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THE EFFECT OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION ON STUDENTS' QUR'ANIC LITERACY SKILLS IN ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION AT SD MUHAMMADIYAH 11 SURABAYA

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Abstract

The implementation of Indonesia's merdeka *curriculum represents a major shift toward learner-centered, differentiated, and holistic education. In Islamic education (PAI), this reform is expected to strengthen pedagogical quality and students' Qur'anic literacy as a foundation for religious character development. However, empirical evidence at the elementary level remains limited. This study examines the effect of merdeka curriculum implementation in PAI on students' Qur'anic literacy skills at SD Muhammadiyah 11 Surabaya. Using a quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental design, the study involved 46 students in grades four to six who had experienced PAI learning under the merdeka curriculum for at least one academic year. The independent variable was merdeka curriculum implementation, measured through curriculum alignment, teacher competence, and formative–authentic assessment practices, while the dependent variable was Qur'anic literacy, encompassing reading accuracy, comprehension, and value internalization. Data were collected through validated assessments, questionnaires, and observations, and analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression. The results show a high level of curriculum implementation (M = 4.15) and high overall Qur'anic literacy (79.3%). Regression analysis indicates a significant positive effect of* merdeka *curriculum implementation on Qur'anic literacy ($R^2 = 0.48$, $p < 0.05$), with curriculum alignment as the strongest predictor. These findings highlight the importance of effective implementation and teacher capacity in strengthening Qur'anic literacy at the elementary level.*

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Qur'anic Literacy, Islamic Education, Elementary School, Curriculum Implementation

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INTRODUCTION

The implementation of Indonesia's merdeka curriculum marks a fundamental transformation in national education policy, emphasizing learner autonomy, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and holistic student development. Within Islamic education (PAI), this curriculum reform is expected not only to modernize pedagogical practices but also to strengthen students' religious literacy as a core foundation of character and moral education. Recent studies indicate that the merdeka curriculum has positively influenced instructional quality, teacher performance, and student-centered learning environments in Islamic education contexts.[1] However, empirical investigations that specifically examine its impact on students' Qur'anic literacy skills particularly at the elementary school level remain limited.

Qur'anic literacy in PAI encompasses multidimensional competencies, including accurate recitation, comprehension of meaning, and the internalization of Qur'anic values in daily life.[2] Prior international and regional scholarship has emphasized the importance of literacy environments, instructional interventions, and curriculum design in shaping students' reading and comprehension abilities.[3] Studies on Qur'an-based literacy further highlight that religious texts function not merely as reading material but as cultural, spiritual, and ethical frameworks that guide learners' identity formation.[4] In the Indonesian context, Qur'anic literacy has also been linked to broader agendas such as religious moderation, moral education, and socio-cultural resilience.[5]

Existing research on the merdeka curriculum in Islamic education has predominantly focused on curriculum readiness, instructional innovation, differentiated instruction, and assessment systems.[6] Other studies have explored *pesantren* curricula and Islamic education models

[1] Asrori Asrori dan Riki Dwi Angga Saputro, "The Relationship Between Differentiated Instruction and Academic Achievement in the Teaching of Islamic Education Under Indonesia's Independent Curriculum," *Al-Mudarris: Journal Of Education* 8, no. 1 (April 2025), https://doi.org/10.32478/5728eq20.

[2] Dewi Fannisa Putri Rohim, Asrori, dan Moch Charis Hidayat, *Model Pembelajaran Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC) untuk Meningkatkan Pemahaman Siswa dalam Membaca dan Menulis Al-Qur'an* (Gresik: CV. Zamron Pressindo, 2024).

[3] Hazel L. W. Chiu, "Twenty-First-Century Second Language Literacy Development in Universities," in *The Idea and Practice of Reading*, ed. R. Joseph Ponniah and Sathyaraj Venkatesan (Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-8572-7_2; Fernando Guzmán-Simón, Javier Gil-Flores, and Alejandra Pacheco-Costa, "Home Literacy Environment and Reading Comprehension in Spanish Primary Education," *Journal of Research in Reading* 43, no. 2 (May 2020), https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9817.12299.

[4] Ibrahima Diallo, "'Every Little Tree Has Its Own Bit of Shade': Qur'an-Based Literacy of the Peul Fuuta Community," *International Journal of Pedagogies and Learning* 7, no. 3 (Desember 2012), https://doi.org/10.5172/ijpl.2012.7.3.227.

[5] Bambang Saiful Ma`arif dkk., "Al-Quran Literacy on Religious Moderation: Critical Communicative Action Research in IRE Learning in the Digital Era," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 3 (Juli 2024), https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i3.3597.

[6] Carolina Lita Permatasari, Kristina Roseven Nababan, dan Rehman Junius, "Developing a Merdeka Curriculum Learning Assessment System to Facilitate Teachers' Performance," *The International Journal of Assessment and Evaluation* 32, no. 2 (Juli 2025), https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7920/CGP/v32i02/193-223; Dian Sa'adillah Maylawati dkk., "Assessing Indonesian Islamic Schools' Readiness for the Independent

from structural and philosophical perspectives, demonstrating how curriculum design influences character formation and religious attitudes.[7] While these studies contribute significantly to understanding curriculum transformation, they tend to emphasize macro-level curriculum structures, teacher competencies, or institutional readiness rather than micro-level student learning outcomes, particularly Qur'anic literacy skills.

