

Islamic Character Education within the Merdeka Curriculum Framework: A Case Study of MAN 4 Denanyar

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DOI: 10.32764/dinamika.v9i2.5691

Received: 21 September 2025

Accepted: 17 October 2025

Published: 31 December 2025

Abstract :

This study aims to explain the formation of Islamic character through the independent curriculum at MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang. The focus of research includes 2 main aspects, namely: (1) The application of the independent curriculum through the formation of Islamic character in MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang, and (2) Problematic and Merdeka Curriculum Solutions to the Formation of Islamic Characters in MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang. This study uses a qualitative deskriptive approach, with data collection techniques in the form of in -depth interviews, observations, and documentation. This method is ideal for understanding the background of the problem, individual social interaction, or studying groups as a whole, with case study research as the first choice in qualitative research. The results of the study explained that: (1) the application of an independent curriculum through the formation of Islamic character in MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang by planning to hold a Bullying and Early Marriage Prevention Seminar, then the implementation of Islamic character formation through the independent curriculum is contained in the RPP and through the Intracurricular, Ceocular and Extracurricular, and finally instilling religious values and discipline and then slipping Islamic values in each material theme; To evaluate the formation of Islamic character through an independent curriculum, namely through assessment and report cards. (2) Problematics and solutions to form Islamic character through the Merdeka Curriculum in MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang, namely there are supporting factors through teachers, students, infrastructure, environmental conditions and behavior approaches. Then there is an inhibiting factor that is lack of understanding so that it cannot impose technology. Then for the solution by frequently holding meetings, training, training and workshops. This research makes a practical contribution to teachers and policy makers in developing Islamic character formation through an independent curriculum in madrasas and providing insights on the implementation of an independent curriculum in the local context.

Keywords : Character Formation, Islamic Character, Merdeka Curriculum, Madrasah, MAN 4 Jombang.

Abstrak :

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjelaskan pembentukan karakter islami melalui kurikulum merdeka di MAN 4 Denanyar jombang. Fokus penelitian mencakup 2 aspek utama, yaitu: (1) Penerapan kurikulum merdeka melalui pembentukan karakter islami di MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang, dan (2) Problematika dan solusi kurikulum merdeka terhadap pembentukan karakter islami di MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif, dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa wawancara mendalam, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Metode ini ideal untuk memahami latar belakang masalah, interaksi sosial individu, atau mempelajari kelompok secara menyeluruh, dengan penelitian studi kasus sebagai pilihan utama dalam penelitian kualitatif. Hasil dari penelitian menjelaskan bahwa: (1) Penerapan kurikulum merdeka melalui melalui pembentukan karakter Islami di MAN 4 Denanyar

Jombang dengan perencanaan mengadakan seminar pencegahan bullying dan pernikahan dini, lalu pelaksanaan pembentukan karakter Islami melalui kurikulum merdeka termaktub dalam RPP dan melalui jalur intrakurikuler, kokuler dan ekstrakurikuler, dan terakhir menanamkan nilai-nilai agama dan kedisiplinan lalu menyelinapkan nilai islami di setiap tema materi; Untuk evaluasi pembentukan karakter islami melalui kurikulum merdeka yaitu melalui asesmen dan rapat. (2) Problematika dan solusi pembentukan karakter Islami melalui kurikulum merdeka di MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang yaitu terdapat faktor pendukung melalui Guru, siswa, sarana prasarana, kondisi lingkungan dan pendekatan behavior. Lalu terdapat faktor penghambat yaitu kurangnya pemahaman sehingga belum bisa memaksakan teknologi. Kemudian untuk solusinya dengan seringnya mengadakan rapat, diklat, pelatihan dan workshop. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi praktis bagi guru dan pemangku kebijakan dalam mengembangkan pembentukan karakter Islami melalui kurikulum merdeka di madrasah serta memberikan wawasan tentang implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam konteks lokal.

