

## **THE ROLE OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ISLAMIC LEARNING IN SCHOOLS**

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### **ABSTRAK**

*Kurikulum Merdeka merupakan kurikulum baru yang diperkenalkan oleh pemerintah Indonesia, sehingga beberapa dekade ini penelitian tentang Kurikulum Merdeka sangat menarik untuk dilakukan. Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif dengan jenis library research, dimana obyek kajian yang relevan diperoleh melalui data pustaka. Sumber data dalam penelitian ini diperoleh melalui berbagai informasi kepustakaan, seperti buku, jurnal nasional, dan jurnal Internasional. Teknik analisis data dilakukan dengan analisis isi, dimana data yang telah diperoleh diidentifikasi berdasarkan objektivitas dan sistematis, dari data yang telah diidentifikasi kemudian peneliti melakukan penarikan kesimpulan. Analisis isi dilakukan oleh peneliti untuk memaparkan data dan menyimpulkan hasil analisis data yang diperoleh. Hasil temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa: 1) konsep dasar Kurikulum Merdeka mengandung banyak makna yang begitu mendalam; 2) rasionalisasi pemberlakuan Kurikulum Merdeka tidak terlepas dari sejarah tragedi besar Covid-19, sehingga kurikulum ini dirancang untuk memulihkan kualitas pendidikan di Indonesia; 3) Kurikulum Merdeka berperan dalam meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran agama Islam di sekolah, meskipun peran yang diberikan Kurikulum Merdeka belum berdampak secara maksimal, namun Kurikulum Merdeka memberikan peran secara perlahan dan berkelanjutan.*

**Kata Kunci:** Kurikulum Merdeka; Kualitas pembelajaran agama Islam; Pendidikan Islam

### **ABSTRACT**

The Merdeka Curriculum is a new curriculum introduced by the Indonesian government, so in the past few decades, research on the Merdeka Curriculum has been exciting. This research is qualitative research with the type of library research, where the relevant study objects are obtained through library data. The data sources in this research were obtained through various library information, such as books, national journals, and international journals. The data analysis technique is carried out using content analysis, where the data obtained is identified based on objectivity and systematicity; the researcher then concludes from the data that has been identified. Researchers carried out content analysis to explain the data and conclude the results of the data analysis obtained. The findings of this research show that 1) the basic concept of the Independent Curriculum contains many deep meanings; 2) rationalization for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum cannot be separated from the history of the great tragedy of Covid-19 so that this curriculum is

designed to restore the quality of education in Indonesia; 3) The Merdeka Curriculum plays a role in improving the quality of Islamic learning in schools, although the role given by the Merdeka Curriculum has not had maximum impact, the Merdeka Curriculum provides its role slowly and continuously.

**Keywords:** Merdeka Curriculum; Quality of Islamic Learning; Islamic Education

### **A. Introduction**

Every country has experienced curriculum changes, which are always adapted to the rapid developments of the times, and this is the case with Indonesia (Ibad, Oktori, Wahidah, & Prasetyo, 2023, p. 164). The Curriculum in Indonesia has undergone many changes because curriculum changes will improve the quality of education in Indonesia (Zami & Hafizh, 2023, p. 171). In the 2022/2023 academic year, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, formulated and established the Independent Learning Curriculum so that it can be implemented by educational institutions, especially for educational institutions that focus on the process of strengthening student competencies, such as Islamic-based educational institutions. The Independent Curriculum provides many benefits for education in Indonesia, one of which is providing flexibility for teachers in the learning process so that the learning process

can be adjusted to the needs and interests of students (RI, 2022).

The existence of the Independent Curriculum cannot be avoided because this Curriculum has a very significant role in the world of education (Halil et al., 2024, p. 961). The Indonesian government's establishment of the Independent Curriculum is used to restore the quality of education, which has long experienced a learning crisis (Nurani, Anggraini, Misiyanto, & Mulia, 2022, p. 2). This learning crisis certainly impacts lagging behind the development of knowledge and management in Indonesian educational institutions, including Islamic ones (Daulay & Dalimunthe, 2021; Zami & Hafizh, 2023). Therefore, Indonesia implemented the Merdeka Curriculum as a new curriculum development to help stimulate the character development process of students, such as reading, arithmetic, and so on (Yoto et al., 2024, p. 2).

