



Research Article

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Application of Islamic Education and Moral Education Based on the Merdeka Curriculum in Senior High Schools

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ABSTRACT

Background: The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education at the Senior High School level still faces challenges, including limited teacher competence, inadequate learning facilities, and difficulties in implementing holistic assessment, which may affect the strengthening of students' religious and moral character. **Objective:** This study aims to analyse the implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education in the Merdeka Curriculum at the Senior High School level, focusing on lesson planning, instructional implementation, and learning evaluation. **Method:** This study employed a qualitative, descriptive research design. Data were obtained from official documents, scientific journals, reference books, and various relevant academic publications. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis techniques. **Result:** The findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education has been effective through differentiated learning, diagnostic assessment, contextual teaching modules, and holistic assessment. However, several challenges remain, including limited teacher competence and inadequate learning facilities. **Conclusion:** The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education at the Senior High School level has generally supported more adaptive, student-centred learning practices, although improvements in teacher competence and educational facilities are still required to optimise its implementation. **Contribution:** This study contributes to strengthening the discourse on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education at the Senior High School level.

1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum transformation is an essential part of efforts to improve the quality of national education and to adapt learning systems to the times (Julaeha, 2019). Over the past few decades, Indonesia has undergone various curriculum changes, ranging from the 2013 Curriculum and the Revised 2013 Curriculum to the Emergency Curriculum during the Covid-19 pandemic and the Merdeka Curriculum (Farih & Ramli, 2023). These changes were implemented in response to global educational challenges, technological advancements, and the need to develop human resources who are adaptive, creative, critical, and possess strong character. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum represents a strategic initiative by the government to address learning loss caused by the

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pandemic while strengthening student-centred learning through flexible, contextual, and competency-based approaches (Anggraini et al., 2026).

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasises the development of students' competencies through differentiated learning, the strengthening of literacy and numeracy skills, and character formation through the Pancasila Student Profile (Ardyanti et al., 2026). Implementing this curriculum requires teachers to design innovative, adaptive learning processes that align with students' needs and characteristics (Muttaqin & Rahmatillah, 2026). In the context of secondary education, the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is highly influenced by teachers' readiness to develop instructional materials, apply active learning strategies, and conduct authentic assessments (Wilandari et al., 2024). However, various studies indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces several challenges, including teachers' limited understanding of differentiated learning, difficulties in preparing teaching modules, and suboptimal implementation of competency- and character-based assessments.

One of the subjects that holds a strategic position in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (Prasetya & Saifuddin, 2020). This subject is not only focused on mastering the cognitive aspects of religion but also emphasises the internalisation of religious, moral, and social values in everyday life. Islamic Religious Education and Character Education play an important role in shaping students who are faithful, pious, morally upright, and capable of addressing social challenges in the modern era (Natsir et al., 2025). Therefore, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education based on the Merdeka Curriculum requires learning approaches that focus not only on knowledge transfer but also on attitude formation, character strengthening, and meaningful learning experiences.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education is aligned with the constructivist approach, which positions students as active subjects in the learning process (Hudri & Umam, 2022). Through this approach, students are encouraged to construct understanding, reflect on religious values, and connect learning materials with real-life experiences (Safithri & Muchlis, 2022). In addition, differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum provides teachers with opportunities to adjust learning strategies to students' needs, interests, and abilities, enabling the internalisation of religious values to occur more effectively and contextually (Irayati et al., 2026).

Several previous studies have shown that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum has positively impacted learning flexibility, teacher creativity, and student engagement in the learning process (Anggraini et al., 2026; Yuza & Jannah, 2026; Zulfikar & Hidayat, 2026). Other studies have also shown that learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the development of more contextually relevant and innovative instructional materials (Irawan & Mukhlis, 2023; Raswan et al., 2025; Yuswar et al., 2023). Nevertheless, most previous studies have focused on the general implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and were primarily conducted in science and social science subjects. Studies specifically discussing the implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education at the senior high school level remain relatively limited, particularly those that integratively analyse aspects of lesson planning, differentiated learning implementation, and learning evaluation in strengthening students' religious character.

These conditions indicate a research gap in studies on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education. To date, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum at the senior high school level has not been fully understood, particularly regarding the integration of lesson planning, differentiated learning implementation, and learning evaluation to support the strengthening of students' religious character. In fact, a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of such learning is crucial for improving the effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education while simultaneously supporting the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in schools.

