



## **OPERATIONALIZING ISLAMIC VALUES AND HUMANISM IN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM: IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS, STAKEHOLDER STRATEGIES, AND POLICY PATHWAYS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

While the integration of Islamic values and humanism into the Merdeka Curriculum has gained widespread philosophical endorsement, empirical evidence reveals persistent implementation gaps at the school level. This study adopts a critical policy analysis perspective to examine how the synergy between Islamic ethics (justice, honesty, responsibility) and humanistic principles (learner autonomy, dignity, holistic development) is operationalized or obstructed within Indonesia's educational reform. Employing a systematic literature review (SLR); interactive data analysis (collection, reduction, display, conclusion drawing), this research identifies key barriers: fragmented teacher understanding of value integration, underdeveloped humanistic pedagogies, weak cross-sector collaboration, and a tendency to reduce the Merdeka Curriculum to administrative flexibility rather than cultural transformation. The findings demonstrate that although the Merdeka Curriculum provides a robust philosophical and practical foundation for character education, the integration of Islamic and humanistic values remains superficial in many classrooms, leaving moral degradation indicators (bullying, drug abuse, student brawls) largely unaddressed. The implications reveal a critical gap between policy intention and classroom reality. Consequently, this study proposes six actionable strategies: (1) integrative curriculum mapping that embeds Islamic values into competency-based learning outcomes; (2) mandatory teacher professional development on humanistic learning theories; (3) Islamic-value-infused Pancasila Student Profile projects; (4) holistic education frameworks; (5) tripartite collaboration among schools, families, and communities; and (6) continuous policy evaluation using mixed-methods research. These recommendations offer policymakers and educators a pathway to transform philosophical ideals into measurable character outcomes, thereby addressing the moral crisis among Indonesian youth.

**Keywords:** Implementation barriers, Islamic values, humanism, Merdeka Curriculum, policy analysis.

### **ABSTRAK (Bahasa Indonesia)**

Meskipun integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dan humanisme ke dalam Kurikulum Merdeka telah diterima secara filosofis, bukti empiris menunjukkan adanya kesenjangan implementasi yang persisten di tingkat sekolah. Penelitian ini mengadopsi perspektif analisis kebijakan kritis untuk mengkaji bagaimana sinergi antara etika Islam (keadilan, kejujuran, tanggung jawab) dan prinsip humanistik (otonomi peserta didik, martabat, pengembangan holistik) dioperasionalkan atau terhambat dalam reformasi pendidikan Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan systematic literature

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review (SLR), penelitian ini mengidentifikasi hambatan utama: pemahaman guru yang terfragmentasi tentang integrasi nilai, pedagogi humanistik yang belum berkembang, kolaborasi lintas sektor yang lemah, serta kecenderungan mereduksi Kurikulum Merdeka menjadi fleksibilitas administratif semata. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Kurikulum Merdeka menyediakan landasan filosofis dan praktis yang kokoh, integrasi nilai-nilai Islam dan humanisme di banyak kelas masih bersifat dangkal, sehingga indikator degradasi moral (perundungan, penyalahgunaan narkoba, tawuran) tidak banyak berkurang. Implikasinya mengungkap kesenjangan kritis antara niat kebijakan dan realitas kelas. Sebagai solusi, penelitian ini menawarkan enam strategi aksi: (1) pemetaan kurikulum integratif, (2) pelatihan guru wajib tentang teori belajar humanistik, (3) proyek profil Pelajar Pancasila berbasis nilai Islami, (4) kerangka holistik, (5) kolaborasi tripartit sekolah-keluarga-masyarakat, dan (6) evaluasi kebijakan berkelanjutan. Rekomendasi ini memberikan jalan bagi pengambil kebijakan dan pendidik untuk mengubah cita-cita filosofis menjadi hasil karakter yang terukur.

