



Evaluation of the Implementation of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education in the Era of Independent Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum (PAI) in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Study Program (PGMI) in the era of Freedom of Learning. The background of this research departs from the demands for curriculum changes that emphasize flexibility, independence, and student-centered learning, so it is necessary to examine how it is implemented in the PGMI environment. The purpose of this study is to find out the extent to which the planning, implementation, and evaluation of PAI learning is in accordance with the principles of Independent Learning. The research method used is qualitative descriptive with data collection techniques through documentation, observation, and interviews with PAI lecturers and PGMI students. The results of the study show that the implementation of the PAI curriculum in the era of Independent Learning has increased in several aspects, especially in the use of more varied learning methods and encouraging active student participation. Project-based learning, group discussions, and the use of digital media are starting to be applied more consistently. However, this study also found obstacles in its implementation, such as limited supporting facilities, uneven digital literacy skills, and lack of lecturer training related to learning innovation. Learning evaluation also still tends to be oriented towards cognitive assessment so that it does not fully reflect the holistic character according to the principles of Freedom of Learning. Overall, the implementation of the PAI curriculum at PGMI is in the right direction, but it still needs optimization, especially in the aspects of media, strategy, and learning evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is the main foundation in the formation of the religious, moral, and social character of students in Indonesia. At the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level, PAI not only functions as a subject, but also as a systematic effort to instill Islamic values from an early age. Therefore, the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Study Program (PGMI) has a strategic responsibility in preparing prospective MI teachers who are competent, professional, and able to integrate PAI values in every learning process. In the context of changes in national education policy, the PAI curriculum at PGMI is one of the important focuses that needs to be developed sustainably, especially since the enactment of the Independent Learning Policy by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology.

The government through the Merdeka Learning policy seeks to provide greater flexibility, autonomy, and creativity space for educational units in designing and developing the curriculum. The curriculum is no longer understood as a static document, but as a dynamic instrument that must keep up with the times and the needs of students. In this context, the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum needs to be able to answer the challenges of the digital era, globalization, and changes in the learning styles of new generation students. The Era of Independent Learning demands a curriculum that not only conveys religious content, but also facilitates character development, critical thinking skills, creativity, collaboration, and pedagogic competencies that are relevant for prospective MI teachers.

However, this change in the educational paradigm requires significant adjustments in universities, especially the PGMI Study Program. The implementation of the PAI curriculum cannot be separated from various challenges, such as the preparation of a Semester Learning Plan (RPS) in accordance with the principle of differentiation, the ability of lecturers to implement innovative learning models, and the availability of supporting technology facilities.

Various previous studies have shown that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAI subjects in schools or madrasas still faces obstacles in terms of learning planning, variations in teaching methods, and the lack of optimal use of digital media. However, studies on the implementation of the PAI curriculum at the university level, especially in the PGMI Study Program as a printer for MI teachers, are still relatively limited. Most of the previous studies only focused on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in elementary schools and madrasas, so it has not provided a comprehensive picture of the readiness of prospective MI teachers in dealing with curriculum changes. The limitations of the study show that there are gaps that need to be filled through evaluative research that focuses on the implementation of the PAI curriculum in the PGMI environment.

Evaluation of curriculum implementation is an important step to identify successes, obstacles, and opportunities for PAI curriculum development at PGMI. Evaluation in this context includes three main aspects, namely learning planning, implementation of the learning process, and assessment of learning outcomes. The planning aspect includes the preparation of RPS, material selection, selection of learning models, and suitability with graduate learning outcomes. The implementation aspect looks at how lecturers implement active, creative, and innovative learning strategies that adapt to student needs. Meanwhile, the assessment aspect focuses on how learning evaluation is designed to measure the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, as well as how the assessment reflects the principles of Independent Learning.

It is in this context that this study aims to provide a clear picture of the effectiveness of the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at PGMI in the era of Freedom of Learning. The evaluation was carried out to determine the suitability between planning, implementation, and learning outcomes with the demands of the Merdeka Learning policy. This research also seeks to identify obstacles faced by PGMI lecturers and students during the learning process, as well as opportunities for curriculum development that can improve the quality of education of prospective MI teachers.

