**ABSTRACT:** The Merdeka Curriculum is a new curriculum in Indonesia that gives teachers the freedom to develop learning materials and methods that suit students' needs. This research aims to examine the influence of the Merdeka Curriculum on the quality of Islamic Education (PAI) learning. This research uses qualitative methods to understand how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum encourages PAI teacher creativity and innovation in three different State Madrasah Aliyah (MAN) schools in the big cities of Medan, Padang and Bukittinggi. Data collection was carried out through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and study of related documents. The Merdeka Curriculum, data analysis was carried out using thematic, narrative and comparative analysis techniques. The research sample consisted of PAI teachers who had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum for more than one year and had sufficient teaching experience. The research results show that the Merdeka Curriculum has positive potential in improving the quality of PAI learning, including a more open and flexible learning approach, the relevance of learning to everyday life, as well as developing the character and ethics of students. However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in PAI learning also faces several challenges, such as teacher competency and readiness, support from each government and schools in each region, as well as the availability of resources. Comprehensive support from various parties, including government, schools and teachers, is needed to overcome these challenges.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemdikbudristek) introduced the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 (Imron, 2023). This curriculum grants teachers the freedom (Limiansi et al., 2023) to design learning experiences that cater to the individual needs and interests of their students (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Imron, 2023). Previous research has shown that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can foster increased motivation (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Limiansi et al., 2023; Sahertian & Effendi, 2023; Sumarmi et al., 2022; Tuasikal et al., 2021) and enhance teacher creativity (Imron, 2023; Limiansi et al., 2023) during instructional sessions.

The Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to inspire teachers to incorporate a wider range of educational approaches (Jonker et al., 2020; Supriyoko et al., 2022), ensuring that students engage in more meaningful learning experiences (Tumin et al., 2020). Moreover, this curriculum has the ability to enhance the overall quality of education within schools (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Mahmud et al., 2023; Purwasih et al., 2021). By granting educators the freedom to tailor their teaching methods according to the unique needs and interests of their students, the Merdeka Curriculum unlocks a world of possibilities (Zaini & Wahib, 2022).

Islamic Education Teacher has an essential role in shaping character (Aningsih et al., 2022; Marini et al., 2021; Mujahid, 2021) and students’ religious values (Adriany, 2019; Kholisoh et al., 2022; Mujahid, 2021; Suri & Chandra, 2021). They must have high competence in creativity and innovation (Suárez et al., 2021). Because creativity and innovation are crucial in developing meaningful student learning.

The Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to enhance the quality of learning (Imron, 2023), but it can also hinder the pace of learning in Islamic education (Hadi et al., 2023). A major obstacle Islamic education teachers face when implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is their lack of understanding and proficiency in the Merdeka Curriculum (Kasman & Lubis, 2022). This is mainly because the Merdeka Curriculum is still relatively new and has not been widely implemented in Indonesia (Hadi et al., 2023; Imron, 2023; Kasman & Lubis, 2022). Moreover, Islamic education teachers often face heavy workloads (Defrizal et al., 2022), making it challenging to attend training or receive technical guidance on the Merdeka Curriculum.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525
This research needs to be conducted to determine how far the Merdeka Curriculum can encourage Islamic education teachers' creativity and innovation. This research also needs to be done to understand teachers' challenges and opportunities in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic religious education in Indonesia.

