Implications of the Independent Curriculum Expansion Policy on the Islamic Boarding School Education Model

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the implications of the Merdeka Curriculum expansion policy on the Islamic boarding school education model at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang. This policy fosters a spirit of flexibility, differentiation, and character building, offering opportunities for Islamic values-based education to flourish, while also presenting structural and cultural adaptation challenges for Islamic boarding schools. This study employed a qualitative-descriptive approach, with data collection techniques including participant observation, in-depth interviews with school administrators, teachers, and students, and internal policy documentation studies. The results indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic boarding schools has led to positive transformations in more contextual and project-based learning, and the integration of Islamic boarding school values into the Pancasila Student Profile. However, significant challenges remain, such as the need for teacher training, the development of teaching materials appropriate to the characteristics of Islamic boarding schools, and adjustments to curriculum management to maintain alignment with the vision of Islamic education. This study recommends synergy between policymakers and Islamic boarding school institutions so that curriculum expansion becomes more than just an administrative policy, but a genuine space for the growth of a relevant, character-based, and contributing model of Islamic boarding school education for the nation's future.

Keywords: Independent Curriculum, Islamic Boarding School Education, Policy Implementation, SMA An-Nur II, Curriculum Transformation

Introduction

The curriculum is the core of education and serves as the primary guideline for the teaching and learning process. Due to its dynamic nature, the curriculum is constantly changing to adapt to changing times. In Indonesia, curriculum changes are often associated with changes in ministers, leading to the perception that these changes are more politically motivated

(Santika et al., 2022). The curriculum in educational institutions serves not only as a learning guide but also plays a role in adapting material to student needs, integrating lessons, differentiating approaches based on ability, and assisting in the preparation, selection, and evaluation of learning processes (Zainuri et al., 2023).

In recent years, the transformation of Indonesia's national education system has undergone a paradigmatic shift. Muhammad Iqbal and his colleagues found that the Indonesian education curriculum has undergone several significant changes since independence. Since 1947, Indonesia has implemented ten curriculum changes: 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, and the current 2013 Curriculum. The 2004 Curriculum, known as the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK), is open and oriented toward educational reform (Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021). In general, curriculum changes in Indonesia are characterized by two main factors. First, a shift in design from a highly centralized system, also known as the administrative model, to a more decentralized approach. Second, a shift in the focus of learning from a teacher-centered model to a student-centered model, emphasizing student involvement in the learning process (Iqbal & Hayati, 2023).

Starting in 2020, Indonesia implemented the Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka). Previously known as the prototype curriculum, the Independent Curriculum was designed to support learning recovery with a more flexible approach. This curriculum focuses on essential material and strengthens students' character and competencies (Setiyorini & Setiawan, 2023). This curriculum not only emphasizes freedom of learning, learning differentiation, and strengthening the Pancasila student profile, but also allows educational institutions to make contextual adaptations according to local values, culture, and student needs (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022).

The transformation of national education policy under President Joko Widodo, particularly through the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Nadiem Anwar Makarim, was marked by the birth of the Independent Curriculum in response to the learning crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Said & Aqodiah, 2024). This curriculum offers a more flexible, participatory approach, oriented toward strengthening the character and competencies of students in the 21st century. Unlike the previous curriculum, which was rigid and content-dense (Damanik et al., 2025), the Independent Curriculum prioritizes the principle of differentiation in learning, which provides room for teachers to adapt methods and materials based on students' needs, interests, and potential. This approach is reinforced by a project-based learning strategy, which emphasizes not only academic achievement but also the development of the Pancasila Student profile, encompassing six main dimensions: faith and devotion to God Almighty, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity (Sitorus, 2025).

The Independent Curriculum represents a progressive education policy that grants greater autonomy to educational units in designing operational curricula based on local contexts and student characteristics (Tasya, 2025). The role of teachers has shifted to that of learning facilitators, requiring strengthened pedagogical capacity and instructional leadership. Government support is realized through the Independent Teaching Platform, a medium for continuous professional development. Although it offers a humanistic educational paradigm

that is adaptive to global challenges, its implementation still faces obstacles, such as gaps in human resource quality, limited digital infrastructure, and low managerial capacity in schools in underdeveloped regions. Nevertheless, the Independent Curriculum remains a national strategy for establishing a transformative, globally competitive education ecosystem, yet rooted in national values.

