

## THE RELEVANCE OF CURRICULUM MERDEKA BELAJAR POLICIES WITH THE FORMATION OF RELIGIOUS CHARACTER

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**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis secara mendalam terkait dengan substansi kebijakan kurikulum merdeka belajar sebagai kebijakan baru dalam peningkatan mutu pendidikan dengan konteks pendidikan karakter religius masa kini. Pada perjalanannya kurikulum selalu mengalami perubahan yang dimaknai sebagai penyempurnaan dari kurikulum sebelumnya. Semangat yang dibangun dalam kurikulum merdeka belajar adalah untuk mewujudkan pembelajaran yang bermutu dan mampu menjawab perkembangan arus globalisasi. Apapun bentuk penyempurnaan dan inovasi yang diinginkan tentu tidak bisa dilepaskan dari tiga aspek pendidikan yaitu pengembangan aspek kognitif, afektif dan psikomotor, dan tujuan utama pendidikan nasional yaitu pada aspek membentuk akhlakul karimah, karena inilah pondasi utama dalam proses pendidikan. Begitu juga dengan kurikulum merdeka, selain bertujuan pada pengembangan kompetensi, peningkatan minat dan bakat juga pada pengembangan karakter peserta didik. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kualitatif dengan metode penelitian studi pustaka. Adapun tahapan dalam pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui buku, jurnal dan karya ilmiah yang berkaitan. Berdasarkan kajian dari berbagai literature maka diperoleh hasil bahwa, kebijakan kurikulum merdeka belajar sejalan dengan konsep pendidikan karakter religius ataupun kurikulum humanism religius, baik dari segi tujuan, proses belajar, metode dan evaluasi, dimana karena peserta didik diberikan ruang yang cukup dalam mengembangkan potensinya melalui kegiatan dilingkungan satuan pendidikan.

**Kata Kunci:** Merdeka Belajar, Karakter Religius

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**Abstract:** This research aims to analyze in depth the substance of the independent learning curriculum policy as a new policy in improving the quality of education in the context of today's religious character education. Along the way, the curriculum always changes which is interpreted as the improvement of the previous curriculum. The spirit built in the independent learning curriculum is to create learning quality that is able to respond to developments in globalization. Whatever the form of improvement and innovation is desired, of course it cannot be separated from the three aspects of education, those are the development of cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects, and the main goal of national education related to the aspect of building students' positive behaviours, because this is the main foundation in the educational process. Likewise with the independent curriculum, apart from aiming at developing competencies, increasing interests and talents, it also aims at developing the character of students. This research uses a qualitative research approach with a literature study research method. The stages in data collection are carried out through reviewing books, journals and related scientific works. Based on the study of various literature, the results are obtained that the independent learning curriculum policy is in line with the concept of religious character education or religious humanism curriculum, both in terms of objectives, learning processes, methods and evaluation, because students are given sufficient space to develop their potentials through activities in the educational unit settings.

**Keywords:** Independent Learning, Religious Character

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## Introduction

The increasingly sophisticated development of science and technology is a challenge for policy makers to innovate the education curriculum, especially for education managers who also have to adapt the national education curriculum so that it can be applied in the learning process in schools, with the hope of producing graduates (outcomes) who are qualified, have competence so they are able to compete in the global world. Whether we realize it or not, the current global era is faced with the challenge of an imbalance between culture and modern power. The industrial era 4.0 gave birth to the concept of education 4.0 which prepares knowledge and skills for students to compete in the modern era. The concept of education 4.0 places students as educational subjects and learning materials are integrated with the demands of work needs (Syamsul Arifin, Nurul Abidin, and Fauzan Al Anshori, 2021).

However, behind this, educational institutions are aggressively demonstrating the quality of their graduates to society based on technology and intellectual intelligence. However, it is considered that this does not adequately represent the goals of education and is not encouraging for the future journey of Indonesian civilization, because the real goal of education is not merely to give birth to an intellectually intelligent generation, but must be in line with the cultivation of religious character education values. According to Muqawwim, as quoted by Nuryanto and Muhammad Badaruddin, education is not only focused on hard skills which only produce graduates who have academic achievements but must also be accompanied by the development of soft skills which function to develop the mentality of students in an effort to adapt to the realities of life. (Nuryanto and Badaruddin, 2019).

