

## **Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education Learning: A Comparative Study of Madrasah Aliyah Palu City**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the planning, implementation, and enabling and constraining factors of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education at two state Islamic senior high schools in Palu. Using a qualitative comparative case study, data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving principals, curriculum vice principals, and teachers directly engaged in curriculum implementation. Data were analyzed thematically through data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification, while trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation and member checking. The findings show that both schools have formally responded to the curriculum through instructional planning and classroom adjustment, but the depth of implementation differs. State Islamic Senior High School 1 Palu is more adaptive in contextualizing teaching documents and adopting innovative learning practices, whereas State Islamic Senior High School 2 Palu is more cautious, particularly in topics requiring accurate transmission of religious knowledge. Implementation is supported by school leadership and teacher collaboration, but constrained by limited infrastructure, administrative burden, and inadequate learning resources. The study concludes that curriculum implementation in Islamic Religious Education is shaped not only by policy adoption but also by institutional adaptive capacity, teacher readiness, and local school context.

### **ABSTRAK**

Penelitian ini mengkaji perencanaan, pelaksanaan, serta faktor pendukung dan penghambat implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam di dua madrasah aliyah negeri di Kota Palu. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus komparatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi kelas, dan analisis dokumen dengan melibatkan kepala madrasah, wakil kepala bidang kurikulum, dan guru-guru yang terlibat langsung dalam implementasi kurikulum. Data dianalisis secara tematik melalui kondensasi data, penyajian data, serta penarikan dan verifikasi kesimpulan, sedangkan keabsahan data dijaga melalui triangulasi dan pemeriksaan kembali kepada informan.

#### **Kata Kunci:**

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Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kedua madrasah telah merespons Kurikulum Merdeka secara formal melalui perencanaan pembelajaran dan penyesuaian praktik di kelas, tetapi kedalaman implementasinya berbeda. Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 1 Kota Palu lebih adaptif dalam mengontekstualkan perangkat ajar dan mengembangkan pembelajaran inovatif, sedangkan Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 2 Kota Palu lebih berhati-hati, terutama pada materi yang menuntut ketepatan transmisi keagamaan. Implementasi didukung oleh kepemimpinan madrasah dan kolaborasi guru, tetapi terhambat oleh keterbatasan infrastruktur, beban administratif, dan minimnya sumber belajar. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa implementasi kurikulum ditentukan oleh kapasitas adaptasi kelembagaan, kesiapan guru, dan konteks lokal madrasah.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum is part of Indonesia's education reform to respond to post-pandemic learning loss while encouraging more flexible, student-centered, and contextual learning according to the needs of education units <sup>1</sup>. In the context of madrasah aliyah, the implementation of this policy becomes more complex because madrasahs not only carry out the function of general education, but also carry out the mandate of Islamic education through the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) cluster. Therefore, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in madrasahs is not just the adoption of new learning strategies, but the process of adjustment between modern pedagogy and religious learning traditions that have so far emphasized the accuracy of substance, memorization, and authority of teachers <sup>2</sup>.

Previous research shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic education moves in two main trends. On the one hand, this curriculum is seen as opening up opportunities for more active, flexible, and character-strengthening learning. Asfiati pointed out that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI can encourage the improvement of academic competence and the strengthening of Islamic character through flexible teaching modules and the integration of *project-based learning* in activities with Islamic

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Education and Culture, "Independent Curriculum Learning and Assessment Guide," *Jakarta: Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia*, 2022.

<sup>2</sup> Ahmad Zubaidi and Saadatus Saidah, "Development of Islamic Religious Education Based on Independent Curriculum in Madrasah Aliyah," *Edunesia : Scientific Journal of Education* 6, no. 2 (2025): 753–65, <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v6i2.1177>.

nuances<sup>3</sup>. This finding is in line with Astuti et al. who consider the Independent Curriculum to be relevant to improve the quality of Islamic education because it provides space for learning that is more responsive to the needs of students and strengthening character values<sup>4</sup>. In a broader context, Wasehudin et al. also show that the transformation of Islamic education through the Independent Curriculum is understood as an opportunity to develop more adaptive learning without letting go of the dimension of Islamic values<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, such normative compatibility has not automatically resulted in profound learning changes. Aluk Maknunah and Abdul Muis pointed out that PAI teachers have participated in curriculum training and developed learning tools, but classroom practice still shows a mixed approach between the 2013 Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum<sup>6</sup>. These findings are reinforced by Afyah et al., Billah and Achadi, as well as Mustofa et al., who both show that implementation still faces problems at the level of policy translation, limited learning resources, and teacher readiness. Thus, *the state of the art* literature shows that the Independent Curriculum has been accepted as a direction of change, but the depth of its implementation in madrassas is still uneven<sup>7</sup>.