Entering the era of President Prabowo Subianto's administration, the national education policy demonstrates continuity and strengthens the foundations laid previously through the Independent Curriculum. Under the leadership of Minister of Education Abdul Mu'ti, an academic and moderate Islamic education figure, the Independent Curriculum was not only maintained but also further developed, emphasizing a pedagogical approach oriented toward deep learning (Fitriani & Santiani, 2025). In this context, deep learning does not merely refer to artificial intelligence or digital technology, but rather to a profound learning process, namely an educational process that enables students to develop essential, transformative, and applicable understanding of knowledge and life values (Suwandi et al., 2024).

Abdul Mu'ti positions education as the foundation for developing a holistic character and intellect. In this context, the Independent Curriculum is directed at providing meaningful, reflective, and contextual learning experiences through a deep learning approach. This strategy is reflected in the strengthening of higher-order thinking skills, project-based learning, and the integration of local spiritual, social, and cultural values. The role of teachers is also redefined as learning coaches who guide students' metacognitive processes (Nurazizah et al., 2025).

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology is also promoting digital transformation that supports an immersive learning ecosystem. Digital platforms serve not only as sources of information but also as a means of strengthening students' cognitive and affective engagement. Learning evaluation is shifting from mere numerical assessments to authentic assessments that capture thinking processes and contextual problem-solving skills (Sucipta et al., 2023).

The implementation of the deep learning-based Independent Curriculum in the Prabowo-Mu'ti era reflects a commitment to responding to digital disruption and the crisis of meaning in education. Education is no longer merely a tool for economic development, but rather a vehicle for civilization that upholds humanitarian values, social justice, and ecological sustainability (Saputra, 2025). This orientation strengthens the relevance of national education to the dynamics of the times and the needs of the nation.

Based on the objectives of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the independent learning curriculum provides an overview, namely that it provides flexibility for teachers and students in the learning process. Its main focus is on deepening concepts, strengthening competencies, and tailoring learning to students' interests and needs. Through a project to strengthen the Pancasila student profile, this curriculum encourages character development without being tied to specific subject matter. Its three main characteristics are: simplified material, project-based learning across subjects, and flexibility in designing the curriculum according to the school context (A. Fauzi, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum also provides opportunities for students to learn independently. The concept of

Merdeka Belajar aligns with the perspective of progressivism, which emphasizes the importance of experience and self-development in the learning process. In this approach, students are encouraged to learn actively, creatively, and independently, according to their interests and needs. Merdeka Belajar provides space for students to become key actors in the learning process, not simply recipients of information (M. A. Fauzi & Akhyak, 2023).

The implementation of learning activities at each institution is based on Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021, Article 36, paragraph 3, which states that the curriculum structure includes the organization of competencies, content, and learning load. The Merdeka Curriculum is structured based on this principle, which is divided into intracurricular and cocurricular activities. Both are determined by the government, while extracurricular activities can be developed by schools as needed (Wahyudin et al., 2024).

In the dynamics of 21st-century education, the Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) emerges as a progressive response to the needs of students living in an increasingly complex digital ecosystem. In its latest implementation phase, the Independent Curriculum has been refined by integrating digital literacy and coding skills into the learning process across all levels. This initiative represents a paradigm shift in education from merely mastering content to developing computational thinking, problem-solving, and technology-based innovation (Halim, 2025).

Coding, within the context of the Independent Curriculum, is not positioned as a standalone, elitist subject limited to superior students, but rather as a universal skill that is instilled gradually and contextually, from elementary to secondary levels (Putri et al., 2025). This aligns with the spirit of "Freedom to Learn," which gives educational units the freedom to adapt their learning approaches based on local potential, resource availability, and student needs. Students are no longer merely technology users, but are encouraged to become creators and critical thinkers capable of designing simple digital solutions to challenges in their environment.

