

# Implementation of Christian Religious Education Based on the Independent Curriculum: Implications for the Growth of Spirituality and Academic Achievement of Class X Students of SMAN 7 Bekasi

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## ARTICLE INFO

### *Keywords:*

SIR;  
Independent Curriculum;  
Spirituality;  
Achievement

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### *Article history:*

Received 2024-09-20

Revised 2024-11-23

Accepted 2024-12-31

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of Christian Religious Education based on the Independent Curriculum at SMAN 7 Bekasi, focusing on its implications on the growth of spirituality and academic achievement of grade X students. This research uses a qualitative approach through in-depth interviews with teachers and students, classroom observations, and analysis of curriculum documents. The results of the study show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum encourages students' active involvement in spiritual activities, such as Bible reading and prayer together, while increasing learning motivation and academic achievement. In addition, the integration of practical learning that emphasizes character development and soft skills contributes to improving the quality of interactions in the classroom. These findings show that the curriculum not only functions as an academic instrument, but also as a means of strengthening students' spiritual values. The implications of this study emphasize the importance of innovative teaching strategies that combine Christian values with a freedom-based curriculum approach. The recommendations are directed at increasing teacher capacity through ongoing training and parental involvement as educational partners. Thus, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can make a significant contribution to the growth of spirituality and academic achievement of students.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The educational landscape in Indonesia has undergone significant changes through curriculum shifts, starting from the 1947 Curriculum to the latest Independent Curriculum (Dayantri & Halimah, 2024). This change aims to improve the quality of human resources so that they can compete at the global level while contributing to national development (Abdillah, 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum was born as a response to the need for education that is more contextual, flexible, and oriented towards student character development (Agung, 2025). Inspired by the idealism of Ki Hajar Dewantara (Samho, 2014), this curriculum encourages independent and creative learning, where students are required to develop initiative, creativity, and social responsibility (Maisaroh & A'yun, 2024).

In this context, Christian Religious Education (PAK) has a central role because it not only emphasizes the cognitive aspect, but also shapes students' moral, ethical, and spiritual awareness (Gea & Kurniawan, 2025). As affirmed by Yudaningsih, ideal education aims to develop intellectual competence while instilling high ethical awareness (Zannah et al., 2025). This is in line with Onisimus's view that education contributes to solving social problems such as poverty and crime. Thus, the integration of PAK in the Independent Curriculum is expected to strengthen the spiritual foundation while supporting students' academic achievement (Praekanata et al., 2024).

Various previous studies provide an empirical basis regarding the implementation of PAK and its influence on character development and academic achievement. For example, Sitompul's (2024) research found that interactive learning approaches in religious education increase students' activeness and confidence (Sitompul & Pratiwi, 2024). Other research shows that project-based learning in the Independent Curriculum can improve the learning outcomes and creativity of high school students (Rosdiana & Mukhtar, 2021). Mubarok (2025) emphasized that the integration of the Independent Curriculum encourages students to be more courageous in their opinions and develop communication skills (Mubarok et al., 2025). Nggiri (2024) added that project-based learning in religious subjects strengthens students' spiritual experiences because they learn through real practice, not just theory (Nggiri et al., 2024). In addition, research by Purba (2020) emphasizes that the use of digital media in religious education can expand access to learning resources, although it requires assistance so that students do not only consume information passively (Kia et al., 2025). All of these studies confirm that the development of students' character, spirituality, and academic achievement can be achieved through innovative, interactive, and contextual learning approaches.