From several news broadcasts through both print and digital media about the facts of violence in the world of education, both verbal and non-verbal violence. There are still widespread immoral acts and other deviations committed by young people. This fact seems to confirm that the current educational process has failed in making humans fit with their nature, people with morals and character. There are still many problems faced by this nation, indicating that character education which has been packaged in the form of a curriculum is not yet effective (Prasetya et al, 2021). Therefore, there needs to be evaluation and participation from all education stakeholders.

National Education System Law Number 20 of 2003 actually clearly states that national education aims to develop abilities and shape the nation's civilization, "The development of students so that they become human beings who believe in and are devoted to God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent and become democratic and responsible citizens". Ideally, the formulation contained reflects the three main aspects of education, namely the effective, psychomotor and cognitive aspects.

Regardless of the ideals of this formulation, the formation of national character is not a process of memorizing exam material and ways to answer exam questions. Character education requires a habituation process. Such as, getting used to doing good, getting used to telling the truth, being ashamed of being deviant. Character is not formed instantly, but must be trained seriously to realize ideal strength. There are still problems in integrating character education into the learning process, so regulations are needed as a strong foundation that certainly have the same spirit as the goals of national education which contain the values and morality of the nation (Anwar, 2021).

Education is something very fundamental, because it is related to various problems in people's lives. As Ridwan Abdullah Sani said, society and education are two things that cannot be separated, because education is a medium for developing human civilization and creating a quality generation (Gunawan, 2014). Anas Salahuddin and Irwanto Alkrienciahie also expressed similar sentiments that education has an important role in changing human thought patterns and behavior and is something urgent in producing the next generation who have superior intellectual insight and noble character (Anas Salahuddin and Irwanto Alkrienciahie, 2013).

The aim of education is to build cognitive intelligence that is in line with mental intelligence and character because the combination of intellect and good character will certainly give birth to attitudes that are in accordance with educational goals. Education is the main thing and has value, because education itself is the main element in advancing a nation. It is through education that human resource development is formed. So in this case, one of the functions of education is to develop skills, build character, educate the nation and improve the quality of life of the Indonesian people in order to realize national education goals (National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003).

The curriculum is the spirit of education that must be evaluated periodically and dynamically in accordance with the demands of graduate competency and responding to current developments. The curriculum as a basic component really determines the direction of education, because it contains a series of plans which then become a reference in carrying out the learning process. In line with this spirit, the independent learning curriculum policy was born as a refinement of the previous curriculum. This new policy provides hope for

educational institutions to explore and develop the quality of education. Freedom to learn can be understood as providing sufficient space to students according to the talents possessed by each student, the learning process with a conducive learning atmosphere and free from all forms of pressure.

Curriculum development that is in accordance with the guidelines can increase effectiveness and answer future challenges as well as efforts to improve students' skills and competencies. The curriculum is prepared and developed so that students have the ability to internalize values in accordance with societal norms and also provides experience so that students can develop their abilities according to their fields of interest. Progress and the demands of the times require education to make improvements in all aspects, especially in the curriculum aspect, namely by adapting the learning approach which was previously centered on educators as a learning resource to become centered on students (student centered learning) so that students actively form their own knowledge. This is in accordance with thinking and learning skills.

Based on the background of the problem above, this research is important to carry out because education plays an important role in instilling moral values in students. Therefore, the educational process that takes place in an educational unit is not just the development of knowledge but there must be a process of instilling religious character values, because that is the essence of the educational goals to be achieved.

## **Method**

This research uses a qualitative research approach with a library research method. Literature review is a type of research that processes and collects data from books, journals and other related scientific works. This research was conducted to examine the relevance of the independent learning curriculum policy, which is a refinement of the previous curriculum and its relevance to current religious character education theories. Therefore, all sources of data and information can be utilized optimally in developing ideas that are relevant to the research objectives. According to Zed, the first step in preparing a library research plan can be done through five stages, namely, 1) Selecting appropriate library sources and topics, 2) tracing library references, 3) Reading references, 4) Documenting appropriate notes, 5) Presenting the results library (Zed, 2008).

## **Findings and Discussion**

### **Independent Learning Curriculum Concept**

Curriculum is defined as a plan in order to achieve educational goals. In line with this, Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the national education system states that the curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding objectives, content and learning materials as a reference for implementing learning activities in achieving educational goals. Based on this definition, it can be understood that the curriculum is a set of plans that are arranged systematically as an effort to achieve educational goals. Education cannot be separated from the curriculum, therefore the curriculum is used as a guideline in implementing the learning process.

