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## Learning Methods for Islamic Religious Education in the Merdeka Curriculum

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### Abstract

Islamic Religious Education plays an essential role in shaping the character and morals of students in Indonesia, especially in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The primary purpose of Islamic Religious Education is to guide students to understand and practice Islamic teachings as a guide to life. With a more interactive and flexible learning approach, the Merdeka Curriculum allows educators to develop methods relevant to the diversity of student's potential and needs. This research examines various effective learning methods in Islamic Religious Education, such as discussion, project-based learning, contextual, storytelling, and demonstration. Hopefully, these methods can increase students' motivation and understanding of Islamic teachings and create an engaging and applicable learning atmosphere. In addition, professional training for teachers is needed to ensure effective curriculum implementation. Thus, this research aims to explore best practices in Islamic Religious Education and provide valuable recommendations to improve the quality of learning so that students become knowledgeable and have good character and morals as the nation's next generation.

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## Introduction

Islamic Religious Education is an effort to provide guidance and guidance to students at school so that after completing their education, they can understand and practice Islamic teachings and make them a guideline for life (Amril et al., 2024). Islamic Religious Education, often abbreviated in bahasa to PAI, plays an important role in shaping the character and morals of Indonesian students. In the context of the Merdeka curriculum, the PAI learning approach needs to be adjusted to meet the diversity of student's potential and needs. The Merdeka curriculum provides flexibility and freedom to educators to develop more relevant and contextual learning methods, creating a more meaningful learning experience.

According to Adrian, the learning method is a science that analyzes systematic ways to carry out activities involving educators and students interacting with each other in learning activities. This process ensures that learning is effective and that teaching objectives are achieved. Based on the various definitions from experts that have been mentioned, it can be concluded that learning

methods refer to methods, models, or a series of learning activities applied by educators to increase student motivation and achieve teaching goals (Hidayat et al., 2024).

The PAI learning method in the Merdeka Curriculum focuses on knowledge transfer and the development of integral religious attitudes, skills, and values. By utilizing a more interactive and collaborative approach, it is hoped that students can be actively involved in the learning process and be able to apply the principles of Islamic teachings in daily life.

The Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum that allows students to gain sufficient understanding and skills through interactive learning. This goal is the background for accepting the Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia, which has previously experienced learning problems for several years (Idris et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum, which has been implemented by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, is a breakthrough in the education system that aims to provide freedom and flexibility to educators in designing the learning process (Arwitaningsih et al., 2023). One of the main challenges in learning PAI in the Merdeka Curriculum is creating an interesting and interactive learning atmosphere.

The Merdeka Curriculum is a development of the 2013 Curriculum, which presents new and innovative concepts in Indonesian education. The goal is to create a qualified generation with superior abilities in the future. This curriculum is designed to build students' character following the values of Pancasila, as well as provide a strong foundation for their lives. Through three main programs, the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to improve the quality of education. The program includes project-based learning that instils Pancasila values in student profiles, focuses on mastering essential materials, and implements a more flexible and adaptive curriculum structure (Aisha Zerlina Syahda, 2020).

Additionally, educators need to consider the differences in the characteristics of diverse students. Each student has a different background, interests, and learning styles, so the method applied must be able to reach all students. The learning methods applied in PAI in the Merdeka Curriculum are diverse and adaptive, including lecture methods, discussions, practices, and project-based approaches designed to increase student active involvement. This approach encourages students to think critically and provides space to develop balanced social, emotional, and spiritual skills. Teachers act as facilitators who guide students in material exploration, build deep understanding, and direct the application of religious values in various life contexts. With this method, learning is no longer one-way but becomes interactive and collaborative, in line with the principle of student-centred learning (Santi et al., 2024). Therefore, training and professional development for PAI teachers is essential to ensure that they have adequate skills and knowledge in implementing PAI teaching methods in the Merdeka Curriculum.

This journal aims to explore various effective PAI learning methods within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. By reviewing the best practices and innovations implemented, it is hoped that recommendations that are useful for educators in improving the quality of learning can be produced. This research will also highlight the importance of collaboration between schools, parents, and communities in supporting the holistic religious learning process.

Through an in-depth analysis of the PAI learning method in the Merdeka Curriculum, it is hoped that this journal can contribute to the development of religious education that is more relevant and impactful so that students become not only knowledgeable individuals but also have good character and morals as the next generation of the nation.

