



The Concept of *Merdeka* Curriculum Implementation: Realizing Humanistic Islamic Education Learning

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Abstract

The *Merdeka* curriculum, an innovative approach in the world of education, has become the main focus in efforts to realize more humanistic Islamic religious education learning. This research aims to determine the concept of implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in the context of Islamic religious education learning and to determine the character and implications of the *Merdeka* curriculum in humanistic Islamic religious education learning for students. The research method used in this research is library research. Library research is a type of research where the data or material needed for research is obtained from sources in the library, such as books, encyclopedias, dictionaries, journals, magazines, and so on. The results of the research show that the concept of implementing an *Merdeka* curriculum for humanistic Islamic religious education learning includes: human values, empathy, student-centered concern. The characteristics of humanistic Islamic religious education learning in the *Merdeka* curriculum include: individual orientation, social interaction, active learning, character development, flexibility in learning, and holistic evaluation. Meanwhile, the implications of *Merdeka* curriculum learning in humanistic Islamic religious education learning include: more interesting learning, stronger character development, critical and creative thinking skills, healthy social interaction, development of problem solving abilities, respect for diversity, independence in learning and relevance religion in everyday life. Based on the description above, it can be concluded that the concept of an *Merdeka* curriculum, students' understanding of the teachings of Islam is deepened with an emphasis on human values, empathy and social care. In addition, students will conduct humanistic learning to develop better character, including the ability to empathize and deeper social understanding so that the realization of students who are ethical and care about society.

Keyword: *Humanistic, Merdeka Curriculum Implementation, Islamic Religious Education*

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INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars in the development of a nation (Nurfatimah, 2022). In Indonesia, education plays a key role in shaping the character, morals, and knowledge of the younger generation (Hidayat, 2022). In an effort to improve the quality of education and respond to the times, the Indonesian government introduced the "*Merdeka Belajar Curriculum*" as the latest educational initiative. The curriculum has a very important role in education, because the curriculum is the core roadmap that guides the learning process (Hazimah, 2021). The curriculum determines what should be taught, how it should be taught, and

what students are expected to accomplish in the end of their education. It is a central instrument in achieving educational goals and directing student development.

The independent learning curriculum is a step forward that aims to give more freedom to schools and teachers in designing curricula according to local needs and contexts (Hamzah, 2022). It also gives students more autonomy in pursuing their personal interests and talents. The goal of this curriculum is to give students more involvement in the learning process and give them the freedom to pursue their personal interests and talents (Jamaludin, 2023). This creates a fun learning experience that emphasizes skills and character.

Islamic religious education (PAI) is an integral part of the education system in Indonesia, with the aim to shape the character and morals of students and provide a strong understanding of Islamic religious values (Firmansyah, 2019). As the majority religion in Indonesia, Islamic religious education has a crucial role in shaping individual and community identity (Allès & Tho Seeth, 2021). In an effort to continue to improve the quality of Islamic religious education learning. However, in recent years, Islamic religious education (PAI) in Indonesia has faced a series of pressing problems for improvement, which makes the adoption of an *Merdeka* curriculum with a humanistic learning approach a crucial step. One of the main problems that arises is the PAI curriculum which may no longer be relevant and less able to handle changing times. Traditional curricula often focus too much on conveying religious theory, without relating it to the context of everyday life. This has an impact on passive and theoretical understandings of religion, which may be difficult to apply in real life (Green & Albert, 2018). Contemporary issues such as religious pluralism, human rights, and ethical challenges are also often not sufficiently integrated in traditional PAI curricula (Anwar, 2016).