In PAI learning, the problem becomes more complex because the challenges are not only technical, but also touch on the way teachers understand learning objectives, processes, and evaluations. Hasanah and Arrasyid point out that successful implementation is highly dependent on training, ongoing mentoring, and support of digital facilities<sup>8</sup>. Nikmah and Nusaibah emphasized that the implementation of the PAI curriculum has been procedurally running, but still requires development in the variety of learning models, media

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<sup>3</sup> Asfiati Asfiati, "Merdeka Curriculum: Encouraging Creativity and Innovation of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Madrasah," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (2023): 681, <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525>.

<sup>4</sup> Mardiah Astuti et al., "The Relevance Of The Merdeka Curriculum In Improving The Quality Of Islamic Education In Indonesia," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 23, no. 6 (2024): 56–72, <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.6.3>.

<sup>5</sup> Wasehudin et al., "Transforming Islamic Education Through Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Boarding Schools," *Journal of Islamic Education* 9, no. 2 (2023): 255–66, <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v9i2.28918>.

<sup>6</sup> Aluk Maknunah and Abdul Muis, "Implementation of Islamic Religious Education Learning in an Independent Curriculum Perspective," *Indonesian Islamic Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2023): 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.35316/jpii.v7i2.485>.

<sup>7</sup> Afyah et al., "Islamic Religious Education in the Implementation of Independent Curriculum at Schools and Madrasah," *Journal of Islamic Education* 13, no. 2 (2024): 152–59, <https://doi.org/10.32478/se4zz847>; Taufik Mustofa et al., "The Readiness of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum," *Educational Journal* 15, no. 4 (2023): 6728–36, <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i4.4557>.

<sup>8</sup> Uswatun Hasanah and Agung Arrasyid, "Exploring the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum In Rural Madrasah," *Tarbany : Journal of Islamic Education* 12, no. 2 (2025): 37–44, <https://doi.org/10.32923/m9rq074>.

innovations, and evaluation strategies<sup>9</sup>. In line with that, Sahibe et al. and Amirudin et al. show that learning evaluations still tend to focus on cognitive aspects and have not fully accommodated affective and psychomotor dimensions. These findings show that the problem of PAI implementation does not only lie in the teaching tools, but also in the incomplete pedagogical transformation in religious learning<sup>10</sup>.

Recent research also shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not sufficiently explained through teacher readiness as an individual factor. Maylawatia et al. show that the readiness of Islamic schools for the Independent Curriculum is related to the readiness of the institution more broadly<sup>11</sup>. Pahrudin et al. affirm that teacher readiness is influenced by digital literacy, institutional support, and resource gaps<sup>12</sup>. In line with that, Suryadi et al. and Tambak et al. point out the importance of leadership, school climate, and sustainable professional development. Thus, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum needs to be read as an organizational process that involves leadership, professional collaboration, and institutional support, rather than merely a change to classroom practice<sup>13</sup>.

Although the literature has evolved in this direction, previous research still leaves some limitations. Substantively, the study of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum mainly discusses Islamic education or madrasahs in general, while studies that specifically examine PAI learning in madrasah aliyah are still limited. Methodologically, many studies are still descriptive and focus on

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<sup>9</sup> Alfi Nikmah and Nusaibah, "Resilience of Madrasah Aliyah Teachers Amid Curriculum Transformation: A Reflective Study from the Merdeka Curriculum to the Love-Based Curriculum," *Filter : Journal of Scientific Research* 4, no. 2 (2025): 192–201, <https://doi.org/10.32332/tapis.v9i2.12232>.

<sup>10</sup> Nurhayati Sahibe et al., "Learning Management in Islamic Religious Education: Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and Its Challenges," *Nidhomul Haq : Journal of Islamic Education Management* 10, no. 1 (2025): 57–72, <https://doi.org/10.31538/ndhq.v10i1.30>; Noor Amirudin et al., "Analysis of Learning Evaluation Issues Affecting Educational Goal Achievement in Islamic Education," *International Research Journal of Multidisciplinary Scope* 6, no. 4 (2025): 299–312, <https://doi.org/10.47857/irjms.2025.v06i04.05800>.