The application of coding is facilitated through cross-subject projects, such as creating educational animations in Indonesian language lessons, creating ecosystem simulations in science, or building simple financial calculation applications in mathematics. Teachers are involved in ongoing training and supported by digital platforms such as the Merdeka Mengajar Platform, which provides self-study modules and references for best practices. The government is also collaborating with various parties, including the technology industry, to strengthen the digital curriculum and expand access to devices and internet networks, especially in 3T (frontier, outermost, and disadvantaged) regions (Dalimunthe et al., 2025).

The integration of coding into the Merdeka Curriculum represents a concrete form of future education that is not only oriented towards academic achievement but also develops resilient, adaptive, and innovative learners. Through coding, students are trained to understand logic, appreciate processes, work collaboratively, and solve problems creatively. This is part of the national education sector's broader effort to cultivate a digital generation imbued with Pancasila character, one that is not only technologically savvy but also upholds ethical values, social collaboration, and global usefulness.

Implications of the Independent Curriculum Expansion Policy on the Islamic Boarding School Education Model: A Study at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang

One strategic policy of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology is the expansion of the Independent Curriculum to various levels of education, including religious-based educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools (Wafi et al., 2023). As stipulated in Minister of Home Affairs Regulation Number 3 of 1979 concerning Islamic Boarding School Assistance, Saifuddin (2016) categorizes Islamic boarding schools into four types. Type A is a traditional Islamic boarding school that still uses traditional teaching methods; type B adopts a classical or madrasah system; type C only provides dormitories while students pursue education outside the Islamic boarding school; and type D is a combination of the Islamic boarding school and madrasah education systems. The DDI Mangkoso Islamic Boarding School is categorized as type D because it combines both systems in its educational process (Ramadhan & Rizki, 2023).

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic boarding schools presents challenges, as Islamic boarding schools have distinctive characteristics such as the integration of general and religious education, moral development, and the strengthening of Islamic values. This raises an important question: how can Islamic boarding schools adapt to the new curriculum without losing their identity and core values. SMA An-Nur II Bululawang, as a pesantren-based secondary education institution, sits at the intersection of modernizing the national curriculum and preserving traditional Islamic boarding school values. This strategic position makes it interesting to study in the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum expansion policy, particularly in terms of how the policy is negotiated and integrated with the distinctive Islamic boarding school educational model, including curricula, spiritual values, learning strategies, and holistic institutional management. Islamic boarding schools adapt to the times through curriculum updates and opening up access to education (A.R., 2018).

In the ever-evolving tide of change in national education, modern Islamic boarding schools like SMA An-Nur II face a crucial challenge: maintaining their deeply rooted Islamic identity while simultaneously responding to the demands of curriculum innovation that emphasizes independent learning, flexibility, and character building. This research is relevant because it aims to explore the extent to which the policy of expanding the Independent Curriculum impacts the design and practice of Islamic boarding school education, and how institutions like SMA An-Nur II respond to this transformation. The lack of studies that specifically address the interaction between national policy and Islamic boarding school educational practices in the contemporary context is a crucial reason for this research. Most previous studies have focused solely on the dichotomy between general and religious curricula, without examining how the two can be harmoniously integrated within a transformative policy framework like the Independent Curriculum.

Literature Review

In order to understand the dynamics of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), previous research provides an important foundation. One relevant study that can be used as a reference is the study entitled

"Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Daarul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School" conducted by Fadia Indri Ramadhani, Rika Meylinda Nasution, and Afrahul Fadhila Daulay. This study used a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to describe in depth the implementation process of the Independent Curriculum at the Daarul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School. The results of the study revealed that the process of implementing the Independent Curriculum in Islamic boarding schools was not without obstacles. A number of challenges emerged, ranging from the readiness of teaching staff, adaptation of the local curriculum, to the integration of traditional Islamic boarding school values with modern educational concepts. Nevertheless, this study also shows the great potential of the Independent Curriculum implementation to encourage improvements in the overall quality of Islamic boarding school education. One key focus is how the Independent Curriculum can serve as a medium to align the noble values of Islamic boarding schools with a more contextual, participatory, and character-based learning approach (Ramadhani et al., 2024).

