



Ta'lif : Jurnal Pendidikan dan Agama Islam

p-ISSN : XXXX-XXXX e-ISSN : XXX-XXXX

Volume 2 Nomor 3 Tahun 2026

DOI : XXXX-XXXX

RELIGIOUS CHARACTER OF STUDENTS THROUGH PAI AND P5 LEARNING IN *KURIKULUM MERDEKA*

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Abstract

The Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) is the latest education policy in Indonesia that emphasizes flexibility in learning and strengthening the religious dimension through the Pancasila Student Profile. The dimension of "Faithful, Devout to God Almighty, and Noble Character" is positioned as an important foundation for student character formation, requiring Islamic Religious Education (PAI) to focus not only on knowledge mastery but also on the transformation of attitudes and behavior. This study uses a library research method by analyzing official policy documents, guidelines for implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka, and relevant studies published since 2016 to 2025 concerning its implementation at the high school level. The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to strengthen students' religious character through the integration of Islamic Education (PAI), the Pancasila Student Profile, and P5 activities, where PAI serves to internalize values through reflective learning and the practice of worship, while P5 facilitates their application in collaborative social action. Nevertheless, its implementation still faces challenges such as a lack of standardized affective assessment instruments, limited teacher competencies, mismatched teaching modules, and differences in school cultural readiness. Therefore, strengthening religious character requires comprehensive synergy focused on enhancing teacher capacity, developing a structured evaluation system, and integrating character indicators into all learning and school activities.

Keywords: Kurikulum Merdeka, Religious Character, Pancasila Student Profile, P5

Abstrak

Kurikulum Merdeka merupakan kebijakan pendidikan terbaru di Indonesia yang menekankan fleksibilitas dalam pembelajaran serta penguatan dimensi keagamaan melalui Profil Siswa Pancasila. Dimensi "Beriman, Taat kepada Tuhan Yang Maha Esa, dan Berakhlak Mulia" diposisikan sebagai landasan penting dalam pembentukan karakter siswa, sehingga Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dituntut untuk tidak hanya berfokus pada penguasaan pengetahuan, tetapi juga pada transformasi sikap dan perilaku. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian pustaka dengan menganalisis dokumen kebijakan resmi, pedoman pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka, serta studi-studi

Article Information

Diterima: 05-09-2026

Direvisi: 16-09-2026

Disetujui: 25-09-2026

Diterbitkan: 29-09-2026

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Pendidikan dan Agama Islam

Email:

purpendijournal@gmail.com

Print ISSN: XXX-XXX

Online ISSN: XXX-XXX

terkait yang diterbitkan sejak tahun 2020 mengenai implementasinya di tingkat sekolah menengah atas. Temuan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka berpeluang memperkuat karakter keagamaan siswa melalui integrasi PAI, Profil Pelajar Pancasila, dan kegiatan P5, di mana PAI berfungsi menginternalisasi nilai lewat pembelajaran reflektif dan pembiasaan ibadah, sementara P5 memfasilitasi penerapannya dalam aksi sosial kolaboratif. Kendati demikian, penerapannya masih dihadapkan pada tantangan seperti minimnya instrumen penilaian afektif yang terstandar, keterbatasan kompetensi guru, ketidaksesuaian modul ajar, hingga perbedaan kesiapan budaya sekolah. Oleh karena itu, penguatan karakter keagamaan membutuhkan sinergi menyeluruh yang berfokus pada peningkatan kapasitas guru, penyusunan sistem evaluasi yang terstruktur, serta pengintegrasian indikator karakter ke dalam seluruh aktivitas pembelajaran dan sekolah.

Kata Kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka, Karakter Beragama, Profil Siswa Pancasila, P5

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INTRODUCTION

The education system has undergone changes in line with the demands of the times, especially after the pandemic, which has had a significant impact on the learning process and the development of children (Fadhlillah et al., 2025; Ro'ifah, 2019). In this context, the *Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum)* has been introduced as a more flexible curriculum strategy (Cholil et al., 2025; Hidayat et al., 2026; Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). This curriculum provides schools with the opportunity to tailor learning to the needs of students through a differentiated approach, project-based learning, and authentic assessments that evaluate both cognitive and affective aspects (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2022).

The concept of the *Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum)* is operationally developed based on several core principles (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). First, simplifying the material on essential outcomes so that learning is no longer content-dense but rather deep in terms of understanding. Second, implementing mastery learning that places students in a developmental phase appropriate to their age and abilities. Third, flexibility in the preparation of teaching modules that allows teachers to innovate in learning planning so that they are not fixated on a single teaching format (Muqoddas & Aziz, 2023). This flexibility also implies that the learning process must be

designed according to the teacher's ability to understand the learning outcomes and core competencies that students want to achieve.

The implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (*Independent Curriculum*) is inseparable from the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Pancasila Student Profile) as a reference for student character development (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). The profile contains six dimensions of character that represent the direction of national education, namely: (1) faith and noble character; (2) global diversity; (3) independence; (4) mutual cooperation; (5) critical thinking; and (6) creativity. Among these dimensions, "Faithful, Devout to God Almighty, and Noble Character" provides an important foundation for developing students' religiosity through religious values, worship practices, and social attitudes based on moral principles (Falah Saitama et al., 2026; Hidayat et al., 2026; Izzah et al., 2026; Kemendikbudristek BSKAP, 2022). Importantly, the development of this dimension requires not only the cognitive acquisition of religious knowledge but also the habituation of religious practices and the presence of teacher role models.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), the *Kurikulum Merdeka* provides space for religious values to be internalized through learning processes that connect religious knowledge with students' experiences (Hidayat et al., 2026; Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). PAI therefore functions as the foundational stage of religious character formation by providing students with religious concepts, opportunities for reflection, and guidance for translating religious values into attitudes and behavior (Izzah et al., 2026; Rafik & Arifah, 2023). Research shows that PAI teaching modules developed within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* incorporate reflective activities such as worship journals, character assessment, religious social case studies, and worship practicums related to students' everyday contexts (Cholil et al., 2025; Diani & Rapono, 2024; Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). These activities allow students not only to understand religious values but also to reflect on their meaning and relevance to their daily behavior. Thus, PAI provides the conceptual and reflective foundation that prepares students to practice religious values beyond the classroom.

This foundation is subsequently extended through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) (Alhamuddin & Murniati, 2024; Maryanah et al., 2024). If PAI primarily provides the knowledge, reflection, and initial internalization of religious values (Azizi et al., 2025; Diani & Rapono, 2024; Hidayat et al., 2026), P5 provides a contextual space in which these values can be practiced through concrete activities and social interaction. In practice, educational units implement activities such as mosque-based social actions, social services, religious digital ethics campaigns, zakat and alms counseling, and collaborative religious activities (Alhamuddin & Murniati, 2024; Maryanah et al., 2024; Wahyuni & Sabariah, 2024). These activities enable students to apply religious values in authentic situations involving cooperation, empathy, responsibility, and social participation. Studies indicate that project-based implementation can support changes in student behavior because emotional and social involvement increases through direct engagement in value-based activities (Mubin & Arifin, 2024).

The relationship between PAI and P5 can therefore be understood as complementary rather than separate. PAI establishes the religious understanding and reflective awareness needed to recognize and interpret religious values, whereas P5 provides opportunities for students to enact those values through concrete social and collaborative experiences (Azizi et al., 2025; Diani & Rapono, 2024; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). Through this sequence, religious character development moves from understanding and reflection in PAI to practice and habituation through P5 (Alhamuddin & Murniati, 2024; Maryanah et al., 2024; S. Wahyuni & Sabariah, 2024). The repeated connection between what students learn, what they reflect upon, and what they practice provides a basis for religious attitudes and behavior. In this sense, P5 does not replace the role of PAI; rather, it extends the internalization of religious values developed through PAI into students' social and community experiences.

However, the integration of religious values across PAI and P5 still faces several obstacles (Alhamuddin & Murniati, 2024; Maryanah et al., 2024; S. Wahyuni & Sabariah, 2024). Teachers find it difficult to determine indicators for evaluating religious character because spiritual dimensions are not easily quantified objectively (Ansori et al., 2022). Assessments of worship practices, social politeness, and behavioral consistency are often conducted without standardized instruments (Diani & Rapono, 2024). This condition can lead to inconsistencies in assessment across teachers, classes, and schools. In addition, teachers still face difficulties in aligning learning outcomes, teaching modules, learning activities, and affective assessment rubrics, resulting in learning that may remain focused on completing academic content.

From the perspective of character education theory, students' religiosity cannot be achieved through curriculum content alone (Ansori et al., 2022; Izzah et al., 2026). It requires a continuous process involving understanding, reflection, practice, habituation, and reinforcement within the students' social environment. In this framework, PAI and P5 have complementary functions: PAI provides the religious foundation and reflective process, while P5 creates opportunities for students to practice and experience those values in authentic contexts (Wahyuni & Sabariah, 2024). School culture and teacher role models further reinforce the consistency of these practices (Alhamuddin & Murniati, 2024; Maryanah et al., 2024; Retnasari et al., 2023; S. Wahyuni & Sabariah, 2024). Therefore, the integration of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, PAI, and P5 can be conceptualized as a continuous process in which religious values are introduced and reflected upon through PAI, practiced through P5, and reinforced through habituation and school culture, ultimately supporting the development of students' religious character.

