

# Research Horizon

ISSN: 2808-0696 (p), 2807-9531 (e)

## Research Horizon

Volume: 05

Issue: 06

Year: 2025

Page: 3105-3116

## Citation:

Abadi, S. B., Toyibah, P. S.,  
Alfadhillah, K., &  
Erihadiana, M. (2025).

Integrating Islamic values  
and modern pedagogy: A  
systematic review of PAI  
curriculum development in  
school. *Research Horizon*,  
5(6), 3105-3116.

## Article History:

Received: October 5, 2025

Revised: November 7, 2025

Accepted: December 11,  
2025

Online since: December 31,  
2025

## Integrating Islamic Values and Modern Pedagogy: A Systematic Review of PAI Curriculum Development in School

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## Abstract

This research is motivated by the demand for changes in educational policy through the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages the development of an adaptive, relevant, and Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum in madrasah and schools. The purpose of this study is to systematically examine various research results related to the development of the PAI curriculum and its relationship to the Merdeka Curriculum policy and the direction of development based on Islamic values. The method used is a Systematic Literature Review by combining thematic qualitative analysis and bibliometric analysis using VOSviewer. Data searches were conducted through the Publish or Perish application with four main keywords and a limit of 20 articles per keyword, resulting in 80 initial articles which were then selected using the PRISMA stage until 20 relevant articles remained. The research findings show that the theme of PAI curriculum development is dominated by the keywords curriculum development, Islamic education, PAI, Merdeka curriculum, education, and Islam, with curriculum development as the highest network center. In conclusion, the development of the PAI curriculum demonstrates a paradigm transformation that is adaptive to national policy, responsive to digitalization, and rooted in Islamic values.

## Keywords

Islamic Education, Madrasah, Merdeka Curriculum, PAI Curriculum, School, Systematic Literature Review.

## 1. Introduction

Curriculum is the core of the education system that determines the direction, content, and learning processes implemented in schools and madrasahs. It does not merely function as a formal document but also serves as a strategic guide for shaping students' competencies, character, and internalized values. In the context of Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI*), the curriculum holds a crucial position because it directly contributes to the formation of students' personality, moral character, and spirituality in accordance with Islamic teachings (Sukmadinata, 2020; Arifin, 2022; Edy & Sumarta, 2024). Therefore, the development of the PAI curriculum should not be viewed solely as an administrative process, but rather as a systematic effort to ensure that Islamic education can respond to contemporary challenges without losing its essential Islamic values.

Rapid social, cultural, and technological developments require the education system to continuously adapt. These dynamics also influence the development of the PAI curriculum in madrasahs and schools. The PAI curriculum faces the challenge of remaining relevant to the needs of modern learners while maintaining its primary function as a means of nurturing faith, morality, and Islamic spirituality (Rahman, 2023; Jamalullel, & Nasehudin, 2025). On one hand, students are expected to possess 21st-century competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy. On the other hand, Islamic education must remain focused on cultivating noble character and strengthening the value of tawhid as the foundation of life. This tension between the demands of modernity and Islamic tradition makes PAI curriculum development a strategic and complex issue.

The transformation of national education policy through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum further highlights the urgency of developing the PAI curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and character strengthening in line with national education goals (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Mulyasa, 2023; Syamsidar et al., 2025). This paradigm provides greater flexibility for educational institutions and teachers to design learning experiences that align with students' characteristics and learning contexts. Within this framework, the PAI curriculum in madrasahs and schools needs to be developed to integrate Islamic values with contextual, humanistic, and adaptive learning approaches. PAI curriculum development includes not only adjustments to learning materials but also the formulation of learning objectives, pedagogical strategies, and evaluation systems oriented toward character building and moral excellence (Nurdin, 2020; Hidayat, 2021; Mujahidin, 2023; Fauzan, 2024).

Nevertheless, various studies indicate that the implementation of PAI curriculum development still faces several challenges. These challenges include the conceptualization of curriculum development models, limited teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum paradigm, and difficulties in translating national policies into contextual and applicable syllabi and lesson plans (Suryana, 2021; Munir, 2022). In addition, the lack of synergy between national policies and the real conditions of madrasahs and schools often hampers curriculum innovation, reflecting a gap between policy ideals and educational practices.