Moreover, studies addressing literacy development both general and religious often examine contexts outside the merdeka curriculum framework or focus on non-PAI subjects.[8] Research on Qur'anic literacy within Islamic education has largely employed qualitative or action research approaches, emphasizing instructional strategies without systematically linking curriculum implementation to measurable student outcomes.[9] This reveals a clear research gap: there is limited empirical evidence that explicitly connects the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in PAI with students' Qur'anic literacy skills, especially in elementary Islamic schools.

Addressing this gap is crucial, as elementary education represents a formative stage for developing foundational literacy and religious competencies. SD Muhammadiyah 11 Surabaya provides a relevant case study due to its active implementation of the merdeka curriculum within IRE and its institutional commitment to integrating religious literacy with contemporary pedagogical approaches. Investigating how curriculum principles such as differentiated instruction, authentic assessment, and learner-centered pedagogy affect students' Qur'anic literacy can offer valuable insights for curriculum evaluation and improvement.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the effect of merdeka curriculum implementation on students' Qur'anic literacy skills in Islamic Religious Education at SD Muhammadiyah 11 Surabaya. The novelty of this research lies in its explicit integration of Merdeka Curriculum policy analysis with empirical measurement of Qur'anic literacy outcomes at the elementary level, a dimension that has been largely overlooked in previous studies. By bridging curriculum reform discourse and Qur'anic literacy assessment, this study contributes to the advancement of Islamic

Curriculum Using Text Analytics," *Multidisciplinary Reviews* 8, no. 10 (April 2025), https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2025336.

[7] Asrori Asrori et al., *Kurikulum Pesantren LDII Dalam Membentuk Karakter Muslim Sejati Di Pondok Pesantren Wali Barokah Kediri* (Yogyakarta: Bildung, 2024); Asrori Asrori, "Model Kurikulum Pesantren Lembaga Dakwah Islam Indonesia: Analisis Anatomi Kurikulum Pondok Pesantren Wali Barokah Kediri," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Al-Thariqah* 9, no. 2 (January 2025), https://doi.org/10.25299/althariqah.2024.vol9(2).19773.

[8] James S. Kim dkk., "Improving Reading Comprehension, Science Domain Knowledge, and Reading Engagement Through a First-Grade Content Literacy Intervention.," *Journal of Educational Psychology* 113, no. 1 (Januari 2021), https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000465.

[9] Udin Supriadi, Tedi Supriyadi, dan Aam Abdussalam, "Al-Qur'an Literacy: A Strategy and Learning Steps in Improving Al-Qur'an Reading Skills through Action Research," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 21, no. 1 (Januari 2022), https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.21.1.18.

education scholarship and provides evidence-based recommendations for strengthening religious literacy within the merdeka curriculum framework.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a quantitative research design employing a quasi-experimental approach to examine the effect of the merdeka curriculum implementation on students' Qur'anic literacy skills in Islamic education (PAI) at SD Muhammadiyah 11 Surabaya. A quantitative approach was selected due to its capacity to generate measurable and objective evidence regarding the relationship between curriculum implementation and student learning outcomes, particularly literacy-related competencies, which can be statistically tested and generalized within the research context.[10]

The research population comprised all 46 students in grades four to six who had participated in PAI learning under the merdeka curriculum for at least one academic year. Given the relatively small and accessible population, this study employed total population sampling, allowing all eligible students to be included as research participants. This sampling strategy was intended to ensure comprehensive data representation, reduce sampling bias, and enhance the internal validity of the findings.[11]

Two principal variables were examined in this study. The independent variable was the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in PAI, while the dependent variable was students' Qur'anic literacy skills. The implementation of the merdeka curriculum was operationalized through three indicators. First, curriculum alignment with core merdeka principles, including student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile into instructional practices.[12] Second, teacher competence in planning, implementing, and evaluating PAI learning in accordance with the merdeka curriculum framework.[13] Third, the use of formative and authentic assessment strategies to monitor student progress and support continuous learning improvement.[14]

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[10] John W. Creswell dan J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2018).

[11] Ilker Etikan, "Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling," *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics* 5, no. 1 (2016), https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11.

[12] Dian Sa'adillah Maylawati dkk., "Assessing Indonesian Islamic Schools' Readiness for the Independent Curriculum Using Text Analytics," *Multidisciplinary Reviews* 8, no. 10 (April 2025), https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2025336; Shofiyah Salsabila Siswanto, Asrori Asrori, dan Rusman Rusman, "Internalization of Pancasila Students' Profile Values Through Al-Qur'an Hadith Materials in Tenth Grade at SMKN 8 Surabaya," *ATTARBIYAH: Journal of Islamic Culture and Education* 8, no. 1 (Agustus 2023), https://doi.org/10.18326/attarbiyah.v8i1.47-59.