Previous studies have examined the implementation of PAI within the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile, and the use of P5 activities in developing students' religious character (Gunawan & Syukri, 2025; Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). However, these studies have largely discussed these components separately, with limited synthesis explaining how PAI and P5 function as complementary stages in the process of religious character formation (Alhamuddin & Murniati, 2024; Maryanah et al., 2024; S. Wahyuni & Sabariah, 2024). In particular,

insufficient attention has been given to how religious values introduced and reflected upon through PAI are subsequently practiced and reinforced through P5 activities, school culture, and habituation (Gunawan & Syukri, 2025; Retnasari et al., 2023). Furthermore, the literature has not sufficiently synthesized the challenges of aligning learning outcomes, teaching modules, character indicators, and systematic assessment of religious character (Diniyanti & Abdulloh, 2025; Hidayat et al., 2026). Therefore, this study is important because it brings these dimensions together to provide a more integrated understanding of how the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, PAI, and P5 can work synergistically to support students' religious character (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025), while also identifying the supporting conditions and evaluation challenges (Ansori et al., 2022; Diniyanti & Abdulloh, 2025) that require further attention.

This study aimed to map and synthesize the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum)* for students' religious character through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) at the high school level. Specifically, this study addresses three research questions: (1) How is PAI learning implemented within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* to support students' religious character? (2) How does the implementation of P5 complement PAI learning in providing opportunities for students to practice and internalize religious values? and (3) What supporting factors and challenges are identified in the implementation and evaluation of religious character development? By addressing these questions, this study synthesizes previous findings to provide a conceptual understanding of the strategies, practices, and conditions that shape the students' religious character through the integration of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, PAI, and P5.

METHOD

This study employed a systematic literature review approach guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The study aimed to examine the formation of students' religious character through Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) within the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The literature search was conducted using *Dimension* as the primary academic database. The search covered publications from 2016 to 2025, using combinations of the keywords "kurikulum merdeka," "pendidikan agama islam," "PAI," "P5," "projek penguatan profil pelajar pancasila," "profil pelajar pancasila," "karakter religius," "religious character," "merdeka curriculum", and "islamic religious education". The keywords were combined using Boolean operators AND and OR to identify literature relevant to the research objectives.

The literature selection process followed the PRISMA stages of identification, duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. At the identification stage, 559 articles were retrieved from the database. After duplicate records were removed, 306 articles remained as unique records. The titles and abstracts of these records were screened based on their relevance to the research topic, resulting in 199 articles that proceeded to the eligibility assessment. At the eligibility stage, the full texts were examined against the predetermined inclusion and exclusion

criteria. A total of 78 articles were excluded, while 12 articles met the eligibility requirements and were included in the final qualitative synthesis. The PRISMA stages were drawn in the following Figure 1.

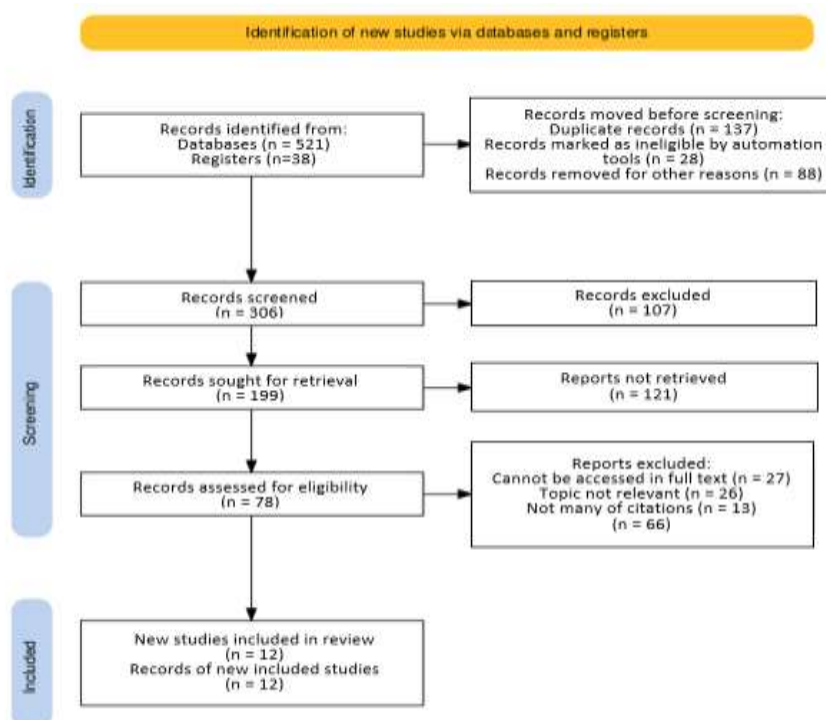


Figure 1.
PRISMA Model Chart

The inclusion criteria were: (1) articles published between 2016 and 2025; (2) studies conducted in the Indonesian educational context; (3) studies addressing the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*; (4) studies related to Islamic Religious Education (PAI), P5, or the Pancasila Student Profile; (5) studies addressing religious character, Islamic values, moral development, or character formation; (6) articles providing findings or substantive discussions relevant to the research objectives; and (7) full-text articles available for analysis. Studies from different educational levels were retained when their findings were relevant to the mechanisms of PAI learning, Pancasila Student Profile integration, P5 implementation, and religious character formation.

