

Analysis of the Readiness of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Implementing the Independent Curriculum in Middle Schools

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the readiness of Islamic Religious Education teachers in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at the Junior High School through a library research approach. Kurikulum Merdeka is the latest innovation in the Indonesian education system which focuses on flexible, innovative and student-centered learning. This research collected data from various secondary sources, including books, journal articles, research reports, and official documents related to the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka and the readiness of PAI teachers. The results of the analysis show that PAI teachers' readiness in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka includes aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation. Then, in implementing differentiated learning in the Independent Curriculum, there are six main steps which will be explained in this article. The challenges in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in PAI learning can be from internal and external factors such as school principals, PAI teachers and other education staff, facilities and infrastructure as well as the lack of optimal synergy and cooperation between related parties. This research provides recommendations for the development of more effective training programs and educational policies that support the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka as a whole.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum as one of the supporting elements for the implementation of the educational process effectively and efficiently is stated in Law number 20 of 2003 which states that "Curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding objectives, content and learning materials as well as methods used as guidelines for implementing learning activities to achieve specific educational goals." [1]. Thus, it can be concluded that the curriculum plays a crucial role as a guide to ensure maximum achievement of educational goals.

The changing lifestyle and socio-political patterns of society require changes and development of the curriculum in accordance with the times. Then recently, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) launched a product in the form of the Independent Curriculum which focuses on core material, character development and student competencies.

The transition from K-13 (2013 Curriculum) to the Independent Curriculum is certainly not an easy one, so collaboration and cohesiveness are needed from every educational structure, especially how prepared teachers are in the implementation process. The readiness of teachers, especially Islamic Religious Education teachers, is an urgency that requires adaptability in learning strategies, training to improve the quality of learning both offline and online, and full understanding of all student needs. [2] In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, the readiness of Islamic Religious Education teachers can be seen from the integration process in Islamic Religious Education subjects, preparing projects that strengthen student profiles based on Pancasila values, as well as the support they provide to students during the implementation of these activities. [2].

The readiness of Islamic Religious Education teachers to implement the Independent Curriculum includes planning, implementation and assessment of learning which must be in line with the principles of the curriculum. The readiness of PAI teachers is also influenced by support from related educational agencies and institutions, such as providing structured training, mentoring programs and special guidance. This support allows teachers to design teaching materials and learning methods that suit students' needs, as well as paying attention to Islamic religious values and a deep understanding of the Islamic religion. Apart from that, aspects of assessment and learning evaluation also need to be considered so that curriculum principles can be integrated well, so that teachers can evaluate student progress holistically in accordance with curriculum objectives.[2].

The Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, has announced an exciting new program for those who care about education. Research conducted shows that the concept of "Freedom to Learn" can be interpreted as providing freedom in the field of education. Currently, the policy of freedom in education is being implemented again. By giving teachers, students and educational institutions more freedom, it is hoped that new and fresh ideas will emerge. Students will be given the opportunity to learn independently and develop their creativity. This allows every student in Indonesia, who comes from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds, to have a different learning approach according to their own unique needs. The concept of "Freedom to Learn" emphasizes the learning process itself. Currently, many students have not been able to develop analytical thinking skills in their learning process. With "Freedom to Learn", it is hoped that students' critical and analytical thinking skills can be improvedn[3].

Basically, all students are unique. Because of their uniqueness, students are not the same. Some students look very intelligent and stand out in arithmetic, others really like sports and are very enthusiastic, and the last are students who really like talking and debating. There are students in other situations who have difficulty speaking and conveying concepts or ideas orally. On the other hand, these students have the ability to be creative through animation and video. This condition is common during classroom learning, and even in families consisting of siblings, these differences may arise.

Students who are great at calculating are no better than students who are great at composing or vice versa, if understood more deeply. As a teacher, this can be a consideration when choosing and implementing learning strategies that suit the diversity of students. It is very important for teachers to use learning strategies that are able to meet students' learning needs and maximize their potential. Tomlinson (2000) states that differentiated learning is an effort to adapt the learning process in the classroom to meet the unique learning needs of each student. Differentiated learning, also known as differentiated instruction, is an effective teaching philosophy or method that offers a variety of methods for understanding new information for each student in his or her diverse classroom community.[4].

