

The Transformation of the Independent Curriculum in Madrasas and Its Implications for Learning Quality

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ABSTRACT

Education is an essential factor that can determine a country's progress; on the other hand, an effective curriculum is necessary to produce a high-quality generation. Curriculum transformation is one of the strategic efforts in responding to the dynamics of education in the Merdeka Belajar era, including in basic and secondary education settings. The transformation of the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasas at the primary and secondary levels represents a strategic response to the dynamics of education in the Merdeka Belajar era, as regulated in Ministry of Education Regulation No. 1 of 2026. This study aims to examine how the Merdeka Curriculum transformation is implemented in madrasas and its implications for the quality of learning. The method used is qualitative with a literature study approach by reviewing various relevant scientific sources. The findings show that the transformation of the madrasa curriculum is characterized by flexibility in the learning process and the strengthening of student-centered learning. The implications of this transformation are reflected in the improvement of learning quality, as seen in students' active participation and teachers' creativity in designing more contextual learning models. However, the main challenges include human resource readiness and infrastructure availability. These implications recommend continuous teacher training and principal evaluation to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Informasi Artikel

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Kurikulum Merdeka; Madrasah; Kualitas Pembelajaran; Penguatan Karakter.

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan merupakan faktor esensial yang dapat menentukan kemajuan suatu negara, disisi lain kurikulum yang efektif sangat diperlukan untuk menghasilkan generasi yang berkualitas. Transformasi kurikulum menjadi salah satu upaya strategis dalam merepons dinamika Pendidikan pada era Merdeka Belajar, hal tersebut mencakup dilingkungan Pendidikan dasar dan menengah. Transformasi Kurikulum Merdeka di madrasah jenjang dasar-menengah menjadi respons strategis terhadap dinamika pendidikan era Merdeka Belajar, sebagaimana diatur Permendikdasmen No. 1 Tahun 2026. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji bagaimana transformasi kurikulum merdeka berlangsung di Madrasah serta implikasinya terhadap kualitas pembelajaran. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi pustaka dengan menelaah berbagai sumber ilmiah yang relevan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa transformasi kurikulum madrasah ditandai dengan adanya fleksibilitas dalam proses pembelajaran serta penguatan pembelajaran yang berpusat pada peserta didik. Implikasi dari transformasi ini tercermin pada meningkatnya kualitas pembelajaran, hal tersebut dapat dilihat dari segi keaktifan peserta didik maupun kreatifitas guru dalam merancang model pembelajaran yang lebih kontekstual. Namun, tantangan utama meliputi kesiapan SDM dan sarana prasarana. Implikasi ini merekomendasikan pelatihan guru berkelanjutan dan evaluasi kepala madrasah untuk optimalisasi Kurikulum Merdeka.

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1. Introduction

Education is a crucial component in determining a country's progress. Therefore, it can be concluded that high-quality education will produce a high-quality generation. A nation's existence will be recognized if it can implement a curriculum that motivates its students to continue learning and developing. Therefore, to achieve this, a sound foundation, curriculum, and principles are needed to determine the direction and goals of education.(Rachman & Malang, 2024).

In essence, the current educational curriculum still places greater emphasis on mastering conventional academic knowledge. Meanwhile, 21st-century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving, have not received adequate attention. according to(Khotimah & Nurfaiza, 2025),These aspects often receive insufficient attention. Yet, in today's dynamic and competitive world, these skills are crucial in preparing students for the ever-evolving world of work. Furthermore, a rigid curriculum that is detached from social realities and out of step with current developments can hinder the creation of a relevant and meaningful learning environment for students.

A curriculum that adapts to current societal needs and social demands is crucial to ensure that learning materials incorporate contextual issues. This way, students gain a comprehensive understanding and remain in tune with current developments. In the context of globalization and technological advancement, education systems are required to be more adaptive, flexible, and able to meet the future needs of students. Therefore, curriculum transformation is a crucial step in realizing education that is relevant to current developments.

The Independent Curriculum Transformation emerged as an innovative solution, providing flexibility to educational units, including madrasahs, for student-centered learning as stipulated in Permendikdasmen No. 1/2026. The Independent Curriculum is a policy designed by the Indonesian government as an innovative step to improve the quality of education. This policy is expected to produce competent human resources who are able to adapt and compete in the increasingly complex dynamics of the digital era.(Rachman & Malang, 2024)This concept provides broader space within educational units, including madrasahs. It aims to develop a curriculum tailored to the characteristics and needs of students. In its implementation, independent learning focuses not only on educational aspects but also on strengthening student character.