The independent learning curriculum is a new policy in the world of education formulated by the Minister of Education and Culture as an effort to develop the previous curriculum, which aims to make Indonesia an intelligent, just, wise and wise country. Talking about an independent curriculum certainly has some relevance to constructivist learning theory. In the constructivist view, the knowledge gained is the result of an interaction process and the learning process tends to have a focus on student activity. With this new policy in the world of education, it is hoped that there will be new breakthroughs made by educators and their students. Of course, freedom of learning must start from the freedom of educators to think and innovate, because students will never feel free if their educators are not free.

Officially, the independent learning curriculum has been implemented in the 2022/2023 academic year. In its implementation, the Ministry of Education and Culture (Mendikbud) established four main policies, namely; 1) The National Standard School Examination (USBN) is changed to an assessment examination, 2) The National Examination (UN) is changed to a Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey, 3) educators are given the freedom to choose, create, use and develop the learning implementation plan (RPP) format according to needs, 4) making new student admission policies (PPDB) more dynamic in accommodating disparities in access and quality in various regions. Of the four main principles of the independent learning curriculum policy, it is focused on creating a generation of people who have good morals by developing all their potential through learning process activities (Ahmad Sahnan, and Tri Wibowo, 2023).

The independent learning curriculum is carried out in restoring learning through meaningful, enjoyable and relevant learning in accordance with the characteristics of the educational unit so that the realization of Pancasila Students who reason critically, are creative, independent, have faith, are devout and have noble morals. Apart from that, according to the National Education Standards Agency, the independent learning curriculum is a curriculum whose learning process refers to developing talents and interests. From this understanding, it can be understood that students can choose lessons according to their wishes, talents and interests.

Freedom of thought is a state of mind that can understand the meaning of independence. In this case it can be understood that an educator gets an atmosphere of freedom of thought in designing a learning atmosphere without any feeling of pressure. So with this freedom, an educator must be sensitive and thorough in formulating designs, strategies and learning methods that can maximize students' intellectual intelligence (Ahmad Sahnan, and Tri Wibowo, 2023). Therefore, the learning process must be in a pleasant atmosphere. Independent thinking can develop with a democratic educational process, freedom in determining learning materials, strategies and media, critical learning strategies like this are called problem based learning, discovery based learning, blended based learning.

### **Character Building**

Character is often interpreted as morals, which means a way of thinking and behaving that is characteristic of each individual related to the values of right and wrong or good and bad, so that the character that will emerge becomes a habit that manifests in attitudes and behavior to always do good things. sustainably. According to Al-Ghazali, character as quoted by Saiful and Hamdi Yusliani states that character is always termed morals and character. Morals are a form of expression that is embedded in the soul which gives rise to easy actions without requiring consideration and thought. Morals and character both contain the same meaning depending on their use (Yusliani, Hamdi, 2022). Furthermore, it is emphasized that the character within each individual can change for the better through the learning process and the desire for strong mental impulses. Al-Ghazali combines Sufism, Sharia knowledge with character education (Antlata Digi Maulana Syah, M. Anang Sholikhudin, and Achmad Yusuf, 2023).

Meanwhile, according to Al-Zarmuji, as quoted by Saefudin Zuhri and Diding Nazmudin, character education is a process of instilling noble character values and preventing despicable actions and the movements of the heart must be known in every action. Therefore, according to Al-Zarmuji, character education is external and internal, which is related to everyday life. So that in the educational learning process it is not just a transfer of knowledge but also an activity to transfer knowledge about character values (transfer value). The transfer of values must be carried out from an early age so that attitudes and behavior will be formed in accordance with religious demands and a sense of caring for others will grow (Zuhri, Nazmudin, and Asmuni, 2022). Character is character, traits based on values believed to and inherent in an individual that underlie the actions taken. Character is permanent so it can differentiate one individual from another. As Lickona said, the realization of character education involves three interrelated theoretical aspects, namely, 1) Moral Knowledge theory, which is the ability to know, understand, consider and differentiate between types of morals that must be followed or not followed, 2) Moral Feelings. (Moral feeling) at this stage tries to foster a feeling of love for akhlakul karimah values and, 3) Moral Action (Moral action) is turning moral knowledge into real action (Lickona, 2009). Furthermore, Lickona said that a comprehensive approach must be taken involving the role of parents, educational units and the community.

