



ANALYSIS OF INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT POLICY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION

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Abstract:

The Independent Curriculum policy, initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, brings about major changes in the national education system by emphasizing the Pancasila-based student profile and learning autonomy. For Islamic educational institutions, this policy requires a managerial and pedagogical reorientation to remain aligned with Islamic values. This study aims to analyze the management of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum from an Islamic education perspective, specifically in interpreting the policy and implementing strategies at the educational unit level. Using a qualitative case study approach, data was obtained through document analysis, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation in several Islamic schools implementing the Independent Curriculum. The research results show that Islamic educational institutions adaptively interpret and implement the Independent Curriculum while maintaining their Islamic identity. The strategies implemented include; Integrating Islamic values into all subjects through a monotheistic epistemological approach, Strengthening the role of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, and Developing Islamic-influenced projects, such as waqf-based social entrepreneurship. In conclusion, the management of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic educational institutions is adaptive, creative, and contextual, guided by an Islamic educational vision. The implication is that policymakers need to understand the characteristics of Islamic institutions, while educational administrators are required to have strategic capacity to manage change without losing their Islamic mission.

Keywords: *Independent Curriculum, Islamic Education Management, Policy Implementation,*

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is the core of the entire education system (Novianti, 2019). It does not simply consist of a collection of subjects, but rather serves as a strategic plan reflecting a nation's philosophy, direction, and vision in shaping the desired future generation (Abas & Jamila, 2025). Along with social developments, technological advances, and changing times, various countries—including Indonesia—continue to reform their curriculum (Hapidin et al.,

2024). These reform efforts aim to maintain the relevance and effectiveness of education in preparing students for a future full of challenges and uncertainty (Hendrik Dewantara, 2024). In this context, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), introduced the Independent Curriculum policy as an innovative and fundamental step in the national education system.

The Independent Curriculum introduces a new paradigm that places students at the center of the learning process (student-centered learning) (Putri, 2023). This policy provides educational institutions and educators with the flexibility to design and develop curricula tailored to the characteristics, needs, and potential of each individual student. Its core concept, "independent learning," is realized through a more flexible curriculum structure, strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile as the primary target, and implementing project-based learning relevant to real-world contexts and authentic experiences (Sappaile, 2025). The ultimate goal is to develop students who excel not only cognitively but also possess strong character, critical thinking skills, creativity, independence, and collaborative skills (Halisoh & Sain, 2024).

Within the context of implementing this policy, Islamic educational institutions—including madrasahs, Islamic schools, and Islamic boarding schools—occupy an interesting and challenging position (Selvia, 2024). As part of the national education system, these institutions are obligated to implement the Independent Curriculum (Wahid et al., 2024). However, they also carry a unique mission: instilling comprehensive Islamic values, developing noble morals, and preserving students' Islamic identity (Arifin & Agoro, 2025). This situation raises important questions: how can the Independent Curriculum policy, which uses a universal and nationalist approach, be interpreted within the epistemological framework and worldview of Islamic education? To what extent can the granted autonomy strengthen the mission of Islamic character education rather than weaken it? Is there potential for conflict or synergy between the Pancasila Student Profile and the ideal character of students from an Islamic perspective?

Based on this background, this study was conducted to answer several main questions: (1) how is the Independent Curriculum management policy understood by Islamic educational institution administrators; (2) what strategies are used by these institutions in implementing the Independent Curriculum at the educational unit level; and (3) how are Islamic values integrated into various components of the Independent Curriculum, such as student profiles, project-based learning, and local content.

This study aims to analyze the Independent Curriculum management policy in depth from an Islamic educational perspective. More specifically, this study seeks to map the various forms of interpretation and implementation models applied in the field. The research findings are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of educational management policy studies in the context of diversity, as well as provide practical recommendations for policymakers to be more responsive to the characteristics of Islamic educational institutions. Furthermore, the results of this study are expected to inspire managers of Islamic educational institutions to manage curriculum changes creatively and strategically without losing their Islamic identity and vision.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research is based on an interpretive paradigm that views social reality as plural and socially constructed. The primary focus of this approach is not to test hypotheses or seek universal generalizations, but rather to explore the deeper meaning behind a phenomenon from the perspectives of its participants. Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen because it can capture the complexity of context, nuances, and interpretative processes that occur in social interactions.

