

Transformation Of Islamic Religious Education: An Analysis of The Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Class VII SMPN 3 Pamekasan

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of the independent curriculum at SMPN 3 Pamekasan, especially in Islamic religious education. Qualitative approach. Case study type. Data were collected from the principal, curriculum vice principal, teachers, and students through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data were analysed with an interactive model and validated with various techniques. The results showed that the independent curriculum involves intracurricular, Pancasila learner profile strengthening projects, and extracurricular. The independent curriculum provides flexible, creative, and meaningful learning experiences and maintains the Pancasila learner profile. The independent curriculum also provides opportunities for students to develop academic and non-academic potential. The independent curriculum in Islamic religious education includes subjects such as Al-Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah, Akhlak, and Fiqh. Implementing an independent curriculum involves continuous planning, implementation, and evaluation. The independent curriculum positively impacts students, teachers and schools but also requires support, commitment and further research.

Keywords: Independent curriculum; Islamic religious education; Pancasila learner profile

Introduction

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum marks a significant shift in Indonesia's educational landscape, particularly within the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) domain. As a subject rooted in moral and spiritual development, IRE serves as a cornerstone for fostering students' character and ethical understanding. The Merdeka Curriculum, designed to promote flexibility and student-centred learning, introduces opportunities for innovative teaching while presenting unique challenges, especially in aligning the curriculum with the pedagogical principles of Islamic education.

The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced to address pervasive challenges in the Indonesian education system, such as outdated pedagogical approaches, a lack of inclusivity, and inadequate adaptability to local and global demands (Suryahadikusumah et al., 2021; Nasution, 2023). These issues are particularly pronounced in the context of IRE, where educators are tasked with integrating religious teachings with modern educational practices. Unlike previous curricula, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasises autonomy for schools and teachers to contextualise learning according to student needs and local circumstances, making its implementation a complex but potentially transformative process (Alfaeni & Asbari, 2023).

Previous research on curriculum changes in Indonesia has extensively documented shifts from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum, focusing primarily on general education (Muhtar & Dallyono, 2020; Rahayu & Sudirman, 2018). However, the specific implications of these changes for IRE have been underexplored. This gap is significant, as IRE is uniquely positioned to address Indonesian society's moral and ethical challenges while simultaneously adapting to modern educational demands. Studies such as those by Fauzan et al. (2021) and Nizar (2020) have highlighted the importance of integrating Islamic values into curriculum design. However, little attention has been given to practical implementation challenges and opportunities at the junior high school level.

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in IRE requires addressing several critical issues. Teachers must balance the curriculum's emphasis on student-centred learning with the delivery of religious teachings, which traditionally follow a more structured and doctrinal approach (Purwanto & Afandi, 2020). Additionally, resource constraints, lack of teacher training, and resistance to change further complicate the implementation process (Rahman & Syafi'i, 2019; Rambung et al., 2023). Understanding how these challenges manifest in the context of IRE is essential for developing strategies to enhance the curriculum's impact.

This research focuses on implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in IRE at SMPN 3 Pamekasan, exploring its practical implications, challenges, and opportunities. Specifically, it aims to assess the alignment between curriculum objectives and classroom practices, identify barriers encountered during implementation, and propose strategies for improving the curriculum's effectiveness. By addressing these aspects, the study seeks to fill gaps in the literature while providing actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the discourse on educational reform in Indonesia, emphasising the role of IRE in bridging traditional values with contemporary educational practices. The findings aim to support the broader goals of the Merdeka Curriculum in enhancing the quality and relevance of education while ensuring its compatibility with the unique pedagogical needs of Islamic education. By doing so, this study advances scholarly understanding and offers practical recommendations to improve the implementation of curriculum reforms in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, researchers used a qualitative approach. This type of case study is very suitable for research related to teaching and learning activities, both from the experience of teachers and students and direct experience (Yin, 2015).

Primary data is collected directly from the source and processed by the organisation or individual. Those included in the primary data are as follows: Principal of SMPN 3 Pamekasan, Waka curriculum of SMPN 3 Pamekasan, Islamic religious education teacher of SMPN 3 Pamekasan, seventh-grade students of SMPN 3 Pamekasan, students' learning atmosphere in class VII of SMPN 3 Pamekasan. In this study, the data collection techniques researchers used were observation (Observation), interview (interview), and documentation analysis.

Data analysis is an analysis of interviews, observations and existing documentation results. Data analysis in this study was carried out before entering the field, during the field, and after completion of the field (Sugiyono, 2019). This study's data analysis activities are carried out interactively and occur continuously until completion, so the data is saturated. The data analysis in qualitative research is as follows: Data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Moleong, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 3 Pamekasan

The Merdeka Curriculum is an innovative step in Indonesian education that allows schools and educators to customise teaching methods and learning materials according to student's needs, interests, and contexts. This approach encourages creativity and instils local wisdom relevant to the dynamics of the local community. As Ningsih (2023) stated, this policy allows local governments and schools to adapt the education system according to regional conditions and available resources. With its flexible and student-centred approach, this curriculum supports independent learning and holistic development, which are priorities for 21st-century education (Anggara et al., 2023; Gaffar et al., 2021).

