

Analysis Implementation the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Strengthening Character Education Based on Qur'anic Vision in Elementary Schools

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Informasi Artikel	Abstrak
Diterima : 09-12-2025 Direvisi : 10-01-2026 Diterima : 15-01-2026 Dipublikasi : 31-01-2026	Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka berbasis visi Qur'ani di sekolah dasar, khususnya dalam keterpaduan antara perencanaan kurikulum, pelaksanaan pembelajaran, dan evaluasi pembelajaran. Kurikulum Merdeka memberikan fleksibilitas kepada satuan pendidikan untuk mengembangkan pembelajaran yang kontekstual dan berpusat pada peserta didik, sehingga memungkinkan integrasi nilai-nilai spiritual dan karakter sesuai dengan visi sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi, wawancara, dan studi dokumentasi terhadap Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan (KOSP), perangkat pembelajaran, serta praktik pembelajaran di kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sekolah dasar berbasis visi Qur'ani telah mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka dengan cukup baik pada aspek perencanaan dan pembiasaan nilai karakter religius. Nilai-nilai Qur'ani telah terintegrasi dalam visi dan misi sekolah, budaya sekolah, serta kegiatan pembelajaran sehari-hari. Namun demikian, implementasi pembelajaran yang mendorong keterampilan berpikir kritis, kreatif, dan penggunaan asesmen autentik masih belum optimal. Guru cenderung menggunakan perangkat ajar yang tersedia tanpa pengembangan mandiri yang kontekstual, dan evaluasi pembelajaran masih berfokus pada hasil akhir. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka berbasis visi Qur'ani berkontribusi positif terhadap pembentukan karakter religius peserta didik, namun masih memerlukan penguatan pada aspek inovasi pedagogik, pengembangan modul ajar, dan asesmen autentik agar tujuan Kurikulum Merdeka dapat tercapai secara optimal. Kata kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka; visi Qur'ani; pendidikan karakter; sekolah dasar; implementasi kurikulum. Abstract This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on a Qur'anic vision in elementary schools, focusing on the coherence between curriculum planning, instructional practices, and learning assessment. The Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for schools to design contextual and student-centered learning, allowing the integration of spiritual and character values aligned with the school's vision. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis of the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP), instructional planning documents, and learning practices. The findings indicate that elementary schools with a Qur'anic vision have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum effectively in terms of curriculum planning and the cultivation of religious character values. Qur'anic values are reflected in the school's vision and mission, school culture, and daily learning activities. However, the implementation of learning strategies that promote critical and creative thinking, as well as the use of authentic assessment, remains limited. Teachers tend to rely on existing teaching modules without sufficient contextual adaptation, and assessment practices still emphasize learning outcomes rather than learning processes. This study concludes that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on a Qur'anic vision contributes positively to the development of students' religious character. Nevertheless, strengthening pedagogical innovation, independent teaching module development, and authentic assessment practices is necessary to optimize the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary education. Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum; Qur'anic vision; character education; elementary school; curriculum implementation.

1. INTRODUCTION

As global educational paradigms continue to shift, education systems are increasingly required to focus on character development, moral values, and competencies relevant to the twenty-first century. Basic education plays a strategic role in shaping students' personalities, as the values, attitudes, and learning habits developed at this stage tend to persist across subsequent levels of education (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Therefore, elementary school curricula must be designed holistically to enable a balanced integration of cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions.

The Merdeka Curriculum responds to these demands by providing schools with greater flexibility to design learner-centered, contextual, and environmentally relevant learning experiences. This curriculum emphasizes character strengthening, formative assessment, and differentiated instruction as key components of education (OECD, 2021; UNESCO, 2021). Alignment among school vision, curriculum planning, instructional practices, and evaluation systems is essential for successful curriculum implementation.

The Merdeka Curriculum also enables schools to integrate local and religious values in accordance with their institutional vision and characteristics. This flexibility has been utilized by Qur'anic-vision-based elementary schools to incorporate spiritual values, moral conduct, and religious practices into both school culture and learning processes. Evidence suggests that integrating religious values into the curriculum can effectively foster students' character development, particularly in terms of moral responsibility, discipline, and social awareness (Jones, 2021).