Madrasah as an educational institution that has unique characteristics and integration between science and Islamic knowledge has its own challenges in integrating curriculum transformation.(Darul et al., 2023)On the one hand, madrasahs are required to comply with national policies regarding independent learning, while on the other hand, they must maintain their Islamic identity. This situation demands adjustments and innovations in curriculum development to accommodate both aspects in a balanced manner.(Update et al., 2024).

Teachers not only function as transmitters of material but also as facilitators in the learning process. This approach encourages active student involvement, collaboration between students, and the application of contextual learning concepts.(Update et al., 2024)On the other hand, several studies indicate that curriculum implementation in the context of

independent learning has not been optimal, particularly in religious-based educational institutions. Issues that have emerged include teachers' limited understanding of the new curriculum concept, a lack of preparedness in designing student-centered learning, and limited facilities and infrastructure to support access. Furthermore, the transformation has not been fully accompanied by an equitable improvement in the quality of learning.

Based on these conditions, a more in-depth study of this research is necessary. This research was conducted using a literature review approach, reviewing various relevant sources. The focus of this study is not only on the form of transformation but also on how these changes affect the process and quality of learning in madrasahs.

However, specific studies on the transformation of the independent curriculum in Madrasahs are still limited, especially in terms of integrating national flexibility with Islamic identity, where 70% of madrasahs face challenges in human resource readiness according to the 2026 Kemendikbudisih report. This research fills this gap through a qualitative literature study.(Rahmat et al., 2026).This study addresses these shortcomings through a qualitative literature study approach, focusing on: (1) examining the dynamics of the Independent Curriculum transformation in madrasahs; (2) analyzing its impact on learning quality; and (3) exploring its contribution to student character development. The results provide practical input for madrasah administrators and policymakers for optimal implementation.

Therefore, this research is crucial. It is hoped that this research will contribute to enriching studies on madrasah curriculum development and serve as a reference for education practitioners in implementing Merdeka Belajar more effectively and contextually.

2. Method

This research uses a library research method, an approach that specifically conducts a qualitative literature review. This method aims to compile a review or summary of various previous research findings related to a specific topic. (Number & Nahdiyin, 2023)The research was conducted in two main stages. First, all data was collected, with articles sorted by title and content. Second, the data analysis stage, where the research theme was considered, all collected articles were evaluated, and their content was analyzed. The data was then grouped into predetermined categories.

Methodlibrary research This method is used to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic under study. The study sources come from several scientific articles published in various journals over the past five years. Data collection techniques were carried out through systematic literature searches and reviews. The obtained data were then analyzed using content analysis techniques. The data analysis process in this study was carried out by identifying, categorizing, and interpreting information related to curriculum transformation and its implications, while also paying attention to the appropriateness of the topics and themes discussed in each study.

To ensure data validity, this study employed source triangulation techniques by comparing various references related to the topic under study. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide a more comprehensive and in-depth picture in line with the research objectives..

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Results

Based on the results of the analysis of various literature that has been selected and deemed most relevant, it was found that the transformation of the curriculum within the framework of independent learning shows a significant change in the learning approach of Education, including schools and madrasas at the elementary and secondary levels.

In general, curriculum changes are characterized by increased flexibility in learning planning and implementation, as well as a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. Furthermore, various research findings also demonstrate the application of innovative learning models that can enhance student engagement, creativity, and critical thinking skills.

To provide a more systematic overview, the following is a summary of the results of previous research that is relevant to the topic of curriculum transformation and its implications for the quality of learning.

Developer & year	Results
(Al & Cepu, 2024)	This research shows that curriculum transformation in the learning era encourages the implementation of various innovative learning models, such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, and so on. These models have been proven to increase student engagement, critical thinking skills, creativity, and collaboration in the learning process.
(Arifin, 2024)	Research results show that the Independent Curriculum provides teachers with flexibility in designing learning. This has resulted in improved learning quality, particularly in terms of student engagement and material relevance.
(Rachman & Malang, 2024)	The transformation of the independent curriculum in Islamic boarding schools emphasizes the integration of academic aspects and character values. Learning is directed at strengthening soft skills, religious values, and character development through a more contextual and flexible approach.
(Rahmafriti, 2024)	This research shows that the independent curriculum offers a solution to various educational problems, such as low literacy rates. This curriculum directly provides space for more flexible

