IRJE |Indonesian Research Journal in Education| |Vol. 9| No. 2|Dec|Year 2025|

Improvement of an independent curriculum learning model via community service mentoring

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Abstract

This research aimed to identify and obtain information regarding implementing the independent curriculum learning model in schools. The research employed an action research approach to enhance the implementation of the independent curriculum learning model by facilitating a Community Service Program (Abdimas). The research results indicated that the independent curriculum learning model improved teacher performance over three mentoring cycles. In cycle 1, teachers' understanding of the national curriculum policy increased to 78.2%, and understanding of the national curriculum implementation reached 74%, indicating a notable improvement from the pre-cycle phase. In cycle 2, further increases were recorded: understanding of learning objective flow rose to 79.42%, understanding of the learning model reached 88.4%, and understanding of the teaching module reached 87.8%, reflecting nearly optimal mastery. In cycle 3, teachers' comprehension regarding the practice of learning models attained 88.6%, signaling their capability to implement effective classroom instruction.

Keywords

Independent curriculum, learning model, mentoring

Article History

Received 15 April 2025
Accepted 28 August 2025

How to Cite

Nuriah, Y., Haratua, C. S., & Komari, K. (2025). Improvement of an independent curriculum learning model via community service mentoring. *Indonesian Research Journal in Education |IRJE|*, *9*(2), 1113 - 1125. https://doi.org/10.22437/irje.v9i02.47222

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Introduction

Enhancing independent curriculum learning models through community service mentoring represents a significant educational approach, aligning closely with contemporary demands for experiential learning and community engagement in higher education. This educational strategy advocates for integrating academic coursework with meaningful community service, resulting in a symbiotic relationship where learning outcomes and community needs inform one another. The fundamental premise posits that such integrations enhance learning, foster student civic responsibility, and improve community welfare.

Firstly, service-learning has emerged as an effective pedagogical model that fundamentally redefines the roles of students, faculty, and community members in the higher education landscape. Students are no longer passive recipients of knowledge but active participants in a co-learning environment where they engage with real-world issues through community service (Ka & Chan, 2013). This model is supported by evidence indicating that service-learning enhances students' academic experiences and cultivates attitudes favoring long-term community engagement post-graduation (Coe et al., 2014). For instance, research demonstrates that service-learning programs significantly influence students' perceptions and willingness to volunteer, promoting an enduring commitment to addressing community needs (Coe et al., 2014).

Moreover, this experiential learning approach aligns with broader educational outcomes by fostering essential skills such as critical thinking, teamwork, and problem-solving. Engaged partnerships promote an epistemological shift in how knowledge is constructed, highlighting the collaborative nature of learning, where community-based and participatory action research become vital components of the educational model (Andrée, 2020). The depth of learning in these settings is amplified by the reciprocal relationships cultivated between students and community partners, characterized by shared goals and active participation in problem-solving processes.

The practical implication of community service mentoring within the independent curriculum is creating a framework for flexible, student-centered learning experiences. The Partnership Model for Service-Learning Programs emphasizes the importance of developing structured processes that guide both students and faculty through the complexities of community engagement and service learning (Flinders et al., 2013). This structured approach ensures academic rigor is maintained while delivering tangible community benefits, thus creating a balanced educational experience that embodies the ideals of civic responsibility.

Furthermore, service-learning enables educators to foster an environment where students can apply theoretical knowledge in practical situations, creating shared value among all stakeholders. As Nikolova and Andersen (2017) articulated, the focus on creating shared value highlights the multifaceted benefits of service-learning, spanning students, faculty, and community organizations. By facilitating these interconnected relationships, educational institutions can significantly enhance their curricula's social impact while enriching student learning experiences through practical application and reflection.

Self-reflection represents another critical component of the service-learning paradigm. Emphasizing reflecting on experiences allows students to internalize their learning and develop a more profound understanding of community issues through personal engagement (Coe et al., 2014). Educational theories suggest that self-reflection enhances learning outcomes

and promotes emotional intelligence and empathetic understanding, critical attributes for future professionals, especially those the community needs are active in community service.

Building on the foundation of service-learning, educational frameworks should consider students' diverse learning styles and needs to optimize engagement and efficacy. This requires a tailored approach where community service mentoring is adapted to fit each student's unique contexts and experiences, as a one-size-fits-all model would undermine the flexible nature of experiential learning.