II. METHOD

This research uses qualitative research methods. This method is used to understand social phenomena in depth and holistically (Ningi, 2022). In this study, researchers focused on how Merdeka Curriculum implementation can encourage Islamic education teachers' creativity and innovation. Researchers collect data through interviews, observations, and document studies. This study used in-depth interviews with Islamic education teachers to understand their experiences in implementing Merdeka Curriculum. Researchers also conducted classroom observations to see directly how Islamic education teachers implemented Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, researchers studied documents related to Merdeka Curriculum, such as the curriculum, syllabus, and Teaching Modules. The data collected was analysed qualitatively to answer research questions (Ikhwan, 2020). Data analysis uses thematic, narrative, and comparative analysis (Thompson, 2022). The research sample is Islamic education teachers at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) I Medan who have implemented Merdeka Curriculum for over a year and have teaching experience for over ten years, Islamic education teachers at MAN 2 Padang who actively participate in professional development activities and have more than five years of teaching experience, Islamic education teachers at MAN 3 Bukittingi who have implemented Merdeka Curriculum for over a year and actively participate in professional development activities.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Merdeka Curriculum can encourage Islamic education teachers' creativity and innovation

Merdeka Curriculum has major potential to encourage Islamic education teacher creativity and innovation. In the context of Merdeka Curriculum, Islamic education teachers have flexibility in teaching methods (da Silva, 2023; De Urraza et al., 2023; Garcia & Michels, 2021; Jones et al., 2021; Jonker et al., 2020; Miedzybrodska et al., 2001; Mohammadi Zenouzagh et al., 2023; Rodgers Gibson, 2019), holistic assessment (Brown, 2020; Hadi et al., 2023; Ng, 2020; Rahim et al., 2023; Wahab et al., 2022), and role as curriculum developer (Limiansi et al., 2023; Looi et al., 2023; Purwashi et al., 2021). It provides opportunities for Islamic education teachers to develop more creative learning approaches, such as information technology, project-based learning, and local curriculum development which is relevant to the students’ context. Previous studies also support this claim, showing that Merdeka Curriculum can motivate Islamic education teachers to develop their creativity (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Kasman & Lubis, 2022; Mohammadi Zenouzagh et al., 2023; Nida et al., 2021). Nonetheless, challenges such as lack of resources and resistance to remain to be overcome. With proper training and mentoring, as well as collaboration among teachers, Islamic education teachers can overcome these challenges and optimize the potential for creativity and innovation in Islamic education learning.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525
The findings from the interviews conducted with Islamic education teachers at MAN 1 Medan have revealed that the Merdeka Curriculum plays a significant role in fostering these teachers' creativity in their teaching practices. This can be attributed to the freedom granted to them, allowing them to develop subject matter and learning methods tailored to their students' needs. Additionally, the results of classroom observations in Islamic education classes at MAN I Medan have demonstrated that the learning methods employed by these teachers fall within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. These methods, such as discussions and project-based approaches, have proven effective in encouraging students to participate and engage in the learning process actively.

The document study shows that Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers to develop subject matter and learning methods that suit student’s needs. It is stated in Merdeka Curriculum document: Implementation Guidelines. The results of this study are in line with the results of previous studies, which show that Merdeka Curriculum can encourage teacher creativity in teaching (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Aningsih et al., 2022; Imron, 2023; Ng, 2020; Suárez et al., 2021). It is due to the freedom given to teachers to develop subject matter and learning methods that suit students' needs. Other research also shows that Merdeka Curriculum can encourage teacher creativity in teaching (Hadi et al., 2023; Ng, 2020; Supriyoko et al., 2022). Therefore, Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes on project-based and contextualized learning.

Based on the research results and critical analysis of previous research results, it can be concluded that Merdeka Curriculum can encourage Islamic education teachers' creativity and innovation. It is due to the freedom given to teachers to develop subject matter and learning methods according to students’ needs. Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for teachers to develop their creativity in teaching. Teachers can establish subject matter that is more contextual and interesting to students. Teachers can also use more interactive and collaborative learning methods (Mardiana & Amalia, 2022). It can make students more active and involved in learning. However, there are needs of the government supports and related stakeholders to provide flexibility to teachers in developing subject matter and learning methods (Sidiq & Ikhwan, 2018). In addition, there are needs to obtain training and mentoring sessions for teachers to increase their ability to develop creativity and innovation in teaching.

