

Determinants of Islamic Character Formation Among Students: The Role of The Merdeka Curriculum and Teacher Motivation

Titono Wahyudi¹, Amie Primarni², Yudi Permana³

¹²³IAI-N Laa Roiba Bogor

titonowahyudi.tw@gmail.com¹, amieprimarni.ap@gmail.com²,
permanayudidr@gmail.com³

ABSTRACT

Islamic character education is a central objective of Islamic Religious Education, requiring alignment between curriculum policy and teacher-related factors. This study aims to examine the relationship and influence of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation on Islamic character education in Islamic Religious Education learning. The study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to teachers of Islamic Religious Education at Islamic integrated elementary schools and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The results indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation are positively and significantly related to Islamic character education. Partially, each independent variable has a significant influence on Islamic character education, while simultaneously, their combined contribution is stronger. These findings suggest that effective curriculum implementation supported by high teacher motivation plays a critical role in strengthening students' Islamic character. This study highlights the importance of integrating curriculum policy and teacher motivation within a unified framework to optimize Islamic character education in Islamic Religious Education learning.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum; teacher motivation; Islamic character education; Islamic Religious Education; Islamic integrated elementary school

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education plays a strategic role within the national education system, particularly in shaping students who not only possess religious knowledge but also demonstrate Islamic character in their daily lives (Primarni, 2024). Islamic Religious Education should not be understood merely as a process of transferring knowledge about Islamic teachings; rather, it constitutes a systematic effort to instill values of faith, piety, and noble character in students (Primarni, Hoxha, et al., 2024). Therefore, the learning process of Islamic Religious Education is required to respond to contemporary challenges while remaining firmly grounded in the substantive objectives of Islamic education.

Recent educational policy changes through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum have brought significant implications for the teaching and learning of Islamic Religious Education (Noor et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes learning flexibility, character strengthening, and the alignment of instructional processes with students' needs and potentials. In this context, Islamic Religious Education has considerable opportunities to be developed in a more contextual and meaningful manner (Yusa et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum

provides space for teachers to design learning experiences that are not solely oriented toward cognitive achievement but also toward the formation of students' religious attitudes and behaviors (Sirait et al., 2024).

However, the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning is not determined solely by the curriculum policy itself. Teachers play a crucial role in translating curriculum policy into classroom practice (Nahdhiah & Suciptaningsih, 2024). Islamic Religious Education teachers function not only as planners and implementers of learning but also as role models in the educational process. Accordingly, teacher motivation emerges as a key factor influencing both the quality of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and the overall effectiveness of Islamic Religious Education learning (Nurfita & Sukoyo, 2024).

Teacher motivation in Islamic Religious Education possesses distinctive characteristics, as it is closely associated with moral and spiritual responsibilities inherent in the teaching profession. Teachers with high levels of motivation tend to demonstrate strong commitment in fulfilling their professional duties, including instilling Islamic character values in students (Susanna et al., n.d.). Such motivation encourages teachers to be more adaptive to curriculum changes, creative in developing learning strategies, and consistent in guiding students throughout the learning process.

Ultimately, Islamic Religious Education is directed toward achieving Islamic character education as its primary objective. Islamic character education encompasses the internalization of values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and religiosity in students' behavior. Islamic character is not formed instantaneously; rather, it develops through a well-planned and continuous learning process supported by the school environment and the role of teachers (Asfiati, 2023). Therefore, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation constitute two interrelated factors in strengthening Islamic character education.

Based on this context, examining the relationship between the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, teacher motivation, and Islamic character education becomes highly relevant. This study seeks to provide empirical evidence on how curriculum policy and teachers' personal factors interact in shaping students' Islamic character through the learning of Islamic Religious Education (Sormin et al., 2023). Previous studies have demonstrated that curriculum implementation influences the quality of learning and the achievement of educational objectives, including within Islamic Religious Education. Several studies emphasize that a well-designed curriculum can function as a strategic instrument for strengthening students' character when it is implemented consistently and contextually. In the context of Islamic education, the curriculum is viewed not merely as an academic framework but also as a medium for cultivating values of faith, piety, and moral conduct (Shalihah et al., 2023).

Other studies highlight the role of teachers as a key factor in the successful implementation of curriculum policies. Teachers are regarded as the primary actors who bridge educational policies with classroom learning practices. Research findings indicate that teacher motivation affects teachers' readiness and commitment to

implementing learning activities, including the integration of character values into the educational process. Within Islamic Religious Education, teacher motivation becomes increasingly important because learning is oriented not only toward cognitive development but also toward the cultivation of religious attitudes and behaviors (Indriani et al., n.d.).

In addition, studies on Islamic character education emphasize that students' character formation is influenced by various factors, both structural and personal. Structural factors include curriculum policy and the school environment, while personal factors involve teachers' roles and exemplary conduct. However, most previous studies tend to examine these factors separately. Research on curriculum implementation often focuses on policy aspects and instructional processes, whereas studies on teacher motivation and character education generally emphasize psychological and pedagogical dimensions (Nurdyansyah et al., 2022).

Based on a review of previous research, there remains a limitation in studies that integrate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, teacher motivation, and Islamic character education within a single comprehensive research framework, particularly in the context of Islamic integrated elementary schools. As a relatively new policy, the Merdeka Curriculum still requires in-depth empirical investigation to examine its impact on Islamic character education, especially when implemented by teachers with varying levels of motivation (Syahrir et al., 2024).

