

Integration of islamic education in the independent curriculum to build student character in the society 5.0 era

Moh. Taufiq^{a.1,*}, Nur Chasanati Indriyaswai R^{b.2}

^{a,b} Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya, Indonesia

¹moh.taufiq@alfithrah.ac.id ²indriramandhita1701@gmail.com

*Correspondent Author

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) into the Merdeka Curriculum to shape student character in the Society 5.0 era. Using a qualitative approach at SDN Sidotopo I/48 Surabaya, data was collected through interviews, observation, and documentation. Based on the theories of character education, constructivism, and the integration of Islamic values, the results show that PAI is integrated not only through formal learning, but also through habituation, Pancasila student profile strengthening projects, and a religious school culture. This integration fosters religious, honest, disciplined, and responsible character, although it is still hampered by limited teacher understanding and a lack of contextual learning media. This study recommends ongoing teacher training, strengthening Islamic school culture, collaboration with parents, and the development of Islamic value-based digital media as an adaptive PAI integration model for elementary schools.

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Introduction

Era Society 5.0 presents new challenges for human civilization by integrating advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), internet of things (IoT), big data, and robotics in various aspects of life. Amidst this technological acceleration, society is required not only to adapt but also to uphold humanitarian, moral, and ethical values as the primary foundation of communal life. Education is a strategic sector that plays a crucial role in balancing technological mastery with character development for the younger generation, enabling them to live meaningfully in the digital age (Fitrotunnisa, 2025).

In the Indonesian context, the government responded to these changes by implementing the Independent Curriculum, a policy that emphasizes school flexibility in determining learning strategies. This curriculum is oriented towards project-based learning to enhance students' core competencies, such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication, while emphasizing character development that is adaptive to global challenges (Wulandari et al., 2023). However, the Independent Curriculum emphasizes not only academic achievement but also character development in students with integrity and noble morals.

Within this framework, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) holds a strategic position. PAI not only teaches the cognitive aspects of faith and worship, but also plays a more significant role in developing strong morals and ethics as a bulwark against the rapid tide of globalization. The integration of PAI into the Independent Curriculum is expected to produce students who are not only intellectually intelligent but also possess spiritual strength and noble character.

This aligns with efforts to create a generation with religious, honest, disciplined, and responsible character amidst the rapid pace of modernization (Hidayat & Lestari, 2024).

However, previous studies tended to focus more on character education within the Independent Curriculum in general or emphasize the profile of Pancasila students without specifically examining the integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) values at the elementary school level. Most existing studies are still conceptual, such as Fitrotunnisa's (2025) study on the urgency of Islamic Religious Education in the Society 5.0 era, or discuss the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum at a macro level without considering its integrative practices in elementary schools. Thus, there is a research gap regarding how Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is truly integrated within the Independent Curriculum into everyday learning practices, particularly in elementary schools with diverse socioeconomic contexts (Susanto & Fitriani, 2024).

Based on these gaps, this study aims to empirically examine the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) integration within the Independent Curriculum at SDN Sidotopo I/48 Surabaya. This research focuses on strategies, implementation methods, and challenges faced in building student character in the Society 5.0 era. Furthermore, this research is expected to provide new contributions in the form of practical recommendations for other elementary schools in developing an adaptive, contextual, and relevant PAI integration model to meet current demands.

Understanding Islamic Religious Education.

Etymologically, the word *education* comes from the word *educate* which means to maintain, foster, train, or nurture. According to Ahmad Tafsir, education in the Islamic perspective refers to the word *education* which comes from the word *rabb*, which means to educate, preserve, improve, organize, and develop. Said *rabb* is also one of the names of Allah SWT, which means God Who is the Sustainer of all His creations. Therefore, the word *education* contains a deep meaning, namely educating humans to develop according to their nature and the guidance of Allah SWT (Ahmad Tafsir, 2007). While the word *Islamic religion* refers to the teachings revealed by Allah SWT through Prophet Muhammad SAW as the last prophet and messenger. Islam in the sense of language means *regards* or peace, total surrender to Allah SWT. Therefore, etymologically, Islamic Religious Education can be interpreted as a process of surrendering oneself to guidance, direction, and development in order to achieve inner and outer peace under the auspices of Islamic teachings.

