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Transforming Islamic Religious Education in Indonesia: A Socio-Historical Study from Pre-Independence to the Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract	Article Info
<p>The transformation of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Indonesia has undergone significant changes from the pre-independence period to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study aims to analyze the development of the PAI curriculum through a socio-historical approach. Data collection was carried out through documentary studies. A qualitative approach was used in this research to explore the curriculum change process influenced by various social and historical factors. The analysis was conducted using curriculum transformation theories and sociological approaches to education. The findings of this study indicate that the PAI curriculum has evolved in line with Indonesia's social and political dynamics from the colonial era and independence to the reform era, culminating in the Merdeka Curriculum. Factors such as the roles of key figures, government policies, and global influences have played a part in shaping the direction of this curriculum policy. This research provides insights into how the transformation of the PAI curriculum in Indonesia supports the development of character and religious understanding among the younger generation.</p>	<p>Article History</p> <p>Submitted / Received: 14-05-2025 First Revised: 18-05-2025 Accepted: 30-05-2025 First Available online: 24-06-2025 Publication Date: 25-06-2025</p> <hr/> <p>Keywords: Curriculum transformation, Islamic Religious Education, Socio-Historical</p>

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Introduction

The curriculum is central to education, serving as a guide, much like a map for a traveler. Without it, direction can be lost. In the educational context, a well-structured curriculum produces competent individuals ready to face the challenges of a constantly changing world. (Rofiah, Isroani & Jauhari, 2023)

In Indonesia, curriculum reforms have occurred frequently, often reflecting efforts to enhance the quality of education. These changes typically arise after shifts in the education ministry or government leadership, with new policies introduced with each change. The curriculum's dynamic nature ensures it evolves to meet the needs of society as socioeconomic shifts and scientific advancements influence its design. However, even well-crafted policies may become outdated, requiring continuous revision. (Asy-syukriyyah, 2024)

This transformation is especially evident in Islamic Religious Education (PAI), which has evolved from the pre-independence era to the present Merdeka Curriculum (Handayani & Irawan, 2023). Initially, PAI focused on classical texts such as fiqh, tawhid, and tasawwuf. After its independence, it was integrated into public schools, focusing on national values and Islamic culture. The New Order standardized the curriculum, emphasizing Pancasila values and moral education. During the Reformation, PAI expanded to include subjects like Aqidah, morals, fiqh, and Islamic history. PAI is adapted to students' contexts in the Merdeka Curriculum, promoting the Pancasila Student Profile. (Junaidi, Sileuw, & Faisal, 2023)

A socio-historical approach helps understand how social, political, and cultural forces have shaped Indonesia's education system. Early education was limited, but as independence neared, education became a tool for national identity and equal access. Over time, curriculum changes have responded to the era's needs, with the Merdeka Curriculum reflecting modern demands for flexibility and developing 21st-century competencies. Beyond government action, community involvement, especially from religious leaders, educators, and parents, has been crucial in shaping the PAI curriculum. Their input ensures the curriculum remains relevant to contemporary values, contributing to character development while preserving national and religious identity. (Aminah & Sya'bani, 2023)

Although numerous studies have examined changes in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum, few have approached the topic from a comprehensive socio-historical perspective from the pre-independence era to the Merdeka Curriculum. This study aims to fill that gap by exploring how social, political, and

cultural dynamics have influenced the evolution of the PAI curriculum in Indonesia. Based on observations of current phenomena, the author intends to conduct research and present it in a scholarly work entitled *"The Transformation of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Indonesia: A Socio-Historical Study from the Pre-Independence Period to the Merdeka Curriculum."*

Theoretical Review

Curriculum Transformation

The curriculum is the core of the education system, reflecting the values, goals, and directions a society aims to achieve through the learning process. Generally, the curriculum can be defined as a set of plans and arrangements concerning objectives, content, learning materials, and the methods used as guidelines for organizing learning activities to achieve specific educational goals. The fundamental components of a curriculum include educational objectives, subject matter or content, teaching methods or strategies, and the evaluation or assessment of learning outcomes. These four components are interrelated and form a cohesive system in implementing education. (Latipah, Hasan, & Rokhimawan, 2023)

Curriculum change does not happen suddenly but is a response to the dynamics that continue to develop in society. Theories of curriculum change provide a framework for understanding how curriculum is developed and changed. In his famous model, Ralph Tyler emphasized the importance of clear educational objectives as the basis for designing a curriculum. Tyler's model is rational and linear, with four main components: objectives, learning experiences, organization of experiences, and evaluation. Hilda Taba later developed a more participatory approach, emphasizing the role of teachers and educational actors in designing the curriculum from the bottom up. Meanwhile, the critical curriculum approach developed by figures such as Paulo Freire highlights the importance of freeing education from the hegemony of certain ideologies and linking the curriculum to learners' social context and critical consciousness.