Currently, Indonesia is implementing the Independent Curriculum as an improvement on the previous curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes intracurricular learning, where teachers are given the freedom to choose teaching materials that suit students' interests and learning needs. Teachers have the flexibility to develop supporting materials creatively to optimize the potential and abilities of each student. It is hoped that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum will strengthen the achievement of the Pancasila student profile evenly, which is still a concern for the government. The concept of Freedom to Learn is an effort to restructure the education system to achieve national change and progress by reaffirming the essence of education in purifying people and educating the country (Syarifah, 2023). Teachers and students become equal participants in the educational process if learning is based on the concept of Independent Learning. Teachers are no longer

the only source of knowledge. Instead, they work with students to explore knowledge and truth collaboratively. Instead of cramming and using test questions in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum to standardize teachers' perspectives, teachers are actually tasked with encouraging students to use critical thinking and reasoning skills when analyzing problems in their environment. Increasing technological innovation has become a force for exploring opportunities during learning because it can separate which educational systems are inflexible and which are efficient. Schools, teachers and students can benefit from the innovative approach of a free learning curriculum with learning, creativity and independence[5].[5].

The Independent Curriculum gives the school a lot of freedom so that teachers can adapt the curriculum to the conditions and abilities of teachers towards students in the school environment. Aims to encourage students to have a deep understanding of the Merdeka curriculum and then implement it at school and in the surrounding environment. In this way, the Independent Curriculum can make it easier for students to process understanding and applying learning that suits the students' own needs. Islamic Religious Education Teachers need to prepare themselves to implement and apply it so that the Pancasila student profile promoted by the government can be implemented well, thereby providing the best support so that students can apply the Pancasila values inserted in the Merdeka curriculum.[6].

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research applies the library research method, which is an approach to conducting research by collecting and reviewing various literary sources such as books, scientific journals, articles and other documents. The main aim of this method is to obtain a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the topic or subject being researched. There are four main stages that must be passed in carrying out a literature study. The first stage is to prepare all the equipment and tools needed to conduct research, such as stationery, computers, internet access, and so on. The second stage is to compile a complete list of references that will be used as sources of information, such as book title, author's name, year of publication, and so on. The third stage is managing and organizing time well so that the research process can run efficiently and on target. The fourth stage is to read carefully and record important information from various literary sources that have been collected previously. The data collection process in library research is carried out by searching for and exploring relevant sources of information from various references such as books, scientific journals, results of previous research, and other sources related to the topic being studied. All library materials obtained are then analyzed critically and in depth to support the propositions, ideas and arguments in the research being carried out. Thus, literature study is a very important and fundamental stage in the research process, where researchers carry out in-depth collection and analysis of various available literature sources, with the ultimate aim of obtaining a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the topic or subject being researched. [7].

This literature study method will later analyze the approach used in developing Islamic religious learning materials that are in accordance with the spirit of an independent curriculum, which allows religious teachers to present material that is relevant and interesting to students. Examining the application of technology in Islamic religious learning, as well as the challenges teachers face in ensuring the accessibility of learning materials for all students. This research will use the literature study method to analyze the appropriate approach in developing Islamic religious learning materials that are in line with the spirit of the independent curriculum. The independent curriculum provides freedom for teachers to present learning material that is relevant and interesting to students, according to their needs and interests. Therefore, this research will examine various literature sources

to find the most effective approach in designing Islamic religious learning materials that are in accordance with the principles of an independent curriculum. Apart from that, this research will also explore the role of technology in Islamic religious learning. In today's digital era, technology can be a very useful tool to facilitate a more interactive and interesting teaching and learning process. However, the use of technology in Islamic learning also has its own challenges. Therefore, this research will examine relevant literature sources to identify best practices in applying technology in Islamic religious learning, as well as strategies for overcoming challenges that may arise. This research will also focus on the issue of accessibility of Islamic religious learning materials for all students. The independent curriculum emphasizes the importance of providing learning materials that are inclusive and accessible to all students, regardless of their background or abilities. Therefore, this research will examine relevant literature to find appropriate solutions and strategies for teachers in ensuring the accessibility of Islamic religious learning materials for all students, including those who have special needs or come from different backgrounds. By using the library study method, it is hoped that this research can provide valuable insights and practical recommendations for Islamic teachers in developing learning materials that are in accordance with the spirit of an independent curriculum, utilize technology effectively, and ensure material accessibility for all students. It is hoped that the results of this research can contribute to improving the quality of Islamic learning in schools in Indonesia.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 PAI Teacher Readiness in Planning, Implementation and Evaluation

Readiness is the overall state of an individual that enables them to be ready to respond to a particular stimulus or situation. Readiness plays an important role in successful learning and helps the individual maintain attention and concentration for longer periods of time. According to Suharsimi, readiness is a form of competence. Therefore, someone who has competence means having adequate readiness to do something[8].