Meanwhile, in terms of terminology, Islamic education experts have various explanations regarding the meaning of Islamic Religious Education (PAI). According to Abuddin Nata, Islamic Religious Education is a conscious, planned, and systematic effort to prepare students to understand, internalize, and practice Islamic teachings through guidance, teaching, training, and habituation (Abuddin Nata, 2011). This definition emphasizes that PAI is not only the transfer of religious knowledge (Islamic knowledge), but also the formation of attitudes (attitude) and behavior (behavior) based on Islamic values. Another opinion is put forward by Zakiah Daradjat who defines Islamic Religious Education as an effort to foster the personality of students so that it is in line with Islamic teachings and can be realized in their daily lives (Zakiah Daradjat, 2000). This shows that the main goal of PAI is the formation of individuals who have strong faith, noble morals, and are able to become *rahmatan lil 'alamin*.

Similarly, Hasan Langgulung emphasized that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is a process of instilling the values of monotheism in all dimensions of human life, both individual and social. This means that PAI does not only emphasize the ritual aspects of worship, but also encompasses morals, social interactions, economics, culture, and other aspects (Hasan Langgulung, 1986).

In Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 1 Paragraph (2) states that education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential. Furthermore, Article 37 Paragraph (1) explains that the primary and secondary education curriculum must include religious education. The explanation of this Law shows that religious

education, including Islamic Religious Education, is an integral part of the national education system in Indonesia (*Undang-Undang Nomor 20 Tahun 2003 Tentang Sistem Pendidikan Nasional, Pasal 1 dan Pasal 37*, t.t.).

The Goals of Islamic Religious Education

The goals of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) are inseparable from the general goals of Islamic education, namely to shape people who are faithful, pious, and have noble morals. Al-Ghazali stated that education aims to bring people closer to God and achieve happiness in this world and the hereafter (Al-Ghazali, 2005). This is in line with the opinion of Muhammad Athiyah al-Abrasyi, who emphasized that Islamic education aims to shape a perfect personality, cultivate natural potential, and prepare students to become useful members of society (Muhammad Athiyah al-Abrasyi, 1970).

1. The Urgency of Islamic Religious Education in the Modern Era

The rapid development of technology and globalization poses unique challenges for Islamic education. The Society 5.0 era, which emphasizes the integration of technology into human life, has both positive and negative impacts. On the one hand, technology facilitates access to knowledge, but on the other, it can pose a threat to the morals and ethics of the younger generation. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a strategic role in ensuring that the younger generation adheres to religious values amidst the rapid flow of modernization (Nana Syaodih Sukmadinata, 2005).

For example, Sururin (2021) in her research demonstrated that strengthening character education through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) in elementary schools proved effective in fostering discipline, responsibility, and tolerance among students (Wisiyanti, 2024). These research findings emphasize the crucial role of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in guiding students in facing the challenges of the digital era.

2. Islamic Religious Education in Elementary Schools

At the elementary school level, Islamic Religious Education serves as the initial foundation for developing an Islamic personality in children. According to Mulyasa, Islamic Religious Education in elementary schools must be presented in a contextual and enjoyable manner so that students can understand Islamic teachings in a way that is appropriate to their developmental stage (E. Mulyasa, 2015). Islamic Religious Education learning strategies in elementary schools typically emphasize storytelling, role models, familiarization, and hands-on practice. Islamic Religious Education teachers are required to be role models (*uswah hasanah*) for students.

Independent Curriculum: Draft, principles, implementation.

1. Understanding the Independent Curriculum

Terminologically, curriculum means a set of plans and arrangements regarding objectives, content, learning materials, and methods used as guidelines for organizing learning activities (*Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System Article 1 Paragraph (19)*, n.t.). While the term *merdeka* in this context refers to the freedom of learning which means that students are given space to determine the learning path according to their interests and talents, and teachers are given the freedom to innovate in planning learning.

In the Independent Curriculum Implementation Guidelines, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) defines the Independent Curriculum as a curriculum with diverse intracurricular learning, where content is optimized to provide students with sufficient time to deepen concepts and strengthen competencies. Teachers have the flexibility to choose various teaching tools so that learning can be tailored to students' learning needs and interests. (*Independent Curriculum Teacher's Guide*, 2022).