The exclusion criteria were applied during the screening and eligibility stages. Articles were excluded when they: (1) were duplicate publications; (2) were published outside the 2016–2025 period; (3) did not discuss the *Kurikulum Merdeka*; (4) were unrelated to PAI or Islamic Religious Education; (5) did not address P5 or the Pancasila Student Profile when these were required by the research focus; (6) did not discuss religious character, Islamic values, moral development, or character formation; (7) focused exclusively on administrative or managerial aspects without relevance to PAI learning or character formation; (8) were conducted in contexts that were not relevant to the Indonesian educational setting; (9) did not provide sufficient information to answer the research questions; or (10) did not have accessible full-text content. These

criteria were used to ensure that the final articles were substantively relevant to at least one of the three analytical themes of the study.

The 12 included articles were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis consisted of reading and extracting relevant information from each article, identifying recurring concepts, coding and categorizing the findings, comparing findings across studies, and synthesizing them into overarching themes (Madum et al., 2025; Moleong, 2018). The analysis focused on three main themes: (1) Implementation of PAI Learning in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*; (2) Integration of the Pancasila Student Profile in Islamic Education Learning; and (3) Implementation of P5 as a Support in the Formation of Religious Character. The analysis also considered learning strategies, project-based and contextual approaches, integration of Islamic and Pancasila values, teacher roles, student character outcomes, supporting factors, and implementation challenges.

RESULTS

The analysis of scholarly articles identified 12 journal articles related to research on the "Religious Character of Students through PAI And P5 Learning in *Kurikulum Merdeka*" as an effort to reinforce students' character. The analysis of these journal articles is presented in the following table 1.

Tabel 1.
Analysis Literatur Review

No	Author	Title	Year	Findings
1	Siti Wahyuni & Hayatun Sabariah	Implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Project-Based Learning to Strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile at SMP IT Ar-Ridha Pantai Cermin	2024	The implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) creates a learning environment that is enjoyable and learner-centered, utilizing varied methods tailored to students' needs. P5 facilitates learning through experiences and projects, making it easier to apply character values in real-life situations.
2	Maryanah, Suyono, & Radeni Sukma Indra Dewi	School Management under the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) regarding the Project to Strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile (P5)	2024	P5 requires careful planning, ranging from the identification of learning outcomes, objectives, project themes, and assessments to the integration of technology. P5 provides students with opportunities to conduct investigations, solve problems, and produce tangible products or actions, while also developing critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, independence, and self-confidence.
3	Alhamuddin	Promoting the	2024	Through the themes of "Local Wisdom"

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| | & Murniati | Character of Respect for Each Other through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5): Educational Transformation in the Merdeka Curriculum Era | | and "Unity in Diversity," P5 provides students with firsthand experience in recognizing and appreciating diversity. Working in heterogeneous groups helps students learn to collaborate, listen to others' opinions, understand differences, and resolve conflicts constructively. Student reflections reveal a positive shift in their perspectives on cultural and social differences. |
| 4 | Diniyanti & Abdulloh | PAI Teacher Challenges in Forming Students' Religious Character in the Independent Curriculum Era | 2025 | Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers face several challenges: the flexibility of the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> ; the influence of the environment and popular or digital culture; students' lack of religious literacy or understanding; limited support from parents and schools; and the difficulty teachers face in adapting teaching methods to student needs and technological advancements. |
| 5 | Neng Sufia & Nasrun Harahap | Building Religious Character through the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> for Islamic Religious Education (PAI): A Study of Design, Strategy, and Implementation | 2025 | <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) provides scope for shaping students who are religious, possess noble character, and demonstrate strong moral integrity through learning that is student-centered, flexible, contextual, and integrative. Innovative approaches—such as project-based learning, collaborative learning, problem- or inquiry-based learning, differentiated instruction, and the use of technology—can be employed to connect Islamic values with real-life experiences. |
| 6 | Amirul Muttaqin, Roibin, Ahmad Barizi, Jamilah, & Bima Fandi Asy'arie | Examining the Model for Forming Religious Character Education through Santri Behavior Traditions in Islamic Boarding Schools | 2024 | The daily traditions of life in <i>pesantren</i> (Islamic boarding schools) serve as a means for the holistic character development of <i>santri</i> (students). Ten behavioral traditions among the students were identified: showing respect to the <i>Kiai</i> (religious teacher), shaking hands, eating together, communicating politely, dressing modestly, maintaining cleanliness, performing acts of worship, showing hospitality to guests, seeking knowledge, and <i>bersampetan</i> (a specific tradition of mutual assistance or cooperation). |

