

Integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic Education Values in *Pesantren* Learning: A Case Study

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Abstract. This study examines the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic education values in *pesantren* as a response to the challenges of globalization and the need to adapt education to the dynamics of the era. The purpose of this study is to identify how Islamic values are integrated into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at *Pesantren* Minhajul Haq Purwakarta. A qualitative descriptive approach was used, with in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation as data collection techniques. The results show that the *pesantren* successfully adapted the Merdeka Curriculum without losing its Islamic identity. This integration is evident in curriculum planning, the implementation of learning based on Islamic values, and educational evaluation. Although challenges remain regarding teachers' understanding and limited digital infrastructure, the culture of mutual cooperation and collective commitment are key factors in successful implementation. This study contributes by offering an integration model that can be adopted by other *pesantren* and provides guidance for policymakers in aligning national education policies with the Islamic identity of educational institutions.

Keyword: *Curriculum Evaluation; Curriculum Integration; Islamic Values; Merdeka Curriculum; Pesantren*

Abstrak. Penelitian ini mengkaji integrasi Kurikulum Merdeka dengan nilai-nilai pendidikan Islam di pesantren sebagai respons terhadap tantangan globalisasi dan kebutuhan untuk menyesuaikan pendidikan dengan dinamika zaman. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi bagaimana nilai-nilai Islam diintegrasikan dalam penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di Pesantren Minhajul Haq Purwakarta. Metode yang digunakan adalah pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan dokumentasi sebagai teknik pengumpulan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pesantren berhasil mengadaptasi Kurikulum Merdeka tanpa menghilangkan identitas keislamannya. Integrasi ini terlihat pada perencanaan kurikulum, pelaksanaan pembelajaran berbasis nilai Islam, dan evaluasi pendidikan. Meskipun terdapat tantangan terkait pemahaman guru dan keterbatasan sarana digital, budaya gotong royong dan komitmen kolektif menjadi faktor penting dalam keberhasilan implementasi. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam menawarkan model integrasi yang dapat diadopsi pesantren lain dan memberikan panduan bagi pembuat kebijakan dalam menyelaraskan kebijakan pendidikan nasional dengan identitas keislaman lembaga pendidikan.

Kata Kunci: *Evaluasi Pendidikan; Integrasi Kurikulum; Kurikulum Merdeka; Nilai-Nilai Islam; Pesantren*

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Introduction

Islamic education in Indonesia faces numerous challenges due to the rapid pace of globalization, digital advancements, and ever-changing socio-cultural dynamics. Globalization and the digital revolution have significantly impacted education in Indonesia, changing how information is accessed, how learning occurs, and influencing the character of the younger generation. In response, the Indonesian government launched the Merdeka Curriculum (KM) policy, aiming to provide greater flexibility for educational institutions, promote student independence, strengthen the Pancasila student profile, and make learning more relevant to the demands of the times (Alimuddin & Johar, 2023). Meanwhile, traditional Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren emphasize the formation of Islamic values (akhlaq, tauhid, adab) and national character. However, the reality on the ground shows a gap between the new national curriculum framework and the Islamic identity of pesantren, making it crucial to study how the Merdeka Curriculum integrates with the Islamic values taught in pesantren.

While pesantren are recognized for their role in shaping the character of youth based on Islamic values, challenges arise when integrating the Merdeka Curriculum with pesantren's Islamic identity. As institutions that emphasize moral and spiritual education, pesantren must balance preserving their Islamic values while adapting to the demands of modern education (Mansyuri & et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant since the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, autonomy, and contextual learning, which may not always be easily applied in institutions with strong traditional roots like pesantren.

Islamic education in Indonesia during President Joko Widodo's second term has faced increasingly diverse challenges due to the rapid pace of globalization, digital transformation, and the continuously shifting socio-cultural dynamics. In response to these developments, the government launched the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka, KM), which aims to grant greater autonomy to educational institutions, foster student independence, strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile, and make the learning process more relevant to the needs of the contemporary era.