Teacher readiness in the learning process consists of three aspects which include emotive attitudinal readiness, cognitive readiness, and behavioral readiness. First, Emotive attitudinal readiness or attitudinal and emotional readiness is considered as a responsibility to carry out the task, an enthusiastic attitude towards the task, a willingness to adapt to the task suddenly, a feeling of comfort and independence in carrying out the task, and the ability to appreciate the intrinsic value of the task the[9].

Second, cognitive readiness or cognitive readiness includes cognitive skills and critical thinking abilities that are essential for carrying out tasks. This involves awareness of one's strengths and weaknesses, as well as carrying out tasks in accordance with field realities. In addition, cognitive readiness includes awareness of one's own worth and motivation to carry out tasks, as well as the ability to combine concepts and tools from various scientific disciplines.[9].

Third, behavioral readiness or behavioral readiness includes the willingness to collaborate with colleagues and act as a facilitator. Apart from that, this readiness also includes the ability to manage time efficiently to achieve goals relevant to the tasks given[9].

According to Lilik, a teacher's readiness can be influenced by several factors, namely (1) physical condition which includes all physical health, (2) psychological condition which includes emotions, personal problems, talents, interests and motivation, (3) mastering knowledge in their field to facilitate learning, and (4) physical and mental readiness[10].

Furthermore, Merdeka Belajar as the newest curriculum has the essence of exploring the best potential of teachers and students, encouraging them to always innovate and improve the quality of learning independently. The Independent Learning Curriculum or Merdeka Curriculum also plays a role in encouraging freedom of thought in order to form an independent spirit character because students and teachers can explore knowledge from the surrounding environment, no longer just relying on material in printed books and modules. Therefore, in implementing the Independent Curriculum, teachers are required to be ready in the planning, implementation and evaluation process so that the desired goals can be achieved.

1. PAI Teacher Readiness in Independent Curriculum Planning

The readiness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in planning the Independent Curriculum includes learning planning stages which are realized in teaching modules. This teaching module is similar to the Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) used in the 2013 or K-13 Curriculum, but expanded to become RPP Plus because it includes not only lesson plans, but also learning materials, student activity sheets, and assessments.[11].

The learning planning stages listed in the teaching module by PAI teachers include seven steps, namely analyzing Learning Achievements (CP) to formulate Learning Objectives (TP), planning diagnostic assessments, developing teaching modules, adapting learning to student achievement levels and characteristics, planning assessments formative and summative, reporting learning progress, and evaluating learning[11].

The preparation of learning materials by teachers must be accompanied by considerations of student characteristics and the chosen learning approach. In preparing teaching modules, PAI teachers can create teaching modules independently or adapt teaching modules created by fellow teachers, then make adjustments to suit the subjects being taught and are in line with the Independent Curriculum standards.[12].

2. PAI Teacher Readiness in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

In implementing the Independent Curriculum, PAI teachers must be ready for all stages of learning as previously planned. The learning implementation process in the Independent Curriculum refers to the practical implementation of the learning plan that has been prepared by the teacher[13]. Through optimization of learning planning, the learning process can run precisely and efficiently.

The implementation of learning by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in the Independent Curriculum consists of three main stages: beginning, core, and conclusion[11]. In the initial stage, the teacher starts by praying, greeting, taking attendance of students, conveying learning objectives, asking stimulating questions, and conducting an initial assessment. Then at the core stage, PAI teachers apply formative and summative assessments that have been designed in the teaching module. Formative assessments are carried out during the learning process as feedback through questions or discussions in class. The final stage is the closing, where the PAI teacher closes the lesson by providing evaluation, reflection, follow-up, prayer and closing greetings.

3. PAI Teacher Readiness in Independent Curriculum Evaluation

The readiness of PAI teachers in the Merdeka Curriculum evaluation aims to measure the level of teacher success in the learning process. Indicators of PAI teacher readiness can be identified from evaluation activities that have been carried out by PAI teachers through summative assessments in the form of tasks to obtain data regarding student development. Learning evaluation covers all aspects of

learning including input, process and output. In managing this process, evaluation plays an important role as a supporting and controlling factor for smooth learning. Evaluations also provide information about student achievements and the obstacles they face[11].