**Challenges faced by Islamic education teachers in implementing Merdeka Curriculum**

Islamic education teachers face several challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. First, the challenge faced is teacher competence (Hadi et al., 2023; Jones et al., 2021; Mahmud et al., 2023; Mohammadi Zenouzagh et al., 2023). Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to have a deep understanding of the subject and the ability to develop innovative learning materials and methods (Looi et al., 2023). Some teachers need additional training to fulfil this requirement. Second, support from the government and schools is also a challenge. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum requires official support and recognition from the government and commitment from the school principal and other school staff (Imron, 2023; Purwashih et al., 2021; Supriyoko et al., 2022). Without sufficient support, teachers have difficulty in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum effectively.

In addition, the availability of resources is also a challenge. Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the use of relevant and varied resources, including technology and teaching

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525
materials that suit students' needs (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Sumarmi et al., 2022). However, not all schools have adequate access to these resources, making it difficult for teachers to implement Merdeka Curriculum optimally. Another challenge is adjusting to rapid changes. Merdeka Curriculum constantly evolves and keeps up with the times (Hadi et al., 2023). Islamic education teachers must keep up with these changes and continuously update their knowledge and skills to remain relevant in teaching. Collaborative efforts are needed between teachers, government, and schools to overcome this challenge (Purwasih et al., 2021; Suárez et al., 2021). Teachers need adequate training and support, while the government and schools must provide sufficient facilities and resources. In addition, discussion forums and experience exchanges between teachers can also be a forum to overcome challenges and improve the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic religious education.

![Figure 1. Teachers challenges in implementing merdeka curriculum](image)

Based on the chart, it can be concluded that the biggest challenge Islamic education teachers face in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is the lack of adequate resources. It can hinder teachers from developing and implementing creative learning approaches and adjusting learning methods to students' needs.

Islamic education teachers face several challenges in implementing Merdeka Curriculum. One of the main challenges is the lack of adequate resources (Purwanta, 2023; Sumarmi et al., 2022; Tuasikal et al., 2021). Merdeka Curriculum encourages the use of information technology (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Fatimah et al., 2023; Limiansi et al., 2023; Purwasih et al., 2021; Rosnelli & Ristiana, 2023; Supriyoko et al., 2022), however, Islamic education teachers have difficulty accessing the necessary tools and infrastructure. In addition, Islamic education teachers also face the limitations in the knowledge and skills needed to develop and implement creative learning approaches in Merdeka Curriculum. Resistance to change also occurs because Islamic education teachers who used to the previous curriculum feel uncomfortable with the changes presented. Adjustment to students’ needs is another challenge faced by Islamic education teachers. Each student has different needs and learning styles, and Islamic education teachers need to adapt learning methods and curriculum materials to students’

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525
individual needs. Finally, both evaluation and assessment are also challenge, as Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes assessment that involves cognitive, effective, and psychomotor aspects. Overcoming these challenges requires commitment and cooperation between Islamic education teachers, school, and related parties. Training, mentoring, resource development, and support from school principals and the government can help Islamic education teachers overcome challenges and successfully implement Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on previous studies, it has been found that teachers of Islamic education encounter numerous obstacles when it comes to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Imron, 2023; Purwanta, 2023; Tuasikal et al., 2021). These hurdles encompass various aspects, with one notable challenge being the insufficient comprehension of the Merdeka Curriculum (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Supriyoko et al., 2022). A significant portion of Islamic education instructors lacks a profound understanding of this curriculum. This deficiency can be attributed to a variety of factors, including inadequate dissemination of information by the government, limited availability of resources, and time constraints preventing thorough study of the Merdeka Curriculum.

According to the study results, 50% of Islamic education teachers at MAN North Sumatra admitted that they did not deeply understand the Merdeka Curriculum. It can hinder teachers in developing subject matter and learning methods under the Merdeka Curriculum. Some Islamic education teachers feel less confident creating subject matter and learning methods under the Merdeka Curriculum. It is due to various factors, such as lack of experience, skills, and support from the school. According to the research results, 33% of Islamic education teachers at MAN North Sumatra feel less confident in developing subject matter and learning methods under the Merdeka Curriculum. It can hinder teachers from implementing Merdeka Curriculum effectively.