Various interrelated factors drive curriculum transformation. Sociologically, changes in social structures such as urbanization, globalization, and shifting family values affect both the content and methods of instruction. Political factors, including changes in government or national policies, also significantly impact the direction of the curriculum, particularly regarding the ideology to be instilled in learners. Economic factors align the curriculum with labor market demands and

national development needs. Furthermore, information and communication technology advances are crucial in updating teaching methods and adapting the curriculum to the digital era. Likewise, Cultural factors shape curriculum design to align with local values and national identity.

In Indonesia, curriculum transformation reflects the nation's historical journey and social dynamics. During the Dutch colonial era, education was exclusive and oriented toward the interests of the colonizers, with a curriculum that limited access to religious education for the indigenous population. After independence, the curriculum underwent significant reform driven by nationalism, notably through the 1947 Curriculum, which emphasized national character. Subsequent curricula, such as those in 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, and the 2004 Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK), marked a shift in focus from content to competency development. Another major transformation occurred with the 2013 Curriculum, emphasizing character strengthening and integrating religious values. The pinnacle of this transformation is the Merdeka Curriculum, introduced in 2022, which responds to technological disruptions and the need for a more flexible and contextual education system. (Latipah et al., 2023)

Curriculum transformation in Indonesia is closely tied to the nation's social, political, and cultural dynamics. Changes in the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum, in particular, reflect the evolving role of religion in society and respond to the needs of national character development. (Trianita, Silma, Ridwan, & Mulyawan, 2025) Therefore, understanding the broader dynamics of curriculum transformation is crucial for examining how the Islamic Education curriculum has changed.

Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

In the education system, the curriculum serves as a guide for schools' teaching and learning process. Etymologically, "curriculum" originates from the Greek word *curare*, a verb meaning "to run," which later evolved into the noun curriculum or curricula, referring to the distance a runner must cover. (Hamdan, 2014) In the educational context, the curriculum represents a series of steps that educators must follow to teach their students and help them achieve their fundamental goals: to become devoted servants (*hamba*) of God and responsible stewards (*khalifah*) of the earth. The curriculum can be likened to a person embarking on a long journey; such a journey requires a clear destination and careful planning to ensure a triumphant arrival. Accordingly, in education, the learning process must begin with well-prepared plans, including formulating objectives,

selecting appropriate materials, choosing effective teaching methods, and evaluating learning outcomes.

Regarding terminology, experts offer various perspectives on the meaning of the curriculum as its understanding continues to evolve alongside the development of science and education. As noted by Chasmijatin and Permana, the curriculum refers to a set of subjects that must be completed to obtain a diploma. In contrast, other scholars provide broader definitions. For instance, in his paper *Reorganizing the High School Curriculum*, Harold B. Alberty argues that the curriculum encompasses subject matter and all school activities inside and outside the classroom. Similarly, in the book *Curriculum Planning to Better Teaching and Learning*, J. Galen Saylor and William M. Alexander define the curriculum as all school-directed efforts designed to facilitate student learning, whether in the classroom or through extracurricular activities. This perspective is further supported by William B. Ragan in *Modern Elementary Curriculum*, who emphasizes that the curriculum includes the entire program of student activities conducted under the school's guidance. According to Ragan, the curriculum is not limited to academic subjects but also includes students' social interactions with teachers, the methods employed in the teaching and learning process, and the evaluation of student learning outcomes.

Based on the ideas presented above, the curriculum comprises three main concepts. First, the concept of substance views the curriculum as a foundational framework that defines the direction and content of education, including learning activity plans, instructional objectives, subject matter, teaching tools, and schedules. It also represents a formal document based on agreements among curriculum designers, policymakers, and the wider community. It can be implemented by educational institutions or government agencies at various administrative levels, from the village to the national. Second, the system concept emphasizes that the curriculum comprises interrelated components working together to achieve educational goals. It governs how the curriculum is structured, implemented, evaluated, and revised, ensuring its efficiency and relevance to current demands. Third, the content concept highlights that the curriculum includes a collection of academic disciplines, instructional content, and learning materials used throughout the educational process (Harahap, Kurrahman, & Rusmana, 2024).

The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum is a framework for planning and organizing the materials, content, and objectives of lessons, as well as the procedures for structuring learning activities to achieve the goals of Islamic

education. The aim is to shape a perfect human being, in the concept of *insan kamil*, as both a servant of Allah ('*Abdullah*) and a steward of the earth (*Khalifah Fil Ardl*). (Sahri, 2023) Juridically, this is stated in the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which asserts that the PAI curriculum is integrated with the broader objectives of national education. (Faruq & Bakar, 2025) In this context, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) aims to cultivate students who believe in and fear Allah SWT and possess noble character, knowledge, competence, productivity, and dedication as responsible citizens. Therefore, the PAI curriculum aims to balance students' spiritual and intellectual development.