[13] Yoto dkk., "The Role of Industry to Unlock the Potential of the Merdeka Curriculum for Vocational School," *Cogent Education* 11, no. 1 (Desember 2024), https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2335820.

[14] Carolina Lita Permatasari, Kristina Roseven Nababan, dan Rehman Junius, "Developing a Merdeka Curriculum Learning Assessment System to Facilitate Teachers' Performance," *The International*

Students' Qur'anic literacy skills were conceptualized as a multidimensional construct encompassing reading accuracy, comprehension, and value internalization. Reading accuracy referred to students' ability to recite Qur'anic texts correctly, including proper pronunciation and application of tajwid rules.[15] Comprehension measured students' understanding of the basic meanings and messages of selected Qur'anic verses.[16] Value internalization assessed students' capacity to reflect Qur'anic teachings in moral reasoning and daily behavior. This conceptualization aligns with contemporary literacy theories that view literacy as an integration of cognitive, linguistic, and affective domains.[17]

Data were collected using multiple instruments to enhance validity and methodological rigor. Students' Qur'anic literacy skills were measured through a structured assessment instrument consisting of oral reading tests, written comprehension questions, and scenario-based tasks designed to evaluate value internalization. Prior to data collection, the instrument underwent expert validation by Islamic education specialists and was pilot-tested on a group of students outside the research sample to ensure reliability, clarity, and construct validity. Data on merdeka curriculum implementation were obtained through teacher questionnaires and classroom observation checklists, capturing both perceived and observed instructional practices related to curriculum principles.[18]

Data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize students' Qur'anic literacy performance and the level of merdeka curriculum implementation in PAI classes. Subsequently, multiple regression analysis was

Journal of Assessment and Evaluation 32, no. 2 (Juli 2025), https://doi.org/10.18848/2327-7920/CGP/v32i02/193-223.

[15] Udin Supriadi, Tedi Supriyadi, and Aam Abdussalam, "Al-Qur'an Literacy: A Strategy and Learning Steps in Improving Al-Qur'an Reading Skills through Action Research," *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research* 21, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.21.1.18; Manal Hendawi et al., "The Development of Islamic Education Curriculum from the Quranic Perspective," *Ar-Fahruddin: Journal of Islamic Education* 1, no. 2 (2024), https://doi.org/10.7401/hms52091; Wahyu Firmansyah, Moch Charis Hidayat, and Asrori Asrori, "Utilization of Qiroati Learning Method to Improve the Ability to Read the Quran at TPQ Al Mubarok Surabaya," *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 19, no. 3 (2025), https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v19i3.5007.

[16] B. Saiful Ma'arif et al., "Al-Qur'an Literacy on Religious Moderation: Critical Communicative Action Research in IRE Learning in the Digital Era," *Journal of Ecohumanism* 3, no. 3 (2024), https://doi.org/10.62754/joe.v3i3.3597; Muhammad Iqbal, Asrori Asrori, and Muhammad Fazlurrahman Hadi, "Development Learning to Recognize Hijaiyah Letters in Reading and Writing the Qur'an Based on Application Canva to Improve Learning Motivation," *Al Qalam: Jurnal Ilmiah Keagamaan Dan Kemasyarakatan* 19, no. 3 (2025), https://doi.org/10.35931/aq.v19i3.4425.

[17] R. Malatesha Joshi, "The Componential Model of Reading (CMR): Implications for Assessment and Instruction of Literacy Problems," dalam *Reading Development and Difficulties*, ed. oleh David Kilpatrick, R. Malatesha Joshi, dan Richard K. Wagner (Cham: Springer, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-26550-2_1; H. L. W. Chiu, "Twenty-First-Century Second Language Literacy Development in Universities," dalam *The Idea and Practice of Reading*, ed. oleh R. Ponniah dan S. Venkatesan (Singapore: Springer, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-8572-7_2.

[18] Maylawati dkk., "Assessing Indonesian Islamic Schools' Readiness for the Independent Curriculum Using Text Analytics," April 2025.

employed to examine the extent to which curriculum implementation variables predicted students' Qur'anic literacy outcomes, while controlling for potential confounding factors such as grade level and prior literacy experience. Statistical significance was determined at an alpha level of 0.05, ensuring robust hypothesis testing.[19]

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Formal permission was obtained from school authorities, and informed consent was secured from teachers and parents of participating students. Participant anonymity and data confidentiality were strictly maintained, and all research procedures adhered to established ethical standards for educational research involving minors.

Overall, the application of a quasi-experimental quantitative design with total population sampling enabled this study to provide empirical evidence regarding the effectiveness of the merdeka curriculum in enhancing students' Qur'anic literacy skills. The integration of classroom observations, teacher questionnaires, and structured student assessments allowed for a comprehensive evaluation of curriculum implementation and its direct impact on learning outcomes, thereby offering meaningful implications for instructional practice and curriculum policy in Islamic elementary education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Level of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation in Islamic Education (PAI)

The descriptive findings demonstrate that the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in Islamic education (PAI) at SD Muhammadiyah 11 Surabaya has reached a consistently high level. The overall mean score of 4.15 on a five-point Likert scale indicates that the fundamental principles of the merdeka curriculum have not only been formally adopted but are also substantially operationalized in day-to-day classroom practices. This suggests that the school has moved beyond symbolic compliance toward meaningful pedagogical transformation aligned with national curriculum reform objectives.