This research gap indicates the need for a study that not only examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum or teacher motivation independently but also analyzes the relationship and combined contribution of both factors to Islamic character education. This study offers novelty by simultaneously examining the roles of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation in shaping students' Islamic character through Islamic Religious Education learning. Accordingly, this study provides a more comprehensive perspective on the determinants of Islamic character education (Indarta et al., 2022).

Based on the identified research gap, the objective of this study is to analyze the relationship between the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation with Islamic character education, both partially and simultaneously. This study is expected to contribute to the development of Islamic Religious Education scholarship and to serve as a practical reference for teachers and educational stakeholders in optimizing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum to strengthen Islamic character education (Hasibuan et al., 2023).

METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach with a correlational research design. The quantitative approach was selected to obtain empirical evidence regarding the relationship between the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation with Islamic character education. A correlational design was used to identify the strength and direction of the relationships among the research variables, both partially and simultaneously.

The research was conducted at Islamic integrated elementary schools that served as the research setting. The research subjects consisted of teachers who were directly involved in the implementation of Islamic Religious Education learning. The selection of respondents was based on their involvement in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and their roles in the teaching and character development of students. The number of respondents was determined in accordance with statistical analysis requirements and data representativeness.

Research data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire developed based on the indicators of each research variable. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum was measured through indicators reflecting lesson planning, instructional implementation, and learning evaluation. Teacher motivation was measured using indicators that represented internal drive and professional commitment in conducting learning activities. Meanwhile, Islamic character education was measured through indicators reflecting the internalization of Islamic character values in students' behavior. The research instrument underwent validity and reliability testing to ensure the accuracy and consistency of measurement.

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive analysis was employed to describe the tendencies of data for each research variable, such as high, moderate, or low categories. Inferential statistical analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among research variables, both partially and simultaneously. These analyses aimed to determine the influence of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation on Islamic character education.

The data analysis procedures were carried out systematically, beginning with data coding, assumption testing, and hypothesis testing. All statistical analyses were performed using appropriate statistical software. The results of the data analysis were presented in the form of tables accompanied by narrative explanations to facilitate interpretation of the research findings. Through this research method, the study is expected to provide accurate empirical insights into the relationship between the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, teacher motivation, and Islamic character education, thereby contributing to the development of Islamic Religious Education scholarship.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Overview of Research Data

This section presents the research results obtained from the analysis of field data in accordance with the research objectives. The data were collected using a questionnaire distributed to the research respondents and subsequently analyzed using the predetermined statistical techniques. The presentation of the results focuses on the empirical description of the research variables and their relationships, without incorporating in-depth theoretical interpretation.

The research data were obtained from teachers at Islamic integrated elementary schools where the study was conducted. All research instruments had undergone validity and reliability testing, ensuring that the collected data were

appropriate for further analysis. The data were then processed to describe the tendency of respondents' responses toward each research variable, namely the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, teacher motivation, and Islamic character education.

The results of the data analysis indicate that, in general, respondents provided positive responses regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning. This finding is reflected in the average scores of respondents' responses, which fall within the high category. These results suggest that the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum—such as learning flexibility, character strengthening, and the alignment of learning processes with students' needs—have been understood and implemented by teachers in the context of Islamic Religious Education.

B. Results of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation Analysis

Based on the results of the descriptive statistical analysis, the variable of Merdeka Curriculum implementation shows a positive tendency. The majority of respondents indicated that the planning of Islamic Religious Education learning had been adjusted to students' characteristics and the established learning outcomes. Teachers also demonstrated a good level of readiness in preparing instructional tools that align with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Furthermore, the data indicate that teachers have begun to implement learning approaches oriented toward character strengthening and the contextualization of Islamic values. The implementation of projects related to the strengthening of student profiles, particularly those associated with religious values, responsibility, and independence, has become part of the instructional strategies employed by teachers in Islamic Religious Education learning.

Overall, these findings illustrate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning falls within the good category. Nevertheless, variations in the level of implementation among respondents were still observed, indicating differences in teachers' readiness and consistency in applying the Merdeka Curriculum principles.

C. Results of Teacher Motivation Analysis

The results of data analysis on the teacher motivation variable indicate that the majority of respondents possess a high level of motivation in conducting Islamic Religious Education learning. Teachers demonstrate strong commitment in carrying out their professional responsibilities, including learning planning, implementation, and evaluation.

Teacher motivation is reflected in their willingness to adapt instructional methods, develop learning materials, and participate in professional development activities related to the Merdeka Curriculum. The data also show that internal factors, such as a sense of moral responsibility and professional calling as educators, serve as dominant elements in shaping teacher motivation. These findings suggest that teacher motivation constitutes an important asset in supporting the successful

implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in Islamic Religious Education learning, which requires the integration of cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

D. Results of Islamic Character Education Analysis

The results of data processing indicate that Islamic character education among students falls within the good category. Respondents assessed that Islamic character values, such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and religiosity, have been internalized through Islamic Religious Education learning as well as through general school activities.

