Exploration of PAI Teacher Challenges and Opportunities; Case Study of Implementation The Independent Learning Curriculum, In East Lombok Elementary Schools

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Abstract: Education in Indonesia is experiencing a significant transformation, one of the concrete steps in dealing with this development is the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum. The Independent Learning Curriculum carries the principle of inclusivity and views every child as an individual who has unique potential, however it still has several challenges and opportunities for Islamic religious education teachers. This study focuses on the challenges of Islamic religious education teachers in implementing, knowing opportunities for teachers and analysing the role of the independent learning curriculum in learning Islamic religious education in elementary schools. The method in this research is a case study using a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach. Data collection techniques use semi-structured interviews, observation and documentation techniques. Data sources are PAI teachers, school principals and PAI Teacher Working Groups in 32 elementary schools in East Lombok. Thematic analysis is used to analysis the extent to which curriculum implementation can be implemented. The results of the research identified several challenges faced by PAI teachers, including adapting student-focused learning approaches, limited resources and infrastructure and strengthening curriculum evaluation. Other findings include opportunities for PAI teachers to utilize technology, increase student engagement, collaboration between subjects for cross-disciplinary learning and an emphasis on developing student skills. In conclusion, PAI teachers need to strive to align PAI learning with curriculum vision and principles that include student-based, contextual and collaborative learning. Meanwhile, opportunities that can be exploited include making PAI learning more interesting, relevant and collaborative and PAI teachers being able to utilize the role of the independent learning curriculum as an opportunity to improve the quality of Islamic religious education in elementary schools, helping students understand religious values and teachings, and being able to support character education efforts based on moral values.

Keywords: Challenges, independent learning curriculum, opportunities, PAI teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, some of the issues that are often seen mainly relate to curriculum issues and end with education policy. When teachers are teaching, we can also see similar problems, one of which is the implementation of the independent curriculum which is a new curriculum model in education in Indonesia. In recent years, the National Higher Education Standards (SN-Dikti) have been updated three times, by the standards set by the Independent Campus Learning Movement (MBKM). This update is in the form of Permenristekdikti No. 49 of 2014, No. 44 of 2015, and No. 3 of 2020 (Suryaman, 2020).

Amid the spirit of educational reform, elementary school PAI teachers are faced with several challenges and opportunities in implementing the independent curriculum (Marisa, 2021). The challenges can vary, from developing teaching materials and learning curricula to the ability to integrate technology into Islamic learning. To achieve the goal of improving the quality of education in a better direction, it is necessary to remember that one of

the goals of educational success is to develop an effective curriculum, adapt to cultural demands and meet the expectations of today's society (Alsubaie, 2016). In Indonesia, several challenges have emerged to achieve equal access to and quality of education, one of which is the implementation of the independent learning curriculum for PAI teachers in elementary schools.

In connection with this, there are some challenges taking place in some primary schools in Eastern Lombok. Among them are *First,* there is a disparity between schools in urban and rural areas, as well as comparisons between schools that are superior and those that are not, making it a serious problem that needs to be addressed. *Second,* conventional educational models are more centered on teachers and curriculum, so they often ignore the important role of students in the learning process. *Third,* teacher readiness and quality of teaching are key factors in achieving a successful education. For example, improving the quality of teachers and preparing them to adopt new approaches contained in the independent learning curriculum, is a significant challenge. *Fourth,* the involvement of parents and the community in education is often underappreciated. This kind of challenge refers to the role and involvement of being more active in supporting the education of their children by the spirit of KMB.