Based on these issues, fragmented studies are insufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the direction and trends of PAI curriculum development. Therefore, a systematic review of previous research is needed to map thematic tendencies, models, and paradigms of PAI curriculum development in madrasahs and schools. Such a systematic review is important not only to enrich academic discourse but also to serve as a reflective foundation for Islamic education practitioners in designing curricula and learning processes that are responsive to students' needs and national education policies. Accordingly, this study aims to systematically examine research on the development of PAI curricula in madrasahs

and schools, analyze its relationship with the Merdeka Curriculum policy, and identify directions for PAI curriculum development that are rooted in Islamic values and adaptive to social and technological change.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Theoretical Foundations and Models of PAI Curriculum Development**

Curriculum development is the core mechanism that directs all learning activities within an education system, serving not merely as an administrative document but as a strategic guide for shaping competencies, character, and spiritual values (Sukmadinata, 2020; Arifin, 2022). In the specific context of Islamic Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Islam/PAI*), this process holds heightened significance as it directly contributes to the formation of students' personality, morality, and spirituality in alignment with Islamic teachings, ensuring the curriculum remains a vital means of nurturing faith and Islamic ethics (Edy & Sumarta, 2024; Jamalullel & Nasehudin, 2025). This foundational role necessitates that PAI curriculum development be viewed as a deliberate, systematic effort to maintain relevance amidst rapid social and technological changes without diluting its essential Islamic essence, thereby positioning it as a central and complex issue in modern Islamic education.

To navigate this complexity, established curriculum development models provide essential frameworks. The Tyler model offers a classic, linear structure that emphasizes the critical, logical relationships between defining learning objectives, selecting content and experiences, organizing these experiences, and evaluating outcomes, thus ensuring coherence and purpose in the curricular design (Tyler, 1949; Sukmadinata, 2020). In contrast, the Taba model advocates for a more grassroots, inductive approach where teachers are positioned as primary developers, creating curricula from specific teaching-learning units up to a general framework, which better accommodates student characteristics and local contexts (Nurdin, 2020). Furthermore, contemporary demands have elevated the relevance of the ADDIE model, an iterative framework encompassing Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation, due to its systematic yet flexible nature, which is particularly suited for integrating digital tools and designing technology-enhanced learning experiences in PAI (Sanjaya, 2019; Munir, 2022). The interaction and adaptation of these models underscore the multifaceted theoretical foundation of PAI curriculum development, which must dynamically synthesize pedagogical structure, teacher agency, and technological innovation to remain effective (Mujahidin, 2023).

### **2.2. The Merdeka Curriculum Policy and Integrative Implications for PAI**

The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum by the Indonesian government marks a profound policy shift that significantly recontextualizes the environment for PAI curriculum development. This new policy paradigm moves away from rigid content standardization toward emphasizing competency-based learning, student-centered pedagogy, and differentiated instruction, which grants educational institutions and teachers greater autonomy (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Mulyasa, 2023). For PAI, this translates into a pressing need to evolve beyond traditional knowledge transmission; the curriculum must now be explicitly designed to integrate core Islamic values with the development of essential 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and digital literacy, ensuring students are both spiritually grounded and competitively prepared for modern challenges (Mujahidin, 2023; Rahman, 2023). Consequently, this policy transformation redefines success in PAI, framing it not only in terms of doctrinal understanding but also in the cultivation of adaptable, morally sound individuals capable of thriving in a complex world.

This integrative mandate fundamentally transforms the role of the PAI teacher from a passive curriculum deliverer into an active, creative learning designer and facilitator (Rasyidi & Al Idrus, 2024; Basri & Ab Rahman, 2025). Teachers are now required to master pedagogical strategies that can translate national policy into contextual, engaging, and value-laden lesson plans and syllabi, a task that involves deep understanding of both student diversity and the spiritual objectives of Islamic education (Hidayat, 2021; Pujianti & Nugraha, 2024). Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum's flexibility creates space for PAI to more robustly incorporate multicultural and contextual values, aligning with the broader Islamic educational goal of fostering tolerant, empathetic character (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) within Indonesia's pluralistic society (Suryana, 2021; Muhajir, 2022; Firdaus & Suwendi, 2025). However, this promising direction is not without challenges, as studies indicate gaps in teacher understanding, digital literacy, and the practical translation of policy into classroom practice, highlighting areas requiring further support and innovative research (Suryana, 2021; Munir, 2022).