Another role of evaluation is as a means of determining whether the learning methods or approaches that have been implemented by PAI teachers need to be maintained or still require improvement. Thus, evaluation plays a role in assessing learning success and identifying areas that need to be improved in learning methods[12].

3.2 Readiness of Islamic Educators in Applying Learning differentiated in the Independent Curriculum

1. Understanding differentiated learning

According to Tomlinson, differentiated learning is an approach that adapts the teaching and learning process to the needs and preferences of each student. This approach is not new, and has long been used in the United States. Marlina explained that the main focus of differentiated learning is on how teachers pay attention to the strengths and needs of their students. Puspitasari added that differentiated learning could be a solution to overcome the diversity of student abilities in one class. This can be achieved by creating a pleasant learning atmosphere, implementing speaking practice, encouraging collaborative learning, and choosing the right learning materials and processes. In short, differentiated learning is a flexible and student-centered approach to ensure all students can learn optimally[14]. [14]

2. Application of differentiated learning in the Independent Curriculum

Differentiated learning, an approach designed to meet the individual learning needs of each student, requires certain stages to be implemented effectively. The following are several steps that can be taken:

a. Identify student needs

The key stage in differentiated learning is recognizing the individual learning needs of each student in the class.

b. Student grouping

After recognizing students' individual learning needs, educators can group them based on similar abilities or learning needs. This allows educators to design activities and learning materials that are suitable for each group.

c. Adjustment of activities and materials

After grouping students, educators need to adjust learning activities and materials to align with the learning needs of each group. For example, students with higher abilities may be given more complex tasks or additional support, while students with lower abilities may be given simpler tasks.

d. Use of Educational technology

The use of educational technology can support the implementation of differentiated learning. For example, educators can use computer programs or online learning applications that allow students to study with additional material or at a pace that suits their individual needs.

e. Different Types of Assessment

In evaluating students' learning progress in differentiated learning, educators need to apply various types of assessments, such as formative assessments, summative assessments, project assignments, journals, and others. Through the use of these various assessment methods, educators can

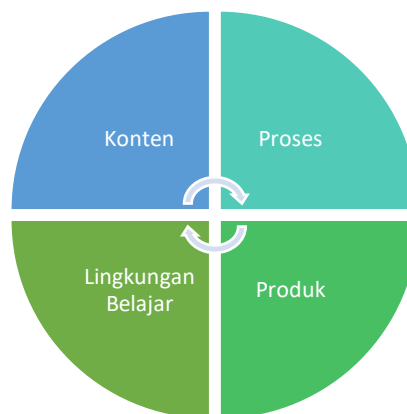
gain a more comprehensive understanding of student learning outcomes in differentiated learning.

f. Reflection and Renewal

After implementing differentiated learning, educators need to reflect to examine aspects that have been successful and those that have not been successful. In addition, they must also consider new ideas that can be implemented in differentiated learning in the future[15].

3. Aspects of Differentiated Learning

In differentiated learning, there are four aspects that are under the control of educators, namely content (the material taught), process (how students learn the material), product (how students demonstrate understanding), and the learning environment or atmosphere in the classroom. Teachers have the ability and opportunity to adapt these four elements according to students' current learning profiles, so they can design learning that is in line with the needs and characteristics of each student in the class.



Picture1aspects of differentiated learning

a. Content Differentiation

In differentiated learning that focuses on content, what students do is study the learning material delivered by the teacher according to their respective learning profiles or learning styles. In other words, teachers present material in a way that is tailored to the characteristics and learning preferences of each student.

b. Process Differentiation

In differentiated learning that focuses on processes, students are given the freedom to complete their tasks according to their individual abilities. This is related to students' skills in optimizing available learning media. The way students' complete assignments can vary, some choose to make products with shapes and patterns that suit their interests, while others decide to make presentation videos that are uploaded to YouTube.

c. Product Differentiation

When a student completes a unit of study or material over the course of a semester, their capacity to demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and understanding is usually demonstrated as a product of differentiated learning. Compared to other activities, this activity requires more understanding and time because of its summative nature. As a result, questions are often solved both individually and in groups, both inside and outside the classroom. If the product is worked on as a group, evaluation is based on the input each team member provides during the project.

d. Learning Environment

In differentiated learning, the physical, social, and personal elements of the classroom environment form the learning environment. To ensure students have high learning motivation, the learning environment needs to be adapted to their readiness, interests and learning profile. For example, based on students' readiness, interests, and learning preferences, teachers can assign seats in class. Students can work alone or in pairs, or they can sit in large or small groups. So that students feel safe, secure and at ease when studying because their needs have been met, teachers basically need to create a pleasant learning atmosphere and environment for them.