Meanwhile, traditional Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren emphasize the cultivation of Islamic values, *akhlaq* (morality), *tauhid* (monotheism), and *adab* (ethics), as well as the development of national character. However, empirical realities reveal a gap between the framework of the new national curriculum and the Islamic identity of pesantren. Therefore, it is essential to conduct a study on how the Independent Curriculum can be integrated with Islamic educational values within pesantren. This raises a fundamental question: How do pesantren integrate the Independent Curriculum with Islamic educational principles so that their Islamic identity remains intact while effectively implementing national curriculum standards?

In the pesantren context, studies on Pesantren-Based Curriculum Integration within general educational institutions have confirmed that curriculum integration has indeed been practiced, yet not specifically within the framework of the Independent Curriculum. Putri et al. (2024), in their research on Grade IV elementary schools, found that implementation reached 84.75%, with notable improvements in project-based learning and character formation aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile. Alimuddin and Johar (2023) explored Independent Curriculum implementation in elementary schools, focusing on teachers' strategies to enhance student autonomy. Marpian et al. (2025) conducted a systematic literature review on the curriculum's implementation in elementary education, identifying key strategies, challenges, and impacts (Marpian et al., n.d.). Khoiril Putera et al. (2024) examined the integration of Islamic educational values from Surah

Luqman into the Independent Curriculum, introducing a “spider-web” thematic model that connects general subjects with pesantren content. Similarly, Rofiq (2022) investigated curriculum integration between pesantren and Madrasah Aliyah at Pondok Pesantren Attanwir Bojonegoro, emphasizing the importance of designing curricula capable of producing graduates who are both competent and morally upright.

From this body of literature, it is evident that most existing research has focused on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in general schools (elementary and junior high) and the integration between pesantren and national or madrasa curricula. However, there remains a significant research gap in three key areas: (1) focus on pesantren as institutions with a distinctive Islamic educational identity; (2) the integration of the Independent Curriculum (not merely the previous national curriculum) with Islamic educational values; and (3) the impact of implementation on students’ character formation, Islamic identity, and overall educational quality within pesantren.

This research fills the gap by investigating how pesantren concretely integrate the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic values and its impact on the character of students and the quality of education. The study also evaluates how Islamic values (such as tauhid, akhlak, and pluralism) are maintained, revitalized, and even developed through the Merdeka Curriculum framework. The contribution of this research is to provide a specific integration framework that other pesantren can adopt and offer guidance for policymakers in aligning national curriculum policies with the Islamic identity of educational institutions. Practically, this study will provide pesantren with guidelines to design learning tools, enhance teacher competency, and build a learning culture that strengthens student character in a dynamic educational context. At the macro level, the findings can support the achievement of Indonesia’s national education goals, which aim to produce Muslim generations who are faithful, ethical, knowledgeable, and ready to contribute to national progress through the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, chosen to deeply understand the process, meaning, and strategies for integrating the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic education values in pesantren. The qualitative descriptive approach allows the researcher to naturally and contextually describe the educational phenomenon based on field data obtained through direct interaction with participants (Fadli, 2021). The primary focus of this study is to explore how the principles of flexibility, independence, and contextual learning in the Merdeka Curriculum are implemented in pesantren without compromising the Islamic identity and distinctive character of pesantren as institutions shaping the moral and spiritual character of students. This research was conducted at Pesantren Minhajul Haq Purwakarta, an Islamic educational institution that has started implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in its educational activities. This location was purposively selected as it is considered representative for studying the integration of the national curriculum with a pesantren education system that has a strong tradition of Islamic scholarship and a unique institutional structure (Oktaria et al., 2025).

