

Learning Islamic Religious Education in the Merdeka Curriculum: A Critical Review

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the learning of Islamic Religious Education within the framework of the *Merdeka* curriculum. The method used in this study is a literature review that examines or reviews critically the knowledge, ideas, or findings contained in the body of academic-oriented literature, and formulates theoretical and methodological contributions for certain topics. The results of the study show that the *Merdeka* curriculum has a considerable influence on learning Islamic Religious Education, which is related to collaboration between subjects, using this kind of interdisciplinary approach certainly makes students' perspectives more open and broad which is useful for provisions in dealing with global world developments and the existence of challenges for educators and students.

INTRODUCTION

The Religion Subject should stand alone without having to be integrated with other subjects. This is because religion is the most basic right among human rights. That is why the Founding Father of our country is the basis of God in the first precepts of Pancasila (Asrori, 2016). The state also guarantees the freedom of the Indonesian people to have a religion according to their religion and belief, as stated in the 1945 Constitution article 29 paragraph (2). The existence of Religious Subjects is specifically regulated in the Education System Law (UU Sisdiknas) Number 20 of 2003 (Noor, 2018). In article 12 paragraph (1) it is stated that every student in each education unit has the right to receive religious education according to the religion he adheres to and is taught by educators who same religion. The religious education referred to in the law is clarified in *Peraturan Pemerintah* (Government Regulation) Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Education. In it it is emphasized that Religious Education is education that provides knowledge and shapes the attitudes, personality and skills of students in practicing their religious teachings which are carried out at least through subjects/lectures in all pathways, levels and types of education (Idris et al., 2022).

From this, it can be said that the existence of *Mata Pelajaran Agama Islam* (Religion Subjects) has a strong foundation both constitutionally, juridically and operationally. So that any curriculum implemented in the National Education System cannot deny the existence of this Religion Subject, as a subject that stands alone without having to be integrated with other subjects. Religious education itself has a very strategic function in efforts to shape the character of the nation's children. Referring to PP 55 of 2007, religious education is given not only to provide knowledge, but further to form attitudes and personality as well as the ability to practice the religious teachings of each student. In every religion - to borrow Amin Abdullah's term - contains elements of nonfalsifiable postulated Alternate Realities in the form of belief, faith, creed, or credo which are assumed to be true and cannot be questioned or questioned by anyone. This element cannot be studied with a philosophical approach or other scientific approaches. Therefore, the treatment of Religion subjects cannot be equated with other subjects. Religion is not limited to knowledge, but also has doctrines, rituals, sacred texts, and morality that cannot be found in other subjects.

Each religion also has special institutions to strengthen its existence. The institution can be a religious figure, organization or religious institution that has the authority and responsibility to maintain the existence of a religion. That is why Article 12 paragraph (1) of the National Education System Law also emphasizes the obligation of each education unit to provide religious teachers who share the beliefs of their students even though they are in a minority. This religious teacher later has the authority to strengthen the diversity of his students. Thus, the existence of religious educational institutions is very important to fulfill the mandate of the law. Religious Education and Religious Education are two sides of a coin that cannot be separated. In Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 it is explained that religious education is education that prepares students to be able to carry out roles that require

mastery of knowledge about religious teachings and/or become religious experts and teach their religion. It is the duty of religious institutions to prepare teachers who have expertise in religion and at the same time can translate it into the existing curriculum (Nugraha, 2022).

Currently the government is promoting Free Learning with a *Merdeka* Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to achieve a learning process that can foster learning independence. The main feature of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is the authority given to each educational unit to create its own curriculum. Teachers are also given the flexibility to design a syllabus/learning plan per semester based on textbooks and other sources. Textbooks from the Ministry of Education and Culture are only an alternative, not an obligation according to the spirit of Freedom to Learn (*Merdeka Belajar*). Implementation of the Free Learning Curriculum also demands the existence of Independent Teachers. There are at least five abilities that must be possessed by *Guru Merdeka* (Free Teacher), namely: fostering internal motivation, involving students in setting goals, providing constructive feedback, showing students the benefits of learning and providing multilevel and meaningful challenges.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Kurikulum Merdeka (Freedom Curriculum)