### 3. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to identify, analyze, and synthesize research findings related to the development of the Islamic religious education curriculum in madrasahs and schools. This approach was selected because it provides a comprehensive overview of the directions, models, and trends in Islamic religious education curriculum development based on relevant and credible academic publications. Data collection was conducted through a literature search using the Publish or Perish (PoP) application, with Google Scholar as the primary data source. The search process applied four main keywords, namely the development of the PAI curriculum in madrasahs, models of curriculum development, syllabus development, and lesson plan (*Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran/RPP*) development, with a limit of the top 20 articles for each keyword based on relevance and citation index, resulting in 80 initial articles.

The research instrument consisted of a literature search and selection guidelines based on predefined inclusion criteria and the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) framework to ensure consistency and accuracy in the screening process. The variables examined in this study included PAI curriculum development, curriculum development models, innovations in Islamic religious education syllabi and lesson plans, and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasahs and schools. Data analysis was conducted using two methods: thematic analysis and bibliometric analysis.

Thematic analysis was applied to categorize and interpret the content of the selected articles into key themes such as curriculum development models, instructional innovation, and Merdeka Curriculum policy directions. Bibliometric analysis was performed using VOSviewer software to map relationships among keywords from the 20 selected articles. This analysis produced co-occurrence network visualizations highlighting dominant concepts such as curriculum development, Islamic education, Merdeka curriculum, education, and Islam, which served as the basis for identifying research trends and directions in Islamic religious education curriculum development in Indonesia. Validation and interpretation were carried out through internal triangulation among PRISMA screening results, thematic findings, and bibliometric visualizations generated by VOSviewer to ensure the validity and consistency of the results. The consistently identified findings were then systematically interpreted and organized into categories reflecting development models, policy orientations, and innovations in Islamic religious education curriculum development.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Systematic Literature Review Approach**

Based on the search results obtained using the Publish or Perish (PoP) application with four main keywords, a total of 80 articles relevant to the topic of Islamic Religious Education curriculum development were identified. After undergoing the screening process using the PRISMA guidelines, 20 articles were found to meet the inclusion criteria and were selected as the main sources for this review. Most of these articles were published between 2020 and 2024, indicating increasing academic attention to PAI curriculum development in line with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia.

In terms of research focus, approximately 45% of the articles discuss curriculum development models, 30% highlight innovations in syllabus and RPP development, and 25% address the implementation of competency-based curriculum policies. These findings indicate that studies on PAI curriculum development continue to evolve both conceptually and practically at the madrasah and school levels. The thematic analysis of the 20 selected articles identified three main themes: adaptive curriculum development models, innovation in syllabus and lesson plan development, and the integration of Islamic values with 21st-century competencies.

Several studies reveal a shift from a centralized curriculum model toward a more adaptive and participatory approach. The Tyler model remains a conceptual foundation for establishing the relationship between learning objectives and evaluation (Sanjaya, 2019; Sukmadinata, 2020), but it is increasingly combined with the Taba model, which provides greater opportunities for teachers to act as curriculum developers through a grassroots approach (Nurdin, 2020). In addition, the ADDIE model is widely used as a modern framework that supports the design, implementation, and evaluation of digital-based learning (Munir, 2022; Mujahidin, 2023).

Innovation in syllabus and lesson plan development is also a major focus, particularly in efforts to align PAI learning with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers are required to design learning activities that not only emphasize cognitive achievement but also foster religious attitudes, critical thinking skills, and digital literacy (Hidayat, 2021), while syllabi are developed in a more contextual, flexible manner and based on essential learning outcomes (Mulyasa, 2023).