The *Merdeka* Curriculum was introduced as a solution to overcome various challenges faced in education, including in the context of religious education. This curriculum is designed with more flexible and student-oriented principles, giving teachers more freedom in designing learning that suits the needs and development of students (Hamzah, 2022). In the context of Islamic religious education, the *Merdeka* Curriculum offers great potential to realize a more humanistic education. The humanistic approach in education considers students as unique individuals, emphasizing active involvement, character development, and providing context in learning. Through an *Merdeka* curriculum, this approach allows the integration of religious values in real-life contexts, allowing students to relate religious theory to real action in society. This creates a deeper and contextual understanding of religion, helping students to understand how religious values can be applied in a variety of everyday situations. In addition, the humanistic approach encourages the development of students' character which includes affective aspects, such as empathy and tolerance, as well as psychomotor aspects, such as social skills and providing solutions to complex ethical issues.

Therefore, this research is important in order to deepen and expand understanding related to the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in the context of Islamic religious education that carries a humanistic approach. The successful implementation of this curriculum can have a significant positive impact on Islamic religious education and student character. With a focus on humanistic approaches, this research will provide deeper insights into how humanistic principles can be integrated in Islamic religious education learning to achieve more well-rounded goals. This will help understand the challenges and opportunities that may arise in the implementation process and provide valuable guidance for PAI teachers and policy makers in education decision making.

In addition, this research will also help maintain the relevance of Islamic religious education in an ever-changing era, so that education can remain a strong pillar in the formation of character and morals of Indonesian students. In other words, this research plays an important role in supporting the improvement of Islamic religious education that is more adaptive, relevant, and humanistic in Indonesia.

The merging of the *Merdeka* Curriculum with a humanistic learning approach in learning Islamic religious education will bring significant changes in Islamic religious education in Indonesia. This will help create a generation that is better prepared to deal with changing times, has a deeper and contextual understanding of religion, and is able to deal with increasingly complex ethical and moral issues. Further research and a strong commitment in implementing this approach are essential in ensuring sustainable change in the Islamic religious education system, making religious education a strong pillar in the formation of students' character and morals, and maintaining its relevance in a changing society. Thus, this step will contribute positively to the improvement of Islamic religious education in Indonesia and create a generation that is more skilled, critical thinking, and able to play a role in realizing a more harmonious society.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research uses qualitative methods with the type of library research. This method involves collecting data through works relevant to the theme discussed in the study. Because this research is in the form of a literature study, the data collection adopted is through various books, articles, journals, magazines by comparing them with one another. The data is then analyzed using content analysis, which is contextually interpreted as directed content analysis. The procedures of this research are topic selection, information exploration, determining research focus, collecting data sources, reading data sources, making research notes, processing research notes, preparing reports. The aim is to provide a thorough understanding of the content under study, focusing on key or essential meanings consistent with the question, purpose, and conceptual framework of the study. (Umar Sidiq, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic Religious Education Learning Concept in the *Merdeka* Curriculum

The independent learning curriculum is a curriculum known as independent learning that aims to change education in such a way that the knowledge and creativity of each student is utilized to produce superior human resources (Cahaya, 2022). The self-paced learning curriculum provides students with the opportunity to maximize the knowledge they need without limiting learning activities inside or outside the classroom. Learning design that provides opportunities for students to learn freely is what is meant by an independent learning curriculum. The idea of self-study sets learning goals based on the circumstances that students have to face. As a result, teachers who teach in each class will create unique learning objectives for each learning session. Because the application of this independent learning curriculum can increase and decrease learning according to the context of students contained in the classroom (Anggaraini, 2019).

As for learning, it comes from the word "learn" which is prefixed with the prefix "pe" and the suffix "an" to become "learning", which means increasing knowledge and the process of acquiring facts or skills that are mastered and used based on needs (Fatimah & Kartikasari, 2018). Learning in English is called learning, which means learning. Learning is the process of student interaction with educators and learning resources in a learning environment (Suardi, 2012). The learning process is an interaction between educators and students, as well as reciprocal educational communication to achieve learning goals (Ratnasari, 2019). Learning can also be understood as a process of organizing so that students can learn well. The learning process in question essentially lasts throughout life, anywhere and at any time.