In general, the Independent Curriculum emphasizes three main things:

- a. Project-based learning for soft skills and character development,
- b. Focus on essential material so that learning is more in-depth,
- c. Teacher flexibility in adapting learning to the context and needs of students

2. Background to the Birth of the Merdeka Curriculum

There are several factors underlying the emergence of the Independent Curriculum:

- a. The results of the Minimum Competency Assessment (AKM) and PISA show that Indonesian students' literacy and numeracy competencies are still below the average of other countries in Asia (OECD, 2019).
- b. The disparity in learning quality between regions, which is influenced by various factors ranging from infrastructure, teacher quality, to school management support.
- c. The demands of the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Society 5.0, where creativity, innovation, critical thinking skills, communication, and collaboration are important competencies of the 21st century (Hutamy et al., 2024).
- d. The COVID-19 pandemic, which demands distance learning, flexibility, and rapid adaptation to change.

Thus, the Independent Curriculum was born not merely as an innovation, but as an urgent need to adapt education to the challenges of the digital and global era.

3. Principles of Independent Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is designed based on student-centered pedagogical principles. Some of its key principles are as follows:

a. Student-Centered

The main principle of the Independent Curriculum is student-centered learning. Students are positioned as active subjects of learning, not passive objects. This encourages them to actively explore, ask questions, discover, and construct knowledge through contextual and meaningful learning processes (Putri, 2023).

b. Differentiation of Learning

Teachers are encouraged to implement differentiated learning based on students' learning readiness, interests, and learning profiles. This approach is relevant to addressing the diversity of students in schools (Pitaloka & Arsanti, 2022).

c. Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5)

The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project is one of the hallmarks of the Independent Curriculum. P5 aims to internalize Pancasila values in students through cross-disciplinary project activities. The six dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile (*Dimensions, elements and sub-elements of the Pancasila Student Profile in the Independent Curriculum.pdf*, n.t.) are:

1. Believing, fearing God YME, and having a noble character,
2. Global diversity,
3. Cooperate,
4. Independent,
5. Critical thinking,
6. Creative.

d. Essentiality and Integration

The Merdeka Curriculum content has been simplified to focus on essential material. The material is no longer dense but in-depth, so that learning fosters higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) (Bastian, 2023).

e. Teacher Flexibility

Teachers are given the freedom to choose, modify, and even create teaching materials tailored to the context of their educational unit. Schools can also develop their own Operational Curriculum for Educational Units (KOSP).

4. Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

a. Implementation Stages

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum is being carried out in stages and is optional. Starting in 2022, schools can choose from three options:

1. 2013 Curriculum,
2. Emergency Curriculum,
3. Independent Curriculum.

In Merdeka Belajar Episode 15, the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology explained that schools are not required to immediately switch, but can implement it according to their readiness.

b. Curriculum Structure

The structure of the Independent Curriculum consists of:

1. Intracurricular learning, namely subjects taught according to the set lesson hours.
2. The Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project is allocated 20–30% of annual teaching hours. Projects can be structured across subjects and tailored to local issues. For example, at the elementary school level, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) remains a compulsory subject integrated with character building through P5. Schools are given the freedom to choose project themes such as diversity, sustainable lifestyles, or local wisdom.

c. The Role of Teachers

The role of teachers in the Independent Curriculum is highly strategic. Teachers are no longer merely content providers, but also facilitators, motivators, and inspirators. Teachers are required to design differentiated learning, conduct diagnostic assessments, and utilize various digital learning resources (Irawan et al., 2025).

d. Implementation Challenges

Although the Independent Curriculum has a good concept, its implementation is not without challenges:

1. Readiness of teacher human resources, especially in technological literacy, differentiated learning design, and assessment.
2. Availability of Learning Resources, especially in remote schools.
3. School Management, because KOSP demands collaboration between teachers and principals.
4. Parental Participation, who also need to understand new learning patterns (Cahyanti et al., 2024).

In practice, many schools have successfully innovated, but others remain stuck in conventional learning paradigms. Therefore, the Merdeka Belajar program is also supported by digital platforms such as Merdeka Mengajar to assist teachers.

5. Contribution of the Independent Curriculum to Islamic Education

In the context of Islamic Religious Education, the Independent Curriculum provides opportunities to strengthen religious learning contextually. Religious values are not only taught cognitively but also integrated through P5. For example, in the "Faith and Noble Morals" dimension, students are guided to practice religious values in their daily lives. Character-building projects such as environmental stewardship, charity, and mutual respect between religious communities can be linked to Islamic values (Munawati, 2017).

Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers are required to be innovative in designing learning that integrates religious theory and practice in real-life contexts. This aligns with the goals of PAI, which emphasize the development of faith, piety, and noble character.

Character formation in the context of education.