The implications of this study's findings warrant further analysis in different contexts. This article specifically highlights how the policy of expanding the Independent Curriculum is implemented in Islamic boarding school-based secondary education institutions, such as SMA An-Nur II Bululawang. Unlike the Daarul Qur'an Islamic Boarding School, which focuses on classical texts and memorization, SMA An-Nur II combines the formal education system with Islamic boarding school values. Therefore, this study will broaden the scope of analysis to examine how the Islamic boarding school education model is transforming amidst national policies that encourage curriculum flexibility and independent learning (Ramadhani et al., 2024).

Another relevant study is the work of Robiatul Adawiyah Siregar and Satrio Abdillah, entitled "Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Gunung Raya Islamic Boarding School, North Padang Lawas." In this study, they emphasize that educational development in Indonesia continues to experience positive progress through policy innovations, one of which is the Independent Curriculum. The study aimed to directly examine the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Gunung Raya Islamic Boarding School. Using a qualitative approach, they found that the implementation of this curriculum included the elimination of the National Examination (USBN) and the National Examination (UN), which were replaced by formative and summative assessments, the strengthening of Islamic-based subjects such as Arabic and astronomy, and the integration of science and social studies study groups. Furthermore, typical pesantren activities, such as Tabligh Week, remain part of the educational routine, indicating efforts to harmonize national curriculum policies and traditional pesantren values (Siregar & Abdillah, 2024).

These findings provide an important initial insight into the dynamics of pesantren adaptation to the new curriculum policy. In the context of this research, the study at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang serves as a strategic extension to further explore how the Merdeka Curriculum expansion policy is implemented in Islamic boarding school-based secondary education institutions. Unlike previous research that focused more on the technical implementation aspects in a single Islamic boarding school, this study seeks to explore more deeply the policy's implications for the Islamic boarding school education model as a whole.

Implications of the Independent Curriculum Expansion Policy on the Islamic Boarding School Education Model: A Study at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang

Therefore, this literature review provides a conceptual foundation and initial comparison that enriches the analysis of curriculum adaptation patterns, challenges, and transformation in a modern Islamic boarding school setting.

By using SMA An-Nur II Bululawang as a case study, this research is expected to make a tangible contribution to the development of Islamic boarding school-based Islamic education literature and offer a contextual policy perspective rooted in local values. The primary focus of this research is to answer the following key questions: how is the Merdeka Curriculum policy implemented in Islamic boarding school environments? How is the Islamic boarding school education model transforming to respond to this new curriculum? And what are the challenges and opportunities that arise in this integration process?

The findings of this study are expected to not only enrich academic understanding, but also serve as a reference for policy makers and educational institution managers in designing curriculum integration strategies that are adaptive, relevant, and remain based on the noble values of Islamic boarding schools.

Research Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design (Safrudin et al., 2023), as the primary focus is to deeply understand the dynamics of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum expansion policy in the context of modern Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). This approach allows researchers to holistically explore the meaning, practices, and impacts of the policy within a culturally and ideologically distinct institutional environment. The research location is SMA An-Nur II Bululawang, a pesantren-based high school that has gradually adopted the Merdeka Curriculum. This location was selected purposively because the school represents a hybrid between the national education system and Islamic boarding school values, making it a rich arena for in-depth analysis.

The research subjects included the principal, vice principal for curriculum, general and religious subject teachers, and several students from grades 10 and 11 directly involved in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews to elicit subjects' perspectives and experiences; participant observation to capture the empirical reality of the students' learning practices and lives; and a descriptive ... and documentation of school curriculum materials, teaching modules, boarding programs, and other internal policies. The collected data were analyzed interactively using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Thalib, 2022). Data were analyzed thematically to uncover patterns of school responses, adaptations, and challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Validity was maintained through triangulation, member checking, and peer discussions. Researchers also reflected on their role through field memos. This approach provides an in-depth overview of the adaptive responses of modern Islamic boarding schools to national education policies.