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| 7 | Putri Diani & Muhammad Rapono | Adaptation of Islamic Religious Education Teachers to the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> : A Case Study at SMA PAB 4 Sampali | 2024 | The implementation of the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> (Independent Curriculum) is showing progress through the use of project-based learning and digital technology. Technology also has the potential to boost student motivation. |
| 8 | M. Quzzan Azizi, Ali Imron, & Ahmad Fauzi | Analysis of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Instruction Based on National Education Standards (SNP) at SMP NU Muara Sugihan | 2025 | The <i>Merdeka Curriculum</i> is integrated with local content based on <i>kitab kuning</i> (traditional Islamic texts). Instruction is conducted collaboratively and accompanied by spiritual practices, such as <i>Dhuha</i> prayer. Assessment combines formative and summative elements with the evaluation of religious practices. |
| 9 | Aulidiyah Paramasasti & Ahmad Marzuki | Implementation of the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) Instruction at MI Miftahul Khoir 1 Karangrejo | 2025 | Implementation has been quite effective through differentiated instruction and contextual religious projects. Pancasila values and Islamic teachings are integrated into both classroom learning and daily routines. Assessment covers cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. |
| 10 | Alhamuddin & Andi Murniati | Promoting the Character of Respect for Each Other through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5): Educational Transformation in the <i>Merdeka Curriculum</i> Era | 2024 | P5 Promotes Mutual Respect Through Diversity-Based Projects, Collaborative Activities, And Reflection, Fostering Students' Tolerance And Appreciation Of Differences. However, Its Effectiveness Depends On Teacher Readiness, Adequate Facilities, Sufficient Time, And Continuous Training. |
| 11 | Mari'atul Kamila Ramadhan, Etharina Latifah, Khoirul Anam & Supriyanto | SLR: Implementasi Proyek Penguatan Profil Pancasila sebagai Upaya Penguatan Karakter Peserta Didik | 2024 | The implementation of P5 demonstrates that project-based learning and real-world experiences can strengthen student character—particularly independence, mutual cooperation, and responsibility. Its success relies on synergy among teachers, parents, and the community, although variations in character development outcomes persist, alongside challenges regarding educators' understanding and readiness. Therefore, the implementation of P5 |

				needs to be tailored to the specific school context and supported by teacher training and adequate resources to ensure that character building proceeds optimally and sustainably.
12	Umu Afiyah, Muhid, & Saefrudin	P5 Implementation Strategy in Islamic Religious Education in Building Environmentally Friendly Student Character	2025	Integrating P5 into PAI learning through environmental projects fosters students' ecological awareness and responsibility by applying Islamic values such as <i>amanah</i> , <i>khalifah</i> , and <i>ihsan</i> . However, limited resources and teacher competence remain challenges in its implementation.

Implementation of PAI Learning in *Kurikulum Merdeka*

The literature review indicates that the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) has shifted the orientation of learning from predominantly content-based instruction toward more student-centered, contextual, and experiential learning (Diani & Rapono, 2024; Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). Across the reviewed studies, teachers are given greater flexibility to adapt learning materials, methods, and activities to students' characteristics and learning needs (Ansori et al., 2022; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). This flexibility is reflected in the use of project-based learning, differentiated instruction, collaborative activities, contextual religious projects, and the integration of digital technology. Rather than positioning religious knowledge as an end in itself, these approaches provide opportunities for students to connect religious concepts with concrete experiences and everyday behavior. Studies included in the review consistently associate this shift with greater opportunities for developing religious, social, and moral values.

A synthesis of the findings shows that the implementation of PAI in *Kurikulum Merdeka* generally follows a common pattern: flexibility in curriculum design enables active learning, active learning creates opportunities for value internalization, and repeated value-based activities support the development of students' character (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). Religious learning therefore tends to be more meaningful when students are not only asked to understand religious concepts but also to practice, reflect on, and apply those values in authentic situations. The reviewed studies describe various forms of this process, including contextual religious projects, collaborative learning, worship practices, reflection, and habituation activities. This suggests that the contribution of *Kurikulum Merdeka* to religious character formation lies not simply in changing teaching methods (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025), but in creating a learning environment in which religious values can be experienced and practiced.

However, the literature also reveals that curriculum flexibility does not automatically produce effective PAI learning (Gunawan & Syukri, 2025). A second pattern emerging across the studies is the strong dependence of implementation on teacher capacity and the broader school environment. Teachers need sufficient

pedagogical and technological competence to translate the flexibility of *Kurikulum Merdeka* into appropriate learning activities (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). At the same time, school culture, parental support, facilities, internet access, learning resources, and opportunities for professional development influence the extent to which innovative approaches can be implemented consistently (Retnasari et al., 2023). Several studies report difficulties related to teacher readiness, uneven understanding of the curriculum, limited facilities, technological constraints, and differences in students' abilities.