Etymologically, the word *character* comes from Greek *kharassaei* in which means 'to engrave' or carve. In the context of education, character can be interpreted as the values of virtue embedded in a person, which are reflected in daily thought patterns, attitudes, speech, and actions (Zubaedi, 2015).

Thomas Lickona, one of the leading figures in character education, defines character as "*goodness in action*", namely a combination of moral knowledge (*moral knowing*), moral feelings (*moral feeling*), and moral action (*moral action*) which forms the individual's personality (Lickona, n.d.). In other words, character education must encompass these three domains in order to form a complete person, not just one who 'knows' what is right and wrong, but also one who has the will and habit of doing good.

1. The Purpose of Character Formation

The main objective of character building in education is to create students who are faithful, pious, have noble morals, have strong personalities, and have social responsibility. In Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 3 explains that the objective of national education is to develop the potential of students to become people who are faithful, pious to God Almighty, have noble morals, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens (*Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System Article 3, t.t.*).

Meanwhile, according to Lickona, the goal of character education is to help students understand, feel, and consistently practice virtuous values in their daily lives. This aligns with the concept of *character education* which emphasizes the process of internalizing values through role models, habituation, enforcement of discipline, and a conducive school culture (Lickona, n.d.).

2. Principles of Character Building

In practice, character building in schools must be based on several basic principles so that its implementation does not simply become a slogan. Based on various character education literature, the following are the principles of effective character building:

- a. Based on Noble Values and Socio-Cultural Context
Character values must be rooted in the nation's noble culture, such as religiosity, mutual cooperation, tolerance, honesty, responsibility, discipline, and independence. However, these values must also be adaptive to the dynamics of the times (Zubaid, 2015).
- b. Holistic and Integrated
Character building is not only the responsibility of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers, but is integrated into all subjects, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, and school culture.
- c. Exemplary behavior
Teachers as educators must be real role models (*uswah hasanah*) for students. Without role models, character education will only be an empty theory (Abuddin Nata, 2011).
- d. Consistency and Sustainability
The process of character formation cannot be instantaneous, but rather requires consistent practice from an early age. This is in line with the concept *habit formation*. Aristotle stated that character is formed through repeated good habits.

3. Character Building Strategies in Schools

In the context of formal education, character building can be implemented through several strategies, including:

- a. Intracurricular Learning
Each subject must integrate character values into its learning process. For example, math teachers instill the value of honesty when working on problems, and social studies teachers instill the value of tolerance when discussing cultural diversity (Nana Syaodih Sukmadinata, 2005).
- b. Co-curricular and Extracurricular Activities
OSIS activities, scouts, religious activities, social services, and sports are strategic vehicles for instilling the values of responsibility, cooperation, social concern, and sportsmanship (E. Mulyasa, 2015).
- c. School Culture
Building a positive school culture, such as a culture of greeting, smiling, saying hello, being honest, clean, and disciplined, will create an environment that supports character building.
- d. *Project Strengthening the Profile of Pancasila Students*
In the Independent Curriculum, character building is actualized through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Through P5, students are trained to think

critically, creatively, independently, and collaboratively, as well as to possess faith and noble morals (*Independent Curriculum Teacher's Guide*, 2022).

4. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Some factors that support character formation in schools include:

a. The Role of Teachers and Role Models

Teachers with good character will be role models.

b. Parental Involvement

Synergy between schools and families is very important so that the character values instilled in schools can be strengthened at home.

c. Positive School Culture

A conducive, orderly, and religious school environment will strengthen the process of internalizing values.

On the other hand, obstacles that often arise are:

a. Lack of Role Model

There still is individual educators who have not become role models.

b. The Value Gap between Schools and Families

The value that implanted at school it can be contradictory if at home students get different examples.

c. Pressures of Globalization and Social Media

Technological advances and openness of information can influence student behavior if not accompanied by good digital literacy (Baehr, n.d.).

5. Character Building in the Era of Society 5.0

The Society 5.0 era brings new challenges to student character development. Technology and digitalization have expanded access to information, but they also open up opportunities for misuse. According to Baehr, digital literacy must be part of modern character education to ensure students are wise in using social media and the internet (Baehr, n.d.).

Furthermore, in this era, adaptive character traits such as creativity, collaboration, leadership, and empathy are becoming increasingly important. Therefore, schools need to design project-based, collaborative learning that fosters growth mindset on students (Sappaile dkk., 2024).

Society 5.0 challenges for religious education.