Several previous studies have also highlighted various aspects of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and Christian religious education. For example, Dayantri & Halimah (2024) emphasized the importance of curriculum changes to improve the quality of human resources (Dayantri & Halimah, 2024). Shela (2025) and Maisaroh & A'yun (2024) emphasize independent and creative learning as the core of the Independent Curriculum (Shela, 2025). Simanjuntak (2025) emphasizes the role of PAK in shaping students' moral and spiritual awareness (Simanjuntak, 2025), while Tanaem (2025) highlights the integration of ethical values in Education (Tanaem & Lao, 2025). Sabuna et al. (2025) affirm that PAK can strengthen spiritual foundations while supporting academic achievement (Sabuna et al., 2025). In addition, Safitri (2025) shows that project-based evaluation provides space for students to develop critical and creative thinking skills (Safitri et al., 2025). Pradana (2024) found that the integration of social service activities in religious learning increases students' social responsibility and empathy (Pradana et al., 2024). Hidayah (2022) emphasizes experiential learning strategies in increasing student involvement and understanding of faith values (H. Hidayah et al., 2025). Nugroho (2020) emphasized the effectiveness of the flexible and student-centered learning-oriented Independent Curriculum in shaping character, spirituality, and academic achievement (Rusdi, 2024). Mutmainnah (2025) highlights the use of digital technology to facilitate access to materials and increase learning motivation, with the note that teachers still need assistance (Mutmainnah Anwar, 2025). Anggraini & Syahputra (2022) found that collaborative learning improves students' communication and problem-solving skills (Anggraini, 2022), while Cantika (2025) states that personal reflection activities and group discussions in PAK support students' spiritual growth and self-

introspection skills (Cantika, 2025). All of these findings confirm the relevance of research that examines the implementation of PAK based on the Independent Curriculum in forming students with character, faith, and achievement.

Globally, many countries are also reforming their curriculum to meet the challenges of the 21st century. For example, Finland implements a phenomenon-based curriculum that emphasizes cross-disciplinary collaboration, while Singapore focuses on 21st-century value- and skill-based learning (Alkhuzaiyah et al., 2024). International research on faith-based education also confirms that the integration of spiritual values in the curriculum can increase students' learning motivation, moral resilience, and academic involvement (Zamroni et al., 2025). However, in Indonesia, studies that specifically highlight the implementation of PAK within the framework of the Independent Curriculum are still limited.

This research gap shows the need for an empirical study that not only discusses the Independent Curriculum in general, but also focuses on the implementation of PAK as an integral part in forming students with character, faith, and achievement. The lack of research linking the practice of Christian spirituality in schools with academic achievement under the Independent Curriculum confirms the urgency of this research.

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the implementation of Christian Religious Education based on the Independent Curriculum at SMAN 7 Bekasi, as well as examine its implications on the growth of spirituality and academic achievement of grade X students.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological strategy (Prof.Dr.Sugiyono, 2022), because the main purpose of the research is to understand the meaning of the experience of students and teachers in the implementation of Christian Religious Education based on the Independent Curriculum at SMAN 7 Bekasi. The phenomenological approach was chosen to explore how research subjects give meaning to their spiritual and academic experiences in the learning process. The research participants consisted of one Christian Religious Education teacher in class X and ten students who were selected purposively, namely students who were active in learning and represented a variety of academic achievement and spiritual involvement. In addition, the snowball technique is used to add participants when additional information is needed from the teacher or other relevant students. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with semi-structured guides, participant observation with guidelines that focused on teacher-student interaction and the atmosphere of classroom spirituality, as well as documentation in the form of syllabus, lesson plans, and student achievement records that function for data triangulation. The research instrument is the researcher himself as a key instrument assisted by interview guides, observation formats, and documentation checklists. To ensure the validity of the data, this study refers to four criteria of trustworthiness, namely credibility through triangulation of sources and techniques, dependability by compiling detailed and consistent field records, confirmability through the use of interview recordings and verification of results from participants (member checking), and transferability by presenting rich contextual descriptions so that findings can be understood and applied in similar contexts (Sugiyono, 2018). With this method, the research is expected to provide an in-depth picture of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Christian religious education and its implications for the spiritual growth and academic achievement of grade X students at SMAN 7 Bekasi.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Result

Based on the results of interviews with Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers and class X students at SMAN 7 Bekasi, this study identified several important findings related to the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. The findings include three main aspects, namely the implementation of PAK, the growth of student spirituality, and the improvement of

academic achievement. Each aspect shows a positive impact, although there are challenges that need to be overcome, such as limited learning resources and the need for innovation in teaching methods. To provide a more systematic picture, the results of the research are summarized in the following table, which contains sub-aspects, findings of interviews and observations, impact or interpretation, and relevance to previous theories or research. This table makes it easier for readers to understand the relationship between the practice of implementing the Independent Curriculum, the growth of spirituality, and the overall academic achievement of students.

