rather than professional learning designers. This is a structural problem, not an individual one.

Third, disparities in facilities and resources exacerbate the failure of curriculum implementation to be carried out evenly. The government is trying to improve the situation through digitization programs and facility assistance, but the gap between regions remains large. The Merdeka Curriculum, for example, requires access to digital platforms such as PMM (Platform Merdeka Mengajar), digital teaching modules, and online-based training. However, not all schools have adequate access to the internet, devices, or basic digital literacy. A study by Nur and Madjid (2022) confirms that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools faces significant obstacles in regions with low infrastructure capacity (Nur & Madjid, 2022). This means that ideologically progressive policies will remain ineffective when confronted with structural realities that do not support them.

Fourth, there is an epistemological problem in the way the curriculum is produced and interpreted. The curriculum is often designed based on an “ideal” image of students and the learning process, but does not adequately take into account the highly diverse socio-cultural conditions of Indonesian schools. As a result, teachers must make intuitive adaptations for the curriculum to work, but these adaptations rarely have clear conceptual guidelines. This phenomenon results in inconsistent implementation: some teachers interpret the curriculum in a very administrative manner, while others interpret it creatively but without a systematic basis. Sanjaya (2016) refers to this condition as an “epistemic alignment deficit” between the curriculum document and the school context. (Sanjaya, 2016).

Fifth, the next structural problem is the weakness of the substantive assistance and monitoring system. Assistance in curriculum implementation often stops at formal training, seminars, or short-term workshops that are not sustainable. In fact, curriculum implementation requires a long-term mentoring cycle that involves classroom observation, coaching, and data-based analysis. Fadlillah (2020) emphasizes that national curriculum training rarely results in significant change because it does not directly address classroom practices. Without strong mentoring instruments, curriculum change only results in changes to documents, not changes in learning (Fadlillah, 2020).

Sixth, the structure of educational incentives also reinforces implementation problems. The school and teacher performance appraisal system places greater emphasis on administrative completeness, student graduation rates, and accreditation achievements, rather than the quality of the learning experience. Because these indicators determine the reputation of the school and the career mobility of teachers, it is natural that curriculum implementation is always seen as an “administrative obligation” rather than a pedagogical project. This type of incentive structure creates a defensive, bureaucratic, and overly cautious school culture that leaves no room for the pedagogical experimentation that is essential for the success of a new curriculum.

Seventh, the complexity of these structural problems is intertwined with a policy literacy gap at the school level. Many principals and teachers understand the curriculum in a fragmented way because the architecture of policy documents is layered, complex, and often changing. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, for example, the main documents are in different regulatory positions: Permendikbudristek (Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation),

technical guidelines, teaching modules, and assessment guidelines. Without clear consolidation, schools find it difficult to determine which standards must be strictly followed and which are flexible. The ministry has provided integrated guidelines, but their implementation remains limited. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) itself emphasizes that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum is highly dependent on "document comprehension management" at the school level.

All of these problems show that curriculum implementation in Indonesia is not just a matter of teacher competence or the availability of learning tools. The problem is systemic, involving bureaucratic structure, social capacity gaps, policy design, school organizational culture, and the way the state positions teachers as actors in education. As long as these structures remain unchanged, no curriculum reform will bring about significant transformation. The curriculum will continue to be an ideal document, while classrooms will continue to operate according to the old logic.

Analysis of the Gap Between Theory and Practice in Curriculum Development

The discourse on curriculum development in Indonesia often appears robust at the normative document level, but fragile when it comes to implementation. On paper, various regulations and policies show a progressive orientation: competency-based curriculum, differentiated learning, authentic assessment, and integration of educational technology. However, practices in the field do not move as fast as the direction of these policies. The gap between theoretical design and the reality of implementation is not merely a technical problem; it is a structural issue involving teacher capacity, school culture, the bureaucratic ecosystem, and policy consistency. In this subchapter, the analysis focuses on three main dimensions: epistemological gap, implementation gap, and contextual policy gap.

a) Epistemological Gap: Conceptual Curriculum vs. Pedagogical Reality

Theoretically, the curriculum is designed to be a document that reflects the needs of the times. National education standards emphasize 21st-century competencies and learning that facilitates creativity, collaboration, and problem solving. However, at the level of understanding, there is still a significant gap between how curriculum developers interpret competencies and how teachers translate them into learning activities.

