

# The Impact of Curriculum Changes During Each Regime on The Learning Achievement of Junior High School Students in Indonesia

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## ABSTRACT

*The Indonesian education curriculum has undergone dynamic transformations over the course of changing government regimes, from the Old Order era to the Merdeka Curriculum era. This study aims to analyze how changes in curriculum policy in each regime impacted the learning outcomes of junior high school (SMP) students. Using a descriptive qualitative method and a historical literature review, this study examines the shift in curriculum orientation from an ideological to a technocratic-competence orientation. The results of the study indicate that although curriculum changes are intended to respond to the demands of the times and globalization, "policy shock" often occurs at the grassroots level due to the lack of a transition period and adequate teacher training. Inconsistencies in implementation strategies across regimes were found to be a factor hampering the stability of student academic achievement. This study recommends that education policy be independent of short-term political interests to ensure the sustainability of the quality of national education.*

**Keywords:** Curriculum Change, Government Regime, Learning Achievements, Junior High School Students, Education Policy.

## Introduction

Indonesia's national education system is characterized by a unique phenomenon: a strong correlation between changes in political leadership and changes in curriculum policy. Since the proclamation of independence in 1945, Indonesia has changed its curriculum more than ten times, a figure that demonstrates both instability and the continued pursuit of the ideal educational formula. The curriculum is viewed not merely as a learning plan, but as a strategic instrument for the state to shape national identity and prepare human resources (HR) in accordance with the vision of the ruling regime (Alhamuddin, 2019). For students at the junior high school (SMP) level, this cognitive transition phase is crucial, as drastic curriculum changes can fundamentally affect the foundations of critical thinking and academic achievement.

In the early days of independence, or during the Old Order era under President Sukarno, the educational curriculum emphasized the development of nationalist character and mental decolonization. The curriculum, from 1947 to 1964, was designed to eradicate the discriminatory influence of Dutch colonial education. During this period, student learning outcomes were measured not through rigorous standardized tests, but rather through social engagement and political awareness (Suratman, 2020). Despite the strong spirit of nationalism, educational infrastructure at the time was still very limited, resulting in junior high school students' access to scientific literature lagging behind the powerful ideological indoctrination.

Entering the New Order era under President Suharto, a paradigm shift occurred from ideological education to a technocratic and centralized one. The 1975 Curriculum and the 1984 Curriculum (CBSA - Active Student Learning Method) were introduced to support the national development agenda (Repelita). During this period, education began to be directed toward creating a skilled, system-compliant workforce (Prasetyo, 2021). However, the implementation of CBSA at the junior high school level is

often misunderstood by educators, with the expected active interaction instead dominated by teacher lectures, resulting in student learning outcomes that tend to stagnate at memorizing information rather than processing information independently.

The 1998 reforms ushered in significant changes with the decentralization of education, resulting in the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK 2004) and the school-Level Curriculum (KTSP 2006). These changes aimed to grant schools autonomy in adapting learning materials to local needs (Mulyasa, 2017). For junior high school students, this period provided an opportunity to explore regional potential, but on the other hand, the quality gap between urban and rural schools widened. Learning outcomes were no longer uniform, creating significant disparities in national exam results because regions were unprepared to independently develop high-quality syllabi.

The next administration introduced the 2013 Curriculum (K-13), which emphasized a scientific approach and authentic assessment. K-13 attempted to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in a balanced manner across all subjects. However, a major challenge was the heavy administrative burden on teachers, which indirectly affected the quality of classroom instruction (Sufyadi et al., 2021). Junior high school students in this era were required to possess higher-order thinking skills (HOTS), but the transition from traditional to new learning styles often triggered academic stress, negatively impacting students' average academic achievement in the short term.

Finally, during the Advanced Indonesia Cabinet, the Independent Curriculum policy emerged as a response to *learning loss* caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This curriculum provides extraordinary flexibility for junior high school students to choose their interests and for teachers to teach according to their ability level (*teaching at the right level*). Although theoretically very progressive, its effectiveness on long-term academic achievement remains a subject of debate among academics (Nadiem, 2022). Technological unpreparedness in remote areas and teachers' adaptation to digital platforms are major obstacles that could threaten student learning outcomes if not mitigated with strong supporting policies.

