

The Politics of Islamic Education and the Independent Curriculum as an Effort to Integrate Islamic Values in the National Education System.

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Abstract: Islamic education in Indonesia has historically been subject to the dynamic shifts in policy that have characterized the nation's political landscape. One of the most recent policies impacting Islamic education is the Merdeka Curriculum, which provides schools and teachers with greater autonomy to design learning experiences that are more contextualized. However, within this increasingly open system, a significant challenge arises in ensuring that Islamic values remain an inseparable part of the national education system. This study employs a qualitative method, incorporating a literature review and policy analysis approach to understand the dynamics of Islamic education politics within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. A comprehensive review of relevant literature was conducted, encompassing journals, academic books, government policy documents, and related research reports. These materials were then subjected to a meticulous analysis using both descriptive-qualitative analysis and political analysis. The objective of this analysis was to assess the extent to which Islamic education has been integrated into the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum provides a significant opportunity for Islamic education to remain relevant in contemporary times. However, challenges persist, such as the lack of explicit regulations on integrating Islamic values, limited resources, and teachers' readiness to implement these concepts. It is imperative to establish a collaborative relationship between the government, educators, and Islamic educational institutions to ensure the continued prominence of Islamic education within the national education system.

Keywords: Islamic Education Politics, Merdeka Curriculum, Integration of Islamic Values, Education Policy, National Education.

Abstrak: Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia selalu berada dalam pusaran dinamika kebijakan yang terus berkembang. Salah satu kebijakan terbaru yang mempengaruhi pendidikan Islam adalah Kurikulum Merdeka, yang menawarkan fleksibilitas bagi sekolah dan guru dalam mendesain pembelajaran yang lebih kontekstual. Namun, dalam sistem yang semakin terbuka ini, tantangan besar muncul dalam memastikan nilai-nilai Islam tetap menjadi bagian yang tidak terpisahkan dari pendidikan nasional. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi literatur dan analisis kebijakan untuk memahami dinamika politik pendidikan Islam dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka. Data diperoleh dari jurnal, buku akademik, dokumen kebijakan pemerintah, serta laporan penelitian terkait, yang dianalisis secara deskriptif-kualitatif dan analisa politik guna mengevaluasi sejauh mana pendidikan Islam telah diakomodasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kurikulum Merdeka membuka peluang besar bagi pendidikan Islam untuk tetap relevan dengan perkembangan zaman, tetapi

masih terdapat tantangan seperti kurangnya regulasi eksplisit terkait integrasi nilai-nilai Islam, keterbatasan sumber daya, serta kesiapan guru dalam menerapkan konsep ini. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan sinergi antara pemerintah, pendidik, dan lembaga pendidikan Islam agar pendidikan Islam tetap memiliki tempat yang kuat dalam sistem pendidikan nasional.

Kata Kunci: *Politik Pendidikan Islam, Kurikulum Merdeka, Integrasi Nilai Islam, Kebijakan Pendidikan, Pendidikan Nasional.*

1. Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia has historically been an integral component of the national education system, even predating the country's independence. From the era of conventional pesantren to the incorporation of religious education in formal schools, the political dynamics of Islamic education exhibit a robust dialectic between Islamic values and the trajectory of state policy. In this context, any alteration in national education policy invariably carries profound ramifications for the very existence and orientation of Islamic education. The Merdeka Curriculum, a recent educational paradigm that prioritizes flexibility, school autonomy, and contextual learning, represents a significant policy that presents both challenges and opportunities for Islamic education. This paradigm offers a strategic and substantial framework within which Islamic educational institutions can adapt and evolve.¹

The Merdeka Curriculum emerged because of the competency-based education reform and the promotion of learning independence. In practice, this curriculum provides educators and students with greater autonomy to explore learning according to their individual needs and potential.² However, this system also poses a fundamental question: to what extent can Islamic values be consistently integrated into an increasingly open and secular curriculum? This challenge is not only technical, such as learning or evaluation methods, but also ideological, as it touches on aspects of a different educational worldview.³

Islamic education possesses value roots that are not only moral and spiritual, but also epistemological. The notion of knowledge within the Islamic context is inextricably linked to human relationships with God (*habl min Allah*) and with fellow humans (*habl min al-nas*). Consequently, Islamic education within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum entails more than a mere adjustment to learning format; it necessitates a comprehensive paradigm integration.⁴ This is a significant challenge for Islamic religious education (PAI) teachers, policymakers, and Islamic education institutions in ensuring that Islamic values remain a central element in the national education framework.⁵

¹ M. Huda dan S. Wahyuni, *Perkembangan Pendidikan Islam dalam Sistem Pendidikan Nasional di Indonesia*, Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Nusantara 10, no. 1 (2022): 45–58.

² Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, *Pedoman Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka untuk Satuan Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Kemdikbud, 2022).

³ R. Hassan dan Z. Malik, *Islamic Education in the Modern Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities*, Journal of Islamic Studies 18, no. 2 (2023): 110–125.

⁴ A. Fathurohim, *Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Islam*, Jurnal Asy-Syukriyyah 24, no. 2 (2023): 184–192, <https://doi.org/10.36769/asy.v24i2.418>.

⁵ D. Rahmawati dan M. Haris, *Kompetensi Guru PAI dalam Era Digital: Studi Kasus Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka*, Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan Islam 6, no. 2 (2024): 77–89.