The data sources in this study consist of both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from interviews with the leaders of the pesantren, ustadz, teachers, and students involved in the curriculum implementation. Secondary data were obtained from supporting documents such as pesantren curricula, teaching modules, Merdeka Curriculum implementation guidelines, learning activity reports, and relevant literature and previous research findings. Data

collection techniques included in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather information in a more flexible manner while still focusing on the research objectives. Participatory observation was conducted by directly observing the learning process, teacher-student interactions, and the application of Islamic values in daily educational activities at the pesantren. Documentation was used to examine various records and written materials related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, source and method triangulation were employed. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documents obtained from different sources to ensure the data is trustworthy and reliable. Additionally, method triangulation was used by comparing the data results from interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure consistency in the data. Data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's interactive model (Miles & Huberman, 1992), which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researcher selects relevant data related to the focus of the research and categorizes it into themes such as integration strategies, adopted Islamic values, and implementation challenges. The data presentation stage involves organizing the findings into a systematic descriptive narrative, supported by direct quotes from informants. The final stage is conclusion drawing, which is done inductively to identify patterns, meanings, and implications of integrating the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic education values. The findings of this research are expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of Islamic education in pesantren, making it adaptive to national policies while maintaining its Islamic character.

Results and Discussion

Integration of the Independent Curriculum with Islamic Educational Values in Islamic Boarding Schools

The study reveals that Pesantren Minhajul Haq Purwakarta has systematically integrated the principles of Indonesia's Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) into its educational framework while maintaining its Islamic identity as a distinctive characteristic. This integration occurs across four major dimensions: curriculum planning, instructional implementation, value cultivation, and educational evaluation (Anwar et al., 2023; Hostini, 2022; Syafrin et al., 2023; Syaikhon, 2018). Collectively, these dimensions form the foundation for understanding how the Independent Curriculum can be implemented in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) with dual orientations, preserving classical Islamic scholarship while responding to the demands of modern education.

First, in terms of curriculum planning, the pesantren has harmonized the structure of the Independent Curriculum with its traditional religious curriculum. Interviews with the school leadership (Ustadz Isrun Abdurahman, M.Ag.) indicate that curriculum design was developed collaboratively between the madrasah curriculum team (Ustadz Muhammad Sulaiman, B.A.) and the boarding school council (Ustadz Rahardian, S.Pd.). They emphasized the importance of aligning the Pancasila Student Profile with Islamic educational values such as *amanah* (trustworthiness), *ikhlas* (sincerity), discipline, and responsibility. Each learning objective in the Independent Curriculum is translated into an Islamic context, enabling students (*santri*) to grasp the spiritual essence of learning activities. For instance, environmental project-based learning is

linked to the Qur'anic concept of *khalifah fil ardh* (humans as stewards of the earth), reinforcing not only scientific competence but also moral and spiritual awareness (Puspitasari et al., 2024).

Second, in the dimension of instructional implementation, integration takes place through thematic and contextual approaches. Classroom observations showed that teachers consistently connected general subjects, such as Indonesian Language, Social Science, and Natural Science, to Qur'anic and Hadith-based values. Leveraging the flexibility of the Independent Curriculum, teachers designed project-based learning (PBL) that fosters collaboration and learner autonomy. One exemplary initiative, the "Santri Economic Independence Project," engaged students in managing small-scale, locally based businesses such as market days and green farming. These activities not only cultivate 21st-century competencies (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication) but also nurture Islamic values such as *ijtihad*, *amanah*, and *ukhuwah Islamiyah*. Thus, the curriculum's implementation extends beyond administrative innovation—it becomes a medium for internalizing Islamic values through authentic learning experiences.

Third, regarding the cultivation of Islamic values, the integration of the Independent Curriculum strengthens students' moral and spiritual formation. Interviews with Ustadz Furqon, B.A., a learning mentor, revealed that teaching sessions always begin with an intention (*niyyah*) for worship and conclude with spiritual reflection. Teachers act as *murabbi* (character mentors), not merely content deliverers. Daily routines, such as congregational prayer, Qur'an recitation, remembrance (*dzikir*), and spiritual talks (*tausiyah*), constitute a "hidden curriculum" that supports the Pancasila Student Profile, especially the dimensions of faith, piety, and noble character (Farhana & Cholimah, 2024). This alignment represents the harmony between the "Pancasila Student Profile" and the Islamic concept of *Insan Kamil*, both aiming to develop holistic human beings who integrate intellectual, moral, and spiritual excellence.