Furthermore, the active involvement of faculty in these programs is crucial, as they serve not only as educators but also as mentors who guide students in their academic and service commitments. The credibility and expertise of faculty members can significantly enhance the depth of community engagement by providing students with frameworks for critical analysis and reflection (Ka & Chan, 2013; Nikolova & Andersen, 2017). Faculty mentors can encourage students to draw connections between their service experiences and academic content, thereby enriching the overall value of the learning process.

To ensure the success of such integrated models, stakeholders must prioritize establishing robust evaluation mechanisms. Continuous assessment of student learning outcomes and community benefits is indispensable to demonstrating the effectiveness of service-learning initiatives (Andrée, 2020). This validates the pedagogical approach and reinforces the commitment of educational institutions to accountability and improvement in community service endeavors.

Moreover, understanding that educational success hinges on the active engagement of the community itself is paramount. Effective partnership strategies offer examples of how universities can streamline collaboration processes, ensuring community needs are accurately reflected in service-learning objectives and outcomes (Flinders et al., 2013). By fostering meaningful relationships with community partners, educational institutions can enhance the sustainability and relevance of the service-learning model.

Addressing potential challenges within the independent curriculum learning model also warrants attention. Balancing academic rigor with meaningful service commitments often leads to conflict, necessitating a structured framework delineating students' and community partners' expectations, responsibilities, and assessment practices (Flinders et al., 2013). Establishing clear communication channels and regular feedback mechanisms can enhance this balance, allowing for adjustments in pedagogy that respond to the evolving landscape of community needs and educational objectives.

The Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 28 of 2021 regarding the Organizational Structure and Work Procedures of the Ministry of Education, and the Ministerial Decree Number 56/M/2022 on the Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation for Learning Recovery, clearly state that curriculum development in educational units should refer to the independent curriculum comprehensively across early childhood, primary, and secondary education.

Education in Indonesia is undergoing a significant transformation with the launch of the independent curriculum, which aims to grant autonomy and flexibility to both educators and learners (Afriani et al., 2023). This curriculum focuses on developing individual student potential, integrating project-based learning, and emphasizing contextual and life-relevant content. Despite its advantages, its implementation poses various challenges that need resolution (Sucipto et al., 2024).

One major obstacle is teachers' limited understanding and skills in applying learning models that align with the principles of the independent curriculum (Sucipto et al., 2024).

Many teachers still rely on conventional, less effective methods under the new paradigm. Additionally, a lack of access to adequate resources and professional support hinders optimal curriculum implementation.

Higher education institutions' Community Service Program (Abdimas) plays a vital role in supporting implementation. Through structured and systematic mentoring, these programs can assist teachers in mastering and applying suitable learning models. This mentoring includes training sessions, workshops, and direct support to improve teacher competence in designing and conducting innovative teaching practices (Sitopu et al., 2023).

This research aims to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the independent curriculum learning model as applied through Abdimas mentoring, focusing on improvements in teacher competencies, enhancements in instructional quality, and feedback from teachers and students about the experience. The outcomes are expected to provide more about the impact of Abdimas' mentoring in advancing independent curriculum implementation while offering recommendations for future mentoring strategies.

