

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The preparation of research results is the most important phase in the research process, thus the last task that needs to be completed by the researcher is writing the research report. The results of the analysis are used by the researcher to present the findings in this chapter. The research findings include an explanation of the information gathered regarding the difficulties faced by EFL teachers when implementing the independent curriculum in Islamic boarding schools, as well as suggestions for how to get over those difficulties. The results of the research are described based on the results of interviews and observations that are examined using thematic analysis techniques.

A. Findings

A number of findings related to the practice and challenges faced by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum, as well as proposed solutions to overcome these challenges have been found by the researcher. These findings are based on in-depth interviews and direct observation of the participants, namely teachers who teach English at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School. Using the thematic analysis technique, the researcher presents the results of the study by identifying and categorizing the main themes and categories that emerged most frequently during the data collection stage. This process covers various aspects, from the preparation for implementing the

independent curriculum, the challenges faced by teachers both before practice, during practice, and after practice, to concrete solutions that can be applied to improve the effectiveness of learning under the Independent Curriculum. The findings are expected to provide deeper insights and contribute to the development of learning strategies that are more adaptive and responsive to the educational needs of the Islamic Boarding School environment.

In this part of the findings, the researcher grouped the discussion data based on the formulation of research problems. The data grouping table is as follows:

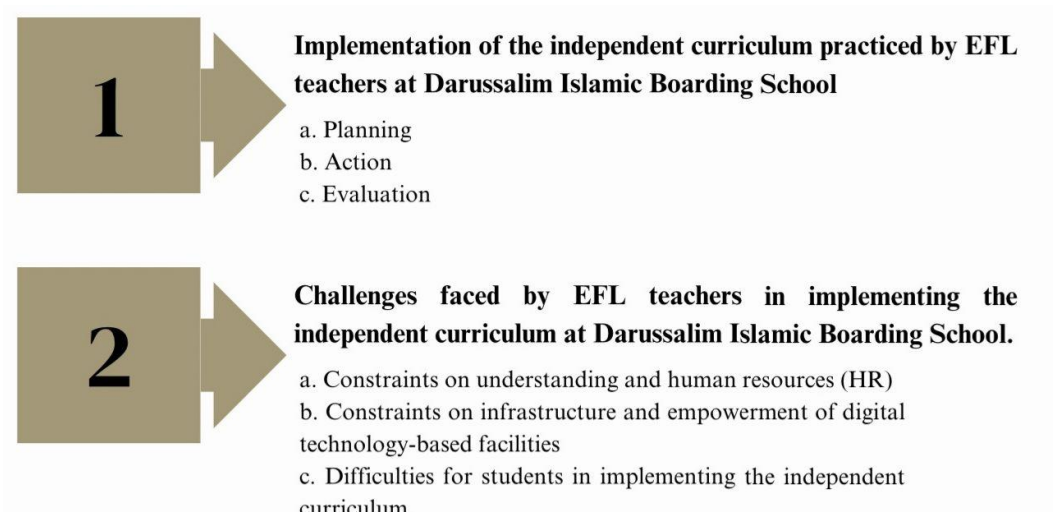


Figure 4. 1 Thematic Categories of the Findings

1. Findings from Observations

In this initial stage, the researcher decided to conduct observations followed by interviews. With classroom observations, researcher know more about the conditions, processes and how the independent curriculum is implemented by EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School. This observation was carried out by coordinating with EFL teachers at the Islamic Boarding School, which began with a direct introduction at the school. After that, the researcher made an appointment to conduct interviews and field observations directly at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School.

The observation process was conducted by the researcher by joining the class and sitting at the back. In this study, the researcher has asked permission from the EFL teacher in each class to join and observe the learning process in the classroom secretly. At each meeting, the researcher also made field notes and took photos when the process of implementing the independent curriculum learning took place. The notes and photos are included in the appendix for further understanding and validity of the data presented.

Based on the Ministry of Education and Research (Kemendikbudristek), the process of implementing learning in the independent curriculum goes through three stages, namely: Diagnostic assessment, planning and learning, which includes evaluation. And based on the observation guidelines made by researchers, it also goes

through three stages, namely: Implementation of planning which consists of planning, preparation, and the readiness of teachers in implementing the independent curriculum, then the second stage of implementing actions which consist of opening, core and closing activities, and finally evaluation which consists of the readiness of teachers in making learning assessments.

- a. Implementation of the independent curriculum performed by EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School.

- 1) Planning

Observing teacher A

Islamic Boarding School Readiness

In the planning and preparation stage of implementing the independent curriculum, the researcher found that Darussalim Islamic Boarding School has implemented the Independent Curriculum since 2023. In the implementation process, the Islamic boarding school formed a special team to ensure that the implementation of the curriculum runs in a structured manner and in accordance with the expected goals.

This shows that the boarding school does not only adopt the independent curriculum, but also involves educators in its planning and implementation.

EFL Teachers' Readiness

During the observation process carried out by the researcher, it was found that Teacher A did not utilize the Independent Teaching Platform as one of the sources and supporting tools in learning and implementing the independent curriculum. This finding was revealed through several direct observations, interviews, and analysis of teachers' habits in planning and implementing learning in the classroom.

The Independent Teaching Platform is one of the technological innovations designed by Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) to assist teachers in understanding, designing, and implementing learning based on the independent curriculum. However, based on observations, the great potential of this platform has not been utilized by teacher A.

Observing teacher B

Islamic Boarding School Readiness

Based on the results of four observations with teacher B, it was found that the Darussalim Islamic Boarding School had taken the first step in planning and preparing the implementation of the independent curriculum by holding socialization and In-House Training (IHT). This activity aims to equip teachers with a basic understanding of the application of the independent curriculum in

learning. However, researchers also noted that the socialization and In-House Training had only been carried out once until now.

EFL Teachers' Readiness

As the observation above related to In-House Training, teacher B has shown active involvement in In-House Training related to the implementation of the independent curriculum organized by the Darussalim Islamic Boarding School. Although this training has only been held once to date, teacher B participation reflects her efforts to understand and implement the independent curriculum.

Observing teacher C

Islamic Boarding School Readiness

The results of observations with teacher C show that Darussalim Islamic Boarding School has not organized training webinars related to the implementation of the independent curriculum. In addition, teacher C has also never participated in similar webinars organized by other agencies. This was confirmed through teacher C statement who said, "I have never attended a webinar on the implementation of the independent curriculum either from the Islamic boarding school or other institutions".

