



# Transforming Learning Through The Integration Of Islamic Values In The Era Of *Merdeka Belajar*

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## Abstract

*This study aims to examine the transformation of the essence, principles, and objectives of education in the era of Freedom to Learn by integrating Islamic values and Islamic educational management. The concept of freedom to learn in Indonesia is known as merdeka belajar. This study was motivated by a paradigm shift in Indonesia's national education policy that emphasizes autonomy, contextual learning, and character development. Through a qualitative literature analysis approach, this study investigates the relevance and application of fundamental Islamic educational values such as adab (ethics), ikhlas (sincerity), and amanah (trustworthiness) in supporting the merdeka belajar philosophy. The results of the study indicate that these values are highly aligned with policy objectives and contribute to the formation of a more holistic and meaningful educational environment. Furthermore, the integration of Islamic educational management practices supports the development of spirituality, competencies, and independent thinking among students. This study contributes to the discourse on Islamic educational reform by providing a conceptual framework that can guide educators and policymakers in designing learning systems rooted in spirituality and responsive to context in the modern educational landscape.*

## Keywords

*Transforming learning; Integration; Islamic values; Merdeka belajar*



## Introduction

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The *merdeka belajar* policy, which changed the national education paradigm, has changed the way learning in Indonesia. This policy emphasizes freedom of learning, school autonomy and contextualizing the education process to meet students' needs. To make these changes, values must be integrated thoroughly. This should include technical policy changes as well as the overall character building of learners.

This transformation is related to the spirit of *ta'dib* (civilizing *adab*), *tazkiyah* (self-purification), and *ta'lim* in Islamic education. These three are the basis of Islamic learning, which emphasizes the formation of students' spirituality and character. It is imperative to incorporate Islamic values into the free learning policy to ensure that education not only produces intellectually intelligent people but also has noble morals.

Previous research shows that incorporating Islamic values into the school curriculum can strengthen character and form a good student personality. Findings indicate that the implementation of Qur'anic and Hadith values in the freedom to curriculum in Islamic educational institutions can be achieved through the application of Islamic values in general subjects and character strengthening through daily activities such as collective prayer, Qur'anic tadarus, and morals lessons that instill Islamic ethics (Syahrizal 2024). The choice of this title is based on the urgent need to respond to the free learning policy in a way that retains Islamic identity. In this situation, Islamic values are incorporated not just as a complement but as a foundation for building a broad education, covering spiritual, intellectual and moral aspects.

Incorporating Islamic principles into *merdeka belajar* policy is not easy. Teachers' limited understanding and ability to connect Islamic values with general subjects is a major problem (Ardillah 2024). In the end, this makes teachers need to be trained and developed professionally. In addition, teachers and communities disagree about the importance of the role of religion in formal education. This is where Islamic education management is very important, namely making plans, managing and supervising the education process so that Islamic principles can be well internalized in schools. Islamic education management serves as a bridge between national policies and the application of religious values in education. This results in an independent education system that is still based on Islamic ethics and spirituality.

A holistic Islamic education management approach is needed to address the problem. In their research, emphasized the importance of integrating the principles



of Islamic education philosophy into Islamic school curriculum management. This approach involves planning, implementing and evaluating the curriculum based on Islamic principles. This approach can help overcome educational dualism and the shortage of appropriate human resources (Setyadi and Mastuti 2014).

In addition, emphasized the importance of incorporating Islamic values into the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in elementary schools (Setiabudi et al. 2024). They found methods to build an educational program, which includes academic, humanistic, technological, and social reconstruction areas. They also assessed the application of Islamic principles in the curriculum. The results showed the importance of integrating value-based learning materials, innovative methods, and character evaluation to create students with strong faith, Islamic character, and adaptability to global changes.

If Islamic values are incorporated into education, it also helps foster student character in the age of computers and the internet. In their research (Taufiq and Ramadhani 2025), found that students who received character education based on Islamic principles showed higher levels of resistance to detrimental online influences and beneficial uses of technology. This shows how important Islamic values are incorporated into students' character education in the age of computers and the internet.