This challenge is further compounded by a regulatory imbalance between public schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECT) and madrasahs overseen by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.⁶ The Merdeka curriculum, developed by the Ministry of Education (MoEC), does not necessarily align with the more structured religious education system found in madrasahs. This phenomenon gives rise to substantial disparities in the way the integration of Islamic values is executed in the field.⁷

In response to these conditions, the present paper aims to critically analyze the political dynamics of Islamic education in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Utilizing a qualitative approach founded upon a comprehensive review of the extant literature as well as a meticulous policy analysis, this study will delve into the challenges and opportunities inherent to the integration of Islamic values into an education system that is becoming increasingly flexible. The objective is to devise specific strategies that Islamic education stakeholders can implement to preserve the pertinence and fortitude of Islamic values in a period of evolving education policies.⁸

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative approach, incorporating literature study and policy analysis methods, to explore the political dynamics of Islamic education in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The qualitative approach was selected because it has the capacity to unveil the latent meanings, interpretations, and power dynamics inherent in educational policy, particularly in the context of integrating Islamic values into the national education system, which is currently undergoing a period of reform.⁹

The data were obtained through the collection of secondary sources, including SINTA-indexed academic journals, scientific books, official government policy documents, and related research reports relevant to the topic.¹⁰ The purposive sampling technique is employed to select documents that demonstrate a high degree of relevance and depth of analysis on the issue of integration of Islamic education and the Merdeka Curriculum. This methodological framework enables researchers to meticulously select data that is deemed to be the most representative and informative.¹¹

The analysis was executed through a combination of a descriptive-qualitative method and a policy analysis approach. Descriptive analysis is employed to systematically describe the phenomenon under study, while policy analysis is used to evaluate policy content, implementation implications, and discursive space for Islamic education in the Merdeka

⁶ M. Hodidin, *Dinamika Politik Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia: Kajian Kebijakan dan Implementasinya*, Jurnal Pendidikan Islam 8, no. 1 (2020): 22–35.

⁷ U. H. Salsabila et al., Pengaruh Perkembangan Teknologi terhadap Pendidikan Islam, *Journal on Education* 5, no. 2 (2023): 3268–3275.

⁸ S. A. Setiawan, Tantangan Guru PAI dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia, *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 3, no. 1 (2024): 49–63

⁹ Norman K. Denzin dan Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018), 12–16.

¹⁰ Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, *Pedoman Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka untuk Satuan Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Kemdikbud, 2022).

¹¹ Sharan B. Merriam dan Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*, 4th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2016), 97–99.

Curriculum.¹² In this process, researchers examine how national education policies address or exclude Islamic elements in the structure and learning process.

To enhance the validity of the data, a process of triangulation was employed by comparing findings from multiple sources of literature, including academic studies, government policies, and previous research results.¹³ The objective of this triangulation is to ensure the integrity of the results of the analysis, ensuring that they are not subject to bias and can accurately represent the factual conditions and diverse perspectives involved. The results of this analysis are expected to contribute to the political discourse of contemporary Islamic education as well as concrete recommendations for policymakers and practitioners of Islamic education.¹⁴

3. Results and Discussion

Political Dynamics of Islamic Education in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Islamic education in Indonesia has gained legitimacy in the national education system through various policy products, one of which is Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System. Article 3 of the law stipulates that the objective of national education is to cultivate the potential of students to become individuals who are devout and committed to God Almighty, possess a noble character, are in good health, are well-informed, are capable, creative, independent, and evolve into democratic and responsible citizens.¹⁵ This formulation demonstrates that Islamic education, with all its values, occupies a significant position in the formation of national character.

However, in its implementation, Islamic education cannot be separated from the ever-evolving changes in national education policy. A recent policy that merits particular attention is the Merdeka Curriculum. This initiative, despite its promise of flexibility and autonomy in learning, presents significant challenges to the sustainability of Islamic substance in education. The absence of explicit guidelines concerning the integration of Islamic values into exploratory and interdisciplinary learning methodologies has given rise to concerns regarding the marginalization of Islamic education, particularly within public educational institutions that do not implement a distinct religious curriculum.¹⁶

The major transformation in the national education system from a standards-based curriculum to a more flexible, personalized, and competency-individualized approach also has serious implications for the structure of Islamic learning. The Merdeka curriculum is designed to motivate students to select learning pathways aligned with their interests and aptitudes. Conversely, Islamic education is characterized by a systematic and normative approach, necessitating the comprehensive integration and in-depth exploration of creed, sharia, and morals. However, if not anticipated judiciously, the autonomy afforded by the

¹² William N. Dunn, *Public Policy Analysis: An Introduction*, 5th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2018), 139–148.

¹³ John W. Creswell dan J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2018), 259–261.

¹⁴ A. Fathurohim, Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Islam, *Jurnal Asy-Syukriyyah* 24, no. 2 (2023): 184–192, <https://doi.org/10.36769/asy.v24i2.418>.

¹⁵ Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional.

¹⁶ M. Hoddin, Dinamika Politik Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia: Kajian Kebijakan dan Implementasinya, *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2020): 22–35.