The Merdeka Curriculum provides significant progress in the

world of Islamic education because the implementation of this Curriculum is considered capable of providing flexibility for Islamic education institutions to develop curricula according to the needs and interests of students, especially in preparing the development of Islamic religious education curricula in schools and madrasas so that This can equip students with various skills to face the rapid growth of the times (Wasehudin, Rohman, Wajdi, & Marwan, 2023, p. 256).

Research related to the Merdeka Curriculum and Islamic religious education in recent decades has been carried out by several previous studies, such as: *First*, Wardani, et al. (2023), which shows that the Merdeka Curriculum implemented in elementary schools is incremental and is considered capable of helping improve the quality of learning that was lagging in preparing the golden generation of 2045 (H. K. Wardani, Sujarwo, Rakhmawati, & Cahyandaru, 2023, p. 513). *Second*, Umar, et al. (2023), show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has a meaningful relationship with teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies. Therefore, this research emphasizes increasing

teacher pedagogical and professional competence (Umar, Ockta, & Mardesia, 2023, p. 3325). *Third*, Qolbiyah, (2022), shows that the Independent Curriculum applied in PAI learning can be carried out using the Contextual Teaching and Learning (CTL) method, where the teacher prepares the required teaching materials and is innovative (Qolbiyah, 2022). *Fourth*, Amril M, dkk. (2024), show that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is relevant to PAI material because the learning is carried out in stages and continuously, such as instilling solid beliefs in the PAI learning process (M & Panggabean, 2024). *Fifth*, Santoso, et al. (2024), show that applying the Merdeka Curriculum in PAI learning positively impacts shaping students' morals and character. Still, its implementation needs always to be improved so that PAI learning is relevant to what students need; apart from that, it also needs support from facilities to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational school (Santoso, Suklani, & Affandi, 2024).

Based on various previous research presentations, there are still gaps, which are, at the same time, empty and novel gaps in this research.

This research aims to analyze in depth the basic concepts of the Independent Curriculum and its role in improving the quality of Islamic learning in schools.

## **B. Research methods**

This research is qualitative research with the type of library research, where the relevant study objects are obtained through library data (Hadi, 1987). The data sources in this research were obtained from various library information, such as books, national journals, and international journals (Wong, Soon, Zed, & Norman, 2014). The data analysis technique is carried out using content analysis, where the data obtained is identified based on objectivity and systematicity; from the data identified, the researcher then draws conclusions. Researchers conducted content analysis to explain the data and conclude the results of the data analysis (Hamzah, 2020).

## **C. Results and Discussion**

### **Basic Concepts of the Independent Curriculum**

The Merdeka Curriculum is a new curriculum prepared by the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education and Culture

because it can accommodate various scientific perspectives (Purnomo, Yulianto, Mahdiannur, & Subekti, 2023, p. 407). The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that has a variety of extracurricular learning so that students have enough time to learn concepts and strengthen their abilities. Teachers can choose various learning methods to tailor to students' learning needs and interests. Apart from that, to increase the achievement of the Pancasila student profile, projects are developed based on specific themes determined by the government. The project aims to achieve particular learning targets, so it is not tied to specific subject content (RI, 2022, p. 9). The concept of independent learning in the Independent Curriculum means giving educational units (schools, teachers, and students) the freedom to innovate, be independent, and be creative in implementing education (Hariyanto et al., 2024, p. 82).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum does not merely aim to adapt to the rapid developments of the times; in fact, this Curriculum also provides special attention to students as human beings who have freedom (Amaruddin, Dardiri, Efianingrum, Hung, &

Purwanta, 2024, p. 13). This Curriculum is designed with a meaningful learning approach involving life experiences, group games, group projects, art activities, dramatization, field trips, social activities, learning centers, interests, and learning environments (Amaruddin et al., 2024). Differentiated learning is also involved when preparing the Independent Curriculum, which focuses on different learning activities based on class, student character, material coverage, and the approach used to assess student learning outcomes (Hariyanto et al., 2024, p. 83). The learning process is also actively participatory and fun (Rusilowati et al., 2024). Therefore, the success of implementing the Independent Curriculum can be influenced by the atmosphere and learning independence, which is supported by the institutional system (Maipita et al., 2021).