Furthermore, the integration of Islamic values in the modern school curriculum can enrich students' learning experience. A flexible and inclusive curriculum can achieve high academic standards, while the improvement of students' character is reflected in moral, ethical and spiritual aspects. Teacher training is an important factor for successful integration, as teachers must be skilled in delivering the material in an engaging way (Zahroh and Iksal 2024).

Science and Social Studies (IPAS) learning in the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools can integrate Islamic values through an approach that emphasizes values such as honesty, responsibility, and cooperation. The role of educators is very important in the learning process because educators must be able to integrate Islamic values into their lessons (Ramadhan and Santosa 2023).

The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) approach can also be used to integrate Islamic values into the curriculum. Research results show that integrating Islamic values into the STEM curriculum can improve students' understanding of ethics and morals (Anas and Iswantir 2024). Teaching that combines scientific theory with Islamic teachings can help people learn values such as discipline, cooperation, honesty, and responsibility.

Highlighting the importance of internalizing the values of *merdeka belajar* (Freedom to Learn) in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning (Nurwahidah and



Eva Syarifatul Jamilah 2022). They state that the concept of freedom to learning consists of six main elements: variation in learning time and place, freedom to choose learning materials and approaches, learning tailored to individual needs, project-based learning, application of the link and match principle, and the use and interpretation of data during the learning process. Their research provides an initial overview of freedom to learning methods in Islamic education.

This research focuses on how Islamic education management can incorporate Islamic values into free learning policies. This study not only looks at the theoretical aspects, but also highlights the role of managers in ensuring that Islamic values such as *adab*, *ikhlas* and *amanah* are incorporated into policies, curricula and learning practices that are in line with Islamic values. Therefore, this study helps build a model that integrates the basic principles of Islamic education and national education policies.

Therefore, to incorporate Islamic principles into free education policies, a comprehensive and participatory approach involving all stakeholders is required. In addition, policies should be tailored to local needs. It is possible that good Islamic education management will be crucial to lead to a well-rounded, faith-based, skills-based and responsible freedom education process.

## Method

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This research is a descriptive-analytical qualitative literature review that focuses on extracting concepts and synthesizing theories from various scientific sources related to learning transformation in the framework of free learning and Islamic education. This method is very suitable for obtaining a deep and relevant conceptual understanding of the problem under study (Rijali 2019).

Based on secondary data collection from physical and digital sources, such as university libraries, Google Scholar, and DOAJ, as well as national repositories such as Garuda and Neliti, the use of digital sources in desk research is essential to obtain relevant up-to-date academic references.

The target of this research is scientific documents that discuss *merdeka belajar* policy, Islamic education values, and Islamic education management principles. The study subjects consist of journal articles, books, and official documents such as regulations of the Minister of Education and Culture, as well as works on Islamic education from classical and contemporary thinkers. This approach assists in comparing modern educational theory and Islamic scholarship.

To obtain the data, literature was identified, selected and classified based on relevance and academic quality. To ensure that the issue is still relevant, scholarly



works published between 2020 and 2025 were used. In addition, classical literature was still used to understand the basic principles of Islamic education.

This research used a qualitative approach and employed a systematically designed *library research* methodology. This research used a literature recording sheet to collect key information from each source. This includes the title, author's name, year of publication, research objectives, key findings, and relevance of the contribution to the research focus. The researcher used a reference management application such as Mendeley to facilitate reference management and consistent citation. This method allowed for efficient and accurate documentation of the literature.

The data was analyzed through content analysis techniques, which were used to extract the main themes, patterns of thinking, and conceptual meanings from the scientific texts studied. As part of the operational process of analysis, data was reduced, classified according to thematic categories, and presented in an in-depth descriptive-narrative form. The focus of the analysis was not only on the content of the texts but also on the context and relevance of the sources to the research objectives. This enabled the development of a critical and in-depth synthesis.