**Table 1. Research Data**

Aspects	Sub-Aspects	Outcome Findings	Impact/Interpretation
Implementation of the PAK Independent Curriculum	Student participation	Students are more confident in expressing their opinions, actively involved in discussions, group prayers, and Bible reading.	Shifting from passive to interactive learning; increasing courage, responsibility, and communication skills
	Utilization of technology	Teachers use digital platforms for online materials and discussions; some students experience difficulties	Expanding access to learning resources, increasing flexibility, but requiring mentoring
	Development of non-academic skills	Students present the results of group discussions	Sharpen public speaking, creativity, and collaboration skills
Spiritual Growth	Challenge	The material is sometimes too in-depth, does not match students' interests, demands high creativity	Teachers need innovation, practice questions, training, and learning adaptation.
	Involvement in spiritual activities	Students regularly pray together, read the Bible, have group discussions, and engage in personal reflection.	Strengthening faith, piety, and spiritual maturity; developing moral character
	Project-based learning	Simple service projects, social service activities	Strengthening social responsibility, the practice of love, and the connection of faith with real action
Improving Academic Achievement	Challenge	Limited access to printed PAK books requires teachers to be more creative and innovative.	Regular evaluation, teacher training, and school support are needed to optimize spirituality.
	Academic value	PAK scores increased significantly; students were given the	Improve students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains

	opportunity to improve their scores.		
Critical thinking skills	Discussion, group work, problem-based learning, and projects	Sharpen analytical, creative, and collaborative skills	
Motivation and interest in learning	Students are more enthusiastic about participating in PAK and religious activities	Increase intrinsic motivation, active participation, and learning satisfaction	

Discussion

Implementation of Christian Religious Education based on the Independent Learning Curriculum for grade X students of SMAN 7 Bekasi

Based on interviews with Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers and several students of class X, the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in PAK subjects shows a significant shift from the 2013 Curriculum. This change is visible in the following aspects.

First, student participation in PAK activities increased. The teacher mentioned that students are more courageous to express their opinions and actively involved in class discussions. One of the students even said that joint prayer activities and Bible readings are no longer just routines, but moments of collective reflection that make them feel close to the values of the Christian faith. This shows a shift from passive learning to more interactive.

Second, the use of technology is increasingly visible in learning. PAK teachers use simple digital platforms to share materials, assign assignments, and facilitate online discussions. While some students still find it difficult to use certain apps, they admit that the use of technology helps them access learning resources faster and more varied.

Third, the development of students' non-academic skills is also one of the real impacts. Students are required to present the results of group discussions, so that public speaking skills, courage, and responsibility are further honed. The teacher observed that some students who were initially passive began to dare to appear in front of the class.

However, there are also challenges faced. The teacher assessed that the depth of the material sometimes overwhelmed students. Some students also feel that the content of the PAK is less relevant to their interests or plans of study in college. In addition, changes in learning patterns that require critical and creative thinking make some students have difficulty adapting. In facing these challenges, teachers carry out several strategies, such as participating in technology use training, designing innovative learning methods, and providing practice questions to help students understand the material better.

Overall, it can be said that the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in PAK at SMAN 7 Bekasi has been running, although it is not yet fully optimal. Teachers and students alike try to adapt so that learning is more relevant, meaningful, and student-centered.

The findings of this study are in line with the concept formulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture, Research and Technology (2022), that the Independent Curriculum emphasizes diverse intracurricular learning so that students have enough time to explore the concepts while strengthening competencies (Atmojo et al., 2024). In the context of PAK, this can be seen from the increasing activity of students in discussions, prayer activities, and group projects.