The *Merdeka* Curriculum is a curriculum with various intra-curricular learning where the content will be more optimal so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competence. Changing the curriculum is a necessity in order to keep abreast of developments and changes, as well as efforts to improve the quality of learning (Fikri & Hasudungan, 2021). Curriculum implementation is the application or implementation of curriculum programs that have been developed in the previous stage, then tested with implementation and management, while always making adjustments to the field situation and the characteristics of students, both their intellectual, emotional and physical development. Every curriculum development besides having to be based on a number of foundations, must also apply or use certain principles (Nasirudin, 2021). With these principles in place, every curriculum development is bound by provisions or law so that in its development it has a clear direction in accordance with agreed principles. A good curriculum will not achieve maximum results if its implementation produces something good for students. The components of the curriculum implementation strategy include teaching, assessment, guidance and counseling and organizing school activities (Kementerian Pendidikan Kebudayaan Riset dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2022). Strategy includes plans, methods and activities planned to achieve certain goals. The learning strategy is an action plan (series of activities) including the use of methods and utilization of various resources/strengths in learning (Hasudungan et al., 2022).

The implementation of the independent curriculum demands that educational units at every level of school provide facilities that can support learning success. In principle, an independent curriculum requires educational units in schools to provide full facilities so that this independent curriculum can

be implemented properly. The goal of the *Merdeka Belajar* (independent learning) curriculum is to restore school authorities and local governments to manage their own education in accordance with the conditions in their area. Accelerate the achievement of national education goals. Preparing for the global challenges of the 4.0 revolution era (Mardhiyah et al., 2021). The curriculum structure in the Merdeka Curriculum is based on three things, namely competency-based, flexible learning, and the character of Pancasila (Nugraha, 2022).

The *Merdeka Curriculum* is a curriculum with various intra-curricular learning where the content will be more optimal so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competence (Khusainova et al., 2018). Teachers have the flexibility to choose various teaching tools so that learning can be adapted to the learning needs and interests of students. Projects to strengthen the achievement of Pancasila student profiles are developed based on certain themes set by the government. The project is not directed to achieve certain learning achievement targets, so it is not tied to subject content (Hasudungan & Abidin, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

This research uses literature review, a systematic, explicit and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating and synthesizing research works and ideas that have been produced by researchers and practitioners. The literature review contains descriptions of theories, findings and other research materials obtained from reference materials to serve as the basis for research activities (Ruhlessin, 2019). Literature search is a step to collect information relevant to research and avoid duplication. Here are some steps that need to be done:

- 1) Finding Relevant Literature. The first stage is to search for literature that is relevant or in accordance with the research topic or scientific paper being carried;
- 2) Choose a Specific Source;
- 3) Carry out identification;
- 4) Create framework;
- 5) Start compiling literature review.

Literature review is a systematic, explicit and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating and synthesizing works of research results and ideas that have been produced by researchers and practitioners (Hasudungan, 2021). Literature review aims to make an analysis and synthesis of existing knowledge related to the topic to be researched to find empty space for research to be carried out. The more detailed objectives are explained by Snyder (2019), namely:

- (1) providing a theoretical background/base for the research to be conducted,
- (2) studying the depth or breadth of existing research related to the topic to be studied and
- (3) answering questions practical questions with an understanding of what has been produced by previous research.

RESULTS

The curriculum is the spirit of education that must be evaluated innovatively, dynamically and periodically in accordance with the times, science and technology (Science and Technology), as well as the competencies needed by society. In fact, the rapid development of science and technology no longer allows the world of education to linger in the comfort zone of the applicable curriculum.

Currently, there is a new curriculum, the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This curriculum is interpreted as a learning design that provides opportunities for students to study in a calm, relaxed, enjoyable, stress-free and pressure-free manner (Sonzarn et al., 2022). To show his natural talent. The *Merdeka Curriculum* provides flexibility for educators to create materials based on student needs (Maipita et al., 2021). In addition, teachers get digital support as a reference in developing their own teaching practices. Learning is designed and implemented to build capacity as a basis for lifelong learning or often called longlasting education. Continuous future-oriented learning (Damayanti & Muhroji, 2022). Reporting from several news sources and from the author's analysis according to the Minister of Research and Technology Education Regulation Number 59 of 2022 there are six updates in this Independent Curriculum.

From several updates in this new curriculum, it has had a considerable influence on the learning of *Pendidikan Agama Islam* (Islamic Religious Education). Among other things, related to collaboration between subjects. By using this kind of interdisciplinary approach, it certainly makes students' perspectives more open and broad which is useful for preparing them to face the development of the global world. There are also challenges for educators and students. Islamic Religious Education is directed at preparing students, so that they are spiritually stable, have noble character, and have an understanding of the basics of Islam and how to apply them in everyday life within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (Muhson, 2022).