<sup>11</sup> Dian Sa adillah Maylawati et al., "Assessing Indonesian Islamic Schools' Readiness for the Independent Curriculum Using Text Analytics," *Multidisciplinary Reviews* 8, no. 10 (2025): 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2025336>.

<sup>12</sup> Agus Pahrudin et al., "Teacher Readiness for Deep Learning in Islamic Education: A Rasch Model Analysis of Challenges and Opportunities," *Journal of Teaching and Learning* 19, no. 4 (2025): 262–83, <https://doi.org/10.22329/jtl.v19i4.9573>.

<sup>13</sup> Suryadi Damanik et al., "Improving the Performance of Education Teachers in the Merdeka Curriculum: The Role of Leadership, School Climate, and Job Satisfaction," *Scientific Journal of Applied Sciences, University of Jambi* 9, no. 3 (2025): 1055–65, <https://doi.org/10.22437/jiutj.v9i3.43215>; Syahraini Tambak et al., "Continuous Professional Development for Madrasa Teacher Professionalism: Engaging Motivation for Engagement," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education* 14, no. 4 (2025): 3171–82, <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v14i4.33501>.

one institution, so there is not much explanation for the variation in implementation comparatively.

In fact, Normawati et al. show that the problems of curriculum understanding, teacher readiness, and limited learning resources have arisen in Madrasah Aliyah Palu City even before the transition to the Independent Curriculum <sup>14</sup>. This shows that the implementation of the new curriculum in Palu takes place on top of structural problems that have existed before.

This gap becomes even more important when it is associated with the context of Palu as a post-disaster area. The literature shows that post-disaster educational recovery is not only related to the rebuilding of physical facilities, but also to learning continuity, psychosocial support, teacher capacity, and the quality of institutional decisions in the recovery process <sup>15</sup>. In addition, studies on post-disaster school design show that the quality of learning spaces and reconstruction strategies also affect the sustainability of the educational process and the welfare of students, so that education recovery needs to be understood as a quality issue, not just the speed of rehabilitation <sup>16</sup>. Thus, Palu is not just a geographical setting, but local conditions that have the potential to affect institutional readiness, resource availability, and madrasah adaptability in carrying out the Independent Curriculum.

Based on the literature map, the novelty of this research lies in its focus which specifically examines PAI learning in Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN), the use of comparative studies on two state aliyah madrasas in one city, and the selection of Palu City as an empirical context that is still rarely studied and has a post-disaster character. Therefore, the significance of this study lies not only in the expansion of the study site, but in its ability to explain how curriculum reform is negotiated in PAI learning, why two madrasas respond to the same policy differently, and how the local context affects the quality of its implementation. On that basis, this study is directed to comparatively analyze the planning, implementation, and factors supporting and inhibiting the implementation of the

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<sup>14</sup> Normawati et al., "Implementation of the Curriculum of 2013 in Madrasah Aliyah, Indonesia: Problems and Solutions," *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* 13, no. 4 (2020): 1034–44, [www.ijicc.net](http://www.ijicc.net), 13.

<sup>15</sup> Avianto Amri et al., "Pathways to Disaster Risk Reduction Education Integration in Schools: Insights from SPAB Evaluation in Indonesia," *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 73, no. February (2022): 102860, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2022.102860>; Elinor Parrott et al., "Fostering Resilient Recovery: An Intervention for Disaster-Affected Teachers in Indonesia," *JSM - Mental Health* 6, no. March (2024): 100355, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmmh.2024.100355>; Stephen Platt, *Factors Affecting the Speed and Quality of Post-Disaster Recovery and Resilience, Geotechnical, Geological and Earthquake Engineering*, vol. 44, 2018, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62099-2\\_19](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62099-2_19).

<sup>16</sup> Yandi Andri Yatmo et al., "Development of Modular School Design as a Permanent Solution for Post-Disaster Reconstruction in Indonesia," *International Journal of Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment* 12, no. 1 (2021): 101–13, <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJDRBE-10-2019-0070>.

Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning in MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City.