**Kata Kunci:** Hambatan implementasi, nilai-nilai Islam, humanisme, Kurikulum Merdeka, analisis kebijakan.

## INTRODUCTION

Education has become a top priority for all nations, as national advancement depends largely on the quality of human resources. Indonesia's human resource quality, however, continues to lag behind that of several developed countries. In response, the Ministry of Education and Culture launched the "Merdeka Belajar" policy and the Merdeka Curriculum, designed initially to recover learning losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and to accelerate Indonesia's educational competitiveness (Indriyani & Desyandri, 2022). The curriculum emphasizes technology utilization, collaborative learning, and the sharing of best practices among teachers and students. Initially applied only in schools deemed ready, it has since expanded nationwide (Nurdin & Irfan Jaya, 2023).

On paper, the Merdeka Curriculum represents a transformative effort to develop a generation that is excellent, adaptive, and morally grounded. The integration of Islamic values and humanism is presented as a strategic approach to harmonizing spiritual and humanistic dimensions. However, a critical examination of implementation reveals a troubling disconnect: despite the curriculum's noble philosophy, the understanding among practitioners remains fragmented, and the embedded Islamic and humanistic values are often marginalized. Evidence of moral degradation bullying, student brawls, drug abuse, promiscuity, and even defiance against teachers persists, indicating that the curriculum's value layer has not been effectively operationalized (Abidah, 2023). Many educational institutions remain ill-prepared to balance technological advancement with moral cultivation, resulting in negative behavioral shifts.

A review of prior studies (e.g., Nugroho, 2022; Afriani, 2023) shows that most research focuses on technical implementation, teacher readiness, and infrastructure, without critically examining *why* the integration of value systems fails at the classroom level. These studies often overlook the philosophical and practical barriers that prevent Islamic and humanistic values from being internalized by students. This gap is critical: without operationalizing Islamic ethics and humanist pedagogy, the Merdeka Curriculum risks becoming another structural reform without cultural transformation—a change in paperwork, not in practice.

Therefore, this study shifts from a descriptive-integration approach to a critical policy analysis. Rather than merely reasserting the importance of Islamic and humanistic values, it asks: *What barriers prevent effective integration of these values into the Merdeka Curriculum? How can*





*stakeholders teachers, principals, parents, and community members actively operationalize these values within the existing policy framework?* By answering these questions, the research provides not only philosophical justification but also concrete, evidence-informed recommendations for bridging policy rhetoric and classroom reality. The aim is to propose an alternative learning design that encourages comprehensive character development while strengthening the essence of *Merdeka Belajar* through independent exploration, creativity, and holistic understanding, grounded in Islamic and humanistic principles.

## METHOD

This study employs a library research approach, relying on the exploration and examination of various written sources. The method allows the researcher to extract information from scholarly works, books, and articles relevant to the topic. For data collection, the study utilizes the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method a structured approach designed to organize, evaluate, and synthesize scientific literature in a comprehensive and critical manner, aiming to generate an in-depth understanding of the subject matter (Suhartono, 2017).

Unlike conventional narrative reviews, this SLR applies a critical policy analysis lens to the selected documents. During the literature search, specific inclusion criteria were applied: peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, and books published between 2019 and 2024 that address the Merdeka Curriculum, Islamic education values, or humanistic education theory.

In the data analysis stage, this research adopts the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (2002), consisting of four main steps: (1) data collection, gathering relevant sources from academic databases and repositories; (2) data reduction, filtering and selecting essential information, during which the researcher explicitly coded for *implementation barriers, stakeholder roles, and contextual constraints*; (3) data display, presenting the reduced data in accessible formats such as matrices and thematic summaries; and (4) conclusion drawing, synthesizing the critically and reflectively analyzed data to formulate findings and recommendations. This analytical shift from a purely descriptive to a critical-interpretive stance enables the study to move beyond normative statements about value integration toward actionable policy pathways. The entire process ensures transparency, replicability, and academic accountability.