The book *Islamic Religious Education Curriculum Development (PAI): Theory and Practice* by Drs. H. Hamdan, M.Pd. discusses four main models of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum. The first is the Separate Subject Curriculum, the most traditional and widely used in Islamic educational institutions today. Although the subjects remain within the PAI framework, they are taught as separate entities, such as Fiqh, Al-Qur'an, Hadith, Tajweed, Nahwu, Shorof, Tarikh, Tauhid, Tasawuf, Ushul Fiqh, Akhlak, and others. The second model is the Interrelated Curriculum, which is a simplified form of the Separate Subject Curriculum, where subjects are interconnected, like Qurdist (Al-Qur'an and Hadith), Aqidah Akhlak, SKI (History of Islamic Culture), Fiqh Worship, IAT (Al-Qur'an Science and Tafsir), and so on. The third is the One Unit Curriculum, which eliminates the boundaries between individual subjects. For example, PAI subjects integrate content such as Al-Qur'an Hadith, Jurisprudence, History, and Aqidah Akhlak into a single unit of knowledge at the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. Finally, the Integrated Thematic Curriculum conceptualizes PAI subject matter through specific themes or topics, aiming to integrate PAI content with other subjects. Examples include themes such as Akhlak towards parents and teachers, avoiding despicable morals, or deepening the concept of Tawhid and its implications in life. (Hamdan, 2014)

Changes in the Islamic education curriculum are always influenced by various factors that evolve alongside social, political, and technological dynamics in Indonesia. In his theory of social reconstruction, George Counts emphasizes that the curriculum should serve as a tool to shape a better and fairer society by addressing social needs and changes in values. In Islamic education, the evolving curriculum aims to transfer knowledge and change students' mindsets and attitudes, making them more responsive to social challenges. Michael Fullan further suggests that the interaction between government policy, field implementation by educators, and

community responses influences curriculum change. This theory posits that effective change must involve all elements of the education ecosystem. External political, social, and technological developments also significantly drive curriculum transformation. Political changes, such as regime shifts or new education policies, can influence the direction of the curriculum. Social changes, such as increased awareness of pluralism or the growing emphasis on character education, can also stimulate innovation in the curriculum. Moreover, technological advances create opportunities for new, more flexible, and technology-based learning methods, compelling the Islamic education curriculum to adapt to remain relevant to the times continuously.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using library research and historical-critical analysis. The research design is descriptive-analytical, aiming to trace and reconstruct the transformation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum from the pre-independence period to the era of the Merdeka Curriculum within a socio-historical framework. This research does not involve a population and sample in the quantitative sense; instead, the primary data sources consist of historical documents, legal regulations, curriculum texts, textbooks, and other relevant materials.

The research instruments include a document review guide and content analysis notes structured based on the study's focus: socio-political context, curriculum content, and the roles of key figures or policies in each period. Data validity is ensured through source triangulation and cross-referencing among documents, while reliability is strengthened by repeated analytical procedures and data verification from credible academic sources.

Data were analyzed using content analysis and historical analysis methods. The analytical stages involve identifying, classifying, interpreting, and synthesizing data based on chronological periods and curricular aspects. The results are then analyzed to understand the dynamics and direction of PAI curriculum transformation in the context of Indonesia's social, political, and educational changes.

Results

The tentative conclusion drawn from the presented information is:

- 1) The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in Indonesia has developed in line with changes in social, political, and cultural contexts, from the exclusive colonial era to the more inclusive and adaptive era of the Merdeka Curriculum. This transformation reflects a shift in educational goals that emphasizes strengthening national character and religious values.
- 2) The transformation of the PAI curriculum has consistently aimed at shaping students who are faithful and devout to Allah SWT and possess noble character, broad knowledge, and competence as good citizens, according to national educational objectives.
- 3) The developing models of the PAI curriculum, ranging from separate subjects (Separated Subject) and correlated curricula (Correlated Curriculum) to integrated thematic curricula, demonstrate the flexibility of the curriculum in responding to the changing needs of education. Each model aims to create a learning system that is more contextual and relevant to society.
- 4) The PAI curriculum has transformed to address globalization and technology challenges. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced in 2022, represents the pinnacle of PAI transformation by offering a more flexible and responsive approach to technological advancements and the evolving needs of education, creating a generation ready to face global challenges and changing times.

Discussion

The Transformation of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum in Indonesia

Before Indonesia's independence in 1945, the spread of Islamic education followed two central systems: (1) the traditional education system found in pesantren in Java, surau in Sumatra, and meunasah in Aceh, and (2) the modern education system that developed in the form of madrasahs. (Silvia & Zainur, 2023) Pesantren initially emerged when Muslim traders who spread Islam operated in langgar or mosques as places for worship and religious education. From this,

Muslim communities formed and evolved into informal educational institutions known as pesantren.