## Methods

This study aims to comparatively analyze the planning, implementation, and factors that support and hinder the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI learning in MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City. The research uses a qualitative approach with a comparative case study design because it allows researchers to understand in depth the implementation of the curriculum in the real context of two madrassas that are in the same policy environment, but potentially show different adaptation <sup>17</sup>patterns.

The research will be carried out at MAN 1 Palu City and MAN 2 Palu City in November 2025. The location was chosen purposively because the two state aliyah madrassas have implemented the Independent Curriculum and are relevant for comparison. The research informants consisted of 9 people consisting of the head of the madrasah, the deputy head of the curriculum division, as well as PAI teachers and cognate subjects who had used the Independent Curriculum in learning. The selection of informants is carried out purposively based on their direct involvement, mastery of information, and experience in planning and implementing learning <sup>18</sup>.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and documentation studies. The interviews were used to explore madrasah policies, implementation strategies, obstacles, and forms of adaptation carried out. Observations are made in the learning process in the classroom to see firsthand the use of learning strategies, teacher-student interaction, and assessment practices. Documentation studies are carried out on teaching modules, Learning Outcomes, Learning Objectives, Learning Objectives Flow, and assessment instruments used by teachers. The use of these three techniques is intended to obtain data that complement each other and strengthen the depth of findings through various sources of evidence <sup>19</sup>.

The data is analyzed thematically with an interactive analysis model through the stages of data condensation, data presentation, and repeated withdrawal and verification of conclusions since the data collection process took place <sup>20</sup>. The analysis is directed to find patterns of similarities, differences, and institutional factors that affect the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the two madrasahs. The validity of the data is maintained through

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<sup>17</sup> Cheryl N. Poth John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, Fourth (London: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2017), 154–256; Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, SAGE Publications, Inc., Sixth (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), 126–29.

<sup>18</sup> Sugiyono, "Qualitative Quantitative Research Methods and R&D," *Alfabeta*, Bandung, 2022, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Yin, *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods*, 126–29.

<sup>20</sup> Matthew B Miles, Michael A. Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña, *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, Third (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Inc, 2014), 12–14.

source triangulation, triangulation techniques, and member checking to ensure the consistency of information and the credibility of the findings <sup>21</sup>. With this procedure, the results of the study are expected to provide an accurate picture of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI learning in MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Planning for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

The results of the study show that MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City have both started the implementation of the Independent Curriculum through internal workshops, the preparation of learning tools, and the analysis of Learning Outcomes which are reduced to Learning Objectives and Learning Objectives Flow. These findings show that at the institutional level, the two madrassas have responded to the policy formally. However, the depth of planning is not entirely the same.

At MAN 1 Palu City, the head of the madrasah emphasized, "We have started to prepare all devices since the beginning of the school year, PAI teachers are required to prepare their own teaching modules that are tailored to the conditions of students here, not just downloading from the Merdeka Teaching platform." This statement shows that planning in MAN 1 does not stop at the preparation of documents, but begins to lead to the contextualization of learning tools. On the other hand, at MAN 2 Palu City, the deputy head of curriculum stated, "Our challenge here is that teachers must understand that CP is not an old KD that is repackaged. This is a new paradigm, so the socialization process must be continuous and cannot be instantaneous." This quote shows that in MAN 2 the focus of planning is still stronger on internalizing the basic concept of the Independent Curriculum among teachers.

These differences show that although the two madrassas are equally responsive to policy, the pressure points of planning are different. MAN 1 is more prominent in adjusting devices to the needs of students, while MAN 2 still emphasizes strengthening teachers' understanding of the logic of the new curriculum. These findings are in line with Billah and Achadi who show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI learning often still shows a mixture of old and new approaches. This means that the main problem of planning does not lie in the absence of institutional response, but in the uneven internalization of the Independent Curriculum paradigm at the teacher level <sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 339–40; Sugiyono, "Qualitative Quantitative Research Methods and R&D," 240–41.

<sup>22</sup> Muhammad Afrizal Sauqi Billah and Muh Wasith Achadi, "Implementation of the Development of the Independent Curriculum in the Subjects of the Qur'an and Hadith in the State Aliyah Madrasah," *JHIP - Scientific Journal of Education* 7, no. 11 (2024): 13067–76, <https://doi.org/10.54371/jhip.v7i11.6284>.

Analysis of the documents also shows that diagnostic assessments have not been consistently included in the planning stage in the two madrasahs. In fact, this assessment is important as a basis for differentiated learning. The findings suggest that planning still tends to focus on the development of core tools, but has not fully moved towards a learning design that is truly based on learners' initial needs.