Result and Discussion

The curriculum plays a crucial role in all aspects of education, so its development must be based on a solid foundation. This foundation needs to be understood by all parties, both designers and implementers, to ensure effective curriculum implementation and support the achievement of educational goals (Mubarok et al., 2021). The curriculum plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of education and graduates, thus involving many parties. Changes are often related to political interests and have broad impacts, particularly on schools, society, and the business world (Marzuqi & Ahid, 2023). However, Indonesia has experienced frequent curriculum changes over the years (Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021), as summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Table of curriculum development in Indonesia

No	Curriculum Year	Curriculum Name	Main Characteristics	Focus
1	1947	Rentjana Pelajaran	Not yet called a "curriculum," it focuses on citizen formation	Character education, nationalism
2	1952	Kurikulum 1952	Course materials are more organized and systematic	Adapting lessons to students' lives
3	1964	Kurikulum Pancawardhana	Emphasize five aspects of student development	Moral, intellectual, emotional, skills, and physical
4	1968	Kurikulum 1968	Adjusting to the New Order, religious studies are strengthened	Formation of Pancasila people
5	1975	Kurikulum 1975	Instructional systems approach (ICT: Objectives, Content, Activities)	Teaching efficiency and effectiveness
6	1984	Kurikulum CBSA	Encourage student activeness in the learning process	Active Student Learning Methods (CBSA)
7	1994	Kurikulum 1994	Condensed materials, tight learning time	Equitable education, introduction of local content
8	2004	Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi (KBK)	Focus on competency mastery	Core competencies and learning outcomes
9	2006	Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan	Schools are free to develop their own curriculum	Decentralization and educational autonomy
10	2013	Kurikulum 2013 (K13)	Scientific approach and character building	Integration of attitudes, knowledge, and skills

11	2022–sekarang	Kurikulum Merdeka	More flexible, focusing on meaningful learning and character	Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), differentiated learning

The curriculum must continuously evolve to ensure learning remains relevant and engaging, in line with advances in technology and technology (Yudianto et al., 2022). Since its inception in 2020, the Merdeka Curriculum, initially known as a prototype curriculum (Lestari et al., 2023), has now been used almost universally in all educational institutions in Indonesia. SMA An-Nur II is one of the educational institutions that has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum in its learning process. The use of this curriculum is a response to changing times and the increasingly complex needs of students. With the Merdeka Curriculum, SMA An-Nur II provides teachers and students with the freedom to develop their potential according to their individual interests and talents. Learning is designed to be more contextual, enjoyable, and student-centered, in line with the spirit of independent learning. The implementation of this curriculum also encourages the integration of Islamic values and character building. Educational institutions play a crucial role in shaping character and instilling moral and ethical values in students (Nuari & Ulfa, 2025).

The components of the curriculum are interconnected. It begins with objectives (Graduate Competency Standards), is realized through material (Content Standards), is implemented through the learning process (Process Standards), and is measured through evaluation to assess results and effectiveness (Lestari et al., 2023). This principle of integration serves as the foundation for curriculum development at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang, which is under the auspices of Pondok Pesantren Wisata An-Nur II, a modern Islamic boarding school that also promotes the concept of educational tourism. In practice, SMA An-Nur II has developed a unique integrative strategy by utilizing the concept of religious educational tourism as a transdisciplinary approach. This approach connects the content of the Merdeka Curriculum with the real-life practices of Islamic boarding school life. Islamic boarding school values such as humility, independence, mutual cooperation, and a love of knowledge are instilled through contextual and down-to-earth project-based learning.

At the beginning of the establishment of SMA An-Nur Bululawang which was established on July 15, 1989 on the idea of KH. Badruddin Anwar, wanted to form a further level of formal education after SMP An-Nur, as well as encouragement from the guardians of students so that there is a high school level in the Islamic boarding school environment, so that students do not need to go to school outside the environment of the An-Nur II Islamic boarding school Bululawang. Currently available majors of Science, Social Studies and Language, which are expected to produce superior students in achievement and implementation of religious teachings to create pious and pious students, in accordance with the vision of the institution. The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum currently being implemented by SMA An-Nur serves as the foundation for realizing the institution's mission: 1) fostering the appreciation and practice of Islamic teachings as a foundation for producing students with noble personalities; 2) optimally developing students' academic potential according to their talents and interests through the learning process; 3) effectively providing students with skills

training and guidance as capital for entering the business world; 4) developing students' potential through sports and other curricular activities to foster discipline and foster creativity; 5) optimizing the competency of the school community in providing services to students and the community by involving the community; 6) implementing participatory management by involving the school community and stakeholders based on the concept of School-Based Management.

