



APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES FOR ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING IN THE CONTEXT OF MERDEKA BELAJAR KAMPUS MERDEKA

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Abstrack

This article examines the implementation of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning approaches and strategies within the policy framework of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM), or Independent Learning–Independent Campus. PAI learning within the MBKM framework emphasizes flexibility, authentic learning experiences, and student autonomy through humanistic, constructivist, experiential, and value-based approaches. These approaches strengthen character formation, value internalization, and the development of students' reflective capacity. Furthermore, project-based learning, project-collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and blended learning strategies enable students to apply Islamic values in real-life contexts through projects, interdisciplinary collaboration, problem solving, and digital technology. Overall, PAI learning in MBKM becomes more contextual, applicable, and relevant to the needs of modern society. The implication of this study is that PAI learning in higher education needs to be designed more adaptively, collaboratively, and practically so that Islamic values are not only understood conceptually but also internalized and implemented in students' academic, social, and professional lives. Therefore, this article highlights the importance of adaptive curriculum design, lecturers' roles as facilitators, and collaboration with external partners in optimizing the implementation of PAI within the MBKM framework. The impact of implementing Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning approaches and strategies within the MBKM framework is increased student engagement and independence in the learning process, the development of critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills, and the strengthening of the internalization and application of Islamic values in academic, social, and professional life. PAI learning also becomes more contextual, applicable, and relevant to the needs of society and the workplace.

Keywords: learning approaches and strategies; Islamic Religious Education; Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka; MBKM; higher education



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Abstrak

Artikel ini mengkaji implementasi pendekatan dan strategi pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI) dalam kerangka kebijakan Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). Pembelajaran PAI dalam kerangka MBKM menekankan fleksibilitas, pengalaman belajar autentik, dan kemandirian mahasiswa melalui pendekatan humanistik, konstruktivistik, eksperiensial, dan berbasis nilai. Pendekatan-pendekatan tersebut memperkuat pembentukan karakter, internalisasi nilai, serta pengembangan kapasitas reflektif mahasiswa. Selain itu, strategi pembelajaran berbasis proyek, pembelajaran proyek-kolaboratif, pembelajaran berbasis masalah, dan pembelajaran bauran memungkinkan mahasiswa menerapkan nilai-nilai Islam dalam konteks kehidupan nyata melalui proyek, kolaborasi interdisipliner, pemecahan masalah, dan pemanfaatan teknologi digital. Secara keseluruhan, pembelajaran PAI dalam MBKM menjadi lebih kontekstual, aplikatif, dan relevan dengan kebutuhan masyarakat modern. Implikasi dari kajian ini adalah bahwa pembelajaran PAI di perguruan tinggi perlu dirancang secara lebih adaptif, kolaboratif, dan praktis agar nilai-nilai Islam tidak hanya dipahami secara konseptual, tetapi juga diinternalisasi dan diimplementasikan dalam kehidupan akademik, sosial, dan profesional mahasiswa. Oleh karena itu, artikel ini menekankan pentingnya desain kurikulum yang adaptif, peran dosen sebagai fasilitator, serta kolaborasi dengan mitra eksternal dalam mengoptimalkan implementasi PAI dalam kerangka MBKM. Dampak implementasi pendekatan dan strategi pembelajaran PAI dalam kerangka MBKM adalah meningkatnya keterlibatan dan kemandirian mahasiswa dalam proses pembelajaran, berkembangnya kemampuan berpikir kritis, kolaborasi, dan pemecahan masalah, serta semakin kuatnya internalisasi dan penerapan nilai-nilai Islam dalam kehidupan akademik, sosial, dan profesional. Pembelajaran PAI juga menjadi lebih kontekstual, aplikatif, dan relevan dengan kebutuhan masyarakat serta dunia kerja.

Kata Kunci: strategi pembelajaran; Pendidikan Agama Islam; Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka; MBKM; pendidikan tinggi

Introduction

Education is a process through which younger generations are prepared to live their lives and achieve their goals more effectively and efficiently. Education is broader than instruction because instruction tends to emphasize the transfer of knowledge, whereas education involves the transformation of values and the formation of personality in all its dimensions. The distinction between education and teaching lies in the emphasis of education on shaping learners' awareness and personality in addition to developing knowledge and skills. When education is connected to Islam as a religious system, it produces meanings that implicitly describe the distinctive characteristics of Islamic education (Darise, 2021; Khadafie, 2023).

Education plays a crucial role in revealing individual potential and shaping the character and cultural values of a dignified nation. Its purpose is to develop generations who are faithful, ethical, healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, democratic, and responsible citizens. In the era of globalization and rapid development of information technology, educational paradigms continue to evolve in response to contemporary demands. One concept that has become central in current educational discourse is Merdeka Belajar, which emphasizes independence, empowerment, and the development of individual potential in the

learning process (Dinata et al., 2024; Irawan et al., 2024; Kharisma et al., 2024; Utomo & Rizqa, 2024).