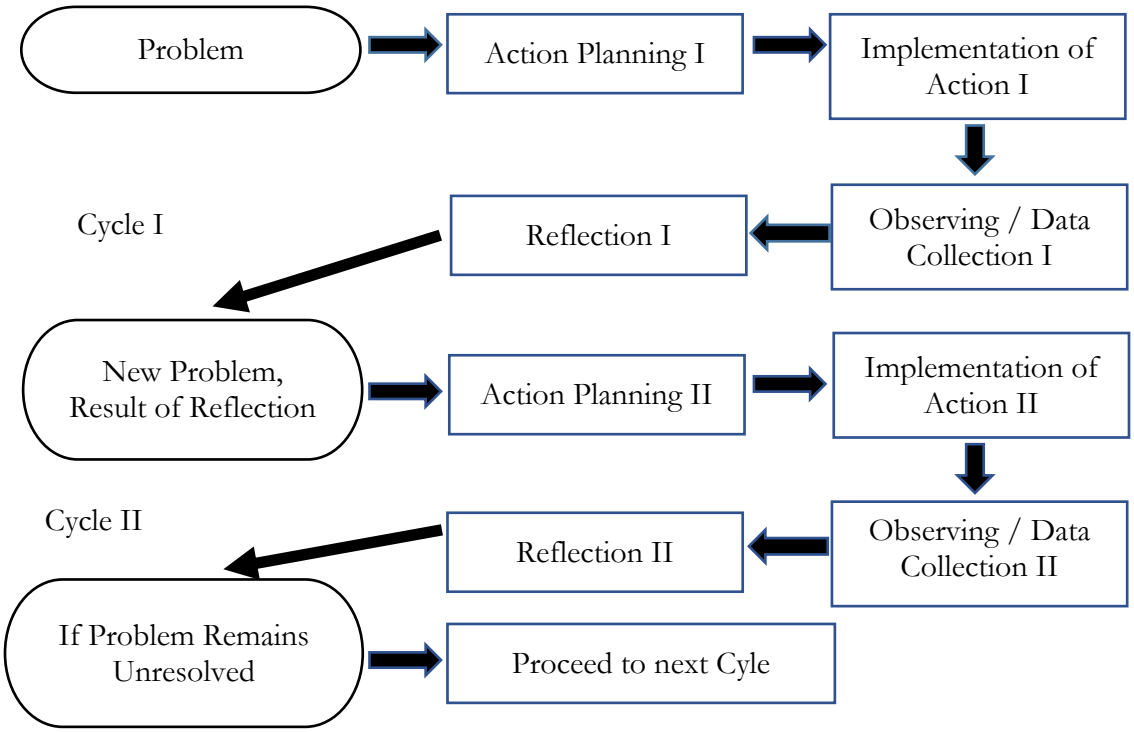
Methodology

The research was conducted at one junior public school in Jakarta. The research employed an action research approach to enhance the implementation of the independent curriculum learning model by facilitating a Community Service Program (Abdimas). This action research involved a collaborative partnership between the researcher and members of the school community, including the principal, teachers, administrative staff, and supervisors, in executing the national curriculum, with particular emphasis on applying instructional models to improve classroom teaching practices.

The research followed four cycles. A pre-cycle phase assessed teachers' readiness to understand and implement the curriculum. Cycle 1 included planning, curriculum policy workshops, and in-class observations (Fitriani et al., 2022; Juliana, 2022; Lasino, 2022; Utomo et al., 2024). Cycle 2 focused on designing learning models and teaching modules. Cycle 3 emphasized practical classroom implementation using PBL, discovery learning, and inquiry-based learning models.

The research Classroom Action Research (CAR) design followed four cycles. This design represented a systematic approach beginning with a preliminary phase (pre-cycle) to collect baseline data on teachers' competencies in executing the independent curriculum and their ability to plan and implement effective instructional processes. The first cycle commenced with a detailed plan focused on deepening the understanding of the independent curriculum learning model. Action 1 (Preliminary Stage) involved designing the mentoring plan, reaching consensus on program structure, assigning responsibilities, preparing supporting documents, and conducting initial school observations during the first meeting (Utomo et al., 2024). Action 2 comprised implementing mentoring activities, specifically conducting workshops on curriculum policy and applying instructional models within the independent/national curriculum during meetings two and three (Juliana, 2022). Action 3 focused on classroom observations during the fourth and fifth meetings, in which researchers observed teachers' instructional practices (Lasino, 2022). Action 4 entailed a reflective session during the sixth meeting, synthesizing insights from the workshops and classroom observations to evaluate teachers' instructional implementation (Fitriani et al., 2022).

Figure 1. *Kemmis and Taggart model*



Cycle 2 focused on strengthening teachers' mastery in designing instructional models and developing teaching modules. The process followed a structured sequence comprising planning, workshop implementation, observation, and reflection on the outcomes of the workshop activities. This phase was followed by implementing the instructional model in alignment with the national curriculum framework. The Abdimas team conducted classroom observations to monitor the enactment of the learning design. Cycle 3 involved the practical application of instructional delivery using pedagogical models aligned with established learning syntax, specifically Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Discovery Learning, and Inquiry-Based Learning.