To increase the reliability and validity of the data, the researcher used a source triangulation strategy to compare the content of different contemporary and classic literatures from various national and international sources. This triangulation was done to ensure that the data reviewed was unbiased and reflected different scientific perspectives. Therefore, this research does not rely on only one perspective or method; instead, it produces a thorough and representative scientific analysis of how Islamic values are incorporated into the free learning policy from the viewpoint of Islamic education management.

## Results and Discussion

### 1. The Nature of Learning in the Perspective of *Merdeka Belajar* and Islam

The concept of *merdeka belajar* is an educational reform that emphasizes student freedom and independence in the learning process. The main purpose of this idea is to reduce administrative burdens and give educators and education units the ability to create a curriculum that is more contextual and adaptive. Therefore, it is hoped that the learning process will be easier, more enjoyable, and empowering (Masri, Rusdinal, and Gistituati 2023). *Merdeka belajar* is also a form of resistance against standardized and rigid educational approaches, as it emphasizes the development of overall potential, active participation, and diverse learning (Mongkau and Pangkey 2024). This free learning method can address the challenges



of 21st-century education, which demands critical thinking, innovation, and creativity.

Analysis of these various theories shows that *merdeka belajar* is not only a technical approach to teaching, but also an educational paradigm that requires a strong philosophical and ethical foundation. In this context, the spirit of Merdeka Belajar is closely related to Islamic values such as *ikhlas* (sincerity), *adab* (ethics), and *amanah* (responsibility). These values can enhance the spiritual and moral dimensions in the learning process, so *merdeka belajar* not only focuses on individual freedom, but also shapes students' character and integrity. Education integrates Islamic values into the framework of free learning and produces knowledgeable, moral, and responsible people. This is why Islamic values must be incorporated into national education policies through a planned and strategic Islamic education management approach.

According to Islam, education is the process of building a perfect human being, namely a human being who develops intellectual, spiritual, and moral aspects in a balanced manner. Education is seen not only as a way to learn, but also as a tool to improve morals and faith (Sholeh 2016). In surah Al-Mujadilah verse 11, it is mentioned that Allah raises the dignity of those who have faith and knowledge. This shows that faith is part of true knowledge, so the Islamic learning process emphasizes *adab* before knowledge. As a result, Islamic learning emphasizes self-transformation towards piety and devotion to Allah SWT.

*Merdeka belajar* is an educational paradigm that requires a firm philosophical and moral foundation. Research into these theories shows that it is more than just a technical learning method. In this situation, the spirit of free learning is closely aligned with Islamic values such as *ikhlas* (sincerity in intention and action), *adab* (ethics in interaction), and *amanah*. These values not only enhance the moral and spiritual aspects of the learning process, but they also provide a clear path to achieving overall educational goals (Muktamar, Wahyuddin, and Umar 2024). In other words, the freedom approach to learning does not mean aimless freedom; it is more akin to freedom wrapped in lofty principles that help develop the nature and dignity of students.

In addition, incorporating Islamic values into Merdeka Belajar framework should be seen as a systematic strategy for Islamic education management. This strategy is not only conceptual but also practical, with the application of Islamic values in the evaluation system and curriculum planning. This shows that educational changes cannot be made without considering the religious and cultural aspects that make up the nation's identity. Therefore, national education policy must provide space to enhance Islamic values as part of the transformation of education



based on character and spirituality. Thus, free learning not only makes students learn for themselves, but also makes them intelligent, moral and responsible individuals.

According to Islam, the purpose of learning is not only to achieve academic achievement but also to build faith and readiness for life in the world and the hereafter. The educational process should be able to produce a generation that is morally and socially superior and cognitively intelligent (Miswanto, Halim, and Ali 2024). This concept is related to the principle of free learning, which prioritizes learning satisfaction and self-achievement. Spiritual value-based education has the ability to increase the meaning of learning and strengthen student character in facing the challenges of globalization (Wibowo et al. 2024).