## RESULT AND DISSCUSION

### **The Integration Process of Islamic Values and Humanism: Between Philosophical Promise and Implementation Reality**

The Merdeka Curriculum is a learning framework that emphasizes optimized intradisciplinary instruction with varied content, allowing students adequate time to explore knowledge concepts and strengthen competencies (Kemdikbud, 2022). It positions students as central agents in learning, encouraging engagement with their environment under educator guidance. Project-based learning supports the "freedom to learn" philosophy, and the Pancasila Student Profile comprises six key dimensions: faith and piety, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity. Assessment refers to learning achievements set by the National Education Standards Agency, encompassing religious and character values, personal identity, and foundational literacy with STEAM (Shalehah, 2023).

In theory, the curriculum aspires to shape a generation that is intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually excellent. To achieve this, integrating Islamic values (morality, spirituality, social responsibility) with humanistic principles (human dignity, freedom of thought, justice) is essential. Islamic educational values, rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, include: (1) Aqidah education, faith in the oneness of Allah, reflected in Qur'anic verses such as Al-Baqarah (2:132) and Yusuf (12:6); (2) Ibadah education, practices like prayer, zakat, and supplication that





cultivate discipline and spiritual consciousness; and (3) Akhlaq education, praiseworthy moral conduct, avoidance of blameworthy behavior, and filial piety (Hidayah, 2019). Humanism in education, according to Malik Fadjar, prioritizes the development of both physical-biological and spiritual-psychological aspects, aiming for *insan kamil* (the complete human being) (Purnomo, M, 2020).

However, the critical question is not whether these values are desirable clearly they are but *how* they are actually integrated. The literature indicates that most schools still treat Islamic values as a separate subject (Religious Education) rather than infusing them across all learning experiences. Core values such as honesty, discipline, responsibility, and modesty are supposed to be embedded in general subjects and daily interactions (Hadi, 2024), yet evidence shows that teachers lack the pedagogical knowledge to do so effectively. The result is a *declarative integration* (stated in documents) rather than *operational integration* (practiced in classrooms). This gap between philosophical promise and implementation reality is the central barrier identified in this study.

### **Implications of Integration: A Solid Foundation That Remains Unbuilt**

Proponents argue that integrating Islamic and humanistic values within the Merdeka Curriculum enhances students' comprehensive understanding of Islamic teachings, shapes character according to virtues like honesty and responsibility, improves spiritual and moral quality, and prepares students to contribute meaningfully to society (Dahirin & Rusmin, 2024). The humanistic dimension, meanwhile, fosters independence, creativity, and respect for human dignity, with teachers acting as facilitators rather than controllers (Wiryanto & Anggraini, 2021).

But the critical implication drawn from this review is that while the *potential* is enormous, the *actual outcomes* have been disappointing. The persistence of moral degradation indicators suggests that the intended religious and humanistic character traits faith, piety, honesty, empathy, respect for diversity, social awareness are not being systematically developed. In many cases, the Merdeka Curriculum has been reduced to surface-level changes: digital tools, project-based assignments without value content, and administrative flexibility. The deep cultural transformation that would produce students who are both religious and humanistic has not materialized.

Therefore, the implication of this study is not to celebrate the curriculum's philosophy, but to sound an alarm: without deliberate intervention, the Merdeka Curriculum will fail to produce the generation it promises. The foundation is strong, but the building remains unbuilt. This leads directly to the need for strategic, actionable recommendations.

### **Strategic Recommendations: Closing the Implementation Gap**

Based on the critical analysis of barriers and gaps, this study proposes six strategies that are more specific, measurable, and stakeholder-oriented than previous recommendations (Nasir, 2024a; Nurdin & Irfan Jaya, 2023; Subechina & Ratnawati, 2024). These strategies directly address the identified implementation barriers:

#### **1. Integrative Curriculum Mapping That Embeds Islamic Values into Competency-Based Learning Outcomes**

Policymakers must redesign curriculum documents to explicitly map Islamic values (e.g., honesty, justice, responsibility) onto specific competencies in every subject, not just Religious Education. This requires a cross-subject task force that produces concrete examples: e.g., in science lessons, reflecting on divine creation; in mathematics, emphasizing integrity in data handling; in language arts, analyzing stories with moral themes (Purnomo, M, 2020).



