

THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ON CURRICULUM CHANGES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE QUALITY OF ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract:

Curriculum changes are part of the government's strategic policy to improve the quality of national education. This article aims to analyze government policies related to changes in the education curriculum over time until the birth of the Independent Curriculum, and examine its implications for improving the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in elementary schools. This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method. Data were obtained from various written sources such as books, scientific journals, policy documents, and relevant laws and regulations, then analyzed using content analysis techniques. The results of the study indicate that curriculum changes in Indonesia, starting from the 1994 Curriculum, the 2004 KBK, the 2006 KTSP, the 2013 Curriculum, and the Independent Curriculum, reflect the government's ongoing efforts to adapt education to current developments and student needs. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum has positive implications for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in elementary schools, especially in encouraging more flexible, contextual, and student-centered learning. This curriculum opens up space for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to innovate through project-based learning and authentic assessment, thus enhancing not only knowledge but also students' religious attitudes and noble morals. Therefore, the Independent Curriculum has the potential to holistically improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning if supported by teacher and school readiness.

KATA KUNCI

Kebijakan Pendidikan,
Perubahan Kurikulum,
Kurikulum Merdeka,
Pendidikan Agama
Islam.

Abstrak:

Perubahan kurikulum merupakan bagian dari kebijakan strategis pemerintah untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan nasional. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis kebijakan pemerintah terkait perubahan kurikulum pendidikan dari waktu ke waktu hingga lahirnya Kurikulum Merdeka, dan mengkaji implikasinya terhadap peningkatan kualitas pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di sekolah dasar. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode penelitian perpustakaan. Data diperoleh dari berbagai sumber tertulis seperti buku, jurnal ilmiah, dokumen kebijakan, dan peraturan perundang-undangan yang relevan, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan teknik analisis konten. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa perubahan kurikulum di Indonesia, mulai dari Kurikulum 1994, KBK 2004, KSP 2006, Kurikulum 2013, dan Kurikulum Merdeka, mencerminkan upaya berkelanjutan pemerintah untuk menyesuaikan pendidikan dengan perkembangan terkini dan kebutuhan siswa. Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka memiliki implikasi positif bagi pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) di sekolah dasar, terutama dalam mendorong pembelajaran yang lebih fleksibel, kontekstual, dan berpusat pada siswa. Kurikulum ini membuka ruang bagi guru Pendidikan Agama

Islam (PAI) untuk berinovasi melalui pembelajaran berbasis proyek dan penilaian otentik, sehingga tidak hanya meningkatkan pengetahuan siswa tetapi juga sikap beragama dan moral. Oleh karena itu, Kurikulum Merdeka berpotensi meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) secara holistik jika didukung oleh kesiapan guru dan sekolah.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Education cannot be separated from the curriculum, because the success of education depends in part on the curriculum used. The better the curriculum, the better or more advanced the education will be. The curriculum is the spearhead for the implementation of educational activities. Without a curriculum, it is impossible for education to run well, effectively, and efficiently as expected. Therefore, the curriculum needs to be given serious attention in each educational unit.

The curriculum is designed to achieve national educational goals in accordance with applicable laws and regulations. Over time, the curriculum has undergone continuous development in line with the times and the needs of students. Curriculum development is always based on philosophical aspects grounded in noble values, academic values, the needs of students and society, and oriented towards competency development (Kondrla et al., 2023).

One of the key elements that can improve the quality of education is the curriculum, which substantially determines the direction and focus of learning at each level of education. The curriculum not only regulates subject matter, but also reflects the values, objectives, and teaching methodologies adopted by an education system (Crowley, 2021; Oeschger et al., 2022).

Based on the background described above, this study attempts to answer two main questions: how government policy has changed the national education curriculum over time, leading to the creation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has impacted the quality of Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a library research method. Data was collected from various written sources such as books, journals, government regulations, and official documents discussing curriculum changes and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the direction of government policy in curriculum change and its impact on the quality of Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools (Wijayanti & Hamami, 2023).