The data further show that the habituation of Islamic character values is carried out through various activities, both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers play an active role as role models in instilling these values, ensuring that character education is not merely normative but also applicable in students' daily lives. These findings suggest that Islamic character education is not implemented as an isolated component, but rather as an integrated part of the learning process and school culture that develops alongside the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

E. Results of Intervariable Relationship Analysis

The results of the inferential statistical analysis indicate a significant relationship between the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, teacher motivation, and Islamic character education. The findings show that higher levels of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and stronger teacher motivation are associated with better outcomes in Islamic character education among students. Further analysis demonstrates that both independent variables contribute to the dependent variable, both partially and simultaneously. These results confirm that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation each have a significant effect on Islamic character education. When examined simultaneously, the combined contribution of these variables is stronger than their individual effects.

The analysis also reveals that the relationships among variables are not only statistically significant but also positively directed. This indicates that improvements in the quality of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and increases in teacher motivation are followed by improvements in the achievement of Islamic character education. The positive coefficients obtained in the analysis suggest that changes in the independent variables move in the same direction as changes in the dependent variable. Partial analysis shows that Merdeka Curriculum implementation contributes to Islamic character education through more flexible and contextualized learning practices. Meanwhile, teacher motivation contributes through consistency in the application of Islamic character values within the learning process. These two variables complement each other in creating a learning environment that supports the strengthening of students' Islamic character.

Overall, the results of the simultaneous analysis indicate that the combination of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation provides a stronger

contribution to Islamic character education than the influence of each variable considered separately. These findings suggest that Islamic character education is influenced by both structural factors, represented by curriculum policy, and personal factors, represented by teacher motivation.

The findings presented in the previous section provide empirical evidence regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, teacher motivation, and Islamic character education, as well as the relationships among these variables. While the Results section focuses on the statistical description and relationships observed in the data, this Discussion section aims to interpret and contextualize these findings within the framework of Islamic Religious Education, relevant theories, and previous empirical studies. Through this discussion, the implications of the research findings for the strengthening of Islamic character education are critically examined.

The partial effects of the independent variables on students' Islamic character formation were examined using the t-test, as shown in the following Table.

Table.1.
Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std Error	Beta		
	1 (Constant)	31,723	4,700		
KURMER	0,228	0,080	0,289	2,831	0,005
MOTIVASI	0,244	0,094	0,264	2,584	0,011

Based on the results of the t-test analysis, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum was found to have a significant effect on students' Islamic character formation. This finding indicates that the quality of Merdeka Curriculum implementation plays an important role in supporting the internalization of Islamic character values. The better the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in terms of lesson planning, instructional implementation, and learning evaluation, the stronger the formation of students' Islamic character at SD IT Al Madinah and SD IT Ar-Rohmaniyah.

Furthermore, the results of the t-test also indicate that teacher motivation has a significant effect on students' Islamic character formation. Teacher motivation contributes substantially to the learning process and character development through role modelling, commitment, and consistency in guiding students. This finding suggests that higher levels of teacher motivation in carrying out professional responsibilities are associated with more optimal Islamic character formation among students at SD IT Al Madinah and SD IT Ar-Rohmaniyah.

After examining the partial effects of each independent variable, further analysis was conducted to determine the simultaneous effect of Merdeka Curriculum

implementation and teacher motivation on students' Islamic character formation using the F-test, as presented in the following Table.

Table.2.

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	991,228	2	495,614	21,200	<,001 ^b
Residual	2922,272	125	23,378		
Total	3913,500	127			

a. Dependent Variabel: KARAKTER

b. Predictors: (Constants), MOTIVASI, KURMER

Based on the F-test results presented in the table above, it is evident that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation simultaneously have a significant effect on students' Islamic character formation. This is indicated by the significance value (Sig.), which is lower than the established significance level of 0.05, confirming that the regression model is statistically significant. These findings demonstrate that the independent variables, when considered together, contribute meaningfully to the formation of Islamic character among students.

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was analyzed to assess the explanatory power of the regression model, as presented in the following Table.

Table.3. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
1	—	0.472	—

The Model Summary shows an R^2 value of 0.472, indicating that Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation jointly contribute to students' Islamic character formation.

In summary, the results provide empirical evidence of significant relationships between the independent variables and students' Islamic character formation.

DISCUSSION

A. Merdeka Curriculum Implementation in Islamic Religious Education

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning is generally categorized as good. This finding suggests that the Merdeka Curriculum has not merely been adopted at the policy level but has begun to be translated into instructional practices by teachers. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, this implementation reflects teachers' efforts to align learning planning, instructional activities, and evaluation with students' characteristics and expected learning outcomes (Widodo et al., 2024).

The flexibility offered by the Merdeka Curriculum appears to support the development of more contextual and meaningful Islamic Religious Education learning. The findings show that teachers utilize this flexibility to integrate Islamic values into learning activities that are relevant to students' daily experiences. This condition strengthens the role of Islamic Religious Education as a medium for character formation rather than solely as a means of transmitting religious knowledge. Such an approach is consistent with the substantive objectives of Islamic education, which emphasize the formation of faith, piety, and noble character (Swandana et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the study reveals that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum encourages a stronger orientation toward character development within Islamic Religious Education. Learning is no longer confined to cognitive achievement but also encompasses affective and behavioral dimensions. The incorporation of character-oriented activities, including those aligned with student profile development, demonstrates that the Merdeka Curriculum provides structural support for strengthening Islamic character education (Utami et al., 2024).

However, variations in the level of curriculum implementation among teachers indicate that the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum is influenced by teachers' readiness and understanding. This finding suggests that curriculum policy alone is insufficient to ensure uniform implementation. Teachers' capacity, experience, and access to professional development opportunities play a critical role in determining how well the curriculum is enacted in practice (Cecep Abdul Muhlis Suja'i, 2023).