The findings therefore indicate that the effectiveness of PAI implementation should not be understood solely from the availability of innovative teaching methods (Gunawan & Syukri, 2025). The central pattern across the literature is the interaction between pedagogical flexibility and implementation capacity. When teachers are able to adapt learning strategies and schools provide an environment that supports religious habituation, collaboration, and contextual learning, PAI has greater potential to move beyond theoretical instruction toward the formation of religious and social character (Sufia & Harahap, 2025). Conversely, when teacher competence, infrastructure, or institutional support is limited, the flexibility of the curriculum may not be fully translated into meaningful religious learning. Thus, *Kurikulum Merdeka* provides the structural opportunity for transformation (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025), while teachers and the school ecosystem determine how far that opportunity is realized in practice.

Integration of Pancasila Student Profile in Islamic Education Learning

The reviewed literature shows that the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile provides an important framework for connecting PAI learning with broader character development (Diniyanti & Abdulloh, 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). In particular, the dimension of "Believing in, Devoted to God Almighty, and Having Noble Character" is closely related to the objectives of religious education because it connects faith and religious practice with students' attitudes and behavior (Afiyah et al., 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). The studies also show that other dimensions, such as mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking, and respect for diversity, can be developed through PAI and P5 activities when religious values are connected with students' social experiences.

A cross-study synthesis indicates that the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile is most visible when religious values are embedded in students' activities rather than treated as separate learning content (Ramadhan et al., 2024). Project activities, collaborative tasks, reflection, discussion of social and ethical issues, and contextual learning provide opportunities for students to practice tolerance, empathy, responsibility, cooperation, and respect for differences. In this sense, PAI functions not only as a subject for transmitting Islamic knowledge but also as a context for interpreting and practicing values within students' social lives (Azizi et al., 2025; Diani & Raponi, 2024; Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). The findings concerning P5 similarly demonstrate that direct experience, heterogeneous group work,

reflection, and problem-solving can help students connect abstract values with concrete behavior.

Another pattern emerging from the literature is that religious character and the Pancasila Student Profile are not positioned as competing value systems (Ramadhan et al., 2024); rather, they can reinforce one another when integrated through contextual learning (Sufia & Harahap, 2025). Islamic values such as noble character, tolerance, responsibility, and respect can be expressed through activities that also develop the broader dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile (Ramadhan et al., 2024). Consequently, character formation becomes more holistic: religious understanding is accompanied by social interaction, collaboration, independence, and sensitivity to diversity. This pattern is particularly evident in studies of project-based and contextual learning, where students are encouraged to encounter real-life situations and reflect on the values involved.

Nevertheless, the literature identifies assessment as a significant unresolved issue. Although several studies describe the use of cognitive, affective, psychomotor, formative, summative, and authentic assessment, the measurement of religious character remains more difficult than the measurement of academic achievement. Religious attitudes and character development are influenced by students' daily experiences and therefore cannot always be adequately represented through short-term classroom assessment. The reviewed studies also point to differences in teacher understanding and the need for stronger assessment practices.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the main challenge in integrating the Pancasila Student Profile into PAI is not the absence of relevant values (Ramadhan et al., 2024), but the consistency of translating those values into learning experiences and documenting their development through appropriate assessment (Azizi et al., 2025; Diani & Rapono, 2024; Gunawan & Syukri, 2025). The literature consequently points toward an integrated model in which PAI provides the religious foundation (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025), P5 and project-based activities provide opportunities for value practice, the school environment reinforces habituation, and authentic assessment records students' development over time. This synthesis indicates that the formation of religious character is more likely to occur when these elements operate as a continuous process rather than as separate instructional activities.

Implementation of P5 as a Support in Formation of Religious Character

The literature review indicates that the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) provides an important contextual space for the formation of students' religious character (Ansori et al., 2022; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). Across the reviewed studies, P5 is implemented through activities that require students to participate directly in social, religious, and collaborative experiences (Afiyah et al., 2025). These activities include social service, religious education, worship-related activities, community engagement, and other projects that connect learning with real-life situations. The findings suggest that the contribution of P5 to religious character formation does not primarily lie in the transmission of additional religious knowledge

(Ansori et al., 2022; Muttaqin et al., 2024), but in creating opportunities for students to experience, practice, and reflect on religious values through concrete activities.

A synthesis of the reviewed studies reveals a consistent pattern: P5 functions as a bridge between religious knowledge acquired through PAI and the actual practice of religious and social values (Azizi et al., 2025; Diani & Rapono, 2024; Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). Classroom PAI learning provides students with conceptual and theological understanding, while P5 creates opportunities to apply these values in authentic social contexts (Sufia & Harahap, 2025). Through collaboration, direct experience, reflection, and interaction with others, values such as responsibility, empathy, tolerance, mutual respect, cooperation, and noble character can be transformed from abstract concepts into observable behavior (Diniyanti & Abdulloh, 2025; Muttaqin et al., 2024). Thus, the relationship between PAI and P5 can be understood as complementary, with PAI providing the value foundation and P5 providing the experiential context for its application.