A closer examination of the implementation indicators reveals variation in the degree to which specific curriculum components are enacted. Curriculum alignment with merdeka principles encompassing student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile emerged as the strongest dimension, with a mean score of 4.28. Classroom observations confirmed that teachers regularly positioned students as active participants in learning

[19] Kim dkk., "Improving Reading Comprehension, Science Domain Knowledge, and Reading Engagement Through a First-Grade Content Literacy Intervention."

activities, encouraging discussion, collaborative tasks, and reflective engagement with Qur'anic content.

Differentiated instruction was evident through flexible grouping, varied learning tasks, and adjustments to instructional pacing based on students' abilities. Furthermore, the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile was clearly reflected in learning activities that emphasized religious moderation, mutual respect, cooperation, and moral responsibility grounded in Qur'anic values, indicating a strong alignment between national character education goals and Islamic educational objectives.

Teacher competence in planning and implementing PAI learning under the merdeka curriculum framework also showed a high level of achievement, with a mean score of 4.12. Teachers demonstrated adequate mastery of curriculum learning outcomes, instructional sequencing, and pedagogical strategies, as reflected in well-structured lesson plans and coherent instructional delivery. Teachers were able to translate curriculum guidelines into contextualized learning experiences that balanced religious content mastery with the development of critical thinking and moral awareness. This finding suggests that teacher readiness plays a crucial mediating role in the successful implementation of the merdeka curriculum within Islamic education settings.

The utilization of formative and authentic assessment strategies recorded a slightly lower, though still high, mean score of 4.05. Teachers frequently employed formative feedback, oral questioning, and performance-based assessments to monitor students' progress in Qur'anic learning. However, classroom observations and document analysis indicated that systematic documentation and longitudinal tracking of assessment results were not yet fully optimized. This suggests that while assessment practices are pedagogically sound, there remains room for improvement in strengthening assessment management to better support data-driven instructional decision-making.

Table 1. Level of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation in PAI

Indicator of Implementation	Mean Score	Category
Curriculum alignment with merdeka principles	4.28	High
Teacher competence in PAI instruction	4.12	High
Formative and authentic assessment	4.05	High
Overall implementation	4.15	High

Table 1 summarizes the mean scores of each implementation indicator, highlighting that all dimensions fall within the high category. Curriculum alignment with merdeka principles appears as

the most dominant component, reinforcing the central role of learner-centered and differentiated pedagogy in curriculum reform.

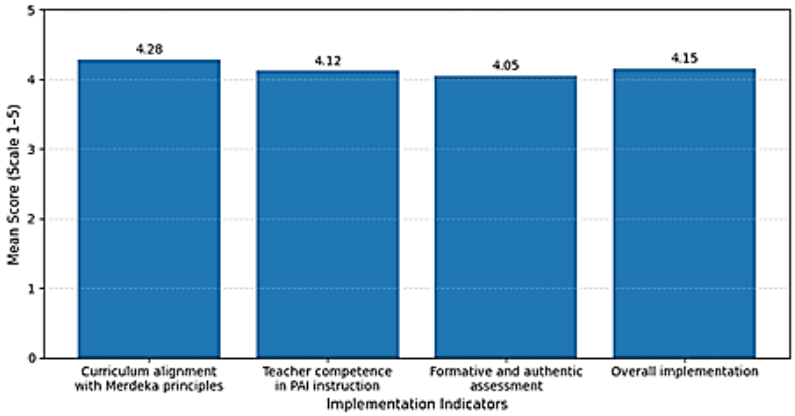

Figure 1. Level of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation in PAI

Figure 1 visually represents the comparative mean scores of the three merdeka curriculum implementation indicators. The bar chart illustrates the mean scores of each implementation indicator on a five-point Likert scale. All indicators demonstrate high levels of implementation, with curriculum alignment to Merdeka principles achieving the highest mean score (M = 4.28). Teacher competence (M = 4.12) and formative-authentic assessment (M = 4.05) also show strong performance, while the overall implementation score (M = 4.15) confirms the effective adoption of the merdeka curriculum in PAI learning.