Merdeka Curriculum may result in a diminution of the rigor of Islamic instruction and a dilution of the distinct identity of Islamic education.¹⁷

Furthermore, madrasahs and Islamic schools are confronted with the imperative to modify their conventional learning methodologies, rendering them more applicable and multidisciplinary in nature, and adopting a project-based approach. Islamic education, which historically prioritized memorization, traditional book studies, and the inculcation of Islamic morals, must undergo a transformation into active, participatory, and contextualized learning environments.¹⁸ However, it must be acknowledged that not all Islamic institutions possess the necessary resources to implement this change in an optimal manner.

The issue of institutional dualism between the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), which regulates public schools, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which oversees madrasahs, also widens the policy gap. The disparity in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum between the two entities gives rise to discrepancies in the preparedness of institutions and educators. Numerous madrasahs encounter constraints in the adaptation of their curricula, primarily due to limitations in available resources and a paucity of professional development opportunities.¹⁹

Additionally, the political dynamics that shape Islamic education policy are of considerable importance. Regime changes and political agendas frequently precipitate alterations in education policy priorities, including those pertaining to the alignment of educational institutions with Islamic education institutions. There have been periods when madrasah and pesantren have received strong affirmation, but there have also been times when the direction of national policy has tended to be secular and has paid less attention to the needs of Islamic value-based education.²⁰ Consequently, Islamic education must be adaptable while retaining its critical role in preserving the integrity of its values.

In the context of increasingly massive globalization and secularization, Islamic education functions not only as a conduit for the dissemination of knowledge, but also as a bastion for the cultivation of students' moral and spiritual identity. Consequently, the Merdeka Curriculum, which exhibits the capacity to diminish the proportion of Islamic religious education in public schools, necessitates a response that is not merely an adaptation but rather one that fortifies the existing framework.²¹

However, the Merdeka Curriculum also creates opportunities for innovation in Islamic learning that is more contextual and applicable. The utilization of experiential learning models has emerged as a pivotal strategy in the process of grounding Islamic teachings within the context of social life. This opportunity manifests in the context of educational initiatives

¹⁷ R. Hassan dan Z. Malik, *Islamic Education in the Modern Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities*, Journal of Islamic Studies 18, no. 2 (2023): 110–125.

¹⁸ S. A. Setiawan, Tantangan Guru PAI dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia, *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 3, no. 1 (2024): 49–63, <http://ejournal.pgmi-syekhjangkung.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-JIPMI>.

¹⁹ S. A. Setiawan, Tantangan Guru PAI dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia, *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 3, no. 1 (2024): 49–63, <http://ejournal.pgmi-syekhjangkung.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-JIPMI>.

²⁰ S. A. Zazkia dan T. Hamami, *Evaluasi Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam di Tengah Dinamika Politik Pendidikan di Indonesia*, *At-Ta'dib: Jurnal Ilmiah Prodi Pendidikan Agama Islam* 13, no. 1 (2021): 82–93, <https://doi.org/10.47498/tadib.v13i01.524>.

²¹ A. Fathurohim, *Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Islam*, *Jurnal Asy-Syukriyyah* 24, no. 2 (2023): 184–192, <https://doi.org/10.36769/asy.v24i2.418>.

that incorporate Sharia economic practices or the execution of moral projects that promote social campaigns grounded in Islamic values.²²

As a strategic step, synergies between the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Culture, Islamic education institutions, and teachers must be systematically built to develop a curriculum that is inclusive, relevant, and value based. The urgent realization of two objectives is imperative: first, the enhancement of PAI teacher resources; and second, the implementation of affirmative policies that support the position of Islamic education in the Free Curriculum era.²³

Independent Curriculum and the Perspective of Islamic Education Philosophy

In the context of Islamic education philosophy, the fundamental objective of education is to cultivate a paradigm of a perfect human being, one who is not only intellectually superior but also possesses a profound faith and a noble character.²⁴ In Islam, education is not merely regarded as a transmission of knowledge; rather, it is also understood as a means of character development and spiritual refinement. Within this paradigm, education serves as a conduit for piety and social piety, rather than being confined to the pursuit of academic achievement.

The Merdeka Curriculum, a program initiated and promulgated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, has precipitated a substantial transformation in the national learning structure. The program is characterized by its adaptability, emphasis on project-based learning, and the personalization of learning pathways.²⁵ However, in the context of Islamic education, a significant challenge emerges: how can the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which are oriented towards individual freedom and autonomy, be aligned with the principles of values and norms in Islamic education philosophy?

The philosophy of Islamic education underscores the harmony between religious and worldly sciences, as well as the synergy between the intellectual and moral dimensions in the formation of students' personalities.²⁶ This approach aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which places a significant emphasis on character development. However, this integration must be done selectively and based on values, so as to avoid contradictions between freedom of thought and the principles of Sharia.

The Merdeka curriculum prioritizes personalised learning according to the interests and potential of students. In Islam, this is consistent with the principle of human nature, which asserts that individuals are endowed with distinct capabilities that must be cultivated to their

²² U. H. Salsabila et al., Pengaruh Perkembangan Teknologi terhadap Pendidikan Islam, *Journal on Education* 5, no. 2 (2023): 3268–3275.

²³ D. Rahmawati dan M. Haris, Kompetensi Guru PAI dalam Era Digital: Studi Kasus Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, *Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2024): 77–89.