The absence of training in the form of webinars indicates a deficiency in planning and strategizing the implementation of the

independent curriculum, especially in providing teachers with access to training to understand and apply the principles of this curriculum.

EFL Teachers' Readiness

Teacher C shows excellent readiness in implementing the independent curriculum. He has the ability to use learning methods that are in accordance with the principles of the independent curriculum, namely through a collaborative approach. This was seen consistently from the first to the fourth observation.

In the first and second observations in class 3 MDW B and 3 MDW A with the material "Preposition", Teacher C used simple props such as erasers, markers, pens, dictionaries, and books to help students understand the material. He gave individual tasks to the students by arranging the objects in various positions and gave instructions to the students to make sentences based on the position of the objects.

In the third and fourth observations, teacher C designed a group project activity themed "Find the Mistake", which was also based on the material "Preposition". In this activity, teacher C divided the students into groups, gave them problems containing sentences containing errors, and instructed the students to find and correct the errors collaboratively. This approach not only

encouraged cooperation among students but also improved their understanding of the material.

The overall observation results show that teacher C has implemented learning that is creative, innovative, and in accordance with the principles of the independent curriculum, especially in collaborative and project-based aspects. This reflects teacher C readiness to support student-centered learning.

2) Action

Observing teacher A

Opening

During the observation, the researcher could see that teacher A had implemented most of the components of the lesson opening well. Teacher A started the activity by saying greetings, followed by asking students to recite prayers together before starting the lesson. Teacher A also asked students' readiness with the question "Are you ready to learn English today?" and checked their attendance. These steps create a positive learning atmosphere and help students prepare themselves mentally for the learning activities.

However, there were shortcomings in terms of conveying learning objectives. In the first and fourth observations in class 1 Ulya B and 1 Ulya A, teacher A did not deliver the learning objectives, while in the third observation in class 1 Ulya A the

learning objectives were delivered, but late, namely at the core activity stage.

Core Activities

In each meeting, teacher A conveys the learning material by writing it on the blackboard, which the students follow. This method helps students to take notes and understand the key points of the material. She also provides clear explanations of the material, with relevant examples for students to easily understand.



Figure 4. 2 Material Delivery Using the Blackboard

In addition, teacher A also ensured that the students understood the material she delivered by asking the students or re-explaining if necessary. In the second observation in class 1 Ulya A with the material “Analytical Exposition”, teacher A also used questioning strategies to provoke students to think critically. This provides an opportunity for students to develop analytical and deep thinking skills, which is one of the important competencies in English language learning.

Closing

In the first three observations, teacher A asked students to recapitulate together to review the material that had been learned. He confirmed students' understanding by asking, "What have you learned today?" which was then followed by students conveying the key points of the lesson. Furthermore, teacher A gave conclusions to strengthen students' understanding of the material, and closed the lesson with a closing greeting.

However, in the fourth observation, teacher A did not recapitulate or provide conclusions because the learning activities were filled with a project. In addition, in all observations, teacher A did not reflect with students. This absence of reflection reduces students' opportunities to evaluate their own learning process, both in terms of successes and challenges they face during learning.

Observing teacher B

Opening

Teacher B starts the class by saying greetings and leading prayers together, creating an atmosphere that is religious and conducive to learning. Then she asks about the material learned in the previous week and relates it to the new material to be learned. This helps students understand the connection between materials and prepare themselves for the day's learning.

Teacher B also consistently conveys learning objectives in each class, so that students have a clear understanding of what is expected to be achieved by the end of the lesson. In the third and fourth observations in class 8 MTS B, the teacher added ice breaking before starting the lesson. This activity provides a relaxed and fun atmosphere, which helps to increase students' attention and readiness to receive the material.

Core Activities

The observation results showed that teacher B had carried out the core learning activities by delivering the material using a variety of learning media. In the first and third observations in class 8 MTS A and 8 MTS B, she delivered the material using only the LKS book, while in the second and fourth observations in class 8 MTS B, she used the blackboard to explain the material. This variation in the use of media helps students in understanding the material, although its use is still limited.



Figure 4. 3 Material Delivery
Using the LKS Book

Teacher B also provided examples for each material presented, so that students could more easily understand the application of concepts in real situations. However, during the observation process, teacher B rarely used active learning methods. As in the second and fourth observations in class 8 MTS B, learning activities tend to be one-way, with the dominance of explanations from the teacher, without actively involving students in the learning process, such as discussions or group work.

Closing

Teacher B's closing activities are still not optimal. Teacher B often provides opportunities for students to ask questions about the material that has been learned, but this happens more often at the core stage of learning. In the closing stage, during the researcher observation, Teacher B only gave students the opportunity to ask questions once, namely during the third observation in class 8 MTS B.

Teacher B tends to immediately provide learning conclusions without reconfirming in the closing stage whether students really understand the material or not. This indicates a lack of evaluation of students' understanding at the final stage of learning, which can reduce the effectiveness of the closing activity as a moment to strengthen understanding and affirm the material.

Observing teacher C

Opening

The opening activity of learning carried out by teacher C began with greeting “*Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh*, Good morning students!” which was then answered enthusiastically by the students, this is a form of positive habituation to create a polite classroom atmosphere. After that, teacher C asked how the students were doing with the question “How are you today?” which aims to build a familiar and friendly atmosphere in the classroom.

Then, he did an apperception by asking back to the previous week's learning material. This was done to link the previous material with the topic to be learned, so that students have an idea of the continuity of learning.

Teacher C then conveyed the topic of material to be learned that day, followed by an explanation of the lesson plan and objectives to be achieved. In the third observation in class 3 MDW B, teacher C also applied ice breaking. The ice breaking is in the form of a “Simon says” game with the command “sit down and stand up”, the goal is to make students more enthusiastic and focused on the core learning activities later.

However, in this opening process, during the four observations, the researcher noticed that teacher C did not provide

motivation to the students. The absence of motivation in the opening stage will result in lowering the students' enthusiasm for learning.