More specifically, this research uses a case study design. This design is considered most appropriate for intensively examining contemporary phenomena—in this case, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum—in a real-life context, namely within an Islamic educational institution. Through case studies, researchers can answer the questions "how" and "why" a phenomenon occur.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the thematic analysis conducted on data obtained through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document review, the researchers identified three central themes that answer the research questions. These three themes illustrate how Islamic educational institutions understand, respond to, and implement the Independent Curriculum policy in practice. The themes that emerged include: (1) Negotiation of Meaning – a combination of positive acceptance and critical caution; (2) Creative Adaptation Strategies – efforts to Islamize the curriculum structure; and (3) Identity Dynamics – the institution's role as an active actor in the change process.

Theme 1: Negotiation of Meaning: Between Positive Acceptance and Critical Caution

Initial findings indicate that Islamic educational institutions did not simply passively accept the Independent Curriculum policy. Instead, they engaged in a complex process of negotiating meaning, where enthusiasm for flexibility and character building combined with caution regarding the possible reduction in the proportion of religious values. The positive response was particularly evident in the acceptance of the Pancasila Student Profile concept. Principals and teachers believe that the values contained within the curriculum—such as religiosity, mutual cooperation, and global diversity—are essentially aligned with Islamic principles.

One principal of an Islamic junior high school stated in an interview:

"We view the Pancasila Student Profile as not contradicting Islamic teachings. In fact, this concept is a way to translate Islamic values into a national context. A child must be religious, of course, that's an obligation, but they must also be able to cooperate and respect differences, as exemplified by the Prophet. The Independent Curriculum provides us with the space to present Islam as a blessing for all the worlds." (Interview, Principal of Ibnu Sina Junior High School, September 15, 2025).

This view demonstrates an effort to contextualize, even Islamize, a concept previously considered general or secular. For them, the Pancasila Student Profile serves as a common ground between the national education vision and the mission of Islamic education.

On the other hand, caution has also emerged regarding the implementation of project-based learning and the allocation of learning time. Some teachers, particularly Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, worry

that an overemphasis on project activities could reduce the effective time available for teaching core subjects such as the Quran, Hadith, Fiqh, and Aqidah (beliefs and morals). One PAI teacher stated:

"Project activities are good because they make students more active, but we need to maintain a balance. We don't want the time that should be spent memorizing surahs or studying fiqh to be reduced by preparing projects whose topics are sometimes far from the religious context. We try to ensure that the religious learning portion remains intact." (Interview, PAI teacher at Ibnu Sina Middle School, September 15, 2025).

This finding aligns with research (Nashuddin, 2020), which revealed that faith-based educational institutions tend to filter national education policies to align them with the institution's core values. Therefore, negotiating meaning in this context cannot be understood as a form of resistance, but rather as a strategy of institutional vigilance to maintain the institution's identity—a characteristic characteristic of policy implementation at the local level.

Theme 2: Creative Adaptation Strategies: Islamization of Curriculum Structure

As a follow-up to this process of negotiating meaning, Islamic educational institutions have designed various innovative and contextual adaptation strategies. These efforts are not merely a reaction to existing policies, but also a proactive step to integrate Islamic values into the Merdeka Curriculum structure internally and systematically.

The first strategy is the integration of Islamic values into all subjects (Tauhid Epistemology).

Observations in science lessons show that teachers strive to link the concept of ecosystems with the principle of balance (mizan) in Islamic teachings. In the Lesson Implementation Plans (RPPs) reviewed, teachers appear to intentionally include verses from the Quran relevant to the learning topics. This step reflects an effort to eliminate the dichotomy between religious and general knowledge—an ideal that has long been part of Islamic education discourse.