The research data sources include national education policy documents, scientific literature, and the results of studies related to the quality of Islamic

Religious Education. Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation and literature review, then analyzed using content analysis to find patterns and meanings relevant to the research focus (Maemonah et al., 2022; Yudiawan & Himmah, 2023). The results of the analysis are presented in a descriptive-analytical manner to illustrate the relationship between curriculum policy and improvements in the quality of Islamic Education in the era of the Independent Curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Definition of Government Policy

Policy is a translation of the English word policy. The word policy is defined as a plan of action or statement of objectives proposed or adopted by a government or political party. Policy is also defined as statements regarding guarantee contracts or written statements (Abubakkar Siddique, 2025; Mustofa, 2025).

Thomas R. Dye defines government policy as “whatever the government chooses to do or not to do” (Dye, 2021). This definition means that when the government makes a decision to take action, for example, prohibiting residents in a certain area from building houses on their own land for specific reasons, this is called government policy.

Definition of curriculum

The term curriculum was first used in the world of sports in ancient Greece, originating from the word *curir* or *curere*. At that time, curriculum was defined as the distance that runners had to cover (Soviany et al., 2022). According to Richards, the curriculum is an important activity because it seeks to examine how teaching quality can be improved by systematically planning, developing, researching, and implementing all aspects of the curriculum (Nurhayati & Lumiaty, 2025).

The definition of curriculum is contained in Article 1 Paragraph 19 of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, namely that curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding the objectives, content, subject matter, and methods used as guidelines for the implementation of learning activities. (Lathif, 2023)

It can be said that the curriculum is a series of plans and arrangements of objectives, content, materials, and learning methods, as guidelines for the implementation of teaching activities. The content of the subject is the learning material compiled to achieve specific objectives. These objectives include national education objectives and meet the characteristics, conditions, potential, educational units, and students (Rajadurai et al., 2025; Wabnitz et al., 2023).

History of Curriculum Development in Indonesia

After the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia, the curriculum that was implemented underwent several changes. History records that there have been eight curricula. The first curriculum was in 1964, followed by the 1976 curriculum, the 1984 curriculum, the 1994 curriculum, the 1994 revised edition curriculum, and

most recently the 2004 curriculum, which was followed by the birth of the 2006 Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP), then the 2013 curriculum (K13), and finally the independent curriculum. (A. P. Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021; Hidayat et al., 2025; Nirwana & Khoiri, 2023) Each curriculum has its own characteristics according to the needs of its time. However, in this article, the author will only discuss curriculum developments from the 1994 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum.

Curriculum 1994

The 1994 curriculum was officially implemented from the 1994/1995 to 2003/2004 academic years during the tenure of Minister of Education and Culture Wardiman Djojonegoro. This curriculum was an improvement on the 1984 Curriculum and was based on Law No. 2 of 1989 concerning the National Education System. The birth of this curriculum cannot be separated from the context of the New Order, which emphasized uniformity and central government control. The orientation of education policy at that time was to produce graduates who not only mastered the material but also had the practical skills to enter the world of work. (N. Durga Rani et al., 2025; Vazira Uzakova, 2025)

The main characteristics of the 1994 Curriculum include a lesson time allocation system that uses a four-month period, replacing the semester system, so that students have more opportunities to receive lesson material in one year. The system used is uniform nationwide, because the content and structure of the curriculum are entirely determined by the central government. (Muhammad Sajid Khan & Mehak, 2024) In classroom practice, this curriculum emphasizes the dominance of teachers as the center of knowledge. The learning method used is generally lecturing, while students tend to be passive and follow instructions.

The 1994 curriculum was eventually replaced because it was considered too dense, placing a heavy burden on students and teachers. Its overly uniform system prevented schools from freely adapting their teaching methods to local conditions or the needs of their students. In addition, the teacher-centered learning model was deemed unsuitable for the modern era, which demands that students be more active, creative, and critical. This curriculum also placed greater emphasis on cognitive aspects, while the development of attitudes and skills received less attention. (Fenyi & Sapaty, 2022; Ibnu Fitrianto & Al Mukaromah Hidayat, 2024; St. Paul University Manila et al., 2025) Therefore, the 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) was created, which attempts to provide more space for the development of students' competencies, creativity, and independence.