Fifth, successful implementation of the independent learning curriculum certainly requires significant investment, in teacher training, technology, development of teaching materials, monitoring and evaluation. So budget and resource limitations are important obstacles that must be kept in mind. *Sixth,* migration from more traditional educational approaches to more open, collaborative, and student-centred models. *Seventh.* the implementation of this independent curriculum must be in harmony with the existing education system, to influence changes in regulations, policies and curriculum, especially in East Lombok elementary schools.(*Observasi Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Guru PAI di Sekolah Dasar Lombok Timur*, 2023)

Another challenge is that 55 PAI teachers consisting of 32 elementary schools and 3 Madrasah Ibtidaiyah play an active role in implementing the independent curriculum. However, the problem that was later discovered was: (1) Financing problems include implementation of training financing, development of teaching materials, monitoring of curriculum implementation in each school (2) The evaluation of learning is still very limited. (3) Lack of teacher enthusiasm and enthusiasm in making changes. (4) Teachers' skills in the use of technology are still low, so they are unable to adapt to the needs of the curriculum (Preliminary Observation of the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in East Lombok Elementary Schools,2023). In other countries like the Netherlands, they are more inclined to use the tradition of freedom in the education system, so governments tend not to make constraints in establishing curriculum development in each school. Finally, it enables schools, teachers and students to have the amount of freedom in expression.(Thijs & Van Den Akker, 2009) Relatedly, this opportunity raises the need for a more inclusive and student-centered approach, as proposed in the independent learning curriculum.

The development of educational curricula is essentially driven by the scientific disciplines themselves. For example, changes in the medical education curriculum in the United States (USA), over the last few decades there has been a shift from just providing knowledge to students, to teaching skills such as clinical reasoning and others.(Schneiderhan et al., 2019) As the process changes, the need to develop a suitable curriculum to teach these new skills becomes increasingly important. Based on the above phenomenon, to realize opportunities based on the challenges faced, it is important to develop technological skills and abilities as well as digital development of PAI teachers in facing climate change and the demands of the world of work. Which has changed the educational landscape in Indonesia. In addition, education needs to keep up with the times, preparing students with relevant skills and adaptability for the future. Substantially, an independent curriculum can create opportunities for teachers to innovate in teaching methods and create a more relevant and creative learning environment for students. Independent curriculum is the new name for the curriculum prototype created by the Minister of Education, Research and Technology. Currently, schools are still allowed to choose the curriculum to be used in each class individually. Other curricula offered include the 2013 Curriculum and the Independent Curriculum.(Wiguna & Tristaningrat,2022) Below is a table of

curriculum changes from year to year occurring in Indonesia.

The independent curriculum is promoted as an independent curriculum which is recommended as a more flexible alternative, with a focus on developing students' character and skills. The main characteristics of this curriculum are (1) Project-based learning to develop soft skills and character by the student's Pancasila profile. (2) The importance of emphasizing the learning environment, to develop basic skills such as literacy and numeracy. As the educational paradigm develops and changes, the Indonesian government introduced the independent learning curriculum as an effort to update and improve the quality of education at all levels, including elementary schools. The advantages of the independent curriculum explained by the Kemendikbud and Culture are that it is more focused on the main material and the gradual development of student competencies so that students can learn more deeply, meaningfully and happily, without rushing. Learning is much more relevant and interactive through project activities, thereby providing wider opportunities for students to actively explore actual issues such as the environment, health and other student issues that can support the development of Pancasila character and competency profiles. This teaching aims to strengthen students' literacy and numeracy as well as their knowledge in each subject.(Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022)

In Indonesia, education plays an important role in developing the personality of the nation and society as a whole, including in the context of moral and religious understanding. Islamic education is an integral part of the school curriculum, as a tool to educate future generations about religious and moral values. Through exploring these challenges and opportunities, Islamic religious education teachers are expected to be able to identify problems and find appropriate solutions, so that PAI learning in elementary schools becomes more effective and interesting, according to students' skills and needs. Therefore, PAI teachers, as the main drivers of Islamic learning at the elementary level, can play a central role in guiding students in understanding religion and morals. On the other hand, the implementation of the independent learning curriculum also encounters many obstacles and challenges, such as limited availability of resources, the need to increase technological competence, as well as

adapting traditional teaching methods to a more progressive learning model. Based on the problems, facts, challenges and opportunities described above, the researcher wants to find common threads with the aim of 1) finding out what the challenges are for Islamic religious education teachers in implementing an independent curriculum in East Lombok elementary schools. 2) find out and analyze PAI teachers' opportunities in implementing the independent learning curriculum. 3) analyze and describe the role of the independent learning curriculum in Islamic religious learning at the elementary school level.