This study aims to analyse the planning, implementation, and evaluation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning in senior high schools based on the Merdeka Curriculum. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative analysis of the implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education based on the Merdeka Curriculum, through the synthesis of lesson planning, differentiated learning, and authentic assessment to strengthen students' religious character. The findings of this study are expected to provide theoretical contributions to the development of studies on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, as well as practical contributions for teachers, schools, and policymakers in improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning at the senior high school level.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive research design. The qualitative descriptive approach was chosen because this study aimed to understand, describe, and analyse in depth the implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education based on the Merdeka Curriculum at the senior high school level. This approach enabled the researchers to obtain a systematic, factual, and comprehensive description of the planning, implementation, and evaluation processes of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation.

2.2 Data Sources

This study was conducted in 2025. The data sources consisted of two types: primary and secondary. The primary data sources included official documents related to the Merdeka Curriculum, instructional guidebooks, scientific journals, and government regulations concerning the implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education. Meanwhile, the secondary data sources were obtained from scientific articles, conference proceedings, reference books, and other academic publications relevant to the research focus. The selection of data sources was carried out purposively, considering relevance, credibility, and recency, with particular emphasis on publications from the last five years.

2.3 Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through documentation study techniques. The researchers reviewed various documents, scientific literature, research articles, and regulations related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education subjects at senior high schools. This technique was used to obtain in-depth data regarding concepts, implementation strategies, challenges, and the development of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum.

2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were analysed using content analysis. The analysis was conducted in several stages: data reduction, data classification, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction stage, the researchers selected and focused on data relevant to the research objectives. Subsequently, the data were classified into research themes, including lesson planning, learning implementation, and evaluation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum. The analysed data were then interpreted systematically to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the research focus.

2.5 Data Validity

To ensure the validity and credibility of the data, this study employed source triangulation techniques by comparing various relevant references and scientific documents. In addition, the researchers conducted critical reviews of the sources used to ensure that the research findings were objective, accurate, and scientifically justified.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Result

The findings revealed that implementing Islamic Religious Education and Character Education based on the Merdeka Curriculum in senior high schools has shifted the learning paradigm toward a more flexible, contextual, and student-centred approach. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning was carried out through several stages, including lesson planning, learning implementation, assessment, and learning evaluation.

Table 1. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education Learning

No	Implementation Aspect	Findings
1	Learning Outcomes Analysis	Teachers formulated learning objectives based on learning outcomes at each phase
2	Diagnostic Assessment	Teachers identified students' initial abilities and learning needs
3	Development of Teaching Modules	Teaching modules were designed flexibly, contextually, and according to students' characteristics

No	Implementation Aspect	Findings
4	Differentiated Learning	Teachers applied various learning methods and media
5	Formative and Summative Assessment	Assessment was conducted continuously to monitor students' progress
6	Learning Evaluation	Teachers conducted periodic reflection and improvement of the learning process

Based on Table 1, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education was conducted systematically, from planning through evaluation. Teachers played an important role in formulating learning objectives, conducting diagnostic assessments, and developing teaching modules that aligned with students' needs. In addition, differentiated learning and continuous assessment became essential components in supporting more effective and meaningful learning.

Table 2. Characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education Learning

No	Characteristics	Implementation in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education
1	Student-centered learning	Students became more active in the learning process
2	Learning flexibility	Teachers were free to determine learning methods and media
3	Focus on essential materials	Learning focused on core competencies and fundamental Islamic values
4	Project-based learning	Implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project
5	Character strengthening	Instillation of religious values, tolerance, and noble character
6	Holistic assessment	Assessment covered cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects

Based on Table 2, the Merdeka Curriculum possesses characteristics that support more flexible and interactive learning in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education. Student-centred learning provides opportunities for students to participate in the learning process actively. Furthermore, the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, through project-based learning, supports the development of students' religious character and social skills.

Table 3. Challenges in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education

No	Challenges	Impacts
1	Teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum remains limited	Learning implementation has not been fully optimized
2	Teachers' technological competence remains low	Digital learning media have not been maximally utilized
3	Use of conventional learning models	Learning remains teacher-centered
4	Limited facilities and infrastructure	Project-based and technology-based learning have not been optimally implemented
5	Adaptation of teaching materials requires time	Curriculum implementation proceeds gradually
6	Differences in students' readiness	Levels of student participation in learning vary

Based on Table 3, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education still faces several challenges, particularly related to teacher readiness and learning facilities. Teachers' limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept and insufficient technological proficiency are factors that influence learning effectiveness. In addition, the use of conventional learning models and limited educational facilities also poses obstacles to implementing project-based and technology-based learning.