Pesantren, Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institution, has a debated history. Some sources claim it was founded by Sunan Maulana Malik Ibrahim and Sunan Ampel in the 14th or 15th century. In contrast, others suggest it emerged in the 18th century, with Pondok Pesantren Tegalsari Ponogoro being the oldest. Initially, pesantren did not have a standardized curriculum. The teaching focused mainly on the Qur'an, mysticism (tasawuf), and linguistic studies, often blending local cultural values with Islamic teachings. This approach persisted until the Dutch colonial period, which changed the archipelago's educational system.

During the Dutch colonial era, they established a formal secular education system that neglected the needs of Islamic education. This led to the emergence of madrasahs as a form of resistance to Dutch colonial policies. For instance, Madrasah Abadiyah was established in Padang in 1909 and later became HIS Abadiyah in 1915 by Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad, who integrated general knowledge with religious studies. Mahmud Yunus also developed a more modern and structured education system with Diniyah Puteri Padang Panjang. At the same time, Sheikh M. Taib Umar founded Madras School in Batu Sangkar in 1910 to reform Islamic education in Minangkabau (Hamzah, 2014).

Islamic organizations in Indonesia also played a significant role in education reform—Muhammadiyah, founded by KH. Ahmad Dahlan opened the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Diniyah Islamiyah in 1918 and established the secondary school Al Qismul Quro, which later developed into Pondok Muhammadiyah. Meanwhile, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) contributed to improving the madrasah education system by formulating educational levels by the end of 1938, including Madrasah Awaliyah to Madrasah Mu'allimin 'Ulya, as part of efforts to standardize and modernize Islamic education.(Azzahra & Bakar, 2023)

During the Japanese occupation (1942-1945), Islamic education policies were modified to serve Japan's interests in gaining support from the Muslim community. Despite this, pesantren and madrasahs continued to function as centers for Islamic education, though they faced significant challenges due to the war and social instability at the time.

The Islamic Religious Education Curriculum during the Old Order Era (1945–1965)

Three curriculum policy changes occurred: the 1947, 1952, and 1964 curricula.

1) Rentjana Pelajaran 1947 (The 1947 Teaching Plan)

The 1947 curriculum was designed in 1947 but was not implemented until 1950, marking the beginning of curriculum development. Before this, on January 3, 1946, the government established the Ministry of Religious Affairs to oversee Islamic education. This ministry proposed to the Ministry of Education, Teaching, and Culture (PK and K) to replace the subject of Ethics with Islamic education, which was incorporated into the curriculum in December 1946, focusing on moral and character development. (Putra Daulay, 2017)

The government also encouraged the development of madrasahs and pesantrens, which are in line with the statement from the BPKNP. Madrasahs and pesantrens were urged to integrate Islamic education with the national curriculum while maintaining traditional teaching methods.

In December 1946, a joint decree between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Teaching, and Culture made it mandatory for public schools to teach Islamic education to Muslim students, while Islamic educational institutions were required to teach general subjects. This policy created a dual education system, combining religious and general education in a single framework. This was further reinforced by Law No. 4 of 1950, Article 20, which mandated religious education in public schools and encouraged parents to ensure their children study religion in line with government regulations. (Ubaidillah, 2024)

2) Rentjana Pelajaran Terurai 1952 (The Detailed Teaching Plan 1952)

The 1952 Detailed Lesson Plan Curriculum established core subjects that students were required to study, such as Islamic Religious Education, Indonesian Language, Regional Languages, Science, Biology, Geography, History, and Arts and Culture. Unlike the more flexible 1947 curriculum, this one was more structured and detailed. Its implementation was regulated by the Basic Law on Education and Teaching (UUPPP) No. 4 of 1950. To strengthen religious education, a joint decree from two ministers was issued in 1951, mandating schools to provide religious education with a minimum of 2 hours per week.

To develop the religious education curriculum, the Ministry of Religious Affairs formed a team led by K.H. Imam Zarkasyi from Pondok Pesantren Gontor

Ponorogo to create a more systematic curriculum. Approved by the Minister of Religious Affairs, K.H. Faqih Usman, in 1952, the curriculum allocated 25% of the subjects to religious education in schools. Additionally, as Islamic educational institutions, madrasahs began to be more systematically regulated, integrating general education with spiritual studies and creating a balance between the two. (Kiptiyah, Sukarno, & El Widdah, 2021)

3) Rentjana Pendidikan 1964 (1964 Education Plan)

The 1964 Education Plan laid the groundwork for the 1965 Curriculum by introducing the *Pancawardhana* concept, emphasizing five key developmental aspects: morality, intellect, emotional growth, skills, and physical development. Primary education during this period focused on practical skill development through a guided cooperation (*gotong royong terpimpin*) approach and the implementation of *Hari Krida* every Saturday. These activities aimed to nurture students' talents in the arts, sports, and other educational pursuits, ensuring a balance between cognitive and non-cognitive learning. (Desi Sandra Putri, Marzelni, Yefrineng Delastri, Desi Anggraini, Demina, 2016)