Philosophically, the Merdeka Curriculum is based on three aspects, namely progressivism, humanism, and constructivism (Purba, Purnamasari, Soetantyo, Suwarma, & Susanti, 2021). This foundation is used because it can help pay attention to psychology (Amaruddin et al.,

2024), learning independence (Samsudi et al., 2024), and interests required by students (Amaly et al., 2023; Latipah et al., 2023).

Based on the various statements above, the Independent Curriculum is a new curriculum introduced by the Indonesian government. Independent Curriculum means providing freedom for educational units to carry out a learning process centered on the activity and interest students need. In its implementation, it not only aims to adapt to current developments but also pays attention to students as human beings with the freedom to choose according to their needs. Therefore, the Merdeka Curriculum is based on three philosophical aspects: progressivism, humanism, and constructivism.

### **Rationalization of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

The 2019-2022 COVID-19 pandemic is a serious challenge for all countries (Halim, Iskandar, Ansari, & Halim, 2024, p. 107), including Indonesia (Suyadi, Asmorojati, Yudhana, Nuryana, & Siraj, 2022, p. 2). This pandemic has had a major impact on various sectors, especially education (Sanjaya & Rastini, 2020, p. 161). This pandemic has hurt the

Indonesian education system for two and a half years. The main concern is the negative impact of COVID-19 (Warsidah, Satyahadewi, Amir, Linda, & Ashari, 2022, p. 234), one of which is the young generation's limited access to high-quality learning materials, thereby hampering their right to a comprehensive education. Before the pandemic, Indonesia had established and implemented the 2013 Curriculum, a competency-based approach aiming to improve skills holistically, including psychomotor, affective, and cognitive. The success of the Curriculum depends on observing student behavior and abilities. However, the shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic poses big implementation challenges, hindering students' achievement of the desired learning outcomes (Yasir, Hamidah, & Anggia, 2021, p. 15). If this problem is not immediately resolved, it will have a worse impact on the Indonesian state because it can reduce the quality of human resources in Indonesia, where the skills and abilities could be improved (N. E. Wardani, Suwandi, & Ulya, 2023, p. 3268). Therefore, the Indonesian government acted decisively by introducing an Emergency Curriculum to be

implemented during the pandemic. This Curriculum simplifies the 2013 Curriculum, which emphasizes increasing student understanding (Sanjaya & Rastini, 2020, p. 163).

To help restore learning during the pandemic (Nursalam, Sulaeman, & Latuapo, 2023; Zumrotun, Widyastuti, Utama, Sutopo, & Murtiyasa, 2024), between 2022 and 2024, the Indonesian government will introduce the Independent Curriculum. This Curriculum is structured in a student-centered manner with a contextual approach that is adjusted based on the needs and readiness of each educational unit (Dirgantoro & Soesanto, 2023). According to Nadiem Makarim (Kemendikbudristek), the Merdeka Curriculum is considered simpler, easier, and more flexible while also aiming to overcome learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and improve the quality of Indonesian education so that it can compete with other countries (Ningrum & Suryani, 2022, p. 221). The implementation of the Independent Curriculum is based on MECRTI Decree No. 1177 of 2020 concerning the Transformational School Program, along with the Decree of the Bookkeeping Development Research Agency No.

028/H/KU/2021 and 029/H/KU/2021 concerning Application of Learning (Teknologi, 2024). This Curriculum has now been implemented in stages in several driving schools and vocational centers of excellence in Indonesia, and it will later be implemented in all Indonesian schools (N. E. Wardani et al., 2023, p. 3269).