Students' Qur'anic Literacy Skills

Students' Qur'anic literacy skills were examined descriptively to capture the extent to which learners had achieved key competencies expected within Islamic education (PAI) under the merdeka curriculum. Literacy outcomes were analyzed across three core dimensions reading accuracy, comprehension, and value internalization reflecting the cognitive, linguistic, and affective domains of Qur'anic literacy. The descriptive results indicate that students at SD Muhammadiyah 11 Surabaya generally demonstrated a high level of Qur'anic literacy, with an overall average score of 79.3%.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Qur'anic Literacy Skills

Qur'anic Literacy Dimension	Mean Score (%)	Category
Reading accuracy	85.6	High
Comprehension	78.9	Medium–High
Value internalization	73.5	Medium
Overall average	79.3	High

As shown in table 2, reading accuracy emerged as the strongest dimension, achieving the highest mean score (M = 85.6%). This finding indicates that the majority of students were able to recite Qur'anic verses accurately, demonstrating proper pronunciation (*makhārij al-ḥurūf*) and consistent application of *tajwid* rules. Classroom observations supported this result, revealing that routine recitation activities, teacher modeling, and corrective feedback were systematically integrated into PAI instruction. These practices appear to have contributed to the development of strong foundational decoding and oral reading skills, which are essential components of Qur'anic literacy at the elementary level.

The comprehension dimension recorded a mean score of 78.9%, placing it in the medium–high category. Overall, students demonstrated a satisfactory understanding of the basic meanings and messages of the Qur'anic passages studied. However, assessment results indicated that some students encountered difficulties when required to interpret verses contextually, connect meanings across passages, or articulate broader moral and theological implications. This suggests that while literal comprehension has been adequately developed, higher-order interpretive skills remain uneven. The findings imply a need for more explicit instructional strategies such as guided questioning, contextual discussion, and integrative reflection to strengthen students' deeper engagement with Qur'anic meanings.

The value internalization dimension yielded the lowest mean score (M = 73.5%), categorized as medium. Although students demonstrated an emerging ability to relate Qur'anic teachings to everyday behavior, their performance on scenario-based tasks revealed variability in translating textual understanding into consistent moral reasoning and ethical decision-making. Some students were able to articulate appropriate Qur'an-based responses to moral dilemmas, while others relied on general social norms rather than explicit Qur'anic principles. This pattern suggests that internalization of values requires sustained pedagogical reinforcement and experiential learning opportunities that connect Qur'anic teachings with students' lived experiences.

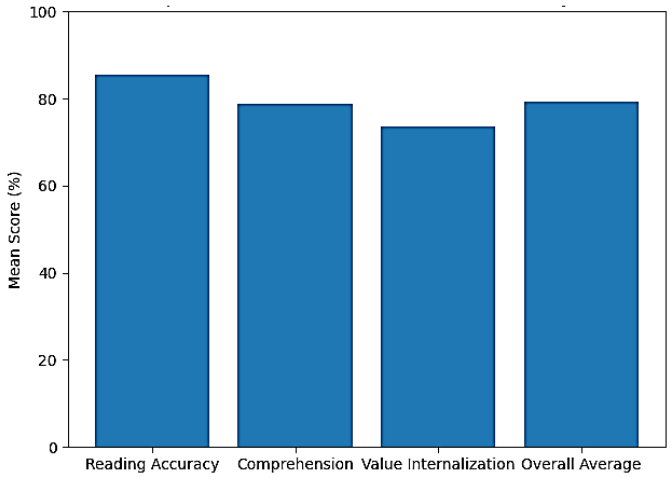

Figure 2. Students' Qur'anic Literacy Skills by Dimension

Figure 2 visually compares students' Qur'anic literacy performance across the three dimensions. The bar chart illustrates students' Qur'anic literacy performance across four dimensions. Reading accuracy achieved the highest mean score (85.6%), followed by overall average literacy (79.3%), comprehension (78.9%), and value internalization (73.5%). Overall, the results indicate a high level of Qur'anic literacy, with comparatively lower achievement in affective-value internalization.

Effect of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation on Students' Qur'anic Literacy Skills

To examine the extent to which the implementation of the merdeka curriculum influences students' Qur'anic literacy skills, a multiple regression analysis was conducted using Qur'anic literacy scores as the dependent variable and three dimensions of curriculum implementation as independent predictors. The analysis reveals that the regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = 0.48$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that approximately 48% of the variance in students' Qur'anic literacy skills could be explained by the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in Islamic education (PAI).

This coefficient of determination suggests a moderate to strong explanatory power, implying that nearly half of students' Qur'anic literacy outcomes are associated with pedagogical and curricular factors rather than being solely determined by individual or background characteristics. Such a result underscores the substantive role of curriculum reform in shaping religious literacy at the elementary level.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Results of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation on Qur'anic Literacy Skills

Predictor Variable	B (Standardized)	Sig. (p-value)	Interpretation
Curriculum alignment with merdeka principles	0.42	< 0.01	Strong Positive Effect
Teacher competence in PAI instruction	0.31	< 0.05	Moderate Positive Effect
Formative and authentic assessment	0.24	< 0.05	Positive Effect
Model summary	$R^2 = 0.48$	< 0.05	Significant Model

As shown in table 3, curriculum alignment with Merdeka principles emerged as the strongest predictor of students' Qur'anic literacy skills ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). This finding indicates that learning practices emphasizing student-centered pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and integration of the Pancasila Student Profile contribute most substantially to students' ability to read, comprehend, and internalize Qur'anic teachings. In classrooms where learners were actively engaged, instructional strategies were adapted to individual needs, and moral reflection was explicitly embedded in learning activities, students demonstrated higher overall Qur'anic literacy outcomes.