The fourth industrial revolution (Industry 4.0) has massively changed the face of the world by integrating information and communication technology into all aspects of life. Japan is a pioneer of the concept. *Society 5.0* introduces a new paradigm that emphasizes the role of human-centered intelligent technologies (AI, IoT, big data, and robotics). This concept emerged in response to the global challenges of the era of massive digitalization, while simultaneously upholding humanitarian values so that technology continues to provide maximum benefits for humanity. In this context, education has also undergone significant shifts, including Islamic religious education, which faces unique and complex challenges.

1. Major Challenges for Islamic Religious Education

a. Moral Decadence in the Digital Age

One of the most obvious challenges is the decline in morals and spiritual values due to the flood of unfiltered information. Free access to content inconsistent with Islamic values can damage students' morals. Pornography, violence, hate speech, and even false information (hoaxes) have become a daily part of the young generation's diet (Wijayanti & Abdurrahman, 2025).

Islamic religious education is required to teach not only memorization and Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh) of worship, but also to strengthen the internalization of moral values and moral filters in the use of technology. The digital era brings an unstoppable tsunami of information. Therefore, Islamic education must be able to serve as a bulwark of faith and character (Elsi Fitriani et al., 2024).

b. Learning Paradigm Shift

Society 5.0 brought about drastic changes in the way we learn. Learning now takes place not only in the classroom, but also through various digital platforms: e-learning, educational videos, webinars, and social media content. Islamic religious education, which has historically been predominantly face-to-face, is now required to adapt and integrate digital-based learning (Editorial Team, 2025).

This is a challenge in itself, considering that many Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia still do not have adequate digital infrastructure.

c. Reducing the Role of Teachers as Sources of Knowledge

In a digital society, students tend to rely on search engines like Google, YouTube, and social media as sources of knowledge. This can marginalize the role of religious teachers if they fail to keep up with technological developments.

In Islam, education is not only about transferring knowledge (naqliyah), but also about being an example (uswah) and a spiritual process that requires the full presence of educators (Olivia et al., 2023).

d. Loss of Scientific Authority

Students are now exposed to a multitude of religious narratives from various sources, including non-authoritative ones. The emergence of impromptu preachers on social media who deliver superficial, provocative, or non-scientific sermons can confuse and influence students' understanding of religion (Amin, 2020).

This is a big challenge for Islamic Education teachers to strengthen students' religious literacy so that they do not easily get lost in the "flood of information".

e. Inequality of Access to Technology

Islamic religious education, which predominantly takes place in madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and other faith-based schools, often faces challenges in accessing technology. The digital divide between urban and rural areas, as well as between large and small institutions, hampers efforts to integrate technology into religious learning. The Digital Divide between Islamic Educational Institutions in Big Cities and Remote Areas - Kompasiana.com, t.t.).

If not addressed, this could widen the gap in the quality of Islamic religious education in Indonesia.

f. The Threat of Dehumanization in Education

The use of AI and robotics in education can lead to a decline in humanistic aspects, such as empathy, spirituality, and social interaction. Islamic religious education, which places a strong emphasis on the spiritual, spiritual, and interpersonal aspects, risks being reduced to mere mastery of religious material or texts without deepening their meaning (Supangat et al., 2024).

2. Strategy Islamic Education's Response to the Challenges of Society 5.0

To address these challenges, Islamic religious education needs to develop a holistic, adaptive, and technology-based approach, without losing the spirit of Islam.

a. Technology Integration in Islamic Education Learning

Islamic Religious Education teachers need to be trained to develop technology-based learning: such as creating digital Islamic preaching content, interactive learning media, and online learning with a spiritual approach.

b. Strengthening Character and Moral Education

Islamic religious education should focus on character development, not just cognitive aspects. Character education based on Islamic values such as honesty, patience, discipline, responsibility, and compassion needs to be emphasized as a filter in dealing with the currents of globalization.

c. Strengthening Islamic Digital Literacy

Students need to be equipped with Islamic digital literacy so they can sort information, avoid negative content, and use technology responsibly.

- d. Revitalizing the Role of Religious Teachers
Islamic Religious Education teachers should not only be teachers of religious content, but also be spiritual guides, moral counselors, and role models in religion and social media.
- e. Collaboration with Halal and Safe Technology
The development of sharia-based educational applications such as digital Al-Quran applications, Islamic educational games, and Islamic social media is very important to answer the needs of the digital generation (Afriadi et al., 2025)

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study type.(case study research)This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of how the integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) within the Independent Curriculum was implemented at SDN Sidotopo I/48 Surabaya and its impact on student character development. According to (Fadli, 2021), a qualitative approach allows researchers to uncover the details of the social context in its entirety, thus providing a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study.