The data were collected using multiple techniques: direct observation during the instructional process to capture real-time classroom dynamics and instructional practices, and interviews with teachers and students to elicit qualitative information to gain more profound insights into their perceptions, experiences, and responses to the implemented learning model. These were used for interviews, pre-research inquiries, and classroom observations during instructional practice. The sheets were utilized to record teacher and student activities throughout the learning process. They were administered to both groups to gather in-depth insights into their experiences with the implemented instructional models. This involved collecting data from relevant documents such as lesson plans, student learning outcomes, and assessment records, which served as supporting evidence for evaluating the effectiveness of the learning model.

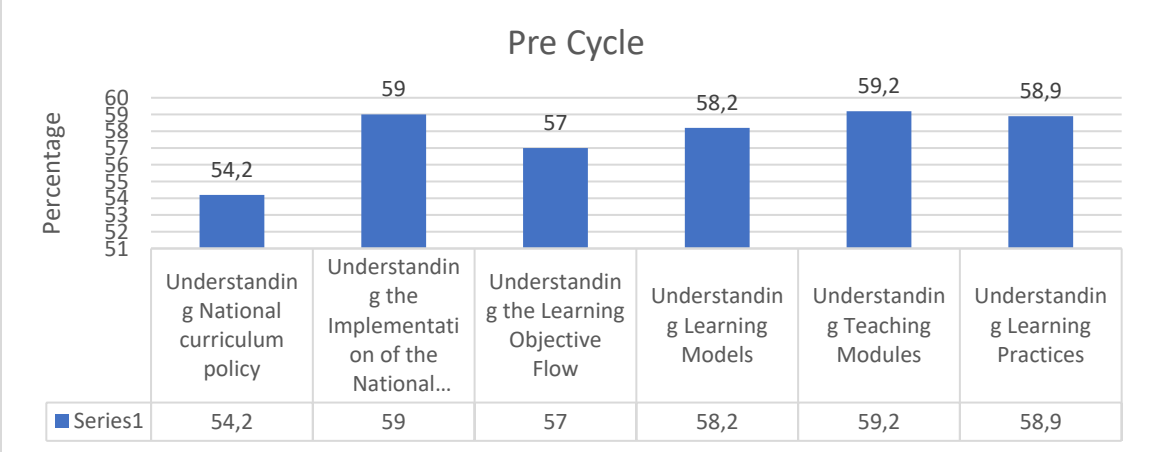
Findings

Pre-cycle

Before conducting the mentoring process on instructional models for teachers, the researcher implemented a pre-cycle phase. This phase involved the administration of research instruments completed by participating teachers to assess their understanding and competencies related to instructional models, as well as observations and guided interviews. The results from this pre-cycle served as baseline data and were used to establish performance benchmarks for subsequent research cycles.

Activities carried out during the pre-cycle included establishing agreements and collaborative arrangements with partner institutions and distributing survey instruments designed to measure teachers' comprehension of the national curriculum policy and its implementation, the structure of learning objectives, instructional model application, and the development of teaching modules. Based on the results of the pre-cycle questionnaire, which were subsequently summarized into a diagram as shown in Figure 2, it is evident that the levels of understanding regarding the instructional model mentoring varied among participants, as illustrated below.