Fourth, in the evaluation process, the pesantren applies an assessment system combining Independent Curriculum principles with the Islamic concept of *ta'dib* (moral discipline). Beyond academic achievement through formative and summative assessments, teachers evaluate Islamic attitudes and behavioral consistency. Assessment focuses not only on learning outcomes but also on the process and students' commitment to Islamic values. Indicators include participation in religious activities, adherence to rules, and responsibility in group projects. This approach reflects the Islamic educational philosophy that true learning success encompasses intellectual intelligence, moral integrity, and spiritual maturity (Zainudin, 2022).

Across these four dimensions, it can be concluded that the integration of the Independent Curriculum at Pesantren Minhajul Haq is both harmonious and adaptive. The pesantren does not reject national educational reforms; instead, it contextualizes them within its long-standing Islamic traditions and epistemology. The integration process is gradual and participatory, involving teachers (*ustadz*), students (*santri*), and school leaders in both planning and evaluation. The key success factors are collective commitment and pedagogical flexibility enabling the pesantren to utilize the curriculum's autonomy to reinforce its spiritual mission.

Nevertheless, several challenges remain. Some teachers still require training to fully understand diagnostic assessment and project-based learning, core features of the Independent Curriculum. Yet, the pesantren's strong sense of *ukhuwah* (brotherhood) and *gotong royong* (mutual cooperation) provides valuable social capital to overcome such obstacles. Through creative adaptations, such as using classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and experiential learning in place of digital media, the pesantren maintains relevance while preserving its identity.

These findings reinforce the theoretical assertion that Islamic boarding schools are adaptive educational institutions capable of embracing change without compromising their religious identity. As emphasized by Mansyuri et al. (2023), pesantren possess the capacity to indigenize modern educational models by embedding them in Islamic epistemology. The Independent Curriculum, with its emphasis on flexibility, autonomy, and differentiated learning, aligns with the Islamic principle of *ta'dib*, which regards learners as active and responsible agents in their own education. The convergence of these paradigms produces a model of education that fosters not only intellectual competence but also emotional and spiritual maturity.

The integration of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) with Islamic educational values at pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) represents a significant effort to modernize Islamic education while maintaining its core spiritual and cultural foundations. This integration, as seen in the case of various pesantren across Indonesia, is focused on fostering holistic student development, which includes both academic skills and moral-spiritual growth.

Flexibility in Curriculum Design

Pesantren such as Fathurrobbaniy Cisoka and Darul Qolam have adapted the Independent Curriculum to suit local needs while maintaining the integration of moral values and 21st-century skills. This adaptability is seen in how these institutions merge the national curriculum with Islamic teachings, allowing students to benefit from both academic proficiency and character-building (Koimah et al., 2024; Wasehudin et al., 2023).

Balancing Traditional and Modern Education

Pesantren such as Pondok Pesantren At-Thahriyah and Al Munawwarah have embraced project-based learning (PBL) and other contemporary methods that align with the Independent Curriculum while preserving their traditional Islamic education models. Methods like "sorogan" and "bandongan" are integrated with modern learning approaches to maintain the religious essence of pesantren education (Fathurohim, 2023; Subechina & Ratnawati, 2024).

Integration of Islamic Values

The integration of Islamic values such as *tawhid* (monotheism), *akhlak* (moral ethics), and *ibadah* (worship) into the curriculum is essential. In the Independent Curriculum, this is accomplished through thematic, cross-disciplinary teaching strategies and the use of technology. The focus is on ensuring that academic subjects are not isolated from Islamic teachings, fostering students who are not only intellectually competent but also morally and spiritually grounded.