## **Methods**

This research applies a literature research method, where the sources used consist of theories relevant to the research topic. Zed (2004) argues that library research involves collecting, reading, preserving, and managing library materials (Amril et al., 2024). The collected data is evaluated for analysis. The sources used include books, journal articles, research reports, and other documents relevant to the research topic.

The first step in this method is to identify and select relevant literature to the problem raised. The researcher then reads and analyzes the content of the literature critically to understand the various viewpoints, theories, and concepts that support the study. The data that has been collected is analyzed using a content analysis approach. This approach aims to dig into the information contained in the text in depth so that it can provide a comprehensive overview of the topic being studied.

Literature research is carried out to answer research problems through theoretical and conceptual reviews. Researchers evaluate the validity and relevance of information from various literature sources. Thus, this research can produce findings that support conclusions and make theoretical and practical contributions related to the researched topic.

The literature research method has the advantage of providing comprehensive and in-depth data because it refers to literature that has been tested and recognized in its field. The results of this research are expected to provide new insights based on a strong theoretical foundation and answer research problems systematically.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Definition of PAI Learning Methods**

To understand the learning method of Islamic religious education, we must look at two main parts of the discussion: the discussion of the word, its meaning, and its etymology. In terms of etymology, the word "method" comes from two Latin syllables: "meta", which means "through", and "hodos", which means "the way". When these two words are combined, they become "methods", which means "the way to go" or "the way to go". In terms of terminology, a method is a way of working with a system that facilitates implementing an activity to achieve a specified goal. According to this perspective, learning techniques are related to working with a system to facilitate completing tasks to achieve the desired goals. This learning method emphasizes the need for "systematic work" in every Islamic religious education learning that teachers must carefully plan and carry out in a consequential and sustainable manner.

In Arabic, these terms are known as *minhaj*, *wasilah*, *kaipiyah*, and *thariqah*, all of which are synonyms. However, the most commonly used term in Islamic education is *thariqah*, the plural form of *thuruq*, meaning the path to take (Azis, 2019). In this sense, methodology is the science that studies the most appropriate (effective) and fast (efficient) ways to achieve the goals of Islamic religious education. Based on this understanding, teaching methodology books discuss various methods, such as lectures, questions and answers, discussions, demonstrations, and so on. Thus, it can be concluded that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning method is an approach or strategy used to teach students Islamic values, principles, and practices. This method aims to improve students' understanding of Islamic teachings and shape their character and morals.

## **Merdeka Curriculum**

In various educational institutions throughout Indonesia, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum has begun and is being widely discussed and seminars. The new curriculum is intended to replace the Emergency Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum, which are currently used in schools. However, the government does not necessarily force all schools to implement the Merdeka Curriculum because school conditions in Indonesia differ.

The Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia has developed gradually since its launch in 2020. The government created this curriculum to catch up or lose knowledge after the COVID-19 pandemic. Various groups strongly support this policy, including academics, education practitioners, and other stakeholders. The Merdeka Curriculum has made many changes to the curriculum. One emphasizes learner-centred, project-based, and active learning (Tuerah & Tuerah, 2023).

The active learning approach allows students to be directly involved in the learning process, individually and in groups, through various activities encouraging their understanding of concepts and their application in the real world. On the other hand, the project-centred approach allows students to learn and apply concepts and skills in the context of projects that are relevant to everyday life. These approaches transform Indonesia's traditional learning paradigm. In this paradigm, students are actively involved in forming skills and knowledge, and teachers are facilitators and guides in the learning process. An in-depth understanding of these strategies will help assess the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy and how it impacts improving the quality of learning in schools.

The Merdeka Curriculum reduces the learning burden and the number of learning hours, especially face-to-face learning. In addition to reducing the number of lesson hours, the subject matter provided is also reduced. The Merdeka curriculum pressures students' abilities, character-building, and creativity. In short, seven things must be known about the Merdeka curriculum: curriculum structure, learning outcomes (CP), implementation of the learning process, number of lesson hours, collaborative learning model, social, natural sciences (IPAS) subjects, and information and communication technology (ICT) (Mulyasa, 2023).

To implement the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers must create an operational curriculum based on educational content standards, processes, and assessments that are by each school's and region's vision and mission. They must also be able to conduct a minimum competency assessment (AKM). This is a key advantage of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is expected to improve the quality of human resources (HR), solve the problem of the gap between education and the world of work, and, in the long run, bring this country and society out of a prolonged crisis, as well as encourage the growth of civil society with good governance and clean governance. Schools must maintain the unity and unity of the nation and the integrity of the current Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) by maintaining differences between schools and regions by emphasizing specific competencies so that students and schools are different.

