



The Impact of Curriculum Changes on Students' Learning Power in Islamic Religious Education Subjects at Madrasah Aliyah

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Abstract

Changes in the education curriculum in Indonesia, including in the subject of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at the Madrasah Aliyah level, seek to improve the quality of education by the development of the times. New curricula, such as the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, bring various changes in the teaching and learning approaches. This article aims to analyze the impact of curriculum changes on students' learning abilities in the PAI subject at Madrasah Aliyah. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study that discusses the various impacts of curriculum changes on the understanding and application of PAI material among students. The study results show that curriculum changes positively influence student motivation, understanding, and character, but are also faced with several challenges in their implementation. Therefore, collaborative efforts are needed between teachers, students, and the madrasah to maximize the positive impact of the curriculum changes.

Keywords: Change Curriculum, Curriculum 2013, Education Islamic Religion (PAI), Impact of Curriculum Changes. Independent Curriculum.

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I. Introduction

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in Madrasah Aliyah plays a critical and strategic role in shaping students' character, morals, and spiritual qualities—who represent the nation's future leaders. These students must not only be knowledgeable but also faithful and pious, embodying the core values of Islam in their daily lives. Beyond providing a medium for deep understanding of Islamic teachings, PAI is a tool for internalising noble moral values essential for students' personal development (Septianingsih et al., 2024). This dual function makes PAI a fundamental pillar in shaping well-rounded, balanced individuals—addressing cognitive learning and affective and psychomotor development.

With the rapid advancements in science and technology, the world of education is continually confronted with new challenges. These challenges necessitate flexibility and innovation in the educational system, prompting curriculum changes that ensure students are equipped for the future. The ongoing curricular reforms in Indonesia, specifically the transition from the 2013 Curriculum (K13) to the Independent Curriculum, directly respond to these evolving educational demands. K13's thematic-integrative approach and competency-based assessments aim to build well-rounded students. Meanwhile, the Independent Curriculum grants greater flexibility in designing student-centred, project-based learning experiences that emphasise active learning and real-world application.

A key indicator of learning success is student learning power, which reflects students' ability to absorb, understand, and apply knowledge (Rahmasari et al., 2024). In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this power is not merely cognitive—it also encompasses the strengthening of affective dimensions (instilling moral and religious values) and psychomotor skills (e.g., worship practices). Therefore, curriculum changes are shaping students' academic achievements and reshaping how they engage with and respond to the teachings of Islam. This transformation is crucial for ensuring that students emerge not just as intellectuals but as individuals who embody the values of their faith.

Implementing Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum presents significant challenges for teachers and educational institutions. Studies highlight issues with teacher readiness, including limited understanding of the new curriculum paradigm and pedagogical methods (Gurion & Nasir, 2024). Inadequate training, ICT resources, and infrastructure gaps hinder effective implementation. (Widiansyah et al., 2024). The transition from the previous K13 curriculum has led to difficulties adapting teaching preparations, evaluation techniques, and learning activities. Despite these challenges, the new curriculum shows potential for enhancing student creativity and preparedness for professional life. Despite the potential benefits of these curricular changes, the transition process poses significant challenges, particularly in the context of teacher readiness, student adaptation, and the alignment between curriculum goals and real-world educational practices (Tabroni et al., 2021). These challenges often lead to a gap between curriculum objectives and their practical implementation in Madrasah Aliyah.

Given the increasing urgency to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education, there is a pressing need for an in-depth evaluation of how curriculum changes, especially the shift from K13 to the Independent Curriculum, affect students' learning capabilities in Islamic Religious Education subjects. This study aims to fill this gap by assessing the impacts of these curriculum shifts, offering valuable insights into how these reforms are influencing student learning outcomes. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the transition between two significant educational reforms and its potential to inform educators and policymakers in optimizing future curriculum design for Islamic Religious Education. By identifying the key factors that facilitate or hinder the successful implementation of these curricula, the study will contribute to enhancing the quality of education and better preparing students for the dynamic challenges of the future.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative approach with a literature review methodology to analyze the impact of curriculum changes on students' learning abilities in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Madrasah Aliyah. The data for this study were sourced from a comprehensive review of relevant literature, including books, journal articles, and previous research related to the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum (K13) and the Merdeka Curriculum.

