



The Influence of the Merdeka Curriculum on the Digitalization of Religious Education Learning

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Abstract

The development of digital technology has driven significant transformations in Islamic Religious Education learning, particularly since the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. This study aims to analyze the influence of the Independent Curriculum on the digitalization of Islamic religious education learning, and how it shapes student behavior patterns, understanding of religious values, and engagement in the learning process. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review as the primary method, which examines various relevant literature on technology integration in religious learning. The results show that the Independent Curriculum encourages learning flexibility, strengthens digital competencies, and improves students' religious literacy through interactive media. However, challenges were also identified, such as the risk of exposure to negative content and the digital access gap. With the strategic role of teachers as facilitators and guides, digitalization in the Independent Curriculum has the potential to improve the quality of religious education relevant to the needs of the times

Keywords: Independent Curriculum; Digitalization of Learning; Islamic Religious Education.

Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi digital telah mendorong transformasi signifikan dalam pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam, khususnya sejak diterapkannya Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh Kurikulum Merdeka terhadap digitalisasi pembelajaran pendidikan agama, serta bagaimana hal tersebut membentuk pola perilaku, pemahaman nilai keagamaan, dan keterlibatan siswa dalam proses belajar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan studi kepustakaan sebagai metode utama, yang menelaah berbagai literatur relevan tentang integrasi teknologi dalam pembelajaran agama. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Kurikulum Merdeka mendorong fleksibilitas belajar, penguatan

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kompetensi digital, dan peningkatan literasi keagamaan siswa melalui media interaktif. Meskipun demikian, ditemukan pula tantangan berupa risiko paparan konten negatif dan kesenjangan akses digital. Dengan peran strategis guru sebagai fasilitator dan pembimbing, digitalisasi dalam Kurikulum Merdeka berpotensi meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan agama yang relevan dengan kebutuhan zaman.

Kata kunci : Kurikulum Merdeka; Digitalisasi Pembelajaran; Pendidikan Agama Islam.

I. Introduction

The development of technology in life begins with simple processes in daily life up to the level of fulfilling satisfaction as individuals and social beings. Over time, technological advancements continue to evolve, starting from the agricultural technology era, the industrial technology era, the information technology era, and the communication and information technology era (Danuri et al., 2020). Technology has also enriched the methods of learning Islam. Learning videos, podcasts, and game-based platforms have changed the way Islamic messages are conveyed to the younger generation. This transformation has also impacted Islamic religious education. Thus, technology has opened up many opportunities and challenges for Islamic teaching (Alfi et al., 2023).

The improvement in internet access and application connectivity has enabled mobile phone users to access digital learning more easily and quickly (Endrawati Subroto et al., 2023). The increase in internet access and connectivity on applications has enabled mobile phone users to access digital learning more easily and quickly. In this regard, there is a trend that reflects changes in user behavior, preferences, and expectations regarding digital content. Therefore, it is very important to understand these changes in order to respond effectively to the continuously evolving learning environment.

Education in Indonesia is currently regulated by the curriculum. To adapt to the developments in Technology and Science, Indonesia has chosen the Merdeka Curriculum as the educational standard. The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational initiative in Indonesia aimed at providing schools with the freedom to design their own curriculum (Lestari et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum also places great emphasis on communication and collaboration skills. Students are taught to communicate effectively, both verbally and in writing, and to be able to work together in teams (Akhmad Fakhri, 2023).

In the field of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), the Independent Curriculum encourages teachers to integrate digital literacy, critical thinking skills, and the use of learning technology in conveying religious values. However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the field of PAI still shows significant variation. Some schools have successfully utilized digital media such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), interactive learning videos, and online applications to support teaching and learning activities. However, others still rely on conventional methods due to limited teacher digital competency and unequal distribution of technological infrastructure

(Kemdikbudristek, 2024). This situation indicates that the digitalization of PAI in the Independent Curriculum era still faces challenges in terms of human resource readiness and supporting infrastructure.

Previous studies have addressed several aspects related to digital learning and educational technology, but there are still relevant research gaps that warrant further study. For example, research by (Belva Saskia Permana et al, 2024). demonstrated that the use of mobile technology in education can increase student engagement and motivation, but the focus of this research was more on general subjects, rather than Islamic religious education. Furthermore, research by (Nurmalasari & Elmunsyah, 2024). highlighted the importance of mobile learning as a means of providing broader access to learning resources and supporting independent learning, but did not examine the spiritual dimension or religious values that are central to Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Meanwhile, research by (Baso Intang Sappaile & Azhariah Rachman, 2023). emphasized that mobile learning has great potential in creating contextual and personalized learning, but this research focused on general pedagogical aspects without addressing its moral and religious implications.