In the context of Palu, the limitations of digital facilities and internet connectivity also narrow teachers' access to online learning resources, so that the space for innovation in the planning stage is not fully optimal. To clarify the comparative basis at the planning stage, the main findings in the two madrasahs are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Comparison of Planning for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI Learning in MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City**

| Aspects                                        | MAN 1 Palu City                                                                                          | MAN 2 Palu City                                                                                 | Key Findings                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Initial response to the Independent Curriculum | Internal workshops and preparation of tools are carried out from the beginning of the school year        | Internal workshops and curriculum socialization are carried out in stages                       | The two madrasahs have responded to the policy formally                                  |
| Preparation of teaching modules                | Teachers are required to compile their own teaching modules and adapt them to the conditions of students | Learning tools are being developed, but the emphasis is still on understanding the new paradigm | MAN 1 is stronger in the contextualization of devices, MAN 2 in conceptual socialization |
| Understanding CP, TP, and ATP                  | Relatively more operational in translating CP into teaching tools                                        | Still emphasizing that CP is not an old KD that is repackaged                                   | The level of paradigm internalization is not yet completely the same                     |
| Diagnostic assessment                          | Not consistently integrated                                                                              | Not consistently integrated                                                                     | Both madrasahs are still weak on the foundation of differentiated learning               |
| Planning tool support                          | Device access is more supportive, but still limited                                                      | Access to devices and online resources is still more limited                                    | Limited digital facilities affect the quality of planning                                |

Note: CP = Learning Outcomes; TP = Learning Objectives; ATP = Learning Objective Flow; KD = Basic Competencies.

Table 1 shows that the two madrasahs have fulfilled the initial stages of formal implementation, but the difference is seen in the depth of curriculum internalization and the level of contextualization of learning tools.

### **Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

At the implementation stage, the results of observations and interviews showed that PAI teachers in the two madrasahs had tried to implement learning that was in line with the Independent Curriculum, especially through project-

based learning and authentic assessments. However, the intensity and form of implementation differ between madrasas and between teachers.

At MAN 1 Palu City, the Akidah Akhlak teacher explained, "I try to apply character projects in class, for example, students are asked to make a daily reflection journal about the practice of moral values in their lives, then present them in front of the class every two weeks." This practice shows that learning has been directed at reflection, personal experience, and contextual character building. These findings show that PAI learning is starting to move from just delivering material to a more meaningful learning experience.

At MAN 2 Palu City, the Fiqh teacher stated, "To be honest, not all fiqh materials can be projected immediately. There is material that does need a direct explanation from the teacher, because if it is submitted to students for independent exploration, they are worried that there will be a wrong understanding, especially when it comes to the laws of worship." This statement shows that the implementation of learning in MAN 2 is more careful, especially in materials that are considered to require stronger explanations from teachers. These findings are important because they show that the limitations of the application of the active learning model are not always born from rejection of the Independent Curriculum, but also from the need to maintain the accuracy of religious understanding.

Comparatively, MAN 1 appears to be more open in developing innovative learning practices, while MAN 2 is more selective in adopting project-based learning strategies. This difference shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in madrasas does not take place uniformly, but is influenced by the character of the material, the pedagogical beliefs of the teachers, and the training experience they have. These findings strengthen Billah and Achadi's argument that the Independent Curriculum can indeed encourage active participation of students, but not all aspects of PAI learning are easily changed <sup>23</sup>.

However, the two madrasas face the same problems in the assessment aspect. The formative assessment that should be an important feature of the Independent Curriculum has not been fully institutionalized in learning practice, because most teachers still rely on conventional written tests. This condition is in line with Hasanah and Arrashid <sup>24</sup>, Nikmah and Nusaibah <sup>25</sup>, Sahibe et al. <sup>26</sup>, as well as Amirudin et al. <sup>27</sup>, which shows that the problem of PAI implementation

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<sup>23</sup> Billah and Achadi.

<sup>24</sup> Hasanah and Arrasyid, "Exploring the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum In Rural Madrasah."

<sup>25</sup> Nikmah and Nusaibah, "Resilience of Madrasah Aliyah Teachers Amid Curriculum Transformation: A Reflective Study from the Merdeka Curriculum to the Love-Based Curriculum."

