



## Freedom of learning policy: a critical review of the teacher professionalism perspective

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**Abstract.** The main objective is to conduct a critical analysis of the independent learning policy from the perspective of teacher professionalism. The data collection method is a literature study with a descriptive analysis. The data obtained were compiled, analyzed, then conclusions were drawn. Based on the results of the study, the implementation of the independent learning policy as an effort to improve the quality of education and the quality of learning will be successful if it is supported by efforts to revitalize the teacher professional development program by compiling a professional teacher management system supported by the facilitation of independent teacher training according to the priority scale of capacity building needs and teacher professionalism. The recommendations of the results of this study require the need for a conducive national teacher management system and the preparation of a national teacher professional capacity map for guidance and professional development of teachers.

**Keywords:** Freedom of learning, teacher professionalism, quality of education

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### INTRODUCTION

On December 10, 2019, the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadim Anwar Makarim, launched the freedom of learning policy to respond to various problems and complaints in the current national education system. There are many problems in the education sector including teacher and student complaints about the education system being pegged with certain test scores, a learning system that restricts teachers and students a lot in learning, as well as various bureaucracy and regulations in the education sector that often hinder teacher innovation and student creativity in learning. Besides, the freedom of learning policy was launched in response to the results of the study program for international student assessment (PISA) in which Indonesia occupies a less happy position. In the 2019 OECD report, Indonesia's PISA score ranking based on a survey in 2018 was for "mathematics" Indonesia was ranked 72 out of 78 countries, while Indonesia's "science" was ranked 70 out of 78 countries, and for the aspect of "reading literacy" Indonesia was ranked 72nd out of 78 countries (OECD, 2019). This capability is even lower than in Vietnam. At PISA 2019, Indonesia was ranked sixth from the bottom and was ranked 74th out of 79 countries.

Therefore, through the freedom of learning policy, it is hoped that it can give birth to "freedom of thought", especially the freedom of thinking of teachers in managing learning as a prerequisite for achieving student freedom of thought, to create innovations in learning and develop student creativity. The freedom of learning policy is expected to create a pleasant and happy learning atmosphere for both teachers and students, for parents, and even happy for everyone.

However, if the freedom of learning policy is not accompanied by efforts to improve teacher professionalism, the aim of implementing this policy will not achieve significant results in efforts to improve the quality of national education. Without being accompanied by efforts to increase teacher professionalism, these policies may not necessarily guarantee the quality of student learning outcomes and that improving the quality of education will be better. Because increasing teacher professionalism is one of the most basic problems in the world of education (Nova et al., 2019; Sulaiman et al., 2018).

The teacher is an important resource aspect of education. The teacher is the spearhead in the educational process, so the role of the teacher is the main key in achieving educational goals (Bafadal, 2003). The notion of teachers as the key to education certainly does not mean that teachers are the only solution to educational problems, because solutions to various educational problems certainly cannot be

borne only by teachers. However, the still weak professionalism of teachers is the root cause of the problems that arise in the world of education in Indonesia.

Therefore, the freedom of learning policy needs to be further directed at more basic educational issues, one of which is increasing teacher professionalism. The implementation of the freedom of learning policy can be misguided without being supported by the adequate abilities of the teacher as the spearhead of the implementation of education and learning in schools. Also, the freedom of learning policy can experience disorientation if it is not accompanied by a good understanding by the teacher in carrying out his professional duties. This is because, in the implementation of the new policy, the transition to teacher readiness and actual performance can be a very difficult experience in its implementation (Safrankova & Hrbackova, 2016). For example, giving teachers the freedom to prepare a Learning Implementation Plan is currently considered very risky because so far the preparation of a Learning Implementation Plan by teachers still depends a lot on technical instructions from the government.

The freedom of learning policy needs to be supported by government efforts to improve teacher competence because without this the freedom of learning policy will not be able to answer the root problems in the world of education which are more basic. The freedom of learning policy requires the readiness and awareness of teachers and schools to implement this policy as an effort to improve the quality and quality of education. So, the development of teacher competence is the main requirement for the implementation of the freedom of learning policy in schools.

The main objective of this paper is to conduct a critical study of the freedom of learning policy from the perspective of teacher professionalism. For this purpose, this article emphasizes the focus of the study on 3 (three) things, namely (1) the freedom of learning policy and improving the quality of education, (2) teacher professionalism and transformational in improving the quality of education, and (3) implementation of the freedom of learning policy and the challenges of professionalism primary education teacher.