In independent and Islamic education, teachers no longer function as the sole source of knowledge; instead, they act as facilitators, motivators and guides who encourage students to learn independently and think critically. Teachers are respected in Islam for being the medium of knowledge that brings life. Rasulullah SAW is known as the best teacher because he taught with compassion and wisdom. To manage meaningful learning for students, teachers in a free learning system must be creative, innovative, and religious (Jumadil Hamid, Pebriyan Pebriyan, and Gusmaneli Gusmaneli 2024).

Contextual learning becomes an effective approach to free learning because it allows students to understand topics in ways that occur in the real world. This is in accordance with the Islamic approach, which links knowledge with life experiences and the natural world (Aisyah et al. 2022). The Qur'an often teaches people to think and reflect on natural phenomena. In reality, contextual learning encourages students to discover, rather than just receive, information, which results in more rewarding learning.

One of the goals of Merdeka Belajar is to foster students who have the ability to think critically and creatively when solving problems. Islam's various commands to think (tafakkur) and explore wisdom (tadabbur) emphasize this value. In Islam, questioning and seeking knowledge are not prohibited as long as it is done within the boundaries of adab and straight intentions (Nadhiroh and Anshori 2023). Therefore, the quality of human learners will be strengthened by improving the ability to think critically and creatively in education based on Islam.

The nature of free and Islamic learning centers on creating human beings who have the freedom to think, learn and behave. The education system should focus on character outcomes, competencies and spirituality rather than academic grades. To produce excellent, competent and socially and spiritually responsible students, the



integration of free learning with Islamic values works well. To ensure this method is implemented thoroughly, all elements of education must support it.

## **2. Principles of Learning: Freedom of Responsibility and Islamic Value in the *Merdeka Belajar***

The concept of free learning places freedom as the main pillar of the learning process. This freedom includes various things, such as choosing learning methods, using contextual teaching materials, and making evaluations tailored to student characteristics. However, this freedom is not eternal (Tunas and Pangkey 2024). According to Permendikbud No. 22 of 2020 on the Ministry of Education and Culture's Strategic Plan, freedom of learning must be accompanied by moral, social, and academic responsibility so as not to lead to individualism that escapes values. Students must be guided to maintain their autonomy in order to stay on a positive and productive path of self-development.

In the Islamic perspective, individual freedom is considered as human nature; however, such freedom should be used within the boundaries of the sharia and moral values established by Allah SWT. Humans are given reason and free will to decide what they want, but ultimately they will be responsible for their decisions in the afterlife (Firdaus and Misnawati 2024). This is in line with the idea of free learning, which emphasizes that students can learn on their own while receiving responsible guidance and supervision. Therefore, academic freedom must be combined with an awareness of moral and spiritual responsibility.

Islamic education emphasizes that everyone must be responsible in every aspect of life, including the learning process. This responsibility includes responsibility to oneself, others, the environment, and especially to Allah SWT. Learners are educated to be responsible for their own learning process and results in a free learning program. This helps them become independent and responsible individuals. If the values of responsibility are applied in education, students will become strong and noble (Amanda 2022).

Learning with freedom must be balanced with the values of honesty and loyalty. *Amanah* in learning means maintaining and making the best use of the knowledge gained for the good of oneself and society (Hermawan and Ahmad 2020). Meanwhile, sincerity in learning means doing the learning process sincerely for Allah SWT, not just to get worldly values or awards. So, learning independently not only makes people smart, but also makes them moral and responsible (Yugo 2024).

Teachers play an important role as facilitators who help students use learning freedom responsibly. Teachers should be able to instill moral and spiritual principles in the learning process, create a conducive learning environment, and



provide appropriate direction (Aini and Ramadhan 2024). Therefore, freedom of learning serves as a tool to build strong and moral students.

Responsible freedom of learning also includes students' ability to manage their time, set learning goals and evaluate their own learning outcomes. This is in line with Islamic educational values that emphasize students' independence and their responsibility to discover knowledge. As a result, students are not only recipients of information but also active participants in the learning process and are responsible for their own development (Furqon 2024).

