

Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education Learning at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the learning of Islamic Religious Education at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal. This study uses a qualitative approach with the type of field research. The subjects of the study include Islamic Religious Education teachers, school principals, and students. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The data obtained were analyzed using data reduction techniques, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal has been carried out quite well. The learning planning process is prepared based on the principles of the Independent Curriculum which is oriented to the needs of students, character strengthening, and flexible learning. The implementation of learning applies discussion methods, project-based learning, and formative assessments that encourage students' activeness and independent learning. Learning evaluation is carried out holistically by assessing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. However, this study also found several obstacles, such as time constraints, technological readiness, and teachers' adaptation to changing learning paradigms. Therefore, continuous support is needed through teacher training and strengthening infrastructure facilities so that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can run more optimally.

Keywords: Independent Curriculum, Islamic Religious Education, Learning Implementation, Madrasah Aliyah

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2nd International Conference on Islamic Community Studies (ICICS)

Theme: History of Malay Civilisation and Islamic Human Capacity and Halal Hub in the Globalization Era

<https://proceeding.pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/ICIE/index>

Introduction

The Merdeka Curriculum is present as an innovation in the Indonesian education system to provide space for freedom of thought, independent learning, and strengthening the character of students. In the context of Islamic religious education (PAI), the implementation of the Independent Curriculum does not only require changes in learning methods, but also requires the cultivation of spiritual and moral values in accordance with Islamic teachings (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022: 5).

Islamic religious education plays an important role in shaping the morals, ethics, and character of students. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning and Pancasila student profiles, which include values such as mutual cooperation, faith, and noble character (IAARD and Books, 2023:11). These values have a strong relevance to the teachings of the Qur'an, especially in Surah Al-Mujadalah which emphasizes the importance of deliberation, ethics in speaking, and social justice (M. Quraish Shihab, 2012: 45–47). Surah Al-Mujadalah verses 1–11 describe the ethics of dialogue, respect for individual rights, and the importance of justice in every decision. Hasan Langgulung, *Islamic Education and Its Development in the Modern World* (Pustaka Al-Husna Baru, 2019: 90–91).

These verses can be used as a philosophical basis for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI learning, because both place humans as independent subjects in thinking and acting, but still in the corridor of moral and spiritual values (Sayyid Qutb, 2004: 222–225)

MAS Islamiyah Sunggal as a medium-level Islamic educational institution plays a role in implementing the Independent Curriculum in the field of PAI. Initial observations show that the learning process in this madrasah has begun to adapt the project-based approach (Project-Based Learning) with the integration of Islamic values, but challenges are still found such as limited teacher resources, adaptation to new paradigms, and philosophical understanding of Islamic values that are in line with the spirit of freedom of learning (Observation results of MAS Islamiyah Sunggal, 2025). Therefore, this study is important to examine how the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI learning at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal.

Problem Formulation

Based on this background, the formulation of the problem in this study is as follows:

1. How is the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the learning of Islamic Religious Education at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal?
2. How is the integration of the values of deliberation, ethics, and justice in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal?

Research Objectives

This research aims to:

1. Describe the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the learning of Islamic Religious Education at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal.
2. Identify the form of integration of the values of deliberation, ethics, and justice in the practice of PAI learning based on the Independent Curriculum at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal.

Literature Review

Independent Curriculum Concept

The Independent Curriculum is a new policy developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in response to the needs of 21st century education. This curriculum emphasizes freedom of thought, character strengthening, and the flexibility of teachers and students in designing meaningful learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022:3). In its basic philosophy, the Independent Curriculum is oriented towards student-

centered learning, which is learning that places students as active subjects who build their knowledge through learning experiences (Daryanto, 2023: 17).

This curriculum carries the principle of differentiation, providing space for students to learn according to their respective talents, interests, and speeds (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022: 12) The Ministry of Education explained that the Independent Curriculum aims to "realize Pancasila students who have faith, fear God Almighty, and noble character, independence, critical reasoning, creativity, mutual cooperation, and global diversity." ⁴ Thus, this curriculum has a strong correlation with Islamic education which emphasizes the formation of moral and universal humanity. (Center for Curriculum and Learning, 2023: 21)

Islamic Religious Education in the Context of the Independent Curriculum

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is a conscious and planned effort to instill Islamic values in students so that they become human beings of faith and piety and noble character (Abdurrahman An-Nahlawi, 2018: 87). In the Independent Curriculum, PAI is expected to function not only as dogmatic teaching, but as a means of forming social character and morals (Zainuddin, 2024: 35). In practice, PAI learning in the Independent Curriculum must prioritize learning by doing and inquiry learning, so that students can experience, reflect, and interpret Islamic teachings in daily life. (Al-Ghazali, 2008: 62). With this approach, PAI becomes a space for dialogue between science and spiritual values.