Al-Ghazali explained that learning is a process of transferring knowledge carried out by educators to students. Regarding learning, Al-Ghazali considers children to be a gift or trust from Allah SWT. Learning aims to get closer to Allah SWT. Al-Ghazali said, the real result of knowledge is getting closer to Allah SWT. According to Al-Ghazali, the time spent studying is a lifetime. Al-Ghazali's description is in accordance with Reber and Wilke's opinion, learning is a change in the ability to react as a result of reinforced training. Meanwhile, Al-Zurnuji explained that learning to value worship will lead a person to achieve success in this world and the hereafter, so it must be intentional to seek the approval of Allah SWT or worship Allah SWT. The meaning is learning as a manifestation of gratitude to Allah SWT (Nasution, 2017).

Based on the description above, we can conclude that learning is a systematic process of transferring knowledge from teachers to students, starting from planning, implementation, assessment to evaluation. The knowledge transfer process involves the active participation of educators and students so that they can maximize their potential. Every learning process is aimed at bringing about positive changes (cognitive, emotional, psychomotor) in students.

Meanwhile, what is meant by Islamic religious education is the conscious effort of educators to prepare students to believe, understand and practice Islamic teachings through predetermined teaching, instruction or training activities to achieve predetermined goals. Zakiyah Darajat believes that Islamic religious education is an effort to develop and nurture students so that they always understand all Islamic teachings. Then aim for that goal and finally be able to practice and make Islam a guide to life (Jaelani, 2022).

Islamic religious education is an effort to educate the Islamic religion or Islamic teachings and their values, to realize the way of life (views and attitudes of life) of students. Islamic religious education is also a conscious effort to obey the provisions of Allah SWT. as a guide and basis for students to obtain religious information and be reliable in applying the principles of Allah SWT's regulations (Mariani, 2022). Muhammad Athiyah Al-Abrasyi explained that Islamic education prepares humans to live a perfect and

happy life, love their homeland, be physically healthy, have perfect morals, orderly thinking, be emotionally sensitive, be competent at work, be gentle in words, be kind. oral and written (Hadi, 2018).

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that Islamic religious education is an activity carried out deliberately, to prepare students to believe, understand and practice Islamic teachings through teaching, teaching or training activities.

Humanistic PAI Learning Characteristics in the *Merdeka* Curriculum

In general, the definition of humanistic learning theory includes physical and mental activities that maximize development. Meanwhile, learning is strictly defined as an effort to master the treasures of knowledge within the framework of a series of activities that form a comprehensive personality. Physical growth does not promote behavioral development. Change or development only occurs through the learning process such as changes in habits or customs, differences in knowledge capacity, attitudes and skills (Armedyatama, 2021). Humanistic learning focuses on the fact that basic learning is an effort to build communication and relationships between individuals and between individuals and groups. Education is not just about providing knowledge and training language skills to students, but is also a form of support for students to be able to realize themselves in relation to educational goals (Maula, 2021).

In essence, it can be concluded that successful education is the ability to convey meaning between educators and students so that they can achieve their goal of becoming superior and wise human beings. The goal is to show students that they need character education. Educators help students discover, develop, and apply the skills they have so they can reach their full potential.

The characteristic of humanistic Islamic religious education (PAI) learning within the framework of the *Merdeka* curriculum is a learning approach that emphasizes students' personal development and human values in the context of Islam. This approach views each student as a unique individual and seeks to understand their needs, interests, and development. Social interaction in the classroom is highly regarded, with teachers encouraging collaboration, discussion, and understanding sharing among students.