Kata Kunci: Pembentukan Karakter, Karakter Islami, Kurikulum Merdeka, Madrasah, MAN 4 Jombang.

INTRODUCTION

Along with the rapid development of time, various social interactions have become more widespread, and ethics and character are declining. Character education must be emphasized in order to prevent issues such as bullying, promiscuity, drugs, and alcohol. Rampant, as it is now, teenagers who should be learning more about character education are unaware that the threats of free association from the outside are very harmful. Therefore, they must be cautious in socializing and choosing their friends.

It is important to remember that social media can also be a cause of the decline in students' character values when misused, such as with apps they don't understand how to use properly. Therefore, there needs to be supervision, whether from family or school, to provide guidance and consequences for those who misuse social media (Arifin and Fuad 2021).

Some factors contributing to the low character education are: first, the education system that focuses less on character development and more on intellectual growth, for example, the education evaluation system that emphasizes cognitive/academic aspects, such as the National Examination. Second, the environment's condition, which does not adequately support the development of good character (Hidayatullah M Furqon, 2010).

Considering the importance of character in building strong human resources (HR), character education must be implemented properly. It can be said that character formation is something that cannot be separated from life. Therefore, character education must accompany all aspects of life, including educational institutions. Ideally, character formation or education should be integrated into all aspects of school life.

Educational institutions, especially schools, are seen as strategic places for shaping students' character. This is intended so that students' words, attitudes, and behaviors reflect good and strong character (Hidayatullah M Furqon, 2010).

In Islamic literature, it is recognized that genetic/hereditary factors are one of the influences on character formation. For example, Islam acknowledges the reason for choosing a prospective wife based on hereditary factors. The

Prophet once said, essentially stating that most people marry women because of factors like appearance, wealth, lineage, and religion. However, Islam teaches that the best factor in choosing a wife is her faith.

Recently, it has been found that the most important factors influencing a person's character, besides genetics, include food, friends, parents, and goals. These are the strongest factors in shaping a person's character. Therefore, it is clear that character can be formed (Abdul majid S.Ag M.Pd 2011).

It can be concluded that character is a person's natural trait in responding to situations morally, manifested in real actions through good behavior, honesty, responsibility, respect for others, and other noble character values. In Law No. 2/1989, Article 4 explains that: 'National education aims to enlighten the nation's life and develop the Indonesian people as a whole, individuals who are faithful and devoted to the Almighty God and have noble character, possess knowledge and skills, physical and mental health, stable and independent personalities, as well as a sense of social and national responsibility.'

In the learning process, new students have already implemented previous research, starting with guidance through holistic and enjoyable education, and all of this is the realization of the Merdeka Curriculum. The learning has received positive responses from both teachers and students, as the learners are given the freedom to be creative with their own ideas. With this freedom, they are motivated to learn, resulting in meaningful learning experiences. Educators also have the freedom to design learning strategies and choose models that align with the character, talents, and conditions of the learners, without external pressure (Saifudin 2023).

In previous studies, there have been many cases depicting the lack of character among students in Indonesia, which often leads to actions taken by the student community (Adirinarso 2023). In shaping character within the Merdeka Curriculum, the school must first provide understanding, habituation, and role modeling (Susanti 2023).

The Merdeka Curriculum for character education has a significant impact on students' education to achieve the Pancasila student profile, and the independent curriculum plays a major role in the development of students' character, leading to better character growth and the improvement of education quality in Indonesia. Our unique curriculum provides freedom to students to learn according to their interests and talents (Daniel, Pangkey, and Sarudi 2024).

Character education for students is very important to be developed within the school environment, using various methods, including teacher role modeling, which is expected to provide a good example. Some methods proposed by experts above include role modeling: knowing, loving, desiring, and doing. Teacher role modeling is the main tool in education. This was practiced by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in educating his followers (Hudi Ahsan, Sugeng Haryadi 2023).