Theoretically, frequent curriculum changes in a short period of time can create pedagogical confusion among education practitioners. Fullan (2016) states that successful educational change requires a minimum of five to ten years to be fully internalized in the system. In Indonesia, frequent changes in education ministers are followed by changes in the curriculum (the "Change Minister, Change Curriculum" postulate), creating uncertainty. Junior high school students, who are going through puberty and searching for identity, need stability in the learning system so they can focus on mastering core material rather than constantly adapting to new assessment formats and subject structures (Hidayat, 2023).

In addition to structural factors, the psychological impact of curriculum changes on student achievement should not be overlooked. When graduation standards and achievement indicators continually change, students' intrinsic motivation can decline as they feel like they are being "experimented" by policies (Raharjo & Santoso, 2022). This is exacerbated by the pressure of standardized testing, which often does not align with recent curriculum changes. For example, the curriculum emphasizes process, but final assessments are often cognitively oriented, creating dissonance in the teaching and learning process at the junior high school level.

Therefore, it is important to critically examine how the political dynamics of each regime influence the curriculum structure and its implications for junior high school student achievement. This research argues that student learning outcomes are determined not only by textbook content but also by the stability of the educational ecosystem, which is often disrupted by political intervention. By understanding this historical track record, it is hoped that future governments can design more sustainable education policies that are oriented toward student interests and transcend sectoral political interests (Siahaan, 2023).

The urgency of this study also lies in the fact that Indonesia is still struggling in the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) rankings. Despite continuous curriculum changes, Indonesian students' literacy and numeracy scores at the junior high school level have not shown significant improvement on the global stage (OECD, 2023). This raises a major question: do these curriculum changes address pedagogical substance, or are they merely cosmetic changes at the administrative level? This article will conduct an in-depth analysis to map the common thread between the regime's ambitions and the reality of student achievement on the ground.

## Research Methods

The research method used in this article is qualitative, with a descriptive-analytical, historical-comparative study approach. According to Zed (2014), the literature study method, or library research, allows researchers to trace the policy trail chronologically by collecting secondary data from official state

documents, academic curriculum manuscripts for each regime, and national learning outcome reports. Data are analyzed using content analysis techniques *to* compare curriculum characteristics across periods, from the Lesson Plan era to the Independent Curriculum, in order to identify patterns of the impact of policy changes on student achievement. Furthermore, in line with the views of Creswell and Poth (2018), this approach integrates educational statistics data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and the results of international surveys, such as PISA, as supporting indicators to objectively observe trends in junior high school students' learning achievement over a long period.

## **Results And Discussion**

### **Characteristics of Inter-Regime Curriculum: From Ideology to Competence**

Research shows that every regime in Indonesia used the curriculum as a tool to legitimize its development vision. During the Old Order era (1945–1966), the curriculum was highly political and ideological. The 1947 and 1964 curriculum plans focused on developing the character of independent and anti-colonial individuals. However, junior high school student achievement during this period was difficult to measure quantitatively due to the lack of standardized national assessment standards, so learning outcomes were more qualitative in nature (Suryosubroto, 2020).

Entering the New Order era (1966–1998), the curriculum became highly technocratic and centralized. The 1975 and 1984 curricula introduced a strict instructional objectives approach. Although the 1984 Curriculum, with its Active Student Learning Method (CBSA), was considered revolutionary in theory, in practice, junior high school teachers often focused on meeting administrative targets rather than on improving student understanding. A study by Beeby (1979), cited in Jalal and Musthafa (2021), shows that despite rapid increases in educational access (quantity), the quality of learning outcomes remained low due to teaching methods that remained highly mechanistic and focused on memorization.

### **The Era of Reform and Decentralization: The Quality Dilemma**

Post-1998, curriculum policy underwent radical decentralization through the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK 2004) and the school-Level Curriculum (KTSP 2006). A key finding during this period was the emergence of wide variations in learning achievement across regions. Junior high school students in Java tended to achieve higher levels than those outside Java due to the availability of infrastructure and the quality of educators developing independent curricula (Mulyasa, 2017). Disorientation in this era occurs when graduation standards (National Exams) remain centralized, while the learning process is decentralized. This creates tremendous psychological stress for junior high school students, where academic achievement is often reduced solely to final exam scores. This, from an educational psychology perspective, can hinder the development of creativity and problem-solving (Raharjo & Santoso, 2022).