METHODS

This research focuses on case study research. The focus of case studies is ongoing events and social interactions within individuals, groups, organizations, or communities.(Syahza & Riau, 2021) This type of research uses a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach.(Fauzi et al., 2023). In this research, the author wants to understand and analyze the challenges and opportunities for PAI teachers in implementing KMB. Meanwhile, the Independent Learning Curriculum is a new curriculum that needs to be adjusted in the implementation of learning in schools. To obtain primary and secondary data sources, the researchers used three techniques: in-depth interviews, observation techniques, and documentation. The interview questions consist of open questions and are used as a method of exchanging information by giving the participants space to discuss the topics that are being discussed.

The interviews are carried out in a semi-structured way to use the initial research data. Researchers focus on meeting informants at different times, according to their availability of time to complete the interview data. Documentation data using MP3 recorders and digital cameras, interviewing and monitoring organizations using data collection tools. Besides, using a notebook has the additional benefit of aligning all conversations with the data. Includes a tape recorder that can be used to record speeches or other voices from data or information sources (Suryana et al., 2013). Moderate participation is used in the observation method. Researchers went directly into the field to observe the findings from the data sources

mentioned above and took part in various practical implementation activities in schools. On the contrary, the data obtained through the observation method is data that cannot be supported by documentation or other evidence, as well as facts that have not been acknowledged or confirmed but are still acceptable. The observations are carried out through communication with informants about the focus and variables of the research.

In addition, there is research documentation through records, translations of books, literary works of teaching materials and modules. Through these documents, researchers can obtain research data and collect data from interviews and observations. According to Sugiyono, documentation studies use the collection of complete data from the methods of interviewees and observation in qualitative research (Sugiyono, 2010). Meanwhile, open interview transcripts, observation descriptions, as well as analysis of documents and other evidence, are used in qualitative methods. The available data is analyzed with a focus on supporting linguistic evidence. It is done to understand phenomena from various perspectives, including social and institutional contexts, and to conduct qualitative research that is inductive and naturalistic. Data analysis in this paper is thematic analysis. Social data analysis that identifies, analyzes and understands recurring themes or motifs that appear in a text is known as thematic analysis (Sitasari, 2022). The main purpose of the thematic analysis in this research is to reveal the meaning contained in the text data and to identify the themes, and the main concepts that emerge from the data (Prastowo, 2019). As a result, students will be more attentive, analytical and motivated in the implementation of the independent learning curriculum carried out by PAI teachers at the primary school in East Lombok.

Findings
PAI Teacher Challenges in Implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum

In this section, the researcher analyzes the findings based on the results of research in the field, that there are limited facilities and infrastructure for PAI teachers in implementing the independent learning curriculum. The condition of school facilities can influence student learning outcomes and facilities can also help in creating a conducive learning environment. Schools that are equipped with adequate facilities and good infrastructure tend to appreciate better educational outcomes than schools without facilities (Nepal, 2016). Therefore, these obstacles are seen in the lack of access to technology, including guides and textbooks, or the required learning resources. Apart from that, the lack of adequate training is a challenge so it is not uncommon for teachers to be less prepared to implement the independent learning curriculum approach in the context of implementing learning in schools. Teachers still feel they are not ready to integrate the independent curriculum with technological capabilities and student-centred learning methods. Another challenge is that PAI teachers have difficulty measuring student progress using different methods, so replacing conventional evaluation approaches with contextual approaches is still confusing.