Competency-based curriculum (KBK) 2004

The 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) was developed from the 1994 Curriculum based on Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. This curriculum was introduced during the tenure of Education Minister Abdul Malik Fadjar, in line with the spirit of reform that encouraged a more democratic education system oriented towards the needs of students. The main focus of KBK is the achievement of competencies, both at the individual and group levels, so that it

not only emphasizes mastery of material, but also skills and attitudes that can be applied in real life.(Fitriani et al., 2022)

Characteristically, KBK emphasizes the achievement of measurable competencies and is oriented towards learning outcomes. The learning system is designed to be more varied by using a variety of methods and utilizing various learning resources, not limited to teachers. Assessment in KBK places greater emphasis on the balance between process and results, so that students can learn according to their individual abilities and pace.(Nurdin et al., 2023; Rofik, 2020) For example, in PAI (Islamic Education) lessons, teachers do not only ask students to memorize prayers, but also encourage them to practice praying before studying, so that they can achieve competence in attitude and skills.

However, in practice, the implementation of KBK has encountered a number of obstacles. First, many teachers do not fully understand the concept of KBK, so its implementation in the classroom does not go according to plan. Second, frequent changes to curriculum documents cause confusion in lesson planning. Third, although it is competency-oriented, teaching practices in the field still tend to focus on delivering material, so the objectives of developing skills and attitudes have not been optimally achieved.(Nisa, 2023)

These limitations then prompted the government to develop the Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP) in 2006. The KTSP was designed as an improvement on the KBK by giving greater autonomy to schools and teachers in developing and adapting the curriculum to local needs and the characteristics of students. The hope is that through this policy, the quality of education can be improved in a more flexible, participatory, and relevant manner to the actual conditions in the field.

Curriculum (KTSP) 2006

The School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) was implemented in 2006 when Bambang Sudibyo was Minister of National Education. The legal basis for this was Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and Government Regulation No. 19 of 2005 on National Education Standards. Its introduction was motivated by the need to improve the 2004 KBK, which was considered difficult to implement consistently in the field because many teachers did not yet understand the concept. In addition, the spirit of post-reform decentralization encouraged the creation of policies that gave greater autonomy to schools.(Abidin & Alfatani, 2023). Through KTSP, schools and teachers are given the authority to develop curricula in accordance with regional conditions, student potential, and developments in science and technology. Thus, KTSP is expected to provide more contextual, relevant, and student-centered learning.

Characteristically, KTSP emphasizes orientation towards basic competencies, active learning, and an integrated approach between subjects. This curriculum also emphasizes continuous character development, with assessments that strive to be balanced between attitude, knowledge, and skills. Principals, teachers, and even the local community are expected to play an active role in its development(Laila Fathimah et al., 2025). For example, schools can incorporate local content such as

regional languages or cultural values into PAI lessons, so that students learn about religion while also understanding their cultural roots.

However, KTSP is not without its weaknesses. The material is too dense and broad, making it difficult for students to master comprehensively, especially at the elementary school level. Assessment still tends to focus on the cognitive domain, so that attitudes and skills are often neglected. In addition, teaching is still often dominated by teachers, so that students' creativity and independence have not developed optimally. The imbalance between the learning process and the demands of national examinations also causes problems, as some subjects receive more attention than others.(Setiawan & Ahla, 2023)

This certainly poses a challenge for schools in areas with limited human resources. Given these conditions, it is understandable that the government feels the need to make improvements through the 2013 Curriculum, which places greater emphasis on scientific approaches and thematic learning.