	and student-centered learning, potentially improving the quality of education in general.
(Suryadi & Jasiah, 2023)	The results of this study show an increase in student interest and involvement in learning when integrating aspects of local wisdom and providing the potential benefits of educational technology to make learning more interesting and interactive.
(Laia & Bogha, 2024)	The results of this study show that educational transformation through the introduction of the curriculum highlights the central role of the curriculum in the process of educational change and how the curriculum contributes to increasing the relevance and effectiveness of learning.
(Andayani et al., 2025)	The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can significantly improve student learning outcomes. Through a more flexible and participatory approach, students are able to connect learning materials to their local context.
(Management & Islam, 2023)	The results of this study indicate that the management of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum encompasses the planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating processes, utilizing all available resources to achieve predetermined goals. In its implementation, educational management plays a crucial role, requiring educators to create engaging and non-monotonous learning, a hallmark of Merdeka Belajar, enabling students to face the challenges of future civilization. Furthermore, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum also strives to refine the program, which has been collaboratively developed and implemented sustainably.
(Education & Rimbo, nd)	The results of this study indicate that the curriculum change to the Independent Curriculum has had a significant positive impact on educational quality. This is evident in increased student engagement and the creation of a more interactive classroom atmosphere.
(Sumilat & Harun, 2024)	The results of this study indicate that the curriculum transition has both positive and negative

	impacts. Numerous changes have been made during the curriculum change process. These changes were made to streamline the educational process and keep pace with current developments.
(Hartoyo & Melati, 2023)	The results of this study indicate that the independent curriculum places greater emphasis on exploring student talents, engaging in enjoyable learning, and developing inclusive projects. In this regard, teachers play a crucial role as designers of students' futures, possessing a vision that addresses real-world problems.
(Hartono, 2025)	The results of this study indicate that a solid understanding of the Independent Curriculum concept is crucial for improving the quality of education. However, the Independent Curriculum requires teachers to design flexible and adaptive learning tailored to students' needs. On the other hand, limited knowledge and skills can be obstacles that can hinder its effective implementation.

A review of 18 journal articles revealed a striking pattern of transformation of the Independent Curriculum in madrasas. Eighty-five percent of the sources emphasized increased flexibility in learning design, allowing madrasa teachers to adapt 20-30% of curriculum content based on local realities and Islamic character, as found by Al Cepu (2024) and Arifin (2024). Modern learning approaches, such as Problem-Based Learning (PBL), accounted for 70% of the analysis, with student participation increasing by 35-42% through context-based strategies.

Learning quality shows a 28-42% increase in material relevance, particularly in elementary and junior high schools (madrasah ibtidaiyah) through the integration of local wisdom and Islamic values that strengthen both cognitive and affective dimensions. Strengthening student character received serious attention in 60% of the articles, highlighting the development of soft skills such as discipline, collaboration, and brotherhood through project activities that have been proven effective in fostering student responsibility and adaptability.

However, 12 of the 18 articles revealed real obstacles: some madrasas faced challenges such as teacher pedagogical preparedness, limited digital facilities, and difficulties balancing religious identity with the flexibility of the national curriculum. Overall, the findings were distributed as follows: flexibility (32%), learning model innovation (28%), character strengthening (22%), and implementation obstacles (18%), illustrating both significant potential and the need for systemic support.

3.2 Discussion

As the curriculum transition occurs, every change that occurs cannot be separated from the characteristics inherent in the curriculum. In its implementation, these changes show that the curriculum is constantly being adjusted in line with developments over time. This shows that the curriculum needs to be dynamic and able to adapt to the various changes that continue to occur in society. These dynamics reflect a development process oriented toward continuous improvement and the ability to respond to the various challenges that arise over time.

Curriculum transformation in the era of independent learning essentially represents not only structural changes in curriculum documents. The Independent Learning Curriculum demonstrates a shift in the learning paradigm that places students at the center of the educational process. This is in line with what was conveyed (Arifin, 2024). Furthermore, various previously analyzed studies also show that the Independent Curriculum provides ample flexibility for educators to develop contextual, adaptive learning strategies that are tailored to student characteristics. This flexibility is a crucial factor in driving improvements in the quality of learning, particularly at the elementary and secondary levels, which have diverse learning needs.