The Independent Curriculum also requires PAI teachers to act as facilitators and role models. Teachers are required to be able to integrate Islamic values with the modern social context. As stated by Abdurrahman An-Nahlawi, Islamic education ideally fosters "monotheistic awareness" which is manifested in a balance between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects (Hasan Langgulung, 2019: 95).

Thus, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal needs to be directed to realize learning that is rooted in Islamic values and oriented towards the development of students' spiritual and social character.

Islamic Education

The philosophy of Islamic education rests on the view that human beings are beings of intellect, soul, and morality, created to be caliphs on earth (Syed M. Naquib al-Attas, 2010: 43). Therefore, Islamic education serves to form a balanced human personality between the worldly and the ukhrawi. Tawhid is the foundation of morality, knowledge as an instrument of understanding, and charity as a real manifestation of knowledge. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, this philosophy is in line with the spirit of freedom of thought accompanied by moral and spiritual responsibility (Syed M. Naquib al-Attas, 2010: 43).

In addition, Al-Attas explains that the purpose of Islamic education is "the formation of good human beings" (human adabi), not just intelligent human beings (M. Quraish Shihab, 2012:39–40). Values such as deliberation, ethics, and justice contained in Surah Al-Mujadalah are tangible expressions of the adabi person who is idealized in Islamic education.

Deliberation in the Qur'an is an important principle in building fair and harmonious social relations. Surah Al-Mujadalah describes how dialogue and debate are carried out in a polite manner, like the story of a woman who objected to the Prophet about the law of zihar (QS. Al-Mujadalah: 1–4). (Al-Qur'an, Surah Al-Mujadalah: 11).

This event shows that Islam values deliberation and active participation in finding solutions. In the context of education, the value of deliberation reflects collaborative and democratic learning as emphasized in the Independent Curriculum (Nata, Abuddin, 2020: 67). Teachers and students need to build an open dialogue space, respect each other's opinions, and make wise decisions—this is in line with the values of agency and collaboration in the Pancasila student profile (Mulyasa, 2023: 53).

Ethics in Surah Al-Mujadalah is explained in verse 11, which emphasizes respect for knowledge and manners in the assembly. Allah said: "O you who have believed, when it is said

to you, 'Have space in the assembly,' then make room for it, and Allah will make room for you..." (QS. Al-Mujadalah: 11). This verse teaches the importance of manners, politeness, and respect for others in the teaching and learning process. In PAI learning, ethical values are the basis for teachers and students to interact, discuss, and express opinions.¹⁵

Ethical values also include al-karimah morals such as humility, respect for differences, and avoiding arrogance in pursuing knowledge. This strengthens the character of students of faith and noble character as the goal of the Independent Curriculum (Nata, Abuddin, 2020: 67).

Research Methodology

Types and Approaches to Research

This study uses a qualitative approach with the type of field research. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is to understand the meaning, values, and implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of in-depth learning of Islamic Religious Education (Sugiyono, 2019: 9). The qualitative method is used to explore educational phenomena from the perspective of the perpetrators, namely teachers and students, and relate them to the philosophical values of Islamic education in Surah Al-Mujadalah (Moleong, Lexy J, 2021:12).

Research Location and Time

This research was carried out at Madrasah Aliyah Private (MAS) Islamiyah Sunggal, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra Province. This location was chosen because the madrasah has implemented the Independent Curriculum in PAI subjects in stages since the 2024/2025 school year (Initial Observation Results: 2025). The research period was carried out from September to November 2025.

Research Subjects and Informants

The subjects of this research include:

1. Islamic Religious Education Teachers as implementers of the Independent Curriculum,
2. The head of the madrasah as a curriculum policy maker, and
3. Grade XI students as learning participants.

The selection of informants is carried out by the purposive sampling technique, which is to select subjects based on the consideration that they understand and are directly involved in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the field of PAI (Bungin, Burhan, 2020: 77).