In character education, role modeling needs to be developed by parents in the family environment, teachers at school, community leaders, scholars, and national leaders. A proverb says, 'Actions speak louder than words.' Da'wah is better done through actions than just words. Teachers must first possess the

character they wish to teach; teachers are those who are to be respected and imitated (their words are trusted and their behavior is followed). Researchers still encounter challenges in the implementation of Qur'an recitation (tadarus) because there are still some children who need special guidance in reading the Qur'an (Umi et al. 2022).

In this study, the main focus is to understand the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in shaping Islamic character, the process of developing students' characteristics, and the factors that influence it. The results of this study can contribute positively to the development of the Merdeka Curriculum for shaping Islamic character in students (Ima Rahmatika and Majid 2684).

RESEARCH METHOD

The approach that will be used in the implementation of this research is a qualitative approach. According to Perreault and McCarthy, the qualitative approach is used to explain, describe, explore information, and provide descriptions related to the research being conducted. The type of research that will be used in this study is descriptive research (McCarthy 2006). This research method is used by the researcher with the aim of gaining a deep understanding of the formation of Islamic character through the Merdeka Curriculum at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 4 Denanyar Jombang. The research data was obtained through in-depth interviews with teachers, students, and relevant stakeholders to gather information about the implementation of Islamic character formation. It also involved direct observation of learning activities and events at the madrasah to see how the formation of Islamic character is applied, as well as documentation in the form of notes, curricula, or other sources relevant to the context of the research.

Data analysis is carried out by systematically searching for and organizing the data obtained from interviews, field notes, and documentation. This is done by categorizing the data, breaking it down into units, synthesizing, organizing it into patterns, selecting what is important and what will be studied, and drawing conclusions so that it is easy to understand both for oneself and for others (Indrawan, Asep 2017). To ensure data validity, this research applies the Triangulation technique. Data source triangulation is done by comparing information from various parties, such as teachers, relevant educational staff, and supporting documents. Method triangulation is used by combining interviews, observations, and documentation to ensure the consistency of the obtained data. Additionally, time triangulation is applied by conducting observations and data collection at different times to obtain a more comprehensive picture. Through this approach, the research is expected to provide an accurate depiction of the formation of Islamic character through the Merdeka Curriculum (Sugiyono 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation is the process of applying or putting a concept, theory, or knowledge into real practice to achieve specific goals. In an implementation, there are steps such as planning, execution, and evaluation. Similarly, the Formation of Islamic Character Through the Merdeka Curriculum at Madrasah

Aliyah Negeri 4 Denanyar Jombang begins with a planning phase, which is developed with various steps and strategies to facilitate the research process. Once the planning is complete, the next stage is execution, where the plan will be carried out according to the predetermined sequence to achieve optimal results. The final stage of implementation is evaluation, which is conducted to assess any shortcomings that occurred during the implementation, such as whether the process has followed the initial plan and whether the objectives have been achieved.

1. Planning for the Formation of Islamic Character

The process of planning the formation of Islamic character through the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang is carried out systematically and involves the synergy of various key parties within the madrasah environment. The planning stages begin with the preparation of lesson plans (RPP) and organizing seminars on anti-bullying and the prevention of early marriage. For this Islamic character formation program, habituation has been implemented prior to the Merdeka Curriculum, as it is part of the madrasah's operational curriculum.

The program is implemented through two channels: the internal channel, which involves applying it to the curriculum that must be taught as part of the teaching and learning process in each subject, and the external channel, which involves activities or projects that engage various elements, including the community. at MAN 4 Jombang, seminars and talk shows are held as part of the curriculum habituation program, which benefits the formation and reinforcement of character. Islamic character is included in the madrasah's operational curriculum through the P5RA program, which integrates the values of Rahmatan Lil'alaamin and Islamic character into every lesson plan (RPP) prepared by the teachers. The habituation of Islamic character is also carried out outside of formal learning, although it is not always regulated in the official program, but rather through everyday habituation activities that include values such as humility, the prevention of violence, and bullying. In addition, activities like seminars, talk shows, and training also play a role in character formation, such as seminars on preventing stunting, bullying, and early marriage. Overall, the formation of Islamic character is achieved through integration into the curriculum, habituation, and character-strengthening activities.