The primary aim of this research is to critically evaluate the influence of these curriculum changes on students' learning outcomes, particularly focusing on the learning power in the context of

Islamic Religious Education (PAI). The literature review was conducted to examine various aspects, including the effectiveness of different learning methods, teaching strategies, and the evaluation outcomes of PAI learning in madrasas. The analysis process followed several key steps:

1. Literature Review: A detailed review of academic sources related to the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum was undertaken. Studies discussing student learning power, teaching methodologies, and evaluations of PAI in madrasas were prioritized.
2. Data Reduction: The collected data were systematically categorized by filtering and sorting only the most relevant information that directly pertains to the curriculum changes and their corresponding impacts on students.
3. Categorization: Once the data was filtered, it was classified into key thematic areas, such as the positive impacts, implementation challenges, and recommendations for enhancing student learning outcomes.
4. Data Synthesis: After categorization, the relevant findings were synthesized to determine overarching trends and patterns regarding the effectiveness of the two curricula in shaping students' learning abilities in PAI.

The analysis shows that curriculum changes have notably influenced both the approach to learning and the student learning outcomes. The 2013 Curriculum emphasizes the development of competencies, whereas the Merdeka Curriculum facilitates the enhancement of critical thinking skills through a more flexible and student-centered approach. To ensure the validity and credibility of the findings, triangulation was applied by cross-referencing the study's results with findings from various scholarly sources and prior research in the field.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 A More Flexible Learning Approach

One of the most notable shifts in the Independent Curriculum is the increased flexibility given to teachers in designing and selecting teaching methods that are responsive to the diverse needs of students. This autonomy allows for adopting exploration-based and problem-based learning approaches, which have significantly enhanced student engagement in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) (Dias, 2024). Students, who were previously passive recipients of knowledge, are now more actively involved in discussions and the practical application of Islamic teachings in everyday life. This shift improves engagement and strengthens the overall educational experience by encouraging deeper learning and critical thinking.

In addition, the Independent Curriculum promotes a more contextualized and relevant approach, aligning learning materials with students' social and cultural realities (Ismail & Imawan, 2023). In the specific context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), this flexibility enables teachers to integrate teaching content with contemporary issues or events, making the learning process more engaging and relatable to students' lived experiences. This approach facilitates a stronger connection between theory and practice, enabling students to understand religious concepts theoretically and apply them in real-life scenarios. As a result, religious learning becomes more dynamic and meaningful, and is better positioned to shape students' character more holistically and practically.

Moreover, introducing project-based learning (PBL) within the Independent Curriculum is another innovative educational method (Kania et al., 2024). This approach allows students to collaborate on projects related to Islamic teachings, such as community service or social welfare activities, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of Islamic values. By engaging in PBL, students develop religious knowledge and essential social and leadership skills, such as teamwork, problem-solving, and empathy. This hands-on approach encourages students to internalize religious values through direct experience, cultivating a sense of social responsibility and an awareness of the

importance of contributing to the broader community. Ultimately, this methodology promotes the application of Islamic principles in ways that actively benefit society.

3.2 Integration of Character Education

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the importance of character education, which is in line with PAI's goal of shaping students' character based on Islamic teachings. This impacts the formation of better student personalities with more internalized religious values (Hamzah, 2018). Students are taught about religious theory and how to apply these values in everyday life.

Character education in the Independent Curriculum provides space for students to understand and apply the moral and ethical values contained in Islamic teachings. Through this approach, students are given religious knowledge and taught how to behave well, respect others, and be responsible for their actions. Values such as honesty, simplicity, empathy, and mutual assistance are integral to Islamic religious education learning, which teaches students to become intellectually intelligent individuals and have noble character. In practice, Islamic Religious Education learning occurs not only in the classroom, but also through activities that involve character development outside the classroom, such as religious, social, and environmental activities.

In addition, the Independent Curriculum also emphasizes the development of students' affective aspects, namely their attitudes and feelings towards the values taught in Islamic Religious Education. Teachers are free to create learning experiences that foster students' love and closeness to Islam. By integrating character education into every teaching material, students are expected to be able to internalize religious values in their daily lives, both in interactions with others and in living their personal lives. This approach also supports the development of students' spiritual aspects, which can help them to be wiser in facing challenges. live and make better decisions based on the religious values they have learned.