Learning PAI and character in the *Merdeka Curriculum* is aimed at providing guidance to students, so that they are spiritually stable, have noble character (Hidayat et al., 2022), always make compassion and tolerance as the foundation of their life; forming students to become individuals who have noble character, true faith, shari'a, and the development of the history of Islamic civilization, and apply them in everyday life; as well as guiding students to be able to apply Islamic principles in thinking so that they are correct, precise, and wise in concluding things and making decisions (Muhson, 2022).

In addition, it also constructs students' critical reasoning abilities in analyzing differences of opinion, so that they behave moderately and avoid radicalism or liberalism; guiding students to love the surrounding natural environment and fostering a sense of responsibility as the caliph of Allah on earth; as well as forming students who uphold the value of unity, so that they can strengthen human brotherhood, religious brotherhood, and also national and national brotherhood with all the diversity of religions, ethnicities and cultures (Lundeto, 2021).

The existence of the *Merdeka* Curriculum provides great hope for educational institutions to explore and develop the quality of education in their institutions (Serdyukov, 2017; Stehle & Peters-Burton, 2019). PAI as a series of Islamic subjects is delivered both formally at school or informally and formally at home and in society. With the material taught starting from the elementary school level to tertiary institutions, it must respond to the *Merdeka* Curriculum policy. With this, training students under the supervision of PAI teachers to always think critically so that it is hoped that students can have more mature, wiser, more careful, and noble morals in practicing the teachings of Islam itself (D. Hakim, 2019).

Assessing the Learning Achievements of Islamic Religious Education in the Merdeka Curriculum

Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI, Islamic Religious Education) learning outcomes in the *Merdeka* curriculum are determined based on the Decree of the Head of BSKAP No. 8 Year 2022. *Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan* (BSKAP) or the Education Standards, Curriculum and Assessment Agency is a new body in the Ministry of Education and Culture. Its position is a combination of Balitbangbuk and *Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan* (BSNP) or National Education Standards Agency (A. L. Hakim et al., 2022).

Islamic Religious Education is directed at preparing students to be spiritually stable, have noble character, and have an understanding of the basics of Islam and how to apply them in everyday life within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. In general, Mapel PAI must direct students to:

- 1) tendency towards goodness (*al-ḥanīfiyyah*);
- 2) attitude of acceptance (*al-samḥah*);
- 3) noble character (*makārim al-akhlāq*);
- 4) compassion for the universe (*raḥmat li al-ālamīn*).

The learning process for PAI subjects uses various approaches besides lectures, namely:

- 1) discussion-interactive;
- 2) inquiry and discovery learning;
- 3) student-centered learning);
- 4) problem based learning;
- 5) project based learning;
- 6) collaborative learning).

The learning of Islamic Religious Education and Character is aimed at:

- 1) provide guidance to students so that they are spiritually stable, have noble character, always make love and tolerance as the basis of their life (Saerozi, 2014);
- 2) form students to become individuals who understand well the principles of the Islamic religion regarding noble character, true faith (*'aqīdah ṣaḥīḥah*) based on the teachings of *ahlus sunnah wal jamā'ah*, sharia, and the development of the history of Islamic civilization, and apply them in everyday life good day in

relation to the creator, oneself, fellow citizens, fellow human beings, and the natural environment within the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia;

- 3) guiding students to be able to apply Islamic principles in thinking so that they are correct, precise, and wise in concluding things and making decisions;
- 4) construct students' critical reasoning abilities in analyzing differences of opinion so that they behave moderately (*wasatiyyah*) and avoid radicalism or liberalism;
- 5) guide students to love the surrounding natural environment and foster a sense of responsibility as the caliph of Allah on earth. Thus he is active in realizing efforts to preserve and care for the surrounding environment; and
- 6) form students who uphold the value of unity so that they can strengthen human brotherhood (*ukhuwwah basyariyyah*), religious brotherhood (*ukhuwwah Islāmiyyah*), and also national and country brotherhood (*ukhuwwah wataniyyah*) with all its religious, ethnic and cultural diversity (Abdullah, 2020).