By incorporating Islamic values into the idea of free learning, education provides a strong foundation for building a well-rounded and characterful education system. Education not only produces intellectually intelligent students, but also students who have integrity and commitment to good values. This is important to form a generation that can maintain Islamic principles despite the challenges of the times.

Education that emphasizes freedom of responsibility is becoming increasingly important in the midst of globalization and technological advancement. Learners must be trained to think critically, learn independently and make informed decisions. To prevent them from abusing their freedom, it must be based on strong moral and spiritual principles. Therefore, an education that combines the idea of free learning with Islamic principles can produce students who are capable, moral and ready to face the challenges of the future.

### **3. Relation of learning objectives in Islam and the Era of *Merdeka Belajar***

The primary goal of education in Islam is to produce individuals who are faithful, knowledgeable, and of noble character; education is not merely the dissemination of knowledge, but a process of self-transformation towards becoming a complete human being (Herwati 2018). This concept is in line with the goal of *merdeka belajar* (Freedom of Learning), which aims to produce Pancasila students who are not only cognitively intelligent, but also have strong, independent, and resilient characters to face the challenges of the 21st century.

The main purpose of Islamic education is to instill noble morality. This is in accordance with what the Prophet Muhammad said that his duty was to perfect human morals (HR. Ahmad). Therefore, the goal of Islamic education is not only to provide knowledge but also to build students' spiritual and moral character. The Pancasila Student Profile is made the main pillar of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes student character. This concept aims to form students who have noble values such as diversity, faith, and piety. This shows that the goals of Islamic education and the orientation of free learning are in line, with both placing character building as the foundation. Therefore, Islamic Religious Education (PAI) included in



the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to serve as a strategic tool to improve character through the application of Islamic and national principles as the basis (Andrianto et al. 2022).

In addition, the Pancasila student profile consisting of six main dimensions of faith and fear of God, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and creativity can be directly linked to values in Islamic teachings. For example, the concept of ta'awun (helping) is related to the value of mutual cooperation, and the Qur'an encourages students to think critically. This analysis shows that the contextual approach in PAI is very relevant to integrate these dimensions into learning. By linking Islamic principles with the Pancasila Student Profile, PAI is not only a means of religious development, but also an important contributor to the achievement of national education goals. This integration is a concrete form of synergy between the vision of Islamic education and the direction of the adaptive and transformative Merdeka Curriculum reform (Konadi and Faisal 2019).

The PAI learning model encourages students to discover religious values through direct experience. The PAI learning model, which uses a scientific and project-based approach, aims to build students' ability to think critically, creatively, communicate, and work together. The principle of learning how to learn is the basis of contemporary education, and this goal cannot be separated from this principle (Putri et al. 2022).

Free learning and Islamic learning goals can be combined in a mutually reinforcing framework. Islamic education emphasizes faith and tawhid, while Free Education emphasizes humanitarian and national values. These two components can work together in practice through combining subject matter, strengthening religious moderation, and applying Pancasila principles in students' daily lives.

To achieve synergistic learning goals between free learning and Islam, effective and valuable education management is necessary. One of the tasks of Islamic education management is to create a vision and strategy for the educational institution that is in accordance with Islamic principles and national goals. The entire learning program will be directed towards achieving holistic goals if the educational institution is governed by spiritual principles such as honesty, trustworthiness, and fairness (Suhadi 2023).

An evaluation system that combines *merdeka belajar* principles and Islamic values is an important component in achieving learning goals (Hasmawati and Mukhtar 2023). Evaluations are formative and summative tests that measure character, cooperation and responsibility. Particularly effective for assessing overall goal achievement are project and portfolio-based evaluations (Setiamihardja 2020).



This is in line with the Islamic concept of hisab, which means that every deed will be accounted for, so the evaluation must be fair and clear.

The national education system can shape a generation that not only excels in knowledge and skills, but also has a strong, resilient and pious personality. This integration does not mean erasing the characteristics of each approach; rather, it means harmonizing the direction so that education can help build the perfect human being. Therefore, learning should be focused on achieving long-term goals, both worldly and ukhrawi.