## METHODS

This study relies on the descriptive method through a literature review related to the freedom of learning policy from the perspective of teacher professionalism. The object of study in this paper focuses on the freedom of learning policy and the challenges of teacher professionalism in improving the quality of education. The type of data used is secondary data. The data obtained were compiled, analyzed, then drawn conclusions and recommendations.

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

### The Freedom of Learning Policy and Education Quality Improvement

The freedom of learning policy refers to the idea of freedom of thought, especially by teachers as the main actor in learning in the classroom. This idea provides breadth for teachers to develop their competence. Teachers are expected to be able to explore their competence in learning without having to be preoccupied with a large and complicated set of administrative tasks. With this, it is expected that the intelligence, creativity, and quality of students can be better formed. Every child has a different intelligence. Learning in the classroom is expected to be able to produce competent educational outputs that are ready to compete in the world of work (Lucas & Spencer, 2017).

One of the goals of the free learning policy is to produce superior and ready-to-work Indonesian human resources, where the current golden generation of Indonesia is expected to be able to compete in the global arena of life. The formation of superior Indonesian human resources who can compete is certainly a good goal. Unfortunately, this policy is not accompanied by a blueprint related to education reforms that will be implemented, accompanied by a road map out of education problems. And if we try to analyze it critically, is the aim of national education solely to form competitive human resources? Is the freedom of learning policy already relevant to the goals of national education, namely to create a golden generation of Indonesians who are smart and have character?

Today's global life is a world economic life that is controlled by economic principles and is full of materialistic "temptations". If the idea of producing superior human beings is only based on considerations of global competitiveness based on "economy and business" alone, it may only produce robotic-mechanical business people. If this is the case, then the freedom of learning policy is nothing more than an effort to create superior human-robotic human resources who can compete in the world economy which is full of competition alone (Tilaar, 2006). One of the major threats to the current and future generations of Indonesian millennials is the threat of a "moral crisis" and a "mental crisis" of the nation's generation

caused by a poor materialistic life on the foundations of values and morals in shaping their character and personality.

The paradigm of freedom of learning has been coined by Paulo Freire (Prentki & Preston, 2013) in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" or "Education of the Oppressed". In this work, Freire criticizes a lot of modern education models that tend to "deceive" students. Freire calls the modern education model that has been widely practiced in the world of education as a factory education model that contains uniformity, a bank education model because it fills students with gaps and doctrines that tend to transform in one direction. The result of education like this is to give birth to students who are not innovative and not creative. Freire offers a liberation education model where education should not "deceive" students, but make students "more empowered." What is meant by more empowered is how students after following the educational process will become more creative and innovative. Prefer to be producers rather than consumers, able to create jobs instead of looking for work, and so on.

The freedom of learning policy as an idea based on the critical education paradigm is very relevant in efforts to improve the quality of education today. However, if the policy for them to learn is not accompanied by efforts to improve the quality and quality of teachers, then the implementation of this policy will be difficult to translate into more operational policy. Because of the paradigm behind this policy cannot be understood by the teacher, the concept of independent learning can experience disorientation (misguided). For example, efforts to simplify lesson plans so that teachers can focus on main learning tasks can be misleading. This failure to understand is not just a simple lesson plan compiled by the teacher, but a lesson plan with a smaller font or one sheet lesson plan accompanied by a bunch of attachments.

The freedom of learning policy is expected to be a solution for improving the quality of education in Indonesia. Improving the quality of education is the main requirement for producing a competent and competitive generation of the nation in the future. From education management or governance, achieving this goal needs to be supported by good education governance following education quality standards. The most common improvement strategy in an organization is to improve education management or governance (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Tjahjadi et al., 2019). Thus, the quality of education will depend on the education governance system. Human resources (HR) is an important element in education governance. Governance can be defined as the use of human resources needed to achieve success in improving the quality of education. Based on this definition, HR, in this case, the professionalism of teachers, is one of the fundamental things that must be improved in quality to improve the quality of education.

### **Teacher Professionalism and Transformation in Improving the Quality of Education**

The teacher's role is very important in education and learning. As a human component of learning, teachers play a major role in the formation of the nation's future generations of human resources. The teacher is a model who becomes a role model for their students, so they must be able to appreciate every potential of their students in developing their personality. The role of the teacher not only contributes to individual and community development but also achieves the self-realization of students through learning (Engelbrecht et al., 2016; Lojdová, 2019; Saunders & Sticker, 2020). Teachers must be able to get along naturally with all their students and be able to arouse their desire to learn. The portrait of the ideal teacher will realize that the moral benefits of learning are to perfect human and cultural inheritance from each generation.