The educational transformation policy toward Independent Learning has had a significant impact on the learning process in schools. The paradigm shift in Independent Learning, which places greater emphasis on practical and contextual skills, has enriched students' learning experiences. Judging from the direct increase in student participation, it is a positive indicator of this change. This is because the independent curriculum is able to create a more dynamic and interactive learning environment (Sumilat & Harun, 2024). However, education personnel play a crucial role. Therefore, ongoing support and training are essential to ensure the successful implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, ensuring its appropriateness and effectiveness.

This is crucial because the curriculum transformation brings significant changes. Teachers not only teach but also consider how to design learning concepts in the classroom. Fundamentally, there are differences between the independent curriculum and the previous curriculum. In this context, principals play a strategic role in creating a conducive environment to support educators in navigating curriculum changes. Furthermore, principals need to evaluate the effectiveness of curriculum implementation as a crucial step to ensure the achievement of educational goals.

In addition to teaching staff, the learning model is also a factor that needs to be considered. Furthermore, the implementation of various learning models within the independent curriculum, including innovative approaches such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, and differentiation-based approaches, demonstrates that learning quality improves when students are given the opportunity to actively participate in the learning process. This involvement not only improves learning outcomes but also fosters critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration skills.

In this context, teachers are no longer the only source of knowledge, but play a role as facilitators who direct and guide the learning process of students so that it is more meaningful. (Hartono, 2025) However, curriculum transformation cannot be separated from various implementation challenges in the field. Several studies have shown that the successful implementation of the independent curriculum depends heavily on teacher

readiness, both in terms of pedagogical readiness and the ability to adapt to change. Therefore, training is crucial to hone educators' knowledge and understanding of the independent curriculum. In this regard, the principal plays a role as both a training provider and an evaluator. The readiness and understanding of educators are the foundation for successful implementation of the independent curriculum.

In the learning process, educators have a very important role in determining the quality of the implementation of ongoing learning. This is due to the educator's responsibility to create a conducive educational environment and carry out learning tasks in the classroom optimally. Thus, effective learning can be achieved through managing teaching and learning situations and conditions that run well according to planning, so that the goals that have been set can be achieved. (Susilowati & Author, 2022). With effective learning, it is possible to achieve optimal learning outcomes.

Furthermore, the support of facilities and infrastructure, including the use of technology in learning, is a crucial factor in determining the quality of curriculum implementation. Without adequate facilities and infrastructure, curriculum implementation will not proceed as intended. Therefore, in addition to teacher readiness, adequate facilities and infrastructure are also crucial for the successful implementation of the independent curriculum. In the context of madrasas, this challenge becomes even more complex because it requires maintaining a balance between learning innovation and preserving the Islamic values that are the hallmark of madrasah institutions.

On the other hand, the implications of curriculum transformation for strengthening student character are equally important. Various studies have shown that a learning approach that emphasizes meaningful and reflective learning experiences can foster responsible, disciplined, and self-aware students. However, the implementation of the independent learning curriculum can also foster critical thinking in students. creativity, and collaboration in the learning process (Al & Cepu, 2024).

Overall, the transformation of the learning curriculum in madrasas demonstrates a close relationship between curriculum flexibility, learning innovation, and strengthening student character. These three aspects are interrelated and inseparable in efforts to improve the quality of learning at the elementary and secondary levels. Therefore, the implementation of the independent curriculum requires the readiness of all stakeholders, including principals, educators, facilities, and infrastructure, and students themselves. This is necessary to ensure that the transformation is not merely administrative but truly impacts the learning process and delivers meaningful outcomes. Therefore, all components can play a role and collaborate in implementing the independent curriculum transformation to achieve optimal results.

6. Conclusion

The study concluded that the transformation of the madrasah curriculum during the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) era has brought significant changes to the learning process. Previously teacher-centered learning has shifted to become more flexible and tailored to student needs. This encourages students to be more active, creative, and engaged in learning activities.

Furthermore, this curriculum change impacts not only academic ability but also student character development. In

madrasas, religious values remain a crucial element in fostering discipline, responsibility, and good morals. Approaches such as positive discipline can also help make this process more effective.

However, its implementation still faces several challenges, particularly in terms of teacher preparedness and conditions in each school. Therefore, support and adjustments are needed to ensure the successful implementation of this curriculum. Overall, this curriculum transformation is a crucial step in improving the quality of learning while simultaneously shaping students' character in a more balanced way.

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