This statement aligns with the goal-planning theory expressed by Richard Daniel Herdi Pangkey and Regina Sarudi. Character building in the *Merdeka Curriculum* helps enhance students' awareness of ethical and moral values necessary for daily life. It enables students to become more ethical and well-mannered individuals. Character formation in the *Merdeka Curriculum* also supports the development of students' social skills, such as communication, collaboration, and empathy. This allows students to become more interactive individuals who contribute positively to society. This theory is relevant to the findings of the research, which show that the planning of Islamic character development at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 4 Denanyar Jombang aligns with this concept (Daniel et al. 2024).

The analysis obtained from the sources indicates that the planning of

seminar and counseling programs, as well as the design of lesson plans (RPP) that incorporate prioritized character values, plays a significant role in character development—particularly in fostering Islamic character. Systematically structured planning, as outlined in the operational curriculum of the madrasah, serves as a foundation for developing students' potential, especially in intellectual and spiritual aspects. At MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang, the planning process is carried out collaboratively, involving the synergy of various parties within the madrasah environment. This process is implemented in a structured manner, engaging key figures such as the Head of the Madrasah, the Vice Principal for Curriculum, and the Vice Principal for Student Affairs, to ensure the effective implementation of character formation.

2. Implementation of Islamic Character Formation Through the Merdeka Curriculum

From the interviews with the Vice Principal of Curriculum and several teachers at MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang, it can be concluded that the implementation The formation of Islamic character through the Merdeka Curriculum is incorporated into the lesson plans (RPP) of each teacher and is also included as part of the program at the madrasah, under the P5RA program. P5RA is a character-strengthening program within the Merdeka Curriculum, which is implemented at the madrasah, including at MAN 4 Jombang. The formation of Islamic character is embedded in the values of Rahmatan Lil'alaamin.

This curriculum is planned to be implemented over the next year. MAN 4 Jombang has developed an operational curriculum for the madrasah, which serves as a collective guide for the implementation of the curriculum throughout the year. One of the focuses of this curriculum is character formation, which is outlined in the lesson plans (RPP) and is part of the P5RA program. This program differs between grades X and XI, with grade X implementing P5RA four times a year, while grade XI does it three times. P5RA is carried out in blocks, with grade X having four full weeks across two semesters and grade XI having three weeks, with the distribution of implementation spread evenly across both semesters.

Two factors in the process of forming Islamic character are internal and external. The internal aspect focuses on the Madrasah Operational Curriculum, which requires the implementation of the character values embedded in that curriculum. In the learning process, he uses a role-modeling approach with the discovery learning method or collaborative-based learning. This allows students to collaborate in learning, independently searching for and discovering new knowledge. He also provides time for students to engage in dialogue and exchange ideas, after which the teacher imparts scientific insights and lessons of wisdom (ibrah).

The implementation of Islamic character formation through the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out through various channels, namely intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities, all of which are oriented towards the values of Rahmatan Lil'Alaamin. In guiding and directing students to understand and apply Islamic values in daily life at MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang, he emphasizes the importance of congregation and teaches children to be disciplined while providing understanding about the virtues of congregation, so that the children become diligent in worship.

In motivating students, he always provides guidance, encouragement, and advice, both in a structured and unstructured manner, to remain consistent in applying the Islamic character values that have been taught. Provide guidance whenever there is an opportunity, both during teaching hours and outside of class time. This is in line with the theory proposed by Jainudin Abdullah and Rustam Hasim, which explains that the *Merdeka Curriculum* places the development of a positive mental attitude as one of the main goals of education. Students are encouraged to cultivate an optimistic mindset, self-confidence, and a strong enthusiasm for learning. The development of this positive mental attitude helps them face challenges with confidence and a willingness to continue growing. Through experience-based learning and group collaboration, students are guided to develop social skills. They learn to communicate effectively, share ideas, work together, and appreciate differences among their classmates. In the *Merdeka Curriculum*, character education can be implemented through the *Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project* (P5) and integrated into learning materials. Character education is essential to produce intelligent and morally grounded students, enabling them to respond to the challenges of a rapidly evolving era (Jainudin Abdullah 2024). Uniquely, MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang employs a spiritual (*batiniyah*) approach to gradually develop students' character, allowing them to feel genuinely cared for by their teachers. As a result, students become reluctant to engage in actions that are deemed inappropriate from ethical and moral perspectives.