The facts above are closely related to the development of artificial abilities. This ability actively acts as the object of the technology device, so that the benefits can be felt. Old literacy is not enough to write, read and analyze. However, it also requires special tools to read, analyze, and use digital information (Big data). Therefore, researchers understand how to communicate in the field of humanities in earlier times (Suryaman, 2020). A PAI teacher in elementary school has a dual role, which means that PAI teachers not only play the role of educators and teachers but there are also other roles such as being a dominant instructor and facilitator that supports the exploration and self-understanding of students. Various settings have been used to encourage the development of executive functions in children, adults, and masters. It is similar to what Lakes stated that learning interactions with educators seem to play an important role in student development. For example, cognitive training, feedback, school practice programmers, attention, student body experience and a good school curriculum. more effective than students who do not get special support from educators.(Lakes & Hoyt, 2004)

It can be a challenge of its own, especially if they've been teaching with a different approach over the years. On the one hand, there are efforts and approaches that PAI teachers can do to deal with students with problems such as (1) disciplinary approaches.(Griffith & Tyner, 2019) which refers to school rules and sanctions. (2) The mentoring and counselling approach does

not use sanctions at all but relies more on the quality of interpersonal relationships of mutual trust between educators and students. Another challenge is resistance to change.(Pardo del Val & Martinez Fuentes, 2003) In other words, the psychological challenges of PAI teachers, such as resistance to change, can be common. A PAI teacher who is accustomed to traditional methods and curriculum recognizes the difficulties in adapting to change. There is also more time and workload, which means PAI teachers in primary schools are also required to implement an independent learning curriculum that focuses on more individual and active learning. So it requires more time and a lot of energy from teachers, ultimately this can add to their already accumulating workload.

Apart from that, there are challenges when PAI teachers try to integrate a nationally designed curriculum into a local context that may have different cultural or religious values. So, adapting to real-life contexts is difficult for PAI teachers. This also includes challenges regarding the involvement of parents and the community in the process of implementing the independent learning curriculum. Unequal access to technology and teacher resources in various geographic regions is also a challenge because students have the same access to education in the independent curriculum. Knowing the challenges above, it becomes a common thought, especially for Islamic religious education teachers in elementary schools, to adapt their abilities to the content of the independent curriculum. So that in the end it can provide benefits for student learning in elementary schools.

PAI Teacher Opportunities in Implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum

The independent learning curriculum policy is one of the strategies for improving the national education system in Indonesia. It is hoped that this program can produce a fun and interesting educational environment. As a result, it is believed that it can create an ideal education (Marliani, Siagian, 2022). Implementing the independent learning curriculum through continuous monitoring and evaluation can be an opportunity to help develop learning strategies and models in schools. This is certainly a good opportunity for PAI teachers to face changes in the educational climate and increase the effectiveness of implementing the independent curriculum at the elementary school level.

Here are some of the opportunities that PAI teachers can take advantage of 1) PAI Teachers can integrate PAI learning with real contexts (students' daily lives). This helps teachers make learning material more relevant and interesting. In the context of Islamic Religious Education, contextual learning means teaching Islamic concepts by referring to situations or events in the lives of students (Ramdani, 2018). PAI teachers can use concrete examples of the student's everyday life, for example, discussing events or issues that match Islamic religious concepts, such as ethics, goodness, or social responsibility. Thus, teachers can take examples of the importance of sharing in Islam and apply this concept to real situations in schools or community environments.

Therefore, students' interest and motivation to learn can increase the learning experience in a fun way. This curriculum model can also be applied outside the classroom. Thus, this activity can encourage students' creativity and innovation. Learning is carried out interactively so that students can get maximum results in the learning process. *"This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience."*(Frese & Gielnik, 2014)