PAI and Moral Education Learning Outcomes include 5 scientific elements which include:

1. Al-Qur'an-Hadith

PAI learning achievements in the *Merdeka* curriculum in the elements of the Qur'an and Hadith are as follows: PAI and character emphasize the ability to read and write the Qur'an and hadith properly and correctly. He also guides students in understanding the meaning textually and contextually and practicing its content in everyday life. PAI and character also emphasize love and high appreciation for the Al-Qur'an and the Hadith of the Prophet as the main life guidelines of a Muslim (Hudri & Umam, 2022).

2. Faith (*Aqidah*)

PAI learning achievements in the *Merdeka* curriculum in the elements of *Aqidah* are as follows: Related to the principle of belief that will lead students to know Allah, the angels, the books of Allah, the Prophets and Messengers, and understand the concept of the last day as well as *qadā'* and *qadr*. This faith then becomes the basis for doing good deeds, having noble character and obeying the law.

3. Morals

PAI learning achievements in the *Merdeka* curriculum in the Moral elements are as follows: Is a behavior that is the fruit of knowledge and faith. Morals will be the crown that colors all elements in Islamic Religious Education and morals (Susilowati, 2022). The science of morality leads students to understand the importance of personal noble character and social morality (Rifa'i et al., 2022), and in distinguishing between good (*maḥmūdah*) and reprehensible (*mazmūmah*) behavior. By understanding this difference, students can realize the importance of distancing themselves from disgraceful behavior and disciplining themselves with noble behavior in everyday life both in their personal and social contexts (Desrianti & Nelisma, 2022). Students will also understand the importance of training (*riyāḍah*), discipline (*tahzīb*) and earnest

efforts to control themselves (*mujāhadah*). With morals, students realize that the basis of their behavior, both for God, themselves, fellow human beings and the natural surroundings is love (*maḥabbah*) (Darise, 2021). Moral education also directs them to respect and appreciate fellow human beings so that there is no hatred or prejudice against existing religious or racial differences. This moral element must be the crown that enters all topics of discussion in the Islamic Religious Education and Morals subject (Nurindarwati et al., 2022), morals must decorate the entire content and become the fruit of PAI and Moral ethics lessons.

4. Fiqh (Islamic Jurisprudence)

PAI learning achievements in the *Merdeka* curriculum in Fiqh elements are as follows: It is an interpretation of the Shari'a. Fiqh is a rule of law relating to the actions of adult humans (*mukallaf*) which include rituals or relationships with Allah SWT, (*'ubudiyah*) and activities related to fellow human beings and (*mu'amalah*). Fiqh reviews various understandings regarding the procedures for implementation and legal provisions in Islam and their implementation in worship and *mu'amalah* (Mubarok & Musaddad, 2017).

5. History of Islamic Civilization

PAI learning achievements in the *Merdeka* curriculum in the *Sejarah Kebudayaan Islam* (SKI) or Islamic Cultural History elements are as follows: Describes the record of the development of the journey of human life in building civilization from time to time (Foley & Mirazón Lahr, 2011). Learning the history of *Sejarah Peradaban Islam* (SPI) or Islamic Civilization emphasizes the ability to take lessons from past history, analyze various kinds of events and absorb various wisdoms that have been presented by previous generations. By reflecting on these historical stories, students have a historical footing in dealing with problems and avoid repeating mistakes for the present and the future. This aspect will become exemplary (*'ibrah*) and inspire the nation's next generation in attitude and resolution of social, cultural, political, economic, science and technology, art, and other phenomena in order to build civilization in their era.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* (independent learning) curriculum is a curriculum that is flexible and gives schools the freedom to explore according to the facilities, inputs, and gives independence to teachers to deliver Islamic education subject matter essentially. Students also maximize their potential. The implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Learning) Curriculum is very suitable for PAI subjects because learning is carried out in stages and continuously from one phase to another. PAI must be delivered in stages and comprehensively and starting from the most basic thing, namely the inculcation of a strong faith and then continuing to other domains.

FURTHER STUDY

Currently the government is promoting Free Learning with a *Merdeka* Curriculum. This curriculum is designed to achieve a learning process that can foster learning independence. The main feature of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is the authority given to each educational unit to create its own curriculum. Teachers are also given the flexibility to design a syllabus/learning plan per semester based on textbooks and other sources. Textbooks from the Ministry of Education and Culture are only an alternative, not an obligation according to the spirit of Freedom to Learn (*Merdeka Belajar*).

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