INTEGRATION OF ISLAMIC CHARACTER EDUCATION IN MERDEKA BELAJAR CURRICULUM

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Kata Kunci:	ABSTRACT
Character education, independent learning curriculum	Islamic character education is an effort to build a generation that has noble morals based on Islamic values. The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum initiated by the Indonesian government provides flexibility for educators to integrate local values, including religious values, into learning. This article aims to analyze how Islamic character education can be integrated in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach through literature review. The results show that the integration of Islamic character education requires collaboration between educators, curriculum, and society in supporting the creation of religious, ethical, and accomplished students. In conclusion, Islamic character education is a key element in building holistic education according to the demands of the modern era.

A. INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia has a big goal to form a generation of faith, piety, and noble character. In this context, Islamic character education is one of the important aspects that need to be developed. This concept not only teaches moral values but also integrates Islamic teachings in every aspect of life. However, its implementation is often hindered by a rigid curriculum that is less relevant to the needs of the times. Merdeka Belajar Curriculum comes as a response to these challenges, providing space for teachers to be more creative and contextual in structuring learning. This curriculum aims to build the profile of Pancasila students who have religious dimensions, global diversity, and mutual cooperation. This opens up opportunities to integrate Islamic values in daily learning at school. However, the implementation of Islamic character education in Merdeka Belajar Curriculum still faces several obstacles, such as the lack of understanding of educators, limited learning media, and resistance from some communities. This problem requires a systematic and innovative approach so that educational goals can be achieved. The method used in this research is a literature review to analyze various theories and practices related to Islamic character education and Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This study will highlight the basic principles of Islamic value integration, implementation models, and the expected impact on students.

Islamic education is deeply rooted in the history and culture of Indonesia, and it has long been a foundation for moral and spiritual development. The teaching of Islamic values, often referred to as akhlaq, serves as the basis for fostering ethical behaviors among students (Mustoip, 2023). However, the traditional delivery of these values has faced challenges in adapting to modern educational needs and global competencies. With the introduction of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, a renewed effort has emerged to bridge traditional Islamic values with contemporary educational frameworks (Hadi, 2024).

One of the significant advantages of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is its flexibility, which allows schools to tailor educational programs to their local and cultural contexts. This flexibility enables the integration of Islamic teachings into general subjects such as science, mathematics, and language arts, fostering a holistic learning experience (Ahmadi et al., 2023). For instance, lessons on sustainability and environmental stewardship can be linked to Islamic principles of khalifah (stewardship) and the responsibility to protect God's creations (Mahardhika & Wantini, 2023). Despite its potential, the integration of Islamic character education faces critical challenges. Limited resources, including insufficient teacher training and a lack of culturally relevant teaching materials, have impeded its effective implementation (Brutu et al., 2023). Furthermore, resistance from certain community groups stems from misconceptions that Islamic education focuses solely on religious doctrines, rather than on universal values such as honesty, responsibility, and respect (Anjani et al., 2023).

The role of educators in implementing the curriculum is pivotal. Teachers are not only knowledge transmitters but also role models who embody the values they teach. However, many educators lack adequate preparation in integrating character education into their teaching practices, especially within the framework of Merdeka Belajar. Comprehensive training programs are essential to equip teachers with strategies for embedding Islamic values in diverse subjects (Muslimin, 2023). Technology offers promising opportunities to address some of these challenges. The advent of digital tools and platforms has made it easier to develop and disseminate resources that align with

Islamic principles. For example, interactive e-modules and mobile applications can provide engaging ways for students to learn Islamic values alongside their academic curriculum (Mahardhika & Wantini, 2023). However, there remains a digital divide, particularly in rural areas, where access to technology is limited (Sri Haryanto et al., 2023).

Community involvement is another critical factor in the successful integration of Islamic character education. Parents and community leaders play a vital role in reinforcing the values taught in schools. Collaborative programs, such as community service projects that reflect Islamic principles of charity and empathy, can strengthen the connection between educational institutions and society.(Roni et al., 2022) Moreover, a strong policy framework is necessary to ensure consistency and sustainability in implementing character education. Government support, through clear guidelines and adequate funding, is crucial for schools to develop and sustain programs that integrate Islamic values into their curricula.(Mustoip, 2023) Incentives for schools that successfully implement these programs can also encourage broader adoption.