²⁴ A. Fathurohim, *Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Perspektif Filsafat Pendidikan Islam*, *Jurnal Asy-Syukriyah* 24, no. 2 (2023): 184–192, <https://doi.org/10.36769/asy.v24i2.418>.

²⁵ Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, *Pedoman Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka untuk Satuan Pendidikan* (Jakarta: Kemdikbud, 2022).

²⁶ R. Hassan dan Z. Malik, Islamic Education in the Modern Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2023): 110–125.

fullest potential.²⁷ Indeed, in the case of QS, this phenomenon is particularly pronounced. In verse 4 of At-Tin, Allah asserts that humans were created in the optimal form (*ahsani taqwīm*), thereby establishing the spiritual foundation upon which education must operate to ascertain students' full potential.²⁸ However, within the framework of Islamic education, this freedom must be constrained by a system of guided values, rather than being unrestrained.

A persistent challenge in the field is the dichotomy between religious and general sciences. Islamic education, however, eschews this dichotomy, embracing instead an integrative-holistic paradigm in which all knowledge is positioned within the framework of *tawhid*. However, in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, there is a tendency to prioritize technical competencies such as literacy, numeracy, and science, while aspects of spirituality and morality are often regarded as ancillary.²⁹ This is a grave challenge that must be met to ensure that the "spirit" of Islamic education is not reduced to mere normative lessons that are divorced from real life.

The project-based learning model that characterizes the Merdeka Curriculum can, in fact, serve as an effective means to implement Islamic values in a contextual manner. Projects such as Sharia economic simulations, Islamic ethics campaigns on social media, or community service based on Islamic values can be concrete examples of transformative education that aligns with the mission of Islamic *tarbiyah*.³⁰ However, it must be noted that the majority of Islamic schools are not adequately prepared to adopt this approach, either in terms of methodology or infrastructure.

Another challenge that arises is the issue of freedom of thought. The Merdeka curriculum is predicated on three fundamental principles: exploration, critical thinking, and open dialogue. In Islamic philosophy, the principle of freedom of thought is upheld, yet it is not considered absolute.³¹ In Islam, the concept of freedom is inherently intertwined with theological and moral responsibility. Consequently, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers assume a pivotal role as facilitators of directed freedom. These institutions do not merely facilitate the transmission of religious knowledge; they also assume the role of guardians of value orientation in the context of the new curriculum, which fosters intellectual freedom.

The Islamic educational philosophy places significant emphasis on the role of morals as the ultimate objective of the educational process. The Merdeka curriculum, which places significant emphasis on character strengthening, frequently commits the fallacy of adopting abstract, secular definitions of character. In Islamic education, moral development must be carried out contextually through spirituality and exemplary approaches. Therefore, it is

²⁷ S. A. Setiawan, Tantangan Guru PAI dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia, *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 3, no. 1 (2024): 49–63, <http://ejournal.pgmi-syekhjangkung.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-JIPMI>.

²⁸ Al-Qur'an, QS. At-Tin: 4.

²⁹ M. Hodin, *Dinamika Politik Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia: Kajian Kebijakan dan Implementasinya*, *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2020): 22–35.

³⁰ U. H. Salsabila et al., Pengaruh Perkembangan Teknologi terhadap Pendidikan Islam, *Journal on Education* 5, no. 2 (2023): 3268–3275.

³¹ D. Rahmawati dan M. Haris, Kompetensi Guru PAI dalam Era Digital: Studi Kasus Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, *Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2024): 77–89.

imperative to fortify strategies such as Islamic mentoring, introspective journaling, and the incorporation of social dakwah into learning projects.³²

Moreover, Islamic education philosophy underscores the significance of community within the educational framework. In the pesantren tradition, education is characterized by a close relationship between teachers and students. This approach can be adapted in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum by strengthening the role of mosques, families, and Islamic communities in the learning process. Digital technology can also be utilized to establish a collaborative learning ecosystem grounded in Islamic values.³³

Consequently, the Merdeka Curriculum and the Islamic education philosophy do not inherently contradict each other. Instead, the integration of these two elements can be achieved through the overarching principle of personalization of learning, which is anchored in a coherent set of values. Consequently, the necessity arises to devise an educational program that can seamlessly integrate science and morals, employ adaptive yet valuable pedagogical strategies, and train PAI teachers as the primary agents of this transformation. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is poised to serve as a transformative catalyst, not only in terms of its structural overhaul but also in its profound spiritual resonance, which is poised to fortify the foundations of Islamic education in Indonesia.

Islamic Education Teachers' Challenges in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers fulfill a pivotal role in shaping students' religious understanding, moral principles, and character development. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, the role of educators has become increasingly multifaceted. They function not only as instructors who deliver religious instruction, but also as facilitators who assist students in their exploratory and reflective processes to understand the practical applications of Islamic teachings in real-life contexts.³⁴ The transition from a teacher-centered approach to a student-centered learning model necessitates that PAI teachers develop interactive methods that align with the principles of autonomy and freedom of learning.³⁵

One of the most fundamental challenges is how to integrate Islamic values in the context of freedom of thought, which is the main characteristic of the Merdeka Curriculum. Islam places a high value on rational thought and critical analysis, yet these are constrained by the boundaries of faith and Sharia law. Consequently, PAI instructors are expected to demonstrate proficiency in facilitating a learning environment that fosters autonomy in students' moral discourse and inquiry while maintaining a foundation in authoritative and

³² A. Hamzah, Metode Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek dalam Pendidikan Islam: Pendekatan Kurikulum Merdeka, *Islamic Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2023): 95–110.