<sup>26</sup> Sahibe et al., "Learning Management in Islamic Religious Education: Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and Its Challenges."

<sup>27</sup> Amirudin et al., "Analysis of Learning Evaluation Issues Affecting Educational Goal Achievement in Islamic Education."

does not only lie in the learning model, but also in the incomplete change in the way teachers understand evaluation as part of the learning process.

To clarify the differences in the pattern of learning implementation in the two madrasas, the main findings at the implementation stage are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. Comparison of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI Learning in MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City**

| Aspects                               | MAN 1 Palu City                                              | MAN 2 Palu City                                                          | Key Findings                                                                                        |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Project-based learning implementation | More open to character projects and reflective activities    | More selective in the use of projects, especially on normative materials | MAN 1 is more progressive, MAN 2 is more cautious                                                   |
| PAI learning pattern                  | More contextual and experiential learning                    | Emphasize more direct explanations of teachers on certain materials      | The difference is influenced by the character of the material and the teacher's pedagogical beliefs |
| The role of teachers                  | Starting to shift to reflective learning facilitators        | Remain dominant as the main explainer on a particular material           | The shift in the role of teachers has not taken place uniformly                                     |
| Student involvement                   | Be more active through reflection journals and presentations | Active, but within the limits of material deemed safe for exploration    | Student participation is influenced by the learning design                                          |
| Learning assessment                   | Still dominated by conventional written tests                | Still dominated by conventional written tests                            | Formative assessments have not been institutionalized in the two madrasas                           |

Table 2 shows that the main difference between the two madrasas lies in the level of courage to adopt innovative learning, while the similarity appears in the lack of optimal assessment transformation.

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI Learning in MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City**

The results of the study show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in both madrasas is influenced by a combination of interrelated supporting and inhibiting factors. The main supporting factors found were leadership support and a culture of professional collaboration among teachers. The Head of MAN 2 Palu City explained, "Alhamdulillah, we have a madrasah head and a very supportive leader. Every time there is a training, we are encouraged to actively participate. The collaboration between PAI teachers is also quite intense, we often create internal MGMP forums to share modules and teaching experiences." This statement shows that leadership support and internal collaboration forums are important capital in encouraging teachers to adapt to the demands of the new curriculum.

On the other hand, the main inhibiting factors that emerged were limited infrastructure, administrative burden, and differences in adaptation capacity between teachers. The teacher of Islamic Cultural History at MAN 1 Palu City stated, "Our problem is not that we don't want to change, but the infrastructure is not yet supportive. LCD projectors in some classrooms are damaged, the internet is often broken, and the handbook for the Independent Curriculum that is in accordance with the SKI map has not been officially issued from the Ministry of Religion." This quote shows that implementation barriers are not only related to teacher readiness, but also to material conditions that affect the likelihood of innovative learning.

This condition becomes increasingly important when it is associated with the context of Palu as a post-disaster area. In this context, infrastructure limitations cannot be read only as ordinary technical problems, but as part of local conditions that affect institutional ability to implement curriculum changes. Therefore, the post-disaster context of Palu City is more appropriately understood as a contextual factor that shapes the quality of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in madrasas. Another inhibiting factor that is no less significant is the administrative burden that is felt to be burdensome by the majority of teachers. The preparation of teaching modules, ATP, diagnostic assessment instruments, and Pancasila Student Profile project reports at the same time is considered too time-consuming and energy-consuming that should be used for more meaningful pedagogical<sup>28</sup> interactions.

Comparatively, MAN 1 Palu City shows a slightly higher institutional adaptation capacity than MAN 2, mainly due to the availability of educators who are more experienced in digital literacy and more access to external training programs facilitated by the Ministry of Religion<sup>29</sup>. However, the two madrasahs still need long-term systemic strengthening, including sustainable teacher capacity development, the provision of more authoritative Independent Curriculum-based PAI textbooks, and adequate and equitable digital infrastructure support<sup>30</sup>. Thus,

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<sup>28</sup> Robi'Atul Adawiyah et al., "Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Educational Institutions," *QOUBA : Journal of Education* 1, no. 2 (2025): 48–54, <https://doi.org/10.61104/qouba.v1i2.173>; Afyiah et al., "Islamic Religious Education in the Implementation of Independent Curriculum at Schools and Madrasahs."