The characteristics of humanistic Islamic religious education (PAI) learning in the framework of an *Merdeka* curriculum include: first, Orientation to the Individual. Humanistic learning of Islamic religious education pays more attention to the individual needs of the students: (Akmal, 2018). Teachers try to understand the uniqueness and differences of each student, and develop approaches that are appropriate to the developmental level, interests and abilities of each student. In the first stage, the humanistic approach emphasizes the importance of teachers understanding each student as a unique individual. Teachers seek to get to know their students on a deeper level, understanding each student's cultural background, interests, abilities and personal experiences. This creates a strong foundation for understanding students' needs and preferences (Hardi, 2022). In the second stage, teachers use their knowledge of each student to design appropriate learning. They can choose methods, teaching materials and approaches that best suit students' abilities and interests. For example, if students are more visual, teachers can use visual media in learning. If students have a special interest in Islamic history, teachers can integrate historical elements in Islamic education learning. The third stage, this approach also recognizes the different levels of student development.

PAI teachers who apply the humanistic approach understand that students are at different stages of development (Nasution, 2020). Therefore, they design learning according to students' cognitive and emotional development levels. This helps students feel comfortable and supportive in the learning process. Thus, the humanistic approach in Islamic education learning helps teachers to create an environment that supports differences and allows each student to feel valued and cared for. With a better understanding of students' individual needs, teachers can create more relevant and effective learning experiences, which ultimately enhance students' understanding of Islam and personal development.

Second, social interaction. Social interaction in the context of humanistic Islamic religious education (PAI) learning in the *Merdeka* Curriculum is one of the main components in learning that is oriented towards personal development and a deeper understanding of Islam. In learning Islamic religious education, healthy social interactions allow students to share experiences, views, and understanding of Islam (Nasution, 2020). Collaboration between students enriches the learning process by allowing them to work together in the exploration of religious teachings and solving complex problems. It can also increase students' sense of engagement with the learning material, as they feel they have an active role in the learning process.

In addition, discussions held in a humanist Islamic education learning environment encourage students to think critically, ask questions and formulate personal views on Islamic topics. This not only

deepens students' understanding but also broadens their horizons. Healthy social interactions enable students to listen to and appreciate the views of others, which is an essential skill in a diverse society.

The importance of healthy social interaction in humanistic Islamic education learning also concerns the development of students' social skills. They learn to communicate effectively, work in teams, and understand cultural differences and views. Such social skills are not only useful in the context of education, but also in daily life and interaction in society.

Third, active learning. Humanistic Islamic religious education learning encourages students to be actively involved in the learning process, become critical thinkers, and create a deeper understanding of Islamic teachings. Students are given an active role in learning. They are invited to ask questions, participate in discussions, and engage in activities that encourage a deeper understanding of Islam. In this environment, the teacher acts as a learning facilitator who guides students in the process of critical thinking and exploration (Maula, 2021).

Active learning also allows students to relate Islamic teachings to everyday life situations. They are given the opportunity to apply religious concepts in real contexts, thus helping them to feel the relevance of the teachings in their lives. It also helps students to understand how Islam can be a guide in facing the challenges and situations of everyday life. In addition, active learning in humanistic PAI creates a more thorough and memorable learning experience. Students not only receive information, but also create their own understanding through exploration, discussion and practice. This allows them to better internalize the teachings of Islam.

Fourth, character development. The humanistic-based *Merdeka* curriculum in learning Islamic religious education (PAI) aims to build student character holistically. In this approach, character does not only refer to moral and ethical aspects, but also includes the development of students' personal and social qualities. Teachers in this curriculum seek to help students understand and apply human values contained in Islamic teachings, such as empathy, tolerance, justice and kindness. Humanistic Islamic education learning provides opportunities for learners to reflect on these values and how to apply them in everyday life.

In addition, this approach also creates an environment that supports healthy social interaction, collaboration and a deeper understanding of Islam. The goal is not just to convey knowledge, but also to shape the character of learners so that they can become individuals who are empathetic, civilized, and contribute positively to society. Thus, the humanistic-based *Merdeka* Curriculum in PAI learning aims to create a generation that is not only academically intelligent, but also has a strong character and is based on high human values.