Challenges and Solutions

Despite the success of many pesantren in adapting the curriculum, challenges remain. Teachers may lack familiarity with some of the newer educational strategies, such as PBL or diagnostic assessments. Additionally, the transition to digital learning platforms may be hindered by infrastructure limitations. Solutions to these challenges include ongoing teacher training, the use of local resources, and community-based efforts to ensure that both traditional and modern learning methods coexist harmoniously (Maghfiroh & Sholeh, 2022).

Impact on Character and Spiritual Development

One of the key benefits of integrating the Independent Curriculum with Islamic education in pesantren is the enhancement of character and spiritual development. Institutions have successfully merged the principles of the Pancasila Student Profile with Islamic teachings, ensuring that students develop critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration skills while also embodying values such as honesty, humility, and responsibility (Subechina & Ratnawati, 2024).

In conclusion, the integration of the Independent Curriculum into Islamic boarding schools like pesantren not only addresses the need for modern educational practices but also strengthens the religious and moral foundations of students. This dual focus ensures that pesantren can continue to produce graduates who are not only academically capable but also spiritually and morally strong, ready to navigate the challenges of the modern world without compromising their Islamic identity. This model of integration serves as a valuable reference for other educational institutions looking to balance tradition with modernity in an increasingly globalized world.

From an Islamic educational perspective, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Pesantren Minhajul Haq illustrates an epistemological synthesis between modern knowledge and *diniyyah* (religious) sciences. This demonstrates that Islam is not antithetical to educational innovation as long as core principles, *tawhid*, *akhlak*, and *ibadah*, remain central. As Ja'far (2022) argues, true Islamic education is the cultivation of *adab* (moral discipline) that leads learners toward divine awareness. In this sense, integrating the Independent Curriculum is not merely a curricular reform but a spiritual reinforcement of moral and character formation amid the pressures of modern life.

Conceptually, the study confirms the strong convergence between the Pancasila Student Profile and the Insan Kamil paradigm. Both frameworks emphasize the development of individuals who are faithful, virtuous, autonomous, and socially responsible. Therefore, the integration of the Independent Curriculum and Islamic education is not a compromise of values but a mutually enriching process that enhances the national education system. The pesantren serves as a living laboratory of value-curriculum integration, offering a model for other Islamic educational institutions.

The impact of this integration is substantial. Students become more active, creative, and critical learners without losing the humility (*tawadhu'*) and discipline that characterize pesantren life. Teachers become more reflective and learner-centered in their pedagogical practices. Institutionally, Pesantren Minhajul Haq demonstrates its ability to transform into a modern yet spiritually grounded educational institution. Thus, the integration of the Independent Curriculum with Islamic educational values not only strengthens students' character formation but also reaffirms the pesantren's vital role as a cornerstone of national education, bridging modernity and spirituality in a coherent educational synthesis.

Conclusion

This study reveals that the integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic education values at Pesantren Minhajul Haq Purwakarta has been carried out in a harmonious and adaptive manner. While the pesantren has successfully maintained its Islamic identity, challenges related to teachers' understanding of project-based learning and limited digital infrastructure still impact the curriculum implementation process. This finding contributes significantly to enhancing the body of research on the integration of the national curriculum with Islamic education, by demonstrating how pesantren can adapt the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum without compromising established Islamic values.

However, the study has some limitations, particularly regarding the time constraints and the focus on a single pesantren. Therefore, further research with a broader scope and involvement of more pesantren across different regions would be valuable in providing a more comprehensive picture of Merdeka Curriculum implementation in Islamic educational institutions.

The implications of this research highlight the importance of policies that support the development of teachers' competencies in addressing the challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum,

as well as the need to improve digital infrastructure in pesantren. Additionally, this study can serve as a guide for other pesantren that wish to integrate the Merdeka Curriculum while preserving their strong Islamic educational traditions. Practically, the research also suggests that pesantren leverage the social and cultural strength of mutual cooperation to overcome challenges in curriculum implementation.

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