Unlike previous studies, this study specifically focuses on the impact of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum on the digitalization of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning through mobile-based media. This research aims to analyze in depth how the use of digital media in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning can influence learning behavior patterns and students' understanding of religious values in the digital era. By comprehensively understanding the dynamics of these changes, it is hoped that the results of this study can contribute to the development of the Independent Curriculum as a foundation for Islamic education that is relevant, adaptive, and responsive to the needs of the times.

II. Research Method

This research uses a library research approach to explore the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on the digitalization of Islamic Religious Education learning. The main focus of this study is the use of digital technology, particularly mobile devices, in the learning process. This research aims to analyze and synthesize various literatures to understand how digitalization affects learning patterns, the integration of Islamic values, and psychosocial aspects in the world of education.

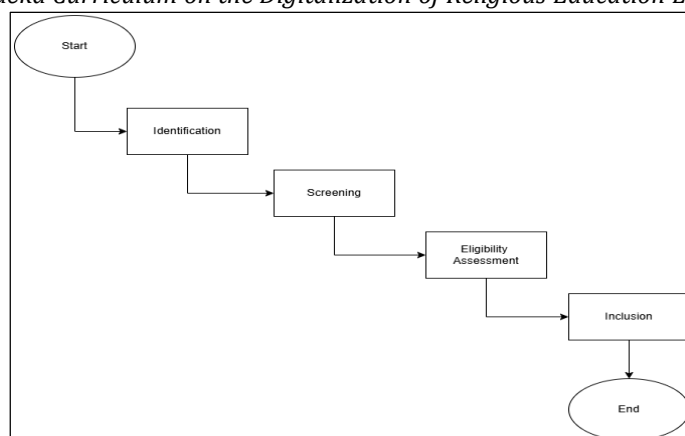


Figure 1. Systematic Literature Selection Steps

The selection of literature in this research was conducted systematically and sequentially to ensure that the sources analyzed were relevant, credible, and up to date. The process followed several structured steps, as described below:

- 1) Identification, The researcher conducted searches using several academic databases, including Google Scholar, Scopus, and ResearchGate. Keywords such as “Merdeka Curriculum,” “Islamic Religious Education,” “Digital Learning,” “Mobile Learning,” and “Educational Technology in Indonesia” were used to identify potential sources. From this process, approximately 80 sources were initially found.
- 2) Screening, The search results were filtered based on publication year (2020–2025) to ensure recency and relevance to current educational developments. Duplicate records, non-academic papers, and sources unrelated to education or technology were excluded. After this stage, approximately 50 sources remained.
- 3) Eligibility Assessment, In the Feasibility Assessment stage, each literature source that has gone through the screening process is then thoroughly evaluated to ensure its suitability. This process is carried out by examining three main aspects: relevance, credibility, and appropriateness of content. The relevance aspect relates to the extent to which the literature discusses topics relevant to the research focus, namely Islamic Religious Education or digital learning within the context of the Independent Curriculum. Meanwhile, the credibility aspect assesses the reliability of sources based on the publisher's reputation, the author's qualifications, and their institutional affiliations, to ensure that the data retrieved comes from a credible scientific source. Furthermore, the alignment aspect is used to assess the consistency between the discussion in the literature and the research objectives, particularly those related to digitalization and the integration of Islamic values into the learning process.
- 4) Inclusion, Only literature that met all criteria and contained substantial discussion about Islamic education, technology integration, or the Merdeka Curriculum was

included for analysis. In total, around 25–30 sources were used as the final dataset for synthesis.

The data sources in this research come from relevant primary and secondary literature. Primary literature includes scientific journals, books, and research reports that discuss the Merdeka Curriculum, PAI, and educational technology. Secondary literature includes popular articles, government policies, and other digital documents that provide additional perspectives on the implementation of technology in religious education. Literature was selected based on the level of relevance, credibility, and timeliness to ensure alignment with the topic being addressed.