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain valid and in-depth data, this study uses several techniques, namely:

1. Observation is carried out to observe the implementation of PAI learning in the classroom, including the interaction of teachers and students as well as the application of the values of deliberation, ethics, and justice (Creswell, John W, 2018: 180).
2. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers, madrasah heads, and students to obtain data on their understanding and experience in implementing the Independent Curriculum (Nazir, Moh, 2017: 63).
3. Documentation, in the form of an analysis of lesson plans, teaching modules, and notes of learning reflections used in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the madrasah (Arikunto, 2019: 231).

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which covers three main stages:

1. Data reduction, which is the process of filtering and sorting data according to the focus of the research;

2. Data presentation is carried out in the form of a descriptive narrative to describe patterns and relationships between variables;
3. Drawing conclusions and verification, which is the process of interpreting the meaning of data based on the theory and philosophy of Islamic education in Surah Al-Mujadalah. (Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldana, 2014:14).

Results

Overview of Research Locations

MAS Islamiyah Sunggal is an Islamic high school educational institution and is under the auspices of the Islamic education foundation in Sunggal District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. This school has a vision to produce a generation of Muslims who are knowledgeable, have noble character, and are able to adapt to the times. In order to realize this vision, MAS Islamiyah Sunggal is committed to implementing national education policies, including the implementation of the Independent Curriculum.

Since the 2023/2024 school year, MAS Islamiyah Sunggal has begun to implement the Independent Curriculum gradually, especially in the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). This implementation was carried out as a response to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology policies that emphasize student-centered learning, character strengthening, and 21st century competency development (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2022).

Based on the results of initial observations, this school has a religious environment that is quite conducive. This is reflected in the existence of routine religious activities such as congregational prayers, recitals of the Qur'an, and the habituation of Islamic morals in the daily lives of students. This condition is an important capital in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning.

Profile of Teachers and Students at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal

There are three Islamic Religious Education teachers at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal with undergraduate and master's education backgrounds in the field of Islamic education. Most teachers have more than ten years of teaching experience, so they have adequate pedagogic and professional competence. However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires teachers to make adjustments to the teaching paradigm, from previously teacher-centered to student-centered.

The results of the interviews showed that PAI teachers initially experienced confusion in understanding the concept of project-based learning and formative assessment. However, through training activities, workshops, and discussions with fellow teachers, this understanding began to develop. This is in line with the opinion of Hasan Langgulung (2019: 95) who stated that curriculum changes require the mental and intellectual readiness of educators so that educational goals can be achieved optimally.

MAS Islamiyah Sunggal students come from diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. These differences in backgrounds affect the level of understanding and practice of Islamic values of students. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, this diversity is an important basis for teachers to differentiate learning according to the needs and abilities of each student.

Based on the results of observations in class, some students showed high enthusiasm in participating in discussion-based and project-based PAI learning. However, there are also students who are still passive and need more intensive assistance. This condition shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires teachers to be more creative and adaptive in managing the classroom.

Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education Learning Planning

PAI learning planning at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal is prepared based on the principles of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes the achievement of essential competencies, character strengthening, and flexibility in the learning process. Teachers are no longer fixated on the target of completing the material alone, but rather focus on a deep understanding and practice of Islamic values by students.

Teachers prepare teaching modules that contain learning objectives, learning activities, assessments, and reflections. In this planning stage, teachers also conduct diagnostic assessments to determine students' initial abilities. The results of the assessment are used as a basis for determining appropriate learning strategies. According to Arikunto (2013: 112), diagnostic assessments are very important to ensure that learning runs according to the needs of students.

Learning Implementation

The implementation of PAI learning at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal is carried out with an active and contextual learning approach. Teachers act as facilitators who guide students in discovering and understanding the values of Islamic teachings. The learning methods used include group discussions, presentations, case studies, and project-based learning.

For example, in the moral material, students are given a project to observe and analyze social behavior in the school environment, then relate it to the commendable moral values in Islam. This activity encourages students to think critically and apply religious teachings in real life. This is in line with Muhaimin's (2022: 76) view that religious learning must be applicable and contextual.

Learning Evaluation

The evaluation of learning in the Independent Curriculum is carried out on an ongoing basis through formative and summative assessments. Teachers not only assess the cognitive aspect, but also the attitude and skills of the students. The forms of evaluation used include written tests, project assessments, portfolios, and observations of students' religious attitudes.