Furthermore, some Islamic education teachers find it challenging to implement Merdeka Curriculum due to the lack of supporting resources, such as textbooks, teaching aids, and learning facilities. According to the research results, 17% of Islamic education teachers at MAN North Sumatra found it challenging to implement Merdeka Curriculum due to a lack of supporting resources. It can hinder teachers in providing meaningful learning experiences for students.

Figure 2. Islamic education teachers’ problem in implementing Merdeka Curriculum

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525
The chart shows that the challenges Islamic education teachers face in implementing Merdeka Curriculum can be categorized into personal challenges, challenges within the teacher, such as lack of understanding of Merdeka Curriculum, lack of confidence and lack of skills. Furthermore, institutional challenges originate from the school environment, such as lack of support from the school and lack of supporting resources. Finally, systemic challenges creed by the education system are the lack of intensive and comprehensive socialization of Merdeka Curriculum.

The results of the study found that the challenges faced by Islamic education teachers in implementing Merdeka Curriculum are a lack of understanding of this new curriculum, a lack of self-confidence, and a lack of skills (Nida et al., 2021; Rahim et al., 2023; Suárez et al., 2021; Sumarmi et al., 2022). Another study found that the challenge faced by Islamic education teachers in implementing Merdeka Curriculum is the lack of supporting resources (Limiansi et al., 2023; Tolchah & Mu’ammam, 2019). However, there are some differences between the results of this study and the previous studies. The results of this study show that personal challenges are the biggest challenges faced by Islamic education teachers, while the results of other studies show that institutional challenges are the biggest challenges (Jonker et al., 2020; Mujahid, 2021; Prabawani et al., 2020).

This research also provides insight that teachers must improve their understanding and skills in developing and implementing creative learning approaches (Afandi et al., 2019) and conducting holistic evaluation and assessment (Brown, 2020; De Veaux et al., 2022). Actively participate in Merdeka Curriculum training and mentoring organized by the government or schools. Collaborate with fellow teachers and related parties to share experiences and knowledge in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Looi et al., 2023). With these efforts, it is hoped that the challenges faced by Islamic education teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum can be overcome so that the Merdeka Curriculum can run effectively and encourage Islamic education teachers' creativity and innovation.

Teacher Competence in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

Teachers who can implement Merdeka Curriculum need to have several specific competencies. First, they must have a deep understanding of the purpose of Merdeka Curriculum (Limiansi et al., 2023), concept (Fatimah et al., 2023), and principles of Merdeka Curriculum, including a competency-based approach (Jones et al., 2021; Mahmud et al., 2023; Rosnelli & Ristiana, 2023), thematic learning (Handini et al., 2019; Qondias et al., 2022; Suhartono et al., 2019; Syamsuddin et al., 2021), and holistic assessment (Hadi et al., 2023; Kasman & Lubis, 2022). Secondly, creativity in lesson planning is essential, where teachers must be able to design exciting lessons using various resources and innovative learning methods (Looi et al., 2023; Murwaningsih & Fauziah, 2022; Qondias et al., 2022). Thirdly, the ability to manage inclusive classroom is also required (Gauthreaux & Diehl, 2020; Knickenberg et al., 2020; Paseka & Schwab, 2020; Sormunen et al., 2020), where teachers must be able to understand the unique needs of students and create an inclusive environment for all students. Fourthly, adaptability and flexibility are essential (da Silva, 2023; Jonker et al., 2020; Mohammadi Zenouzagh et al., 2023), and teachers must be prepared for changes in the curriculum, teaching methods, and students' needs. Fifth, teachers must have holistic evaluation and assessment skills (Brown, 2020; De Veaux et al., 2022; Ng, 2020; Rahim et al., 2023; Shahi et al., 2022; Wahab et al., 2022) and be able to measure student
progress in various aspects. Sixth, collaboration and effective communication are essential competencies (Afandi et al., 2019; Sumarmi et al., 2022) because teachers need to cooperate with peers, school staff and parents. Lastly, teachers need to be able to monitor and reflect on their teaching practices (Suddahazai, 2023) by identifying strengths and weaknesses and taking steps to improve the quality of their teaching. By developing these competencies, teachers will be better prepared to implement Merdeka Curriculum and provide meaningful learning experiences for students.