Teacher competence in implementing PAI learning under the merdeka curriculum also showed a significant and positive contribution ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$). This result highlights the mediating role of teachers in translating curriculum principles into effective instructional practices. Teachers who demonstrated strong mastery of learning objectives, instructional planning, and classroom management were more successful in facilitating meaningful Qur'anic learning experiences. This reinforces the argument that curriculum reform alone is insufficient without adequate teacher readiness and pedagogical capacity.

The use of formative and authentic assessment exhibited a positive, albeit relatively weaker, effect on Qur'anic literacy skills ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$). While assessment practices such as performance tasks, oral recitation, and reflective feedback supported student learning, their lower beta coefficient suggests that assessment functions more as a supporting mechanism rather than a primary driver of literacy development. Nonetheless, its statistical significance confirms that continuous feedback and authentic evaluation remain essential components of effective Qur'anic literacy instruction.

Importantly, after controlling for grade level and prior Qur'anic literacy experience, the regression model remained statistically significant. This indicates that the observed effects of the merdeka curriculum implementation were not merely attributable to students' developmental

differences or previous exposure to Qur'anic learning, but rather to the quality and consistency of curriculum enactment within the PAI classroom.

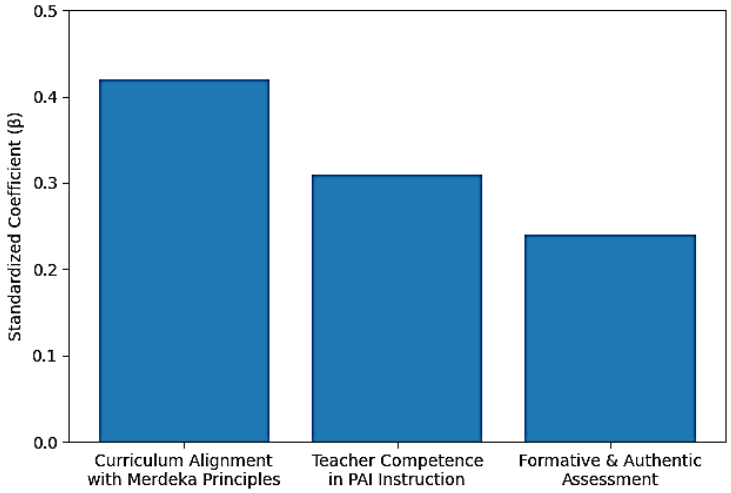

Figure 3. Standardized Effects of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation on Qur'anic Literacy Skills

Figure 3 presents a visual comparison of the standardized beta coefficients for each predictor variable in the regression model. The figure illustrates that curriculum alignment with Merdeka principles has the largest standardized effect, followed by teacher competence and formative–authentic assessment. The descending pattern of the bars reflects the relative strength of each predictor, emphasizing the central role of learner-centered and differentiated pedagogy in enhancing Qur'anic literacy outcomes.

Narratively, the figure reinforces the quantitative findings by demonstrating that instructional design and classroom practice exert a stronger influence on Qur'anic literacy than assessment mechanisms alone. This visual trend supports the argument that the merdeka curriculum's pedagogical orientation rather than its administrative or evaluative components serves as the primary catalyst for improving students' religious literacy.

Overall, the regression results provide robust empirical evidence that the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in PAI at SD Muhammadiyah 11 Surabaya has a significant positive effect on students' Qur'anic literacy skills. While students' reading accuracy appears well established, the findings suggest that curriculum elements emphasizing learner engagement and differentiated instruction are particularly influential in supporting deeper comprehension and value internalization. These results substantiate the claim that curriculum reform grounded in student-centered pedagogy can meaningfully enhance religious literacy outcomes at the elementary level and offer important implications for the continued refinement of PAI instruction under the merdeka curriculum framework.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide empirical evidence that the implementation of Indonesia's merdeka curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) significantly contributes to the enhancement of students' Qur'anic literacy skills at the elementary school level. The statistically significant regression model ($R^2 = 0.48$, $p < 0.05$) indicates that nearly half of the variance in students' Qur'anic literacy outcomes can be attributed to curriculum implementation factors. This result reinforces the argument that curriculum reform, when effectively enacted at the classroom level, plays a substantial role in shaping religious literacy outcomes rather than functioning merely as an administrative or policy-level change.[20]

The strongest predictor of students' Qur'anic literacy skills was curriculum alignment with merdeka principles ($\beta = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$). This finding aligns with previous studies demonstrating that learner-centered pedagogy and differentiated instruction significantly improve academic achievement in Islamic education contexts.[21] The emphasis on student autonomy, active engagement, and contextual learning appears to create a learning environment that supports not only technical reading skills but also deeper comprehension and reflective engagement with Qur'anic texts. In this regard, the merdeka curriculum operationalizes contemporary literacy theories that conceptualize literacy as an integrated cognitive, linguistic, and affective process.[22]

The high performance observed in the reading accuracy dimension ($M = 85.6\%$) suggests that structured recitation practices, teacher modeling, and corrective feedback remain effective foundations for Qur'anic literacy development. This finding corroborates earlier research emphasizing the importance of systematic instruction in pronunciation and *tajwid* for improving Qur'anic reading skills.[23] From a literacy perspective, strong decoding and oral reading fluency are essential prerequisites for comprehension and higher-order meaning-making.[24] The merdeka

[20] Yoto dkk., "The Role of Industry to Unlock the Potential of the Merdeka Curriculum for Vocational School."