At SMPN 3 Pamekasan, the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented through three main components: extracurricular activities, the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), and extracurricular activities. These three elements create a balanced learning experience, integrating academic knowledge, practical skills, and character building.

1. Intracurricular Activities

Intracurricular activities are the foundation of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 3 Pamekasan. This curriculum focuses on classroom learning and includes subjects such as Islamic Religious Education (PAI), social studies, and citizenship. As Ridho (2019) emphasised, the Merdeka Curriculum's extracurricular structure allows teachers to choose learning strategies and techniques that suit their students' needs. This approach improves students' understanding of the material and develops critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

At SMPN 3 Pamekasan, extracurricular activities are planned annually, allowing teachers to integrate innovative methods. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), learning is not only limited to religious understanding but also incorporates contemporary pedagogical approaches to instil moral and spiritual values relevant to students' daily lives.

2. Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5)

The Pancasila Learner Profile Strengthening Project (P5) is a flagship feature of the Merdeka Curriculum that emphasises project-based learning. This approach encourages students to tackle real-world problems by developing critical thinking, collaboration and problem-solving skills. These projects reflect Pancasila values such as environmental sustainability, social responsibility and intercultural tolerance.

At SMPN 3 Pamekasan, these projects are a means of practical learning and a medium to instil character education. With 25% of annual learning time allocated for P5, the school supports research showing that project-based learning can significantly improve student engagement and learning outcomes (Pertiwi et al., 2023). In addition, integrating Pancasila values into the project ensures that students understand local and global issues and practice the values daily.

3. Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities at SMPN 3 Pamekasan are designed to support the development of students' non-academic talents and interests. Programs such as art, sports, and scouting become a vehicles for instilling social skills, cooperation, and leadership. Rahmadayanti and Hartoyo (2022) noted that the extracurricular program at this school is divided into compulsory activities (such as scouting) and elective activities, which ensure all students can participate in meaningful development experiences.

Through these activities, students gain additional learning experiences outside the classroom and learn to manage time, build self-confidence and explore their potential. These programs support the Merdeka Curriculum's mission to create learners who are not only intellectually intelligent but also emotionally and socially mature.

Islamic Religious Education in Merdeka Curriculum

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) under the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide a deep understanding of Islamic teachings while integrating modern educational principles. This allows students to fulfil their religious obligations while remaining relevant to the challenges of the modern world. Research by Nadhiroh and Anshori (2023) emphasised the importance of including moral and ethical dimensions in the curriculum, as seen in the approach implemented at SMPN 3 Pamekasan.

The implementation of PAI involves three main stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. Teachers design learning modules that focus on the Qur'an, Hadith, Fiqh, and Akhlak and are relevant to students' daily lives. Thus, students are equipped with conceptual understanding and the practical ability to apply religious values.

Although the Merdeka Curriculum offers various opportunities for innovation, its implementation is not free from challenges. The two main challenges that are often faced are:

1. Standardization: The absence of a uniform standard benchmark can create gaps in learning outcomes between regions.
2. Resources: Limited teacher training and educational facilities are significant barriers.

However, the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum provides a great opportunity for schools to design learning experiences relevant to local needs. To overcome this challenge, measures such as:

1. Professional training for teachers.
2. Regular assessments to monitor learning outcomes.
3. Development of a clear framework for implementation

This study contributes to the curriculum reform literature by revealing how integrating religious values and local traditions can work harmoniously with modern educational principles. SMPN 3 Pamekasan demonstrates that the Merdeka Curriculum can be an effective implementation model, balancing flexibility and quality standards to ensure meaningful and equitable learning outcomes.

In addition, these findings provide practical recommendations for policymakers and educators to improve the effectiveness of Merdeka Curriculum implementation. By bridging the gap in previous research, this study lays the groundwork for further exploration of the relationship between religion, education and curriculum innovation in Indonesia. The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational instrument and a tool to shape a creative, adaptive and highly moral generation.

CONCLUSION

Implementing the independent curriculum at SMPN 3, Pamekasan involves three main contents: extracurricular, a project to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students, and extracurricular. Implementing this independent curriculum aims to provide a more flexible, creative, and meaningful learning experience for students, as well as to strengthen the profile of Pancasila learners with skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are based on the values of Pancasila. Implementing this independent curriculum also allows students to develop their potential in academic and non-academic fields according to their interests and talents. Implementing an independent curriculum in Islamic religious education at SMPN 3 Pamekasan includes subjects such as Al-Qur'an and Hadith, Aqidah, Akhlak, and Fiqh. The implementation process involves planning, implementation, and continuous evaluation. The implementation of the independent curriculum at SMPN 3 Pamekasan has had a positive

impact on students, teachers, and schools. However, implementing this independent curriculum requires adequate support from all parties involved, including facilities, resources, and commitment. In addition, implementing this independent curriculum also needs further evaluation and research to measure its effectiveness and benefits more comprehensively.

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