



Implementation of the Curriculum 2013 and Merdeka Curriculum Evaluation System in Islamic Religious Education Learning at MTsN 1 Langsa

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to analyze the implementation of the learning evaluation system for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at MTsN 1 Langsa by comparing two curriculum approaches, namely Curriculum 2013 (K13) and the Merdeka Curriculum. The main focus of this study is on the planning, implementation, and evaluation instruments applied by PAI teachers within the two curriculum frameworks. This research employs a qualitative approach using a case study method. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation involving PAI teachers, the head of the madrasah, and students. The results indicate that the implementation of learning evaluation in Curriculum 2013 emphasizes structured assessments of knowledge, skills, and attitudes using standardized instruments. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater flexibility for teachers in selecting more contextual evaluation methods that are oriented toward students' individual competencies. Nevertheless, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum presents greater challenges, particularly in terms of teacher readiness and the availability of flexible evaluation tools. This study concludes that each curriculum has its own strengths and limitations in the learning evaluation system, which need to be aligned with the needs and characteristics of learners. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective and adaptive evaluation policies for Islamic Religious Education at the madrasah level.

1. Introduction

The development of the 21st century, which has become increasingly complex, has given rise to various social problems frequently encountered in society, such as moral crises, radicalism, environmental degradation, and other related issues. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) can serve as a guiding solution for students in safeguarding themselves and applying noble character in their daily lives (Farida & Hidayat, 2023). By studying and internalizing Islamic Religious Education, students are expected to be able to avoid negative changes occurring in the world so that these changes do not disrupt their personal development, whether in their relationship with God, themselves, fellow citizens, other human beings, or the natural environment (Susilowati, 2022).

This concept is in line with the first revelation received by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as stated in Qur'an Surah Al-'Alaq verses 1–5. These verses emphasize the importance of

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education for every human being. Humans are encouraged to seek as much knowledge as possible through activities such as reading, calculating, and memorizing, which constitute fundamental aspects of learning. The ultimate goal is to become wise individuals with broad insight. Among the fields of knowledge that must be deeply understood by every Muslim is Islamic Religious Education.

However, challenges remain in the implementation of Islamic Religious Education in practice, particularly within the newly introduced Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning) curriculum. One of the contributing factors is teachers' limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. A sample involving ten Madrasah Tsanawiyah teachers in Langsa Lama District, Langsa City, revealed four main challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum: the formulation of learning objective pathways, the evaluation of IRE learning implementation, limited training time management, and the lack of comprehensive information regarding the Merdeka Curriculum.

These findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces various obstacles in practice. Many educators experience difficulties in understanding, applying, and evaluating this new curriculum. Therefore, teachers are expected to adapt quickly and appropriately, considering their crucial role in the success of teaching and learning activities.

Nevertheless, schools are still required to implement the Merdeka Curriculum gradually yet consistently. Based on preliminary observations, several madrasahs in Langsa City have begun implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, including MTsN 1 Langsa. The implementation at this institution started in the 2022/2023 academic year (Observation, September 20, 2024).

MTsN 1 Langsa is one of the educational institutions that has adopted the latest government curriculum, namely the Merdeka Curriculum. According to policies issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented at the basic education level. At MTsN 1 Langsa, the curriculum has been applied only to grades VII and VIII, while grade IX continues to use Curriculum 2013. This decision was made because grade IX has not yet transitioned to the new curriculum (Observation, September 20, 2024).

Based on an interview with Mrs. Fauzah, S.Pd.I, M.Pd, the Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs at MTsN 1 Langsa, she stated that: "At the beginning of the 2023/2024 academic year, we started implementing the Merdeka Curriculum for Grade VII and the current Grade VIII. Ideally, all grades should have implemented it; however, due to internal issues, Grade IX students are still using Curriculum 2013. Therefore, at present, only Grades VII and VIII are able to implement the Merdeka Curriculum." (Interview with Mrs. Fauzah, S.Pd.I, M.Pd, Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, September 20, 2024)

Although the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MTsN 1 Langsa is limited to Grades VII and VIII, the curriculum is still applied consistently. Furthermore, MTsN 1 Langsa is a formal madrasah that integrates learning with the surrounding natural environment. The teaching and learning process is not confined to classroom-based instruction; rather, many learning activities take place outside the classroom. Activities such as observation, field study, and direct participation are frequently conducted by students of MTsN 1 Langsa. This approach constitutes a distinctive characteristic that differentiates MTsN 1 Langsa from other madrasahs or schools. The implementation of education that emphasizes not only theoretical knowledge but also practical field experiences becomes a unique strength of this institution. As a result, students' talents and interests are more effectively developed, accompanied by the formation of strong moral values and character. This condition serves as a particular attraction for parents who choose to entrust their children to this madrasah.