Curriculum 2013

This is certainly a challenge. The 2013 Curriculum was created as part of the government's efforts to improve the 2006 Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP), which was considered to still focus on cognitive aspects and did not fully address the educational needs of the 21st century. This curriculum was introduced during the administration of President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, with Mohammad Nuh serving as Minister of Education and Culture. In general, the birth of the 2013 Curriculum was a response to global demands and the need to improve the quality of Indonesia's human resources so that they could compete in an era full of technological developments, science, and social dynamics, especially for schools in areas with limited human resources. Given these conditions, it was only natural for the government to feel the need to make improvements through the 2013 Curriculum, which placed more emphasis on a scientific approach and thematic learning.(Hasanah, 2024; Khuluqo et al., 2022)

The background to the creation of the 2013 Curriculum stems not only from internal needs, but also from the results of international evaluations. The results of the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that Indonesian students' reading, numeracy, and science skills are still below the average of other countries. This situation served as a wake-up call for the government to update the curriculum so that it would not only emphasize memorization, but also train students in critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration. Thus, the 2013 Curriculum is aimed at developing students who are intellectually intelligent and have strong character, as well as a balance between knowledge and practical application.(Fitri & Arief, 2025) From a legal perspective, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum is based on Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which serves as the foundation for the development of a curriculum based on national standards. This provision is reinforced by Government Regulation Number 32 of 2013, which

amends Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005 concerning National Education Standards.(R. Ananda, 2021) This regulation explains in detail the content standards, processes, assessments, and graduate competencies that must be implemented by every educational institution. In addition, the technical implementation of K-13 is further regulated in Permendikbud (Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation) Number 65 to 71 of 2013, which serves as a reference for teachers in developing learning tools and evaluation systems.(Mutia Rosiana Nita Putri, 2023)

The 2013 curriculum emphasizes competency-based learning, character values integration, and a scientific approach. Through this approach, students are guided to be active in the learning process through five main stages, namely observing, questioning, trying, reasoning, and communicating (5M). The main objectives of this approach are to foster curiosity, train critical thinking skills, and encourage students to discover the meaning of each subject they learn. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in elementary schools, this approach is applied, for example, by asking students not only to memorize daily prayers but also to observe prayer practices before learning, discuss their meanings, and write them down in personal reflections.(Rahmah et al., 2024) Thus, learning activities become more contextual and meaningful for students' lives.

When compared to the 2006 Curriculum (KTSP), the fundamental difference lies in the structure and direction of its development. While the KTSP provides schools with broad autonomy to develop curricula tailored to local needs, the 2013 Curriculum places greater emphasis on national standardization, with uniform Core Competencies (KI) and Basic Competencies (KD). The 2013 Curriculum also integrates three learning domains attitudes, knowledge, and skills in a balanced manner. Assessment is conducted authentically, through portfolios, projects, attitude journals, and behavioral observations, so students are assessed not only cognitively but also on how they apply values and skills in their daily lives.(Ahmad Efendi et al., 2025)

Despite its more progressive orientation, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum has not been smooth. Many teachers have difficulty implementing a scientific approach due to a lack of training and mentoring. Furthermore, heavy administrative burdens and disparities in facilities between regions have also hampered its implementation. Schools in large cities are relatively better prepared than those in remote, resource-poor areas. As a result, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum tends to be uneven, with varying results across regions.

In general, the 2013 Curriculum ushered in a new paradigm in Indonesian education: from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. By integrating character education and 21st-century competencies, this curriculum laid a crucial foundation for subsequent education reforms. However, the complexity of its implementation necessitated a more flexible and adaptive policy. This prompted the government to develop the Independent Curriculum, which aims to simplify administration, reduce material density, and provide teachers and

schools with greater flexibility in designing learning tailored to local contexts.