Core Activities

Based on the observation, teacher C has carried out the core learning activities well and involved students actively in their learning. Besides giving examples in every lesson, teacher C also always gives assignments to students. In the first two observations, the teacher gave individual assignments to the students, then in the last two observations, the teacher gave group assignments that supported the competency, collaborative and critical thinking approaches. This is a form of practice to strengthen students' understanding of the material that has been delivered.



Figure 4. 4 Student Group Assignments

In this core activity, teacher C actively collaborated with students and guided them directly. Teacher C active involvement in the tasks given shows an interactive approach and supports students' learning process optimally.

Closing

At the end of the lesson, teacher C gave feedback to the students. This feedback took the form of praise or giving additional marks. In the second observation, in class 3 MDW A he gave feedback to one of the students who dared to ask a question, in the second observation, in class 3 MDW A the teacher gave feedback to one of the students who dared to ask a question, she said “Good job students! Thanks for asking that, very good question!”, then in the third and fourth observations in class 3 MDW B and 3 MDW A, he gave feedback in the form of additional grades to students who actively participated in group work.

In addition, teacher C also gave gifts in the form of snacks to students whose groups obtained the highest scores. This gift is a form of effort to increase students' motivation and enthusiasm for learning, as well as to create a more enjoyable active learning atmosphere.

3) Evaluation

Observing teacher A

EFL Teachers' Readiness in Assessment

Teacher A readiness in making learning assessments still needs to be improved. During four observations, it was found that teacher A did not understand the principles of assessment in accordance with the independent curriculum. Teacher A tends to

provide assessments based on final exam results only, without considering students' active involvement in discussions or group assignments. This can be seen from his statement “I consider more on the assessment at the end of the semester”.

In addition, the lack of training related to learning assessment in the independent curriculum is a major factor affecting his understanding. Teacher A has not had the opportunity to update his knowledge and skills because the Islamic Boarding School where he teaches rarely holds this kind of training.

Learning Assessment

Based on four observations, it was found that teacher A had not implemented reflection on the learning process as part of the learning assessment. Teacher A revealed “I never reflect on the learning process, other than using summative assessment to evaluate student learning outcomes”.

This shows that teacher A has not utilized reflection as a tool to improve the effectiveness of future learning. Without reflection, opportunities to identify strengths and weaknesses in the learning process and improve teaching methods are limited.

Observing teacher B

EFL Teachers' Readiness in Assessment

Teacher B has good readiness in making learning assessment in accordance with the principles of the independent curriculum. She understood various learning assessment instruments, both formative and summative, and was able to apply them in the teaching and learning process.

Teacher B's understanding of assessment techniques in the independent curriculum is also reflected in the practices carried out. During the first observation in class 8 MTS A with the material "Complementary", teacher B gave students individual project assignments, then applied assessment techniques that not only focused on the final result, but also paid attention to the students' work process and presentation.

Learning Assessment

The observation results showed that Teacher B implemented learning assessment with a focus on formative and summative assessment. During the four observations, the researcher found that Teacher B only carried out formative assessment twice, namely in the first and third observations in class 8 MTS A and 8 MTS B. This assessment is carried out to monitor students' understanding during the learning process.

In addition, Teacher B also routinely applied summative assessments at the end of each semester to evaluate the achievement of student learning outcomes after the learning process is complete.

Observing teacher C

EFL Teachers' Readiness in Assessment

Based on the observation, the researcher can conclude that teacher C showed good readiness in designing and implementing learning assessment in accordance with the objectives to be achieved. Teacher C has developed an assessment plan that includes various techniques, such as formative, summative, project and reflective assessments.

Formative assessments were implemented consistently in each class to monitor the development of students' understanding during the learning process. In addition, he also prepared summative assessments at the end of the semester to evaluate students' overall learning achievements. Project assessments are given both individually and in groups, demonstrating teacher C efforts in assessing students' collaboration, creativity and problem-solving skills.

In addition, there was also a reflective assessment that he applied at the end of the material, such as in the first observation in class 3 MDW B with the material "Preposition", at the end of the lesson teacher C asked students "What have you learned in this preposition material?" This was to encourage students to evaluate their learning, but the application was still rare.

Learning Assessment

Teacher C regularly evaluated students' understanding and progress in each class. The evaluations vary, including giving small group tests with “Find the Mistake” questions related to the material “Preposition”, as seen in the third and fourth observations in class 3 MDW B and 3 MDW A. In addition, in the first and second observations in class 3 MDW B and 3 MDW A, Teacher C also gave individual tasks to the students which aimed to assess each student's ability.

Although the evaluation activities conducted by Teacher C were quite diverse and included effective formative assessment, there was a weakness in the implementation of remedial activities. Teacher C has not designed remedial activities that suit students' needs, which can help students who have difficulty in understanding certain material.

2. Findings from Interview

Then, the researcher continued with the interview stage. The researcher coordinated with the EFL teachers regarding the interview schedule. In this case, the researcher interviewed three EFL teachers with three different levels. The results of the interviews were then written into transcripts, followed by the preparation of draft scripts based on themes, and at the end, the researcher coded each draft that had been prepared.

b. Challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing the independent curriculum at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School

This study identifies various challenges that EFL teachers have faced in implementing the independent curriculum in the Islamic Boarding School environment. Based on the interviews conducted, some of the main obstacles have been revealed by the participants, namely three EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School. The results of interviews between the researcher and teachers as participants are described to provide an in-depth understanding. The following is the data from the interview:

1) Constraints on understanding and human resources (HR)

EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School face significant challenges in implementing the independent curriculum. The main challenge includes technology where teachers have difficulty integrating technology in independent curriculum-based learning which requires the use of technology, while teachers feel they still lack mastery in the use of technology. Apart from that, technological facilities from the boarding school are also still inadequate, such as projectors as a supporting tool in implementing the independent curriculum. Teacher A said:

“I have difficulty integrating technology in independent curriculum learning, as we know that the independent curriculum requires the use of technology, while I still feel that I am not good at it and the technology in this Islamic boarding

school is also still limited, especially in projectors". (Ust. A, Script 1, line 10, interview data)

Understanding the principles of the independent curriculum is also a significant limitation for teachers, such as the development of relevant and project-based teaching materials, as well as policies from the Islamic boarding school that limit the use of technology by students. Teacher B said:

"I have difficulty adjusting the subject matter to fit the principles of the independent curriculum which is project-based and student-centered. Moreover, the technology available at the Darussalim Islamic Boarding School is still less supportive, and students are also not allowed to use cellphones, so that further adds to my obstacles". (Ustdzh. M, Script 2, line 11, interview data)

Apart from that, teachers did not find it difficult to understand the process of designing lesson plans, they only struggled with the implementation process. Teacher C said:

"When it comes to designing lesson plans, I have no difficulties. However, the implementation is often quite difficult. For example, a sudden obstacle such as a projector that cannot be used makes the learning process not go according to plan". (Ust. AS, Script 3, line 24, interview data)

Based on teachers' statements, it shows that although the independent curriculum has the potential to improve the quality of learning, practical challenges such as limited facilities, development of relevant teaching materials, and integration of technology are the main barriers for EFL teachers in Darussalim Islamic Boarding Schools. This suggests the need for greater support in terms of

infrastructure and training to assist teachers in implementing this curriculum effectively.

In addition, constraints in the aspect of human resources (HR) are also an obstacle for teachers. The lack of training and professional development causes teachers to be less than optimal in understanding the concepts and methods of the independent curriculum. Teacher C said:

“Lack of training and professional development programs. This makes me not fully understand the concepts and methods that need to be applied according to the independent curriculum”. (Ust. AS, Script 3, line 33, interview data)

Nonetheless, all teachers showed a positive attitude towards the curriculum change and were able to change their perspectives. They also made efforts to develop themselves in various ways to improve their competencies and support the successful implementation of the independent curriculum, such as attending available training and collaborating with peers. Teacher B revealed:

“Of course I was able to change my perspective and try to develop myself by attending training provided by the Islamic boarding school, sometimes I also asked questions and did sharing sessions with other EFL teachers”. (Ustdzh. M, Script 2, line 42, interview data)

The teachers' commitment to improving their competencies reflects an awareness of the importance of adapting to curriculum changes. When EFL teachers are unable to move out of their comfort zone,

greater support from the Islamic boarding school is needed to make the implementation of the independent curriculum more effective.

2) Constraints on infrastructure and empowerment of digital technology-based facilities

The results of the interviews with the participants show that the implementation of the independent curriculum at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School still faces major challenges in terms of infrastructure and empowerment of digital technology-based facilities. The main obstacle faced by EFL teachers in terms of facilities is the limited hardware such as projectors and Laptop equipment. Another significant obstacle as mentioned above is the digital divide among students due to the cell phone ban imposed by the Islamic boarding school. This constraint hinders the full application of technology in the interactive learning process.

Teacher A revealed:

“The main obstacle I faced was the inadequate availability of projectors. In addition, there is also a digital divide among students. In our Islamic boarding school, students are prohibited from using cellphones, so they have difficulty accessing digital learning materials independently”. (Ust. A, Script 1, line 50, interview data)

Mastery of digital technology skills among teachers also varies. There are teachers who feel that they have not fully mastered technology because they rarely use it, while others already have this ability thanks to training and experience. Islamic boarding school

Darussalim also has technology training such as the use of laptop/computer devices that help improve teachers' skills in operating technology devices, although challenges such as limited supporting facilities are still a major obstacle in the optimal application of technology. Teacher C said:

“In general, teachers here have technology skills, because Darussalim Islamic Boarding School has technology training, especially related to laptop/computer devices. But of course there are challenges when the supporting facilities are inadequate”. (Ust. AS, Script 3, line 61, interview data)

The participating teachers admitted that the infrastructure such as classrooms is adequate, but the availability of technology facilities is not evenly distributed throughout the classrooms, thus creating obstacles in the implementation of project-based learning. Teacher B emphasized:

“In terms of infrastructure, there is no shortage. However, for facilities such as projectors, they are not available in all classes. So it is quite a hindrance if learning requires technological support”. (Ustdzh. M, Script 2, line 96, interview data)

The impact of these limitations is evident in the daily learning process. Teachers have difficulty in utilizing technology effectively for teaching, so learning methods designed to encourage students' independence, creativity and active involvement have not worked as expected. This also affects students' readiness to accept new learning approaches that are more independent and collaboration-based. Nonetheless, the EFL teachers interviewed

indicated that they are ready and able to utilize technology if adequate facilities are available. Unfortunately, Darussalim Islamic Boarding School only provides limited technology facilities, although internet facilities are adequate according to some teachers.

3) Difficulties for students in implementing the independent curriculum

Based on the results of interviews with EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School, it can be concluded that the implementation of the independent curriculum, especially with project-based learning methods, faces a number of challenges, especially related to student ability and engagement. Many students have difficulty adjusting to this more independent learning method, especially those with introverted personalities or communication difficulties. Despite this, most students can understand the material presented, although their understanding varies. As teacher B said:

“Some of them, especially students who have a difficult personality to communicate or tend to be quiet, experience difficulties. They often find it difficult to contribute to group or project-based assignments”. (Ustdzh. M, Script 2, line 79, interview data)

Student engagement in the learning process also showed mixed results. Most students can be responsible and actively involved in the project, but there are also those who are less motivated and feel unmotivated to participate. Teacher A revealed:

“Some students were able to take responsibility and be actively involved, but there were also those who were lazy or lacked enthusiasm for the project”. (Ust. A, Script 1, line 78, interview data)

The main factors influencing engagement include communication skills, teamwork, interest and motivation to learn. Support from teachers will play an important role in improving student engagement through differentiation, personalized guidance, interest and emotional motivation. By applying appropriate and diverse strategies, student engagement can be increased, so that project-based learning is more effective in developing students' skills according to the objectives of the independent curriculum.

B. Discussion

The researcher conducted qualitative research using the case study method to collect relevant data. This research specifically focused on the implementation process and challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing the independent curriculum in Islamic boarding schools. In the discussion section, the researcher describes the findings obtained from the data collection and analysis process. The researcher also added solutions related to the challenges that the EFL teachers have faced. The main purpose of this discussion is to provide answers to the general and specific research questions that have been formulated in the context of this study.

The researcher focuses on the following research questions when describing the findings:

1. How is the independent curriculum implementation practiced by EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School?
2. What are the challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing the independent curriculum at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School?