3.2. Discussion

The implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education based on the Merdeka Curriculum in Senior High Schools demonstrates a shift in the learning paradigm from a teacher-centred to a student-centred approach. The findings indicate that the learning process has become more flexible, contextual, and adaptive to students' needs. These findings are consistent with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which positions students as active subjects in the learning process through competency development, differentiated instruction, and character building. In the context of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, this paradigm shift is essential because learning is not only about mastering religious knowledge but also about internalising religious values and developing students' moral character.

The findings also reveal that the lesson planning stage was carried out through the analysis of learning outcomes, diagnostic assessment, and the development of teaching modules adjusted to students' characteristics. These findings indicate that teachers have attempted to implement the principles of differentiated learning as emphasised in the Merdeka Curriculum. Diagnostic assessment serves a strategic function in identifying students' readiness, learning needs, and prior abilities, enabling teachers to determine more effective instructional strategies. From a constructivist perspective, this process reflects teachers' efforts to create learning experiences relevant to students' real-life conditions (Davison & Leung, 2009). Islamic Religious Education and Character Education are no longer understood as a one-way transfer of knowledge but rather as a reflective process that encourages students to actively and contextually construct religious understanding (Aprilia & Wahab, 2025).

The development of flexible, context-specific teaching modules also serves as an important indicator of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teaching modules function not only as administrative learning tools but also as pedagogical instruments that support meaningful learning (Hijriati, 2023). In Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, the flexibility of the teaching modules enables teachers to integrate Islamic values with students' real-life experiences (Hidayat et al., 2023). This is important because the challenges of religious education in the modern era are not only about conceptual understanding but also about students' ability to apply religious values in social life. Therefore, contextual learning can enhance the relevance of instructional materials to students' life experiences, thereby making the process of value internalisation more effective.

At the instructional implementation stage, the findings indicate that teachers have begun to apply differentiated learning through varied methods, media, and instructional strategies. These findings indicate a shift from previously monotonous learning patterns toward more interactive and participatory learning. Differentiated instruction provides opportunities for students to learn according to their interests, needs, and learning styles. In Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, the application of differentiated learning is highly relevant because students possess diverse religious backgrounds, academic abilities, and social experiences (Lukešová & Martincová, 2015).

The implementation of project-based learning through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project represents one form of instructional innovation within the Merdeka Curriculum. Project-based learning can develop students' critical, collaborative, and reflective thinking skills through activities grounded in real-life experiences (Moradimokhles & Hwang, 2022; Suardana et al., 2018). In the context of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, learning projects may focus on strengthening religious values, tolerance, social awareness, and the development of noble character (Saada & Magadlah, 2021). These findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is not solely focused on academic competency development but also on strengthening students' moral and character dimensions.

The findings further indicate that assessment in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education is conducted holistically through formative and summative assessments. Evaluation focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on affective and psychomotor dimensions (Willard & Norenzayan, 2013). This assessment approach aligns with the characteristics of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, which emphasise the balance between knowledge, attitudes, and behaviour. Continuous formative assessment provides teachers with opportunities to monitor students' learning progress while simultaneously reflecting on instructional effectiveness. Thus, evaluation functions not merely as a tool for measuring learning outcomes but also as a means of continuously improving the learning process (Gerdes et al., 2025).

Although the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education has yielded various positive developments, the findings also reveal several obstacles that affect its effectiveness. One of the primary challenges is teachers' limited understanding of the concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum and differentiated instruction (Moraal et al., 2023). These findings suggest that curriculum transformation cannot be optimally implemented without adequate teacher competency readiness. Teachers play a central role in implementing the curriculum; therefore, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum is highly influenced by teachers' pedagogical, professional, and technological competencies (Raswan et al., 2025).

In addition, limited technological competence and inadequate infrastructure have become obstacles to implementing digital and project-based learning. In the digital era, the utilisation of educational technology has become an essential component in creating innovative and engaging learning environments. However, limited educational facilities and teachers' insufficient ability to utilise digital media have led learning to remain dominated by conventional methods (Fahrudin et al., 2025). This condition indicates that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum requires systemic support, including teacher training, digital literacy development, and adequate learning facilities.

The findings of this study demonstrate that implementing Islamic Religious Education and Character Education based on the Merdeka Curriculum has important implications for strengthening students' religious character.