The increase in student participation is also in accordance with the findings of Yuliani (2022), who stated that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum encourages students to be more courageous in their opinions and develop communication skills (Farma, 2024). This is reinforced by

research by Sitompul (2024) who found that interactive learning approaches in religious education increase students' activeness and confidence (Sitompul & Pratiwi, 2024).

In addition, the integration of Christian faith values into learning activities is in line with the view of Tilaar (2025), which emphasizes that Christian education must be holistic, that is, not only emphasizing cognitive aspects, but also spiritual, moral, and social aspects (Tapilaha, 2025). The practice of joint prayer, Bible reading, and simple service performed by students are tangible examples of the application of the principles of holistic education.

Nonetheless, challenges such as the depth of the material and the demands of creativity point to a gap between theory and practice. Marpaung (2021) found that teachers often face obstacles in balancing the demands of the new curriculum with limited time and student readiness (Dewi et al., 2024). This condition is also felt at SMAN 7 Bekasi, where teachers must continue to innovate so that PAK materials remain relevant and can be understood by students with diverse backgrounds.

The use of technology in PAK also shows relevance to the results of Rusli's (2023) research, which shows that the use of digital media expands students' access to religious learning resources, although intensive assistance is needed so that students do not only consume information, but also criticize it (Rusli, 2023).

From a theoretical perspective, the student-centered approach of the Independent Curriculum is very compatible with the principle of self-directed learning. In PAK, this provides an opportunity for students to explore the value of faith independently, build personal reflection, and relate it to everyday experiences. However, for this approach to be effective, teachers must play the role of facilitators who not only deliver the material, but also guide students to find the meaning of learning.

By paying attention to the results of previous analysis and theory/research, it can be concluded that the implementation of PAK based on the Independent Curriculum at SMAN 7 Bekasi has had a positive impact on the growth of students' spirituality and academic skills. However, the challenges that exist require teachers to continue to evaluate, innovate, and collaborate with parents and the community. Only in that way can the goal of the Independent Curriculum in forming a profile of students who are faithful, independent, creative, and able to collaborate can be optimally achieved.

### **Implementation of Christian Religious Education based on the Independent Curriculum for the Growth of Spirituality of Grade X Students of SMAN 7 Bekasi**

The results of interviews with PAK teachers and class X students show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the subject of Christian Religious Education has a real positive impact on the growth of students' spirituality.

First, students become more involved in spiritual activities. They regularly attend joint prayers, Bible readings, and group discussions aimed at understanding the values of the Christian faith in daily life. PAK teachers emphasized that the habit of reading the Bible began to grow, not just as an obligation, but as part of the students' personal reflection.

Second, project-based learning implemented in the Independent Curriculum encourages students to develop spiritual habits through hands-on experience. For example, some student groups carry out simple service projects, such as social service activities in the school environment and the surrounding community. This strengthens the connection between faith, acts of love, and social responsibility.

Third, despite the progress, some challenges were also found. Some students complain about the limited access to PAK printed books and still feel that the material studied is not always in accordance with the desired major. Teachers also face demands to continue to be creative and innovative so that PAK lessons are not only theoretical, but are able to bring spiritual values to life that are relevant to students' lives.

Fourth, teachers consider that routine evaluation and special training are needed so that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can be more optimal. School support in the form of providing learning facilities and teacher development programs is needed to strengthen the integration of Christian faith values in every learning activity.

These findings support the basic principles of the Independent Curriculum which places character growth and spirituality as one of the top priorities. In the curriculum structure, 20–30% of learning hours are allocated for the development of the Pancasila Student Profile through projects (Juwita et al., 2024). This is clearly seen in the practice of PAK at SMAN 7 Bekasi, where simple projects become a means of forming students' faith, responsibility, and social concern.

The growth of students' spirituality in this study is also in accordance with the dimension put forward by Fowler (1981), that the development of faith involves the recognition of values, self-reflection, and involvement in the spiritual community (Scherilda, 2025). The prayer activities, Bible readings, and service carried out by the students reflect the process towards a more mature maturity of faith.

