# Islamic Education Teacher's Strategy in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Keywords:	The Merdeka curriculum emphasizes the importance of student
Their Curriculum; Teacher	independence and courage in the learning process, providing space for
Strategies; Islamic Religious	teachers to develop strategies that suit the needs of each student. The
Education	implementation of this curriculum is highly dependent on the
	innovations made by teachers in designing effective learning
Article history:	strategies. This study aims to determine how the PAI teacher's strategy
Received 2024-10-11	in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 16
Revised 2024-11-12	Semarang. This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with
Accepted 2024-12-02	data collection techniques through observation, interviews and
-	documentation. The results of this study show that the PAI teacher's
	strategy in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 16
	Semarang is carried out in several ways, namely, collaborative
	learning strategies, Problem Based Learning and Project Based
	Learning strategies, and technology utilization strategies in the
	learning process.
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# INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes aspects of student independence and courage in learning, providing space for teachers to create learning strategies that are aligned with the needs of their respective students. (Mujab et al., 2023). This curriculum pays special attention to student character building (Ansari, A. H., Alpisah, A., & Yusuf, 2022) such as the values of honesty, responsibility and tolerance. In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum also emphasizes the importance of developing essential skills for students (Dedi Lazuardi, 2017), such as critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration. The material presented in this curriculum is more diverse than the 2013 Curriculum, covering various fields of knowledge, including natural, social and technological sciences (Syarnubi, 2019a). hrough the Merdeka Curriculum, which focuses on essential and less dense materials, teachers have more time to develop character, competence, and creativity in schools (Syarnubi.S., Syarifuddin, A., & Sukirman, 2023). This opens up opportunities for teachers to create various innovations in the learning process and improve the overall quality of education services. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to realize Indonesian education that is sovereign, independent, and has a personality by forming the profile of Pancasila Students who are critical, creative, independent, faithful and devoted to God Almighty, noble, able to work together, and uphold diversity in a global context..(Syarnubi, S., Alimron, A., & Muhammad, 2022).

Teachers as curriculum implementers must be capable in the learning process (Kuswanto, 2015). This is because teachers have a central role in implementing the curriculum as implementers of education. The role of the teacher is not only limited to the delivery of learning materials, but also includes strategy innovation in the learning delivery process. Teachers are required to use an

effective approach so that the curriculum can be implemented optimally(Syarnubi, 2019b). As curriculum implementers, teachers have a great responsibility in adjusting and adapting every aspect of the curriculum to support an effective and relevant teaching and learning process for students.(Syarnubi, 2022). The implementation of the curriculum is inseparable from how innovative strategies are carried out by teachers in the learning process (Sulastri et al., 2023). This learning strategy is a plan that includes various methods, approaches, and utilization of resources to achieve the expected educational goals (Yusri, 2017). The teacher's strategy in learning must adapt the approach to student needs and develop according to curriculum demands so as to create an effective learning experience.(Syarnubi, S, Fauzi, M., Anggara, B., Fahiroh, S., Mulya, A. N., Ramelia, D., ... Ulvya, 2023) In implementing learning strategies in the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are expected to be able to choose an approach that prioritizes students in learning activities. From this problem, the author wants to examine how the PAI teacher's strategy is in implementing the independent curriculum at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang.

Previous researchers have examined various PAI teacher strategies that have been carried out as implementing an independent curriculum, including the Implementation of Islamic Religious Education Learning in the Independent Learning Curriculum carried out by PAI teachers by using two strategies, namely the strategy of student activeness and innovative learning media(Nadhiroh S & Anshori I, 2023), The strategy of formulating Special PAI Learning Objectives (Moh. Yusuf Efendi1, 2022), and the strategy of discussion, question and answer and media such as video(Junaidi et al., 2023). However, to further maximize the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum, more innovative strategies are needed. At SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, several inspiring approaches applied by PAI teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are collaborative learning strategies, Problem Based Learning and Project Based Learning strategies, and technology utilization strategies in the learning process. This approach will help create a more dynamic and effective learning environment.

#### METHODS

His type of research uses descriptive qualitative methods with data collection techniques through observation, interviews and documentation. We used interviews to understand how the PAI Teacher's strategy in implementing the Merdeka curriculum at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang. Through in dept interviews, the author digs up so much data that it becomes the main data in the research. The documentation conducted by the author aims to obtain some supporting data for the research so that it becomes supporting data in the research. Through data analysis using miles and Huberman, which includes collecting data, displaying data and condensation data(Miles, 1994), ter that drawing conclusions.

#### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 1. Characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is one of the policies of the Minister of Education and Research Nadiem Makarim, which has the concept of "hands-on experience activities, abilities and appropriate use (Noor, 2023)." adiem Makarim introduced Merdeka Curriculum as an improvement of the 2013 Curriculum on December 10, 2019. This update begins with four Merdeka Belajar policies (Kemdikbud, 2021) including first, changing the National Standardized School Examination (USBN) in 2020 to an assessment organized by schools, so that a more thorough assessment of student competence can be carried out. This provides flexibility for teachers and schools in assessing student learning achievements using various methods.

*Secondly*, in 2021, the National Examination is replaced by the Minimum Competency Assessment (MCA) and Character Survey focusing on literacy, numeracy and character. These new assessments aim to improve the quality of learning by adopting international assessment practices such as PISA and TIMSS. Third, the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) is simplified from 13 components to three main components: learning objectives, learning activities and assessments. This simplification aims to give teachers more time to prepare and evaluate learning more effectively. Fourth, the New Student Admission policy is made more flexible to encourage equal access and improve the quality of education in all regions.

The Merdeka Curriculum is an innovation in education designed to improve the quality and relevance of learning (Gumilar et al., 2023). The independent curriculum was developed to support the implementation of new paradigm learning. (Syarnubi, S, Mansir F., Purnom, M.E., Harto, K.,&Hawi, 2021). This means that this curriculum is designed to tailor the learning process to the needs, interests, abilities, and potential of each student. Through the integration of freedom, creativity, and flexibility, this curriculum allows students to be more active in developing their potential, while being ready to adapt to the dynamics of an ever-evolving world..(Syarnubi, 2023)

One important aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum is the integration of religious values, which plays a role in shaping students' character and morals(Ramadhan & Santosa, 2023). Essential religious values are an important foundation in educating students to be able to think critically, act ethically, and have a good attitude in social life (Syarnubi, 2020). This is reflected in the role of teachers who become facilitators and provide examples in moderate and inclusive religious practices, because the teacher is an educator who has a role in the teaching process and must be able to apply a curriculum at school.

The Merdeka curriculum has a number of advantages designed to enhance students' learning experience. Here are some of the main points regarding the advantages of the independent curriculum (Kemendikbudristek, 2024) namely the first focus on essential material, where the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes essential material and the development of student competencies according to their developmental phase. This aims to enable students to learn more deeply, meaningfully, and enjoyably, without feeling rushed. With this approach, learning becomes more relevant and interactive, allowing students to engage in project activities that explore actual issues such as tolerance.

Second, character development, one of the main objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum is to support the development of student character in accordance with the Pancasila Learner Profile. (Syarnubi.S., 2024). Through integrated project activities, students are invited to develop their spiritual, moral, social, and emotional competencies. This creates an enjoyable learning atmosphere and supports the development of strong character. Third, Freedom in learning, this curriculum gives schools, teachers and students the freedom to determine the learning methods that best suit their needs. There is no longer a demand to achieve a minimum completeness score; the focus is on the quality of learning (Syarnubi, 2016).

Fourth, in terms of flexibility of implementation, schools are given the freedom to implement this curriculum in stages according to their level of readiness. They can choose to implement some parts of the Merdeka Curriculum or develop their own teaching tools. This provides an opportunity for each education unit to innovate in the way they teach. And finally, the emphasis on literacy and numeracy The Merdeka Curriculum also focuses on strengthening students' literacy and numeracy. With a more focused approach to each subject, students are expected to increase their knowledge more effectively. Overall, Merdeka Curriculum aims to create a learning environment that is more inclusive and adaptive to the needs of students and the challenges of today.

### 2. Implementation of PAI Teacher Strategies in the Merdeka Curriculum

Strategy is defined as part of achieving goals, while learning strategy is a series of learning activities that teachers and students must do so that learning objectives can be achieved (Yusri, 2017). Effective learning strategies must consider the needs and characteristics of students. In designing learning strategies, teachers need to integrate various appropriate strategy innovations. Teachers play an important role in the learning process, teachers are not just delivering material, but also must have innovative learning strategies that are good and appropriate in delivering their learning materials in order to achieve the desired educational goals.