In the Merdeka Curriculum, learning is designed to provide space for students to develop their full potential, including academics, character, and life skills. To achieve this, the learning process is divided into three main forms: intra-curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular learning. This is also being implemented at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang, which implements the Merdeka curriculum within its Islamic boarding school environment. The following is the development of the Merdeka curriculum structure in the implementation of learning activities at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang:

Table 2. Table of Intra-Curricular, Co-Curricular and Extra-Curricular Activities of An-Nur High School

Aspek	Intra Kurikuler	Ko-Kurikuler (P5)	Ekstra Kurikuler
Fokus	Kompetensi Akademi	Karakter & nilai kehidupan (P5)	Bakat, minat, keterampilan tambahan
Metode	Pembelajaran tatap muka atau daring	Projek lintas disiplin	Kegiatan non-akademik
Pengembangan SMA An-Nur	• Jurusan IPA • Jurusan IPS • Jurusan Bahasa	• Pameran Seni Puncak Semester • Bazar Produk Siswa Pada Puncak Semester	Pagar Nusa, Perisai Diri, Paskibra, Pramuka, PMR, Jurnalisitik, Multimedia, Panahan, Futsal, Sepakbola, Bulu Tangkis, Volli, Basket, Qiroah, Banjari, Kaligrafi, Robotik, Muhadatsah, Englis Club, Robotik

Intracurricular activities at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang are implemented in a structured and planned manner in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. The school has three main departments: Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Languages, each designed to optimally meet the needs and potential of students. In the Natural Sciences department, students are facilitated to explore sciences such as Physics, Chemistry, and Biology through a project-based and experimental approach. The Social Sciences department emphasizes an understanding of social, economic, and historical dynamics through contextual learning methods that foster students' critical and analytical skills. Meanwhile, the Language department provides space for students to develop linguistic skills, whether in Indonesian, English, or other foreign languages, with activities that emphasize literacy, literary appreciation, and communication. All these intracurricular activities refer to the Learning Outcomes (CP) and the Pancasila Student Profile (Jayawardana et al., 2022), and are supported

by formative and summative assessments that promote student-centered learning (Nur Budiono & Hatip, 2023).

The administration of President Prabowo Subianto, along with Minister of Education Abdul Mu'ti, has demonstrated a strong commitment to transforming national education, particularly in responding to developments in digital technology through the integration of coding subjects into the curriculum (Awaluddin & Muhamad Sofian Hadi, 2025). In his statement following a meeting with the President in late November 2024, Abdul Mu'ti emphasized that the head of state strongly supports the development of students' digital competencies, including programming and artificial intelligence, which will be gradually incorporated into the curriculum starting in the 2025/2026 academic year (Kompas.Com, 2025). This commitment was reinforced by the issuance of Minister of National Education Regulation No. 13 of 2025, which affirms the importance of a deep learning approach and active student involvement in technology-based learning (Detik Edu, 2025).

The implementation of this policy has begun to be seen in several educational institutions, including Islamic boarding school-based institutions such as SMA An-Nur II Al-Murtadlo, which is under the auspices of Pondok Pesantren Wisata An-Nur II Bululawang, Malang Regency. This school has developed a flagship program known as Kelas Idaman (Dream Class), an information technology-based class that integrates digital devices into the learning process. Under this program, students are permitted, and even encouraged, to bring their own laptops to support teaching and learning activities, supported by Wi-Fi hotspot facilities within the school environment. Furthermore, a computer laboratory is available to facilitate technology learning and develop students' digital literacy. SMA An-Nur II's infrastructure indicates the institution's readiness to adopt new curriculum policies. Initiatives such as Kelas Idaman represent a concrete example of an integrative effort between the vision of a modern Islamic boarding school, character-based learning, and digital transformation, aligned with the direction of national policy under the Prabowo-Mu'ti leadership. Thus, Islamic boarding schools have the strategic potential to become pioneers in developing a curriculum that adapts to 21st-century needs without abandoning their Islamic values.