Character education that is systematically embedded within the curriculum is more effective than partial or incidental approaches. Character education yields a significant impact when values are explicitly articulated within instructional strategies, learning objectives, and assessment indicators (Birknerová et al., 2022). Nevertheless, several studies indicate that the implementation of value-based curricula continues to face considerable challenges, particularly in relation to teacher readiness, instructional material development, and the use of authentic assessment methods.

Despite the growing body of research on character education and the Merdeka Curriculum, relatively few studies have specifically examined how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in Qur'anic-vision-based elementary schools. Most existing studies focus primarily on policy dimensions or teachers' perceptions, without sufficiently exploring the interconnections among school vision, instructional practices, learning assessment, the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP), and institutional identity (Fredriksen, 2023). Therefore, further in-depth research is required to understand how Qur'anic values are systematically integrated into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Within the curriculum development cycle, curriculum implementation represents a critical stage in which educational policies are translated into instructional practices at the school level. A curriculum cannot generate meaningful impact unless it is implemented contextually, sustainably, and consistently. According to contemporary curriculum theory, implementation is viewed as a dynamic and evolving process involving interactions among teachers, school institutions, policy frameworks, and student characteristics (Putri & Aliyyah, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes a paradigm shift from standardized learning approaches toward learning models that recognize diversity in students' abilities, interests, and learning needs. This curriculum was developed in response to the demand for a more flexible, adaptive, and competency-oriented education system. Consequently, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum extends beyond the mere application of curriculum documents and requires meaningful pedagogical transformation (Gideon, 2022).

Conceptually, the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level is grounded in several key principles, including curriculum flexibility, learner-centered instruction, differentiated learning, and assessment focused on learning processes and student development. Curriculum flexibility enables schools and teachers to design a School Operational Curriculum (KOSP) that aligns with the school's social, cultural, and value-based context (Oliver, 2021).

The Merdeka Curriculum positions teachers as central actors in pedagogical decision-making. Rather than functioning solely as technical implementers of the curriculum, teachers are reconceptualized as independent learning designers. Recent studies indicate that teacher autonomy in instructional design can enhance learning quality when supported by continuous professional development and a strong understanding of curriculum principles (Sahlberg, 2021). However, increased autonomy also requires higher levels of pedagogical competence, particularly in developing formative assessments and implementing differentiated instruction.

In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary level, strong alignment among learning objectives, instructional activities, and assessment practices is essential. Assessment is no longer viewed merely as an evaluative tool but as an integral component of the learning process, serving to monitor student progress and provide constructive feedback. Empirical evidence suggests that regular use of formative assessment can enhance students' learning motivation and conceptual understanding in basic education settings.

Educational leadership and school culture also play a crucial role in curriculum implementation. Research demonstrates that the success of school-based autonomous curricula largely depends on instructional leadership that supports pedagogical innovation, teacher collaboration, and continuous reflection (Leithwood et al., 2020). Within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, instructional leadership is essential to ensure that curriculum flexibility is utilized to improve learning quality rather than merely to fulfill administrative requirements.

Nevertheless, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools faces several

challenges, including limited teacher readiness, resource constraints, and shifts in learning culture. Recent studies reveal that elementary school teachers often require intensive mentoring to effectively implement differentiated instruction and authentic assessment, particularly during the initial stages of curriculum reform (Alimuddin, 2023). Without adequate support, curriculum implementation may become fragmented and inconsistently applied across classrooms and teachers.

Therefore, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum should be understood as a systemic process that involves policy alignment, teacher capacity, school culture, and the local context of educational institutions. Successful implementation is not solely indicated by the development of KOSP documents, but more importantly by conscious, adaptive, and meaningful instructional practices that respond to students' needs. This conceptual framework is essential for examining how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in Qur'anic-vision-based elementary schools, which possess distinctive educational goals and value orientations.

2.2. Character Education and Qur'anic Vision in Learning

Character education is a fundamental component of basic education, as it serves to establish students' moral, spiritual, and social foundations from an early age. Effective character education must be integrated into the curriculum, instructional strategies, and school culture, and cannot be separated from formal learning processes (Purwanti et al., 2024). The integration of character values is particularly crucial at the elementary school level, as this period represents a formative stage during which habits, attitudes, and values are developed and exert long-term influence on individual development.