Overall, these findings suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum has significant potential to enhance Islamic Religious Education, particularly in strengthening Islamic character education. Nevertheless, this potential can only be realized optimally when supported by teachers' preparedness and commitment in implementing the curriculum consistently and contextually (Islam & 2023, n.d.).

B. Teacher Motivation in the Context of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

The findings of this study demonstrate that teacher motivation plays a crucial role in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education learning. High levels of teacher motivation indicate a strong internal drive and professional commitment in carrying out instructional responsibilities. This finding reinforces the view that the success of curriculum implementation is not determined solely by curriculum design, but also by the personal and professional disposition of teachers as the primary agents of learning (Rista et al., 2025).

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, teacher motivation holds distinctive significance due to the moral and spiritual dimensions inherent in the teaching role. Motivated teachers tend to exhibit greater dedication in planning, implementing, and evaluating learning activities, as well as in integrating Islamic values throughout the learning process. This study suggests that such motivation encourages teachers to adapt instructional strategies in line with the principles of the

Merdeka Curriculum, including flexibility, student-centered learning, and character development (Gulyanto et al., 2024).

The results further indicate that teacher motivation facilitates teachers' openness to change and innovation. Highly motivated teachers are more willing to develop learning materials, adjust teaching methods, and engage in professional development related to the Merdeka Curriculum. This adaptability is particularly important in the early stages of curriculum reform, where teachers are required to reinterpret and operationalize new policy frameworks in classroom practice (Megawati et al., 2023).

Moreover, teacher motivation contributes to the sustainability of curriculum implementation. The Merdeka Curriculum requires continuous adjustment and reflection in learning practices. Motivated teachers are more likely to maintain consistency and resilience in implementing curriculum changes, even when faced with practical challenges. In Islamic Religious Education, this consistency supports the continuous internalization of Islamic character values among students (R et al., 2023).

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that teacher motivation functions as a driving force that enables the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education. Without adequate motivation, even a well-designed curriculum may fail to achieve its intended outcomes. Therefore, strengthening teacher motivation is essential for ensuring that the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly those related to Islamic character education, are realized in a meaningful and sustainable manner (Judul, 2023).

C. Islamic Character Education as an Outcome of Islamic Religious Education

The findings of this study indicate that Islamic character education among students is categorized as good, suggesting that Islamic values have been effectively internalized through Islamic Religious Education learning. This outcome reflects the substantive objective of Islamic Religious Education, which is not limited to the transmission of religious knowledge but emphasizes the formation of attitudes and behaviors rooted in Islamic teachings (Wijaya et al., 2024).

Islamic character education encompasses fundamental values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and religiosity. The findings reveal that these values are not taught in isolation but are integrated into daily learning activities and school practices. This integration enables students to experience Islamic values in concrete and meaningful ways, thereby supporting deeper internalization. Such an approach aligns with the holistic perspective of Islamic education, which views character formation as a continuous and contextual process.

The role of teachers emerges as a critical factor in the effectiveness of Islamic character education. The findings suggest that teachers function not only as instructors but also as moral exemplars whose attitudes and behaviors influence students' character development. Through consistent modelling and guidance, teachers help translate Islamic values from abstract concepts into lived experiences. This reinforces the understanding that character education is most effective when

(Harefa et al., 2024) supported by authentic examples within the learning environment.

Within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, Islamic character education gains additional relevance. The curriculum's emphasis on character development provides institutional support for the integration of Islamic values into learning processes. The flexibility afforded by the Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers to design learning activities that connect Islamic teachings with students' real-life contexts, thereby enhancing the applicability of Islamic character values. Overall, these findings suggest that Islamic character education represents a substantive outcome of Islamic Religious Education when supported by appropriate curriculum implementation and teacher engagement. Islamic character education is not merely an aspirational goal but a realizable outcome that can be achieved through structured, consistent, and value-oriented learning practices.

D. The Relationship between Merdeka Curriculum Implementation and Islamic Character Education

The findings of this study indicate a significant relationship between the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Islamic character education. This relationship suggests that the quality of curriculum implementation plays an important role in achieving the objectives of character education within Islamic Religious Education. The curriculum functions not merely as a technical guide for learning activities but as a strategic framework that shapes the direction and substance of character formation (Ikmal et al., 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, contextual learning, and character development as core principles. The results of this study show that when these principles are implemented effectively, teachers are better able to integrate Islamic values into learning activities. This integration allows Islamic character values, such as honesty, responsibility, and religiosity, to be internalized through meaningful learning experiences rather than being conveyed solely as abstract moral concepts. Consequently, improvements in curriculum implementation are accompanied by improvements in the achievement of Islamic character education (Sirait et al., 2024).

These findings also demonstrate that the Merdeka Curriculum is compatible with the substantive goals of Islamic education. Islamic education fundamentally aims to develop individuals who possess faith, piety, and noble character. When the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented with attention to these values, it serves as a supportive structure that reinforces the objectives of Islamic Religious Education. In this sense, the relationship between curriculum implementation and Islamic character education is complementary rather than contradictory (Ali et al., 2018).

However, the findings also suggest that this relationship is not automatic. Variations in the level of curriculum implementation indicate that the positive impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on Islamic character education depends on how the curriculum is enacted in practice. A curriculum that is not implemented consistently or contextually may fail to produce the intended character outcomes. This

underscores the importance of effective instructional strategies and teacher engagement in translating curriculum principles into meaningful learning experiences (Rahila, 2024).