Some important themes and categories that emerged from the data collection and analysis were used as core concepts in connecting the findings of this research with previous theories related to the implementation of the independent curriculum and its challenges. The following descriptions address each of the research issues discussed in this study:

- a. Implementation of the independent curriculum practiced by EFL teachers

- 1) Planning

The data collected in the field or observation related to planning the implementation of the independent curriculum is divided into two subthemes, namely a) The readiness of Islamic boarding schools and b) The readiness of EFL teachers.

- a) The readiness of Islamic boarding schools

In the early stages of planning, the Darussalim Islamic Boarding School turned out to have implemented the independent curriculum since the 2023/2024 school year, where

the application of the new independent curriculum is tested at the MTS, MDW and Ulya levels. MTS and Ulya levels are grades 1 and 2, the reason itself is because it follows the structure that grades 1 and 2 are the initial classes. While the MDW level is tested only for grade 3, the reason itself is because grades 1 and 2 at the MDW level focus on learning *kitab kuning*, general subjects are only applied in grade 3, because they will face graduation exams. This shows that Darussalim Islamic Boarding School not only follows the development of educational policies, but is also committed to improving the quality of learning that is relevant to the needs of students. As part of this effort, the Islamic boarding school also established a special team to ensure the implementation of the curriculum runs in a structured manner. This is in line with the findings of Hadikusumo et al. (2024) related to the changed management, there are 8 important elements in changed management, one of which is: Team. The team is responsible for planning, implementing, and monitoring changes. The presence of a strong and competent team is essential in ensuring that changes are carried out successfully.

Apart from that, the Islamic boarding school has also held socialization and in-house training (IHT) to equip teachers with an initial understanding of the independent curriculum. However, this activity has only been carried out once to date. In

addition, the absence of organizing webinars by the Islamic boarding school related to the implementation of the independent curriculum, which results in hampering the improvement of teacher competence in understanding and applying the principles of the independent curriculum. This is in line with the findings of Mustofa and Mariati, (2022) regarding teacher competence, that there are still many teachers who experience difficulties in implementing the independent curriculum due to lack of socialization or training.

Nevertheless, Darussalim Islamic Boarding School has started the implementation of the independent curriculum with good steps, such as the formation of a special team and the implementation of initial socialization and in-house training. Although the training is limited because this boarding school has just implemented the independent curriculum, so the Islamic boarding school can be said to be still in the early stages and has not yet reached the stage of further curriculum development.

b) The readiness of EFL teachers.

Not only Islamic boarding schools, but also teachers have readiness in implementing the independent curriculum. The three EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School show

different levels of readiness in understanding and implementing the independent curriculum.

In terms of designing learning activities and methods in accordance with the principles of the independent curriculum, teachers have a good understanding of readiness by using various creative methods, such as the group project approach that encourages cooperation between students and increases their understanding of the material in depth. This is in line with the findings of Hasibuan et al. (2024) regarding the main principle of the independent curriculum, namely learner-centered learning, which emphasizes the importance of active involvement of students in the learning process. The use of simple teaching aids is also applied in their learning, which reflects that teachers have the ability to adapt to the available resources. This is also in line with the findings of Hasibuan et al. (2024), with the independent curriculum principles that emphasize the importance of context-based learning. The principle of contextualized learning is also important in independent curriculum learning, because it will make learning more meaningful for students. In addition, the active involvement of EFL teachers in in-house training activities related to the independent curriculum reflects the efforts of

teachers to understand the independent curriculum, even though the training has only been conducted once.

However, teachers' understanding of the utilization of the independent teaching platform technology is a crucial factor that results in teachers still being unprepared in the implementation of independent curriculum learning. The independent teaching platform as one of the supporting tools in learning based on the independent curriculum designed to help teachers understand, design, and implement learning according to the principles of the independent curriculum. But apparently, the great potential of this platform has not been fully utilized by EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School.

Teachers' readiness to implement the independent curriculum is strongly influenced by their ability to access, understand, and utilize innovations such as the independent teaching platform. This is in line with findings by Diplan (in Fatah, 2022) which emphasize that teacher readiness in curriculum change does not only include understanding of concepts or principles, in this increasingly digitally connected educational environment, teachers need to master relevant technological tools and applications to support learning.

2) Action

The stages of action in the implementation of independent curriculum learning in English subject are divided into three main stages, namely: Opening, core activities, and closing.

Opening activities play an important role in determining the atmosphere and students' readiness to follow the learning process. As the first stage of implementing independent curriculum learning, the researcher noticed some of the most common opening activities carried out by the teachers. All teachers start learning by greeting students with "*Assalamualaikum warahmatullahi wabarakatuh*, Good morning students!" which is answered enthusiastically by the students, then continued with checking student attendance and reading prayers together to create a religious and conducive atmosphere, in accordance with the characteristics of Islamic boarding school-based education which instills religious values in every aspect of learning. This practice is in line with the independent curriculum guidelines that prioritize a contextual approach based on local values and culture. This is also in line with the findings of Setiyowati et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of integrating cultural values and local wisdom into the national curriculum.

Teachers also convey plans and objectives in this opening stage, providing clear directions to students so that they understand what

will be learned. In line with the opinion of Turhusna and Solatun, (2020) teachers must convey learning objectives so that students know what they will get after carrying out the learning process. In addition, apperception activities are also applied by teachers to connect previous material with the material to be learned, so that students understand the relationship between the materials.

A friendly and relaxed atmosphere is also applied by teachers, through positive communication such as asking how students are by saying “How are you today?” in order to build a positive emotional relationship between teachers and students, and also applying ice breaking activities as a teacher's effort to increase students' attention and interest before entering core activities. This is in line with the findings of Haryati and Puspitaningrum, (2023) regarding the impact of the application of ice breaking, which makes students become more focused on learning material and more enthusiastic in following the learning process delivered by the teacher.



Figure 4. 5 Ice Breaking Students

Overall, teachers have implemented most of the components of the lesson opening in accordance with the principles of the independent curriculum, although there are still inconsistencies and shortcomings that can be corrected. Namely, some teachers are still inconsistent in conveying learning plans and objectives, sometimes they convey objectives in the core stage or even do not convey them at all. Teachers also do not provide motivation to students, even though motivation is important to build enthusiasm for learning and encourage students to be more active in participating in learning. To optimize the opening of learning, teachers need to improve these aspects so that learning becomes more effective, interesting and meaningful for students in accordance with the principles of the independent curriculum.