³³ H. Farhan dan R. Hidayat, *Peran Orang Tua dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pendidikan Agama Islam*, *Journal of Islamic Parenting* 7, no. 2 (2023): 56–72.

³⁴ S. A. Setiawan, Tantangan Guru PAI dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia, *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 3, no. 1 (2024): 49–63, <http://ejournal.pgmi-syekhjangkung.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-JIPMI>.

³⁵ R. Hassan dan Z. Malik, Islamic Education in the Modern Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2023): 110–125.

valid teachings.³⁶ In such cases, pedagogical aptitude and ideological acumen become paramount.

From a methodological perspective, the shift from conventional teaching methods, which emphasize lectures and memorization, to more project-based learning, case studies, and interdisciplinary approaches, continues to encounter significant challenges. A significant number of PAI teachers lack familiarity with active and experiential learning models, a deficiency that may stem from inadequate training or a paucity of digital literacy and learning innovation skills.³⁷ Project-based contextual learning aligns closely with the tenets of Islam; however, the absence of robust technical and methodological support can hinder its effective implementation.

Additionally, the implementation of educational technology in the classroom poses significant challenges. Despite the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on the integration of digital media, such as e-learning, interactive videos, and Islamic applications, the prevailing reality on the ground indicates that a significant number of PAI teachers continue to grapple with technological limitations.³⁸ Conventional teaching methods have been shown to create an imbalance between the needs of the current era and pedagogical readiness. This discrepancy can lead to a decline in student interest and engagement.

The field of learning evaluation has undergone a paradigm shift. In the preceding period, rote-based assessment was the prevailing standard. However, contemporary assessment practices have evolved to prioritize authentic assessment, which reflects the practice of Islamic values in real behavior.³⁹ Project, portfolio, and observation assessments are the prevailing methods, yet their implementation is frequently suboptimal due to the dearth of comprehensive guidelines for educators. This underscores the necessity to revitalize an evaluation system that is more humanistic and transformative.

In addition to technical competence, teachers' mental readiness and professionalism are crucial variables in the success of the Merdeka Curriculum. A significant number of PAI teachers report feelings of discomfort or reluctance to modify teaching methods that have been in place for an extended period.⁴⁰ This resistance can be mitigated through continuous, practice-based training rather than administrative formalities.

The provision of institutional support has been identified as a critical factor in this regard. It is imperative that educational institutions provide technological devices, digital learning resources, and internal policies that support a curriculum based on freedom of learning. The government must also establish explicit regulations and offer incentives for PAI teachers who demonstrate innovation in their pedagogy.⁴¹ It is imperative to devise

³⁶ R. Hassan dan Z. Malik, *Islamic Education in the Modern Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities*, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2023): 110–125.

³⁷ D. Rahmawati dan M. Haris, *Kompetensi Guru PAI dalam Era Digital: Studi Kasus Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka*, *Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (2024): 77–89.

³⁸ U. H. Salsabila et al., *Pengaruh Perkembangan Teknologi terhadap Pendidikan Islam*, *Journal on Education* 5, no. 2 (2023): 3268–3275.

³⁹ A. Nasution, *Evaluasi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Kurikulum Merdeka*, *Jurnal Evaluasi Pendidikan* 9, no. 1 (2023): 30–45.

⁴⁰ A. Hamzah, *Metode Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek dalam Pendidikan Islam: Pendekatan Kurikulum Merdeka*, *Islamic Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2023): 95–110.

⁴¹ H. Farhan dan R. Hidayat, *Peran Orang Tua dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pendidikan Agama Islam*, *Journal of Islamic Parenting* 7, no. 2 (2023): 56–72.

policies that alleviate the administrative burden on teachers and provide them with a space for reflection.

In addressing these challenges, a collaborative approach between teachers can serve as a strategic solution. The accelerated adoption of Merdeka Curriculum methods in Islamic schools can be facilitated by a variety of educational initiatives, including discussion forums, PAI teacher study groups, and internal mentoring programs. Teachers who possess proficiency in project-based learning can provide mentorship to their colleagues in a collegial manner.⁴² This approach has been demonstrated to enhance pedagogical competencies while fostering a sense of professional solidarity.

Evaluation of PAI Curriculum in Merdeka Curriculum

Evaluation constitutes a pivotal component within the educational system, serving to assess the efficacy and attainment of curriculum implementation. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, the evaluation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has become increasingly strategic. This is due to a paradigm shift from structural and cognitive-based learning toward a more flexible, project-based approach that emphasizes character formation. In the past, the evaluation of PAI subjects was predominantly characterized by written tests, memorization of verses, and conceptual understanding of *fiqh*. Nonetheless, the Merdeka Curriculum calls for educators to assess students in a more applied and contextual manner, specifically regarding the implementation of Islamic values in real-life scenarios.