Fifth, flexibility in learning. Humanistic Islamic Education (PAI) learning in the *Merdeka* Curriculum Framework offers significant flexibility in designing learning. This flexibility includes various aspects that allow for a learning approach that is more suited to the individual needs of students. In the first stage, in learning Islamic education with a humanistic approach, teachers are allowed to adjust teaching methods according to students' characteristics. This means that teachers can choose a variety of learning strategies, including group discussions, collaborative projects, concept exploration, interactive lectures, or other methods, according to students' developmental levels and interests. (Perni, 2018). This flexibility allows students to experience a variety of learning approaches that make learning more interesting and relevant.

In the second stage, teachers can customize teaching materials according to students' needs. In the context of learning Islamic religious education, this includes selecting texts or materials that are relevant to the understanding of Islam. In addition, teachers can integrate additional resources such as videos, audio recordings or other digital resources that support learning. This flexibility allows teachers to structure learning materials to suit the characteristics of their class and students. In the third stage, in a humanistic approach to Islamic education, student assessment can be adjusted to reflect their understanding and progress more holistically. Assessment can take various forms, such as project work, presentations, portfolios or written exams (Salamah, 2018). Flexibility in assessment allows students to demonstrate their understanding from different points of view, according to their individual strengths and preferences.

In the fourth stage, teachers can customize learning approaches according to students' social and emotional development. They can create an environment that supports healthy social interaction, collaboration and self-reflection. This flexibility helps students feel comfortable and supported in the learning process, which is very important in Islamic religious education that considers aspects of individual diversity and social care. Therefore, humanistic Islamic learning in the *Merdeka* Curriculum Framework provides flexibility that allows learning approaches to better suit students' needs and characteristics. This

creates a learning environment that is inclusive, relevant and supports holistic student development. This flexibility also reflects the spirit of the *Merdeka* Curriculum which emphasizes independence and freedom in learning.

Sixth, holistic evaluation. Holistic evaluation in humanistic Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning within the framework of an *Merdeka* curriculum reflects a more holistic approach in assessing learner development. This evaluation covers various aspects to understand students' personal, social and academic development. It includes cognitive assessments, such as understanding of Islamic religious concepts, ethics and values, which can be measured through written tests or research assignments. But holistic evaluation also includes the assessment of students' attitudes and behaviors towards human values and the religion of Islam, by looking at social interactions, tolerance, justice and caring.

In addition, the assessment involves students' social skills, such as the ability to communicate, work in teams, and resolve conflicts in a constructive way. Students' portfolios can be used as a platform to reflect on their progress, including reflection notes, collaborative projects, or other creative outputs that demonstrate achievements in various aspects (Naulandani, 2020). Finally, students' self-evaluation provides an opportunity for them to reflect on their personal development and understanding of Islamic teachings. With this holistic approach, evaluation not only checks academic understanding but also helps to create a more comprehensive picture of learners' individual development in the context of humanist Islamic education learning that reflects the spirit of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Implications of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Humanistic PAI Learning for Students

The implications of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning that are humanistic in nature to students are very significant and involve various aspects of learning, personal development, and their readiness to face a diverse and changing world (Maula, 2021). **Figure 1**, a broader explanation of those implications:

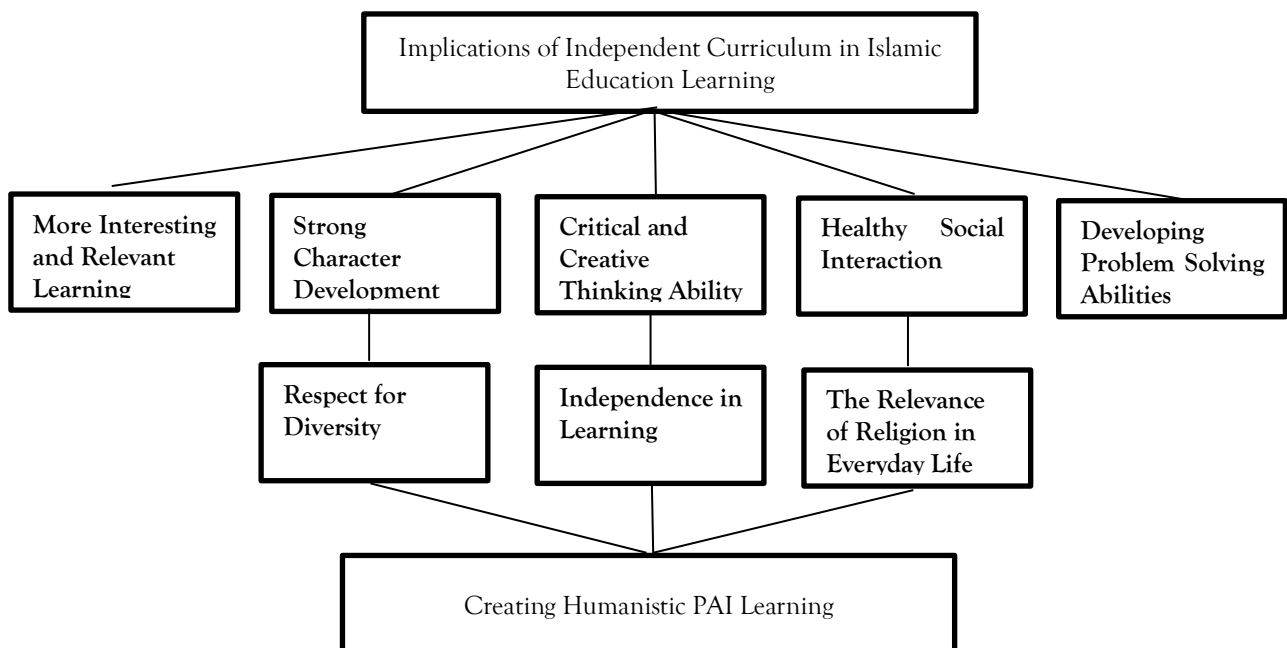


Figure 1. implications of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI)

More Interesting and Relevant Learning

The *Merdeka* curriculum emphasizes freedom and flexibility in learning. In the context of humanistic Islamic religious education, this results in more interesting and relevant learning for students. They have the freedom to engage in projects that interest them, making learning about the Islamic faith a more holistic and meaningful experience.

Strong Character Development

Humanistic Islamic religious education learning focuses on developing student character. This includes values such as empathy, tolerance, justice, and kindness. Students learn to understand and apply these values in their daily lives, resulting in more ethical and empathetic individuals.

Critical and Creative Thinking Ability

Humanistic Islamic religious education learning encourages students to think critically, ask questions, and formulate personal views. They are also given the opportunity to think creatively in understanding Islamic teachings and applying them in everyday life situations.

Healthy Social Interaction

The *Merdeka* Curriculum creates a learning environment that supports healthy social interactions. Students collaborate, discuss, and share understanding with each other. This builds their social skills and helps them to understand different perspectives.

Developing Problem Solving Abilities

Students are trained to solve problems and deal with everyday life situations using Islamic religious values as a guide. They develop the ability to face challenges in a constructive and ethical way.

Respect for Diversity

Humanistic Islamic religious education teaches students to respect the diversity of cultures, views and religious beliefs. This helps them become more inclusive and tolerant individuals in an increasingly diverse society.

Independence in Learning

The *Merdeka* Curriculum encourages student independence. They learn to manage their time, take initiative in learning, and plan their own actions. This is an invaluable skill for their daily lives and future careers.

The Relevance of Religion in Everyday Life

Students will better understand the relevance of Islamic teachings in their daily lives. They are able to apply religious values in their decision making and actions, thereby becoming more ethical and responsible individuals. Therefore, an *Merdeka* curriculum in humanistic Islamic religious education learning not only creates students who are academically intelligent, but also individuals who have strong character, think critically, and are ready to face the world with high ethics and empathy. This is one of the main goals of holistic Islamic religious education.