Figure 2. *Pre-cycle graph*

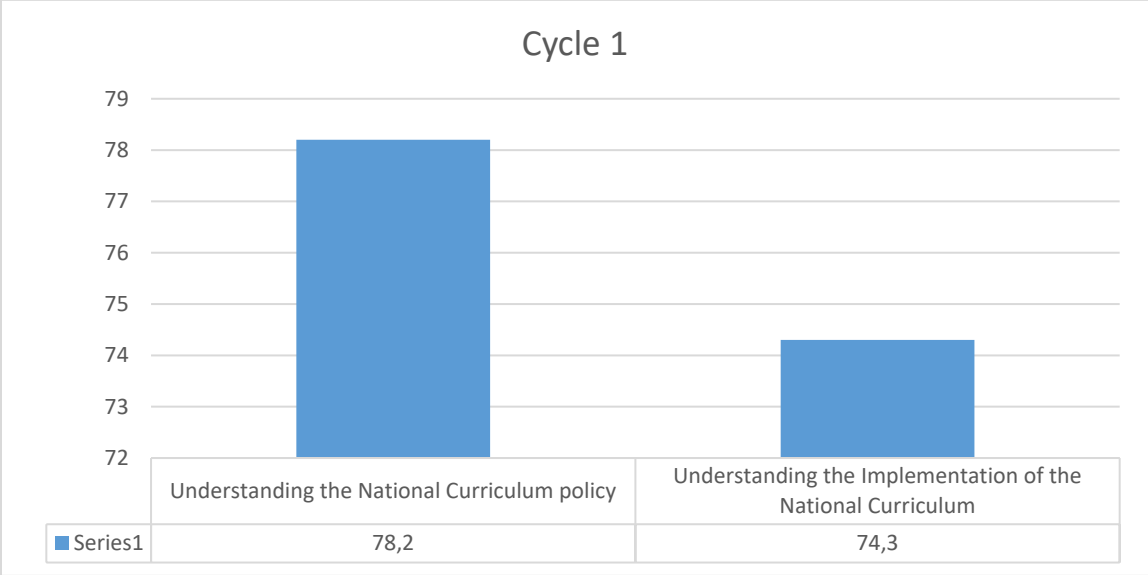


Based on the results of the pre-cycle mentoring of learning models for teachers, the general conditions in the pre-cycle are as follows: 1) Understanding of the national curriculum policy from the results of the instrument obtained an understanding value of 54.2%, and understanding of the Implementation of the national curriculum from the results of the instrument obtained an understanding value of 59%. 2) Understanding of the flow of learning objectives obtained an understanding value of 52%, 3) Understanding of the learning model obtained an understanding value of 57%, and understanding of the teaching module obtained an understanding value of 59.2%. Understanding the implementation of learning practices is 58.9%. The pre-cycle of mentoring the learning model for teachers revealed a level of understanding that requires further improvement. The average understanding score was in the

range of 50-60%. These results indicate the need for intensive mentoring to effectively improve teacher understanding and skills in implementing the curriculum and learning model.

Implementing mentoring for learning models attended by teachers consists of cycle 1, which involves mentoring on the national curriculum policy and its implementation. Planning is needed to implement an understanding of the national curriculum policy. Implement mentoring and observation by providing teachers with the necessary instruments. The data results from observations are processed, called reflection, to improve planning for cycle 2.