From various statements, it is concluded that the rationalization or reason for implementing the Independent Curriculum is to help facilitate the recovery of education in Indonesia during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted various countries, including Indonesia. This pandemic has also hurt the Indonesian education sector. Therefore, the government is offering an Emergency Curriculum during the pandemic to make it easier for all parties, both teachers and students, in the learning process. However, this Curriculum was only implemented briefly because the government reintroduced a new curriculum, namely the Merdeka Curriculum. This Curriculum is considered more concise and flexible. Its preparation is student-centered with a contextual approach that is adjusted based on

the needs and readiness of each educational unit in Indonesia.

### **The Role of the Independent Curriculum in Improving the Quality of Islamic Learning in Schools**

The implications of implementing the Independent Curriculum in schools have significant value for changes in education, as is the case with Islamic education (Abidin & Achadi, 2023). This implication covers a broader educational discourse, so it does not only cover the assessment of each school. Combined intracurricular learning provides positive results on student competence and can increase students' understanding of conceptual aspects more effectively and optimally. The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project also helps build a character that meets graduation competency standards (Pratama & Dewi, 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes autonomy and various teaching methods that can stimulate active involvement and critical thinking in students, thereby creating a comprehensive educational atmosphere. This is certainly in line with the development of global education, which prioritizes active learning and student-centered

creativity (Usanto, 2022). To achieve success in implementing the Independent Curriculum, which focuses on autonomy and various methods, teachers need to receive support through systematic training and guidance in designing teaching models for structured learning, including developing a systematically organized flow of learning objectives (Jasiah et al., 2024, p. 402), so that this training can produce teachers who are competent in implementing the Independent Curriculum in Islamic religious education in schools (Rifa'i, Asih, & Fatmawati, 2022; Setiawati, 2023).

At least six main aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum must be internalized into Islamic religious learning in schools. First, project-based learning involves students actively solving problems, increasing their understanding, and developing problem-solving skills. Second, the Merdeka Curriculum has values that include students' freedom to determine the time and place of study and create a varied and exciting learning environment. Third, students are given flexibility and freedom to choose the material they want. They were fourth, learning tailored to the individual, where the teacher acts as a

facilitator to help students acquire universal Islamic values by maximizing their potential. Fifth, being able to apply the link and match principle, where the values contained in Islamic teachings can be applied and contextualized in students' daily lives. Sixth, teachers and students need to use data interpretation to analyze and solve problems found. The emphasis on these six aspects encourages teachers to be able to perfect their pedagogical skills. This impacts teacher performance in assessments because the success of learning Islamic religion in the Independent Curriculum can be influenced by the teacher's ability to determine core materials and develop a structured flow of learning objectives (Jasiah et al., 2024, p. 403).

From the various statements above, it can be concluded that the values contained in the Independent Curriculum provide freedom for teachers and students. The Merdeka Curriculum offers comfortable learning but still involves students actively and critically. Apart from that, teachers are also given flexibility in using various learning methods that can be adapted to students' interests. To support the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum, it needs to



be strengthened by providing support to teachers through systematic training, such as guidance in designing teaching models for structured learning. Emphasizing the internalization of the six points of the Merdeka Curriculum into Islamic religious learning is also needed to support the successful implementation of the Curriculum so that the Merdeka Curriculum can play a fundamental role in improving the quality of Islamic religious education in schools.

### **E. Conclusion**

The Independent Curriculum is a new curriculum developed by the government through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. This Curriculum was used to restore the quality of education after the major COVID-19 tragedy, which hurt various sectors, including the education sector in Indonesia. The Merdeka Curriculum is flexible, where in its implementation, the government provides flexibility and freedom for educational institutions in the learning process but still focuses on the activity and interest needed by students. Even though it has yet to play its maximum role, the Independent Curriculum can slowly

improve the quality of Islamic learning in schools.

Considering the limitations of this research, further research is necessary for future studies to complement the limitations of this research from various aspects, such as the methods used and the addition of variables to enrich the study.

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