Discussion

Islamic Religious Education Learning Concept in the *Merdeka* Curriculum

The independent learning curriculum is a learning concept that provides students with the opportunity to maximize knowledge without limiting learning activities inside or outside the classroom. Learning designs that provide opportunities for students to learn freely are what is meant by an independent learning curriculum. The above statement is in accordance with the research results of Muh Nur Islam Nurdin et al., the independent learning curriculum is education that is based on nature and developments over time, where each student has their own talents and interests, which is the core of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Nurdin, 2023).

Education that is based on nature and developments over time, where each student has their own talents and interests, is the core of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. During the Covid-19 epidemic, the goal of self-paced learning is to minimize learning delays. Learning is a systematic process of transferring knowledge from teachers to students, starting from planning, implementation, assessment to evaluation. The knowledge transfer process involves the active participation of educators and students so that they can maximize their potential. Every learning process is aimed at bringing about positive changes (cognitive, emotional, psychomotor) in students. The statement above is in accordance with Al-Ghazali's opinion, namely that learning is a process of transferring knowledge carried out by educators to students. The result of this knowledge is what brings you closer to Allah SWT (Nasution, 2017).

Islamic religious education is the conscious effort of educators to prepare students to believe, understand and practice Islamic teachings through predetermined teaching, instruction or training activities to achieve predetermined goals. Islamic religious education is an effort to educate the Islamic religion or Islamic teachings and their values, to realize the way of life (views and attitudes of life) of students. The above statement is in accordance with Harun Nasution's opinion in Mahmudi that the aim of Islamic Religious Education is to create people who are devoted to Allah SWT. and have commendable morals in every line of life (Mahmudi, 2019). Based on the description above, it can be concluded that Islamic religious education is an activity carried out deliberately, to prepare students to believe, understand and practice Islamic teachings through teaching, teaching or training activities.

Characteristics of Humanistic PAI Learning in the Independent Learning Curriculum

The characteristic of humanistic Islamic religious education (PAI) learning within the framework of an *Merdeka* curriculum is a learning approach that emphasizes the personal development and human values of students in an Islamic context. This approach views each student as a unique individual and seeks to understand his or her needs, interests, and development. Social interaction in the classroom is highly valued, and teachers encourage collaboration, discussion, and sharing of understanding among students. The above statement is in accordance with the results of Hambali Alman Nasution's research that in humanistic theory, it can be said that every human being created on this earth is a creature with their own nature and will develop this nature optimally (Nasution, 2020).

Implications of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Humanistic PAI Learning for Students

First, learning is more interesting and relevant. Second, strong character development. Third, the ability to think critically and creatively. Fourth, healthy social interactions. Fifth, develop problem solving abilities. Sixth, respect diversity. Seventh, independence in learning. Eighth, the relevance of religion in everyday life. The description above is in accordance with the results of Suprihatin's research, stating that the implications of humanistic learning are student-centered, developing student creativity, creating fun and challenging conditions, providing diverse learning experiences and learning through doing (Suprihatin, 2017). This is also in line with the results of Febri Widiandari's research (Widiandari & Tasman Hamami, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The aim of implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in the context of learning Islamic religious education is to encourage significant changes in learning approaches, by changing the role of teachers to become facilitators who encourage student participation. Through the concept of an *Merdeka* curriculum, students' understanding of Islamic teachings is deepened with an emphasis on human values, empathy and social concern. The implications of an *Merdeka* curriculum in learning humanistic Islamic religious education aim to develop better character, including the ability to empathize and deeper social understanding. The importance of implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum concept in Islamic religious education in order to create a generation that is more empowered, ethical and cares about society. This concept provides a strong foundation for achieving more humane and relevant educational goals in an increasingly complex society. Apart from that, the concept of implementing an *Merdeka* curriculum is a positive step in combining religious values with human values in Islamic religious education, so as to create a generation that is able to make positive contributions to society.

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