Merdeka Belajar represents a concept of academic freedom that enables learners to develop autonomy in learning. It is considered a relevant step toward achieving an ideal form of education that is aligned with contemporary conditions. The goal is to prepare a resilient, intelligent, creative generation with character rooted in Indonesian national values (Fridiyanto et al., 2022). Within higher education, the MBKM learning process is an important realization of student-centered learning. It provides both challenges and opportunities for developing innovation, creativity, capacity, personality, and the learning needs of students. It also cultivates independence in discovering knowledge through real-world dynamics such as competency requirements, real problems, social interaction, collaboration, self-management, performance expectations, targets, and achievements (Baharuddin, 2021; Rokhimawan et al., 2023; Zakkiyah et al., 2023).

Islamic Religious Education has an important role in the Merdeka Belajar system. This policy provides educational institutions with greater freedom to design and regulate learning processes. In this context, Islamic Religious Education can be adapted to the needs, characteristics, and environments of learners. The inclusion of PAI in the Merdeka Belajar system is also related to the fact that the majority of Indonesia's population is Muslim and that Islam is recognized as one of the official religions in the Indonesian constitution. Therefore, PAI is considered important in providing an understanding of Islamic beliefs, values, and principles to younger generations while encouraging tolerance, understanding, and interreligious dialogue (Darise, 2021; Khadafie, 2023).

The integration of Islamic Religious Education into the Merdeka Belajar system demonstrates recognition of the role of religion in shaping both individual identity and society. Through this system, learners have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of Islamic teachings, moral values, tolerance, openness, and social concern. These qualities are essential in a plural and modern society. Consequently, there is a close relationship between Islamic Religious Education and Merdeka Belajar. On the one hand, it creates opportunities; on the other hand, it also presents challenges. PAI is required to adapt to modern educational dynamics, including curriculum planning, learning strategies, and assessment mechanisms. Based on this background, this article aims to describe the approaches and strategies of Islamic Religious Education learning in the context of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (Habibi, 2023; Ibadin, 2023; Latipah et al., 2023; Siregar et al., 2020).

Method

This article employed a library research method. This approach was used to examine and analyze various sources, including books, scholarly journal articles, and other written references relevant to Islamic Religious Education learning strategies. The selection of a qualitative library-based method was based on the nature of the study, which did not require direct field data collection. Through this method, the authors were able to conduct an in-depth analysis of PAI learning strategies, particularly those related to the implementation of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka in PAI learning (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Sugiyono, 2021).

The data were obtained from relevant literature discussing Islamic

education, MBKM, learning approaches, learning strategies, character education, project-based learning, collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and blended learning. The analysis was conducted by identifying, classifying, interpreting, and synthesizing the main ideas found in the selected literature. The results of the analysis were then organized into two main themes: PAI learning approaches in MBKM and PAI learning strategies in MBKM (Habibie & Wachidah, 2025; Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024).

Results and Discussion

In the context of MBKM, Islamic Religious Education learning needs to employ more flexible, contextual, and experience-oriented approaches. This is because the new educational paradigm emphasizes freedom of learning, the development of individual potential, and active student engagement in the learning process. Flexibility is needed so that PAI learning is no longer confined to traditional lecture-based patterns but can adapt methods, media, and learning environments to the diverse needs and characteristics of students (Huwaida, 2024; Sintiawati et al., 2022).

Table 1
Main Findings on PAI Learning Approaches and Strategies in MBKM

No.	Aspect	Main Findings
1	PAI learning approaches in MBKM	PAI learning requires flexible, contextual, and experience-based approaches. The approaches relevant to PAI implementation in MBKM include humanistic, constructivist, experiential learning, and value-based approaches.
2	PAI learning strategies in MBKM	Appropriate strategies include project-based learning, project-collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and blended learning. These strategies position students as active learners, promote soft skills, encourage social engagement, and facilitate the application of Islamic values in real-life situations.

The findings indicate that several learning approaches are relevant to the implementation of PAI within MBKM, namely the humanistic approach, constructivist approach, experiential learning, and value-based approach. These approaches support MBKM principles that encourage independence, authentic

learning experiences, and student character development. In addition, the learning strategies most suitable for PAI within the MBKM framework include project-based learning, collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and blended learning. These strategies can be implemented through activities such as Kampus Mengajar programs, internships in religious institutions, community service, socio-religious projects, and the development of digital da'wah media. Overall, the findings show that PAI can be effectively integrated into MBKM through adjustments in learning approaches and strategies that emphasize autonomy, field experience, and the internalization of Islamic values (Habibie & Wachidah, 2025; Rokhimawan et al., 2023; Zakkiyah et al., 2023).