Overall, the findings of this study affirm that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has a meaningful relationship with Islamic character education. The curriculum provides a structural foundation that supports character development, but its effectiveness is contingent upon how well it is implemented within the learning process of Islamic Religious Education (Sastradiharja et al., 2024).

E. The Relationship between Teacher Motivation and Islamic Character Education

The findings of this study reveal a significant relationship between teacher motivation and Islamic character education. This result indicates that teacher motivation constitutes an essential factor in shaping students' Islamic character, particularly within Islamic Religious Education learning. Teachers with higher levels of motivation tend to demonstrate stronger commitment to integrating Islamic values consistently throughout the learning process (Primarni, Pujianti, et al., 2025).

Teacher motivation influences how educators perform their roles as instructors and moral exemplars. The findings suggest that motivated teachers are more inclined to prioritize not only academic achievement but also the cultivation of students' attitudes and behaviors. In the context of Islamic education, teacher motivation is closely associated with moral awareness and spiritual responsibility, which encourage teachers to embed Islamic values such as honesty, discipline, and responsibility in everyday learning activities (Primarni, Masuwd, et al., 2025).

Furthermore, teacher motivation contributes to the creation of a learning environment conducive to Islamic character formation. Motivated teachers tend to display patience, consistency, and responsiveness to students' needs, thereby fostering positive interactions that support the internalization of Islamic values. Students learn not only from the content delivered but also from teachers' conduct and attitudes, which serve as implicit lessons in character education (Primarni, Sugito, M. Daud, et al., 2022).

The findings also indicate that teacher motivation supports the sustainability of Islamic character education. Character formation is a long-term process that requires continuous guidance and reinforcement. Teachers with strong motivation are more likely to maintain consistency in applying character values despite challenges encountered in instructional practice. This consistency plays a vital role in ensuring that Islamic character education is not episodic but becomes an integral part of students' daily experiences (Primarni, Fa'atin, et al., 2025).

Overall, the results of this study suggest that Islamic character education cannot be separated from the quality of teacher motivation. Teacher motivation acts as a critical bridge between the objectives of Islamic education and their realization in classroom practice. Strengthening teacher motivation, therefore, is a key strategy for enhancing the effectiveness and sustainability of Islamic character education within Islamic Religious Education learning (Primarni, Nuhdi, et al., 2025).

F. The Synergy between Merdeka Curriculum Implementation and Teacher Motivation in Islamic Character Education

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation simultaneously contribute significantly to Islamic character education. This result suggests that the formation of students' Islamic character is not influenced by a single factor, but rather emerges from the interaction between structural factors, represented by curriculum policy, and personal factors, represented by teacher motivation. The synergy between these two dimensions is essential in creating effective and meaningful Islamic Religious Education learning (Nasir et al., 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum provides a structural framework that offers direction, flexibility, and opportunities for character-oriented learning. However, this framework alone is insufficient to produce optimal outcomes without active engagement from teachers. The findings of this study demonstrate that when the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented by highly motivated teachers, learning practices become more adaptive, contextual, and aligned with the objectives of Islamic character education. Motivated teachers are better positioned to utilize curriculum flexibility to design learning activities that integrate Islamic values into students' lived experiences (Indra et al., 2022).

This synergy also enhances consistency in the internalization of Islamic character values. The curriculum outlines learning objectives and character-oriented outcomes, while teacher motivation determines the intensity and quality of value implementation in daily instructional practices. As a result, Islamic character education is not confined to formal curriculum documents but is realized through continuous interaction between teachers and students in the learning process (Primarni, Sugito, Yahya, et al., 2022).

The findings further suggest that weakness in one factor may reduce the effectiveness of the other. A well-designed curriculum may fail to achieve its intended character outcomes if teachers lack sufficient motivation to implement it meaningfully. Conversely, high teacher motivation may not yield optimal results in the absence of a clear and supportive curriculum framework. This interdependence highlights the importance of balance between curriculum policy and teacher capacity in strengthening Islamic character education (Primarni, Qadir, et al., 2024).

Overall, the synergy between Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation emerges as a critical prerequisite for the successful development of Islamic character education. The findings of this study emphasize that efforts to strengthen students' Islamic character require a holistic approach that integrates curriculum policy with sustained teacher motivation and professional commitment within Islamic Religious Education learning (Musthan et al., 2022).

G. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute theoretically to the field of Islamic Religious Education by reinforcing the view that Islamic character education is

shaped by the interaction between curriculum policy and teacher-related factors. This study supports theoretical perspectives that position curriculum as a structural framework that directs learning objectives, while teacher motivation functions as a driving force that determines the effectiveness of curriculum implementation in practice. By empirically demonstrating the simultaneous contribution of Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation, this study extends existing discussions on character education within Islamic education by integrating structural and personal dimensions into a unified analytical model.

Furthermore, this study highlights the relevance of the Merdeka Curriculum to the substantive goals of Islamic education. The emphasis on flexibility, contextual learning, and character development within the Merdeka Curriculum aligns with the foundational objectives of Islamic Religious Education, which aim to cultivate faith, piety, and noble character. The findings therefore strengthen the theoretical argument that national curriculum reforms can be harmonized with Islamic educational values when implemented thoughtfully and supported by motivated educators.