Creativity in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

Research conducted by researchers in 2023 at MAN North Sumatra shows that the competence of Islamic education teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum still needs to be improved. The research results indicate that only 45% of Islamic education teachers understand the Merdeka Curriculum, 33% of Islamic education teachers have good skills in developing subject matter and learning methods, and 22% of Islamic education teachers have good skills in conducting evaluations and assessments.

The results of this study indicate that Islamic education teachers’ competence in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum needs to be improved, especially in terms of understanding the Merdeka Curriculum. Merdeka Curriculum is a new curriculum with a paradigm different from the previous one (Hadi et al., 2023). Therefore, teachers need to understand the Merdeka Curriculum well to implement it effectively. Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers to develop subject matter and learning methods that suit students’ needs. Therefore, teachers must have good skills in developing subject matter and learning methods to provide meaningful learning for students. In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes holistic evaluation and assessment. Therefore, teachers must have good skills in conducting evaluations and reviews to assess student learning outcomes comprehensively.

The chart shows that the challenges faced by Islamic education teachers in implementing Merdeka Curriculum can be categorized into three. There are personal challenges that come from within the teacher, such as lack of understanding of Merdeka Curriculum, lack of confidence, and lack of skills (Nida et al., 2021). In addition, institutional challenges which come from the school environment, such as a lack of support from the school and a lack of supporting resources (Mujahid, 2021). Next are

Figure 3. Teachers creativity in implementing merdeka curriculum

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525
systemic challenges, which are challenges originating from the education system as a whole, such as the lack of intensive and comprehensive socialization of Merdeka Curriculum (Hadi et al., 2023).

Personal challenges are the biggest challenges faced by Islamic education teachers. Due to the lack of socialization in Merdeka Curriculum, teachers do not understand this new curriculum. Institutional challenges are also a significant challenge. It is due to the lack of support from the school, both in terms of providing supporting resources and assisting teachers in implementing Merdeka Curriculum. Meanwhile, systemic challenges can also be challenging, especially regarding the lack of intensive and thorough socialization of Merdeka Curriculum. It can cause teachers not to understand this new curriculum deeply, thus they are less confident in implementing it.

The results of previous research found that the challenges faced by Islamic education teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are the lack of understanding of this new curriculum (Hadi et al., 2023; Jonker et al., 2020; Limiansi et al., 2023), lack of confidence (Syahrial et al., 2020), and lack of skills (Nida et al., 2021). In addition, other studies have also found that the challenge faced by Islamic education teachers in implementing Merdeka Curriculum is the lack of supporting resources (Imron, 2023).

However, there are some differences between the results of this study and the previous studies. The results of this study show that personal challenges are the biggest challenges faced by Islamic education teachers. In contrast, the results of previous studies show that institutional challenges are the biggest.

Innovation in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

Innovation in implementing Merdeka Curriculum is essential in creating relevant learning experiences (Nida et al., 2021), interesting (Muhammad Faisal Ahmad et al., 2023; Saif et al., 2024; Sanders & Mukhari, 2023), and effective for students (Tuasikal et al., 2021). Teachers can utilize technology, such as interactive or applicative learning software (Jones et al., 2021), to increase student interaction and engagement. Project-based and collaborative learning approaches can also be utilized (Ching & Hsu, 2023), where students can work in groups or teams to achieve learning objectives. Problem-based learning, differentiation, and use of local resources are also innovations that can be applied in implementing Merdeka Curriculum (da Silva, 2023; Imron, 2023). In addition, a continuous learning approach can also be used to encourage students to become lifelong learners (Duci et al., 2024; Saif et al., 2024). By implementing these innovations, teachers can create dynamic learning experiences and help students reach their full potential.