This substantial transformation in the evaluation system is reflected in the use of formative assessment based on projects, portfolios, and observations of religious attitudes. In accordance with the directives stipulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the assessment framework within the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to prioritize the cultivation of students' competencies. This approach diverges from the conventional measurement of content mastery, emphasizing an alternative evaluation paradigm. In the PAI context, this implies that students' success is assessed based on their ability to internalize Islamic teachings and actualize them in social actions.⁴³

For instance, in the context of lessons on *zakat* and *infaq*, PAI instructors may assign students the task of engaging in actual charitable activities. These activities may include the organization of collective alms programs or the implementation of Islamic social campaigns. Subsequently, students are tasked with documenting their experiences through the medium of a reflective journal, which forms a component of the assessment. This experiential evaluation model fosters authentic learning and facilitates students' engagement with the fundamental principles of Islam.

However, the transition from a test-based evaluation paradigm to a character-based assessment framework is not without its challenges. A significant number of PAI teachers continue to adhere to conventional assessment models and encounter challenges in designing suitable project-based assessment instruments. However, it should be noted that not all educational institutions possess the requisite resources or professional development opportunities to effectively implement this innovative evaluation method. These challenges

⁴² M. Hoddin, *Dinamika Politik Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia: Kajian Kebijakan dan Implementasinya*, Jurnal Pendidikan Islam 8, no. 1 (2020): 22–35.

⁴³ A. Nasution, *Model Evaluasi Pembelajaran PAI dalam Kurikulum Merdeka [Evaluation Models for Islamic Religious Education in the Merdeka Curriculum]* (Bandung: Pustaka Edukasi Islam, 2023).

are further compounded in remote regions, where limited human resources and infrastructure continue to present significant obstacles.

The assessment of spiritual competence and Islamic character also poses methodological challenges. The evaluation of attitudes, moral principles, and the internalization of religious values cannot be equated with assessments in exact sciences. The necessity for valid and reliable instruments that are sensitive to students' diverse backgrounds is paramount. Furthermore, it is imperative for educators to acknowledge that character and spirituality are not exclusively conveyed through verbal expression. These qualities frequently manifest in students' daily behaviors that extend beyond the confines of the classroom.⁴⁴

The Merdeka Curriculum calls for a more inclusive and differentiated approach to evaluation. Each student contributes a unique set of experiences and sociocultural backgrounds to the practice of Islamic teachings. Consequently, educators must devise assessments that facilitate authentic interpretation and religious expression. For instance, in the context of Islamic leadership, students can be evaluated based on their participation in Islamic organizational activities or school-based social da'wah projects.

Another salient aspect pertains to the integration of technology within the evaluation system. In the context of the increasing digitalization of education, PAI evaluation can be facilitated through a variety of platforms, including online quizzes, reflective videos, and assessments via Islamic educational applications. These tools have the potential to enhance student engagement and broaden access to learning. Nevertheless, a considerable number of schools and PAI teachers are not adequately prepared with the necessary digital infrastructure and competencies. This has led to the digital divide becoming a pivotal concern in the execution of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The onus of evaluation should not be exclusively shouldered by teachers. The role of parents in evaluating students' character development is of particular importance, given the prevalence of Islamic values within the home environment. Evaluations that engage parents, such as reflective home journals, family interviews, or observations of religious practices outside school, have the potential to enhance the integration of formal and nonformal education.

Nevertheless, the phenomenon of parental involvement is not without its challenges. A significant number of parents encounter constraints in terms of comprehending or allocating sufficient time to facilitate their children's Islamic education. Consequently, educational institutions must implement family education programs that are designed to enhance parental religious literacy and cultivate enhanced evaluative synergy.

To address the challenges, a systemic approach is required. This approach must include the following: - The training of PAI teachers in character- and project-based assessment design - The provision of digital tools and contextual evaluation guidelines - The reinforcement of the role of families and Islamic communities as partners in educational evaluation.

⁴⁴ H. Salsabila, R. Maulana, and N. Azizah, *Digitalisasi Pendidikan Islam dan Tantangannya* [The Digitalization of Islamic Education and Its Challenges] (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Al-Fikr, 2023).

Strategi Integrasi Pendidikan Islam dalam Kurikulum Merdeka

In addressing the various challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, an integrative strategy is required to maintain the relevance of Islamic education while adapting it to the dynamics of the national education system. The Merdeka Curriculum, distinguished by its flexibility and project-based orientation, presents a substantial opportunity for Islamic education to evolve into a more contextual, applicable, and adaptive approach, thereby aligning with contemporary demands. Therefore, the integration strategy of Islamic education must be both normative and technical. This strategy should encompass teacher competency development, innovation in learning processes, the use of digital technology, and inter-institutional collaboration.⁴⁵

Improving the Competence of Islamic Education Teachers

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers play a pivotal role in integrating Islamic values with the Merdeka Curriculum pedagogical approach. The enhancement of pedagogical efficacy ought not to be confined to the mere mastery of Islamic content; it should encompass the utilization of active learning methodologies, constructivist approaches, and the capacity to formulate project-based and character-based assessments.⁴⁶ The Merdeka Curriculum is predicated on an educational approach that prioritizes comprehension, experiential learning, and the practical application of values. These values are congruent with the fundamental mission of Islamic education.