A Qur'anic vision positions the Qur'an as the primary source of moral, spiritual, and ethical values within religiously oriented education. This vision extends beyond the acquisition of religious knowledge to encompass the cultivation of noble character, social responsibility, and balance among intellectual, emotional, and spiritual intelligence. Contemporary studies indicate that students' affective dimensions such as empathy, discipline, and moral awareness can be strengthened through the integration of religious values into educational practices (Arif & Mujrimin, 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum provides schools with substantial opportunities to integrate character values in alignment with institutional vision and mission. Through curricular flexibility, Qur'anic-vision-based educational institutions are able to internalize Islamic values contextually through thematic learning, the reinforcement of school culture, and religious habituation practices. This approach aligns with the notion that character education is more effective when it is connected to students' real-life contexts and the guiding principles upheld within the school environment (Suwanto & Zainudin, 2025).

Recent studies demonstrate that character education grounded in religious values has a positive impact on students' behavior and learning attitudes in elementary schools. Learning activities that incorporate spiritual values can enhance students' moral awareness and sense of personal responsibility (Akbar et al., 2023). Qur'anic values such as honesty, perseverance, and social concern are not merely conveyed through lectures or conventional instruction, but are more effectively internalized through reflective and collaborative learning activities.

Nevertheless, research has identified symbolic and pedagogically fragmented implementation as a major challenge in character education. Character education is often manifested through routine habituation or ceremonial activities without clear alignment to learning objectives and assessment practices (Arumsari et al., 2025). Such conditions risk reducing character values to normative discourse that has limited influence on students' actual learning experiences.

Character education, including that based on a Qur'anic vision, must therefore be embedded within the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning under the Merdeka Curriculum. To effectively monitor students' character development, character assessment should be designed authentically and conducted continuously. Recent research suggests that effective character evaluation cannot rely solely on descriptive judgments without clear indicators; instead, it must be formative, reflective, and grounded in contextual observation (Irfan et al., 2023).

Furthermore, in Qur'anic-vision-based character education, the role of teachers is highly strategic. Teachers function not only as educators but also as role models who embody the values being taught. Accordingly, the enhancement of teachers' pedagogical competence and personal integrity is essential to the success of character education initiatives.

In conclusion, character education and Qur'anic vision in learning can be understood as an integrative process that requires alignment among values, curriculum, pedagogy, and school culture. The Merdeka Curriculum provides a framework that enables such integration; however, its success depends largely on schools' and teachers' capacity to embed Qur'anic values into reflective, contextual, and meaningful instructional practices. This conceptual framework serves as a foundation for examining the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on a Qur'anic vision in elementary schools.

3. METHOD

This study was conducted in an elementary school that has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and adopts a Qur'anic-based educational vision. The purpose of this research was to provide an in-depth description of how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented at the elementary school level within a Qur'anic-vision-based educational context. Research data were obtained through field observations of classroom instruction and school activities. The observations were carried out systematically by focusing on how the Merdeka Curriculum was enacted, how teachers applied instructional strategies, how Qur'anic values were integrated into learning activities, and the extent of students' engagement in the learning process.

The collected data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach. The analysis involved stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to generate a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in a Qur'anic-vision-based elementary school.

To further strengthen the methodological rigor, observations in this study were conducted through direct and non-participant observation. In this approach, the researcher acted solely as an observer, allowing the data to be collected in a natural and unbiased manner without direct involvement in the instructional

process. The observation focused on key principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, including learning flexibility, learner-centered instruction, and the integration of Qur'anic values into classroom activities and school culture. Learning situations, teacher–student interactions, and the broader learning environment were documented through detailed field notes.

Data analysis was conducted concurrently during and after the data collection process by examining relationships between field findings and the conceptual framework of the study. This iterative process was intended to produce a comprehensive understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum, grounded in a Qur'anic vision, is implemented in an elementary school setting.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section constitutes the core and most substantial part of the research article. The research findings are described and analyzed by relating them to the conceptual framework and relevant previous studies. The results and discussion are organized comprehensively to provide an in-depth account of how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented, how Qur'anic values are integrated into the learning process, the roles of teachers and students, and the challenges encountered during its implementation. Accordingly, this section not only presents the empirical conditions observed in the field but also critically analyzes the research findings by considering relevant educational theories and policy frameworks.

The objectives of this article are as follows: (1) to address the research questions and focus concerning the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on a Qur'anic vision; (2) to demonstrate how the research findings were obtained through an examination of school culture and instructional practices; (3) to interpret the research findings within the context of basic education; (4) to relate the findings to relevant theoretical frameworks and previous research; and (5) to generate meaningful insights for educational stakeholders.