Another understanding of character, as stated by Mu'in, is that character is always coupled with "character", namely a combination of human characteristics that is permanent, so that it can distinguish one individual from another (Mu'in, 2016). It is with character that the quality of the human person can be measured, because there is an integration of thoughts and attitudes which are reflected in his words and actions. From these insights, it can be understood that character is something integral, inherent in every individual (Rifki et al, n.d). Therefore, it can be understood that character refers to character which is an inner atmosphere that can influence a person's actions. Meanwhile, character education is the process of internalizing values in students. The values in question are positive values that will mean that students behave well. Armed with strong values, it is hoped that students will easily interact with other people (Prasetia et al, 2021).

### **Religious Character**

The religious term "religion" means religion or belief inherent in humans which is used as a guide in everyday life. Religious character is a form of actualization of a person's attitudes and behavior that reflects trust and confidence in Allah SWT which is demonstrated through obedience to the teachings of his religion, namely obedience in carrying out the commands of his religion and avoiding things that are prohibited in his religious teachings. As Aulia said, religious values are very closely related to religious values, religious values are absolute and eternal. Religious character can also be understood as obedient behavior in carrying out religious teachings and having a sense of tolerance towards fellow students (Aulia, n.d).

Apart from being related to religion, religion cannot be separated from diversity because it focuses on

aspects of the heart, personal attitudes, soul identity and tastes that encompass the quality of a person's personality (Muhaimin, 2008). According to Gunawan, religious character is character values that are connected to God and the integration of thoughts, words and actions which are always based on the values of religious teachings (Gunawan, 2014). Ahmad Tafsir also said the same thing, that cultivating religious values is a process of inserting values integrally into the human heart, so that the spirit and soul act in accordance with religious provisions (Tafsir, 2014).

Meanwhile, the meaning of religious character in the Al-Qur'an is very clearly stated through the values of monotheism. Belief in Allah, as the Supreme Creator and all of His attributes is a manifestation of the value of monotheism. When belief in all of HIS characteristics has been formed, it will have an influence and become integrated into human culture and life (Muntaqo et al, 2022). In the same vein, Mohamad Mustari also said that one of the characteristics of a person who can be said to have a religious character is belief in God, there is a belief that everything in this universe is proof of the existence of the Almighty Creator and Pluralist, this is a fact that cannot be avoided and that is a gift, religious tolerance is highly respected (Mustari, 2014). According to Alwi Shihab, as quoted by Firdaus, pluralism is like a continuous series and continues throughout life. Therefore, pluralism cannot be rejected, and if there are certain communities that reject it, it is the same as rejecting life itself (Yunus, 2014).

Religious character in the context of education is that educational institutions have a role in realizing the personality and behavior of students by instilling religious values to create religious individuals. Therefore, character education must be instilled from an early age so that later the nation's generation will have good moral character. To make this happen, the educational process in schools must be synergized with family and environmental education, because the involvement of these three elements really supports the formation of religious character (Prasetia et al, 2021). A pleasant learning atmosphere where an educator can interact more deeply, students not only sitting quietly listening to explanations from educators, however, forms the character of students who are brave in socializing and competent. So in this learning process there is no longer too much emphasis on the ranking system, because each student has potential and intelligence according to their respective fields.

Educational institutions, both schools and madrasas, have a responsibility to maintain their existence as institutions that are full of religious character education processes. Character education values such as discipline, honesty and responsibility require strengthening and seriousness in the implementation process (Prasetia et al, 2021). Religious character education is not just a matter of good and bad behavior in a person, but is very much needed in the journey of a nation in preparing a generation of people with integrity and religion and becomes an indicator of the greatness and progress of a nation.

### **The Relevance of the Independent Learning Curriculum in the Context of Today's Character Education**

The aim of education is basically to prepare students as a whole, to produce a generation that is intelligent and has noble character and is able to answer the life challenges they face. The learning process must be carried out by placing students as the main actors. Therefore, learning activities can be carried out with awareness, motivation and participation (Hardika, 2012). Learning transformation is a learning process that brings students to the realities of life, then the position of an educator is only as a facilitator who guides the learning process. If character is linked to the context of education, then character education can be understood as an educational system that instills values in accordance with national culture with component aspects of knowledge, attitudes, feelings and real actions, both in relation to the Creator, oneself, society and the nation.