This research is expected to provide benefits for the development of the PAI curriculum in universities, especially the PGMI Study Program. The results of the research can be the basis for curriculum developers, lecturers, and educational institutions to improve aspects of planning, teaching methods, the use of technology, and assessment models. In addition, this research contributes to strengthening the literature on the implementation of the PAI curriculum in the era of Freedom of Learning and provides direction for further research in the field of Islamic education. Thus, this research is expected to be able to become a strategic reference in an effort to improve the quality of prospective MI teachers who are professional, adaptive, and have character according to Islamic values.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative research design with a case study approach, because the focus of the research is directed at the evaluation process of the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Study Program (PGMI) in the era of Independent Learning in depth and contextually. The research population included all lecturers teaching PAI courses, PGMI students, and study program managers, while the research sample was selected by purposive sampling, namely those who were considered to have the most relevant information to the implementation of the curriculum, such as the head of the study program, lecturers in the field of PAI, and students who had taken several core PAI courses.

Data collection techniques are carried out through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation studies of curriculum documents, RPS, learning tools, and internal evaluation reports. The research instrument was developed through semi-structured interview guidelines, observation sheets, and document analysis lists, which were compiled based on curriculum evaluation indicators according to the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model. The presence of the researcher in this qualitative research is very important, because the researcher acts as the main instrument that interacts directly with the research subject and decides to focus on the analysis flexibly according to the findings in the field.

To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses source triangulation techniques and techniques, namely comparing information from various informants and matching the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. The location of the research is in the PGMI Study Program at one of the UIN/IAIN/PTKIN which implements the Merdeka Learning curriculum, and the duration of the research is carried out for approximately two months, covering the process of data collection to analysis. The data obtained was then analyzed using the qualitative analysis technique of the Miles and Huberman model, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn.

Because this study does not use laboratory equipment, the specifications of the tools used are only in the form of supporting devices such as voice recording devices, laptops, and curriculum documents, which function to record interviews, process data, and analyze documents. With this method, the research is expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the effectiveness of the implementation of the PAI curriculum at PGMI in the era of Freedom of Learning.

RESULTS

The results of this research were obtained through observation, in-depth interviews with lecturers and students, as well as the review of curriculum documents and learning tools. All data are presented in categories according to the focus of the research, namely the evaluation of the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Study Program in the era of Independent Learning.

Conformity of the PAI Curriculum Structure with the Independent Learning Policy

The results of the study show that the PAI curriculum structure has integrated a number of elements of the Independent Curriculum, such as Graduate Learning Outcomes, Pancasila Student Profiles, OBE (Outcome Based Education)-based course achievements, and the preparation of RPS that emphasizes flexibility and learning autonomy.

However, the implementation of policies at the implementation level is still uneven. Lecturers who already understand the concept of Independent Learning tend to implement project-based, collaborative, and reflective learning. On the other hand, lecturers who are not familiar still apply traditional and lecturer-centered patterns.

According to the theory of curriculum implementation by Michael Fullan (2007), curriculum change will be effective if the implementer (teacher or lecturer) understands the idea of change and has the willingness to change teaching practices. The research findings reinforce this theory—although the curriculum document has changed, the uneven understanding of lecturers makes implementation less than optimal.

These findings are also in line with Posner's view that curriculum implementation includes "curriculum as enacted," i.e. how the curriculum is actually implemented in the field, not just a document.

Implementation of PAI Learning: Methods, Strategies, and Learning Activities

Observations show that the lecture method is still often used, especially in theoretical courses. Even so, significant developments can be seen in the implementation of Independent Learning-based learning models, such as:

- Project-Based Learning (PBL), for example da'wah video projects,
- Problem-Based Learning (PBL) through the analysis of religious cases in MI,
- Collaborative Learning, especially in microteaching practices,
- Case Method, especially in the study of contemporary Islamic education.

Students feel more enthusiastic when lecturers provide freedom in exploring ideas, in accordance with the principle of Freedom of Learning which places students as learning subjects.