Research underscores the importance of aligning educational content with students' lived experiences. The cultural and religious diversity of Indonesia necessitates a localized approach to curriculum design, ensuring that Islamic character education remains relevant and impactful.(Hadi, 2024) This aligns with the broader goals of Merdeka Belajar, which seeks to empower students with critical thinking skills and moral fortitude to navigate the complexities of the modern world.(Ahmadi et al., 2023) The integration of Islamic values is not limited to academic settings but extends to extracurricular activities as well. Programs such as Islamic-themed arts and sports competitions provide additional platforms for students to practice and internalize these values in engaging and meaningful ways.(Muslimin, 2023) These activities help to create a balanced education that nurtures the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of students.

The challenges of integrating Islamic character education in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum highlight the need for innovative and collaborative approaches. The synergy between educators, policymakers, parents, and communities is essential for addressing the gaps and fostering an education system that prepares students for both worldly and spiritual success.(Brutu et al., 2023) By embracing these collaborative efforts, Indonesia can harness the transformative potential of its educational system to produce morally and intellectually capable citizens.

Despite the growing body of literature on the integration of Islamic character education in Indonesia, significant research gaps remain. While previous studies have explored various aspects such as the alignment of Islamic values with the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum,(Brutu et al., 2023),(Muslimin, 2023) the challenges of educator preparedness,(Mustoip, 2023) and the role of community involvement,(Roni et al., 2022) there is limited empirical evidence on how these elements can be systematically integrated across diverse educational settings, especially in underprivileged or rural areas. Additionally, few studies have examined the long-term impact of these integrative approaches on student outcomes, such as moral reasoning, ethical decision-making, and adaptability in global contexts. This research aims to address these gaps by providing a comprehensive analysis of implementation strategies, while also evaluating the measurable outcomes of Islamic character education within the flexible framework of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.

Education in Indonesia has a big goal to form a generation of faith, piety, and noble character. In this context, Islamic character education is one of the important aspects that need to be developed. This concept not only teaches moral values, but also integrates Islamic teachings in every aspect of life. However, its implementation is often hindered by a rigid curriculum that is less relevant to the needs of the times. Merdeka Belajar Curriculum comes as a response to these challenges, providing space for teachers to be more creative and contextual in structuring learning. This curriculum aims to build the profile of Pancasila students who have religious dimensions, global diversity, and mutual cooperation. This opens up opportunities to integrate Islamic values in daily learning at school. However, the implementation of Islamic character education in Merdeka Belajar Curriculum still faces several obstacles, such as the lack of understanding of educators, limited learning media, and resistance from some communities. This problem requires a systematic and innovative approach so that educational goals can be achieved. The method used in this research is a literature review to analyze various theories and practices related to Islamic character education and Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This study will highlight the basic principles of Islamic value integration, implementation models, and the expected impact on students.

B. METHOD

This type of research uses a qualitative descriptive approach(Sugiyono, 2020) to understand the process and strategy of integrating Islamic character education in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. Literature review is used as the main method, by collecting data from journals, books, and education policy documents. The data is analyzed through an in-depth interpretation process to identify key themes related to Islamic character education and Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. The focus is on how Islamic values can be adapted into a flexible curriculum structure. The analysis was conducted in three stages: data collection, data reduction, and interpretation.(Anwar, 2020)

The main data sources in this study are government policies related to Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, such as Ministry of Education, Culture and Research documents and technical guidelines for curriculum implementation. In addition, this research also refers to case studies from schools that have successfully integrated Islamic values in learning. To ensure data validity, triangulation is carried out by comparing findings from various sources. Interviews with educators were also used as additional data to understand their perspectives and practical experiences.(Kemendikbud, 2022)

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Islamic character education forms the backbone of efforts to nurture individuals with high moral values rooted in Islamic teachings. It not only focuses on instilling religious values but also emphasizes embedding these values as guiding principles across all aspects of learning. Core values such as honesty, diligence, justice, and compassion are critical in shaping student character to align with the demands of a modern, dynamic world.(Mustoip, 2023) The integration of these values within the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum ensures that students are not only academically competent but also morally resilient and socially responsible.