Independent curriculum

The Independent Curriculum is the latest education policy developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in response to various challenges in implementing the 2013 Curriculum. This policy was introduced in 2021 and began to be implemented nationally in 2022 under the leadership of Nadiem Anwar Makarim. The birth of the Independent Curriculum is not merely a simplification of the previous curriculum, but also the result of the government's reflection on social changes, technological advances, and learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has revealed the need for a more adaptive, flexible, and contextual curriculum, able to adapt to the dynamics of modern society. (Satici et al., 2025)

This policy was formulated in a phased and measured manner. The first phase began in 2021 through the School Mover and Vocational School Center of Excellence (SMK PK) Program, which served as a pilot project for the limited implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Selected schools implemented a flexible, project-based learning model, emphasizing student character development. After evaluation results demonstrated increased student participation and learning effectiveness, the government expanded its implementation in a second phase in 2022, through Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Decree No. 56/M/2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Learning Recovery.

The next phase will take place in 2023–2024, when all educational units will be given the opportunity to independently implement the Independent Curriculum. During this phase, schools can choose their implementation status: independent learning, independent change, or independent sharing, depending on their level of readiness. Data from the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency (BSKAP) shows that by 2023, more than 80% of schools in Indonesia had implemented the Independent Curriculum, either fully or in a limited way. The government then targeted a national consolidation phase that would last until 2027, when all schools would have fully and sustainably implemented this curriculum.

Legally, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is strengthened by Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation Number 7 of 2022 concerning Content Standards and Graduate Competency Standards for Primary and Secondary Education. Furthermore, this policy is also in line with the direction of national education development in the 2020–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) and Presidential Regulation Number 18 of 2020, which emphasizes improving the quality of superior human resources and strengthening 21st-century competencies. Thus, the Independent Curriculum is part of a major transformation of the Independent Learning program, launched in 2019 as a national education reform strategy towards a more autonomous, simplified, and student-centered system.

In terms of substance, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes streamlined teaching materials, teacher independence, and project-based learning. This approach fosters critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and social awareness in students. The curriculum's primary focus is the development of the Pancasila Student Profile, encompassing six dimensions: faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity. Through interdisciplinary projects, students learn from real-life experiences relevant to their lives, not just from theory or memorization.

In practice, the Independent Curriculum grants teachers broad autonomy to develop teaching materials tailored to students' characteristics and needs. For example, in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons in elementary schools, the theme "Alhamdulillah, I Can Pray" can be developed into a simple project in the form of a daily prayer journal. Through this activity, students not only understand the procedures for prayer but also develop a disciplined and reflective practice of worship. This contextual approach emphasizes that religious learning extends beyond the cognitive aspect to include spiritual and affective aspects.

Based on the initial evaluation conducted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's BSKAP (2023), more than 80% of pilot schools reported increased learning motivation and student participation after implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. However, challenges remain in teacher training, the digital divide, and the availability of learning resources in the regions. To support the adaptation process, the government launched the digital platform "Merdeka Mengajar," which serves as a platform for training and sharing best practices among educators across Indonesia.

In the context of Islamic education, the Independent Curriculum policy provides space for strengthening students' spiritual and moral values. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers can design learning based on religious projects, such as Friday almsgiving, prayer room cleaning activities, or social activities based on Islamic values. This approach aligns with the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Religious Moderation program, which aims to instill values of tolerance, balance, and noble morals in schools. Thus, the Independent Curriculum not only develops academic competence and national character but also strengthens the foundations of students' faith and Islam as part of the quality of national education.

Despite bringing positive changes, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum still faces various challenges on the ground. Limited teacher training, disparities in facilities between regions, and differences in educational unit readiness are issues that require attention. Furthermore, the continuity of this policy must be maintained to prevent it from being interrupted by changes in national leadership. Equitable access to technology and budgetary support for education are also key factors in ensuring the policy's equitable and sustainable implementation.

Overall, the policy of shifting to the Independent Curriculum represents a strategic step by the government to reform the national education system toward

a more humane, adaptive, and sustainable direction. The phased approach adopted demonstrates the government's commitment to implementing changes carefully and based on data. With the support of educators, the community, and Islamic educational institutions, the Independent Curriculum is expected to become a crucial foundation for building a generation of Indonesians with faith, character, and global competitiveness.