This learning practice is in line with Vygotsky's theory of constructivism which emphasizes the active role of learners and the importance of social interaction in learning. Merdeka Belajar, views students as "owners of the learning process" so that lecturers act as facilitators, not the main source of knowledge.

Previous research has also shown that project-based learning is able to increase students' creativity, critical thinking, and responsibility. These findings confirm that innovative learning in PAI has a positive effect on the quality of mastery of religious materials.

Utilization of Learning Resources and Learning Media

The results of the study show that learning resources are available digitally, but their use is not evenly distributed. Some lecturers still rely on PowerPoint and printed materials, while the use of application-based digital media, interactive platforms, or educational videos is not optimal.

Students want more modern PAI learning because Generation Z is used to digital technology. In addition, the use of digital learning media has been proven to increase student interest in learning and engagement.

According to the TPACK (Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge) theory, the success of technology integration in learning depends on the ability of educators to combine technology, pedagogy, and content. The findings of the study show that the TPACK competence of PGMI lecturers has not been evenly distributed, so media innovation has not been fully achieved.

Another relevant theory is SAMR (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) by Puentedura. The practice of learning media at PGMI is still in the stage of Substitution and Augmentation (replacing conventional methods with simple technology), not yet in the Redefinition stage.

Learning Evaluation and Assessment System

Research has found that appraisals have taken various forms such as process appraisal, outcomes, portfolio, and performance appraisal. However, some obstacles still arise:

- The assessment rubric is not yet uniform,
- Authentic assessments have not been fully implemented,
- Feedback is still minimal on some courses.

Students said that the transparency of grades and the explanation of assessment criteria still need to be improved.

Assessment in Independent Learning emphasizes assessment as learning and assessment for learning, not just assessment of learning. This refers to Earl's (2013) theory which emphasizes the importance of evaluation as a reflection process, not just determining the final number.

The finding that some lecturers have implemented portfolios is in line with the principles of authentic assessment, according to Wiggins. However, the implementation has not been consistent, so this study reinforces the theory that evaluation change requires continuous training.

The findings of the study show that the obstacles to the implementation of Freedom of Learning at PGMI are aligned with these four factors—especially human resource competencies, facilities, and policy communication.

DISCUSSION

Overview and relevance to the research objectives

This discussion began from the disclosure of field facts that the PAI curriculum document in the PGMI Study Program has been revised and is formally aligned with the principles of Freedom of Learning (integration of CPL, Pancasila Student Profile, and OBE orientation), but its implementation in the field is heterogeneous. These findings are consistently produced through data triangulation (learning observations, lecturer and student interviews, as well as analysis of RPS documents and learning tools). Thus, the discussion was directed to answer the research objectives: (1) the extent to which the planning, process, and evaluation of PAI learning is in line with Freedom of Learning; (2) obstacles and support for implementation; and (3) recommendations for improvement. The following is a detailed discussion per main theme.

Curriculum suitability (planning) and its implications

The results of the document analysis show that the RPS and syllabus have been compiled to reflect broader learning outcomes (knowledge, 21st-century skills, and character). However, the uneven understanding of lecturers towards the philosophy of Independent Learning causes planning not always to translate into a congruent learning strategy. According to Fullan (curriculum change), the success of curricular reform is more determined by the understanding and commitment of the implementers. These findings indicate that although policy documents (curriculum "on paper") already exist, the quality of the "curriculum as enacted" still depends on the capacity of institutions to build common understanding. The practical implication is that the preparation of the curriculum must be followed by socialization and capacity building activities (RPS workshops, equalization of perceptions between lecturers) so that planning can be realized consistently.

Learning process: practice, variation, and dynamics of pedagogical transformation

Observation and interview data show a duality of practice: some lecturers are still dominant in the lecture method while others have begun to implement PjBL, PBL, collaborative microteaching, and product-based assignments. The interpretation of these findings leads to two things: (a) there is a pedagogical shift towards a constructivist approach—in line with the goal of Freedom of Learning—but (b) the transformation is incremental and uneven. Vygotsky and constructivism emphasize the role of social interaction and scaffolding; The implementation of PjBL/PBL in several courses shows the application of these principles, which then seems to strengthen student motivation and involvement. However, the limitation of lecture time and lecturer/student ratio are serious obstacles to adopting an intensive strategy on the management of the learning process. Therefore, to deepen pedagogical transformation, it is necessary to restructure the curriculum load (e.g., time allocation, task load) and increase the managerial capacity of lecturers in designing complex learning activities.