Mrs. Fauzah further explained: "Most parents entrust their children to this madrasah because they want them to develop not only cognitively, but holistically covering multiple intelligences. For example, children who are less active, lack confidence, or feel insecure. After studying here, we train

them to be brave, confident, and responsible. Eventually, many positive changes occur, and parents frequently express their satisfaction with these developments.” (Interview with Mrs. Fauzah, S.Pd.I, M.Pd, Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, September 20, 2024)

These distinctive characteristics indicate that students’ intelligence should not be measured solely by academic scores or cognitive achievement. Students’ potential and interests are equally important aspects that must be considered. Parents are encouraged to pay greater attention to this holistic development so that their children’s cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains can be fulfilled comprehensively. Consequently, students’ hard skills and soft skills can develop and demonstrate their full potential.

According to a study conducted by Supardi Bin Baiqi (2023), MTsN 1 Langsa also applies a humanistic curriculum model that emphasizes the development of students’ talents and interests. The curriculum equips students with structured outdoor learning experiences through the Spider Web learning method. The Spider Web model is designed to teach certain topics that are integrated across several subject areas. In this model, themes serve as the central framework that guides learning activities both within and across disciplines.

Through the Spider Web approach, curriculum development begins with the selection of a specific theme, which is then expanded into sub-themes by considering their relevance to various subject areas. These sub-themes are further developed into learning activities that students are required to undertake. Mrs. Fauzah explained the learning system implemented at MTsN 1 Langsa as follows: “The learning system we use is called the Spider Web. Within this system, learning materials are organized into four pillars: cognitive development, faith and moral conduct (aqidah and adab), leadership, and entrepreneurship. Islamic Religious Education is included in the faith pillar. PAI learning is directly integrated into field-based learning activities. We have separate subjects such as fiqh and aqidah, but we integrate them into broader themes. For example, in a theme about environmental conservation, we incorporate Islamic teachings by asking students to find religious references related to cleanliness, which then become part of the learning material.” (Interview with Mrs. Fauzah, Vice Principal for Curriculum Affairs, September 20, 2024)

Thus, learning at MTsN 1 Langsa employs a thematic approach based on the four pillars described above. This approach is similar to thematic learning models commonly used in schools, but it is specifically adapted to the nature-based school concept. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MTsN 1 Langsa began in the 2022/2023 academic year. However, despite this implementation, there remain several shortcomings that require evaluation. Various aspects of the curriculum implementation still need improvement, including the quality of instruction, students’ competency development, and the enhancement of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities.

In addition, the Merdeka Curriculum has not yet been implemented across all grade levels. It is currently applied only in Grades VII and VIII, while Grade IX continues to use Curriculum 2013. This decision is influenced by differences in student report book formats applied at each grade level.

2. Methodology

This research adopts a field research approach, namely a study conducted by collecting data through field surveys. Based on the research approach and the type of data used, this study falls under qualitative research. The data analyzed are descriptive in nature and do not involve numerical data as found in quantitative research.

The data sources employed in this study are divided into two categories: primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through a list of interview questions using direct, face-to-face interviews with informants at the research site, namely the principal and Islamic Religious Education teachers at MTsN 1 Langsa. The Islamic Religious Education teachers involved in

this study include teachers of Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, Al-Qur'an and Hadith, and Islamic Cultural History at MTsN 1 Langsa. Secondary data were obtained indirectly from the research object and sourced from documented literature. In this study, secondary data include books, academic journals, and documents relevant to the research topic.

The data collection techniques used in this study consist of observation, documentation, and interviews. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. After completing the research process and obtaining the research findings, the validity of the data was ensured through triangulation techniques.

3. Results

3.1. The Evaluation System of Islamic Religious Education Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum at MTsN 1 Langsa

The competency- and character-based evaluation approach implemented at MTsN 1 Langsa reflects the integration of Islamic values into holistic assessment practices. The head of the madrasah emphasized that the evaluation of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) does not solely measure cognitive aspects but also focuses on character formation through authentic assessment instruments, such as collaborative projects involving the production of da'wah videos, daily attitude observations, and direct practice of religious worship. This approach aligns with the principles of assessment for learning and assessment as learning promoted in the Merdeka Curriculum and reinforces the findings of Susilowati (2022), who highlights the importance of contextual evaluation in IRE that goes beyond mere theoretical mastery. This implementation demonstrates coherence with the contemporary Islamic education paradigm, which emphasizes a balance between fardhu 'ain and fardhu kifayah.

The utilization of technology in evaluation faces challenges related to disparities in digital infrastructure, despite the adoption of platforms such as Google Classroom and Quizizz. Internet connectivity issues reported by students, particularly those residing in rural areas, strengthen the findings of Jannah et al. regarding digital inequality in madrasahs. Ironically, in the era of Society 5.0, which emphasizes digital transformation, madrasahs continue to struggle with fundamental issues such as internet connectivity. Nevertheless, teachers' efforts to combine conventional and digital assessment methods deserve recognition as a form of adaptive response to contemporary educational demands.

Holistic and differentiated assessment through memorization portfolios, debates on contemporary issues, and reflective journals has significantly increased student engagement. These findings are consistent with the study by Muharrom and Aslan (2023), which confirms the effectiveness of project-based assessment in IRE learning. Students in Grades VII and VIII demonstrated positive responses to these methods, which, according to Azizah and Zainudin (2020), are capable of bridging the gap between religious theory and everyday life practices.