Many teachers understand competencies as a list of indicators rather than as integrated skill sets. Widiastono's study shows that most teachers still view competencies as administrative outputs rather than as processes for developing contextual life skills. As a result, the curriculum, which is intended to be a flexible guide, becomes a rigid document that is read textually (Widiastono, 2019).

This epistemological gap is exacerbated by the lack of academic discussion space in schools. Teachers are more often faced with administrative supervision than academic supervision. In these conditions, curriculum theory is treated as a "rule" rather than a "framework for thinking." The epistemological gap causes the curriculum to lose its reflective spirit, which is its foundation.

b) Implementation Gap: Teacher Competence, Resources, and School Culture

At the implementation level, the most obvious gap arises from the variable of teacher competence. Modern curricula require the ability to design active learning, conduct authentic assessments, integrate technology, and manage differentiated learning. However, national research shows that most teachers have not yet fully mastered these pedagogical skills.

The implementation problem is not only a matter of individual competence, but also a matter of limited resources. Many schools do not yet have ICT equipment, stable internet networks, or learning spaces that support collaborative learning. When infrastructure is minimal, a differentiated curriculum turns into a curriculum of "forced uniformity."

Furthermore, school culture often still emphasizes obedience, memorization, and exam orientation. Even though the National Examination has been abolished, the shadow of a number-based

evaluation culture still looms large. According to Puspitasari's research, teachers still prioritize cognitive assessment because it is considered easier to administer. Thus, the competency-based curriculum, which is supposed to assess attitudes and skills, becomes inoperable.

c) The Contextual Policy Gap: The Principle of Flexibility vs. Centralized Practices

Rhetorically, curriculum policy in Indonesia always echoes flexibility and school autonomy. The Merdeka Curriculum, for example, emphasizes the importance of contextual adaptation and school-based curriculum development. However, the reality of the policy still tends to be centralistic. Official documents, teaching modules, sample tools, and standard assessments often become the sole reference that is considered "most correct."

This centralistic tendency stems from two factors:

First, schools' fear of the risks of supervision and accreditation. Many principals direct teachers to follow standard formats because they are considered safer administratively.

Second, the tradition of school-based curriculum development is still weak. Many schools do not have internal curriculum teams capable of analyzing contextual needs.

As a result, the flexibility that should liberate teachers instead becomes a source of confusion. Teachers have formal freedom but lack the structural capacity to utilize it. In educational policy theory, this condition is called pseudo-decentralization.

d) The Gap between Academic Rationality and Bureaucratic Pressure

Another aspect that is rarely discussed is the tension between teachers' academic rationality and the bureaucratic pressure of the education system. Curriculum theory places teachers as the primary designers of learning experiences. However, bureaucratic practices encourage teachers to become technical implementers of a series of instructions.

Many teachers complain about the high administrative burden, ranging from learning reports, filling out digital platforms, to data verification. Hamidah's study found that 38 percent of teachers' working time is spent on administration, not on lesson planning. If this is the case, it is difficult to imagine that the curriculum can be implemented creatively and reflectively. This gap reveals an internal contradiction in the education system: theoretically, teachers are positioned as curriculum developers, but in practice, they are treated as policy executors. This role mismatch causes recurring friction in curriculum implementation.

e) Consequences of Unresolved Gaps

The most serious consequence of these gaps is the loss of coherence between national curriculum objectives and learning outcomes at the school level. When teachers do not understand the philosophy of the curriculum, when the infrastructure is unsupportive, when policies are too technocratic, the curriculum ceases to be a tool for educational transformation. It becomes a text filled with jargon but has no effect on the quality of learning. If this gap is not addressed, curriculum development in Indonesia will only continue to be a cycle of document changes without changes in practice. This is not merely a technical obstacle but a structural failure that threatens the very goals of national education.

1. Epistemological Criticism of the National Curriculum Change Model

Curriculum changes in Indonesia always occur at relatively short intervals. The 1994 curriculum was replaced by the 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum, refined into the 2006 KTSP, then shifted to the 2013 Curriculum, and now the Merdeka Curriculum is being implemented. This rapid change is generally explained as a response to changing times, global competency demands, or the results of national evaluations. However, these explanations are often technocratic and normative. At the epistemological level, the curriculum change model in Indonesia has a number of fundamental problems that cause inconsistencies in orientation, a blurred theoretical basis, and weak implementation sustainability.