Figure 3. *Cycle 1 graph*

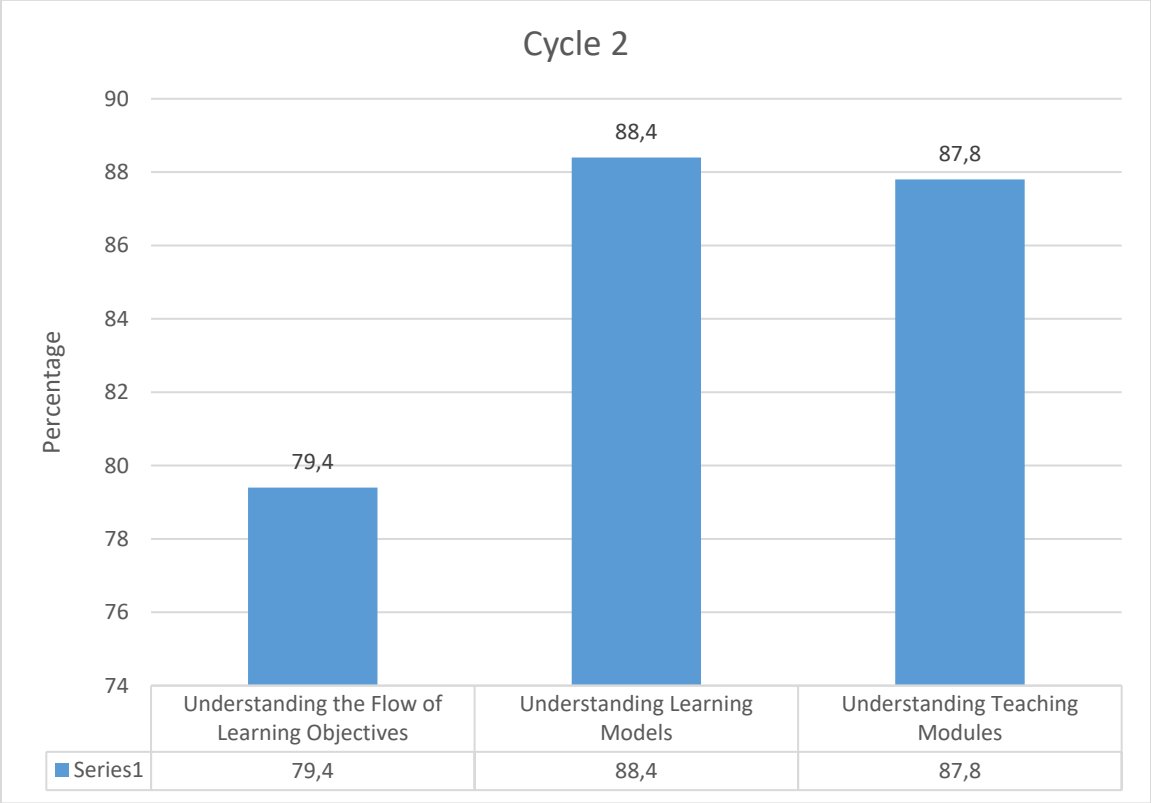


From Figure 3, the cycle 1 graph indicates that the value of the results of the implementation of the learning model assistance on understanding the national curriculum Policy from the instrument results obtained a value of 72.2%, and understanding the implementation of the national curriculum from the instrument results obtained a value of 70%. The results of the learning model mentoring showed an increase compared to the pre-cycle conditions. The understanding value of the national curriculum policy indicator reached 72.2%, which reflects a fairly good understanding. The implementation of the national curriculum reached 70%, showing an increasing understanding and starting to approach the "good" category. In conclusion, mentoring has succeeded in increasing teachers' understanding of aspects of national curriculum policy and implementation. However, there is still a room for improvement to achieve optimal understanding.

Cycle 2

Carrying out mentoring with materials on the flow of learning objectives, learning models, and teaching modules. Implement mentoring and observation by providing teachers with the necessary instruments. The results of the data from the observation are processed, which is called reflection, to improve the planning of cycle 3.

Figure 4. *Cycle 2 graph*

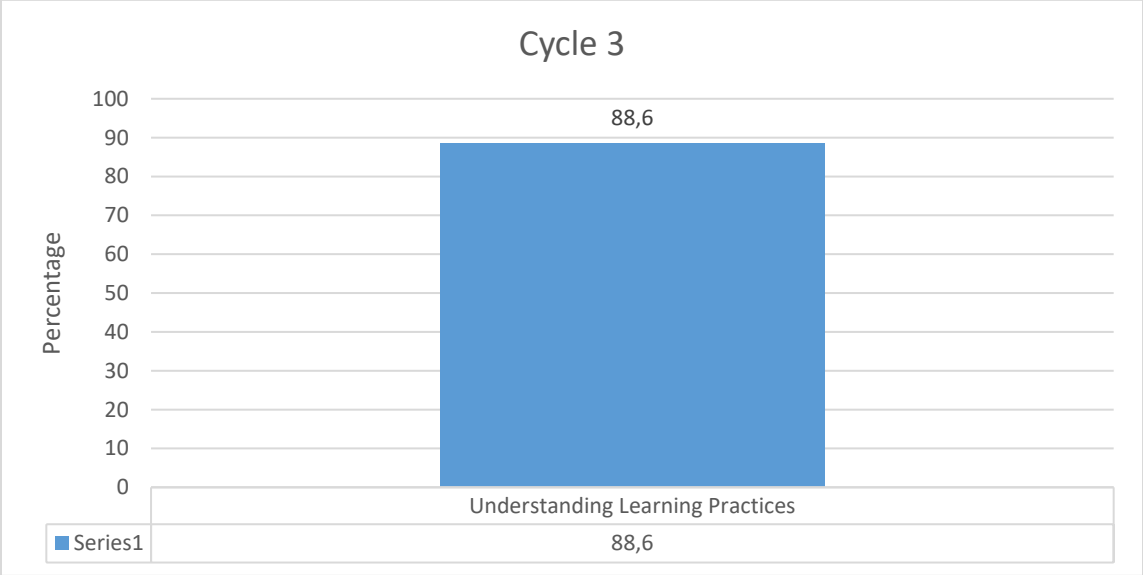


From Figure 4, the cycle 2 graph, it can be explained that the value of the results of understanding the implementation of the learning model assistance on understanding the learning objective flow obtained a value of 78.2%. Understanding the learning model obtained a result of 88.4%, and understanding the teaching module obtained a result of 87.8%. The results of implementing the learning model assistance showed an increase in understanding in the learning objective flow indicator: Understanding reached 78.2%, indicating good understanding. Learning model: Understanding reached 88.4%, indicating very good and almost optimal understanding. Teaching module: Understanding reached 87.8%, indicating a very good ability in understanding and using the teaching module. In conclusion, mentoring has improved teachers' understanding of learning models and teaching modules, so they are ready to implement the curriculum more confidently and effectively.