1. **Flexibility in Curriculum Design**

One of the hallmarks of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is its flexibility, which provides opportunities for contextualized and thematic learning approaches. This

flexibility allows educators to align academic subjects with Islamic values. For instance, in Indonesian language classes, students can critically analyze inspirational stories of Islamic figures such as Prophet Muhammad or historical Muslim leaders, enhancing their understanding of Islamic ethics while developing literacy skills.(Ahmadi et al., 2023) Similarly, in mathematics, lessons on concepts like fair division or resource allocation can incorporate the values of justice, fostering a sense of fairness and equity in students.

This thematic integration extends beyond traditional subjects. Science lessons can include discussions on Islamic principles of environmental stewardship, such as preserving nature as a trust from God (amanah), thus instilling a deeper respect for sustainability.(Mahardhika & Wantini, 2023) By embedding these values into academic content, the curriculum not only enriches students' understanding of subjects but also deepens their moral awareness.

Furthermore, the flexibility of the curriculum encourages the use of diverse pedagogical methods to cater to various learning styles. Teachers can incorporate interactive storytelling, group discussions, and role-playing to bring Islamic values to life in a way that resonates with students. For example, role-playing activities where students reenact historical events involving Islamic leaders can help them internalize lessons on leadership, integrity, and community service.(Sri Haryanto et al., 2023) This dynamic approach ensures that students engage deeply with the material, fostering both cognitive and emotional connections. The integration of Islamic values into creative subjects like art and music also highlights the curriculum's versatility. Art classes can explore Islamic geometric patterns or calligraphy, teaching students about the rich artistic heritage of Islam while enhancing their creative skills. Similarly, music lessons can include compositions inspired by Islamic culture, encouraging students to appreciate the diversity and universality of Islamic contributions to the arts.(Muslimin, 2023) This cross-disciplinary approach enriches students' educational experiences while preserving cultural relevance.

Moreover, the flexibility of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum supports collaboration between teachers from different disciplines, enabling them to design interdisciplinary lessons. For instance, a collaborative project between science and social studies teachers could explore the role of Islamic innovations in scientific advancements during the Golden Age of Islam. This not only strengthens students' knowledge across subjects but also instills a sense of pride in their cultural and religious heritage.(Hadi, 2024) Such projects highlight the interconnectedness of knowledge and values, creating a more holistic learning experience. The curriculum's flexibility also empowers teachers to respond to local contexts and community needs. In regions with specific environmental challenges, for example, schools can design localized lessons that incorporate Islamic values of conservation and community care. This approach ensures that students learn to address real-world issues in ways that align with their ethical and spiritual beliefs, preparing them to become active, value-driven contributors to their communities.(Roni et al., 2022) By fostering this relevance, the curriculum strengthens the connection between education and lived experiences.

Lastly, the emphasis on flexibility in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum encourages the integration of modern technology to enhance learning. Digital platforms and virtual tools can be used to explore topics like the history of Islamic civilization or environmental ethics in Islam. Interactive simulations and virtual tours of historical

Islamic sites allow students to engage with their cultural heritage in innovative and immersive ways.(Brutu et al., 2023) This integration of technology not only makes learning more engaging but also prepares students for a technologically driven world.

2.   **Project-Based Learning as a Medium for Integration**

The project-based learning approach, central to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, offers practical avenues for implementing Islamic character education. For example, students can engage in community service projects rooted in Islamic principles, such as organizing charity drives or conducting environmental cleanups. These activities teach empathy, compassion, and responsibility while giving students hands-on experiences in applying Islamic values in real-world contexts.(Sri Haryanto et al., 2023) Environmental projects grounded in the principles of khalifah (stewardship) and sustainability provide opportunities for students to integrate scientific knowledge with religious principles. For example, designing solutions for local environmental issues or creating campaigns to promote water conservation combines ethical awareness with critical thinking and problem-solving skills.(Muslimin, 2023) These initiatives not only enrich students' understanding of environmental challenges but also reinforce their moral obligations to act as stewards of the Earth, as taught in Islam.