[21] Asrori dan Riki Dwi Angga Saputro, "The Relationship Between Differentiated Instruction and Academic Achievement in the Teaching of Islamic Education Under Indonesia's Independent Curriculum"; Febriani Suci Islamiati, Asrori Asrori, dan Mukhammad Bakhruddin, "Evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Education Using Goal-Free Evaluation: An Analysis of Instructional and Non-Instructional Impacts on Students' Development," *Al-Mudarris: Journal Of Education* 8, no. 2 (Januari 2026), https://doi.org/10.32478/epw0cn83.

[22] Joshi, "The Componential Model of Reading (CMR): Implications for Assessment and Instruction of Literacy Problems"; Rıdvan Kahramanoğlu, Derya Altun, dan Dilek B. Kalaycıoğlu, "K12 Skills Framework Holistic Model of Türkiye," *Milli Eğitim*, advance online publication, 2024, https://doi.org/10.37669/milliegitim.1307713.

[23] Supriadi, Supriyadi, and Abdussalam, "Al-Qur'an Literacy: A Strategy and Learning Steps in Improving Al-Qur'an Reading Skills through Action Research"; Kipty Aviatri Marta, Asrori Asrori, and Rusman Rusman, "Open Ended: Inisiatif Model Pembelajaran Tajwid Di Lembaga Pendidikan Islam," *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam Al-Thariqah* 7, no. 1 (2022), https://doi.org/10.25299/al-thariqah.2022.vol7(1).9757.

[24] Kim dkk., "Improving Reading Comprehension, Science Domain Knowledge, and Reading Engagement Through a First-Grade Content Literacy Intervention."

curriculum, by allowing instructional flexibility, enables teachers to reinforce these foundational skills while adapting instructional pacing to students' individual abilities.

However, the comparatively lower scores in comprehension (M = 78.9%) and value internalization (M = 73.5%) indicate that Qur'anic literacy development extends beyond technical proficiency. These findings resonate with international and regional scholarship emphasizing that religious literacy involves interpretive competence and ethical application, not merely textual accuracy.[25] The moderate achievement in comprehension suggests that while students are capable of grasping literal meanings, they face challenges in contextual interpretation and integrative reasoning. This supports prior research showing that comprehension development requires explicit instructional strategies such as guided discussion, contextual analysis, and reflective questioning.[26]

The value internalization dimension, which reflects students' ability to translate Qur'anic teachings into moral reasoning and everyday behavior, demonstrated the weakest performance. This finding is consistent with studies highlighting that affective and ethical dimensions of literacy require sustained experiential learning and reinforcement beyond classroom instruction.[27] Although the merdeka curriculum integrates the Pancasila Student Profile and emphasizes character education, the results suggest that internalization of Qur'anic values is a gradual process that depends on consistent modeling, authentic learning experiences, and school-wide cultural support.[28] In this sense, curriculum reform alone may be insufficient unless accompanied by deliberate strategies that bridge textual understanding and lived religious practice.

Teacher competence emerged as a significant predictor of Qur'anic literacy skills ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$), underscoring the mediating role of teachers in curriculum enactment. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating that curriculum effectiveness is closely linked to teachers' pedagogical, emotional, and spiritual competencies.[29] Teachers who possess a strong understanding of curriculum objectives and the flexibility to adapt instructional strategies are better positioned to facilitate meaningful Qur'anic learning experiences. This supports broader arguments in Islamic

[25] Diallo, "'Every Little Tree Has Its Own Bit of Shade.'"

[26] Guzmán-Simón, Gil-Flores, dan Pacheco-Costa, "Home Literacy Environment and Reading Comprehension in Spanish Primary Education."

[27] Hendawi dkk., "The Development of Islamic Education Curriculum from the Quranic Perspective."

[28] Siswanto, Asrori, dan Rusman, "Internalization of Pancasila Students' Profile Values Through Al-Qur'an Hadith Materials in Tenth Grade at SMKN 8 Surabaya."