In essence, differentiated learning combines different teaching strategies tailored to the needs of different student populations. This means that all aspects of learning, including the environment, methods, results and content, can be differentiated according to the learning profile, interests and readiness of each individual student. The foundation of a learning process that is appropriate to the nature or character of students is the fulfillment of their learning needs. Differentiated learning can also help develop the characteristics of Pancasila students, including faith, independence, cooperation between peers, awareness of global diversity, and the ability to think critically and creatively. Therefore, customized teaching can help each student in the class in learning independently [16].

3.3 Challenges for teachers in implementing the independent curriculum in PAI learning

In research on the challenges of PAI teachers' readiness to implement the independent curriculum, it is stated that there are many factors that make its implementation successful, especially those that are an important concern in every school institution. First, the role of the principal is very important in advancing the school with high enthusiasm. As the main captain, the principal has a big role in directing the school towards progress. The Merdeka Curriculum encourages school principals to create new innovations in school management. Second, teachers also have a crucial role that is equally important. A teacher must be a tutor, facilitator and source of inspiration for his students. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, teachers are expected to be able to create a learning process that motivates students, increases their enthusiasm for learning, without placing excessive burdens. Teachers need to develop new skills and innovations in teaching, as well as utilize technology as a learning resource. Third, complete facilities and infrastructure are very important to support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in schools. The availability of books or learning resources that suit the curriculum objectives is key in efforts to create an effective learning system. Therefore, synergy and solid cooperation between all parties involved is very important in facing the challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum in educational institutions.

In this case, assessing the extent to which PAI teachers are ready to develop learning in teaching classes in the Merdeka curriculum is an important step. School principals need to understand how to improve teacher competence, especially in designing effective learning, choosing appropriate methods, and assessing learning outcomes. PAI teachers have a major role in curriculum implementation, and therefore, their needs must be prioritized. They are the backbone of direct interactions with students, influencing how students learn. The Merdeka Curriculum has changed the role of teachers in the learning process, and they must be ready to implement it even though the tools are not yet fully available.

Based on research and analysis at SMP Negeri 1 Rejotangan, it can be concluded that teachers as a whole are ready to implement the Merdeka curriculum, although there are still several inhibiting factors such as lack of teacher experience, limited resources and facilities, and the need to adapt material to ATP. To overcome this, school principals and teachers have taken steps such as increasing training for teachers, providing resources, and seeking additional references regarding learning assessment.[17]. In the context of implementing the Merdeka curriculum at SMP Negeri 1 Rejotangan, the involvement of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers is very important. PAI teachers have a strategic role in shaping students' character and morals, as well as supporting the development of spirituality in the educational process. Therefore, PAI teachers' readiness to welcome the Merdeka curriculum has a significant impact on the entire learning process. In terms of cognitive readiness, PAI teachers need to understand well the concepts in the Merdeka curriculum, including replacing the USBN and National Examination with scientific papers and character surveys. They also need to understand the planning and assessment processes that fit this new curriculum.

In the physical aspect, PAI teachers must be prepared with all the supporting equipment and facilities needed to implement the Merdeka curriculum. This includes resources such as books, relevant learning materials, as well as access to technology that supports learning. Meanwhile, in terms of psychological readiness, PAI teachers need to be motivated and interested in adapting themselves to curriculum changes. They must also be ready to face challenges in adapting ATP material in accordance with the Merdeka curriculum. In overcoming inhibiting factors, such as teachers' lack of experience in implementing the Merdeka curriculum, school principals and teachers need to provide special training to PAI teachers. This will help improve their understanding and skills in implementing this new curriculum effectively. Overall, PAI teachers' readiness to welcome the Merdeka curriculum is very important for the successful implementation of the curriculum at SMP Negeri 1 Rejotangan. Through good understanding, adequate physical readiness, and high psychological readiness, PAI teachers can be at the forefront in supporting the vision and mission of the Merdeka curriculum and achieving the desired educational goals.