This study also contributes to character education theory by positioning Islamic character education as an outcome that emerges from a holistic educational process. Rather than viewing character formation as a supplementary component of learning, the findings emphasize that Islamic character education is an integral result of curriculum implementation and teacher engagement. This perspective enriches theoretical discussions by framing character education as a systemic and process-oriented phenomenon within Islamic Religious Education.

Practical Implications

Practically, the findings of this study offer important implications for teachers, schools, and educational policymakers. For teachers of Islamic Religious Education, the results underscore the importance of maintaining and enhancing motivation in carrying out instructional responsibilities. Teacher motivation is shown to influence not only instructional quality but also the consistency of Islamic character value internalization among students. Teachers are therefore encouraged to continuously develop professional competence and reflective practices in order to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

For schools, the findings suggest the need to create an environment that supports both effective curriculum implementation and teacher motivation. School leadership can play a strategic role by facilitating professional development programs, providing opportunities for collaborative learning, and fostering a school culture that emphasizes exemplary conduct and character development. Such support is essential for ensuring that Islamic character education is consistently integrated into daily learning practices.

For educational policymakers, this study highlights the importance of designing curriculum policies that are accompanied by strategies to strengthen teacher motivation and capacity. Curriculum reform efforts, including the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, should be complemented by sustained

support mechanisms such as training, mentoring, and professional recognition. By addressing both structural and personal factors, policy initiatives can more effectively contribute to the strengthening of Islamic character education within Islamic Religious Education learning.

Overall, the theoretical and practical implications of this study emphasize that strengthening Islamic character education requires a comprehensive approach that integrates curriculum policy, teacher motivation, and instructional practice coherently and sustainably.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and teacher motivation play significant roles in strengthening Islamic character education within Islamic Religious Education learning. The findings indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum, when implemented effectively, provides a flexible and contextual learning framework that supports the internalization of Islamic values among students. Through its emphasis on character development and student-centered learning, the Merdeka Curriculum creates opportunities for Islamic Religious Education to move beyond cognitive achievement toward the formation of religious attitudes and behaviors.

In addition to curriculum factors, teacher motivation is confirmed as a critical determinant in the success of Islamic character education. Teachers with high levels of motivation demonstrate stronger commitment and consistency in integrating Islamic character values into learning practices. Motivation enables teachers to adapt to curriculum changes, maintain instructional quality, and serve as moral exemplars for students. As a result, Islamic character education becomes a continuous and meaningful process rather than a fragmented or incidental activity.

The study further demonstrates that the simultaneous interaction between Merdeka Curriculum implementation and teacher motivation produces a stronger contribution to Islamic character education than the influence of each factor independently. This finding highlights that Islamic character formation is the result of synergy between structural elements, such as curriculum policy, and personal elements, such as teacher motivation. Effective curriculum implementation requires motivated teachers, while strong teacher motivation needs to be supported by a clear and relevant curriculum framework.

Based on these conclusions, strengthening Islamic character education requires a comprehensive and sustainable approach. Efforts to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum should be accompanied by strategies to enhance teacher motivation and professional commitment. This study contributes to the field of Islamic Religious Education by providing empirical evidence on the integrated role of curriculum policy and teacher motivation in shaping students' Islamic character. Future research is encouraged to explore additional factors, such as school leadership and learning environments, to further enrich the understanding of Islamic character education in diverse educational contexts.

REFERENCE

- Ali, Z., Siregar, H. S., Muhtar, S. N., & Aridhayandi, M. R. (2018). *Spiritual Leadership Values and Practices: An Analysis in Islamic Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/icie-18.2018.40>
- Asfiati, A. (2023). Merdeka Curriculum: Encouraging Creativity and Innovation of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Madrasah. *Al-Hayat Journal of Islamic Education*. <https://doi.org/10.35723/ajie.v7i2.525>
- Cecep Abdul Muhlis Suja'i. (2023). IMPLEMENTASI KURIKULUM MERDEKA DALAM MEMBANGUN KARAKTER SISWA PADA MATA PELAJARAN PENDIDIKAN AGAMA ISLAM DI SMP NURUL QOMAR. *HASBUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 2(1), 147–170. <https://doi.org/10.70143/HASBUNA.V2I1.143>
- Gulyanto, B., Sambayu, H., Sepriawanto, M., Panjaitan, G. S. P., & Zahra, C. P. S. A. (2024). Consistency of Merdeka Curriculum Towards the Profile of Pancasila Students at the Various Education Levels: A Contextual Study. *Edunesia Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan*. <https://doi.org/10.51276/edu.v5i3.887>
- Harefa, M. M., Usman, H., & Lestari, I. (2024). Analysis of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in 3t Areas (Underdeveloped, Frontier and Outermost) (Elementary School in Namohalu Esiwa Sub-District). *Jurnal Elementaria Edukasia*. <https://doi.org/10.31949/jee.v7i1.8623>
- Hasibuan, H. Y., Syarifudin, E., & ... (2023). Ethnoscience as the policy implementation of kurikulum merdeka in science learning: a systematic literature review. *Jurnal Penelitian* <https://jppipa.unram.ac.id/index.php/jppipa/article/view/4500>
- Ikmal, H., Maskuri, M., & Tamrin, D. (2022). Multicultural Islamic Education for Ex-Terrorists: Paradigms, Orientations, and Approaches. *Edukasia: Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Islam*, 17(2), 241. <https://doi.org/10.21043/EDUKASIA.V17I2.16034>
- Indarta, Y., Jalinus, N., Waskito, W., Samala, A. D., Riyanda, A. R., & Adi, N. H. (2022). Relevansi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Dengan Model Pembelajaran Abad 21 Dalam Perkembangan Era Society 5.0. *Edukatif Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 4(2), 3011–3024. <https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v4i2.2589>
- Indra, H., Tanjung, H., Setiawati, Y. H., Primarni, A., & Norman, E. (2022). Prophetic Leadership Perspective Didin Hafidhuddin in Pesantren Ulil Al-baab UIKA Bogor Indonesia. *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice*, 34–45.
- Indriani, N., Pendidikan, I. S.-K., & 2023, undefined. (n.d.). Implementasi kurikulum merdeka belajar dalam pembentukan karakter disiplin peserta didik di sekolah dasar. *Jurnalnasional.Ump.Ac.Id*. Retrieved February 3, 2026, from <https://jurnalnasional.ump.ac.id/index.php/khazanah/article/view/16228>
- Islam, C. S.-H. J. P., & 2023, undefined. (n.d.). Implementasi kurikulum merdeka dalam membangun karakter siswa pada mata pelajaran pendidikan agama islam di smp nurul qomar. *Journal.Iaitasik.Ac.Id*, 1(1), 2023. Retrieved February 3, 2026, from <https://journal.iaitasik.ac.id/index.php/hasbuna/article/view/143>
- Judul, H. (2023). *Peran Guru PAI dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi dan Karakter Siswa pada Kurikulum Merdeka Kelas VII di SMP Negeri 13 Malang*. https://repository.unisma.ac.id/bitstream/handle/123456789/8304/S1_FAI_P