Moreover, project-based learning can be utilized to address social issues within local communities. For instance, students can organize health awareness campaigns that incorporate Islamic teachings on hygiene and well-being. By creating educational materials or hosting workshops, students can actively engage with their communities while internalizing values such as service, compassion, and responsibility. These projects bridge the gap between academic learning and practical life applications, fostering a holistic approach to education.(Ahmadi et al., 2023) In addition to environmental and social projects, students can explore historical themes through project-based activities. For example, students might research and present on the contributions of Islamic scholars to fields like mathematics, astronomy, and medicine. This not only cultivates a sense of pride in Islamic heritage but also highlights the compatibility of faith and scientific inquiry. Such projects encourage students to see themselves as inheritors of a rich intellectual tradition, motivating them to contribute positively to society.(Mahardhika & Wantini, 2023)

Another innovative application of project-based learning involves collaborative artistic projects inspired by Islamic culture. For example, students could design community murals or exhibits featuring Islamic calligraphy and art that reflect values such as unity, peace, and gratitude. These projects provide an avenue for creative expression while fostering teamwork and an appreciation for Islamic aesthetics. Engaging in such activities deepens students' understanding of their cultural heritage and reinforces moral values in a visually impactful manner.(Brutu et al., 2023)

Technology can also enhance the effectiveness of project-based learning. Students can create digital campaigns or design mobile applications that promote Islamic teachings on topics like ethical consumerism or community support. These digital projects not only develop students' technological competencies but also provide platforms for broader societal engagement, enabling students to share Islamic values with wider audiences.(Hadi, 2024) This integration of technology with project-based learning ensures that students are prepared for the demands of a digitally driven world while maintaining a strong moral foundation. Finally, the flexibility of project-based learning allows educators to tailor projects to the unique needs and interests of their

students. Teachers can collaborate with students to identify pressing local issues, ensuring that the projects are both relevant and meaningful. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership among students, empowering them to take initiative and act as change-makers within their communities. The integration of Islamic principles into these projects ensures that the students' actions are guided by ethical and moral considerations, creating a well-rounded and impactful learning experience.(Roni et al., 2022)

3.   Challenges in Implementation

Despite its potential, integrating Islamic character education within the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is not without challenges. A significant barrier is the lack of educator preparedness. Many teachers lack the training and expertise needed to effectively integrate Islamic values into diverse subjects. This shortfall highlights the need for professional development programs focusing on curriculum design and instructional strategies that incorporate Islamic principles.(Brutu et al., 2023) Another challenge is the limited availability of resources tailored to Islamic character education. Schools, particularly in rural or underprivileged areas, often lack access to relevant teaching materials or media that align with Islamic values. Developing digital learning platforms featuring interactive modules and multimedia content can address this gap, providing educators and students with engaging tools to enhance learning.(Hadi, 2024) Additionally, collaborative efforts between educational institutions and technology providers can help produce innovative tools that ensure equitable access to resources across different regions.

Resistance from certain communities poses an additional challenge. Misconceptions about Islamic character education being overly dogmatic or restrictive can hinder its broader acceptance. To counter this, educators must adopt inclusive, dialogical approaches that emphasize universal values like integrity, responsibility, and mutual respect, which resonate with individuals of all backgrounds.(Roni et al., 2022) These universal values serve as a bridge, fostering a shared understanding that Islamic character education aligns with globally accepted ethical norms. Moreover, societal stereotypes about the rigidity of religious education can dissuade parents and stakeholders from fully embracing the integration of Islamic values. Addressing these stereotypes requires proactive communication strategies. Schools and educators must actively engage communities by organizing open dialogues, workshops, and public events to demonstrate how Islamic character education supports both moral and intellectual development in a balanced manner.(Sri Haryanto et al., 2023) This engagement helps dismantle misconceptions and builds trust among diverse community groups.

Another critical challenge lies in the integration of Islamic values with modern pedagogical methods. Many educators face difficulties in translating abstract moral concepts into tangible classroom activities. Bridging this gap requires not only professional development but also the creation of best practice guides and success stories that showcase effective implementations of Islamic character education within the Merdeka Belajar framework.(Ahmadi et al., 2023) Highlighting these examples can serve as motivation for educators and policymakers to adopt similar strategies. Finally, the dynamic nature of Indonesia's sociocultural landscape adds complexity to implementing a uniform approach to Islamic character education. The diversity of religious practices and interpretations across regions necessitates localized adaptation

of the curriculum. This requires policymakers to provide flexible guidelines that allow schools to tailor Islamic character education to align with their unique cultural and social contexts (Muslimin, 2023). By balancing national standards with regional adaptability, educational institutions can ensure inclusivity and relevance in delivering moral education.