## **Concept of Merdeka Curriculum**

The Merdeka Curriculum is a new paradigm in Indonesian education that emphasizes freedom of thought as its main core. In this concept, teachers are the primary facilitator who enables the realization of freedom of thought among students (Fawzi et al., 2024). This shows that the success of implementing this curriculum is highly dependent on the ability of teachers to design and manage relevant and adaptive learning processes. In the current era of digitalization, technological advances affect the quality of education. Teachers and students use digital devices in each task, fostering

interactive learning, improving access to resources, and enhancing collaboration in the classroom. Merdeka curriculum education combines literacy, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mastery of technology. In the current era of digitalization, technological developments significantly influence the quality of education. Teachers and students utilize digital devices as part of the teaching and learning process, from collecting information to implementing academic tasks. In this context, the Merdeka Curriculum integrates literacy, knowledge, skills, attitudes, and mastery of technology as the main pillars of education.

This concept gives learners the freedom of thought to maximize their knowledge. A modern curriculum requires students to learn independently through formal and non-formal education. The concept of freedom of this century will allow students to learn as much as possible. Literacy activities can help talent growth through skills and positive things that support the development of each student. The concept of the Merdeka learning curriculum is naturally applied equally in all educational institutions in Indonesia today. This concept will not only impact student development but will also help educators apply creative learning approaches. A free learning curriculum can reduce current teacher costs. In addition, the idea of an independent learning curriculum will also help solve educational problems in the current era of digitalization. To achieve this, we as academics must have the ability to be the foremost leader in encouraging an independent learning curriculum in the current Indonesian educational environment (Abdul Fattah Nasution et al., 2023).

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum evenly in all educational institutions in Indonesia is very important. In addition to positively impacting student development, this curriculum encourages educators to adopt a more innovative and creative learning approach. Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum improves the quality of learning and reduces the administrative burden on teachers, which has been one of the main challenges in education. More than that, the concept of the Merdeka Curriculum provides a solution to educational challenges in the era of digitalization, where education must adapt to technological changes and the needs of the times (Lestari et al., 2023). As academics and stakeholders in the field of education, we have a responsibility to be the driving force in encouraging the effective implementation of this curriculum. The full support of all parties will ensure that the Merdeka Curriculum can become the foundation of relevant, inclusive, and sustainable education for the nation's future generations.

### **Independent Learning in Islamic Religious Education**

Islamic Religious Education is a learning process that aims to provide knowledge to shape individual character and behaviour in harmony with Islamic principles. Education based on Islamic principles is characterized by theories from the Qur'an and hadith (Marbella et al., 2023). Before implementing the independent learning curriculum, teachers used learning models such as lectures, discussions, memorization, and questions and answers, which tended to make students bored. However, by implementing the independent learning curriculum, teachers are expected to make PAI lessons fun for students by creating innovations in learning. In this case, Islamic religious education is part of the Independent Learning Curriculum proposed by the government.

The Independent Learning Curriculum brings many changes for teachers in preparing learning plans:

- a. Learning tools now use Learning Outcomes as a substitute for the Core and Basic Competency Frameworks.
- b. The syllabus is changed to a Learning Objectives Tool prepared by educators.

- c. The Learning Implementation Plan preparation was changed to a Teaching Module managed by teachers.
- d. The materials are submitted thematically and based on subjects, with all materials adjusted to the needs of each school.
- e. The teaching materials also allow students to choose the priorities and lessons as they see fit (Marbella et al., 2023).

Independent Learning is an educational approach that aims to provide freedom for students to develop their potential to the fullest by prioritizing creativity, innovation, and learning that is more independent and flexible (Hamzah et al., 2022). This approach is in line with the principles in the Merdeka Curriculum applied in Indonesia, which aims to create relevant and adaptive education to the times. Independent Learning in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) integrates freedom of learning and Islamic teachings based on the Qur'an and Hadith. It prioritizes the formation of students' character by Islamic values.

Implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education has significantly changed how materials and learning approaches are delivered. Some of the important changes that need to be implemented in PAI include:

- a. Using a Thematic Approach.  
PAI learning materials are arranged thematically, meaning that each topic is taught separately and connected to major themes relevant to daily life. For example, themes about morality can be combined with worship topics, Islamic history, or social roles in society.
- b. Project-Based and Experiential Learning  
Implementing project-based learning is one way to make learning more engaging and enjoyable. Students may be tasked with conducting research or projects that link Islamic teachings to real-life situations, such as creating charity-focused social projects or community service activities driven by Islamic principles.
- c. Encouraging Independent Learning  
The Independent Learning Curriculum encourages students to learn independently with diverse resources, be it books, articles, or digital media. It allows students to find their answers and understandings regarding the teachings of Islam and apply them in their context.
- d. Utilization of Technology in Learning  
With the advancement of technology, PAI learning can be integrated using digital devices such as videos, learning applications, and online platforms. This allows students to be more engaged in interactive and dynamic learning. For example, through da'wah videos or online lectures, students can deepen their understanding of specific topics that are more in-depth.
- e. Character and Moral Education  
PAI learning in the context of Freedom of Learning also emphasizes character and moral education, which includes Islamic teachings regarding ethics, morals, and social interaction. Teachers act as facilitators who guide students to internalize the noble values of Islam in their daily lives.

Freedom of creative and independent thinking is the goal of Freedom of Learning. Teachers are expected to be a driver for positive actions taken by students. The conclusion of the learning idea is a form of suggestion to change the national education system. The reorganization was

carried out to respond to the changes and progress of the country and adapt to the times. Therefore, students can develop according to their potential and abilities. Independent learning is fast, applicative, critical, progressive, expressive, and diverse. How students act and think can show that they are learning independently. One is dynamic, optimistic, positive, creative, and daring to try new things.

## **Effective PAI Learning Methods in the Merdeka Curriculum**

### **1. Discussion Methods**

The discussion method involves exchanging ideas between two or more people. In this process, all parties dialogue and convey their views argumentatively. This activity took place with an open attitude and whole of brotherhood. The main purpose of this method is to find the truth. Using this method, students can respond to their intellectual abilities, conduct critical analysis, and develop confidence in building thoughts that can be accounted for and benefit all humanity (Tambak, 2015).

The discussion method is a method of lesson storage in which teachers and students share information, opinions, and experiences to solve problems. In his book entitled *Introduction to Teaching and Learning Interaction*, Winarno Surachmad said that problems or questions that are worth discussing must have the following characteristics:

- a. Attract the interest of students who are by their level.
- b. It usually does not ask "which is the correct answer" but instead prioritizes reasoning that considers and considers more than a defensible answer.
- c. It usually does not ask "which is the correct answer" but prioritizes reasoning that considers and compares. If the discussion method is used, the discussion leader can be held by the teacher or requested by one of the students or learners (Komariah, 2021).

### **2. Project Methods**

Project-based learning, also known as (project-based learning), is an innovative learning model that emphasizes contextual learning through various activities. This model allows teachers to manage classroom learning by involving project work. Teachers can use project work learning to increase students' creativity and motivation (Arya Hasan As'ari et al., 2023).

Project-based learning is a learning model focusing on students' creativity and important needs. This model uses projects or activities as the main activity in the learning process. Some of the stages of PAI learning with this model are as follows.

- a. Fundamental question determination stage  
It starts with important questions to gather students' information, responses, criticisms, and ideas about the project theme to be discussed.
- b. Create a product design plan  
At this stage, students create a project plan. This process is carried out collaboratively, with teachers and students agreeing to plan for it. This planning can include understanding the game's rules, activities that help answer important questions and knowledge of the materials and tools needed to complete the project.
- c. Preparation of product manufacturing schedule  
In this case, teachers and students can work together to plan activities that will be carried out during the project.
- d. Monitoring student performance and project progress



At this stage, teachers must monitor student activities as they complete projects. Teachers can create rubrics to record all the things students do to make it easier to supervise them.

e. Assessment of results

Teachers carry out this stage to measure the achievement of standards and evaluate student progress. Assessments also provide feedback on student understanding and help teachers create their next lesson plan.

f. Evaluate the learning experience

This stage ends with reflection on the activities and project results carried out by teachers and students at the end of the learning process. Both individuals and groups can carry out this process (Arya Hasan As'ari et al., 2023).

### **3. Contextual Methods**

The contextual learning model encourages students to apply the knowledge they have in everyday life. This model emphasizes understanding the material being taught and how it can influence student behaviour in their daily activities.

The contextual learning model aims to reinforce the applicative learning experience for students by providing more opportunities to do, try, and experience themselves (learning to do) rather than just being a passive listener who receives information from the teacher. Therefore, in this model, teaching is not just about transferring knowledge from teachers to students by memorizing concepts separate from real life, but rather an effort to facilitate students to develop life skills from what they learn. In this way, learning becomes more meaningful, schools are more connected to society, and what is learned at school is always related to the situations and problems in their environment, both in the family and the community (Tamam M. Badrut, 2015).