A case study was chosen because this research focuses on a single case unit, namely the practice of Islamic Religious Education integration at SDN Sidotopo I/48, which was studied intensively, in-depth, and in detail. (Suharsimi Arikunto, 2016) explains that case studies allow researchers to examine certain phenomena from various sources to gain a more complete understanding. The research participants were selected using the purposive sampling, namely the selection of subjects based on certain considerations relevant to the research objectives. The criteria used include:

- a. Islamic Education teachers who are directly involved in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (2 people).
- b. Headmaster and the Deputy Head of Curriculum who plays a role in PAI integration policies and strategies (1 person each).
- c. Student upper classes (grades V and VI) who have participated in Independent Curriculum-based learning (30 students each).
- d. Parents of students who actively accompany their children in school activities (15 people).

Thus, the total number of participants in this study was 79. This number was deemed sufficient to gather in-depth data in accordance with the characteristics of qualitative research.

1. Technique Data retrieval

To obtain valid and reliable data, several data collection techniques are used, namely:

- a. In-depth Interview (*In-depth Interview*):
 - 1) This was conducted with Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers to find out how the process of integrating Islamic Religious Education (PAI) into the Independent Curriculum in schools and the challenges faced in its implementation.
 - 2) Interviews were also conducted with the principal and vice principal for curriculum to find out the school's policies and strategies in supporting the implementation of PAI integration.
- b. Participatory Observation
Researchers conducted direct observations of classroom learning processes involving Islamic Religious Education (PAI) integration. Observations were conducted to understand the dynamics of the PAI teaching process within the curriculum and how religious values are taught practically in students' daily lives.
- c. Open Questionnaire
An open questionnaire was given to students to find out their views on Islamic Religious Education (PAI), how they understand the integration of religious values in

- daily life, and its impact on their character formation, especially in the context of the challenges of the Society 5.0 era.
- d. Documentation
Collection of related documents such as CP, TP, ATP, lesson implementation plans (RPP) or PA teaching modules, and school policies related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and programs related to character building.
2. Data analysis techniques
The data obtained was analyzed using a qualitative descriptive method with the following stages:
 - a. Data Reduction
Data obtained from interviews, observations, and questionnaires will be selected, simplified, and focused on important aspects that are relevant to the research focus.
 - b. Data Presentation
After being reduced, the data is presented in narrative descriptions, tables, or diagrams to facilitate researchers in drawing conclusions. This presentation includes an explanation of the implementation of Islamic Religious Education integration, the challenges faced, and its impact on student character development.
 - c. Conclusion Drawing
After the data is analyzed and presented, the researcher draws conclusions supported by the research findings. These conclusions answer the problem formulation that was previously proposed.
 3. Data Validity (Triangulation)
To ensure the credibility of the research, source and method triangulation techniques were used. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information from teachers, principals, curriculum vice-principals, students, and parents. Method triangulation was achieved by combining interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documentation. Furthermore, researchers conducted member checks with participants to confirm the accuracy of the data and created an audit trail, a transparent record of the research process that can be traced by other researchers

Result

To understand the implementation of the integration of Islamic Religious Education in the Independent Curriculum and its impact on the character formation of students at SDn Sidotopo 1/48, researchers conducted in-depth interviews with several key informants, the results of which are as follows:

1. Principal

The principal stated that character education is the soul of the Independent Curriculum, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons play a strategic role in realizing this. He also emphasized the importance of collaboration between PAI teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents in developing students' holistic character.

"PAI isn't just about religious studies, but also about character development. If it doesn't start early, children will lose their way when they encounter the digital world." (*Interview with Mr. Bambang as Principal, February 3, 2025*)

2. Theacher Pai

The Islamic Religious Education teacher explained that in the Independent Curriculum, religious learning is more contextual and oriented towards students' lived experiences. He frequently relates the material to everyday life, including through religious projects and integration into the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) activities.

"We no longer just teach Islamic jurisprudence and faith by rote. Now, children practice directly, for example, the etiquette of entering the mosque, sharing, helping friends, and reflecting." (*Interview with Mrs. Kholifah, February 3, 2025*)

3. Parents

Several parents reported that their children have experienced behavioral changes since the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. They are more empathetic, polite, and willing to help around the house. Parents believe that Islamic Religious Education (PAI) lessons are more beneficial because they relate them directly to everyday life.