Data were analyzed using content analysis and thematic synthesis techniques. Content analysis was used to explore the main concepts from each source, while thematic synthesis was conducted to identify patterns of findings and connections between the literature. The final results are presented in the form of a systematic narrative that includes the main findings and practical recommendations that can be applied to support the digitalization of Islamic Religious Education learning in the era of the Independent Curriculum.

III. Result and Discussion

A. Changes in Learning Patterns Through the Merdeka Curriculum

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has driven significant transformation in the process of Islamic Religious Education, particularly through the integration of digital media based on mobile phones. Learning, which was previously conventional, has now become more flexible, independent, and technology-based.

Students can access learning materials anytime and anywhere, enabling the creation of more contextual learning that meets their needs. This curriculum also facilitates changes in students' behavior regarding the consumption of digital content. They become more active, creative, and collaborative in the learning process. This aligns with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum to provide meaningful learning freedom while developing students' potential in accordance with the times. Basically, in the future, students will be able to :

- 1) More active in learning to seek out materials and set the pace in their own learning. Basically, the independent curriculum encourages learning based on students' interests and needs. (Lince, 2022).
- 2) It can lead to an increase in student participation because digital technology encourages student engagement in discussions, projects, and online activities. Interactive media also helps students become more emotionally and cognitively engaged (Yuliarti & Sultoni, 2024).
- 3) In the use of digital media, it can be utilized as a learning resource such as podcasts, autoplay, and educational videos used to convey religious material so that students

can more easily understand religious concepts with a visual and audio approach (Widiawati et al., 2022).

- 4) The shift in information consumption patterns among students is evident from their tendency to prefer using gadgets to search for and access learning materials compared to printed books. This is due to the ease of access, speed of information, and more visually appealing presentation of digital content. As a result, printed books are starting to be abandoned because they are considered less practical and not as interactive as digital media (Syahputra, 2023).

B. Strengthening Student Digital

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum directly encourages the strengthening of students' digital competencies as part of their readiness to face the Industrial Revolution 4.0 era. Through the use of technology such as mobile phones, students not only learn to receive information but are also trained to become active and responsible producers of digital content (Azhari Hasibuan et al., 2025).

The developed digital competencies include the ability to efficiently access, manage, and evaluate information through the internet, as well as skills in creating and modifying digital content such as educational videos, online presentations, or educational blogs (Suriani & Hadi, 2022). In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this means that students can create religious reflections in the form of vlogs, make digital posters themed around Islamic values, or engage in discussions through online forums in an ethical and courteous manner.

Through a digital-based learning approach, Religious Education students not only gain cognitive understanding of religious material but also experience the enhancement of digital skills such as information literacy, online communication abilities, and virtual collaboration. Learning media such as podcasts, autoplay, and other online platforms contribute to developing technical skills as well as students' critical attitudes towards the information they consume (Mustopa et al., 2024).

The use of digital media allows for the integration of Islamic values in a more contextual and engaging manner, so that students can understand religious teachings not only theoretically but also applicatively in their daily digital lives.

C. Positive Impact on Islamic Religious Education Learning

The integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with digital media has had a significantly positive impact on Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. The paradigm shift from conventional learning to digital-based learning models has created new spaces for educators and students to develop the process of internalizing religious values that are more contextual, personal, and relevant to modern life (Fakhruddin et al., 2025).

One of the most noticeable impacts is the increased motivation of students to learn religious material. Interactive and visually-based digital media such as educational

videos, Islamic podcasts, and educational games can bring to life teaching materials that were previously delivered in a textual and monotonous manner. This creates a more enjoyable learning atmosphere, reduces boredom, and stimulates students' affective engagement in understanding the values of faith, worship, and morality. Strengthening the affective side is crucial in religious education, because the essence of PAI lies not only in the cognitive aspect but also in the formation of attitudes and spiritual character (Nurjadid et al., 2025).

The digitalization of learning in Islamic Education (PAI) also encourages critical and reflective thinking skills towards contemporary religious issues. Through open access to various digital Islamic sources, both local and global, students have the opportunity to explore and compare perspectives, while also engaging in open discussions on available digital platforms. This activity enriches religious insights, fosters tolerance, and encourages students to respond to differences wisely and based on Islamic values (Kurniawan et al., 2025).

Overall, the utilization of digital technology in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has holistically enhanced the effectiveness of PAI learning, both cognitively, affectively, and psychomotorically. This transformation emphasizes that religious education no longer has to be confined to traditional spaces, but can instead develop in virtual spaces that remain meaningful and spiritually profound.