At SMPN 03 Pancung, Islamic Religious Education teachers stated that although they had a fairly good understanding of the Independent Curriculum, they still experienced confusion in applying it in the learning process. Some teachers tend to use the K-13 Curriculum due to a lack of adequate training in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The Independent Curriculum focuses on summative and formative assessments and requires innovation in learning facilities, such as projectors. Teachers need to have skills in using technology to meet the requirements of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes more interactive learning rather than just relying on lectures. The differentiation method is key in implementing the Independent Curriculum so that teachers can accommodate learning needs from various perspectives. The lack of teacher preparation in compiling teaching modules is related to significant differences between the components of teaching modules and the lesson plans previously used in the K-13 Curriculum. This results in difficulties for teachers in designing appropriate teaching modules. Low teacher competency also causes their lack of confidence in designing teaching modules, so that the components of teaching modules are considered too complex to be developed. Difficulties in planning teaching modules are also influenced by the lack of teacher training on methods for developing teaching modules for the Independent Curriculum[18].

The challenges faced by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers at SMPN 03 Rejotangan in implementing the Merdeka curriculum include a fairly good understanding of the curriculum, but there is still confusion in its implementation. The lack of adequate training in implementing the Merdeka curriculum is the main factor that causes some teachers to tend to use the K-13 curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes summative and formative assessments and requires innovation in learning facilities, including the use of technology such as projectors. Apart from that, the teacher's ability to use differentiation methods is also the key to meeting learning needs from various points of view. Another challenge is the lack of preparation in compiling teaching modules that are in accordance with the Merdeka curriculum components, especially due to significant changes between the teaching module components and the lesson plans previously used in the K-13 curriculum. Teachers' lack of competence and confidence in designing teaching modules is the main obstacle, which is caused by a lack of adequate training in teaching module development methods for the Merdeka curriculum.

PAI Teachers' readiness in preparing teaching modules is one of the initiatives designed to evaluate the extent of PAI teachers' preparation in developing teaching materials in accordance with the Merdeka curriculum in the learning process to answer the challenges of PAI teachers' readiness. School principals are encouraged to understand how to improve the competence of teachers, especially those who teach PAI, in designing and implementing learning, as well as choosing effective teaching methods and materials. This is important to ensure adequate assessment of learning to achieve educational goals. As the front guard in curriculum implementation, the role of PAI teachers is very important and needs attention. A teacher plays a direct role in interactions with students and influences how they complete learning tasks. The Merdeka Curriculum brings fundamental changes to the role of teachers in the learning process in the classroom. Teachers are required to be ready to implement the new curriculum in a short time, but currently, the equipment is still not optimal.

One of the main focuses in this research is evaluating the readiness of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers in preparing teaching modules that are in accordance with the Merdeka curriculum. This is an important initiative to overcome the challenges faced by PAI teachers in implementing the new curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum brings significant changes to the learning process, including in terms of developing teaching materials, teaching methods and learning assessment. PAI teachers, as the front guard in curriculum implementation, have a very important role in ensuring the successful implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in the classroom. However, this change also requires adequate readiness and competence from PAI teachers.

4. CONCLUSION

PAI teacher readiness in implementing the Independent Curriculum includes three main aspects. First, in planning, teachers must be ready to develop comprehensive teaching modules. Second, in implementation, teachers must be ready to carry out learning according to plan, including the use of formative and summative assessments. Third, in evaluation, teachers must be ready to carry out summative assessments to determine student achievement, identify obstacles, and improve learning. Overall, PAI teacher readiness includes the ability to plan, implement and evaluate learning effectively.

Implementation of differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum includes six main steps: 1) Identifying individual student learning needs; 2) Divide students into groups based on learning needs; 3) Adapt learning activities and materials for each group; 4)

Utilizing educational technology; 5) Using various types of assessments; and 6) Carry out continuous reflection and renewal. These steps enable teachers to accommodate the diversity of students' learning needs effectively in implementing the Independent Curriculum. In differentiated learning, teachers can modify content, processes, products and learning environments according to student learning profiles to create learning experiences that meet the needs and characteristics of each student in the classroom.

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in PAI learning, the main challenges include: 1) The important role of school principals in creating innovation and school progress, 2) PAI teachers must be able to act as tutors, facilitators and inspirers for students by developing new skills and innovations in teaching, as well as utilizing technology, and 3) Availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure to support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Synergy and cooperation of all related parties is very important in facing these challenges.

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