Problems relating to the professional development of teachers in schools are still one of the fundamental problems in the national education system. Efforts to improve teacher professionalism, either through training, workshops, and so on, are still low. Ironically, although there are teachers who have attended seminars and workshops, often the results obtained are not accompanied by their implementation in improving learning. Teacher disparity is also a problem related to teacher professionalism. Even though it is almost impossible that students can learn and grow without the help of a teacher (Howe et al., 2019; Van Bergen et al., 2020). Sociocultural differences and teacher work experiences, especially between schools in cities and villages (especially remote areas), are one of the problems of disparity in teacher professionalism. Because teacher confidence in carrying out their professional duties is strongly influenced by socio-cultural factors in the local context where the teacher works and the length of service (length of service) of the teacher (Safrankova & Hrbackova, 2016). The problem of teacher shortages is that there are still a lot of teacher shortages in the availability of teachers according to needs, especially in remote areas (Nugroho, 2013). Finally, many teachers in remote areas who teach not according to their field of expertise (Makovec, 2018; Oosterhoff et al., 2020).

Another factor that becomes a problem regarding the development of teacher professionalism which has implications for the low performance of teachers is the factor of teacher welfare. Although government efforts related to teacher welfare have been carried out through the provision of professional allowances or teacher certification, this aspect of welfare is especially the gap in allowances for honorary teachers who

are still far from the appropriate category and below the minimum salary. Likewise, the welfare of teachers in remote areas is still one of the factors affecting teacher performance.

One important aspect that determines the quality of education is the teacher factor. So, efforts to improve teacher professionalism are closely related to efforts to improve the quality of education. Empowering teachers must be one of the priorities for reform and improving the quality of education at all types and levels of education (Hadi, 2016). The goals and ideals of the free learning policy will be successful if the government can pay attention to the aspects of improving the quality of education and increasing the professionalism of teachers as two currencies because the development of teacher professionalism in carrying out their professional duties is one of the most important factors in improving the quality of education (Budi Wiyono & Supriyanto, 2014). Teachers should always be able to improve their knowledge and skills in carrying out their professional duties.

Efforts to improve (reform) the education sector should start from improving the quality of teachers. And the first step in efforts to improve the field of education is starting from improving the personal interpretive framework (Ham & Dekkers, 2019). Teacher's interpretation is a set of cognitions, mental representations that serve as a lens for teachers to view their professional work and provide meaning and action in carrying out teacher professional duties. This framework includes teachers' beliefs about their self-image, work motivation, future perspectives, and their perspectives on their professional duties (Fransson et al., 2019). Thus improving the quality of education must be in line with efforts to develop or increase the professional ability of teachers. In other words, improving the quality of teachers is fundamental and an integral part of efforts to improve the quality and reform of the education sector.

### **Teacher Professionalism Development through Continous Professional Development**

To answer the demands of quality human resource development, a coaching system is needed that supports the professional development of teachers in carrying out their professional duties. In the context of modern social development, the concept of sustainable education is considered a fundamental need for a strategy to improve the quality of education both nationally and globally. Continuous education for teachers is part of the development of professional and pedagogical knowledge for teachers which must be continuously improved, assessing actual issues in the world of education, as well as an effort to develop teacher professional skills in the future effectively and efficiently (Kigozi, 2020; Komorowska, 2016).

The freedom of learning policy needs to be strengthened by a professional development mechanism for teachers through continuous professional development (CPD). The CPD aims to reduce the gap between the actual abilities of teachers today and the needs of the times that are the demands of teacher professional development needs (Kemendikbud, 2018). The CPD program is needed so that teachers can improve their abilities, especially in making learning innovations. Through innovative learning, students are expected to have more knowledge and better skills.

Professional development is a pattern of continuous development for teachers who start from those without reliable competence to become reliable teachers in schools (Kyndt et al., 2016; Makovec, 2018). Therefore, professional development for teachers through the CPD program is necessary for the successful implementation of the freedom of learning policy as an effort to improve the quality and quality of education. The government, in this case, the Indonesian ministry of education and culture, needs to formulate a CPD program mechanism to improve teacher professionalism in Indonesia. Without a proper and effective CPD mechanism, the implementation of the independent learning policy will only run in place. The grand design of an effective teacher professional development model can be developed in 5 (five) stages, namely: (1) needs analysis, (2) development of development programs, (3) implementation of coaching programs, (4) evaluation of coaching programs, and (5) action continued coaching results (Budi Wiyono & Supriyanto, 2014).