In implementing learning strategies, there are several important components that need to be guided by the teacher so that teaching and learning activities achieve the expected results.

To support the success of the strategy, educators need to identify the characteristics of students, choose the right approach or learning method, and set a minimum limit or standard of success . (Syarnubi, S,. Efriani, A., Pranita, S., Zulhijra, Z., Anggara, B., Alimron, A., ... & Rohmadi, 2024). This standard will later become a reference in evaluating learning outcomes, so that areas that need improvement can be identified and learning outcomes can be optimized.

Islamic religious education teachers are professionals who are tasked with providing an understanding of Islamic religious material to participants (Syarnubi, S&Fahiroh, 2024). Islamic Religious Education aims to guide people to be able to worship and get closer to Allah SWT, so as to achieve happiness in the world and the hereafter (Roslan Mohd Nor & Malim, 2014). slamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers have two main roles. First, as educators and teachers in schools. Second, to provide a deep understanding of Islamic religious material to students. The goal is that students and the community are able to understand religious teachings (Al-Qur'an and Hadith) correctly, which is reflected in polite, peaceful attitudes and behaviors, and reject all forms of violence (Muchith, 2017).

Learning strategies include various techniques, activities, and approaches designed to support the student learning process effectively. (Fauzi, M., Lestari, A.R.S.,&Ali, 2023). Some experts identify the types of learning strategies that are relevant in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. (SMA Negeri 13 Kerinci, n.d.) amely, collaborative learning strategies, problembased learning strategies, project-based learning strategies, discussion-based learning strategies, inquiry-based learning strategies, simulation-based learning strategies, and experiential learning strategies. At SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, the PAI teacher's strategy in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum uses several strategies, among others:

a. Collaborative learning strategy

Collaborative learning is a group learning model that encourages students to interact and learn together to improve their understanding (Djamilah Bondan Widjajanti, 2008). . At SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, PAI teachers are required to present material that is essential and relevant to the context of students' lives. Collaborative strategies allow teachers to facilitate students in discussing core materials, such as Islamic values, ethics, and morals, in a more interactive way. Through group discussions, students can explore their understanding of religious concepts and their application in daily life.

One of the advantages of collaborative learning is that it encourages students to improve their understanding and critical thinking skills. In the context of learning Islamic Religious Education, students can express opinions, ask questions, and share personal experiences related to the teaching material through groups. This not only increases student engagement, but also builds their confidence and communication skills. This strategy is carried out in the form of small or large groups according to the needs and dynamics of the class. Collaborative learning strategies provide opportunities for students to think critically and analyze various points of view. This is reinforced by the results of an interview with one of the PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, that;

"Through collaborative learning, students are encouraged to actively participate in group discussions. I think this strategy is effective because it allows students not only to memorize concepts, but also to understand their meaning through discussion. They are trained to relate the values learned to everyday life, making it easier to remember and relevant. This strategy is also expected to help students apply the values outside the classroom."

#### b. Strategi Problem Based Learning and Project Based Learning

Problem Based Learning (PBL) is a learning approach that focuses on using real problems as a starting point for learning. While Project Based Learning (PJBL) is a teaching strategy that involves students in real projects that demand their knowledge and skills to complete a specific task. At SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, Problem Based Learning and Project Based Learning are integrated through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. The program aims to instill Pancasila values while developing students' characters, such as mutual cooperation, responsibility, and integrity.

PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang apply Problem Based Learning and Project Based Learning strategies through P5 with several steps in identifying problems, group discussion and research, project design, project implementation, project presentation and evaluation, reflection and further learning. With this approach, students not only gain knowledge, but also experience in applying Pancasila values in real life. They are also encouraged to develop skills for the future, such as leadership, social responsibility and problem-solving skills. This is reinforced by an interview with one of the PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, that;

"In Merdeka Curriculum, the main focus of learning is on the process, not just the end result. Learners are encouraged to be actively involved in every step of learning, from material exploration to problem solving in projects. With this approach, students have more space to learn in their own way, discover new ideas, and develop deep understanding."

It can be concluded that from the results of an interview with one of the PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the importance of a learning process that involves active student participation at every stage, thus providing a more meaningful and in-depth learning experience.

c. Utilization of technology in the learning process

Technology is a human effort to utilize science for the benefit and welfare(Riyana & Indonesia, 2017). At SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, the application of technology in the learning process, especially in the field of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), has become one of the interesting innovations. PAI teachers in this school have integrated learning methods with technology through an online Juz Amma memorization program outside of class hours. This initiative not only makes it easier for students to memorize, but also encourages them to learn independently and flexibly and gives them the freedom to manage their learning time according to their needs.