The core learning activities observed in this study cover a range of elements, including material delivery and teaching methods. The teachers delivered the material systematically by giving clear explanations, using traditional learning media, such as blackboards and LKS books in the learning process. Accompanied by providing relevant examples to facilitate students' understanding, this is a form of teacher effort to ensure students understand the concepts taught. Teachers also utilize interaction during learning to ensure students understand the material, such as by re-explaining if needed or guiding directly. This shows an approach that supports the holistic

development of students' abilities. Apart from that, this approach is also in line with the findings of Hasibuan et al. (2024) related to the independent curriculum principles that emphasize competency-based learning and active student involvement.

In addition, teachers implement a series of teaching steps that involve students in the learning process by giving individual tasks or organizing students into working groups, aiming to help students understand the material contextually and guiding them directly in the process. The active involvement of teachers shows a collaborative approach that supports the development of students' competencies as a whole. This is in line with the findings of Ervilia and Fauzi, (2024) that learning with a collaborative approach is very successful in making students enthusiastic in participating in learning.



Figure 4. 6 Teacher Involvement in Students' Group Work

Although some aspects of the core learning activities are in line with the principles of the independent curriculum, namely competency-based, contextual and relevant, however, there are

some shortcomings that result in these core activities not being fully in line with the principles of the independent curriculum. It is the lack of use of media and technology, while the independent curriculum encourages the integration of technology to create more innovative learning. In addition, the use of learning methods in accordance with the independent curriculum, such as problem-based learning, discovery-based learning, and project-based learning, is still uneven and not maximized. The tasks given by teachers are not included in the independent curriculum learning methods, but these tasks are included in learning strategies that support competency-based approaches, collaboration and critical thinking. To optimize this core learning activity, teachers need to increase continuous training so that the English learning process at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School can become more interactive, relevant and in accordance with the principles of the independent curriculum.

Finally, the closing activity can be interpreted as an important stage to systematically close the teaching and learning activities. In this case, the teachers have various approaches, with different levels of effectiveness. Some similarities in the activities carried out by the teachers in this closing activity, namely all teachers carry out activities to reinforce learning material as a form of their efforts to make closing activities a moment to strengthen students' understanding of the material that has been taught. Different

approaches are done by each teacher, namely teacher A who is more likely to do a recapitulation with students by asking, “What have you learned today?” as an effort to encourage students to identify the important points of learning. Meanwhile, Teacher B tends to provide conclusions at the closing stage without reconfirming students' understanding of the material and teacher C who is more likely to choose to provide feedback in the form of praise or appreciation to students. Even though these approaches are different, the teachers' goal of applying these approaches remains the same, namely to determine the mastery of the material that has been learned by the students. This is in line with Sukirman (in Lestari et al. 2021) that the purpose of the closing stage is to provide affirmation, draw conclusions and evaluation and assessment in order to determine the mastery of the material that has been learned by students.

Apart from that, the provision of feedback by teachers was very varied, such as verbal praise by saying “Good job students! Very good question!” Which helps increase students' enthusiasm for learning and giving additional grades, or giving physical gifts (snacks) to students who are active and successful in doing assignments. This is a form of effort to increase student motivation in learning and also create a more fun and active learning atmosphere. This is in line with the findings of the results of Nurhasanah and Ningsih, (2024) which confirms that giving rewards

is effective in increasing students' motivation to learn. Students show more enthusiasm in asking questions, expressing opinions, and completing tasks, because they are interested in getting rewards. In this closing stage, teachers also provide conclusions to strengthen students' understanding of the material that has been learned, and provide affirmation of important learning points. In addition, teachers also close the learning with a closing greeting, which creates a positive and memorable atmosphere and is in accordance with the values of politeness and local wisdom.

The approach taken by the teachers in this closing stage is quite innovative, but there are still some shortcomings that prevent the closing activities from running optimally, namely the absence of reflection activities with students. Reflection serves as a means for students to understand their successes, identify challenges, and design improvement strategies. This absence of reflection reduces the opportunity for students to learn metacognitively, even though the independent curriculum emphasizes the importance of developing self-regulated learning. In addition, inconsistency is also a problem in this closing stage, such as the space for questions and answers that is rarely given by teacher B, showing the less than optimal function of closing activities as a means of two-way evaluation between teachers and students. The independent curriculum actually gives teachers the freedom to adapt appropriate

strategies, but still demands a systematic and planned approach. By improving these shortcomings, closing activities can become a more meaningful part of learning and contribute to strengthening student learning outcomes.

3) Evaluation

The data collected in the field or observation related to the evaluation of the implementation of the independent curriculum is divided into two subthemes, namely a) EFL teacher readiness in assessment and b) Learning assessment.

a) EFL teacher readiness in assessment

The readiness of the EFL teachers in Darussalim Islamic Boarding Schools with regard to making learning assessments varies greatly depending on their level of understanding and practice experience of the independent curriculum learning assessment techniques and principles. The teachers have integrated various assessment techniques, such as formative and summative, which show that the teachers have a good understanding of assessment techniques and are able to apply them effectively to cover the students' learning process and its outcomes. This is also in line with the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud RI) Number 262/M/2022 (in Simarmata and Dafit, 2023) regarding the independent

curriculum assessment technique, which reveals that in the independent curriculum assessment, the education government has implemented two assessments, namely: Formative and Summative. Apart from that, teachers who have an understanding or training experience regarding the techniques and principles of assessing independent curriculum learning also show a very good understanding, such as teacher C who has used additional assessment techniques, such as project and reflective assessment techniques. Project assessment is used by teachers in assessing students' collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving skills. While reflective assessment was applied at the end of the material by asking "What have you learned in this material?" to encourage students to evaluate their learning, its application is still rare.