Overall, this section presents a comprehensive analysis of the research findings regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum grounded in a Qur'anic vision at the elementary school level. The discussion integrates empirical evidence derived from field observations with theoretical analysis and relevant prior studies. The findings are organized thematically to illustrate the key dimensions of curriculum implementation, the integration of Qur'anic values into learning practices, and students' behavioral and ethical development.

4.1. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Learning Process at the Elementary School Level

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level, teachers are required to make significant adjustments to their instructional methods. They must also reconsider the range of teaching approaches used in the classroom. In practice, teachers no longer function solely as content deliverers; instead, they assume the role of active facilitators who guide students through more contextualized and learner-centered learning processes. Studies indicate that teachers have begun to adopt

lesson planning practices aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, including the design of learning activities that integrate project-based learning, authentic assessment, and instructional approaches responsive to students' needs. These planning processes are developed collaboratively, taking into account student characteristics and the learning objectives stipulated by the revised curriculum (Syamsidar et al., 2025).

However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum varies across schools. Evaluation results from several elementary schools in Pasaman Regency reveal that teachers' levels of understanding of Merdeka Curriculum learning concepts significantly influence classroom learning quality. Schools that demonstrate strong alignment in planning, instructional strategies, and assessment practices tend to produce teaching and learning processes consistent with the principles of the new curriculum. In contrast, other schools continue to face challenges such as uneven teacher competence and limited availability of learning resources, which ultimately affect the overall quality of instructional implementation (Suci & Kadri, 2023).

Furthermore, literature reviews on curriculum implementation highlight the importance of professional support and intensive training in enabling teachers to become key agents of effective instructional practice. Teachers who actively participate in professional learning communities or training programs have shown improved capacity to utilize digital platforms, such as the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, more effectively. These efforts demonstrate that enhanced pedagogical skills influence not only instructional strategies but also the quality of classroom interactions (Syamsidar et al., 2025).

From a broader perspective, evaluations of Merdeka Curriculum implementation based on systematic literature reviews indicate that the curriculum facilitates pedagogical transformation and the adoption of diverse instructional approaches in elementary schools, particularly through authentic and contextual learning strategies. These studies emphasize that learner-centered instruction and continuous formative assessment are essential components of instructional processes aligned with the new curriculum framework (Saniah & Hari Nugraha, 2024).

Overall, the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary education reflects positive developments in teaching practices. Key changes include the increased use of authentic assessment focused on understanding students' learning processes, more flexible and contextual lesson planning, and instructional practices that prioritize active student engagement. These findings suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to foster a more contemporary learning environment, although several schools continue to face operational constraints and contextual variations that influence the consistency of its implementation.

4.2. Character Education and Qur'anic Values in the Merdeka Curriculum

Several empirical studies in Indonesia indicate that character education grounded in the Qur'an can strengthen the internalization of moral values within school settings. The integration of Qur'anic values into education has the potential to cultivate a generation that is both morally resilient and competitive in the modern era. This is achieved through the application of Qur'anic teachings in school activities and

formal learning processes, which simultaneously reinforce students' spiritual development (Nurjannah et al., 2024).

Qur'an-based character education programs typically involve consistent religious activities. Regular Qur'an reading practices in elementary schools have been shown to significantly shape students' character by enhancing discipline, patience, and concentration. Beyond functioning as routine activities, these habituation models support the internalization of strong spiritual principles that guide students' daily lives (Solekha & Suyatno, 2022).

A broader curricular approach can also be employed to implement Islamic value-based character education in elementary schools. For instance, integrating Qur'anic values across subject areas, school culture, and extracurricular activities can foster an educational environment conducive to character development. The reinforcement of Islamic character values may occur both within formal instructional processes and through a school culture that consistently reflects Islamic moral and ethical principles (Carvina et al., 2023).

Character evaluation based on Qur'anic values can be conducted by reflecting on students' behaviors and positive habits. Interpreting the Qur'an as a source of moral values provides a strong foundation for character education in schools, particularly in addressing the moral challenges faced by today's younger generation. This approach enables the integration of traditional value education with the character demands of twenty-first-century learners (Budihardjo, 2017).