Another pattern emerging from the literature is that the character-forming potential of P5 is closely related to the quality of student participation (Afiyah et al., 2025). Projects that involve students in investigation, problem solving, collaboration, decision making, and reflection provide a stronger opportunity for value internalization than activities in which students merely participate as recipients of a predetermined program. The reviewed studies indicate that direct experience and interaction with diverse social environments can encourage students to develop empathy, respect for differences, responsibility, and collaborative attitudes. This suggests that P5 contributes to religious character formation not simply because it is labelled as a project (Ali et al., 2023; Ansori et al., 2022; Sufia & Harahap, 2025), but because its learning process allows students to actively construct meaning from their experiences.

However, the literature also shows that P5 does not automatically result in character formation. A recurring pattern across the studies is the presence of implementation constraints, including limited time, teacher readiness, facilities, funding, learning resources, and difficulties in developing appropriate assessment instruments (Diniyanti & Abdulloh, 2025; Muttaqin et al., 2024). These constraints may reduce P5 to a formal activity or school event when the project is not supported by clear learning objectives, meaningful student involvement, and systematic reflection. Therefore, the effectiveness of P5 depends not only on the type of project selected but also on how the project is designed, facilitated, and evaluated.

Based on this synthesis, P5 can be viewed as a supporting mechanism for religious character formation rather than a stand-alone substitute for PAI learning (Ali et al., 2023; Ansori et al., 2022; Diniyanti & Abdulloh, 2025). Its contribution becomes more meaningful when projects are intentionally connected to religious values, classroom learning, students' real-life experiences, and school culture (Retnasari et al., 2023). The literature consequently points to an integrated process in which PAI establishes the religious and moral foundation, P5 provides opportunities for students to practice these values, and reflection and authentic assessment help identify their development. This pattern indicates that the formation of religious character is more likely to be

sustainable (Ansori et al., 2022) when P5 is implemented as a continuous learning process rather than as a temporary or ceremonial program.

DISCUSSION

Challenges in Evaluating Religiosity in Islamic Education Learning

The evaluation of religious character emerges as one of the most significant challenges identified in the reviewed literature (Diniyanti & Abdulloh, 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). Unlike cognitive learning outcomes, which can generally be assessed through tests or other observable measures, religious character involves internal dispositions that are expressed through attitudes, habits, moral decisions, and consistency of behavior (Ali et al., 2023; Diniyanti & Abdulloh, 2025; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). Consequently, evaluating religiosity requires more than measuring students' knowledge of religious teachings or their performance in particular acts of worship. The central difficulty lies in determining whether religious values have been genuinely internalized and consistently manifested in students' everyday behavior. The literature therefore indicates a gap between the conceptual objectives of religious character formation and the practical capacity of teachers to measure its development.

A synthesis of the reviewed studies suggests that this difficulty is primarily related to the operationalization of religious concepts into observable and assessable indicators. Concepts such as faith, piety, sincerity, noble character, responsibility, tolerance, and religious discipline are multidimensional and cannot be adequately represented by a single observable behavior. For example, the performance of worship may demonstrate religious practice, but it does not necessarily provide sufficient evidence of the consistency of students' moral attitudes in situations outside the classroom. Similarly, a student may demonstrate appropriate behavior during a monitored school activity while responding differently in less structured situations. This creates a methodological problem: teachers need to distinguish between temporary compliance with school expectations and the more stable internalization of religious values. The reviewed literature indicates that current assessment practices have not yet fully addressed this distinction.

Another recurring pattern is the predominance of teacher observation without sufficiently structured documentation and assessment rubrics. Observation is important because religious character is manifested through behavior, but observation without clear indicators can result in subjective judgments and inconsistent interpretations among teachers. The problem is therefore not the use of observation itself, but the absence of systematic procedures for transforming observations into reliable evidence of character development. As reported in the literature, teachers still experience difficulties in establishing standardized indicators for assessing religiosity objectively, while affective assessment is often conducted through informal observation rather than documented authentic instruments.

This condition has an important implication for the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). The curriculum provides greater flexibility for contextual, project-based, and experiential learning, which creates more opportunities for students to demonstrate religious and social values. However, greater flexibility in

learning is not necessarily accompanied by equivalent flexibility and clarity in character assessment. This creates an assessment gap: learning activities may successfully generate opportunities for students to practice religious values, but teachers may have limited instruments to document whether those experiences produce sustained changes in character. In other words, the problem is not only whether character formation occurs, but also whether the educational system has an adequate mechanism to recognize, document, and evaluate that development (Fadhilillah et al., 2025).

The literature consequently points toward the need for longitudinal and triangulated assessment rather than one-time judgment. Because religious character develops through repeated experiences and habituation, its assessment should ideally draw on evidence collected across different situations and periods. Reflective journals, behavior records, project documentation, teacher observations, student self-reflection, and observations from other members of the school community could provide complementary evidence of character development. Such an approach would reduce dependence on a single teacher's impression and allow assessment to capture both the process and consistency of students' behavior. The importance of authentic, formative, and continuous assessment is also reflected in studies discussing the implementation of PAI within *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

More importantly, the evaluation problem reveals a broader conceptual issue in religious character education: what is being assessed should not be reduced to visible religious behavior, but should encompass the consistency with which religious values guide students' decisions and interactions. This distinction is important because character education ultimately concerns internalization, not merely participation. Therefore, the development of assessment instruments should move from simply recording whether students perform particular religious activities toward examining patterns of behavior, reflection, responsibility, empathy, integrity, and consistency across different contexts. Such an approach would make assessment more closely aligned with the actual objective of religious character formation.