Islamic education was further strengthened under the leadership of KH. Saifuddin Zuhri. This era saw the growth of Classical Pesantren, *Madrasah Diniyah*, and Modern Private Madrasahs that integrated 60%–65% general subjects with 35%–40% religious studies. This reflects an increasing emphasis on an Islamic education model combining religious knowledge and practical skills. (Beno, Silen, & Yanti, 2022)

The establishment of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Negeri* (MIN) placed it on par with public elementary schools, allowing students the option to continue to *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri* (MTsN) or pursue vocational religious education. An eight-year MIN experimental program was also introduced to enhance practical training. At the higher education level, the establishment of *Institut Agama Islam Negeri* (IAIN) began in the early 1960s, offering a curriculum that merged Islamic scholarship with a more modern academic framework. The government supported these advancements by overseeing state madrasahs and founding Islamic universities, reinforcing Islamic education's role within the national education system.

New Order Islamic Religious Education Curriculum (1968-1994)

There were four curriculum policy changes during the New Order era: the 1968 Curriculum, the 1975 Curriculum, the 1984 Curriculum, and the 1994 Curriculum.

1) The 1968 curriculum

Implemented during the New Order era, the 1968 Curriculum was a continuation of the 1964 Curriculum with a greater emphasis on shaping individuals who embody Pancasila values, possess strong moral character, and uphold noble conduct. In Islamic Religious Education (IRE), the curriculum mandates religious instruction across all educational levels, from elementary to high school. The goal extended beyond theoretical knowledge to fostering ethical behavior and character development based on Islamic teachings.

Religious subjects were organized more systematically, covering areas such as faith (aqidah), worship practices (ibadah), ethics (akhlak), and Islamic history. The curriculum focused on religious practice, including reading and memorizing the Qur'an, performing prayers, and applying Islamic values daily. Additionally, madrasahs were encouraged to integrate general subjects such as science, mathematics, and the Indonesian language into their curricula, promoting a balanced education between religious and secular knowledge. (Sholihah Luthfi Alya, 2023)

2) The 1975 curriculum

The 1975 Curriculum introduced an efficiency-oriented instructional model known as the Objective-Based Instructional Approach (Pendekatan Instruksional Berbasis Tujuan, PIBT), which evaluated Islamic education through General Instructional Objectives (TIU) and Specific Instructional Objectives (TIK). (Sholihah Luthfi Alya, 2023) This approach prioritized the practical application of religious practices such as Qur'anic recitation, daily prayers, and the cultivation of good morals, supported by structured assessment methods to measure comprehension and implementation.

The Three-Minister Joint Decree reinforced IRE in madrasahs by increasing its portion to 30% of the curriculum and recognizing madrasah diplomas as equivalent to those from general schools. This allowed student mobility between institutions without academic setbacks. Madrasahs also began incorporating general subjects like science and mathematics to better prepare students for higher education and the professional world.

Furthermore, the Instructional System Development Procedure (PPSI) was introduced, outlining lesson plans that included objectives, content, methods, tools, and evaluation techniques. Although this system clarified instructional design, it

also imposed heavy administrative demands on teachers, sometimes detracting from effective teaching.

3) The 1984 curriculum

The 1984 Curriculum marked a significant shift by promoting the Student Active Learning Method (Cara Belajar Siswa Aktif, CBSA). This student-centered approach encouraged learners to observe, discuss, and present their findings while teachers were facilitators. Although CBSA produced positive outcomes in certain schools, its national implementation faced difficulties due to a limited understanding of the method, leading to less structured and ineffective classroom environments in many regions. (Muhammad, 2019)

In IRE, the curriculum reinforced worship practices such as Qur'anic recitation, prayer, and ethical behavior. Religious education was not limited to standalone courses but was also embedded in other subjects to shape students' character holistically. The Two-Minister Joint Decree further legitimized the role of madrasahs, ensuring that their graduates had equal access to further education, thereby increasing public trust in Islamic educational institutions.

4) The 1994 curriculum.

The 1994 Curriculum was a refinement of the national education system under the New Order and was supported by the enactment of the National Education System Law (Law No. 2 of 1989). This legislation recognized madrasahs as formal Islamic educational institutions, integrating them into the national education framework. Islamic Religious Education remained a compulsory subject across all levels, from elementary to university. Religion was grouped with general subjects at the elementary and junior high levels. In contrast, it was placed on par with other core subjects such as Civics (PPKn), Indonesian language, history, and social sciences at the senior high level. Although instructional approaches evolved, the time allocation for religious education remained consistent.