4. **Role of Collaboration**

Collaboration between educators, parents, and communities is essential for the success of Islamic character education. Parents play a critical role in reinforcing values learned at school, creating a cohesive moral environment for students. For example, family discussions about Islamic teachings or participation in school-based religious events can strengthen the educational experience.(Anjani et al., 2023) Communities, too, can contribute by supporting extracurricular activities such as religious study groups or service projects that promote Islamic values. Moreover, collaboration with religious leaders and community organizations can enhance the impact of Islamic character education. Religious leaders, as respected figures, can provide guidance and support to both educators and parents in integrating Islamic teachings into daily life. For instance, they can conduct workshops for teachers on applying Islamic principles in education or offer counseling sessions for families to align home environments with school values.(Roni et al., 2022) Community organizations can also organize interfaith or intercommunity events, fostering mutual respect and understanding while emphasizing shared values like compassion and integrity.

Schools themselves can serve as hubs for collaboration by creating platforms for regular communication and engagement. Parent-teacher associations (PTAs) and community meetings can be used to discuss the objectives and strategies of Islamic character education, ensuring alignment between school and home environments. Additionally, schools can invite parents and community members to participate in cultural or religious celebrations, such as Islamic New Year or Ramadan activities, creating a sense of unity and shared responsibility in character building.(Ahmadi et al., 2023) The role of educators in fostering collaboration cannot be overstated. Teachers act as intermediaries between the school and the community, ensuring that educational objectives are understood and supported by all stakeholders. Educators can develop collaborative projects that involve parents and community members, such as organizing local charity drives or environmental cleanups based on Islamic values. These initiatives not only strengthen ties between stakeholders but also provide students with tangible examples of collective moral action.(Brutu et al., 2023)

Technology can further enhance collaboration by providing platforms for ongoing dialogue and resource sharing. For instance, schools can create digital portals or apps where parents can access updates on their child's progress, view educational materials, or participate in virtual discussions about Islamic teachings. Community forums or social media groups can also facilitate broader engagement, enabling stakeholders to share ideas, experiences, and resources related to Islamic character education. These digital tools make collaboration more accessible and inclusive, especially in geographically dispersed communities.(Hadi, 2024) Lastly, collaboration between policymakers and educational institutions is vital to ensure consistent support for Islamic character education. Policymakers can work with schools to design frameworks that encourage community involvement and allocate resources for collaborative initiatives. Providing incentives for schools that actively engage parents

and communities in character education can further strengthen these efforts. By working together, educators, parents, and communities can create a robust support system that ensures the success of Islamic character education within the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.(Muslimin, 2023)

5. **Leveraging Technology**

In the digital era, technology offers transformative opportunities to enhance Islamic character education. Interactive applications and e-learning platforms can make Islamic values more accessible and engaging for students. Social media and online forums can also facilitate discussions and activities that encourage the application of Islamic principles in everyday life.(Mahardhika & Wantini, 2023) However, bridging the digital divide, particularly in remote areas, remains a priority to ensure equitable access to these tools. Mobile applications designed for Islamic education can include features such as interactive quizzes, digital prayer guides, and video tutorials on topics like ethical decision-making and community service. For example, an app that gamifies learning about Islamic history and values can make the content more appealing to younger audiences. These apps allow students to learn at their own pace, fostering independent exploration of Islamic principles while leveraging the benefits of digital engagement.(Ahmadi et al., 2023)

E-learning platforms can also play a critical role by offering comprehensive modules on Islamic character education that align with the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. These platforms can integrate multimedia content such as videos, animations, and infographics to explain complex concepts in an accessible way. For instance, an animated video could illustrate the importance of justice in Islamic teachings through relatable real-life scenarios, helping students internalize these values effectively.(Hadi, 2024) Additionally, e-learning platforms can serve as repositories for teachers to access lesson plans and resources that incorporate Islamic values. Social media platforms offer unique opportunities to engage students in discussions about Islamic character education. Schools and educators can create dedicated groups or pages to share inspirational Islamic content, promote student-led initiatives, and organize virtual events that reflect Islamic values, such as online charity drives or webinars on ethical leadership. These platforms also encourage collaboration and dialogue among students, parents, and teachers, fostering a community-centered approach to learning.(Brutu et al., 2023)