Islamic Religious Education Learning Approaches in MBKM

The humanistic approach in Islamic Religious Education learning positions learners as dignified subjects whose personal potential, empathy, and character need to be developed. In this approach, lecturers or teachers act as facilitators who listen to learners' emotional and spiritual needs. In the MBKM context, this approach is highly relevant because MBKM demands learning that is flexible, contextual, and oriented toward real-life experience. PAI learning can therefore be designed to provide space for personal reflection, field projects, and community service experiences that bring Islamic values to life. Differentiated learning, inclusive learning, and character strengthening through real activities are examples of how this approach can be implemented. The humanistic approach is rooted in the ideas of Carl Rogers and Maslow, who emphasize self-actualization and supportive relationships between teachers and learners (Sultani et al., 2023; Sumantri & Ahmad, 2019). Thus, PAI is not merely the transfer of religious knowledge but a process of personal and social transformation.

The constructivist approach in PAI learning places students as active constructors of knowledge. Learners are given real experiences, opportunities for discussion, spaces for reflection, and tasks that connect religious material with the context of everyday life. As a result, the meaning of Islamic values emerges from the learners' own thinking processes. This approach aligns with the spirit of MBKM, which emphasizes autonomy, contextual learning, and field experience. Recent studies suggest that constructivist strategies such as case studies, project-based learning, and collaborative discussion can increase student engagement, conceptual understanding, critical thinking, and the internalization of religious values through concrete experiences (Habibie & Wachidah, 2025; Rachman & Nurhanifansyah, 2024; Setiawati et al., 2024).

Theoretically, constructivism, including Piagetian and social constructivist perspectives, supports learner-centered instruction and social interaction as sources of learning. In the campus context, lecturers are expected to become facilitators who design authentic tasks, field experiences such as internships in religious institutions, community service, digital da'wah projects, and reflective activities aligned with the MBKM curriculum. However, effective implementation requires clear assessment guidelines, adequate learning resources, and facilitator competence so that field experience does not become merely an activity, but truly develops critical thinking and religious value appreciation (Baharuddin, 2021; Latipah et al., 2023; Muslihati et al., 2023).

Experiential learning in PAI within the MBKM context emphasizes learning through authentic experience integrated with MBKM programs such as internships,

field practice, community service projects, and entrepreneurship. The stages include designing contextual experiences, active student participation, structured reflection to internalize religious values, conceptualizing theory from practical experience, and conducting further action experiments. Through this cycle, religious and ethical values are not only understood cognitively but are also practiced in daily life. This approach is in line with the MBKM philosophy, which provides space for cross-program learning and authentic assessment such as portfolios and project-based evaluation. It can increase student motivation, religious attitudes, and practical competence when supported by lecturers and external partners (Fridiyanto et al., 2022; Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024).

The value-based approach in PAI learning within MBKM places the internalization of Islamic values, such as morality, ethics, social concern, and responsibility, at the center of learning. The goal is not simply cognitive mastery of content but the formation of behavior and attitudes consistent with Islamic values. Learning experiences, such as community service projects, internships in religious institutions, or socially oriented entrepreneurship, are designed to develop these values. The value-based approach combines real practice, structured reflection, and theoretical integration so that students can conceptualize their moral experiences and apply them in professional and community contexts. MBKM provides cross-disciplinary and external partnership opportunities that enrich this value context (Irawan et al., 2024; Latipah et al., 2023). Assessment in this approach should prioritize authentic evidence, such as e-portfolios, performance assessments, and reflective reports that demonstrate changes in attitudes and value-based practices throughout the program (Habibie & Wachidah, 2025).

Islamic Religious Education Learning Strategies in MBKM

Project-based learning in PAI within the MBKM framework positions students as active actors who design and implement real projects. Examples include developing Qur'anic literacy programs in communities, planning community-based da'wah activities, or creating social enterprises that integrate Islamic values. Through these activities, learning is not limited to knowledge transfer but also includes the formation of practical competence, attitudes, and character (As'ari et al., 2023; Rachman & Nurhanifansyah, 2024; Setiawati et al., 2024). The PBL process in PAI includes identifying contextual problems with external partners, designing products or projects with clear course learning outcomes, conducting interdisciplinary collaborative work, and documenting and reflecting on the process through authentic assessment such as portfolios, e-portfolios, and performance assessment (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024).