In contrast to teacher A, during the researcher observation, it was found that the teacher's readiness in assessment still needs to be improved. The assessment tends to focus on the final exam results without considering aspects of the learning process, such as student involvement in discussions and group assignments. The main influencing factor is the lack of specialized training related to the assessment of the independent curriculum. This is in line with the findings of Simarmata and Dafit, (2023) regarding the problems experienced by teachers in assessing the

independent curriculum, namely due to the lack of training on assessment in the independent curriculum. Therefore, it is necessary to increase teachers' knowledge about assessment in the independent curriculum so that teachers can carry out assessments properly. Support from the institution, namely the Darussalim Islamic Boarding School, is needed in improving the competence of teachers. Especially providing training related to the principles and techniques of learning assessment of the independent curriculum.

b) Learning assessment

In the learning assessment stage, EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School apply summative assessment as part of the evaluation of student learning outcomes. Summative assessment is an assessment process carried out at the end of a learning unit or period, the purpose of which is to measure students' overall learning outcomes. This is in line with Simarmata and Dafit, (2023) findings related to summative assessment, that summative assessment is applied to determine students' understanding and achievement of learning outcomes during one semester about the material that has been delivered during the learning process. This assessment is routinely carried out by EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School to measure student achievement at the end of

the learning period, such as the end of the semester. In addition, formative assessment is also applied by teachers, formative assessment is an assessment process carried out during learning, the aim is to identify the extent to which students understand the material taught at a certain stage, so that teachers can provide feedback quickly. This is also in line with the findings of Simarmata and Dafit, (2023) regarding formative assessment, that formative assessment is applied to monitor the learning process and evaluate learning activities to achieve learning objectives. Apart from that, teachers also carry out activities to evaluate student understanding and development in each class. Diversity in evaluation methods is applied by teachers, such as group assignments, small tests, and individual assignments. This is a form of additional effort from the teacher to determine the extent to which students understand the material that has been taught.

However, there are weaknesses in this stage of learning assessment, namely the inconsistent application of formative assessment, such as teacher A and teacher B who rarely apply formative assessment to their learning, so the opportunity to monitor student progress on an ongoing basis is not optimal. In addition, teachers also do not utilize reflection or remedial as a tool to support more inclusive learning. Evaluation activities

without reflection will make teachers miss the opportunity to understand students' development more deeply, because reflection serves to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching strategies and methods. The absence of remedial activities that suit students' needs will also increase the gap in understanding between students, students who understand the material well will continue to progress, while students who are left behind will be further away from the expected learning outcomes.

Overall, the implementation of learning assessment within the framework of the independent curriculum at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School still needs to be improved, especially in terms of learning reflection, optimizing formative assessment, and implementing remedial according to student needs. This effort is important to ensure that learning can run effectively and inclusively, in accordance with the principle of the independent curriculum that emphasizes learning based on students' needs and potential.

b. Challenges in implementing the independent curriculum for EFL teachers

1) Constraints on understanding and human resources (HR)

The independent curriculum was developed with a number of key principles, namely simple yet in-depth learning, providing more

freedom, and being relevant and interactive. These principles aim to create a more effective and interesting learning process for students. However, in the implementation process, there are often some challenges. EFL teachers in Darussalim Islamic Boarding Schools still lack understanding of the main principles of the independent curriculum, especially in designing relevant and project-based teaching materials and student-centered learning. This finding shows that there is a gap between the ideal goal of the independent curriculum which emphasizes student independence and the actual conditions in the field. As expressed by teachers, the adaptation of teaching materials is a challenge because project-based learning requires high creativity and flexibility from teachers. This is in line with Nyoman (in Rahmawati et al. 2024) that teachers are the main key in the successful implementation of the curriculum in schools.

The integration of technology in independent curriculum learning is also one of the important points. However, EFL teachers at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School experience major obstacles in this aspect. The lack of understanding of technology is experienced by teacher A who stated that he still lacked mastery of technology. Then, it is exacerbated by the limited supporting facilities such as projectors in the boarding school. This is in line with Prayudi and Taqiyuddin, (2024) who said that there are two factors that are key elements in the success of curriculum

implementation, namely teacher competence and infrastructure availability. The limited facilities also illustrate the general challenges faced by educational institutions in areas with minimal access to technology. In comparison, the results of a study by Rachmawati (in Prayudi and Taqiyuddin, 2024) revealed that schools with more adequate facilities tend to be more successful in implementing the independent curriculum, especially in the implementation of project-based learning and cooperation between students. In the case of Darussalim Islamic Boarding School, this limitation not only hinders learning innovation but also affects teachers' motivation to use technology. This challenge is further exacerbated by the boarding school's policy that restricts the use of technology by students, such as the prohibition of cell phone use. Although this policy aims to maintain discipline, in practice it reduces teachers' flexibility in implementing technology-based learning methods.

Limited training and professional development programs are also a major obstacle for teachers in understanding and implementing the independent curriculum. Teachers revealed that the lack of training makes them feel that they do not fully understand the methods that need to be applied in learning. This finding indicates an urgent need for ongoing training specifically designed for EFL teachers in Darussalim Islamic Boarding Schools. This is in

line with Andersson et al. (2022) that continuous professional development is commonly regarded as a requirement to always improve the quality of each teacher's individual skills and knowledge. In this context, training that integrates understanding of technology theory and practice is a top priority to support the successful implementation of the independent curriculum.

Although they face various obstacles, the teachers show high commitment to overcome these challenges. They try to develop themselves through training provided by the Islamic boarding school and collaboration with colleagues. This attitude reflects their awareness of the importance of adapting to curriculum changes. Teachers said that sharing experiences with other teachers is one of the strategies to overcome limitations. This commitment is in line with Rahmawati et al. (2024) that the role of teachers is very important as agents of change in curriculum reform. However, for this effort to be more effective, support from the Islamic boarding school is an important factor that cannot be ignored. Providing facilities, intensive training, and supportive policies are strategic steps needed to optimize the implementation of the independent curriculum.

Overall, utilizing training, collaboration, self-learning resources, continuous training, professional guidance from experienced

trainers, and provision of supporting facilities are key elements to help teachers adapt, develop competencies, and overcome the challenges they face in implementing the independent curriculum. With this support, teachers at the Islamic boarding school can improve their competencies and implement the curriculum more optimally, which in turn will have a positive impact on the quality of learning at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School.