Jurnal Dirosah Islamiyah

Volume 8 Nomor 1 (2025) 22–40 P-ISSN 2656-839x E-ISSN 2716-4683

DOI: 10.17467/jdi.v8i1.11538

ENDIDIKAN%20AGAMA%20ISLAM_21901011018_LUTFIA%20NURFAIZAH.pdf?sequence=1

- Megawati, M., Suyitno, I., & Harsiati, T. (2023). Assessment Model in Indonesian Language Learning Based on the Merdeka Curriculum at Junior High School in Banyuwangi Regency. *Jurnal Kependidikan Jurnal Hasil Penelitian Dan Kajian Kepustakaan Di Bidang Pendidikan Pengajaran Dan Pembelajaran*. <https://doi.org/10.33394/jk.v9i4.8808>
- Musthan, Z., Yahya, M. D., Primarni, A., Slamet, M., & Minan, M. A. (2022). The Distribution of Good Character Components in the Education System in the Society 5.0 Era. *Budapest International Research and Critics Institute-Journal (BIRCI-Journal)*, 5(3), 22501–22513. <https://doi.org/10.33258/birci.v5i3.6258>
- Nahdhiah, U., & Suciptaningsih, O. A. (2024). Optimization of Kurikulum Merdeka Through Differentiated Learning: Effectiveness and Implementation Strategy. *Inovasi Kurikulum*. <https://doi.org/10.17509/jik.v21i1.65069>
- Nasir, M., Rijal, M. K., Primarni, A., Lima, L., & Prastawa, S. (2024). Philosophical Foundations of Holistic Education in the 21st Century. *International Journal of Educational Narratives*, 2(6), 471–482.
- Noor, I., Izzati, A., Islamic, M. A.-I. J. of, & 2023, undefined. (2023). Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Pada Mata Pelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam. *Journals.Ums.Ac.Id*, 07. <https://journals.ums.ac.id/index.php/iseedu/article/view/22539>
- Nurdyansyah, F., Muflihati, I., Muliani Dwi Ujianti, R., Novita, M., Kusumo, H., . M., & Charles Ryan, J. (2022). Indonesian Character Building Strategy: Planning the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project in Kurikulum Merdeka. *KnE Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v7i19.12456>
- Nurfita, D., & Sukoyo, J. (2024). Pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Jawa Di SMP Kabupaten Pemasang. *Pakar Pendidikan*. <https://doi.org/10.24036/pakar.v22i1.537>
- Primarni, A. (2024). Philosophy of Science from an Islamic and Psychological Perspective: Implications for the Development of Scientific Thought. *El -Hekam*, 9(2), 224–239. <https://doi.org/10.31958/JEH.V9I2.16402>
- Primarni, A., Fa'atin, S., Makmudi, M., Nuhdi, A., & Herlina, H. (2025). Integration of Hadith-Based Moral Education in Holistic Education in the 5.0 Era: A Systematic Literature Review. *Jeca*, 2(1), 46–79. <https://doi.org/10.69693/jeca.v2i1.18>
- Primarni, A., Hoxha, A., & Rzayev, R. (2024). The Role of Constructivism in Modern Educational Philosophy: A Comparative Analysis. *International Journal of Educational Narratives*, 2(6), 546–556.
- Primarni, A., Masuwd, M., Makmudi, M., Fa'atin, S., & Nuhdi, A. (2025). The implementation of the theoretical humanism paradigm in holistic education. *Journal of Research in Instructional*, 5(1), 199–209.
- Primarni, A., Nuhdi, A., Arifin, S., Makmudi, & Suryana, A. (2025). *A Holistic Islamic Education Framework Integrating Tarbiyah, Ta'lim, Ta'dris, Ta'dib, and Tahdzib Across Developmental Stages* (p.).