Implications of Improving the Quality of Islamic Religious Education Learning in Elementary Schools in the Independent Curriculum Era

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) has significantly impacted the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in elementary schools. This curriculum emphasizes the freedom for teachers to design learning tailored to the needs, potential, and character of elementary-age students, who are still in the concrete development stage. In the context of PAI, this policy opens up greater opportunities for teachers to deliver contextual, enjoyable learning that is oriented toward the development of Islamic morals and character, appropriate to the thinking stage of elementary-aged children. (Amrullah & Chanda Chansa Thelma, 2025)

The first change is evident in the learning approach. The Merdeka Curriculum encourages Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in elementary schools to move away from conventional teacher-centered models and toward active, student-centered learning. Models such as project-based learning and discovery learning are well-suited to the characteristics of elementary school students, who enjoy learning through hands-on experiences. Teachers can link material to real-life activities, such as cleaning the school prayer room, Friday almsgiving, or practicing congregational prayer on the school grounds. Through this approach, the values of faith, piety, and noble morals can be naturally instilled because students not only hear and memorize but also directly experience the application of Islamic teachings.

Furthermore, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has implications for strengthening the profile of Pancasila-based students at the elementary school level, aligning them with Islamic values. The dimensions of faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble character are the primary foundations of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning. Islamic Religious Education teachers serve not only as transmitters of material but also as spiritual guides who foster Islamic behavior in the elementary school environment, such as praying together before learning, respecting each other, maintaining cleanliness, and cultivating responsibility through simple religious activities. (Hafipudin et al., 2025)

From a teacher professional perspective, this policy requires Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in elementary schools to be more creative, patient, and adaptable to students' diverse learning styles. Teachers are given the freedom to choose methods, media, and assessments appropriate to the characteristics of elementary-aged children. The teacher's role shifts to that of a facilitator, assisting students in discovering the meaning of Islamic teachings through concrete learning

experiences.(Muhammad Alfian Wiandani et al., 2025; Salsabila et al., 2025) Therefore, training and improving teacher competency are important elements in maintaining the quality of Islamic Religious Education learning in elementary schools.

In terms of assessment, the Independent Curriculum emphasizes authentic assessment that encompasses knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Teachers can use instruments such as devotional portfolios, daily moral journals, prayer practice assessments, or observations of students' social behavior in the classroom. This approach allows teachers to assess students' holistic religious development, both in terms of understanding and practice.(Aluk Maknunah & Abdul Muis, 2023)

Overall, the improvement in the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning in elementary schools during the Independent Curriculum era can be seen in three main dimensions. First, in terms of process, learning has become more active, enjoyable, and child-friendly. Second, in terms of outcomes, students have demonstrated progress in practicing Islamic teachings and developing religious and social attitudes. Third, in terms of the school environment, religious culture has strengthened through morning Quran recitation (Tadarus), congregational prayers, Friday almsgiving, and the Islamic-influenced Pancasila student profile project.(Latipah et al., 2025)

Thus, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum provides a significant opportunity to improve the quality of Islamic Religious Education (IS) in elementary schools. Teachers have ample room for innovation, students become more active and reflective, and the learning process becomes more relevant to children's developmental needs. However, successful quality improvement still requires school support, ongoing teacher training, and the collaboration of the entire school community to create a religious, inclusive learning environment that aligns with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The government's curriculum changes over time demonstrate a strong commitment to continuously improving the quality of national education. Every policy issued, from the 1994 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum, aims to adapt the educational process to social and cultural developments and student needs. The introduction of the Independent Curriculum represents a strategic step by the government to improve the learning system to make it more flexible and student-centered. In the context of Islamic Religious Education in Elementary Schools, this policy provides significant opportunities for teachers to develop learning that aligns with children's character, emphasizes hands-on experiences, and instills Islamic values relevant to everyday life.

The Independent Curriculum policy has also improved the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning, both in terms of process, outcomes, and the learning environment. The learning process becomes more active, creative, and meaningful because teachers have room to innovate. Student learning outcomes are

reflected not only in mastery of religious knowledge but also in attitudes and behaviors that reflect values of faith, piety, and noble character.

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