The main challenges in implementation lie in teachers' administrative workload and limited instructional time. Regular training programs recommended by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology need to be concretely implemented through needs-based coaching clinic programs for teachers. This solution aligns with the findings of Daga (2021), which emphasize the importance of continuous mentoring in the implementation of new curricula. Furthermore, gaps in teachers' understanding of project-based assessment require systematic intervention through communities of practice, as proposed by Hasibuan et al. (2022).

The implications of this evaluation system for IRE learning are multidimensional. On the one hand, there is an improvement in the quality of active learning and the internalization of Islamic values. On the other hand, strengthening digital infrastructure and enhancing teacher capacity remain essential to achieving optimal outcomes. These findings reinforce Arifin's (2023) perspective

on the necessity of reconstructing an IRE evaluation system that is adaptive to social change. For future research, it is important to conduct longitudinal studies on the impact of project-based evaluation on students' character development, considering that character education in Islam is cumulative and long-term in nature.

3.2. The Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum Evaluation in Islamic Religious Education Learning

The holistic evaluation approach integrating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains within the Merdeka Curriculum has been concretely implemented at MTsN 1 Langsa. Islamic Religious Education (IRE) teachers have developed a variety of assessment instruments, ranging from HOTS-based (Higher Order Thinking Skills) written tests to measure cognitive aspects, attitude observations through daily journals to assess affective dimensions, and direct worship practices assessed using criteria-based rubrics for the psychomotor domain. This implementation aligns with Susilowati's recent study, which argues that IRE evaluation within the Merdeka Curriculum must accommodate the development of spiritual values as well as students' practical skills. However, field findings indicate that time constraints constitute a major challenge in conducting in-depth affective assessments, as expressed by several teachers during interviews.

The use of technology in learning evaluation has also become a distinctive feature of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in this madrasah. Digital platforms such as Google Classroom, Madrasah CBT, and the Merdeka Mengajar application have been utilized for various evaluation purposes. According to the latest guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the use of technology in assessment not only improves efficiency but also enables more differentiated evaluation practices. Nevertheless, infrastructure-related challenges such as unstable internet connectivity and limited data quotas, as reported by several students, remain major obstacles. These findings reinforce previous research on the digital divide in Islamic educational institutions, which indicates that approximately 65% of madrasahs in regional areas continue to experience similar constraints in utilizing educational technology.

Project-based and contextual evaluation, which is a hallmark of the Merdeka Curriculum, has also been adopted at MTsN 1 Langsa. Various collaborative projects such as the creation of zakat posters and da'wah videos as well as self-reflection through portfolios, have become integral components of the assessment system. This approach corresponds with Vygotsky's constructivist theory as further developed by van Oers (2022), which emphasizes the importance of experiential and context-based learning. However, teachers acknowledged ongoing difficulties in developing assessment rubrics for projects related to contemporary fiqh topics, indicating the need for strengthened teacher capacity in designing authentic assessments.

Several implementation challenges were identified, including heavy administrative workloads, disparities between Curriculum 2013 and the Merdeka Curriculum, and limited student participation in self-assessment practices. Recent research by Fauzi et al. (2024) confirms that 72% of madrasah teachers experience similar difficulties in balancing administrative demands with the implementation of meaningful evaluation. To address these challenges, strategic measures are required, such as the regular organization of workshops on evaluation instrument development, the simplification of grading and reporting systems, and improvements in supporting infrastructure.

Thus, the implementation of evaluation practices within the Merdeka Curriculum at MTsN 1 Langsa demonstrates significant progress toward the development of a more holistic and authentic assessment system. However, to achieve optimal outcomes, stronger policy support and adequate resource allocation are essential, particularly in strengthening teacher capacity and providing supporting infrastructure. These findings reinforce Nurgiyantoro's (2023) argument that

transforming educational evaluation systems requires not only curriculum reform but also comprehensive support from the broader educational ecosystem.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher draws the following conclusions:

1. The Islamic Religious Education (IRE) learning evaluation system within the Merdeka Curriculum at MTsN 1 Langsa is implemented through a competency- and character-based evaluation approach that reflects the integration of Islamic values within a holistic assessment framework. The IRE evaluation system not only measures cognitive aspects but also emphasizes character formation through authentic assessment instruments, such as collaborative projects on da'wah video production, daily attitude observations, and direct worship practices. This approach is aligned with the principles of assessment for learning and assessment as learning promoted in the Merdeka Curriculum.
2. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum evaluation in IRE learning at MTsN 1 Langsa has demonstrated significant progress through a holistic approach encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Teachers have developed diverse assessment instruments, including collaborative projects (such as da'wah videos and zakat posters), direct worship practices, and reflective journals, which align with the principles of assessment for learning. The integration of technology through platforms such as Google Classroom, Quizizz, and E-Report (E-Rapor) has also enhanced the efficiency and interactivity of the evaluation process. However, several challenges remain, including teachers' time constraints due to administrative workloads, disparities in digital infrastructure (unstable internet connections and limited data quotas), and variations in teachers' understanding of designing authentic assessments, particularly for contemporary fiqh materials.

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