By using an online platform, students can access memorized materials anytime and anywhere, and interact with teachers and classmates virtually. This creates a more interactive and fun learning atmosphere, where students can discuss and encourage each other. In addition, the program is also equipped with various learning resources, such as video tutorials on reciting the Quran, which further enhances the effectiveness of the learning process. In this way, students not only learn to memorize, but also build discipline, responsibility, and technological skills that will be beneficial in the future. This innovation reflects the commitment of SMP Negeri 16 Semarang to deliver relevant and quality learning, in line with the times. This is reinforced by an interview with one of the PAI teachers at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, that;

"We try to keep up with technological developments by integrating them into PAI learning. One of the initiatives we have implemented is an online Juz Amma memorization program outside of class hours. Through this program, students can memorize anytime and anywhere. They are not only required to memorize, but can also learn independently and manage their time according to their needs."

#### 3. Results of Implementation of PAI Teacher Strategies on Student Output

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has an impact on all aspects of education, but the most significant impact is felt by students and teachers as the main implementers of this curriculum implementation. (Siregar et al., 2024). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang has many significant results on students' learning experience. The following are the visible results of this application, including the following:

a. Development of students' critical thinking skills

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) by implementing strategies such as project-based learning and learning that focuses on active student participation, student output shows the development of critical thinking skills. Students not only learn through theory, but also apply knowledge in real activities, such as group projects and exploratory assignments. Through projects and group work, students are encouraged to seek solutions, solve problems, and put forward new ideas. This not only improves critical thinking skills, but also helps students develop creativity and analytical skills in addressing problems from various perspectives.

PAI teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang use a student approach that invites students to think critically about Islamic religious teachings. With this approach, students become more active in exploring and understanding the material. Learning that involves exploration and discussion allows students to master the material more deeply than the one-way lecture method. The active learning process also makes it easier for students to remember and apply the information learned in everyday life. Increased learning independence and initiative

b. Increased learning independence and initiative

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) focuses on increasing students' independence and learning initiatives. With the freedom to explore and discover new ideas, students are encouraged to be more independent and responsible in the learning process. They are taught to actively take the initiative in understanding the material, completing assignments, and managing their learning independently.

This approach that emphasizes active participation makes students not only act as recipients of information, but also directly involved in searching and understanding the material independently. When given the opportunity to explore, discuss, and solve problems individually and in groups, they begin to develop an attitude of responsibility towards learning. This trains them not to be completely dependent on teacher direction, but to have the control and freedom to determine the most effective way of learning according to their needs.

c. Mastery of information and technology skills

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning provides mastery of technology and information skills for students through the implementation of an online Juz Amma memorization program. This has several important influences on student development, especially in terms of digital literacy and technology utilization. The online integrated memorization program gives students hands-on experience in using technology, such as online learning platforms and various supporting digital tools. These experiences enhance students' digital literacy, including an understanding of how to access information, navigate digital platforms, and interact in digital spaces safely and effectively. Digital literacy is becoming an essential foundational skill in today's information age.

Through experiences using technology in learning, students develop technical skills that are beneficial in various areas. For example, they get used to using interactive features, sharing learning resources and searching for additional materials independently. This mastery of technology increases students' readiness to face various technological demands, both in the school environment and in the world of work later.

Based on the discussion above, the researcher draws the conclusion that the PAI teacher's strategy in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang is carried out in several ways, namely First, collaborative learning strategies, where this strategy is carried out in the form of small or large groups according to the needs and dynamics of the class. Second, Problem Based Learning and Project Based Learning strategies, where this learning strategy is integrated through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project activities. Third, the strategy of utilizing technology in the learning process, where PAI teachers in this school have integrated learning methods with technology through an online Juz Amma memorization program outside of class hours.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, the researcher draws the conclusion that the Islamic Religious Education teacher's strategy in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 16 Semarang is carried out in several ways, namely, collaborative learning strategies, Problem Based Learning and Project Based Learning strategies, and technology utilization strategies in the learning process. Through the application of the PAI teacher's strategy carried out above, it also gives results to students, namely, the development of students' critical thinking skills, increased independence and learning initiatives, and mastery of technology and information skills.

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