Cycle 3

Carrying out mentoring with the implementation of model learning practices. Implementing mentoring while carrying out observations by providing instruments to teachers. The results of data from observations are processed, which is called reflection.

Figure 5. *Cycle 3 graph*



From Figure 5, the cycle 3 graph can be explained as the value of the results of understanding the implementation of the learning model practice obtained a value of 88.6%.nThe value of the results of understanding the implementation of learning model practices of 88.6% indicates that the teacher's understanding of implementing learning practices is very good. This reflects that teachers have been able to implement learning models effectively, both in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning. This level of understanding also indicates the teacher's readiness to create an interactive, relevant, and appropriate teaching and learning process for students. The conclusion of the discussion compares the pre-cycle to cycles 1, 2, and 3 as follows:

Table 1. *Results of pre-cycle, cycles 1, 2, and 3*

No.	Indicators	Pre-cycle	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
1	National curriculum policy	54.2%	78.2%		
2	National curriculum implementation	59%	74.3%		
3	Learning objectives flow	57%		79.4%	
4	Learning model	58.2%		88.4%	
5	Teaching module	59.2%		87.8%	
6	Practice implementation	58.9%			88.6%

The achievement of pre-cycle values with cycle 1, cycle 2, and cycle 3 in mentoring learning models for teachers experienced an increase in value seen from the results of cycle 1 regarding understanding the national curriculum policy; from the results of the instrument, it obtained a value of 78.2%, and understanding the Implementation of the national curriculum from the results of the instrument obtained a value of 74%. The results of cycle 2 regarding understanding the flow of learning objectives obtained a value of 79.42%, understanding the

learning model obtained a value of 88.4%, and understanding the teaching module obtained a value of 87.8%. The results of cycle 3 regarding the practice of learning models obtained a value of 88.6%. The achievement of values in mentoring learning models for teachers showed a significant increase from pre-cycle to cycle 3. During the pre-cycle, the average understanding was between 50-60%, indicating the need for intensive mentoring.

In cycle 1, teachers' understanding of the national curriculum Policy increased to 78.2%, and understanding of the Implementation of the national curriculum reached 74%, showing satisfactory progress compared to the pre-cycle. Furthermore, in cycle 2, there was a further increase in understanding of the flow of learning objectives by 79.42%, understanding of learning models by 88.4%, and understanding of teaching modules by 87.8%, reflecting almost optimal mastery. In cycle 3, understanding related to learning model practices reached 88.6%, which shows teachers' ability to implement learning effectively and in a structured manner. Overall, this increase in value reflects the success of mentoring in strengthening teachers' understanding and skills in implementing learning models according to curriculum standards.

Discussion

Enhancing the independent curriculum learning model through community service mentoring at SMPN 187 Jakarta presents an opportunity to improve educational outcomes, student engagement, and community involvement. This essay synthesizes relevant literature to encapsulate the critical components and efficacy of integrating community service into the independent curriculum framework in junior secondary education. Firstly, the independent curriculum is characterized by its focus on flexibility and the development of essential competencies necessary for student growth. This curriculum aims to rejuvenate the educational landscape in Indonesia by emphasizing the necessity for project-based learning that cultivates soft skills alongside academic mastery (Maspul, 2023). Such a paradigm shift is pivotal, considering the earlier rigid structures that hindered educators' adaptability and the personalization of learning experiences for diverse student populations. The flexibility inherent in the independent curriculum allows for incorporating various learning modalities and acknowledges the significance of contextual learning, which can be enhanced through community service initiatives (Ingram, 2014).