#### **4. The Role of Islamic Education Management in the Transformation of Learning in the Era of *Merdeka Belajar***

Islamic education management offers a framework that is based on the values of faith and morals and on administrative efficacy. Islamic management integrates spiritual, moral and professional aspects in education management, distinguishing it from the more pragmatic and instrumental conventional approach. In fact, the goal of Islamic education management is to create an education system that not only focuses on academic achievement but also integrates the values of *tauhid*, *amanah*, and *adab* into every educational process. This is a relevant foundation to support the implementation of *merdeka belajar*, where education is focused on the process of building learners overall character, not just results.

Prophetic leadership (*nubuwwah*), which emphasizes integrity, exemplary, and transformative vision, is the main approach in Islamic education management. The leader of an Islamic education institution not only acts as an administrator, but also functions as a moral and spiritual guide for all school components. This kind of leadership is very relevant to the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum, where teachers and principals are asked to bring change and help students learn in a humanist, creative and adaptive way. Educational leaders are able to create a dynamic, inclusive and spiritually meaningful learning environment by emulating prophetic traits. This is in line with the principle of student-centered learning in Free Learning.

In addition, the principle of *khidmah*, or service, is the main value in the management of Islamic education. According to this perspective, service is a form of worship performed with the sincere intention of fostering a generation with morals and knowledge. The concept of *khidmah* can be interpreted as prioritizing the needs and potential of individual students in the context of free learning (Andrianto et al. 2022; Hidayatullah 2021). Schools can integrate Islamic values into 21st century competencies such as critical thinking, collaboration and creativity by giving autonomy to education units to develop a contextualized curriculum (van Laar et al. 2020). As a result, Islamic education management is not only relevant, but also



strategic as it serves as a bridge between Islamic scientific heritage and the needs of the modern era (Ulum, 2023). This shows that Islamic education has the ability to adapt to changes in modern education while maintaining its identity and noble values.

Free learning requires flexibility in curriculum and learning approaches. Schools can use Islamic education management to build an integrative curriculum that combines Islamic values with 21st century skills (van Laar et al. 2020; Ulum 2023). Thus, Islamic education management can serve as a bridge between the Islamic scholarly tradition and the needs of modern students.

Islamic education encourages the use of digital technology to improve education and da'wah. In the current era of computers and the internet, the use of information technology is essential to support school management and support the concept of free learning (Wardhani et al. 2024).

Through value-based policies, Islamic education management has a major role in fostering student character. In school activities, values such as discipline, responsibility, and honesty can be instilled well. This is in line with *merdeka belajar*'s efforts to build student character Pancasila (Anas and Iswantir 2024).

Good human resources are essential for the transformation of learning within the framework of *merdeka belajar*. Through training based on Islamic values and innovation, Islamic education management is responsible for improving the capacity of teachers and education personnel. Strengthening teachers' pedagogical competence and spirituality is essential for empowered learning (Firman 2024; Hidayatullah 2021).

In facing global challenges such as the industrial revolution 4.0 and the era of society 5.0, Islamic education management is strategically responsible for ensuring that Islamic values remain the foundation. A management system that is able to respond to the changing times while maintaining its Islamic identity is needed. To produce mentally and spiritually prepared students, this collaboration is essential.

## Conclusion

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Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that incorporating Islamic values into modern educational principles, especially *merdeka belajar*, provides a strong framework to support students' freedom, flexibility, and independence in the learning process. Islamic values such as responsibility, sincerity, and adab are in line with the spirit of *merdeka belajar*, which emphasizes individualized learning and focuses on developing Islamic education goals that lead to the formation of insan kamil also support efforts to achieve a complete Pancasila student profile. However,



the discussion of Islamic education management as a strategic framework in managing learning transformation in the *merdeka belajar* era needs to be strengthened and clarified. Islamic education management can serve as a systematic foundation for incorporating spiritual and moral values into educational programs and learning practices, thereby producing a generation that is not only academically superior but also moral and spiritual.

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