The epistemological criticism here is directed not at the content of the curriculum, but at the way of thinking that underlies the design and change of the curriculum itself. This criticism covers four central issues: unstable change orientation, deviation between academic and political logic, weak context-based needs analysis, and the absence of a tradition of knowledge building in the cycle of educational policy change.

1) Unstable Change Orientation

The national curriculum change model tends to follow the logic of total substitution, rather than the logic of gradual development. Each new curriculum is positioned as a "turning point" from the previous curriculum. This logic is epistemologically problematic because it assumes that educational change occurs through a paradigm shift, rather than through cumulative evolution.

As a result, every curriculum change always brings new jargon: core competencies, scientific approach, PPK, higher-order thinking, and now differentiation and formative assessment. In fact, in curriculum theory, major changes must always reflect epistemic continuity between the past and the future. When this continuity is not maintained, the curriculum loses its theoretical stability.

Kurniasih's research shows that teachers experience confusion when curriculum changes do not offer continuity of concepts, but rather a replacement of terms. This means that epistemic problems arise because the state places too much emphasis on terminological innovation rather than theoretical consistency.

2) Academic Logic vs. Political Logic

National curriculum changes are often influenced more by political agendas than by the results of epistemological reflection. Curriculum academics emphasize that curriculum change must be based on an analysis of learning problems, empirical findings, and a strong theoretical framework. However, in bureaucratic practice, curriculum change often becomes a symbol of the new government's commitment, a tool for political legitimacy, or a national image strategy.

When political logic dominates, decisions on curriculum change are made without a longitudinal study of the effectiveness of the previous curriculum. Curriculum epistemology, which should be research-based, has turned into declarative epistemology: the state announces changes and then seeks normative reasons to justify them. Nurhayati's (2020) study notes that 67 percent of teachers view curriculum change more as a policy project than a pedagogical necessity. This reveals an internal contradiction between the academic goals of curriculum development and the political goals of policy change.

Epistemologically, this is dangerous. When political logic precedes academic logic, the curriculum becomes a rhetorical text that lacks a strong scientific foundation.

3) Weak Context-Based Needs Analysis

The epistemological framework of modern curricula emphasizes the importance of evidence-based needs assessment. However, curriculum changes in Indonesia are often carried out using a macro approach that ignores local variations. Indonesia has more than 270 million inhabitants, 17,000 islands, and highly heterogeneous socioeconomic conditions. In this context, curriculum development must be based on context-sensitive design.

The problem is that national curriculum documents tend to assume that all schools have uniform resources, teacher competencies, and access to technology. This insensitivity creates a curriculum epistemology that ignores empirical reality.

Lestari's research in the National Education Journal (2019) shows that schools in 3T areas cannot implement the 2013 Curriculum as designed due to limitations in teachers, electricity, and digital access. If empirical reality is not the basis for curriculum change, then the epistemology of the curriculum becomes abstract and inoperable.

In other words, national curriculum changes are often not based on evidence-based policy, but rather on assumption-based policy. This is a serious epistemological problem.

4) Absence of Knowledge Building Tradition

Curriculum development should be carried out through a tradition of continuous research: evaluation of old curricula, analysis of empirical data, documentation of best practices, and integration of field findings. However, Indonesia does not yet have such an epistemological tradition. Old curricula are often simply abandoned without any institutional learning mechanisms. There is no national repository of effective learning practices, no national system for mapping school innovations, and curriculum evaluations are rarely conducted longitudinally.

As a result, each new curriculum is born into a vacuum of knowledge. There is no epistemic continuity between field findings and new curriculum design. As a result, the country repeats the same mistakes in every curriculum: heavy administrative burdens, unrealistic assessments, and a gap between teachers' abilities and curriculum demands. Hidayat in the Indonesian Curriculum Journal (2021) asserts that national curriculum policy has failed to become a developing knowledge cycle and tends to be a repetitive administrative cycle.