Moreover, the operational success of the independent curriculum hinges on the effective engagement of students, educators, and the surrounding community. Lisdawati (2024) emphasized the importance of fostering a robust understanding and familiarity with the independent curriculum among all stakeholders involved. This necessitates the design of educational experiences that reflect curriculum principles and encourage active participation across community levels. This inclusive approach can be bolstered through community service mentoring, where students apply learned skills in real-life settings, solidifying their understanding and expanding their social competencies. The literature underscores that one of the hallmark features of the independent curriculum is the prioritization of essential material, allowing sufficient engagement with core subjects like literacy and numeracy. Permatasari et al. (2023) argued that project-based learning enhances knowledge acquisition and aligns with the values propagated by the *Pancasila* student profile, which espouses character development through active engagement. Integrating community service as a learning platform can catalyze such project-based initiatives, facilitating a deeper connection to the material and a better understanding of the community's needs and challenges. This alignment

propels student interest and drives academic performance by making learning relevant and impactful.

In nurturing a culture of differentiated learning, Yasir et al. (2023) elucidated the necessity of training educators in strategies that accommodate various learner distinctions, particularly within the scope of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Implementing these strategies through community service programs equips teachers with the necessary pedagogical tools and empowers them to devise lessons tailored to students' unique interests and capabilities. This contextual teaching strategy can improve student motivation and participation, crucial for a curriculum prioritizing learner autonomy and personalized education.

The role of community service mentoring in this framework serves dual purposes: it enhances educational practice while simultaneously addressing community issues. For instance, through community engagement, students can undertake projects that respond to local needs, thereby realizing the curriculum's objective to build competent, compassionate citizens. As Wardani et al. (2023) discussed, teachers must conduct diagnostic assessments and employ differentiated learning strategies to cater to individual student needs, facilitating tailored approaches according to each student's progress (Wardani et al., 2023). This entails continuous collaboration among educators, parents, and community stakeholders toward creating a cohesive learning environment.

Furthermore, integrating community service within the independent curriculum framework does not merely serve educational ends. It is also foundational in fostering a sense of social responsibility among students, encouraging them to apply their learning in authentic contexts and contribute positively to society. This symbiosis between education and community service underlines the overarching goal of the independent curriculum to nurture academic skill while fostering holistic student development through active, engaged citizenship. In practical terms, implementing community service mentoring at SMPN 187 Jakarta would require careful planning and resource allocation. Educators must have access to professional development opportunities that enhance their understanding of the independent curriculum while providing tools for integrating community service projects effectively. Barriers such as limited infrastructure and centralization must be addressed through strategic partnerships with local organizations and authorities to enrich the community service initiatives undertaken by students. By fostering such collaborations, schools can better support educators in engendering an environment conducive to active learning and community participation.

As the educational landscape evolves, such initiatives must also incorporate feedback mechanisms to assess the impact of community service on student learning outcomes. Engaging with parents and community members through regular workshops and feedback sessions can ensure that varied perspectives are embraced and that the independent curriculum aligns sufficiently with local contextual needs (Lisdawati, 2024). An iterative approach to curriculum development and community involvement could yield intricate workshops that enhance educator and student experiences aligned with the independent curriculum's goals.

In summary, improving the independent curriculum Learning Model via community service mentoring at SMPN 187 Jakarta is a progressive approach to educational reform. By centering on flexibility, active participation, and community engagement, educational stakeholders can cultivate an enriched learning environment that benefits students and the wider community. The literature reviewed supports the claims that education can transcend traditional confines through well-structured community service initiatives, resulting in meaningful, impactful student learning experiences.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research activities were conducted face-to-face in the form of mentoring the national curriculum learning model at SMPN 187 Jakarta, as seen from the seriousness and activeness of the participants from the pre-cycle to cycle 3 in the three cycles. The results of this research indicate that the independent learning curriculum learning model achievement of pre-cycle values with cycle 1, cycle 2, and cycle 3 in mentoring learning models for teachers experienced an increase in value seen from the results of cycle 1 regarding understanding the national curriculum Policy; from the results of the instrument, a value of 78.20% was obtained, and understanding the Implementation of the national curriculum from the results of the instrument obtained a value of 74.30%. The results of cycle 2 regarding understanding the flow of learning objectives obtained a value of 79.40%. Understanding the learning model obtained a value of 88.40%, and understanding the teaching module obtained 87.80%. The results from the practice of the learning model in cycle 3 achieved a value of 88.60%.

The achievement of the results of the presentation and learning practices using learning models according to the national curriculum guidelines is expected to improve the quality of learning so that educational goals are achieved. For schools, it is expected to continue the research on the independent learning curriculum to sustainably improve classroom learning management, which can ultimately improve the quality of education. The national curriculum learning model requires all schools to implement the national curriculum.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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