[29] Dawamul Khikam et al., "Implementation of Teachers' Emotional, Moral, and Spiritual Competencies Through the Guru Penggerak Program," *Thawalib: Jurnal Kependidikan Islam* 6, no. 2 (October 2025), https://doi.org/10.54150/thawalib.v6i2.546; Maylawati et al., "Assessing Indonesian Islamic Schools' Readiness for the Independent Curriculum Using Text Analytics," April 2025.

education scholarship that curriculum reform must be accompanied by continuous professional development to ensure pedagogical coherence and instructional quality.[30]

The positive but comparatively weaker effect of formative and authentic assessment ($\beta = 0.24$, $p < 0.05$) suggests that assessment functions primarily as a supporting mechanism rather than a primary driver of Qur'anic literacy development. This finding is consistent with studies indicating that formative assessment enhances learning by providing feedback and scaffolding but relies heavily on instructional quality for its effectiveness.[31] In the context of Qur'anic literacy, authentic assessment practices such as oral recitation, performance tasks, and reflective responses appear to support students' progress when integrated systematically into instruction. However, the findings indicate a need for improved documentation and longitudinal use of assessment data to inform instructional decision-making more effectively.

Importantly, the persistence of the regression model's significance after controlling for grade level and prior Qur'anic literacy experience suggests that the observed effects are not merely developmental or incidental. Rather, they reflect the substantive influence of curriculum implementation quality on student outcomes. This supports the broader curriculum theory perspective that emphasizes the enacted curriculum what actually occurs in classrooms as the primary determinant of learning outcomes.[32]

Overall, this study extends existing literature by empirically linking merdeka curriculum implementation with measurable Qur'anic literacy outcomes at the elementary level an area that has been largely overlooked in prior research. While previous studies have focused on curriculum readiness, institutional structures, or pesantren-based models, this research demonstrates that learner-centered pedagogy and differentiated instruction within the merdeka curriculum framework can meaningfully enhance students' religious literacy.[33] The findings suggest that strengthening Qur'anic comprehension and value internalization should be a priority in future curriculum refinement, supported by targeted teacher development and integrative instructional strategies.

In sum, the discussion affirms that the merdeka curriculum, when implemented with strong pedagogical alignment and teacher competence, has the potential to advance Qur'anic literacy beyond technical proficiency toward deeper understanding and ethical internalization. These results contribute to Islamic education scholarship by bridging curriculum reform discourse with empirical

[30] Khozin Khozin, Abdul Haris, dan Asrori Asrori, "Pengembangan Integrasi Kurikulum," *TADARUS* 10, no. 1 (Mei 2021), https://doi.org/10.30651/td.v10i1.9090.

[31] Permatasari, Nababan, dan Junius, "Developing a Merdeka Curriculum Learning Assessment System to Facilitate Teachers' Performance," Juli 2025.

[32] Yoto dkk., "The Role of Industry to Unlock the Potential of the Merdeka Curriculum for Vocational School."

[33] Asrori dkk., *Kurikulum Pesantren LDII dalam Membentuk Karakter Muslim Sejati di Pondok Pesantren Wali Barokah Kediri*.

literacy assessment and offer evidence-based implications for improving PAI instruction in elementary Islamic schools.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in Islamic education (PAI) has a significant effect on strengthening Qur'anic literacy among elementary school students. The findings demonstrate that the quality of curriculum implementation particularly the alignment of classroom practices with the core principles of the merdeka curriculum, such as learner-centered pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and the integration of the Pancasila student profile constitutes the most decisive factor in enhancing students' ability to read, comprehend, and internalize Qur'anic values. In this regard, the merdeka curriculum functions not merely as a policy framework, but as an effective pedagogical instrument that shapes students' religious competencies at the micro level of classroom practice.

Substantively, the results indicate that students' Qur'anic literacy is relatively strong in terms of technical reading accuracy, yet remains in need of further development in the domains of deeper comprehension and value internalization. This finding underscores that Qur'anic literacy is a multidimensional construct that cannot be reduced to correct recitation alone, but rather requires the integration of cognitive understanding, affective engagement, and moral praxis. The merdeka curriculum, with its pedagogical flexibility, has been shown to support a more holistic development of Qur'anic literacy when implemented consistently and reflectively.

From a theoretical perspective, this study reinforces the view that the effectiveness of curriculum reform is largely determined by the enacted curriculum what is actually implemented in classrooms rather than by normative curriculum design alone. Within the context of Islamic education, these findings extend curriculum studies by providing empirical evidence that national curriculum reform can directly contribute to measurable religious literacy outcomes. Consequently, this research bridges merdeka curriculum policy discourse with Qur'anic literacy scholarship, which has previously been dominated by conceptual or qualitative approaches.

Practically, this study recommends strengthening PAI teachers' professional capacity through continuous professional development focused on contextual, reflective, and value-based instructional strategies. In addition, formative and authentic assessment practices should be managed more systematically so that they function not only as evaluative tools, but also as a foundation for long-term pedagogical decision-making. Schools are also encouraged to integrate Qur'anic learning with school culture and students' everyday experiences in order to reinforce the internalization of Qur'anic values.

For future research, broader studies involving multiple schools and educational levels are recommended, as well as the use of longitudinal or mixed-methods designs to capture the dynamic and gradual process of Qur'anic value internalization more comprehensively. Such efforts will contribute to the continued refinement of Qur'anic literacy development within the merdeka curriculum framework as an integral component of improving the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia.

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