D. Challenges and Risks of Digitalizing Religious Education

Digitalization in the Merdeka Curriculum brings various conveniences and innovations, especially in the field of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), but there are also significant challenges and risks that need to be seriously considered by education stakeholders. Digitalization, without adequate supervision and literacy, actually has the potential to reduce the essence of religious values and open up space for the distortion of religious teachings (Fakhruddin et al., 2025).

One of the main challenges is exposure to negative content that is widely circulated on digital platforms. Students who use mobile phones to access religious learning materials are also at risk of being exposed to information that is not in line with Islamic values, such as pornography, violence, hate speech, or extremist religious ideologies. The students' unpreparedness in filtering information can lead to bias in understanding religious teachings, even causing behavioral deviations and radicalization in both subtle and overt forms.

Psychosocial aspects also pose a risk that needs to be anticipated. The intensive use of technology in religious education can lead to impacts such as social isolation, decreased interpersonal empathy, and reduced direct modeling from teachers, who have been a central element in character education in religious contexts. In the context of PAI, the presence and figure of the teacher are very important as spiritual guides who cannot be fully replaced by technology. When learning interactions shift to the virtual space, the

affective and spiritual dimensions tend to weaken due to the loss of relational warmth in the teaching-learning process (Nasor et al., 2025). This can create new disparities in achieving spiritual competence and religious literacy, especially in remote areas or those with limited digital infrastructure.

Therefore, these challenges and risks demand a holistic approach that involves strengthening teachers' capacities in digital literacy, formulating protective policies against negative content, and the active role of families and schools in supervising the use of digital media. Religious education in the digital era must be guided by principles of caution, critical literacy, and strong moral exemplarity to remain a means of spiritual transformation, not just superficial consumption of religious information.

E. The Role of Teachers as The Key to Success

The transformation of education through the Merdeka Curriculum positions teachers as central actors in the successful implementation of learning digitization, including in the realm of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Although technology plays a significant role in facilitating 21st-century learning, the role of teachers remains irreplaceable as guardians of values, spiritual facilitators, and moral guides amidst the complex and limitless flow of information (Peluang et al., 2025).

In the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers not only function as conveyors of material but also as designers of digital learning who can adapt religious content with a technology-based approach. Teachers are required to have dual competencies: a deep understanding of Islamic values and proficiency in information technology. Only with this combination can teachers develop learning content that is not only engaging and interactive but also maintains theological accuracy and pedagogical relevance.

The role of teachers is also very vital in building students' religious digital literacy. In a digital ecosystem that is prone to being infiltrated by extreme, superficial, and even misleading religious information, teachers have a strategic responsibility to guide students in filtering, understanding, and verifying information with moderate Islamic principles and the concept of rahmatan lil 'alamin. This makes teachers the guardians of orthodoxy in a digital space filled with free interpretations. Teachers are not merely technical practitioners, but moral and intellectual architects who determine the quality of a digitally literate religious generation (Hasyati & Abdi Siregar, 2025).

Thus, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum in deeply and meaningfully digitizing religious education greatly depends on the capacity and commitment of teachers. Without adaptive, reflective, and inspiring teachers, digitization will only be a change in form, not essence. Teachers are the heart of vibrant, empowered, and impactful religious education in the digital world.

IV. Conclusion

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has had a significant impact on the digitalization of Religious Education learning. This curriculum encourages a shift in learning patterns from conventional models to more flexible, independent, and technology-based approaches. Students are becoming increasingly accustomed to using digital devices, especially mobile phones, to access interactive and contextual religious materials. Strengthening digital competencies has become a prominent positive impact, encompassing skills in information management, critical thinking, and creating religious content relevant to contemporary developments. Learning religion through digital media also enhances students' motivation to learn, understanding of Islamic values, and overall religious digital literacy.

However, this process of digitalization also presents serious challenges, such as low digital literacy, the risk of exposure to negative content, and unequal access to technology. Therefore, the role of teachers becomes the key to success. Teachers not only function as facilitators of learning but also as moral guides, guardians of the authenticity of religious values, and responsible promoters of digital literacy. With the support of an adaptive curriculum, educational digital resources, and the transformative role of teachers, the digitalization of Religious Education can become an effective means of shaping a religious generation that is technologically savvy, has character, and is able to face the challenges of the times wisely

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