3.3 Challenges in Implementation

Although curriculum change brings many benefits, its implementation faces challenges, especially related to teacher readiness to adapt the new curriculum. Many teachers are not fully prepared for more independent and technology-based learning methods, which leads to inequality in the learning process (Zaki, 2021; Harahap, 2022).

In addition, challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum are also seen in teachers' lack of understanding and skills in using technology in learning. In this digital era, a technology-based curriculum requires teachers to master various platforms and digital tools supporting learning. However, not all teachers have adequate access or skills in integrating technology effectively into learning. This can lead to uneven quality of learning, especially in areas with limited access to technology, and can potentially worsen the education gap between regions. Therefore, training and mentoring for teachers is very important so that they can utilize technology to improve the quality of learning that is more interactive and interesting.

Another challenge faced in implementing the Independent Curriculum is the change in teachers' mindset in managing learning that is more independent and based on a more flexible approach. Teachers need to leave the traditional approach that tends to be teacher-centered, and switch to an approach that provides more space for students to seek and develop their own knowledge actively. This requires skills in designing more creative and adaptive learning, as well as the ability to motivate students to learn independently. For some teachers, this change can be a big challenge, because they are used to more structured learning methods and sometimes do not allow students to explore their own ideas. Therefore, support from various parties, both the government and educational institutions, is needed so that this transition can run smoothly and provide maximum benefits for students.

3.4 Influence on Students' Absorption Capacity

The change in curriculum significantly influences students' ability to absorb and engage with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) content. Under the 2013 Curriculum, which emphasizes basic competencies and authentic assessments, students are expected to develop a deeper understanding of Islamic Religious Education materials. However, this shift to a new curriculum introduces challenges in terms of adaptation, both for students and teachers (Syamsudin, 2020; Taufik, 2021).

This transition influences how students internalize and process PAI materials, particularly with the shift toward a more exploration-based learning approach and contextual understanding. In the 2013 Curriculum, the emphasis is not only on mastering basic competencies but also on developing critical and reflective thinking skills through assessments that stress the practical application of knowledge. These assessments, often task-based and real-world-oriented, require students to apply theoretical knowledge to solve problems in authentic contexts.

However, with the introduction of the Independent Curriculum, which grants teachers greater autonomy in selecting and applying teaching methods, students are expected to engage more actively in self-directed exploration of the material. While this encourages independence and deeper learning, it may pose a challenge for students who are more accustomed to the structured, theory-focused approach under the 2013 Curriculum. The shift toward student-centered learning and active exploration requires significant adjustments in the way students approach learning. For some, this transition may be particularly difficult, as they may find it challenging to navigate open-ended tasks without clear instructions and guidance.

Therefore, it is crucial to provide comprehensive support mechanisms for both students and teachers during this period of adaptation. Teacher training and student guidance programs can facilitate the transition by ensuring that educators are well-equipped to guide students through the exploration-based learning process. Additionally, providing ongoing assessment and feedback mechanisms can help monitor student progress and ensure that the learning objectives of Islamic Religious Education are being effectively achieved. By creating an environment that balances flexibility with clear guidance, the adaptation process can be made more seamless, enhancing both student engagement and learning outcomes in PAI.

4. Conclusion

The curriculum changes, particularly the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, have a significant impact on students' learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at Madrasah Aliyah. These reforms emphasize a more flexible learning approach, character education integration, and technology utilisation, all of which enhance the quality and relevance of Islamic Religious Education. However, despite the potential benefits, several challenges remain in effectively implementing these changes, particularly concerning teacher readiness and the availability of educational resources.

To fully realize the benefits of these curriculum reforms, it is crucial to address these challenges by ensuring that teachers are adequately prepared and that educational resources are accessible and relevant. This can be achieved through targeted professional development programs for educators and the provision of appropriate teaching materials and technological tools. Furthermore, a collaborative effort is needed between government bodies, educators, and madrasah administrators to create a supportive environment that fosters successful implementation. Such cooperation will help ensure that these curriculum changes improve educational outcomes and enhance student character development.

The positive impact of these reforms on Islamic Religious Education at Madrasah Aliyah can only be fully realized if these challenges are overcome and a systematic approach is applied to

curriculum delivery. Thus, continued attention to teacher training, resource allocation, and institutional collaboration will be essential to ensuring the long-term success of these educational reforms.

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