Furthermore, the results of this study confirm the findings of Legi (2025), who stated that the application of project-based learning in religious subjects strengthens students' spiritual experiences because they learn through real practice, not just theory (Legi & Legi, 2025). This is in line with the view of Tapilaha (2025), that Christian education must be holistic, including spiritual, moral, and social transformations (Tapilaha, 2025).

However, the limited access to PAK printed books and the demands of teachers' creativity show challenges that are also noted by Marpaung (2021). According to him, the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is greatly influenced by the readiness of teachers and the availability of resources. Without this support, risky learning does not run consistently with its original goals.

From a theological perspective, the growth of students' spirituality at SMAN 7 Bekasi is in line with the teachings of the Bible, especially Ephesians 4:15–16 which emphasizes the importance of growing in Christ through love. The prayer, service, and reflection activities of the Word that students practice not only support the goals of the curriculum, but also reflect the process of faith transformation that is at the core of Christian education.

Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAK is able to provide space for students to develop their spirituality in a more real and contextual way. However, challenges in the form of limited learning resources and the need for teacher innovation need to be overcome immediately so that the growth of spirituality does not only stop at formal practice, but really becomes part of the lifelong journey of faith of students.

### **Implementation of Christian Religious Education based on the Independent Curriculum for Improving the Achievement of Class X Students at SMAN 7 Bekasi**

Interviews with PAK teachers and class X students showed that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum had a positive impact on learning achievement. Students experience a significant increase in grades, mainly due to the opportunity to improve their grades and involvement in religious activities. Teachers also emphasized that the learning atmosphere becomes more collaborative and encourages students to think critically through discussions, group work, project-based learning, and problem-based learning.

Students said that they felt more motivated because they were given the freedom to pursue their interests as well as space for the practice and visualization of PAK learning. This makes them more actively participating, both in class activities and religious activities at school.

These findings are in line with the concept of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes character and competency development through flexible and innovative learning. According to Muhibbin Syah, learning achievement is an indicator of success in achieving teaching goals that include cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains (Syafi'i et al., 2018). The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has been proven to support the achievement of these domains by providing a space for a more in-depth learning experience.

Furthermore, the theory of learning achievement emphasizes that student achievement is influenced by internal (motivation, interest, learning readiness) and external factors (school environment, learning methods, teacher support) (Simamora et al., 2020). In this context, the

Independent Curriculum strengthens both aspects: internal factors are enhanced through opportunities for students to develop interests, while external factors are strengthened through teachers' innovations in creating active learning.

The results of this study are consistent with a study conducted by Hidayah which found that the project-based learning model in the Independent Curriculum increases the learning outcomes and creativity of high school students (R. Hidayah & Sari, 2025). Similarly, research by Sari (2024) shows that a collaborative approach is able to encourage increased motivation and academic achievement of students (Sari et al., 2024). This finding is also in line with the research of Situmorang (2023) which confirms that Christian Religious Education learning based on the Independent Curriculum strengthens spiritual values while increasing students' academic achievement (Kia et al., 2025).

Thus, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMAN 7 Bekasi not only has an impact on improving academic scores, but also on the formation of collaborative attitudes, critical thinking skills, and spiritual motivation of students. This proves that the new curriculum policy is able to answer the needs of education oriented towards the development of holistic competencies.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of Christian Religious Education based on the Independent Learning Curriculum at SMAN 7 Bekasi for grade X students has a positive impact on student involvement, spirituality growth, and improvement of academic achievement. The Independent Curriculum encourages interactive, student-centered learning, and emphasizes practices and projects that develop 21st-century character and skills.

The implication of these findings is the need to strengthen the role of teachers through professional training, the use of learning technology, and the involvement of parents and the community to support the successful implementation. In addition, curriculum development must continue to pay attention to the integration of Christian values, inclusivity, and compliance with applicable educational regulations.

However, this study has limitations because it only focuses on one school with a qualitative approach and a limited number of participants. Therefore, further research is recommended to be conducted in several schools with a comparative method or longitudinal study, so as to provide a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum in Christian religious education.

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