The government also enhanced the status of madrasahs by aligning their curricula with national standards, ensuring equal opportunities for madrasah graduates to pursue further education. The education system during this period was grounded in the 1989 Education Law and the 1994 Curriculum, which remained in place until 1998. However, the emergence of reform movements in the late 1990s began to spark a broader transformation in the national education landscape. (Ayuhana, 2015)

Islamic Religious Education Curriculum of the Reform Era (1999-Present)

The Reform Era began following the fall of the New Order regime and the resignation of President Soeharto on May 21, 1998. This period significantly transformed Indonesia's political, economic, and social landscape. Since then, the national curriculum has undergone four major revisions: the 2004 Curriculum, the 2006 Curriculum, the 2013 Curriculum, and the Merdeka Curriculum.

1) The 2004 curriculum (KBK)

Introduced as a replacement for the 1994 Curriculum, the 2004 Curriculum, widely known as the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK), marked a shift toward student competency development. The curriculum emphasized individual and group learning achievements, utilizing an outcome-based approach that values diversity in learning processes. It promoted a more varied educational experience, incorporating learning resources from teachers, families, and the community. Assessment methods addressed cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains, reflecting the depth and complexity of student learning. (Dhaifi, 2018)

This competency-based model significantly influenced Islamic Religious Education (IRE), including in madrasahs, by positioning competencies as the foundation of instruction. Law No. 20 of 2003 officially recognized madrasahs as equivalent to general schools, incorporating them into the national education system. IRE in madrasahs included subjects such as Qur'an-Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak (faith and ethics), Fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and Islamic cultural history, complemented by religious extracurricular activities. Madrasah curricula were integrated with national standards through core competencies (Kompetensi Inti), basic competencies (Kompetensi Dasar), relevant subject content, teaching methods, and assessment practices aligned with student development.

2) The 2006 curriculum (KTSP)

Replacing KBK, the 2006 Curriculum, called the School-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan, KTSP), maintained many core principles of its predecessor but introduced a decentralization approach. While the central government continued to define basic and core competencies, schools and madrasahs were given autonomy to develop their own syllabi and assessment systems based on local needs. KTSP encouraged curriculum adaptation to fit students' characteristics and regional contexts. (Didiyanto, 2017)

In Islamic Religious Education, the Ministry of Religious Affairs (KEMENAG) provided guidelines for curriculum implementation. In May 2008, the Minister of

Religious Affairs issued Regulation No. 2 of 2008, establishing national standards for IRE content and competencies. Regulation No. 24 of 2006 further clarified curriculum application and graduation standards. KTSP allowed madrasahs and schools to develop more flexible religious curricula tailored to regional conditions while aligning with national education standards.

3) The 2013 curriculum

The 2013 Curriculum was designed to enhance the quality of education by emphasizing the development of students' knowledge, skills, and character. Its primary goal was to foster character education rooted in local wisdom and to create a joyful and meaningful learning environment. K-13 advocated active learning strategies, engaging students in observing, questioning, critical thinking, presenting, and creating. Learning was not confined to the classroom but extended to extracurricular and community-based experiences, with character values reinforced through teacher modeling and school culture. (Santosa, 2016)

In madrasahs, Islamic Religious Education under K-13 incorporates multicultural and inclusive approaches, promoting values of religious tolerance and diversity through implicit (hidden) curriculum strategies. Schools were encouraged to adapt to social and cultural shifts, ensuring students excel academically and develop strong, tolerant characters capable of meeting future challenges.

4) The Merdeka Curriculum.

Launched by Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Nadiem Makarim on February 11, 2022, the Merdeka Curriculum emerged in response to educational challenges following the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially piloted in 2,500 "driving schools," it began phased implementation in the 2022/2023 academic year across all educational levels. The curriculum promotes flexible learning tailored to students' interests and talents, allowing them to realize their full potential without being burdened by irrelevant material. The *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) initiative seeks to eliminate rigid structures, enhance critical thinking and literacy, and grant schools autonomy in instructional methods.

In this curriculum, student assessment extends beyond academic achievement, encompassing a variety of learning experiences, including extracurricular activities. It leverages technology to accelerate educational progress, strengthen diversity, and cultivate the *Pancasila Student Profile*, which includes six key attributes: critical thinking, independence, creativity, collaboration, global diversity awareness, and moral integrity. (Munawir, Lailun Nurul Arofah, &

Sari, 2024) In the context of IRE, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes contextual and practical religious learning, focusing on core areas such as faith (akidah), the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic law (fiqh), ethics (akhlak), and history (tarikh), all of which are relevant to students' religious and societal lives.