The second strategy is strengthening the role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) as a binding subject.

While previously Islamic Religious Education (PAI) subjects tended to be taught separately, with the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, PAI teachers in these schools take an active role by collaborating with teachers of other subjects. This collaboration aims to instill a spiritual dimension in students.

Strategi Adaptasi	Bentuk Konkret	Implementasi	Tujuan Utama
Integrasi Nilai Islam (Tauhid Epistemologi)	Menyisipkan ayat Al-Qur'an/hadis, menghubungkan konsep sains dengan nilai Islam, mengaitkan materi sejarah dengan peradaban Islam.	Al-	Menghilangkan dikotomi ilmu agama-umum, menunjukkan keunggulan Islam.
Penguatan Peran PAI	Koordinasi lintas mata pelajaran, memandu refleksi spiritual pasca-proyek, menjadi penjaga "karakter" kegiatan	mata refleksi menjadi kegiatan	Menjaga agar esensi keagamaan tetap dominan dan menjadi landasan karakter.

belajar.

Pengembangan Proyek Bernuansa Islam	Membuat proyek tentang wakaf, ekonomi syariah, biografi ilmuwan Muslim, atau seni kaligrafi.	Memanfaatkan fleksibilitas kurikulum untuk memperkuat identitas Islam secara praktis.
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These strategies demonstrate that curriculum management in Islamic educational institutions is bricolage-like—a creative process of combining elements of external policies with internal resources and values to create a new form appropriate to the local context.

Theme 3: Identity Dynamics: Becoming Active Subjects in Change

The main findings of this study demonstrate that Islamic educational institutions do not position themselves as passive parties simply awaiting direction from higher authorities. Instead, they emerge as active subjects with initiative in managing change. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum provides a platform for these institutions to negotiate, strengthen, and reaffirm their institutional identity.

Their adaptations are not merely technical steps but also ideological ones. Through the process of Islamizing the curriculum structure, Islamic educational institutions demonstrate that Islamic values are not only relevant but also able to enrich and provide a deeper framework of meaning for national education policy (Nashuddin, 2020). This aligns with the concept of glocalization, where global or national phenomena are adapted to the local context, resulting in distinctive meaning and character.

These dynamics disprove the view that policy implementation is always top-down and linear. The research findings demonstrate the power of grassroots education practitioners, who are able to reinterpret and even reshape policies to suit their local needs and values. The success or failure of a policy ultimately depends on how local actors interpret and apply it within their contexts (Tjilen, 2019).

Overall, this research confirms that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic educational institutions is a dialogic, adaptive, and creative process (Samsul, 2025). These institutions have successfully established a harmonious synergy between the national values reflected in the Pancasila Student Profile and the religious mission of developing a perfect human being. This demonstrates the resilience and strong managerial capacity of Islamic educational institutions in maintaining their existence and identity amidst the dynamics of changing national policies (Hefniy et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Merdeka Curriculum) in Islamic educational institutions is dynamic and adaptive, not passive or mechanical. Islamic educational institutions act as agents of change, capable of interpreting and adapting policies in accordance with the values and vision of Islamic education. The Independent Curriculum is seen as an opportunity to expand the space for innovation in Islamic education, with the positive reception of the Pancasila Student Profile concept, which is considered aligned with universal Islamic

values. However, its implementation remains cautious to ensure that the substance of religious education is not diminished. In practice, Islamic educational institutions develop adaptive strategies by integrating Islamic values into all subjects using a monotheistic epistemological approach, strengthening the role of Islamic Religious Education as a character-building subject, and designing Islamic-themed learning projects. Islamic values are implemented comprehensively in the planning, implementation, and assessment of learning, thus reflecting a holistic and contextual Islamic worldview. Overall, the management of Islamic education in the Independent Curriculum era reflects the practice of bricolage, namely a creative effort to combine national policies with local values and resources to form an educational model that is meaningful, contextual, and has an Islamic identity.

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