"My child is more polite now. Every time he comes home from school, he loves to tell stories about the prophets or the value of honesty. That makes me happy." (*Interview with a father with the initials FH Selakai, student guardian, February 4, 2025*)

4. Students of Grades V and VI

The students showed enthusiasm when invited to talk about religious studies. They said they enjoyed the lessons, which included lots of role-playing, discussions, and extracurricular activities related to moral and religious values.

"I love Ramadan the most when I'm invited to share takjil (breaking fast) and help orphans. It makes me happy because I can share with those in need." (*Interview with students with the initials DSA and U, February 8, 2025*)

Researchers also use various library sources and official documents as secondary data to support findings in the field, including:

1. Curriculum Document

- Islamic Religious Education Learning Outcomes in the Independent Curriculum. This document states that the goal of Islamic Religious Education learning is to foster faith and piety and to develop noble morals relevant to students' lives.
- The 2022 Independent Curriculum Implementation Guide from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology explains the principles of flexible, differentiated, and character-oriented learning.
- Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project Module. In the P5 project, schools have the flexibility to integrate religious values such as mutual cooperation, integrity, and local wisdom.

2. Internal School Documents

- The Operational Curriculum of the Educational Unit (KOSP) of SDN Sidotopo I/48 Surabaya for 2023–2024 includes a strategy for integrating Pancasila and Islamic values in all subjects and school activities.
- Islamic Religious Education Learning Implementation Plan (RPP)/Islamic Religious Education Teaching Module. This module demonstrates how teachers connect Islamic Religious Education learning themes with character building through discussion, case studies, and role-play methods.

These results can be understood in table 1.1 of the impact of PAI integration on character formation below.

1.1 Impact of PAI Integration on Character Formation

NO	Informant	Forms of PAI Integration	Impact on Character
1	Principal and Deputy Head of Curriculum	Collaboration policy between Islamic Education teachers, homeroom teachers, and parents	Character education as the soul of the curriculum; important from an early age to prepare students to face the digital world.

2	Guru PAI	Contextual learning, hands-on practice, P5 projects	Students are more religious, honest, disciplined, and accustomed to reflection.
3	Parent	Home learning support	Children are more polite, empathetic, honest, and like to share stories of the Prophet.
4	Student	Enthusiastic in practice (role play, sharing takjil, social activities)	Enjoy learning, feel happy because you can share and help

Discussion

Integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Character Building in the Era of Society 5.0. Islamic Religious Education (PAI) plays a crucial role in the national education system, particularly in shaping students' character. In the context of Indonesia's diversity and Pancasila as its national ideology, religious values are an integral part of the educational process, serving not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also as an instrument for shaping students' morals and ethics. The integration of PAI into the Independent Curriculum is a crucial strategy in shaping students' character that is adaptive to current developments, particularly in the era of Society 5.0.

The Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) is a new paradigm in Indonesian education that emphasizes freedom of learning, competency strengthening, and the development of Pancasila-based student profiles. This curriculum no longer focuses solely on content mastery but also on character building and developing students' potential in line with current needs. In other words, the Independent Curriculum provides educators with greater opportunity to integrate religious, social, and cultural values into the learning process.

In this context, integrating Islamic Religious Education (PAI) into the Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) not only means including religious instruction within the curriculum structure, but also goes beyond that, establishing Islamic values as the foundation for all aspects of learning. This means that every subject and school activity has the opportunity to instill religious values that align with the principles of character education.

Japan's Society 5.0 era promotes the idea of a society oriented toward technology-based solutions, yet still grounded in humanitarian values. In this society, artificial intelligence and information technology are developing rapidly, but they are required to synergize with social and spiritual values. Therefore, the world of education must be able to prepare a generation that is not only intellectually and technologically savvy, but also spiritually and morally mature.

The integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) into the Independent Curriculum is highly strategic in facing the challenges of Society 5.0. While students are required to possess digital literacy and critical thinking skills, they must also cultivate strong character to avoid identity crises, moral degradation, and social deviance. Religious education serves as both a guide and a regulator to ensure that technological developments do not erode human values.

SDN Sidotopo I/48 Surabaya demonstrates how concrete efforts to integrate Islamic Religious Education (PAI) systematically within the Merdeka Curriculum implementation. This school incorporates religious values as part of its school culture, embedded in daily activities, learning activities, and the Pancasila student profile strengthening project (P5).