Furthermore, several studies emphasize the importance of integrating Islamic values with 21st-century competencies, such as collaboration, communication, and creativity (Arifin, 2022; Rahman, 2023). Through this integration, the PAI curriculum is expected not only to focus on doctrinal aspects but also to develop tolerant and empathetic character in line with the Islamic principle of “*rahmatan lil ‘alamin*” (Suryana, 2021). At the data extraction stage, each selected article was systematically analyzed to identify and classify key information, including the authors’ names, year of publication, title of the work, research methods used, and main findings related to the development of the PAI curriculum, syllabus, and lesson plans in madrasahs and schools, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the characteristics and contributions of the reviewed studies.

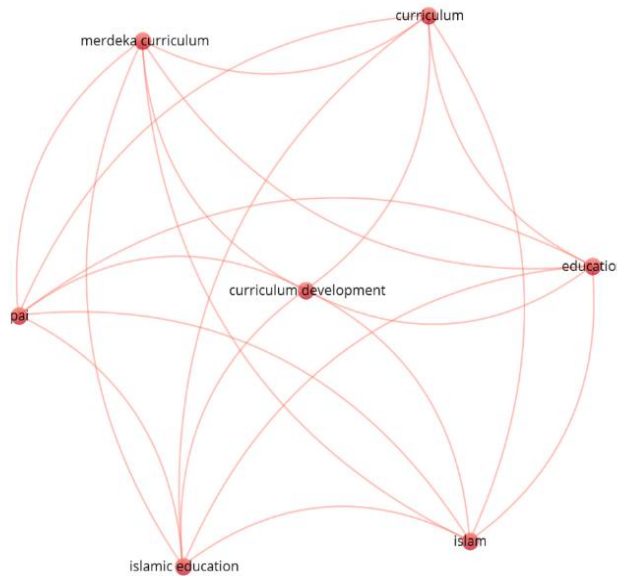
Table 1 presents a summary of the articles and primary sources used in the SLR related to PAI curriculum development in madrasah and schools. This table includes information on the author and year of publication, the title of the article or book, the method or type of study, and key findings relevant to the research focus.

**Table 1.** The Results of Data Extraction

| No | Author & Year                  | Article / Book Title   | Method / Type of Study     |
|----|--------------------------------|--|----------------------------|
| 1  | Arifin (2022)                  | Islamic Educational Philosophy and Its Relevance to the PAI Curriculum             | Theoretical study          |
| 2  | Fauzan (2024)                  | Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in PAI Learning in Secondary Schools      | Field study / Qualitative  |
| 3  | Hidayat (2021)                 | Teacher Competence in Developing HOTS-Based PAI Lesson Plans in Madrasah Aliyah    | Descriptive qualitative    |
| 4  | Kemendikbudristek (2022)       | Merdeka Curriculum Implementation Guide  | Policy document            |
| 5  | Kitchenham and Charters (2007) | Guidelines for Performing Systematic Literature Reviews in Software Engineering    | Methodological (SLR)       |
| 6  | Mulyasa (2023)                 | Development and Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum                           | Theoretical study          |
| 7  | Mujahidin (2023)               | Integration of 21st Century Competencies in Islamic Religious Education Curriculum | Literature review          |
| 8  | Munir (2022)                   | Digital Transformation in PAI Learning   | Conceptual study           |
| 9  | Nasution (2011)                | Principles of Curriculum   | Classic theoretical        |
| 10 | Nurdin (2020)                  | Innovation in PAI Curriculum Development in Madrasah                               | Descriptive qualitative    |
| 11 | Piaget (2015)                  | Cognitive Learning Theory and Its Application in Curriculum                        | Psychological theory       |
| 12 | Rahman (2023)                  | Challenges of PAI Curriculum Development in the Digital Era                        | Literature review          |
| 13 | Sanjaya (2019)                 | Planning and Design of Learning Systems  | Conceptual study           |
| 14 | Sukmadinata (2020)             | Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice  | Theoretical                |
| 15 | Suryana (2021)                 | Multicultural Curriculum in Islamic Education                                      | Conceptual study           |
| 16 | Tilaar (2017)                  | National Education Policy: Philosophical and Sociological Review                   | Policy review              |
| 17 | Tyler (1949)                   | Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction                                     | Theoretical model          |
| 18 | UNESCO (2020)                  | ICT and Curriculum Reform in Developing Countries                                  | Global policy study        |
| 19 | Vygotsky (2016)                | Social Theory and Modern Education   | Social-psychological study |
| 20 | Law Number 20 of 2003          | National Education System  | National regulations       |

#### 4.2. Bibliometric Analysis (VOSviewer)

Bibliometric analysis was conducted using the VOSviewer application to map the interrelationships between keywords appearing in 20 selected articles selected from the systematic literature review. Data were processed using the co-occurrence of keywords approach using the full counting method.