Virtual and augmented reality (VR/AR) technologies hold immense potential for enriching Islamic character education. For instance, VR can be used to create immersive experiences, such as virtual visits to historical Islamic sites or simulations that teach students about the significance of zakat (charitable giving) and other Islamic practices. These technologies enable experiential learning, allowing students to connect deeply with Islamic values and their historical and cultural contexts.(Muslimin, 2023) However, making these tools available in underprivileged areas requires significant investment and policy support. While technology offers many benefits, ensuring equitable access remains a pressing challenge. Bridging the digital divide requires targeted efforts, such as providing affordable devices, improving internet connectivity in remote areas, and training teachers and students to effectively use digital tools. Governments and private organizations can collaborate to establish community technology centers equipped with resources for Islamic character education. Such

initiatives can ensure that technological advancements benefit all students, regardless of their geographic or socioeconomic background.(Roni et al., 2022)

6.   **Assessment and Monitoring**

Effective assessment frameworks are crucial for evaluating the integration of Islamic character education. Teachers can use a variety of instruments, including reflective journals, behavioral observations, and value-based projects, to monitor student progress holistically. These assessments ensure that character education goes beyond cognitive achievements, capturing changes in attitudes and behaviors.(Mustoip, 2023) One effective method is the use of student portfolios, where students document their experiences and reflections on how they apply Islamic values in their daily lives. For example, a portfolio might include evidence of acts of kindness, group activities reflecting teamwork, or projects emphasizing sustainability as a form of stewardship (khalifah). These portfolios allow educators to track growth over time and provide feedback tailored to individual students' moral and ethical development.(Ahmadi et al., 2023)

Rubrics designed specifically for Islamic character education can help standardize the evaluation process. These rubrics might include criteria such as honesty, respect for others, and responsibility, assessed across various activities and interactions. Teachers can use these tools to observe behaviors during group projects, classroom discussions, or even extracurricular activities. Such structured assessment ensures consistency in monitoring while making evaluations transparent for students and parents.(Sri Haryanto et al., 2023) Interactive methods, such as peer evaluations and role-playing activities, also contribute to assessing character development. In peer evaluations, students can assess one another based on criteria aligned with Islamic values, such as cooperation and fairness. Role-playing activities that simulate ethical dilemmas can provide insights into how students apply Islamic principles in decision-making processes. These methods not only assess students' understanding but also reinforce the values being taught by actively engaging them in their application.(Mahardhika & Wantini, 2023)

Digital tools and platforms can further enhance the assessment and monitoring process. For instance, mobile applications can include self-assessment quizzes or behavioral tracking features where students record their daily efforts to embody Islamic values. Teachers can analyze these records to identify trends and provide targeted interventions where necessary. Furthermore, online discussion forums moderated by educators can serve as platforms for reflective dialogue, enabling students to articulate their thoughts and experiences related to character education.(Muslimin, 2023) Finally, assessments should also incorporate parental feedback to ensure that students' behaviors at home align with the values being taught at school. Regular parent-teacher meetings or surveys can provide valuable insights into how well students are internalizing Islamic principles in various aspects of their lives. This collaborative approach not only validates the school's efforts but also ensures consistency between home and school environments in fostering moral development.(Roni et al., 2022)

7.   **Supportive Policies and Incentives**

The success of Islamic character education requires robust policy support. Clear guidelines on integrating Islamic values into the curriculum, combined with financial incentives for schools that demonstrate excellence in implementation, can encourage widespread adoption. Government collaboration with educational institutions is

essential to establish a sustainable framework for character education.(Brutu et al., 2023) One essential policy initiative is the development of comprehensive frameworks that outline the objectives, methods, and expected outcomes of Islamic character education. These frameworks should provide detailed guidance on integrating Islamic values across various subjects and grade levels. By standardizing these guidelines, the government ensures consistency in how schools implement character education while allowing flexibility for adaptation to local contexts.(Sri Haryanto et al., 2023)