Innovation in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum can be interpreted as teachers' efforts to develop subject matter and learning methods that are creative and relevant to student needs (Nguyen-Viet & Nguyen-Viet, 2023). This innovation can be carried out in various aspects, from subject matter learning methods to evaluation and assessment. Based on the results of research conducted in 2023 at MAN North Sumatra, it was found that innovation in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum still needs to be improved. It is shown by only 20% of Islamic education teachers who innovate in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The innovations made by Islamic education teachers are still limited to aspects of learning methods such as project-based learning, theme-based learning, and digital literacy-based learning. The results of this study indicate that many Islamic education teachers still have not made innovations in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.
Efforts are needed from previous parties, such as the government, schools, and teachers, to increase innovation in implementing Merdeka Curriculum. The results of interviews with Islamic education teachers at MAN I Medan who have teaching experience for more than ten years, Islamic education teachers at MAN 2 Padang who actively participate in professional development activities and have teaching experience for more than five years, and Islamic education teachers at MAN 3 Bukittinggi explained that implementing Merdeka Curriculum requires adaptation so that there are no obstacles to innovation in subject matter is the teacher's habit of using structured and linear learning materials.

The results obtained from prior investigations can be utilised as a benchmark against which to evaluate the findings presented in this paper. While previous research suggests that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in MAN North Sumatra is not substantial (Aliyyah et al., 2023; Imron, 2023; Limiansi et al., 2023), the Islamic Education Teacher of MAN 3 Bukittinggi stated in this discussion that the research findings were quite encouraging, demonstrating that the teachers' adaptation to the Merdeka Curriculum in MAN North Sumatra has advanced. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that certain aspects remain that necessitate enhancement, specifically concerning subject matter innovation. The juxtaposition illustrated herein reveals discrepancies in evaluating various studies and the deductions made by scholars. The observed inconsistencies can be attributed to differences in research samples, methodologies, or particular conditions accompanying the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. However, it is critical to acknowledge that while this discourse recognises the advancements made by educators in adjusting to the Merdeka Curriculum, it continues to emphasise the necessity for further ingenuity in the realm of subject matter. Upon examination of this comparison, specific disparities emerge between the conclusions drawn by researchers and the outcomes of prior investigations. Nevertheless, the comparison demonstrates that the research findings offer a more sanguine perspective concerning the execution of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN North Sumatra.

**The influence of Merdeka Curriculum on the quality of Islamic Education learning**

When discussing the Merdeka Curriculum, it is critical to contemplate the potential positive ramifications on the calibre of Islamic education that may result from evolving pedagogical methods and an increased emphasis on fostering ingenuity and originality. Scholars such as Imron and Purwasih have emphasised the significance of this possibility. By embracing a more inclusive and progressive stance, instructors of Islamic education can possess the autonomy to investigate a wide range of pedagogical techniques and produce thought-provoking resources that captivate and impart significance to their pupils (Imron, 2023; Purwasih et al., 2021).

The Merdeka Curriculum additionally grants Islamic education instructors the chance to incorporate Islamic religious principles into social, cultural, and environmental spheres of student life (Kasman & Lubis, 2022; Suud et al., 2019). Students’ interest in and comprehension of Islam may be piqued and their knowledge of Islamic education rendered more pertinent and contextualised. Learning quality can be enhanced through pedagogical modification and a greater focus on fostering innovation and creativity (Suárez et al., 2021). By adopting a more inclusive and progressive stance, instructors of Islamic education can enhance their adaptability in crafting instructional strategies and resources that captivate and resonate with pupils.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525
It is essential to consider that the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on the quality of Islamic education learning can differ from one school to another, depending on how it is implemented and the teachers involved. Various factors, including the competence of the teachers, availability of resources, and support from both the government and the school, can play a significant role in determining how effective the Merdeka Curriculum is in enhancing the quality of Islamic education learning.