Based on the synthesis of the reviewed literature, the evaluation of religious character can therefore be identified as a critical implementation gap in PAI learning under *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). The curriculum and learning strategies increasingly provide opportunities for contextual and experiential character formation, but the assessment system has not developed at the same pace (Hidayat et al., 2026; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). This gap may weaken teachers' ability to determine whether religious learning has resulted in sustainable character development. Thus, strengthening religious-character assessment should not be treated as a technical addition to the learning process; it is a fundamental component of ensuring that the objectives of PAI and P5 are translated into measurable, documented, and continuously monitored student development.

Conceptual Synthesis of Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation in PAI

Synthesis of the reviewed studies indicates that the formation of students' religious character through *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be understood through a simple conceptual framework as seen in the Figure 1 below.

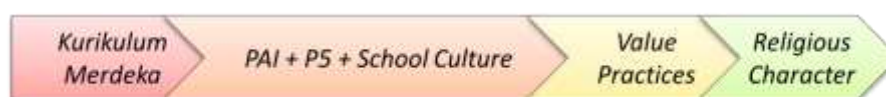


Figure 2.
Conceptual Framework Synthesized from the Reviewed Literature

foundation that enables learning to be more flexible, contextual, student-centered, and oriented toward character development (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). Islamic Education (PAI) functions as the primary learning space for providing the theological and moral foundation of religious values, while the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) provides opportunities for students to experience and practice these values through contextual, collaborative, and project-based activities (Ramadhan et al., 2024). At the same time, school culture strengthens the continuity of value formation through religious habituation, teacher modelling, school routines, and a supportive social environment.

The synthesis further shows that the three components PAI, P5, and school culture do not operate independently (Retnasari et al., 2023). Their interaction creates opportunities for students to transform religious knowledge into concrete practices, such as discipline, responsibility, honesty, tolerance, cooperation, and consistent participation in religious activities. Thus, the formation of religious character occurs through a process of learning values, experiencing values, practicing values, and habituating values (Diniyanti & Abdulloh, 2025; Rafik & Arifah, 2023; Sufia & Harahap, 2025). PAI provides the conceptual and spiritual foundation, P5 expands the opportunities for authentic application, and school culture maintains the consistency of these practices beyond the classroom (Retnasari et al., 2023). This process indicates that religious character is not formed merely through the delivery of religious content, but through the repeated practice of values in meaningful learning and everyday school life.

Based on this framework, the effectiveness of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in strengthening religious character depends on the extent to which curricular learning, project-based experiences, and school habituation are connected and consistently supported (Paramasasti & Marzuki, 2025). Teacher competence, school policies, availability of learning resources, and appropriate assessment mechanisms function as supporting conditions that enable this integration. Therefore, the conceptual synthesis of this review suggests that religious character emerges as an outcome of the continuous interaction between curriculum, PAI learning, P5 activities, and school culture, mediated by students' opportunities to practice and internalize religious values (Maryanah et al., 2024; Retnasari et al., 2023). In other words, *Kurikulum Merdeka* provides the framework, PAI and P5 provide the learning and experiential processes, school culture provides continuity, and value practices become the pathway through which religious character is gradually internalized.

CONCLUSION

The literature review identifies three main findings. First, within the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, PAI is positioned as a medium for religious value internalization through reflective learning, worship habituation, and the development of religious social attitudes. Second, P5 provides an applicative context in which these values can be practiced through social and collaborative activities, suggesting a complementary relationship between PAI and P5. Third, implementation is constrained by the absence of standardized instruments for assessing religious character and uneven teacher readiness in affective assessment. Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that the implementation of PAI and P5 is shaped by the interaction of curriculum design, teacher competence, school culture, value habituation, and systematic evaluation; however, this review does not establish empirical changes in students' religious character.

SUGGESTION

For educators, especially PAI teachers, it is expected that they can improve their competence in designing learning and evaluating religious character that is integrated with the achievement of the Pancasila Student Profile, particularly in the affective and spiritual domains. Then, for educational units, it is necessary to support the school culture that consistently supports the habituation of religious values, as well as to synchronize PAI intramural learning with P5 activities so that they are not merely ceremonial. In addition, for policymakers, it is recommended to provide technical guidelines and more standardized religious character evaluation instruments to assist teachers in conducting objective and continuous assessments. The last, for future researchers, field research with an empirical approach is highly needed to test the effectiveness of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) in directly supporting religious character in schools.

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