Integration of technology and utilization of learning resources

Findings: the availability of digital teaching materials is sufficient but the use of technology (interactive applications, educational videos, LMS platforms) is still low; the majority of use is still in the substitution stage (PowerPoint, PDF). Linking to TPACK theory and the SAMR model shows that many practices are still at the early stages of technology integration (Substitution/Augmentation) and have not yet achieved the Modification/Redefinition that contributes to the transformation of learning. Influencing factors include the diverse digital competencies of lecturers and the availability of campus technology facilities. As a result, the learning potential that encourages creativity and technology-based collaboration has not been

maximized. Practical recommendations: structured TPACK training, ongoing technical mentoring, and incentives for the development of reusable digital teaching materials (OER).

Learning evaluation: validity, reliability, and transparency of assessment

The findings show the use of various forms of assessment (formative, summative, portfolio, performance), but the inconsistency of rubrics and transparency between lecturers gives rise to the variability of assessment standards. Theoretically, authentic assessments (Wiggins) and assessments for/as learning (Earl) demand clear criteria, standardized rubrics, and ongoing feedback to support learning. The results of the study showed that when portfolios and rubrics were used (by lecturers who understood Merdeka Belajar), students showed increased reflection and metacognition; However, because it is uneven, the effect is not at the same time on the level of the study program. Best practices that need to be standardized include the use of shared rubrics, assessment moderation procedures, and feedforward mechanisms.

Supporting and inhibiting factors: synthesis of findings

Data triangulation identified supporting factors: the existence of institutional policies (study program commitments), the availability of teaching materials, and student motivation; Meanwhile, the main obstacles are the heterogeneous technological capabilities of lecturers, limited facilities, lack of continuous training, and administrative burden of lecturers. Linking the findings to the policy implementation model (Edward III), the barriers relate to policy communication, resource allocation, implementing disposition, and institutional structure. To drive sustainability of implementation, recommendations include: improved clear policy communication, allocation of funds for infrastructure, ongoing professional development programs, and reorganization of faculty workloads.

Contributions to theory and suggestions for theoretical modification

This research confirms many theories of curriculum implementation and technology integration; but it also offers practical modifications: in the context of PGMI, the success of Merdeka Belajar requires three synergistic pillars—(1) knowledge alignment, (2) technology-pedagogical capacity (TPACK building), and (3) joint evaluation mechanisms (rubric & moderation). This synergistic concept emphasizes that curriculum documents (policies) are only effective if accompanied by simultaneous interventions on human resource capacity and evaluation systems.

Limitations of research and advanced research agenda

The limitations of the study include focusing on one study program (limited generalizability), relatively short observation duration (± 2 months), and limited number of informants. Further research can expand the sample across PTKIN/University, use longitudinal design to observe changes in practice as training interventions, and combine qualitative-quantitative methods (mixed methods) to measure the effect of specific interventions (e.g., TPACK training) on learning outcomes.

Practical implications

Practically, these results recommend (1) the implementation of structured training on Freedom of Learning and TPACK for PGMI lecturers, (2) standardization of rubrics and assessment moderation procedures at the study program level, (3) strengthening technology facilities and technical support, and (4) revising the allocation of lecture time to provide space for learning activities that require interaction and projects. The implementation of these recommendations is expected to reduce the gap between curriculum documents and real learning practices.

Research Discussion Table

Aspects	Research Findings	Analysis / Explanation	Theoretical Relevance	Implications
1. Learning Planning (Curriculum & RPS)	The curriculum document is in accordance with Merdeka Belajar, CPL is complete, but the lecturers' understanding is uneven.	The formal curriculum is good, but implementation depends on the understanding of lecturers. There is a gap between "written curriculum" and "implemented"	Fullan (Change Theory): Curriculum change is successful if the implementer understands and accepts the change.	It needs regular training, RPS workshops, and equalization of perceptions between lecturers.