5) Epistemological Consequences for Education Quality

This epistemological criticism is important because errors at the epistemological level always lead to implementation failures. When curriculum changes do not stem from a strong scientific logic, their implementation is never stable. Teachers are confused, schools are overwhelmed, and students do not feel the benefits. Worse still, the country loses the opportunity to build a resilient education system. Instead of strengthening teacher capacity, deepening learning research, or building a tradition of school innovation, the country chooses the quick route of curriculum change.

The curriculum becomes a symbol of change, not a tool for improving the quality of learning. Epistemologically, this signifies the state's failure to understand that the curriculum is not an administrative document, but a construction of educational knowledge. If this epistemological criticism is not taken into account, Indonesia will continue to be stuck in a cycle of curriculum change without any significant improvement in quality. The only thing that changes is the document, not educational practice.

Reconstruction of the National Curriculum Development Model

Reconstructing the national curriculum development model is an urgent necessity, given the various epistemological, structural, and implementation problems that have been identified previously. If the national curriculum continues to be developed through administrative logic and terminology changes, Indonesian education will only move in a circle of stagnation. Reconstruction here is not merely a matter of changing the curriculum design, but of rebuilding the way of thinking, the way of producing knowledge, and the way of managing curriculum change systematically. The reconstruction must combine three levels: epistemological, institutional, and practical. These three levels are interrelated and inseparable. Failure to understand one level will cause the other levels to collapse. Therefore, curriculum reconstruction should not be carried out partially, as has often been the case.

a. Epistemological Reconstruction: Organizing Ways of Thinking about Curriculum

The first step in curriculum reconstruction is to reorganize its epistemic foundations. Until now, the national curriculum has been constructed as a collection of instructions, not as a body of knowledge. However, according to the theories of Tyler, Taba, and Ornstein, the curriculum is a theoretical construct that must be rooted in a value system, needs analysis, and the relationships between learning components.

Epistemological reconstruction requires three fundamental shifts: First, the curriculum must be understood as an ecological system, not as a static document. This means that the curriculum does not only contain competencies and materials, but also the relationships between policymakers, teachers, students, the environment, and social structures. This approach is in line with McNeil's view of the

curriculum as a social system. Second, curriculum change must be based on cumulative knowledge. This means that every change refers to well-documented empirical findings. Unfortunately, the tradition of documenting educational knowledge in Indonesia is still weak. As noted by Hidayat (2021), the curriculum cycle in Indonesia emphasizes administrative changes rather than epistemological reflection.

Third, the curriculum must depart from contextual rationality, not just global normative rationality. Many developed countries have successfully developed curricula because they have adapted to teacher capacity, infrastructure conditions, and learning culture. In Indonesia, the assumption of uniformity has led to failed implementation in 3T areas, as shown in a study by Lestari (2019). Epistemological reconstruction requires the state to treat the curriculum as a product of research, not a product of politics. Without this change in mindset, curriculum change will merely become a cycle of terminology replacement.

b. Institutional Reconstruction: Organizing the System, Not Just the Syllabus

A strong epistemology will not function without institutions capable of implementing it. Until now, national curriculum development has been too centralized, so that teachers have lost their space for innovation and schools have become mere objects of implementation. In fact, modern curriculum models emphasize distributed curriculum governance, which is the management of curriculum development that is divided proportionally between the central government, regions, and schools. Institutional reconstruction requires three major changes: First, strengthening the role of teachers as curriculum designers, not just administrative implementers. Mulyasa's (2020) research confirms that teacher capacity is the most decisive factor in the successful implementation of a curriculum. Therefore, teacher training must focus on learning design skills, not just document socialization. Second, an independent national curriculum research institute is needed. Puskurjar has played a major role so far, but it does not yet have a tradition of continuous scientific publication or a longitudinal evaluation mechanism. Countries with stable curricula, such as Finland and Singapore, have research institutions that produce data and inform policy changes. Indonesia needs something similar. Third, the reconstruction must touch on the area of governance alignment. The curriculum will not function if national assessments, accreditation systems, and teacher regulations are not aligned. Many teachers complain that the demands of the curriculum are not in sync with the demands of school administration. This indicates institutional dissonance that must be corrected.

c. Practical Reconstruction: Building a Responsive Curriculum Design

At the practical level, the reconstruction of the curriculum model must produce a curriculum design that is responsive to the local context, rooted in the required competencies, but still has a clear national direction.