**Figure 1.** Results of Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis Using VOSviewer

Figure 1 is a visualization of the bibliometric network (co-occurrence network) generated using VOSviewer, which illustrates the relationship between keywords in research on the development of the PAI curriculum.

**Table 2.** Result of Keyword Co-occurrence Analysis

| <b>Keywords (Nodes)</b> | <b>Meaning or Context</b>  | <b>Relevance to Research</b>   |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Curriculum development  | Systematic curriculum development to achieve educational goals.                | The main focus of the study is how the PAI curriculum is designed and adapted to the context of the madrasah/school. |
| Islamic education       | Education based on Islamic values and spirituality.                            | It shows that all research is rooted in Islamic principles in learning.  |
| GOOD                    | PAI as a core subject in schools/madrasah.                                     | Describe the specific scope of research in the field of PAI.   |
| Merdeka curriculum      | Indonesia's new curriculum emphasizes freedom of learning and differentiation. | Linking PAI research with the latest national education policies.  |
| Education               | The general context of education and learning in Indonesia.                    | Showing the relevance of PAI in the framework of the national education system.                                      |
| Islam                   | Islamic values, teachings, and ethics as the foundation of the curriculum.     | Describe the ideological and philosophical dimensions in the development of the PAI curriculum.                      |

Table 2 shows the results of bibliometric mapping using the VOSviewer application, which produced one main cluster that represented the relationship between keywords in studies related to the development of the PAI curriculum in madrasah and schools. On the network map, six dominant keywords can be seen that

are closely interrelated, namely curriculum development, Islamic education, PAI, Merdeka curriculum, education, and Islam. These six keywords form a strong cluster, with the center of connection being in the term curriculum development, which has the highest total link strength among other keywords.

The dominance of the term curriculum development indicates that most research in this field focuses on the process and model, not just on implementation or evaluation. The strong relationship between Islamic education, PAI, and Islam shows that there is an emphasis on Islamic values in curriculum development in Islamic educational institutions, reflecting the ongoing effort to ensure Islamic education maintains its religious identity while responding to contemporary educational demands (Nahuda, 2024). Meanwhile, the relevance of the Merdeka curriculum indicates the relevance of the research to the latest national education policies that emphasize learning differentiation, student independence, and the integration of spiritual values in the modern context.

In addition, the connection with the word education shows that the development of the PAI curriculum does not stand alone, but is part of a broader educational discourse, including issues of 21st-century competencies, learning innovation, and digital literacy. This interconnectedness reflects the holistic approach needed for PAI to remain relevant in an evolving educational landscape that increasingly values comprehensive competency development (Rahman, 2023). Thus, the results of this analysis strengthen the finding that the current direction of PAI curriculum development in madrasahs and schools is oriented towards the integration between Islamic values and the principles of the Independent Curriculum that are adaptive to the changing times. Quantitatively, the results of the analysis show that the six keywords form one main cluster with a total of about 45 relationships (link strength) between concepts. The dominance of the word curriculum development strengthens the position of this research as the main field of study, while the relationship between Islamic education and the independent curriculum indicates a trend of synergy between Islamic spiritual values and national education policies.

## 5. Discussion

The results of the systematic study show that research on the development of the Islamic religious education curriculum in madrasahs and schools has an integrated thematic tendency. Through VOSviewer bibliometric analysis, it was found that all the main keywords, curriculum development, Islamic education, Merdeka curriculum, education, and Islam, form a large cluster that is closely interconnected. This shows that the focus of research in the field of the Islamic religious education curriculum is not divided into different subthemes, but is centered on one consistent development direction, namely the integration of Islamic values with modern learning based on the Independent Curriculum, which signifies a cohesive academic effort to synthesize tradition with contemporary educational innovation (Mulyasa, 2023).