It is imperative that a continuous training program be established for educators to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge in Project-Based Learning (PjBL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and digital technology utilization methods. It is imperative that educators possess the requisite methodological tools to facilitate an interactive, participatory, and contextually relevant learning atmosphere.⁴⁷ Indeed, the ability to competently navigate the digital landscape is an integral component of contemporary pedagogical competencies, particularly in the context of Islamic education. Teachers must possess the capacity to utilize online learning platforms effectively to facilitate the dissemination of knowledge in this domain.

In addition to honing technical skills, it is imperative to furnish educators with an educational psychological approach and cultural sensitivity. This is of particular significance given the wide range of religious affiliations represented by the learners. Competent teachers are defined as those who can establish a connection between Islamic teachings and the unique needs of learners.⁴⁸

The present study aims to explore strategies for enhancing the efficacy of the project-based learning model.

The project-based learning model aligns with the fundamental principles of Islamic education, emphasizing the importance of *'amal ṣāliḥ*, or practical charity, as a tangible expression of faith. In this context, learners are instructed not only to conceptualize the

⁴⁵ A. Nasution, *Evaluasi Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam dalam Kurikulum Merdeka*, Jurnal Evaluasi Pendidikan 9, no. 1 (2023): 30–45.

⁴⁶ D. Rahmawati dan M. Haris, *Kompetensi Guru PAI dalam Era Digital: Studi Kasus Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka*, Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan Islam 6, no. 2 (2024): 77–89.

⁴⁷ M. Hamzah, *Metode Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek dalam Pendidikan Islam: Pendekatan Kurikulum Merdeka*, Islamic Education Journal 11, no. 1 (2023): 95–110.

⁴⁸ K. Prasetyo dan L. Wahyuni, *Psikologi Pendidikan Islam*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2022), 115

values of honesty, responsibility, and social care, but also to apply them in real-life scenarios.⁴⁹ Examples of such initiatives include Islamic economic projects, such as Sharia business simulations, and Islamic social activities, such as alms distribution and productive waqf.

The project-based approach facilitates the internalization of Islamic teachings through experiential learning, introspection, and collaborative work. The educator functions as a facilitator, orchestrating the process rather than serving as the sole repository of knowledge.⁵⁰ This objective aligns with the fundamental principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which prioritizes active, critical, and solution-oriented learning methodologies.

However, the successful implementation of this approach necessitates the establishment of a support system, encompassing teacher training, project resources, and flexibility in time and curriculum. Absent this component, the implementation of PjBL in madrasah or Islamic schools will encounter significant challenges in attaining optimal outcomes.

Utilisation of Digital Learning Resources

Digital transformation in education is an unavoidable reality. Islamic education must utilise this progress to enrich learning resources and revive the spirit of Islamic literacy in the digital era. Various online platforms such as digital Qur'an, interactive videos, Islamic history animations, and gamification-based educational applications can be interesting and educational alternatives.

By utilising technology, teachers can package PAI materials in a more interesting, interactive manner, and in accordance with the learning style of the digital generation.⁵¹ Documentary videos on the history of the Prophet, daily applications of *fiqh*, and online discussion forums on morals and Sufism can be integrated into the learning process.

However, there is still a gap in access to and mastery of technology among Islamic teachers and schools, especially in remote areas. Therefore, digital integration strategies must be accompanied by affirmative policies, intensive training, as well as the provision of basic infrastructure to ensure equitable access.

Collaboration between Educational Institutions and Government

The comprehensive integration of Islamic education within the Merdeka Curriculum is an imperative that cannot be achieved in a piecemeal fashion. Multi-stakeholder collaboration is imperative among the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Islamic schools, pesantren, universities, and Islamic community organizations.⁵² This collaboration can take the form of adaptive curriculum development, innovative panellations on Islamic pedagogy, and the establishment of PAI teacher mentoring networks.

Islamic universities have the capacity to develop research-based modules and training, while pesantren and mosques can support the strengthening of students' Islamic character

⁴⁹ H. Farhan dan R. Hidayat, Inovasi Pembelajaran Islam Berbasis Proyek di Sekolah Menengah, *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Kontemporer* 7, no. 1 (2023): 45–61.

⁵⁰ M. Hodidin, *Dinamika Politik Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia: Kajian Kebijakan dan Implementasinya*, *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 1 (2020): 22–35.

⁵¹ F. Mulyadi dan I. Santosa, Literasi Digital dalam Pendidikan Agama Islam, *Jurnal Transformasi Pendidikan Islam* 10, no. 3 (2023): 180–196.

⁵² R. Hassan dan Z. Malik, Islamic Education in the Modern Curriculum: Challenges and Opportunities, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 18, no. 2 (2023): 110–125.

outside of school hours. Moreover, community-based mentoring programs can serve as a medium for the contextualization of Islamic values.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic education is not merely a technical curriculum issue; it also intersects with the political realm of educational values and ideologies. The Merdeka Curriculum is characterized by an emancipatory spirit that aims to liberate students from the constraints of conventional learning methods. This pedagogical approach fosters the realization of each individual's unique potential, challenging students to think beyond the boundaries of the status quo. Conversely, Islamic education is characterized by a tradition of transcendental values that are regarded as normative and universal, accompanied by an ethical system that is distinct from other ethical frameworks. The central inquiry of this study is as follows: *It is imperative to ascertain whether these two paradigms are mutually exclusive or whether they can be utilized in conjunction.*