In connection with this, a total of 55 teachers of Islamic education follow Technical guidance (BIMTEK). The formation is comprised of 49 PAI primary school teachers and 5 Religious Education high school teachers. In the discussion of the implementation of the independent curriculum (ICM) PAI Basic School was presented about the policy of the Ministry of Religion during 2 hours of meeting. Analysis of CP, TP, ATP and KKTP PAI during the 8-hour meeting. PAI 6 hours of meetings on diagnostic assessment, PAI teaching module 8 hours of meetings and RTL or entrepreneurship 6 hours of meetings. So that's a total of 32 hours of meetings over three days. The following is a table of participants who attended the assistance in implementing the Independent Curriculum (IKM).(*Workshop Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar di Kemenag Lombok Timur*, 2023). In the above training, there was enthusiasm from PAI teachers, but until now it has not been carried out optimally, this is because

there is no continuity of the training. Budi Hadianto one of the teachers of PAI Elementary School 1 Sepit revealed that: "I lack understanding about the curriculum of learning, the flow and its systematics". 1). It is not easy to implement the new curriculum launched by the Kemendikbud and Culture at the beginning of 2020 after COVID-19. 2). PAI teachers can use various technological tools and facilities to present Islamic religious education learning in a more interactive, interesting and innovative way. The use of technology in PAI learning allows teachers to create a more dynamic learning experience and adapt to current technological developments. For example, by creating learning materials that combine text, images, audio and video.

So they can create multimedia presentations that visualize Islamic religious concepts, display historical images, or show video recordings of lectures or sermons. 3). PAI teachers can also utilize e-learning platforms or online learning management systems to upload lesson materials, assignments and additional resources. Students can access it online, and teachers can track their progress and provide feedback on learning. Thus, the use of technology in PAI learning is not only about replacing traditional methods with digital tools but also about improving the quality of learning by utilizing the advantages of technology to make the material more interactive, accessible and interesting for students.

In this way, PAI teachers can create a learning environment that is more dynamic and relevant to students' current interests and learning styles. 4). The independent learning curriculum (KMB) can encourage collaboration between subjects.(Nadhiroh & Anshori, 2023) In this case, PAI teachers can collaborate with teachers from other subjects to create interesting and meaningful cross-subject learning. Collaboration between subjects can help teachers work together to create integrated and more meaningful learning experiences for students. For example, by combining the theme of cultural diversity, religious stories, literature, or local stories related to that theme. In the context of the Independent Learning Curriculum (KMB), collaboration between subjects is emphasized to enrich the learning process and help students make connections between different concepts.

Collaboration between subjects can also encourage student skill development. Such as being able to think critically, and collaboratively and being able to solve problems found. Through integrated learning, students can also learn to connect concepts from various subjects in real-life contexts. 5). Project-based learning, in this case, PAI teachers can develop learning projects that involve students in research, exploration and application of PAI concepts in students' daily lives. 6). Another opportunity is that students can develop life skills, meaning PAI teachers can integrate learning life skills, such as critical thinking skills, ethics, leadership and tolerance, in PAI teaching at school. Therefore, education does not only focus on providing cognitive knowledge but also on developing practical skills and psychomotor skills. This can include skills that are relevant to the student's personal, social and professional life. The Merdeka curriculum is expected to produce a superior generation, capable of facing the challenges of the future. Thus, this curriculum can cultivate the interest of students to learn and develop themselves.

Discussion
The Role of KMB in PAI Learning in Elementary Schools

Many important things are recommended by the independent learning curriculum for learning the Islamic religion in public schools. The results can change the learning paradigm and improve the quality of religious education in Indonesia. KMB is a curriculum framework that aims to provide freedom and flexibility to teachers and students in the learning process (Susilowati, 2022). Among them is the *first*, the development of contextual learning on the curriculum can drive PAI learning achievement. PAI teachers are allowed to design learning that relates to real situations or contexts in student life, such as religious values in the family, school, or community environment. As a result, KMB places students as active subjects in the learning process. PAI teachers are encouraged to give more space to students to ask questions, make opinions, and actively participate in learning.