Flexible, contextual, and student-centred learning provides broader opportunities for the internalisation of Islamic values in everyday life. Through differentiated learning, holistic assessment, and project-based learning, students not only acquire conceptual understanding of Islamic teachings but also develop religious attitudes, tolerance, responsibility, and social awareness.

This study reinforces the constructivist perspective that learning becomes more effective when students are actively involved in constructing their knowledge and learning experiences. In the context of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education, the constructivist approach enables religious learning to become more reflective, dialogical, and contextual. In practice, this study contributes to teachers and schools by developing more effective strategies for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly to strengthen students' religious character at the Senior High School level.

4. IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

4.1 Research Implications

The findings of this study provide theoretical implications for the development of studies on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education subjects. This study strengthens the understanding that curriculum implementation is not only about administrative changes in learning but also involves transforming pedagogical paradigms that emphasise student-centred learning, differentiated instruction, and the strengthening of religious character. In addition, this study extends constructivist perspectives in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education by integrating contextual and reflective learning experiences.

4.2 Research Contributions

In practice, this study contributes to teachers, schools, and policymakers by improving the quality of Merdeka Curriculum implementation. Teachers may use the findings of this study as a foundation for developing teaching modules, differentiated learning strategies, and authentic assessments that align with students' characteristics. Schools may utilise the findings as evaluation materials to enhance support for learning facilities and teacher training programs. Meanwhile, policymakers may use the results of this study as a reference in formulating teacher competency development programs and strengthening the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education subjects.

5. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

5.1 Limitations of the Study

This study has limitations because it employed a literature study approach; therefore, the findings are more conceptual and descriptive based on the analysis of various scientific sources. This study did not involve direct field observations or in-depth interviews with teachers and students at the senior high school level. Consequently, the findings have not fully captured the dynamics of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in actual classroom learning practices.

5.2 Recommendations for Further Research Directions

This study focused more generally on the implementation of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning. It did not specifically examine the effectiveness of particular learning models, the use of digital media, or the influence of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation on students' learning outcomes. Therefore, future studies are recommended to employ mixed-methods approaches or field research involving teachers, students, and schools directly to obtain more comprehensive empirical data. Future research may also develop studies concerning the effectiveness of differentiated learning, authentic assessment, and the integration of digital technology in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum.

6. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning at the senior high school level demonstrates a shift toward a more flexible, contextual, and student-centred learning paradigm. The implementation was carried out in stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers conducted analyses of learning outcomes,

diagnostic assessments, prepared teaching modules, and differentiated learning to adjust the learning process to students' needs and characteristics. In addition, Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning was not only oriented toward cognitive aspects but also toward strengthening students' religious, moral, and social values.

The findings revealed that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum created more interactive and meaningful learning in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education. Project-based learning, holistic assessment, and differentiated learning provided opportunities for students to become more actively involved in the learning process while supporting the internalisation of religious values in daily life. However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still encountered several challenges, including teachers' limited understanding of differentiated learning concepts, limited technological competence, reliance on conventional learning models, and limited educational facilities and infrastructure. These challenges affected the effectiveness of the learning process and underscored the importance of teacher readiness and educational facility support for the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Character Education learning has been well conducted. However, it still requires strengthening in terms of teacher competencies and support for technology-based learning. Therefore, continuous teacher training, the development of innovative teaching materials, and improvements to learning facilities are necessary to ensure optimal implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, Islamic Religious Education and Character Education at the senior high school level are expected to develop students who not only possess strong religious understanding but also demonstrate religious character, adaptability, and the ability to face the challenges posed by contemporary developments.

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Author Contribution Statement

All authors discussed the results, contributed to the final manuscript, and approved the final version for publication. Nimas putri Wulan: Conceptualization and Design, Methodology, Writing - Original Draft; Junaidi sahan: Writing - Review & Editing, Performed data collection and Analysis, Interpretation of the results.

Declaration of Generative AI (GenAI) Usage in Scientific Writing

The authors declare that the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology in the preparation of this article was limited to assisting with grammar correction, language editing, and the development of the academic writing structure. All substance, analysis, data interpretation, and conclusions presented in this article are entirely the authors' own ideas and responsibilities. All instances of Generative AI usage in this article were conducted by the authors in accordance with the [JIKPI GenAI Tool Usage Policy](#), with the authors assuming full responsibility for the originality, accuracy, and integrity of the work."

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest in the conduct of this research or the publication process of this article, whether financial, institutional, or personal, that could influence the results and interpretation of the study.

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