Quality education will be born from quality teachers and professional teachers (Karwowski, 2017). The quality of learning in schools cannot be improved without increasing the quality of teachers. Therefore, an effective sustainable professional development mechanism for teachers is very important for the implementation of the freedom of learning policy in schools. If the freedom of learning ignores the aspects of an effective teacher professionalism enhancement mechanism, the hope for "freedom of thought" for teachers will become a policy that is "far from fire". Teachers who are at the forefront of learning will not be able to generate innovation and creativity, and there will never be effective learning.

Continuous professional development is closely related to the formation of teacher beliefs and behaviors in carrying out their professional duties. Several studies have proven that successful professional development experiences have an impact on improving teacher performance, especially that a large number of teachers around the world are not ready for their profession (Gajda et al., 2017). The implementation of independent learning needs to be accompanied by adjustments to education management policies, both macro and micro, especially in increasing teacher professionalism, such as

developing a national teacher management system that is conducive to spurring the professionalization of teacher positions and developing teacher competencies through professional organizations. The role of the Teacher Working Group and the Subject Teacher Conference needs to be optimized through granting full authority to teacher professional organizations as direct program managers, accompanied by program synchronization between institutions in implementing teacher competency improvement programs.

### **Implementation of Free Learning Policy and Challenges for Primary Education Teachers**

Basic education is a very important level of education because it is at this level of education that the personality and potential of students are formed at its earliest stages. Therefore, the role of primary education teachers is expected to be able to help students to acquire knowledge, skills, and habits that will enable them to learn independently and create values and attitudes that lead to wise behavior, appropriate and responsible decision making, and to respect the rights and obligations of citizens.

The challenge for basic education teachers in the future is the need for awareness of the development of basic education goals that are oriented towards preparing students to become good personal qualities, competitive, innovative, exploring and developing their interests and potential, and preparing them to be able to actively participate in society (Jeřábek et al., 2007). Primary education should be able to guarantee the formation of individuals who can lead happy lives as good people and good citizens (Tan et al., 2018). Of course, this challenge is not easy, because it requires the participation of all parties, especially teachers as the spearhead of learning.

If you look at the facts in the field, one of the challenges in implementing the freedom of learning policy in schools, especially in primary schools, is the inadequate quality of the professionalism of primary school teachers. The rapid development of information technology today requires teachers to be responsive, innovative, and creative in the use of information technology in learning. In schools, in general, various media and learning technologies are available, but teachers have not been able to use them for optimal learning purposes. Many research results indicate that one of the reasons is that teachers cannot utilize this technology optimally because they have not been trained effectively (Ndongfack, 2015). The professionalism of teachers in mastering subject matter can have a positive effect on learning achievement (Bakar, 2018).

A study conducted on 313 primary school teachers (Seferoglu & Seferoglu, 2001) revealed that in general primary school teachers agree on the importance of getting opportunities to improve their teaching skills and knowledge, but teachers do not get the professional help they need through the training activities they participate in. Teachers generally agree that participating in development training activities helps teachers to gather and share experiences and provides them with opportunities to improve their teaching knowledge and skills. However, they cannot participate in development activities optimally and they do not have the opportunity to choose or participate in development programs that are relevant to teacher needs.

Another study conducted by Suharyadi (2019) in six provinces in Indonesia (East Java, West Java, Lampung, East Kalimantan, South Sumatra, and East Papua) shows that teacher training receives training materials emphasizes receptive theory rather than direct practice resulting in a lack of internalization of training materials. The modeling provided by training instructors is also lacking so that teachers do not know how to implement the results of the training and the time or length of training is still very limited.

Based on the results of the studies above, the implementation of the freedom of learning policy also needs to be supported by the facilitation of freedom teacher training, which is to give teachers the freedom to choose and participate in training according to the priority scale of teacher capacity building needs. The professional development of basic education teachers must be adapted to the needs or problems faced by teachers today. Therefore, the implementation of the freedom of learning policy needs to be supported by the revitalization of the professional development program for primary school teachers by developing a professional teacher management system. The freedom of learning policy will be successful if it is supported by efforts from the government to revitalize teacher professionalism by compiling a professional teacher management system that is more directed at developing teacher competence in more freedom, directed, the orderly and sustainable manner by involving and empowering existing teacher professional organizations.

Based on the results of this study, so that the implementation of the freedom of learning policy can be achieved by its objectives of improving the quality of education and the quality of learning, the government needs to develop a system of conducive teacher management and a national map of teacher professional capacity to spur the professionalization of teacher positions. For the implementation of the freedom of learning policy to be carried out optimally by teachers, the professional teacher management system needs to be supported by the government's efforts to revitalize the teacher professional development program in a sustainable manner and be supported by the facilitation of freedom teacher

training, namely giving teachers the freedom to choose and participate in training according to priority scales teacher capacity building needs.

### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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