3. Evaluation of Islamic Character Formation Through the Merdeka Curriculum

Evaluation of Islamic character formation is reflected in the P5 report, which has a special report card. Each P5 project has a specific character to be developed, tailored to the theme being raised. In addition, in the RA (Academic Report), the madrasah also emphasizes values such as civility and deliberation. All of this is incorporated into P5, and each aspect is assessed. However, for the habituation report, there is no specific assessment. Measuring students' habits is indeed somewhat abstract. For the evaluation of Islamic character development, there is a separate report card, and there are specific characteristics to highlight according to the theme. For example, from P5, it focuses on critical thinking, creativity, ethics, or morals. Meanwhile, from Rahmatan Lil'Alamin, it emphasizes manners, politeness, and consultation.

The evaluation of the implementation of the Strengthening of Pancasila Student Profile and Rahmatan Lil'Alamin Student Profile projects at this madrasah is carried out periodically by the madrasah to measure the achievement of objectives and the established indicators of success, with the aim of improvement and sustainability. The evaluation is conducted by the madrasah authorities (Principal and or Vice Principal), as well as the mentors/guides/trainers of the activities. And the evaluation conducted by the school is to carry out assessment as an integrated part of the learning process, learning facilitation, and the provision of holistic information, serving as feedback for educators, students, and parents/guardians in determining the next learning strategy. The assessment is designed and carried out according to its function, with flexibility in determining the technique and timing of the

assessment to effectively achieve the learning objectives. The assessment is designed to be fair, proportional, valid, and reliable to explain learning progress, make decisions on the next steps, and serve as a basis for To develop the next learning program, the report on students' learning progress and achievements is simple and informative, providing useful information about the character and competencies attained, as well as follow-up strategies. The assessment results are used by students, educators, educational staff, and parents/guardians as material for reflection to improve the quality of learning.

Based on these findings, it is evident that the assessment approach in the *Merdeka Curriculum* significantly differs from traditional assessment methods, which typically focus solely on final results or test outcomes. Instead, this more in-depth formative approach emphasizes understanding and tracking students' progress throughout the learning process. This aligns with the primary goal of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which is to nurture diverse and unique learners by giving special attention to their individual development. These findings provide valuable insights into how the *Merdeka Curriculum* implements a student-centered assessment approach that supports its vision of developing skilled, diverse learners who are well-prepared to face future challenges.

4. Supporting Factors for the Formation of Islamic Character through the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang

Each party within the educational ecosystem holds a significant role in the process of shaping students' character, ranging from teachers and parents to the broader community environment. Strong collaboration among these three elements is essential to ensure that character values—particularly Islamic character—can be instilled consistently and comprehensively. However, in practice, not all students share the same perspective on the importance of developing good character. Differences in background, personal experiences, and the influence of social environments can shape varying perceptions among students regarding moral and ethical values.

All parties involved in the field of education, including teachers, students, and parents, share equal responsibility in shaping students' character holistically. Character development cannot be placed solely on one party, such as teachers at school, but must be a shared commitment that is continuously carried out both in the school environment and at home. Teachers serve as facilitators as well as role models in the learning process by instilling moral and spiritual values. Meanwhile, parents play a crucial role in reinforcing character education within the family setting, as the family is the first and foremost place for a child's education. Students themselves must also be actively involved in the character-building process through self-awareness, reflection, and the application of the values they have been taught.