### **The 2013 Curriculum and PISA Standards: The Challenge of Higher-Order Thinking**

The SBY and early Jokowi administrations introduced the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) with a scientific approach (*5M: Observing, Asking, Gathering Information, Reasoning, and Communicating*). The primary goal was to improve Indonesia's consistently low PISA scores. However, academic discussions have shown that implementing K-13 at the junior high school level faces significant obstacles due to the complexities of authentic assessment. Based on PISA 2018 data, Indonesian students' literacy, numeracy, and science achievements actually decreased compared to 2015. This proves that "top-down" curriculum changes without fundamental strengthening of teacher capacity will not have a significant impact on student learning achievement (OECD, 2019). Junior high school students are often given more difficult material (HOTS), but without a strong foundation of basic literacy, resulting in a gap between the "desired" curriculum and the curriculum that "happens" in the classroom.

### **Independent Curriculum and the Post-Pandemic Era: Flexibility vs. Standardization**

The current era is marked by the Independent Curriculum, which eliminates early majoring and provides flexibility through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Discussions regarding the impact on achievement have found that this flexibility helps reduce the mental burden on junior high school students following the COVID-19 pandemic. However, critics argue that eliminating rigorous assessment standards risks reducing academic rigor or depth (Hidayat, 2023).

**Table 1.** Independent Curriculum and the Post-Pandemic Era: Flexibility vs. Standardization

Regime Era	Curriculum Name	Focus on Achievement	Impact on Middle School Students
<b>Old Order</b>	Lesson Plan 1947-1964	Nationalist Character	High political awareness, low scientific literacy.
<b>the new order</b>	Curriculum 1975-1994	Development & Discipline	High compliance, weak critical thinking skills.
<b>Reformation</b>	KBK 2004 & KTSP 2006	Autonomy & Competence	Disparities in achievement between regions are increasing.
<b>SBY/Jokowi</b>	2013 Curriculum (K-13)	Scientific & Attitude	Heavy study load, orientation on numerical values.
<b>Independence Era</b>	Independent Curriculum	Literacy & Character	Study pressure decreases, risk of declining academic standards.

### Why Hasn't Student Achievement Experienced a Significant Increase?

A critical analysis of the entire regime reveals a "vicious cycle" in curriculum policy in Indonesia. Each curriculum change is followed by the procurement of new textbooks and short -term teacher training. Fullan (2016) asserts that curriculum changes without changes in "school culture" and "instructional quality" will be merely cosmetic. For junior high school students, the most obvious impact of regime change is the loss of continuity in learning. For example, when a seventh-grade junior high school student starts with the Curriculum 13 (K-13) and switches to the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in ninth grade, there is a disconnect in the sequence of prerequisite materials. This instability prevents students from achieving optimal learning outcomes as they continually adapt to the new system (Siahaan, 2023). Political factors that dominate the direction of education result in the curriculum becoming a short-term product lasting four to five years, rather than a long-term plan that transcends political leadership.

### Synthesis: Towards a Sustainable Curriculum

This discussion concludes that junior high school student learning outcomes in Indonesia will not improve drastically simply by changing the curriculum. Consistent policies that transcend political tenure are needed. Indonesia should learn from countries with stable education systems (such as Finland or Singapore) that do not completely overhaul their curricula with each ministerial change, but instead make continuous improvements at the pedagogical level and in teacher welfare (Schleicher, 2020). Junior high school student achievement results from a long-term process, not policy experiments that change every five years.

## Conclusion

Based on the historical and comparative analysis that has been carried out, this study concludes several fundamental points: **Dominance of Political Interests:** The curriculum in Indonesia, from the Old Order era to the Independence era, has consistently been used as a political instrument to reflect the identity and development vision of the ruling regime. This has resulted in curriculum changes often being *top-down* and reactive to changes in leadership, rather than based on in-depth and ongoing pedagogical evaluation. **Stagnant Learning Outcomes:** Despite continuous curriculum changes promising modernization and competency improvement (such as the KBK, K-13, and the Merdeka Curriculum), international survey data (PISA) shows that junior high school student achievement in Indonesia, particularly in literacy and numeracy, tends to stagnate. **Administrative changes to the curriculum have not addressed the root of the classroom problems:** instructional quality and teacher capacity. **The Impact of "Policy Shock" on Students:** Junior high school students are most vulnerable to frequent curriculum changes. Inconsistencies in prerequisite material and shifting assessment standards between regimes create academic uncertainty and administrative burdens, diverting focus from in-depth understanding to simply adapting to new formats.

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