<sup>29</sup> Agus Akhmadi, "Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *Andragogi: Journal of Educational and Religious Technical Training* 11, no. 1 (2023): 33–44, <https://doi.org/10.36052/andragogi.v11i1.310>; Elly Kurniawati et al., "The Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education Learning: Challenges and Innovation in Schools and Madrasahs," *JHIP - Scientific Journal of Education* 9, no. 1 (2026): 1227–33, <https://doi.org/10.54371/jhip.v9i1.10280>.

<sup>30</sup> Nurul Mubin et al., "Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education to Improve the Quality of Learning," *JHIP - Scientific Journal of Education* 8, no. 6 (2025): 6849–58, <https://doi.org/10.54371/jhip.v8i6.8568>; Evita Yuliatul Wahidah and Radzie Sulaeman, "The Implementation of Independent Learning in Islamic Religious Education Learning in Elementary Education," *Masagi* 2, no. 2 (2024): 72–82, <https://doi.org/10.37968/masagi.v2i2.597>.

the results of this study show that the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not only determined by the commitment of teachers or policy support, but by the interaction between pedagogical capacity, institutional support, and local conditions that form the implementation space.

To summarize the factors that affect the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the two madrasas, the supporting and inhibiting factors are presented in Table 2.

**Table 3. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI Learning in MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City**

| Category Factors                    | MAN 1 Palu City                                                                          | MAN 2 Palu City                                                            | Implications                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Madrasah leadership                 | Support implementation and encourage teacher adaptation                                  | Supporting teacher training and collaboration                              | Leadership is the main supporting factor in both madrasahs                                            |
| Teacher professional collaboration  | There is cooperation between teachers and sharing experiences with each other            | An internal MGMP forum is active to share modules and teaching experiences | Collaboration strengthens institutional adaptation                                                    |
| Teachers' digital literacy          | Comparatively higher                                                                     | Relatively more limited                                                    | Affects the variation in media use and learning innovations                                           |
| Access training                     | Make more use of external training                                                       | There is training, but the intensity is relatively lower                   | Training access affects implementation capacity                                                       |
| Learning infrastructure             | Facing the constraints of LCD, internet, and learning resources                          | Facing similar obstacles                                                   | Technical barriers limit innovative learning                                                          |
| Independent Curriculum Textbook     | Not sufficiently available                                                               | Not sufficiently available                                                 | Limited teaching materials slow down curriculum adjustment                                            |
| Administrative burden               | Compilation of modules, ATP, assessments, and project reports are assessed as burdensome | Facing the same administrative burden                                      | Teachers' energy is divided between administrative demands and pedagogical practice                   |
| Post-disaster contextual conditions | Affecting the infrastructure and adaptation space of the institution                     | Affecting the infrastructure and adaptation space of the institution       | The implementation of the curriculum is influenced by local factors, not just internal school factors |

**Note:** MGMP = Subject Teacher Deliberation; LCD = Liquid Crystal Display; ATP = Learning Objective Flow.

Table 2 shows that both madrasahs are supported by leadership and internal collaboration, but also face relatively similar obstacles, especially in terms of infrastructure, administrative burden, and limited learning resources.

## Discussion

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City has progressed beyond the policy adoption stage toward institutional implementation, although the depth of implementation varies considerably between the two madrasas. This finding suggests that curriculum reform should not be understood merely as compliance with government regulations but as an organizational learning process that requires the transformation of teachers' pedagogical beliefs and institutional culture. The observed differences between the two madrasas demonstrate that identical policy directives may produce different educational practices depending on the capacity of schools to internalize curriculum philosophy. This supports the perspective of Fullan (2007), who argues that educational change is fundamentally a process of cultural transformation rather than the implementation of technical procedures alone.

The planning phase revealed that both madrasas formally prepared learning tools, including Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), and Learning Objective Flow (ATP), yet the quality of planning differed substantially. MAN 1 demonstrated stronger contextualization by encouraging teachers to develop their own teaching modules according to students' characteristics, whereas MAN 2 focused primarily on strengthening teachers' conceptual understanding of the Independent Curriculum. These differences indicate that curriculum planning is influenced not only by administrative readiness but also by teachers' curriculum literacy. This finding aligns with the work of Billah and Achadi, who argue that many Indonesian teachers continue to experience conceptual ambiguity because the Independent Curriculum requires a paradigm shift rather than merely replacing previous curriculum documents. Consequently, successful curriculum planning depends on teachers' ability to reinterpret curriculum philosophy within their own educational contexts rather than simply reproducing standardized instructional materials.