Second, KMB supports the use of technology in PAI learning. There are many important aspects of the recommendations of the Free Learning Curriculum for Islamic learning in schools. It can help students to engage more in learning. In addition, the KMB promotes formative assessment, which means that PAI teachers can provide more qualified and in-depth feedback to students continuously so that

teachers can monitor student's progress and help them overcome difficulties in understanding PAI material. *Thirdly,* it can shape the progress of student independence by providing an opportunity for students to develop their independence in learning. For example, PAI teachers can provide tasks or projects that enable students to explore Islamic concepts more independently. In addition to enabling PAI teachers to incorporate Islamic teaching into classroom lessons, this also allows students to understand and apply Islamic ethical and moral principles in everyday life. In addition, it allows PAI teachers to integrate Islamic values into learning across subjects, creating opportunities for students to understand and apply Islamic ethical and moral principles

Fourth, encourage the concept of lifelong education, because PAI learning is not only limited to inside the classroom but also outside the classroom. Students are encouraged to continue studying and developing their understanding of Islam throughout their lives so that Islam is not only understood as a religion but also has divine values in its teachings. Thus, KMB plays an important role in improving the quality of PAI learning at the elementary school level. It helps create a more dynamic, relevant, and interactive learning environment that can help students understand and internalize Islamic values and teachings better.[1] In this context, PAI teachers have a key role in designing and managing learning in the spirit of the independent learning curriculum to increase the understanding of Islam among students.

Several additional aspects can explain the role of KMB in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning at the elementary school level, including KMB which encourages the development of relevant life skills in PAI learning. In addition to understanding religious concepts, students are also taught practical skills such as communication skills, problem-solving, personal management skills, and critical thinking skills to help them face challenges in everyday life. In addition, the independent learning curriculum also provides an opportunity for PAI teachers to teach an appreciation of religious and cultural diversity so that PAI teachers can explain the principles of tolerance, cooperation, and respect for differences in the context of Islamic values.

The independent learning curriculum supports character education efforts based on moral and ethical values, which are in line with Islamic values. So PAI teachers can play an important role in helping students develop good character, such as integrity, respect and responsibility. Including empowering students to explore interests and talents. PAI teachers can help students develop an interest in various aspects of the Islamic religion, such as the art of calligraphy, Islamic music, or Islamic studies and Islamic history. The independent curriculum provides opportunities to increase religious literacy among students. PAI teachers can teach a deeper understanding of the Al-Quran, Hadith, Islamic history, and other Islamic religious teachings. In this way, PAI teachers can encourage students to think creatively about how to connect religious concepts and solutions to life's problems.

The role of the independent learning curriculum in learning the Islamic religion at the elementary school level can create an environment that supports students in knowing the Islamic religion, developing positive character, and practical skills that can help students become fighters. a central role in integrating Islamic religious and ethical values into students' learning experiences in the spirit of an independent curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research analysis above, researchers can conclude that PAI teachers need to strive to align PAI learning with the vision and principles of the independent learning curriculum, including student-based, contextual and collaborative learning. This can be a challenge if the PAI learning approach is not in line with the KMB paradigm. Limited resources, including textbooks, teaching materials, and an understanding of technology, can be a challenge in implementing innovative technology-based learning. In addition, PAI teachers need ongoing training and additional professional development to fully understand the concepts and practices of KMB and how to integrate KMB elements into PAI learning. Meanwhile, opportunities that can be exploited include making PAI learning more interesting and relevant to student's lives through contextual approaches, technology and

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[1] (Hidayat, 2016) 15.

collaboration between subjects. In addition, there is an opportunity for PAI teachers to help students develop good character by Islamic values. Also helps students develop practical skills and skills in everyday life so that they can contribute to society and their environment. Integrating Islamic values in learning across subjects, to create opportunities for students to understand and practice Islamic ethical and moral principles. By understanding the challenges and taking advantage of these opportunities, PAI teachers can make the role of implementing the independent learning curriculum an opportunity to improve the quality of Islamic religious education in elementary schools and help students understand religious values and teachings, as well as being able to support character education efforts that are based on values. morals and ethics, which are consistent with Islamic values. So PAI teachers can play an important role in helping students develop good character.

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