In practice, Islamic Religious Education teachers not only teach material from textbooks but also incorporate Islamic values into every learning activity. They encourage

students to actively engage in discussions, reflect on values, and engage in concrete actions that reflect noble morals, such as almsgiving, congregational prayer, and other social activities.

Furthermore, the principal of SDN Sidotopo I/48 plays a crucial role as the primary driver in creating a religious and humanistic school atmosphere. The school's vision and mission are formulated based on character education values, including the strengthening of spiritual values. This is reinforced by school activities such as the recitation of the Asmaul Husana (The Beautiful Names of Allah), Islamic literacy, and commemorations of Islamic holidays, which are designed to be both ceremonial and educational.

Interviews with parents indicate that this integrative approach has a positive impact on changing children's behavior at home. Parents witnessed that their children became more polite, honest, and responsible after participating in the learning process at school. This demonstrates that the integration of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) into the Independent Curriculum is not only effective in theory but also in everyday practice.

Students themselves feel that religious studies are not merely rote learning, but rather a fun and meaningful experience. Through a contextual approach and project-based learning, they learn how to apply Islamic values in real life, including when using social media, playing with friends, and interacting with adults.

From an academic perspective, this integration also encourages teachers to be more creative and innovative in developing teaching modules that are tailored to student characteristics and current needs. They are trained to design assessments that measure not only cognitive aspects but also affective and psychomotor aspects, particularly in assessing the success of student character development.

Furthermore, the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) integration within the Independent Curriculum at SDN Sidotopo I/48 is also supported by school policies that are responsive to current developments. For example, the school has established a digital parenting team to educate parents and students on the wise use of technology. This program aligns with the objectives of the Independent Curriculum and the spirit of Society 5.0.

However, there are several challenges that require attention. First, not all teachers have an adequate understanding of the philosophy and strategies of the Independent Curriculum, particularly in the context of religious education. Second, there is still a limited availability of learning media and resources to support optimal Islamic Religious Education (PAI) integration. Third, ongoing training is needed to enable teachers to develop integrated teaching modules and assessments.

Nevertheless, the initial steps taken by SDN Sidotopo I/48 deserve to be appreciated as a model of good practice in developing the integration of religious values and character in a more holistic and relevant education system.

The integration of Islamic Religious Education into the Independent Curriculum is not merely an administrative change or an addition to the curriculum, but rather a paradigm shift in education toward the formation of holistic individuals who possess spiritual, emotional, and social intelligence, in addition to intellectual intelligence. This is crucial to addressing the challenges of the Society 5.0 era, which demands that humans become not only users of technology but also directors and guardians of humanitarian values

Conclusion

This research has provided a comprehensive overview of the importance of integrating Islamic Religious Education (PAI) values into the national education system, which is being transformed through the Independent Curriculum. The Independent Curriculum is a response to the increasingly complex needs of the times, demanding flexible, contextual learning that emphasizes strengthening student character. In this context, PAI values are highly relevant as a foundation for student character development.

Research findings indicate that SDN Sidotopo I/48 Surabaya has implemented Islamic Religious Education (PAI) integration into its teaching and school life comprehensively. The school not only delivers religious material in the classroom but also brings Islamic values to life through daily activities, habituation, and projects that strengthen the Pancasila student

profile. The principal and teachers are strongly committed to creating a religious school culture that supports students with noble character.

The approach used by Islamic Religious Education teachers focuses not only on cognitive aspects but also on affective and psychomotor aspects. Students are encouraged to internalize Islamic values in real life, both inside and outside the school environment. Interviews with parents and students indicate that the integration of Islamic Religious Education values has a positive impact on children's behavior and character.

Furthermore, this integration also encourages teachers to be more creative and innovative in designing learning. The Independent Curriculum allows teachers to adapt learning modules to suit student characteristics. This makes the learning process more meaningful and contextual, in line with the spirit of Society 5.0, which emphasizes a balance between technological advancement and humanitarian values.

However, this study also identified several challenges that require attention. These include teachers' limited understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum philosophy, the lack of contextual Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning media, and the need for policy support from the education office. This indicates that the process of integrating PAI into the Merdeka Curriculum still requires strengthening in various aspects, including human resources, facilities, and other support systems.

In other words, the integration of Islamic Religious Education into the Independent Curriculum is not a one-time process, but rather a continuous one that requires synergy between various parties: teachers, principals, parents, and the government. This transformation aims to create students who are not only intellectually and technologically savvy but also possess noble morals and are resilient in facing the challenges of the times.

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