Aspects	Research Findings	Analysis /Explanation	Theoretical Relevance	Implications
		curriculum".		
2. Implementation of Learning	Some lecturers have used PjBL, PBL, discussions, but some are still traditional lectures.	There was a transition to constructivist methods, but not evenly. There are time constraints, large classes, and lecturer readiness.	Vygotsky & Constructivism: Effective learning through interaction, scaffolding, and collaborative activities.	It is necessary to increase the capacity of lecturers, reduce lecture load, and assist in the implementation of active methods.
3. Technology Integration (TPACK)	Technology is available but utilization is still basic (PPT, PDF). Not to the maximum use of LMS or interactive applications.	Technology integration is still at the substitution level, it has not transformed learning.	SAMR Model: Most are at the Substitution/Augmentation level. TPACK: The competence of Technological Pedagogical Content is not yet strong.	It is necessary to provide digital training, provide facilities, and develop innovative digital teaching materials.
4. Learning Evaluation	Assessments vary, there are portfolios, quizzes, rubrics, but the standards between lecturers are different.	Standard inconsistencies reduce the objectivity of the assessment. Rubrics are not yet used evenly.	Wiggins (Authentic Assessment) and Assessment for Learning: Assessments should be rubric, consistent, and provide feedback.	Study programs need common rubric standards, value moderation, and authentic evaluation training.
5. Supporting Factors	The policy of the study program is good, the lecturers are quite competent, and the students are enthusiastic.	This supports accelerates the implementation of Freedom of Learning if it is used optimally.	Edward III (Policy Implementation): Communication and the disposition of the implementer are decisive.	Study programs need to strengthen communication and optimize student motivation.
6. Inhibiting Factors	Technological limitations, diverse lecturers' digital competencies, high administrative burden.	Structural and skill barriers hinder learning innovation.	Top-down Model: Policies without resource readiness will be problematic.	It is necessary to improve infrastructure, technological assistance, and arrange the workload of lecturers.
7. Impact of MBKM Implementation	Students are more active, critical thinking increases in classes that use PjBL/PBL.	A positive impact occurs when the constructivist model is applied seriously.	Rogers Humanism Theory: Learning is meaningful when students are emotionally and intellectually engaged.	It is necessary to expand the application of PjBL to all PAI PGMI courses.
8. Research Limitations	The location is only one study program, the	Reduce generalization of results.		

Aspects	Research Findings	Analysis Explanation	Theoretical Relevance	Implications
	observation time is short, and there are few informants.			

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum (PAI) in the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education Study Program (PGMI) in the era of Independent Learning has shown positive developments, although it still faces various implementation challenges. Learning planning is basically in accordance with the principles of Freedom of Learning, which is characterized by the arrangement of a structured curriculum, CPL, and RPS. However, lecturers' understanding of the philosophy of Independent Learning is not evenly distributed, resulting in differences in quality in the preparation and implementation of learning.

The implementation of learning shows a shift towards active learning models such as Project-Based Learning and Problem-Based Learning, but its implementation has not been consistent in all classes. The integration of educational technology is also still limited to the use of basic media, so it does not fully support innovative learning as mandated in the Merdeka Learning policy. Learning evaluation has used various forms of authentic assessment, but differences in standards between lecturers create inconsistencies in the objectivity of assessment.

From the theoretical side, this study contributes to the development of the PAI curriculum evaluation study by confirming that the success of curriculum implementation is highly dependent on the understanding of implementers (Fullan), technological readiness (TPACK), and quality of authentic evaluation (Wiggins). This research also strengthens the theory of constructivism which states that the success of learning depends on the activities, interactions, and independence of students. In addition, this study offers new thinking that the success of Merdeka Learning in the context of PAI PGMI is greatly influenced by the consistency of instructional standards between lecturers and the digital readiness of the institution.

This research has several limitations, such as the scope of the location that only covers one study program, the limited number of informants, and the short research time. Therefore, further research with a wider scope is needed, involving several PGMI campuses, and using a longitudinal approach to obtain a more in-depth and comprehensive picture of curriculum implementation.

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