The results show that this evaluation approach provides a more comprehensive picture of student development. Students are not only judged by the final results, but also by the learning process they undergo. This approach is in accordance with the concept of holistic evaluation put forward by Mulanda (2021: 127).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Supporting Factors

The main supporting factors in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal are the support of the principal, the availability of learning resources, and a religious school environment. The principal provides space for teachers to innovate and take part in training, thereby increasing teachers' readiness to implement the new curriculum.

Inhibiting Factors

However, there are several obstacles faced, such as time constraints, technological readiness, and resistance of some teachers to change. This obstacle shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires a continuous adaptation process (Rahmani, 2018: 88).

Discussion

Based on the results of the research that has been presented in the previous section, it can be seen that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal is going quite well, although in its implementation there are still various challenges. In general, the Independent Curriculum has a

positive impact on the learning process, especially in increasing students' activeness, independence, and understanding of Islamic values. This shows that the change in the learning paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered is beginning to be realized in PAI learning practices.

The activeness of students can be seen from the involvement of students in group discussions, presentation of learning results, and project-based learning activities designed by teachers. In the Independent Curriculum, students not only play the role of recipients of information, but also as learning subjects who actively seek, process, and reflect on the knowledge obtained. This finding is in line with the objectives of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes the importance of meaningful and contextual learning, so that students are able to relate Islamic Religious Education materials to the reality of daily life.

In addition to activeness, the Independent Curriculum also encourages the growth of student learning independence. This independence is reflected in students' ability to manage learning tasks, complete group projects, and reflect on their learning processes and outcomes. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, learning independence is an important aspect because Islamic teachings are not only understood theoretically, but also practiced consciously and responsibly in daily life. Thus, PAI learning is not only oriented to mastering the material, but also to forming students' religious attitudes and characters.

Students' understanding of Islamic values has also increased after the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This is due to more applicable learning approaches, such as case studies and project-based learning, which allow students to examine and apply moral values, *aqidah*, and worship in a real context. For example, through the project of observing social behavior in the school environment, students can understand the importance of the values of honesty, responsibility, and tolerance as part of Islamic teachings. This approach makes Islamic Religious Education learning more lively and relevant to the needs of students.

The findings of this study strengthen the theory of Hasan Langgulung (2019: 95) who states that Islamic education must provide responsible learning freedom so that students are able to develop their potential optimally. Freedom of learning in the Independent Curriculum does not mean that it is unlimited, but rather remains within the corridor of Islamic values and the goals of national education. In this case, teachers play the role of guides who direct the freedom of learning so that students still have a strong moral and spiritual foundation.

However, the results of the study also show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal has not been fully optimal. One of the main challenges is the readiness of teachers to change learning patterns that have tended to be conventional. Not all teachers are used to project-based learning and formative assessments that demand more careful planning and more complex classroom management. This condition shows that curriculum changes are not only related to learning documents, but also to changes in the mindset and work culture of educators.

In addition, limited learning time is an obstacle in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Project-based learning takes a relatively longer time than conventional learning. As a result, teachers must be able to manage time effectively so that all essential competencies can still be achieved. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, time management is a challenge in itself because PAI material includes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects that are interrelated.

Another factor that also affects the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is the readiness of facilities and infrastructure, especially related to the use of learning technology. Although the Independent Curriculum encourages the use of digital media, not all students have the same access and ability to use this technology. Therefore, an adaptive learning strategy is needed so as not to create a learning gap between students.

Overall, this discussion shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal has made a positive contribution to improving the quality of learning. This curriculum is able to encourage students

to study actively, independently, and responsibly, while strengthening their understanding and practice of Islamic values. However, the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is highly dependent on the readiness of teachers, school support, and the availability of supporting facilities. Therefore, efforts to improve teacher competence and strengthen collaboration between school residents are important steps so that the goals of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning can be achieved optimally.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning at MAS Islamiyah Sunggal has been carried out quite well. The process of planning, implementing, and evaluating learning has referred to the principles of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes student-centered learning, character strengthening, and the development of spiritual and social competencies. Discussion- and project-based learning is able to increase students' activeness and understanding of the values of Islamic teachings in daily life.

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum still faces several obstacles, such as limited learning time, technological readiness, and the adaptation of some teachers to changes in learning paradigms. Therefore, continuous support from schools is needed through teacher training, the provision of infrastructure, and the collaboration of all school residents so that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning can run more optimally.

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