### **4. Method Storytelling**

Storytelling is a teaching technique that uses stories as a tool to convey religious messages and values. In the context of PAI, this method helps students understand Islamic teachings more enjoyably and memorably. The storytelling method is a way to convey or present learning material orally in the form of stories from teachers to students. In its implementation, this method introduces, provides information, or explains new things to convey learning that can develop various essential competencies (Tambak, 2016).

Stories have an attraction that can touch children's feelings because, in reality, stories can connect people's hearts and affect their emotions and lives. Stories that contain wisdom are very effective in attracting children's attention and stimulating their minds to be more active. This method is also considered good for stimulating children's mindsets. Listening to the story stimulates both children's thoughts and emotions, so they are interested in absorbing the message conveyed without feeling forced. This method has been exemplified by the Prophet PBUH since ancient times when he often told the stories of the previous ummah to his companions to take wisdom and lessons from the stories.

### **5. Demonstration Method**

One of the methods of delivering learning materials is demonstrations. This method involves showing or showing students a process of a particular situation or object being studied, either actual or simulated and is usually accompanied by an oral explanation. It is very important to use

demonstration methods to improve students' cognitive abilities and enable them to apply the concepts they learned after demonstration activities (Syahidah, 2020).

Steps in the application of the demonstration method will be more effective if the teacher pays attention to the following:

- a. The goals that students want to achieve should be formulated first.
- b. The steps to be carried out in the demonstration need to be arranged in an orderly manner according to the scenario that has been planned.
- c. Prepare the necessary equipment before the demonstration starts.
- d. Try following the actual reality (Husain & Wardana, 2021).

The demonstration method in PAI learning is an effective strategy to improve students' understanding and skills. Students learn about theory and how to apply it in everyday life by demonstrating actual practice. This method can make PAI learning more engaging and meaningful with good planning and active involvement.

## **6. Cooperative Learning Methods**

Cooperative learning invites students to work in small groups to solve problems or learn a specific topic. This method can be applied in PAI through group discussion activities, presentations, or games focusing on Islamic teachings. For example, students may be grouped to prepare presentations regarding Islamic history or tafsir, allowing them to exchange knowledge and experience with each other.

## **7. Lecture Method**

The lecture method is one of the most common learning methods teachers use to convey information or knowledge to students verbally. This method is usually used to provide explanations about a topic or material that is more theoretical. Although it seems conventional, the lecture method is still effective in specific contexts, especially when learning is to transfer large amounts of knowledge or inform students about basic concepts or specific facts.

The lecture method is a learning technique in which a teacher (teacher or lecturer) speaks to students to convey specific knowledge, information, or ideas orally. Lectures are given before the class; students usually listen and take notes on the material. Sometimes, lectures can be followed by question-and-answer sessions or discussions to deepen students' understanding (Pratiwi & Irawan, 2024).

## **Conclusion**

The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning method aims to introduce and instil Islamic teachings to students through various approaches that are by the times. In the Merdeka curriculum, the PAI learning approach is designed to prioritize active and experiential learning. Students receive information passively and engage in activities that encouraging them to understand Islamic teachings more deeply through discussions, questions and answers, or practical activities relevant to daily life. This approach makes PAI learning more enjoyable and imprints in students' lives.

The Merdeka Curriculum provides a broader space for teachers and students to adapt teaching materials to their needs and interests. Project-based learning is one of the effective methods in this curriculum, where students not only learn theory but can also apply their knowledge in projects related to Islamic values. For example, students can create projects that invite them to implement Islamic teachings in social activities or the surrounding environment. Through this method,

students can better understand how Islamic principles are applied in authentic contexts and strengthen their character through religious teachings.

In addition, technology and digital media also play an important role in PAI learning in the era of the Merdeka curriculum. Teachers can deliver material more engagingly and interactively by utilizing various applications and digital platforms. Students can access a broader range of learning resources, such as videos, articles, or educational apps that support their understanding of Islamic teachings. Technology-based learning also makes it easier for students to collaborate with their peers in person and online and develop 21st-century skills, such as creativity, communication, and collaboration. With a more flexible and innovative approach, PAI learning in the Merdeka Curriculum is expected to produce a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also has a strong character based on Islamic values.

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