An important finding concerns the inconsistent integration of diagnostic assessment into curriculum planning. Although diagnostic assessment represents one of the essential foundations of differentiated instruction under the Independent Curriculum, both madrasas have not yet institutionalized this practice. This suggests that teachers still tend to perceive assessment primarily as a mechanism for measuring learning outcomes rather than as a tool for understanding students' initial learning needs. Such conditions indicate that the implementation of differentiated learning remains procedural rather than pedagogically transformative. This finding corroborates Tomlinson's theory of differentiated instruction, which emphasizes that meaningful differentiation begins with comprehensive knowledge of students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles before instructional decisions are made.

Regarding classroom implementation, the findings demonstrate that teachers have begun shifting toward more student-centered learning approaches,

particularly through project-based learning and contextual character education. Nevertheless, the implementation remains selective and highly dependent on the characteristics of PAI subject matter. Teachers in MAN 1 were more willing to facilitate reflective learning experiences through character projects, whereas teachers in MAN 2 preferred maintaining direct instruction for topics involving Islamic jurisprudence to avoid misconceptions. This finding illustrates that pedagogical innovation within religious education cannot be separated from epistemological considerations concerning the transmission of religious knowledge. Unlike many general subjects, PAI contains normative dimensions that require careful mediation by teachers to preserve doctrinal accuracy while simultaneously promoting active student engagement.

Another significant finding concerns assessment practices, where conventional written examinations continue to dominate despite the Independent Curriculum emphasizing formative assessment and continuous feedback. This indicates that assessment reform has progressed more slowly than instructional reform. Teachers appear relatively capable of adopting innovative learning activities but experience greater difficulty transforming their assessment practices into formative and authentic processes. Similar patterns have been reported by Hasanah and Arrashid, Nikmah and Nusaibah, Sahibe et al., and Amirudin et al., who found that teachers often retain traditional assessment cultures despite adopting new instructional models. Consequently, assessment emerges as one of the most critical challenges in achieving meaningful implementation of the Independent Curriculum because evaluation practices strongly influence teachers' instructional decisions and students' learning experiences.

The findings further reveal that institutional leadership and professional collaboration constitute the primary enabling factors supporting curriculum implementation. Active leadership, participation in teacher training, and collaborative forums such as MGMP create organizational conditions that facilitate collective learning among teachers. These findings support the concept of professional learning communities, which emphasizes that sustainable educational improvement depends on collaborative knowledge construction rather than isolated teacher development. However, the study also demonstrates that leadership alone cannot overcome structural barriers, including inadequate digital infrastructure, insufficient teaching resources, and excessive administrative workload. Thus, effective curriculum implementation requires simultaneous investment in human resources, institutional capacity, and educational infrastructure.

Finally, this study contributes to the literature by demonstrating that curriculum implementation is significantly shaped by local contextual conditions, particularly within post-disaster educational environments such as Palu City. The limitations of infrastructure, internet connectivity, and learning resources observed in this study should not be viewed merely as technical obstacles but as contextual realities influencing schools' adaptive capacities. This finding extends

previous studies by emphasizing that successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum cannot be explained solely through teacher competence or policy design. Instead, implementation represents a dynamic interaction among pedagogical capacity, institutional leadership, organizational collaboration, and socio-contextual conditions. Therefore, future curriculum policies should adopt a more context-sensitive implementation strategy by recognizing regional disparities and providing differentiated institutional support, particularly for schools operating under resource-constrained environments.

## CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning in MAN 1 and MAN 2 Palu City is a process influenced by the interaction between teacher capacity, institutional support, the character of PAI material, and the local context of the madrasah. Therefore, the quality of implementation is not enough determined by formal acceptance of policies, but by the ability of madrasahs to translate the curriculum into learning practices that are contextual, adaptive, and in accordance with the pedagogical demands of Islamic education. These findings confirm that the difference in response between madrasahs reflects the difference in institutional adaptation capacity in managing curriculum changes.

The next research is suggested to expand the scope of study in more madrasahs and different regional contexts in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the variations in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI learning. In addition, further research also needs to examine more deeply the experiences of students, authentic assessment practices, and the influence of local context on the success of Islamic educational institutions' adaptation in carrying out curriculum reforms.

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