The strength of project-based learning lies in its ability to improve critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and the application of religious values in real action. Studies in PAI contexts have reported that PBL can increase learner motivation and competence when adapted to the Merdeka Curriculum or MBKM guidelines. For effective implementation, PBL in PAI requires alignment between course plans and MBKM activities, training for lecturers and field partners in project-based facilitation, and transparent assessment mechanisms that connect project products with religious values and competencies (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024; Rahmat et al., 2019).

Project-collaborative learning in PAI combines project-based learning and collaborative learning. Students work in interdisciplinary teams to design, implement, and account for real projects with campus or community partners. This strategy places collaboration, role distribution, communication, and group reflection at the core of the learning process so that cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and Islamic value competencies can be achieved in an integrated manner (Amara et al., 2025; Aryani et al., 2025; As'ari et al., 2023; Suriana et al., 2025). Implementation includes identifying contextual problems with external partners, designing clear project outcomes connected to MBKM course learning outcomes, conducting collaborative team work, documenting the process, and using authentic assessment such as e-portfolios, team and individual performance rubrics, and reflective reports (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024).

The advantages of this strategy include strengthening twenty-first-century skills such as collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. It also reinforces the internalization of religious values through social practice and increases graduates' relevance to the needs of society because projects are oriented toward real solutions. Nevertheless, its success depends on the alignment of course plans with MBKM, lecturers' and partners' readiness to facilitate collaboration, and clear partnership and supervision mechanisms (Amara et al., 2025; Huwaida, 2024; Muslihati et al., 2023; Suriana et al., 2025).

Problem-based learning in PAI within MBKM uses real problems, particularly religious, ethical, and social issues in the community, as the starting point for learning. Students are encouraged to identify contextual problems, conduct literature and field investigations, formulate solutions based on Islamic values, test and present recommendations, and reflect on both process and outcomes as part of continuous learning. This strategy is aligned with MBKM because it provides space for cross-program experience and external partnerships through community service, internships, and community collaboration (Hermawan et al., 2024; Rodiyah, 2022; Saraswati et al., 2025). PBL enables PAI learning outcomes to be achieved not only in the cognitive domain but also in affective and psychomotor domains through authentic tasks and portfolio-based assessment (Erviani, 2025; Hermawan et al., 2024; Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024).

Blended learning in PAI within the MBKM framework combines in-depth face-to-face learning, such as value clinics, religious text discussions, and worship mentoring, with structured online activities such as interactive modules, lecture videos, formative quizzes, and e-portfolio platforms. This combination provides flexibility, expands access to MBKM experiences, and facilitates authentic assessment that documents students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies. Through course plans that integrate online and offline components, PAI lecturers can align learning outcomes with MBKM activities. Online platforms can be used for preparation and field reflection, while face-to-face meetings can be used for textual deepening, spiritual mentoring, and evaluation of religious practice (Astriani & Anbiya, 2024; Kharisma et al., 2024; Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, 2024).

Recent national studies show that blended learning in PAI can increase learning motivation, student engagement, and access to learning resources. However, its effectiveness depends on infrastructure readiness, lecturers' capability in managing pedagogical technology, and clear integration with MBKM

partnerships. Practical implementation requires measurable online modules connected to MBKM assignments, the use of e-portfolios as evidence of value and competence assessment, training for lecturers and field partners in blended pedagogy, and regular monitoring of infrastructure quality and partnership continuity (Astriani & Anbiya, 2024; Kharisma et al., 2024; Zakkiyah et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Islamic Religious Education learning within the MBKM framework requires approaches and strategies that position students as active, independent, and responsible subjects in developing their intellectual, spiritual, social, and Islamic character potential. The humanistic, constructivist, experiential learning, and value-based approaches provide a philosophical foundation that PAI learning should not merely focus on content mastery but also on self-transformation and value strengthening through real experience, social interaction, and reflective processes. These approaches are consistent with the spirit of MBKM, which provides flexibility, learning autonomy, inclusivity, and character strengthening through field-based activities.

Meanwhile, learning strategies such as project-based learning, project-collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and blended learning function as implementative media that enable students to develop religious understanding contextually, applicatively, and in accordance with the needs of society. These strategies enable students to practice solving religious problems, collaborate across disciplines, produce real products and solutions for communities, and use digital technology in learning. Through these strategies, PAI learning in MBKM becomes more meaningful because it integrates academic activities with practical experiences through internships, community service projects, research, and community-based activities.

Overall, PAI learning in MBKM requires adaptive curriculum design, authentic portfolio-based assessment, lecturers' readiness as facilitators, and sustainable collaboration between universities and external partners. When these components work harmoniously, PAI is not only a medium for transmitting religious knowledge but also a vehicle for character formation, value strengthening, twenty-first-century competence development, and student empowerment as agents of change who are able to apply Islamic values in their social and professional environments.

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