2) Constraints on infrastructure and empowerment of digital technology-based facilities

Article 42 of Government Regulation No. 19/2005 on National Education Standards states that every education unit must have facilities such as furniture, learning equipment, books, teaching materials, and other necessary equipment. In addition, education units must also have infrastructure that supports the learning process in an orderly and sustainable manner. The infrastructure includes land, classrooms, space for educators, administrative space, libraries, laboratories, workshops, production units, canteens, electrical installations, sports facilities, places of worship, play areas, creation spaces, and other supporting areas. The goal is to support the success and efficiency of the implementation of the teaching and learning process by providing services and professionalism. This is in line with Raflis (in Fathalloh and Marno,

2023) that the purpose of infrastructure facilities is to support the educational process that has been determined to be effective and efficient. However, the limitations of technological facilities, such as projectors and laptops that are not yet evenly available in all classes, hinder the successful implementation of the independent curriculum at Darussalim Islamic Boarding School, thus significantly affecting the quality of student education. The EFL teachers recognized that although the classrooms and basic facilities were adequate, the limitations of these technological devices often prevented them from implementing project-based learning and interactive methods that are at the core of the independent curriculum. This is in line with Widyawati, (2023) findings that providing adequate technology tools is also crucial to support the successful implementation of technology-based learning media. Without the support of such facilities, teachers often have to improvise, and this results in reducing the quality of learning. In the context of Darussalim Islamic Boarding School, the limitations of these facilities have resulted in the implementation of technology-based interactive learning has not been able to run optimally.

In addition to limited facilities, empowering digital technology facilities is also a major challenge. The Islamic boarding school policy that prohibits the use of cell phones by students creates a digital divide, so students cannot access digital learning materials

independently. Teachers also have difficulty integrating technology into learning due to the lack of adequate devices. In fact, the use of technology in education can be one of the efforts in improving student learning outcomes. This is in line with the findings of Suyuti et al. (2023) who asserts that the use of technology can significantly improve student learning outcomes, especially in honing cognitive and critical thinking skills. In addition, technology also plays a role in supporting the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning process. However, in Darussalim Islamic Boarding School, the institutional policy that prohibits the use of technology by students becomes an obstacle in utilizing the full potential of technology-based learning.

Digital technology skills among teachers also vary. Some teachers feel adequately prepared because they have attended technology training provided by the Islamic boarding school, while others still face difficulties due to a lack of hands-on experience. This constraint is exacerbated by inadequate technology facilities, as expressed by one teacher in the interview. This is in line with the findings of Rudianti et al. (2024) who assert that continuous professional development through training and workshops on educational technology, as well as collaboration with peers and experts in the field of technology, are important factors in strengthening educators' professionalism. However, training that is

not matched by the provision of facilities will make it difficult for teachers to apply technology optimally. The limited facilities and integration of digital technology have a direct impact on the effectiveness of the independent curriculum implementation. Teachers face difficulties in implementing project-based learning that aims to increase students' creativity, independence and engagement. In addition, students are also not fully ready to accept the collaboration-based learning approach due to the lack of access to digital technology.

However, this study also shows that teachers have the potential to utilize technology if adequate facilities are available. Teachers' proactive attitude in attending training and collaboration with peers shows that this obstacle can be overcome with better support from the Islamic boarding school. EFL teachers also have their own strategies to overcome this challenge. Namely, by utilizing all available resources as best as possible. Creativity and optimization efforts are key in supporting the implementation of the independent curriculum even in limited conditions. This reflects the adaptability and commitment of teachers to continue providing quality education despite infrastructure challenges.

Overall, the continuous training, professional development, experiential training, and provision of adequate technological

facilities from the Darussalim Islamic boarding school will help improve the competence of the teachers and the successful implementation of the independent curriculum in the Islamic boarding school. By implementing these measures, the Islamic boarding school will be able to create a learning environment that supports project-based and innovative learning methods and improve the quality of education provided to students.

3) Difficulties for students in implementing the independent curriculum

In the context of the independent curriculum, student involvement is one of the main principles emphasized. Students are not only passive recipients of material, but also play an active role in the learning process. They are given the opportunity to engage in various activities that encourage exploration, critical thinking, and skill development. However, the implementation of the independent curriculum at Darussalim Islamic boarding school faces a number of challenges, especially in the aspect of student ability and involvement.

The independent curriculum emphasizes project-based learning that requires student independence and initiative. However, research findings show that many students have difficulty adjusting, especially those with introverted personalities or a lack of

confidence in communication. EFL teachers revealed that introverted students are often reluctant to contribute to group tasks, thus hindering the achievement of collaboration-based learning goals. This is in line with the social constructivism theory proposed by Vygotsky (in Salsabila and Muqowim, 2024) which states that the learning process is strongly influenced by social interaction. In this context, students who are not familiar with the dynamics of group work or interpersonal communication require more intensive guidance from the teacher. Therefore, the teacher's role as a facilitator is important to help students develop social skills and increase their self-confidence.

The second challenge is in the aspect of engagement. Students' involvement in project-based learning is still diverse. While some students show responsibility and active participation, others are less motivated or even reluctant to participate. The main factors influencing this involvement include lack of interest in the project, low motivation to learn, and poor group cooperation. In project-based learning, student engagement determines the success of the learning process. Teachers can improve student engagement by providing projects that are more interesting, contextual, and relevant to their lives. This is in line with the findings of Rahayuningsih and Hanif, (2024), which state that a student-focused learning approach in the independent curriculum, by providing relevant tasks

according to students' interests and needs, can inspire intrinsic motivation and strengthen student engagement in learning.

In line with this, EFL teachers themselves have implemented various strategies to address this challenge, one of the main strategies used by teachers is rewarding students who succeed in the project, which aims to increase student motivation and engagement. This reward not only encourages the spirit of healthy competition, but also provides an incentive for students to be more actively involved in project-based learning. In addition, teachers also choose to make the projects interesting for students, so that they feel more interested and motivated in completing the tasks. Another strategy implemented is to provide assistance and feedback to students, especially for those who have difficulties in communicating or working together in groups.

These strategies demonstrate the teachers' efforts to ensure that every student, regardless of initial difficulties, can actively participate in learning. Overall, the strategies implemented by the EFL teachers reflect a commitment to overcoming the challenges posed by the different characters and abilities of the students. Rewarding, creating interesting projects, and mentoring are key elements in promoting the successful implementation of the independent curriculum in the Islamic boarding schools. With this

adaptive approach, students will be able to more easily adapt and engage in the project-based learning process.