A thorough examination reveals a notable conceptual convergence between the Merdeka Curriculum and Islamic education, underscoring a mutual recognition of the significance of character development, meaningful learning, and the holistic formation of the individual (*insān kāmīl*). However, a point of tension arises when the flexibility in the Merdeka Curriculum is considered to have the potential to shift the normative authority of Islamic teachings in the education system. Some observers have expressed concerns that the religious character of Islamic values may become compromised within a curriculum framework that is excessively malleable and oriented towards global competence, lacking a robust religious foundation.⁵³

However, this concern can be addressed through an integrative approach. In the context of Islamic education philosophy, as articulated by Syed Naquib al-Attas, education is conceptualized as a process of *ta'dīb*—the formation of adab, rather than merely the accumulation of knowledge.⁵⁴ Consequently, Islamic values are not merely the subject matter taught, but rather, they become the epistemological framework that organizes and evaluates the entire learning experience. The significant contribution of Islamic education to the enrichment of the Merdeka Curriculum is evident in its approach to innovation. Rather than rejecting novel ideas, Islamic education employs an epistemological and practical Islamization process, integrating new concepts into the existing framework.

This discussion also demonstrates that the politics of Islamic education is insufficient as a strategy of adaptation to state policies; rather, it must be a cultural and intellectual project that is critical, creative, and transformational. Islamic education should be regarded not only as a complement to the national system, but also as an active participant in shaping the direction of national education, drawing upon local wisdom, values, and divine transcendence.⁵⁵ In this manner, the incorporation of Islamic education within the Merdeka Curriculum does not signify a mere policy compromise; rather, it presents a valuable opportunity to cultivate a devout, informed, and civilized Indonesian society.

⁵³ A. Hasyim, Relasi Kurikulum Nasional dan Pendidikan Islam di Indonesia, *Jurnal Filsafat Pendidikan Islam* 14, no. 2 (2022): 98–113.

⁵⁴ Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, *The Concept of Education in Islam: A Framework for an Islamic Philosophy of Education* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 1999), 17–23.

⁵⁵ Zainal Abidin Bagir, *Pendidikan Islam dan Tantangan Keindonesiaan*, *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan* 19, no. 3 (2023): 205–219.

4. Conclusion

Islamic education in Indonesia plays a strategic role in shaping a religious and civilized national character. The advent of the Merdeka Curriculum, a reform in national education policy, has introduced a paradigm shift by emphasizing flexibility, personalized learning, and character development. This shift presents both significant opportunities and challenges for Islamic education. The findings discussed in this article demonstrate that the flexibility offered by the curriculum can serve as a strategic space for Islamic education to adapt and grow, if the integration of Islamic values is carried out systematically and without compromise.

First, the political dynamics surrounding Islamic education necessitate the establishment of clear regulations that ensure the continuity of Islamic content within the national education system. Despite the formal legitimization of Islamic education within educational policy, it remains within the stream of state policy that is characterized by its secular nature. Therefore, it is imperative to substantiate the position of Islamic education as an integral component of national development through the fortification of regulations, curricula, and affirmative policies that ensure the autonomy of Islamic values within the framework of national education.

Secondly, from a philosophical perspective, there is a point of convergence between the principles of Islamic education and the direction of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in aspects related to character development, ethics (*adab*), and the balance between worldly and spiritual knowledge. However, this integration necessitates epistemological prudence to ensure that intellectual freedom does not deviate from the established boundaries of Islamic creed and law. Islamic education must find a way to harmonize intellectual freedom with a framework of transcendental values, thereby enabling students to become intellectually competent as well as spiritually and morally mature.

Thirdly, the role of Islamic religious education (PAI) teachers is becoming increasingly complex within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers are expected not only to demonstrate mastery of Islamic content, but also to exhibit pedagogical competencies that are adaptable to project-based learning, technology integration, and personalized approaches. This underscores the necessity for ongoing training and substantial institutional support to ensure that PAI teachers are not left behind in the ongoing educational transformation.

Fourthly, the evaluation system in Islamic religious education is undergoing a significant paradigm shift. The shift is from merely assessing cognitive aspects to implementing holistic assessments that emphasize character and the internalization of Islamic values. Nevertheless, challenges emerge in the objectivity of evaluating students' character and spirituality. Consequently, the development of comprehensive and valid evaluation instruments is imperative. The involvement of parents and the broader community becomes crucial in bridging the gap between the school environment and students' lived reality.

Fifthly, the strategy for integrating Islamic education into the Merdeka Curriculum must be systemic and collaborative. The enhancement of teacher competencies, the strengthening of project-based learning, the utilization of Islamic digital technologies, and the fostering of synergy between the government, Islamic schools, and the Muslim community are pivotal to success. If implemented consistently and measurably, Islamic education will not only survive within the dynamic national education system but also emerge as an ethical and spiritual force in the development of national character.

Consequently, Islamic education within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum is not merely adaptive to policy changes; rather, it is proactive in shaping the direction of education, which is rooted in divine values and Indonesian identity. This article makes a significant contribution to the ongoing discourse on educational reform by underscoring the imperative of preserving the continuity of Islamic values as the foundational principles that serve as the bedrock for the development of national ethics, character, and integrity.

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