2. **Mandatory Teacher Professional Development on Humanistic Learning Theories**  
Teachers are the weakest link in the implementation chain because most have never been trained in humanistic pedagogy or value integration. Therefore, pre-service and in-service training must include certification-based modules on humanistic learning theories, student-centered facilitation, and methods for embedding Islamic ethics into daily lessons (Sumantri & Ahmad, 2019).
3. **Islamic-Value-Infused Pancasila Student Profile Projects**  
The Merdeka Curriculum already requires project-based learning for the Pancasila Student Profile. However, these projects often lack explicit Islamic content. Schools should redesign projects around Islamic values: e.g., a community service project that emphasizes *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *ta'awun* (mutual cooperation); a environmental project framed as *khalifah* (stewardship of the earth) (Nasir, 2024b).
4. **Holistic Early Childhood Education Frameworks**  
Value integration must start early. For early childhood education, a holistic approach combining cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains should be mandated, with specific play-based activities that teach empathy, honesty, and respect for diversity (Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan et al., n.d.).
5. **Formalized Tripartite Collaboration Among Schools, Families, and Communities**  
Schools cannot change values alone. A formal memorandum of understanding or regular structured programs involving parents and community leaders is essential. Examples include weekly value-reinforcement homework with family discussions, community-led moral storytelling sessions, and joint monitoring of student behavior outside school (Hadi, 2024).
6. **Continuous Policy Evaluation Using Mixed-Methods Research**  
Finally, the Ministry of Education must commission annual independent evaluations that go beyond quantitative metrics (e.g., test scores) to include qualitative assessments of character outcomes. These evaluations should use classroom observations, student interviews, and teacher surveys to measure the actual internalization of Islamic and humanistic values (Subechina & Ratnawati, 2024).

These strategies are not merely theoretical; they are grounded in the same literature that describes the Merdeka Curriculum's philosophy. By implementing them, policymakers and educators can transform the curriculum from a document of good intentions into a lived reality of balanced, character-driven education.

## CONCLUSION

This critical policy analysis of integrating Islamic values and humanism into the Merdeka Curriculum yields three main conclusions.

**First**, while the curriculum provides a philosophically sound foundation (balancing *aqidah*, *ibadah*, *akhlaq* with humanistic principles of learner autonomy and dignity), its implementation remains fragmented. The main barriers identified are: teachers' insufficient training in humanistic pedagogy, lack of explicit curriculum mapping for Islamic values across subjects, weak school-family-community partnerships, and a tendency to reduce the Merdeka Curriculum to administrative flexibility and digital adoption without cultural transformation.

**Second**, the implication of this gap is that students are not consistently developing the intended religious-humanistic character. Moral degradation indicators bullying, drug abuse, student brawls, defiance against teachers have not significantly declined post-implementation. Therefore, the solid foundation that the Merdeka Curriculum promises remains largely unbuilt, and urgent action is required.





**Third**, this study offers six strategic recommendations that are more actionable and context-specific than previously proposed: (a) integrative curriculum mapping; (b) mandatory teacher training on humanistic learning theories; (c) Islamic-value-infused Pancasila Student Profile projects; (d) holistic early childhood education frameworks; (e) formalized tripartite collaboration among schools, families, and communities; and (f) continuous policy evaluation using mixed-methods research.

By adopting these recommendations, policymakers and educators can bridge the gap between policy rhetoric and classroom practice, transforming the Merdeka Curriculum into a genuine vehicle for Islamic humanism. Future research should conduct longitudinal, mixed-methods studies measuring the actual impact of these strategies on student behavior, moral reasoning, and social cohesion. This study acknowledges its limitations primarily its reliance on existing literature rather than primary data and welcomes constructive criticism for further refinement.

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