Financial support is another critical component of successful implementation. Allocating funds for training programs, resource development, and infrastructure improvements can empower schools to adopt Islamic character education effectively. Grants or subsidies can be offered to schools that demonstrate innovative practices in integrating Islamic values into their curricula. For instance, schools that design project-based learning activities rooted in Islamic principles or utilize technology to enhance character education could receive additional funding as an incentive.(Ahmadi et al., 2023) Collaboration between government bodies and private organizations can further enhance policy support. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives can contribute by funding teacher training workshops or developing digital learning tools that promote Islamic values. Such partnerships can provide additional resources and expertise, fostering a more robust ecosystem for Islamic character education.(Roni et al., 2022)

Recognition and rewards for schools, teachers, and students can also serve as powerful motivators. National or regional awards for outstanding implementation of Islamic character education can highlight best practices and inspire others to follow suit. Similarly, creating platforms to showcase successful programs, such as annual conferences or online repositories of exemplary projects, can encourage knowledge sharing and innovation.(Muslimin, 2023) Finally, incorporating Islamic character education into national education assessments can reinforce its importance. By evaluating schools' success in fostering Islamic values alongside academic performance, policymakers can emphasize that character development is a core component of education. Such assessments can be used to refine policies and allocate resources more effectively, ensuring continuous improvement in the integration of Islamic values into the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.(Anwar, 2020)

8. Broader Impact

The integration of Islamic character education in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has far-reaching implications. Students who internalize these values are more likely to contribute positively to society, demonstrating ethical behavior in both personal and professional spheres. Moreover, the emphasis on moral education prepares students to navigate complex global challenges with integrity and resilience.(Roni et al., 2022) One significant societal impact is the cultivation of a morally conscious generation capable of addressing pressing social issues. For example, students with a strong foundation in Islamic values such as justice ('adl) and compassion (rahmah) are better equipped to contribute to initiatives that promote social equity, reduce poverty, and protect human rights. These values also encourage collaborative problem-solving and community engagement, making students active participants in building a just and inclusive society.(Brutu et al., 2023)

In the professional realm, Islamic character education helps foster ethical leadership. Graduates who embody principles like accountability, honesty, and respect

are likely to make decisions that prioritize the welfare of their teams and communities over personal gain. This approach is increasingly valued in global markets, where ethical conduct and corporate social responsibility are critical. Students trained in such an environment can become leaders who balance economic success with moral responsibility, contributing to sustainable business practices.(Mahardhika & Wantini, 2023) The integration of Islamic values also enhances students' adaptability in multicultural and global contexts. Values like mutual respect (ta'awun) and understanding foster openness to diverse perspectives, enabling students to work effectively in international settings. As global challenges like climate change and digital ethics demand cooperative solutions, individuals who embody these values can play key roles in fostering cross-cultural collaboration and innovative approaches to complex problems.(Muslimin, 2023)

Another critical impact is on students' personal development and mental well-being. Islamic character education emphasizes values such as gratitude (shukr) and patience (sabr), which contribute to emotional resilience and a positive outlook on life. These traits are particularly important in helping students cope with stress and uncertainty in an ever-changing world. A curriculum that nurtures such inner strength not only prepares students for external challenges but also promotes their overall well-being.(Roni et al., 2022) Finally, the integration of Islamic character education benefits the broader community by creating a ripple effect of positive influence. Students who practice these values often inspire others, including peers, family members, and community members, to adopt similar ethical behaviors. This collective impact can strengthen societal bonds and foster a culture of mutual respect and shared responsibility, aligning with national goals for moral and civic development.(Ahmadi et al., 2023)

D. CONCLUSION

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum offers flexibility for educators to integrate local values, including Islamic principles, into learning through thematic and project-based approaches. This approach allows students to understand lessons contextually while internalizing Islamic values in their daily lives. For instance, students can learn about the principle of khalifah (stewardship) in science lessons or apply the value of justice in mathematics. However, this study also identifies various challenges in implementation, such as insufficient teacher training, limited learning resources, and resistance from some communities. The authors emphasize the need for collaboration among educators, communities, and the government to create a framework that supports the successful integration of Islamic values. Technology is also recognized as a potential solution to address gaps in educational resources. In conclusion, the integration of Islamic character education into the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum offers a significant opportunity to create a holistic education system that prepares students to face global challenges with strong moral and spiritual foundations. With clear policy support, adequate training, and close collaboration among various stakeholders, Islamic character education can become a key component in achieving national education goals.

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