The Ministry of National Education has formulated 18 character items that will be instilled in students, 1) Religious, 2) Honest, 3) Discipline, 4) Hard Work, 5) Responsibility, 6) Tolerance, 7) Creative, 8) Independent, 9) Democratic, 10) Curiosity, 11) National Spirit, 12) Love for the country, 13) Appreciation of achievements, 14) Friendly, 15) Love of peace, 16) Love of reading, 17) Care for the environment and, 18) Social. These eighteen items have been formulated in Law no. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, that the aim of education is to become a human being who has faith and devotion to God Almighty, has noble character, is healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creatively independent and becomes a democratic and responsible citizen. This formulation is very necessary in the current educational context, namely to overcome the religious character crisis (Nurrahman and Irawan, 2020).

The application of religious character is very necessary to face problems that destroy the human system, the application of religious activities is a comprehensive development, it requires time and patience in creating a human being who is obedient to HIS Rabb. Character education is not enough just to be taught through the delivery of material in class, but it must be carried out through a process that is directed as an effort to acculturate each activity so that a systematic and structured activity will be created (Nurrahman and Irawan, 2020).

According to Thomas Lickona, the basis for building character in students is to first develop respect and a sense of responsibility.

Creating respect and responsibility in students can be done through a process of religious habituation. Habit is something that is deliberately done repeatedly. As Gunawan said, habituation places humans into something special, because religious character is directly related to God which includes a person's thoughts and words which are always based on religious values (Gunawan, 2014). The formation of religious character can be done in several ways, including using understanding, habituation and using exemplary methods (Nasiruddin, 2010).

The essence of habituation is repetition. If an educator enters the class every time he says greetings, then this can be interpreted as a habituation process. Instilling religious character values can be one way to improve the character of students. Religious values such as implementing habits that are full of religious values such as; 1) Tadarrus Al-Qur'an before starting the learning process, 2) Duha Prayer, and 3) Congregational Prayer. Habits like those that must be carried out by educational institutions as an effort to form high morality and religiosity (Marzuki and Haq, 2018).

Apart from that, the independent learning curriculum cannot be separated from the concept of a religious humanism curriculum, namely an educational concept that views humans as a whole, developing their potential (religious intellectual) which is based on religious and cultural values (Abdurrahman Mas'ud, n.d). Referring to humanistic theory that the process of humanizing humans is the goal of learning. Students are said to be successful if they can understand themselves and their environment. As explained by Arifin, religious humanism is a religious concept that places humans in the position of *hablum minallah* and *hablum minannas* (Arifin, 2014)

There is some importance for the theory of religious humanism being developed in educational institutions today, because whether we realize it or not that there are types of educational institutions, namely schools that only develop knowledge from religious aspects without any general knowledge and conversely there are also schools that only focus on developing general knowledge and intellectual formation (Mukhyidin, Junanah, and Susilo, 2020).

Indonesia actually already has a humanist educational paradigm for all multicultural educational conditions. If you look at the cultural background of the paradigm of national education goals, it becomes a necessity for religious humanist education to be developed in the learning process in schools. This is in order to develop the potential of students in multicultural conditions.

## Conclusion

Based on the description above, several conclusions can be made relating to the analysis of the relevance of the independent learning curriculum policy to the formation of the character of students within educational institutions, namely, the independent learning curriculum is a refinement of the previous curriculum and also as a response to problems in the world of education. Progress in science and technology requires innovation in the educational curriculum that is based on religious values. The implementation of the independent curriculum policy provides freedom for educators and students to develop all their potential. This is in line with the religious humanist learning model in the formation of religious character, honesty, tolerance, participation, discipline and hard work. In the context of today's Islamic education management, the curriculum must be oriented towards the theory of religious humanism education and there is no longer any distinction between general education and religious education, both must go hand in hand and be integrated.

Regardless of the advantages and disadvantages, as a new policy in the curriculum it is necessary to build dynamic communication between policy makers, in this case the ministry of education and culture, and education implementers, namely schools or madrasas. The independent learning curriculum is in line with religious humanist education theory, this can be seen from the aim of placing students as both subjects and objects in the educational process and given sufficient space to develop potential, be creative, innovate and participate. Integration of character education in educational institutions must be carried out through planning, implementation and evaluation. Evaluation. The evaluation was carried out considering various learning materials related to character education, for example through citizenship education, religious education, moral education and other dogmas, but they have not provided an effective solution in reducing the problem of immorality.

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