The three main principles of practical reconstruction are:

1. Flexible in implementation, consistent in purpose.

This means that national core competencies must remain in place, but the government allows schools to adapt the curriculum based on local conditions. This concept is similar to KTSP, but must be strengthened with teacher capacity and learning-based monitoring mechanisms, not administration.

2. Implementing formative assessment as the center of learning, not summative assessment.

Modern curricula place formative assessment as a tool for improving learning quality. Unfortunately, assessment in Indonesia is still dominated by summative formats. Hartati's (2020) study shows that the use of formative assessment improves learning performance by up to 27 percent in the classes she studied.

3. Realistic integration of technology.

Technology integration policies often fail because they ignore the digital divide. Technology integration must be based on mapping school conditions. Otherwise, technology will only become policy jargon without epistemic function.

d. Curriculum Model Reconstruction: Integrative Framework

Combining the three levels of reconstruction above, a new national curriculum model needs to be built with four core components:

1. Epistemology based on national education research.

   The curriculum must be born from systematic empirical evaluation, not political rhetoric.

2. An institutional structure that places teachers as actors of knowledge.

   Teachers are given space, training, and authority to innovate in the curriculum.

3. A curriculum design that is adaptive but standardized nationally.

   The state regulates core competencies, schools regulate learning strategies.

4. An evidence cycle-based curriculum evaluation system.

   No curriculum changes before the completion of the five-year evaluation cycle.

This model is radically different from Indonesia's curriculum approach over the past three decades. It does not rely on jargon, it does not depend on changes in government, and it does not depend on mere changes in documents. This model is built on the idea that the curriculum is a system of knowledge, a social system, and a governance system all at once.

With this framework, Indonesia can break out of the repetitive cycle of curriculum change and begin to build a stable, deep-rooted educational tradition oriented toward continuous improvement in learning quality

Conclusion

Indonesia's national curriculum over the past three decades has developed through a pattern of reform that has been more administrative than epistemological in nature. This has created a cycle of repeated change but has not resulted in significant improvements in learning quality. When traced, the root of the problem lies in two things: how the state understands the curriculum and how the education system manages it.

First, there is a long-standing epistemic weakness. The curriculum is positioned as a technical document, rather than a construction of knowledge that must be subject to the logic of research, accumulated experience, and needs analysis. As a result, every change to the curriculum is more of a change in terminology than a reconstruction of the paradigm. This explains why there is always a gap between theory and practice, and why teachers continue to be burdened without ever being empowered as epistemic actors. Second, curriculum management is still trapped in administrative centralism. The state sets standards down to the operational level, while schools and teachers only carry out instructions. This model closes the space for local innovation and hinders the responsiveness of the curriculum to Indonesia's socio-cultural diversity. This situation is exacerbated by the lack of synchronization between curriculum policy, assessment, accreditation, and school administrative demands. An implementation gap is inevitable.

Third, at the practical level, curriculum design often does not consider the real capacity of teachers and educational infrastructure, especially in schools far from urban centers. As a result, curricula that are conceptually progressive lose their operational power when they enter the classroom. Many teachers end up using old learning strategies because they lack the technical, pedagogical, and institutional support to implement new models. This analysis shows that the problem with the Indonesian curriculum does not lie in its concept, but in the ecosystem of its development.

Therefore, a robust reconstruction of the curriculum can only occur if it is carried out through three channels simultaneously:

1. Epistemological improvement: the curriculum must be based on national education research, not rhetoric.
2. Institutional reform: teachers must be at the center of curriculum design, supported by credible research institutions and synchronized governance across education system units.
3. Practical redesign: the curriculum must be flexible in implementation but consistent in its objectives, technologically realistic, and oriented toward formative assessment.

This kind of integrative model avoids the pitfalls of cosmetic reform and paves the way for the development of a stable, gradual, and sustainable curriculum tradition. In other words, the quality of education will not improve through changes in documents, but through changes in paradigm. If reconstruction is carried out consistently, Indonesia can break out of the cycle of repetitive curriculum changes and begin to enter an era of knowledge-based curricula, rather than curricula based on political momentum.

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