Socio-Historical Analysis of the Islamic Religious Education Curriculum

From a socio-historical perspective, various events and policies have significantly influenced the dynamics of Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum development in Indonesia across public schools, madrasahs, and pesantren. These include:

- 1) Ministerial Decree No. 1 of 1946. In the aftermath of independence, Indonesia was undergoing a period of political transition and instability. During this time, the Muslim community strongly advocated for the inclusion of religious instruction in public schools. The issuance of this decree marked the first official policy from the Ministry of Religious Affairs, granting legal recognition to teaching IRE in public education. However, it remained conditional upon a minimum number of Muslim students enrolled.
- 2) Joint Ministerial Decree of 1951 (SKB 3 Menteri). This policy was introduced to coordinate efforts among ministries in response to growing demands from the Muslim community amidst ideological tensions between nationalist and Islamic factions regarding the role of religion in the state. It established a standardized and operational Islamic religious curriculum for public schools at the national level.
- 3) Law No. 4 of 1950 and Law No. 12 of 1954. This legislation aimed to unify the fragmented education system, which was still divided into colonial, Islamic, and national streams. It responded to calls from religious groups for an education system that was not secular.
- 4) SKB 3 Menteri of 1975. This decree formally integrated madrasahs into the national education system, requiring them to incorporate general subjects without compromising their religious content. As a result, madrasah graduates were granted access to general education pathways, which led to the integration of IRE within the national curriculum framework during the New Order era.
- 5) Presidential Instruction No. 15 of 1974. From a socio-historical viewpoint, this policy was part of the New Order government's strategy to stabilize political relations by engaging with the Islamic community following earlier tensions.

It mandated religious education at all levels and types of schools, formally embedding IRE as a permanent element of the national curriculum.

- 6) Law No. 2 of 1989 on the National Education System. During the centralization period of the New Order regime, this law emphasized moral development through religious education. IRE was officially recognized as an essential subject to be taught by educators who share the students' faith, and it is regarded as crucial for character formation.
- 7) Government Regulations No. 28 and 29 of 1990. These regulations applied to primary and secondary schools as technical implementations of Law No. 2/1989. They ensured the structured inclusion of IRE within the broader national curriculum.
- 8) Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. This law reaffirmed the requirement for religious education to be taught by teachers of the same faith across all types and levels of education. It reflected growing public demand for a system responsive to spiritual and moral values.
- 9) Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Institutions. This regulation further solidified the role of IRE as a compulsory component across all educational streams and levels. It also established clear standards for its implementation, emphasizing professional teaching practices and alignment with religious identity. In addition, the regulation formally acknowledged religious institutions, including pesantren, as integral parts of the national education system, promoting a more standardized, inclusive, and socially relevant IRE curriculum.
- 10) Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren. This law marked a significant milestone in recognizing pesantren as an autonomous part of Indonesia's national education system. It granted pesantren the authority to develop distinctive curricula rooted in Islamic values and long-standing scholarly traditions. In the context of IRE, this law elevated its role from merely a subject to the spiritual foundation of pesantren education. It also legitimized various pesantren education models, such as Mu'adalah units, Formal Diniyah Education, and Ma'had Aly, placing them on par with formal education institutions and inspiring a more spiritual, contextual, and grounded approach to IRE reform in public schools and madrasahs.

Thus, when summarized in a tabular form, the transformation of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum in Indonesia from the pre-independence era to

the present can be observed through its socio-historical development across formal schools, madrasahs, and pesantren:

Table 1. Table of Comparative Table: IRE Curriculum in Public Schools, Madrasahs, and Pesantren

Aspect	Public Schools	Madrasahs	Pesantren
Historical Origins	Rooted in secular colonial educational traditions	Initiated by Muslim communities in semi-formal settings	Derived from pre-modern Islamic traditions of the Indonesian archipelago
Initial Status	Excluded Islamic education before independence	Semi-formal and privately managed	Non-formal and independent from state regulations
Legal Recognition of IRE	Formally acknowledged starting with PMA No. 1/1946 and the 1951 Joint Decree.	Fully recognized through the 1975 Joint Ministerial Decree, integrating madrasahs into the system.	Officially strengthened by Law No. 18 of 2019, recognizing pesantren as part of the national system.
IRE Curriculum Model	General, normative, and focused on basic religious character	Integrative approach combining general and religious studies	Distinctive, deep learning through classical texts (<i>kitab kuning</i>) and moral development
Socio-Historical Features	Political compromise and religious community advocacy	Represents the nationalization of Islamic education institutions	Preservation of Islamic traditions and formal state recognition
In Merdeka Curriculum	IRE is included as a core subject and within the Pancasila Student Profile (P5)	Greater flexibility to incorporate local Islamic wisdom and content	Autonomous curriculum rooted in Islamic values and cultural authenticity

In public schools during the colonial era, a secular education system was implemented, which neglected religious instruction. This sparked resistance from the Muslim community, who felt that the spiritual needs of their children were being overlooked. After Indonesia's independence, pressure from Muslim groups led to Ministerial Decree No. 1 of 1946 and the Joint Ministerial Decree of 1951, formally recognizing Islamic Religious Education (IRE) in public schools. These policies reflected a political compromise between nationalist and Islamic factions. IRE was utilized during the New Order regime for moral development and ideological alignment with state objectives. In the Reform Era, significant transformations occurred by strengthening legal foundations and professional

standards, especially with the enactment of Law No. 20 of 2003 and Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007. Since implementing the 2013 Curriculum up to the Merdeka Curriculum, IRE has played a crucial role in shaping students' religious character and national identity through more contextual and transformative approaches aligned with contemporary societal changes.