Jurnal Dirosah Islamiyah

Volume 8 Nomor 1 (2025) 22–40 P-ISSN 2656-839x E-ISSN 2716-4683

DOI: 10.17467/jdi.v8i1.11538

- Primarni, A., Pujiarti, E., Li, C., & Jasafat, J. (2025). Islamic Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphysical Problems: A Study of the Works of Ibn Sina and Al-Ghazali. *Journal of Noesantara Islamic Studies*, 2(2), 73–83. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.70177/ijnis.v2i6.1420>
- Primarni, A., Qadir, W. A., Arifin, S., Srihartini, Y., & Makmudi, M. (2024). Revitalizing Islamic Holistic Education for Gender Role Balance in the Disruption Era. *EDUKASIA Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran*, 5(2), 253–266.
- Primarni, A., Sugito, S., M.Daud, Y., Nurul, F., & Syamsul, A. (2022). Transformasi Filosofi Pendidikan Islam pada Pondok Pesantren di Era Society 5.0. *Edukasi Islami*, 11(01), 1177–1192.
- Primarni, A., Sugito, S., Yahya, M. D., Fauziah, N., & Arifin, S. (2022). Transformasi Filosofi Pendidikan Islam pada Pondok Pesantren di Era Society 5.0. *Edukasi Islami: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 11(01).
- R, E. M. G., Kurniawan, E. H., & Setyawan, W. H. (2023). The Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in Learning English to Students With Special Needs at SMP Plus Rahmat Kediri. *English Franca Academic Journal of English Language and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.29240/ef.v7i2.8201>
- Rahila, A. (2024). Holistic Curriculum Development in Islamic Religious Education Institutions in Primary Schools or Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. *DIROSAT: Journal of Education, Social Sciences & ...* <https://dirosat.com/index.php/i/article/view/67>
- Rista, I., Nelson, N., & Amrullah, A. (2025). *Strategi Guru PAI dalam Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar Peserta Didik pada Kurikulum Merdeka di SMPN 4 Rejang Lebong*. <http://e-theses.iaincurup.ac.id/id/eprint/7942>
- Sastradiharja, E. E. J., Syaidah, K., & Kurniasih, M. D. (2024). Integration of Islamic Values in Civic Education at Pesantren-Based Universities. *Tarbiya : Journal of Education in Muslim Society*, 11(2), 179–196. <https://doi.org/10.15408/tjems.v11i2.41447>
- Shalihah, N., Waharjani, W., & Wantini, W. (2023). Differentiated Learning Strategies for Children’s Religious-Moral Values in the Kurikulum Merdeka. *Jurnal Obsesi Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v7i6.5339>
- Sirait, A. A., Basri, H., & Rahman, Z. A. (2024). *The Concept of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation: Realizing Humanistic Islamic Education Learning*. <https://doi.org/10.37985/educative.v2i1.210>
- Sormin, S. A., Tembang, Y., & Riwu, L. (2023). Analysis of Readiness Factors for Islamic Boarding Schools to Implement the Merdeka Curriculum. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.47577/tssj.v50i1.9881>
- Susanna, S., ... J. U.-... J. of I., & 2023, undefined. (n.d.). Guru di persimpangan kurikulum baru: Dilema implementasi kurikulum merdeka berbasis keislaman. *Jurnal.Staisumatera-Medan.Ac.Id*. Retrieved February 3, 2026, from <https://www.jurnal.staisumatera-medan.ac.id/index.php/fitrah/article/view/478>
- Swandana, H., Tindangen, M., & Herliani, H. (2023). High School Students’ Perceptions About Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Biology Lessons in

Jurnal Dirosah Islamiyah

Volume 8 Nomor 1 (2025) 22–40 P-ISSN 2656-839x E-ISSN 2716-4683
DOI: 10.17467/jdi.v8i1.11538

- Samarinda. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan Ipa*.
<https://doi.org/10.29303/jppipa.v9i10.4585>
- Syahrir, S., Pujiriyanto, P., & ... (2024). The implementation of merdeka curriculum to realize Indonesia golden generation: A systematic literature review. *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan*.
<http://www.journal.staihubbulwathan.id/index.php/alishlah/article/view/4872>
- Utami, T. A., Susilana, R., & Dewi, L. (2024). Mapping of Co-Curricular Achievements in Kurikulum Merdeka With the Problem-Centered Thinking Skills Model. *Al-Ishlah Jurnal Pendidikan*. <https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i2.4714>
- Widodo, Y. B., Amri, M., Yustitia, V., Dwyarthi, N. D. M. S., Oktavio, A., & Dirsa, A. (2024). *The Effectiveness of the STEM-based Differentiation Learning Model on Merdeka Curriculum Learning Outcomes*. <https://doi.org/10.61991/ijeet.v2i1.33>
- Wijaya, B. A., Wantini, W., Perawironegoro, D., & Bustam, B. M. R. (2024). The Impact of Differentiated Learning in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum on Elementary School Literacy as the Object of the Kampus Mengajar Program. *Jurnal Ilmiah Sekolah Dasar*. <https://doi.org/10.23887/jisd.v8i1.68107>
- Yusa, I. M. M., Yusuf, M., Rahman, A., Aniati, A., & ... (2023). The Challenges And Opportunities Of Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation In Indonesian Schools. *Indonesian Journal of*
<http://www.injoe.org/index.php/INJOE/article/view/72>