Therefore, integrating Qur'an-based character education into the Merdeka Curriculum is a shared responsibility of teachers and all stakeholders within the school community, including school leaders, parents, and the wider educational community. Such collaboration is essential to ensure that Qur'anic values are not merely taught theoretically but are consistently practiced in students' daily lives, both at school and at home.

4.3. The Role of Teachers in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum Based on a Qur'anic Vision

The success of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools is highly dependent on the role of teachers, particularly in strengthening character education and implementing a Qur'anic vision. Teachers function not merely as transmitters of knowledge, but also as facilitators who actively guide the learning process and support the development of students' character values (Nurjannah et al., 2024). Within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, the role of teachers shifts from being the primary source of knowledge to becoming learning facilitators who direct, motivate, and guide students through active and meaningful learning experiences that accommodate diverse abilities and learning needs. This transformation requires teachers to possess strong pedagogical competence.

Studies conducted in Indonesian elementary schools indicate that Guru Penggerak (teacher leaders) play an expanded role in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Beyond managing classroom instruction, these teachers promote collaboration among educators, motivate students, and foster creative and supportive learning environments. In Qur'anic-vision-based schools, teachers employ habituation approaches by embedding Qur'anic values into daily activities, such as teaching Islamic ethics, leading

prayers, and integrating Qur'anic perspectives contextually into subject matter. This role aligns with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize not only academic achievement but also the development of students' moral and character dimensions (Paridah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, teachers guide and support students in developing twenty-first-century skills through project-based learning, authentic assessment, and collaborative activities that remain grounded in Qur'anic values. Teachers are expected to understand the foundational principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and to enrich learning experiences by contextualizing moral and ethical values derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. This expectation necessitates continuous professional development and active participation in professional learning communities to address challenges such as digital literacy, variations in teacher readiness, and curriculum comprehension. To achieve learning processes that are pedagogically effective and robust in strengthening Islamic character, teachers must synergize the Qur'anic vision with the practical implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Akbar et al., 2023).

5. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine how the Merdeka Curriculum, grounded in a Qur'anic vision, is implemented in elementary schools. The research focused on lesson planning, instructional procedures, and the integration of character education based on Qur'anic values within the school context. The primary objective of the study was to investigate the extent to which the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum particularly learner-centered instruction and learning flexibility are enacted in educational practice.

The findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on a Qur'anic vision has generally been carried out effectively and aligns with the broader framework of national education policy. Schools have demonstrated a strong commitment to integrating Qur'anic values into both instructional practices and school culture through religious activities, teacher role modeling, and learning experiences that emphasize character strengthening. These practices reflect concrete efforts to instill character values such as honesty, responsibility, discipline, and mutual respect among students from the elementary school level.

However, the findings also reveal that the implementation of the Qur'anic-vision-based Merdeka Curriculum tends to remain focused on normative and symbolic aspects and has not yet been systematically integrated into lesson planning and assessment mechanisms. Measurable achievement indicators and structured character assessment tools have not sufficiently supported the integration of Qur'anic values into learning processes. As a result, the implementation of character education has not reached its optimal potential.

A key finding of this study is the gap between curriculum planning and classroom practice. Although curriculum planning documents reflect the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and the school's Qur'anic vision, their implementation continues to face challenges related to teacher readiness, time constraints, and the need to strengthen teachers' understanding of curriculum concepts. This gap limits the overall impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on character strengthening and the quality of student learning.

Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of coherence among school vision, learning objectives, instructional strategies, and assessment systems in curriculum implementation. The findings suggest that the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum cannot rely solely on curriculum policy directives; rather, it requires systemic support, including continuous teacher capacity development, supportive school leadership, and a school culture consistently aligned with Qur'anic values. Accordingly, curriculum implementation should be understood as an ongoing and systemic process.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted in a single school context, which limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, data collection relied solely on observational methods, without incorporating student perspectives or in-depth interviews. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the scope of investigation by involving multiple schools and diverse educational contexts, as well as employing mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of Qur'anic-vision-based Merdeka Curriculum implementation. Further studies may also focus on the development and evaluation of character assessment instruments grounded in Qur'anic values, as well as the role of teacher professional development in enhancing curriculum coherence. The findings of such research are expected to contribute more comprehensively to the advancement of Merdeka Curriculum implementation practices in Qur'anic-vision-based elementary education.

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