These findings strengthen the understanding that the development of the Islamic religious education curriculum in Indonesia is not only moving in a theoretical dimension, but also in a practical and policy dimension. The concept of “curriculum development” is the central point, illustrating the seriousness of academics and education practitioners in updating the curriculum structure to be relevant to the demands of the times. The close relationship between Islamic education, and the Merdeka curriculum shows that there is a synergy between Islamic spirituality and national education policies (Mulyasa, 2023; Rahman, 2023).

Conceptually, curriculum development models such as Tyler, Taba, and ADDIE (Sukmadinata, 2020; Nurdin, 2020; Munir, 2022) remain the main theoretical reference points, but they have been adapted to suit the differentiation and flexibility approach offered by the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, recent studies have highlighted

more innovative aspects, such as the integration of digital learning (Mujahidin, 2023), the application of Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) (Hidayat, 2021), and the formation of Islamic characters that are contextual to the global era (Suryana, 2021; Arifin, 2022).

In addition, this study also emphasizes that the development of the Islamic religious education syllabus and lesson plan plays an important role in translating curriculum values into teaching and learning activities. Teachers as learning designers play a role in connecting core competencies, spiritual values, and student needs. This is in accordance with the direction of research that places teachers as curriculum innovators, not just implementers of education policy (Mulyasa, 2023). Thus, it can be concluded that the development of the Islamic religious education curriculum in madrasahs and schools is currently moving towards a contextual, integrative, and collaborative paradigm where Islamic values are harmonized with modern education policies to produce students who are moral, think critically, and are able to adapt to social changes (Nurdin et al., 2024).

Although various studies show the integration of Islamic values with the independent curriculum, most studies still focus on the conceptual and policy levels. There has not been much empirical research that measures the effectiveness of the implementation of the PAI curriculum in madrasahs and schools directly. Challenges in the field are also still found, such as the limitations of digital literacy of Islamic religious education teachers, differences in readiness between educational institutions, and the lack of practical guidance in preparing RPP based on Merdeka curriculum. This condition shows that there is a gap in advanced research that needs to be explored to strengthen the implementation of the Islamic values-based PAI curriculum in the context of 21st-century education.

## **6. Conclusion**

Based on a systematic review of 20 relevant articles, the main findings indicate that research on the development of the PAI curriculum is predominantly centered on the theme of curriculum development integrated with Islamic education and the Merdeka Curriculum. Bibliometric analysis reveals that all key concepts form a single thematic cluster, demonstrating a unified research direction focused on integrating Islamic values with modern educational policies and innovations. These findings address the research objective by confirming that PAI curriculum development in madrasahs and schools is moving toward an integrative paradigm that emphasizes not only spiritual values but also the development of 21st-century competencies. The most frequently applied curriculum development models include the Tyler, Taba, and ADDIE models, which have been adapted to align with the principles of flexibility and differentiation promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum. The development of PAI syllabi and lesson plans represents a concrete form of curriculum implementation, oriented toward strengthening students' spiritual, social, and digital literacy competencies.

The implications of these findings are theoretical, practical, and policy-oriented. Theoretically, this study reinforces the view that PAI curriculum development should be integrative, combining Islamic values with contemporary educational demands. Practically, the results can serve as a reference for teachers and madrasahs in designing contextual syllabi and lesson plans that align with student characteristics and the Merdeka Curriculum. From a policy perspective, the findings encourage the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to expand opportunities for curriculum innovation grounded in spirituality and technology. As a recommendation, future research should focus on empirical studies that examine the effectiveness of implementing the Merdeka-based PAI curriculum in diverse madrasah and school contexts. In addition, the development of national technical guidelines for digitally based PAI

curriculum development grounded in Islamic values is recommended to support effective and consistent implementation.

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### ***Acknowledgment***

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of individuals who supported the completion of this article.

### ***Funding Information***

This research did not receive any funding.

### ***Conflict of Interest Statement***

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

### ***Ethical Approval and Originality Statement***

Ethical approval was obtained for this study. The manuscript represents original work and has not been previously published, nor is it under consideration by another journal.

### ***Data Disclosure Statement***

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.



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