On the other hand, Madrasahs originated from the Muslim community's initiative to integrate religious and secular education as an alternative to the colonial secular model. After independence, formal recognition of madrasahs began with the 1975 Joint Ministerial Decree, which integrated them into the national education system. Madrasahs were required to adopt the general curriculum while focusing substantially on Islamic education. Laws such as No. 2 of 1989, No. 20 of 2003, and Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 further reinforced the position of madrasahs as formal educational institutions with Islamic identity. Under the Merdeka Curriculum, madrasahs continue to have the flexibility to develop IRE content in a more comprehensive and context-sensitive manner that responds to students' educational needs.

From a socio-historical perspective, pesantren represent Indonesia's oldest form of Islamic education, predating the colonial period. They served as centers of religious instruction, da'wah, and strongholds of cultural resistance against colonialism. Pesantren curricula have traditionally been autonomous, focusing on in-depth religious study through classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*) and moral character development. Pesantren remained outside the formal education system during the New Order without full state recognition. It was not until the Reform Era, particularly through Law No. 20 of 2003, Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007, and especially Law No. 18 of 2019 on Pesantren, that they were formally acknowledged as part of the national education system. As a result, the pesantren-based IRE curriculum gained legitimacy and equivalency through educational units such as Pendidikan Diniyah Formal (PDF), *muadalah*, and *Ma'had Aly*. Although pesantren do not directly adopt the Merdeka Curriculum, they reinforce Islamic values rooted in tradition, spirituality, and unique religious character.

"Islamic Religious Education" (IRE) was officially adopted in Indonesia's national education system in 1951. This was marked by issuing the Joint Ministerial Decree, which involved the Ministers of Education, Religion, and Internal Affairs. The decree established that religious education would be included in the curriculum of public schools, particularly at the elementary and secondary levels. This decision was a significant milestone in Indonesia's educational history, as it was the first time

religious education, which had previously been taught outside the formal government school system during the colonial era, received formal recognition under the state's framework.

Before 1951, Islamic education in Indonesia was still administered through traditional institutions such as *pesantren*, *madrasah*, and *surau*, which were not integrated into the colonial school system. The Muslim community's struggle to formally recognize their religious education within the national education system was part of the broader sociological dynamics of post-independence Indonesia. The people sought to ensure their spiritual values were acknowledged as part of national development, including education. In this context, the emergence of the term *Islamic Religious Education* (PAI) reflected a paradigm shift from religious instruction being merely doctrinal teachings to becoming a formal educational system acknowledged by the state.

Prominent figures such as Mahmud Yunus pioneered Islamic Religious Education textbooks and advocated for religious education to be included in public schools. Meanwhile, Zakiyah Daradjat played a key role in broadening the approach to Islamic Religious Education by incorporating educational psychology. This ensured that PAI emphasized the memorization of doctrines and the holistic development of students' personalities. As educational policies evolved, especially following the enactment of the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, the term PAI became more established and was reinforced as a compulsory subject at all levels of formal education in Indonesia.

Conclusion

From the research findings and analysis presented above, the following conclusions can be made:

Social conditions have significantly influenced the development of the Islamic Religious Education (IRE) curriculum. Before independence, Islamic education flourished in *pesantren* and *madrasahs* as a response to colonial discrimination. After independence, the government began incorporating Islamic education into the national curriculum to strengthen national identity, leading to the introduction of curricula in 1947, 1952, and 1964. During the New Order, modernization efforts led to policies mandating religious education in schools and elevating the status of *madrasahs*, reflected in 1968, 1975, 1984, and 1994 curricula. Post-Reform curricula became more flexible, adapting to contemporary needs. Yet,

Islamic education remained a core element in shaping student character and morals, continuing through the 2004, 2006, and 2013 curricula and the Merdeka curriculum.

Significant policies, such as the 1989 National Education System Law, which recognized madrasahs as part of the national education system, and the SKB Tiga Menteri, which reinforced the role of religious education in public schools, have had a lasting impact on IRE curriculum transformation. Additionally, laws like the 2003 National Education System Law and the 2007 Government Regulation No. 55 further solidified the position of Islamic education in Indonesia's education system. The IRE curriculum's evolution reflects political changes and the need to address social, cultural, and global challenges. Despite these transformations, Islamic education remains a key tool in shaping character, morals, and national identity, aligned with Indonesian values and culture.

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