Co-curricular activities within the Independent Curriculum are realized through the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which carries the theme of Character and Life Values (Shilviana & Hamami, 2020). This project is designed across disciplines, integrating various subjects to shape the character of students to be holistic and competitive. As a form of actualization, the school holds a Semester Climax Art Exhibition and a Student Product Bazaar. In the art exhibition, students display creative works as expressions of the life values they have learned. Meanwhile, the bazaar provides a platform for students to market the products of their thinking and skills, while simultaneously fostering an entrepreneurial spirit. These two activities not only strengthen character values but also provide space for students to develop holistically through meaningful and contextual learning (Shilviana & Hamami, 2020).

At SMA An-Nur II Bululawang, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not only realized through intracurricular activities, but is also enriched with various extracurricular activities that support the strengthening of character and life values (Pancasila

Student Profile Strengthening Project/P5) (Arifudin, 2022). This school develops various cross-disciplinary projects designed to shape students with integrity, creativity, and the ability to collaborate in real life. A variety of extracurricular options are provided, ranging from self-defense activities such as Pagar Nusa and Perisai Diri, discipline and leadership through Paskibra and Pramuka, to developing empathy through the Youth Red Cross (PMR). Student talents and interests are also facilitated through journalism, multimedia, archery, futsal, soccer, badminton, volleyball, and basketball. In addition, the strengthening of Islamic religious and cultural values is developed through Qiroah, Banjari, Calligraphy, and Muhadatsah activities. Meanwhile, for global and technological aspects, the school provides platforms such as an English Club and robotics. All of these activities are an integral part of SMA An-Nur II's efforts to prepare a young generation who are not only academically intelligent but also excel in character and 21st-century skills.

The learning approach implemented is contextual, collaborative, and reflective. Teachers are no longer positioned merely as providers of material, but as facilitators of values and guides in the learning process that humanizes students (Mustofa & Muadzin, 2021). Blended learning and project-based learning models are utilized to bridge theory and the students' real-life practices. Project-based learning encourages students to be active, collaborative, and critical thinkers through solving real-life problems, thus equipping them to face global challenges (Rineksiane, 2022). In this context, SMA An-Nur II asserts itself not just as a formal educational institution, but as a living institution that educates students through holistic life experiences. Project-based, collaborative, and reflective learning approaches have begun to be applied in various subjects, including religious studies. For example, in Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh), students not only study texts but also design simulations of socio-religious activities involving the Islamic boarding school community. This marks a shift from normative pedagogy to transformative pedagogy, fostering activeness, curiosity, and genuine involvement among students in understanding the lessons.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum also impacts the Islamic values instilled in the Islamic boarding school educational model. Values such as independence, mutual cooperation, integrity, and spirituality, which are part of the Pancasila Student Profile, strongly resonate with the ideal character of students within the Islamic boarding school tradition (Triyono & Mediawati, 2023). However, challenges arise when curriculum flexibility potentially shifts the emphasis on the study of yellow books, the practice of adab (ethics), and the strengthening of oral religious traditions, which have long been the hallmarks of Islamic boarding schools. The Islamic boarding school curriculum is developed to remain unique yet relevant to modern education. Humanistic and technological approaches are used to support the students' potential (Nurkholis & Santosa, 2022).

In terms of graduate output, SMA An-Nur II is beginning to demonstrate a more adaptive profile to the dynamics of the times. Students not only possess a strong foundation in religious knowledge, but also critical thinking skills, public communication, technological literacy, and even an entrepreneurial spirit. The Independent Curriculum, in this context, encourages Islamic boarding schools to produce graduates who are not only spiritually pious but also intellectually and socially resilient. This demonstrates that Islamic boarding schools

are not lagging behind, but are capable of becoming educational pioneers that combine the strengths of tradition with policy advancements. Modernization of Islamic boarding school management is urgently needed to face challenges and capitalize on opportunities in the era of Society 5.0, particularly in terms of technology and governance (Aldeia & Izazy, Nurul Qolbi, 2023).

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang is dynamic, involving adaptations from teachers, students, and management. Teachers enthusiastically innovated after receiving training, despite initial confusion in developing modules, assessments, and project-based learning while maintaining the Islamic boarding school's religious values. Training and monitoring support also strengthened this process. Through training and seminars, Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers gained a sufficient understanding of the Independent Curriculum and assessed its alignment with the madrasah's character. However, the implementation of differentiated learning remains suboptimal (Juliastuti et al., 2024). School management plays a crucial role in maintaining harmony amidst change. The principal and curriculum team actively bridge the vision of the Independent Curriculum with the unique mission of Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). Managing an Islamic educational institution requires professional skills, sincerity, and mental fortitude, with a management approach that integrates expertise and Islamic leadership values (Triyono & Mediawati, 2023).