In the context of implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*, the supporting factors for the formation of Islamic character fundamentally lie in the roles of teachers, students, educational staff, and the availability of facilities and infrastructure. All of these elements function as facilitators that enable the creation of a conducive learning environment for strengthening Islamic character values.

In the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, the success of Islamic

character development is not solely determined by the curriculum content itself, but also heavily depends on various supporting factors within the educational environment. These supporting factors include a conducive school environment and adequate madrasah facilities, the availability of competent educators and educational staff, as well as the readiness of students to adapt to changes and the dynamics of the new curriculum. A positive madrasah environment and facilities that support learning can significantly strengthen the internalization process of Islamic values. Likewise, educators who possess both pedagogical competence and strong personal character can serve as role models in shaping students' character. On the other hand, students' readiness is also a critical aspect that determines the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in fostering comprehensive Islamic character development.

Supporting factors play a crucial role in the successful development of Islamic character through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. These factors include a supportive environment, adequate madrasah facilities, and the availability of competent educators and educational staff. A positive and religious madrasah environment can serve as an effective medium for instilling Islamic moral values in students, both through habitual activities and daily social interactions. In addition, adequate facilities such as comfortable classrooms, Islamic libraries, and representative worship spaces further strengthen the internalization process of religious values. Equally important is the quality of educators and educational staff, which significantly influences the success of curriculum implementation, as they function not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as role models in applying Islamic values in real life. With the synergy of these supporting factors, the development of Islamic character can take place optimally and sustainably.

This statement aligns with the theory put forward by Ummu Khoiriyah and colleagues, which explains that one of the key factors driving the success of differentiated learning is the role of the school principal, who consistently motivates teachers and provides support through various activities such as in-house training, webinars, and seminars in developing teaching modules. These activities become more effective when teachers also have access to reference materials to help them design diverse and innovative learning activities. However, in practice, during the implementation of the *Program Sekolah Penggerak* (Driving School Program), both teachers and principals are required to participate in numerous activities, leaving them with limited time to explore additional references. In response to this, the government has developed the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform, which teachers can use to share best practices and support one another in their teaching efforts (Khairiyah et al. 2023).

5. Barriers and Solutions to the Development of Islamic Character through the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang

As for the obstacles, or more precisely referred to as challenges, sometimes the Merdeka Curriculum is both understood and not yet understood by All teachers and students sometimes understand the Merdeka Curriculum, but it has not yet been fully implemented because the program is still new or has only been running for two years. Therefore, teachers are still figuring out the best approach to convey to the students. Additionally, there is a limitation in the knowledge of

the facilitators. Time is also a constraint, as delivering a theme requires time, but the facilitators do not all have the same background. Not all students have the same perspective on personal growth, and not everyone possesses the integrity needed to build character.

The obstacles include the fact that some educators have not fully optimized the use of IT, and access to digital-based learning is not yet optimal, as all students are not allowed to bring communication devices/phones/laptops. The lack of understanding among some educators about technology, which continues to evolve with the passage of time, has resulted in digital-based learning not being fully optimized, as students are not allowed to bring communication devices such as phones and laptops. In a heterogeneous class, which consists of students with different backgrounds, abilities, needs, and learning styles, teachers must be able to share fairly in all aspects, as this can also affect the mental and psychological well-being of a student.

This aligns with the theory proposed by Baehaqi, which explains that in the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, there are several challenges faced by teachers. Among 20 respondents, many reported experiencing similar obstacles, such as a lack of teaching media, inadequate infrastructure, and diverse student character traits. By identifying these challenges in implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum* in the learning process, it is hoped that educational authorities will pay greater attention to both infrastructure readiness and human resources. This will help ensure the smooth implementation of the curriculum, so that its intended goals can be effectively achieved (Baehaki 2023).