According to a study, it has been found that the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to enhance the motivation of students studying Islamic education (Tolchah & Mu'ammar, 2019). Not only that, but this curriculum also contributes to a better understanding of Islamic religious values among these students (Mujahid, 2021). These findings are consistent with previous research that highlighted the significance of modifying learning methods and emphasising fostering creativity and innovation, as they positively influence the overall quality of education (Onu et al., 2023).

The results of the study state that the Merdeka Curriculum has significant positive potential for learning Islamic education. First, with a more open and flexible learning approach, teachers can switch from a passive lecture approach to an active and participatory learning method. Students are no longer passive objects that only receive information but are actively involved in learning. Islamic education teachers can use approaches such as project-based learning, discussion, and problem-solving to awaken students' creativity and critical thinking skills (Alegre, 2023) in understanding the teachings of Islam.

Second, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the importance of the relevance of learning to daily life. Islamic education teachers can use this opportunity to relate Islamic values to the reality of students' lives (Onu et al., 2023) so that religious teachings are understood theoretically and applied in everyday life. It will increase the relevance of Islamic education learning and strengthen students' internalization of spiritual values.

Third, the Merdeka Curriculum also supports the development of students' character and ethics. In the context of Islamic education learning, teachers can use curriculum freedom to integrate Islamic values into the learning process so that not only it transfers knowledge but also shapes the behaviour and character of students with noble character (Aningsih et al., 2022). Through habituation, exemplary methods, and self-reflection, teachers can invite students to understand and practice values such as honesty, justice, and tolerance in everyday life. Finally, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages increased teacher competence and creativity. With the freedom to develop learning materials and methods (De Urraza et al., 2023), Islamic education teachers are encouraged to innovate and find practical approaches for their students. It will spur teachers' creativity in developing learning materials and methods that are interesting, inspiring, and easily understood by students.

Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum has positive potential to improve the quality of Islamic education learning through an open and flexible learning approach, relevance to daily life, student character development, and increased teacher competence and creativity. However, its implementation still requires good support from the government, schools, and teachers to achieve optimal results.
IV. CONCLUSION

After thoroughly examining the research and engaging in meaningful discussions, it is evident that the Merdeka Curriculum holds great promise in enhancing the standard of Islamic education. This potential for positive change encompasses various aspects, including a more inclusive and adaptable approach to learning, the practical application of knowledge in everyday situations, the development of character and values, and an overall boost in teacher competency and innovative teaching methods. Nevertheless, successfully implementing the Merdeka Curriculum within Islamic Education has its fair share of obstacles. Some of these challenges encompass ensuring that teachers are adequately qualified and prepared, securing support from both the government and educational institutions, as well as guaranteeing the availability of necessary resources. To tackle these challenges, it is imperative to garner support from many entities, including the government, educational institutions, and educators. The government must equip Islamic education teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to implement the Merdeka Curriculum effectively. On the other hand, schools should ensure that teachers have access to the essential resources required for their teaching endeavours. I Am encouraged by the support of various stakeholders that the Merdeka Curriculum can be successfully implemented and that it will improve the standard of Islamic education in Indonesia. To investigate this subject further, I propose implementing a longitudinal study to track the continuous effects of the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, it would be advantageous to broaden the scope of its research sample to encompass educators and students who possess many attributes. In conclusion, by utilising a variety of research methodologies, we will be able to analyse the impacts of the Merdeka Curriculum from various perspectives.

V. REFERENCES


DOI: https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525


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