In practice, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum also faces several obstacles. The main obstacles are teachers' limited conceptual understanding of the new curriculum design, the lack of supporting resources such as digital devices and open learning spaces, and overlapping schedules between the national curriculum and Islamic boarding school programs. The Independent Curriculum provides a more flexible learning environment, but teachers still struggle to adapt, burdened by workloads, limited facilities, and a lack of parental support (Aufa et al., 2024). Furthermore, cultural resistance emerged from some caregivers who feared the Independent Curriculum would reduce the intensity of moral and religious education. However, SMA An-Nur II creatively responded to this challenge with contextual solutions. For example, several P5 themes were adapted to Islamic boarding school traditions, such as "Social Life within the Framework of Islamic Brotherhood" or "Santri as Ambassadors of Independence and Leadership." Learning modules were also developed with an integrative approach, combining national curriculum content with the spirit of Islamic boarding schools.

Conclusion

This research reveals that the policy of expanding the Independent Curriculum has had a significant impact on the Islamic boarding school education model, particularly at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang, a representative of a progressive, modern Islamic boarding school. The implementation of this new curriculum not only impacted the learning structure and pedagogical approach but also reshaped the relationship between national values and the institution's religious identity. In this context, SMA An-Nur II demonstrated strong adaptive capacity in integrating the flexibility of the Independent Curriculum with the characteristics of

Islamic boarding school education, including through a contextual learning approach, the integration of Islamic values in P5, and the strengthening of students' character through programs based on independence and spirituality.

The research findings confirm that the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Islamic boarding schools depends heavily on the readiness of human resources, managerial leadership, and a local curriculum design that can bridge the needs of the state with the traditions of the Islamic boarding school. Barriers such as value resistance, limited understanding of the new curriculum, and the burden of a dual schedule between general and religious programs pose real challenges. However, An-Nur II High School successfully overcame these challenges through local innovation, collaborative teacher forums, and the integration of Islamic boarding school values into teaching modules. Academically, this research provides a theoretical contribution to the discourse on modern Islamic education, demonstrating that the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) is not a threat to the identity of Islamic boarding schools, but rather an opportunity to strengthen their function as transformative educational centers. In this regard, Islamic boarding schools have proven capable of providing a space for dialogue between traditional values and the demands of the times, producing graduates who are not only intellectually superior but also spiritually and socially strong.

Based on the findings, several strategic recommendations are worth considering. First, Islamic boarding school educational institutions need to design an operational curriculum that not only aligns with the principles and structure of the Independent Curriculum but also affirms the distinctive identity of Islamic boarding schools as a forum for developing Islamic character and spirituality. This can be achieved by integrating Islamic values comprehensively into the learning process and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile (P5) strengthening project.

Second, systematic efforts are needed to provide ongoing training for teachers. This training should not only be limited to a technical understanding of the Independent Curriculum, but also address pedagogical dimensions relevant to the culture and philosophy of Islamic boarding schools. Teachers are encouraged to take on the role of innovators and collaborative partners in creating a contextual, transformative, and meaningful learning environment for students. Third, the government, both at the central and regional levels, is expected to provide affirmative space for Islamic boarding schools that implement the Independent Curriculum with a distinctive approach. This support can be realized in the form of adequate funding, policies responsive to local characteristics, and inter-institutional partnerships that reconcile national educational values with Islamic boarding school traditions. Finally, academically, further exploration of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in various types of Islamic boarding schools, both Salafiyah and Khalafiyah, is crucial. Such studies will enrich our understanding of the transformation of Islamic education within the context of national policy, which continues to evolve toward a more autonomous, participatory, and character-based educational model.

Implications of the Independent Curriculum Expansion Policy on the Islamic Boarding School Education Model: A Study at SMA An-Nur II Bululawang

Declaration of conflicting interest

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