Based on the researcher's observations, teachers often hold meetings to exchange opinions in order to solve problems, engage in discussions, remind each other, and encourage one another. They also frequently organize activities with students and incorporate elements that can inspire and motivate the students. Periodically providing guidance in the form of training, workshops, and seminars to educators and educational staff to enhance their competencies. Encouraging educators and educational staff To always collaborate in the implementation. Creating a madrasah environment and learning environment that provides guidance in building character. Using mapping techniques, prioritizing the more dangerous and important aspects, and focusing more on physical interaction. Because character must indeed be built in a gentle manner, slowly and carefully when advising, as making the wrong move can lead to the child not obeying.

Therefore, the primary goal of the character-building process is to cultivate obedience within students. An individual can be considered well-educated when they are able to improve their moral conduct, especially in building social relationships through the application of Islamic character values. Moral values are a crucial component that must be developed in the character formation process, particularly in the effort to build an Islamic character. The *Merdeka Curriculum* not only provides an understanding of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project but also encourages students to change their attitudes and behaviors in a more positive direction, in line with the guidance of proper manners (*adab*) and the life values being taught.

The statement aligns with the theory proposed by Teti Rosminda and Fadriati. In the previous curriculum, known as Kurtilas (Curriculum 2013), character education strengthening was a primary goal. The Merdeka Curriculum offers opportunities for teachers to innovate in shaping and guiding students into quality individuals. Students have the freedom to learn, yet remain under the guidance of educators within educational institutions. The development of Merdeka Belajar within the Merdeka Curriculum is based on the philosophy of progressivism developed by John Dewey. This philosophy asserts that educational institutions have the freedom to explore competencies, skills, and other potentials possessed by students, tailored to their interests in a flexible, democratic, and enjoyable manner. With the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, students are empowered to develop themselves progressively. They are encouraged to carefully and attentively follow guidelines that distinguish between what is permissible and what is not. What is permissible is that which enhances the quality of the students, both personally and as members of society (Rosminda and Fadriati 2023).

CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this study shows that the formation of Islamic character through the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out in three interconnected stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. In the planning stage, the formation of Islamic character through the Merdeka Curriculum is designed through lesson plans (RPP) and incorporated into the madrasah's operational curriculum. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the formation of Islamic character at MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang is carried out thoroughly through the stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation. The planning includes programs such as seminars on bullying prevention and early marriage prevention. These are carried out through two channels: internal and external. The implementation of character formation through the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 4 Jombang is carried out through several activities, including: the character-building process outlined in the lesson plans (RPP), conducted through both internal and external channels. The approaches or methods used to instill Islamic character include implementation through intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities, following structured steps. These steps involve instilling religious values and discipline, embedding Islamic values into each theme of the material, and consistently providing guidance. The evaluation of the formation of Islamic character through the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 4 Denanyar Jombang is carried out by: assessment through a special report card and conducting assessments.

It can be concluded that the implementation process starts from It can be concluded that the implementation process starts from the planning stage, where the school organizes an Anti-Bullying Prevention Seminar for students to ensure the effective formation of Islamic character that aligns with students' characteristics. Then, the implementation of Islamic character formation through the Merdeka Curriculum refers to the lesson plans (RPP), with an emphasis on the character to be developed. A flexible method is used, in accordance with

P5RA (Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile Rahmatan Lil'Alamiin Project), and the focus is on the character-building process, not just the final outcome. This approach prioritizes alignment with the individual student's character. For the evaluation of Islamic character formation through the Merdeka Curriculum, assessments are carried out, and a separate report card is created for P5RA. The implementation is done in a structured and organized manner. In a problem, there are supporting factors and hindering factors. Here are the supporting factors: Teachers, Students, Facilities and Infrastructure, and Environmental Conditions. Given the differences in character among each student, where these hindering factors greatly affect the quality of character formation, the hindering factors are: Difficulties in understanding, Time, and Lack of mastery in using technology. The solution is to encourage both students and teachers in building Islamic character, which includes: Frequently holding meetings for educators and educational staff with discussions and providing motivation for students, as well as organizing training, seminars, or workshops for both educators and students.

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