



The CIPP Model in Evaluating the Independent Curriculum: A Study of Islamic Religious Education and Ethics in Muhammadiyah Kleco II Elementary School Kotagede, Yogyakarta

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Received: 19-09-2025

Revised: 27-09-2025

Accepted: 01-10-2025

ABSTRACT

Education plays a crucial role in preparing generations to face future challenges, and the curriculum is key to ensuring relevant learning. The Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) is a flexible innovation that adapts to the needs of the 21st century, particularly following the learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, its implementation in elementary schools continues to face challenges, necessitating a comprehensive evaluation. This study applies the Independent Curriculum to fourth-grade Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (*PAI* and *BP*) at Muhammadiyah Kleco II Elementary School, Kotagede, the driving school and pilot study. The study used a qualitative approach with the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model. Data were collected through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Huberman and Saldana model. The research subjects consisted of a content standard coordinator teacher, a *PAI* and *BP* teacher, and six fourth-grade students. The study lasted six months, with data validity tested through source triangulation, technique triangulation, and method validation. The results showed that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in *PAI* and *BP* was successful, with school support, teacher readiness, and flexible and collaborative learning. Students experienced improvements in character and understanding. However, challenges remained, such as time constraints, lack of parental understanding, and the need for teacher training. These solutions were implemented through time management, teacher competency improvement, intensive communication, and collaboration between teachers.

Keywords: *Evaluation of CIPP, Independent Curriculum, PAI and Character Education*

ABSTRAK

Pendidikan memiliki peran penting dalam mempersiapkan generasi menghadapi tantangan masa depan dan kurikulum menjadi kunci dalam memastikan pembelajaran relevan. Kurikulum Merdeka hadir sebagai inovasi yang fleksibel serta menyesuaikan kebutuhan abad ke-21, khususnya pasca learning loss akibat pandemi COVID-19. Namun, implementasinya di sekolah dasar masih menemui hambatan sehingga diperlukan evaluasi menyeluruh.

Penelitian ini mengevaluasi penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka pada pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam dan Budi Pekerti (PAIBP) kelas IV di SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede, sekolah penggerak sekaligus percontohan studi tiru. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan model CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product). Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan dokumentasi, lalu dianalisis menggunakan model Huberman dan Saldana. Subjek penelitian terdiri dari guru koordinator bidang standar isi, guru PAIBP, dan enam siswa kelas IV. Penelitian berlangsung enam bulan dengan uji keabsahan data melalui triangulasi sumber, teknik, dan validasi metode. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka pada PAIBP berjalan baik dengan dukungan sekolah, kesiapan guru, serta pembelajaran fleksibel dan kolaboratif. Siswa mengalami peningkatan karakter dan pemahaman. Meski demikian, masih terdapat kendala seperti keterbatasan waktu, kurangnya kesepahaman orang tua, dan kebutuhan pelatihan guru. Solusinya dilakukan melalui pengaturan waktu, peningkatan kompetensi guru, komunikasi intensif, serta kolaborasi antarguru.

Kata Kunci: *Evaluasi CIPP, Kurikulum Merdeka, PAI dan Budi Pekerti*

INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the main pillars in preparing the younger generation to face the demands and challenges of the future (Thana & Hanipah, 2023). Amid rapid and complex developments, the curriculum is one of the key elements in ensuring relevant and effective learning for students (Liriwati, 2023). The Indonesian education system has undergone various transformations through curriculum evaluations to meet the demands of the times, starting from the 1947 Curriculum to the 2013 Curriculum, and now the Merdeka Curriculum (Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021). The Merdeka Curriculum is an effort to ensure the relevance of Indonesian education to the ever-evolving demands of the times.

The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is the latest policy in the Indonesian education system, aiming to provide students with freedom and flexibility in choosing learning paths that suit their interests and talents (Ekayana, 2022). This curriculum was developed in response to the decline in education in Indonesia resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic (Aulia et al., 2025; Rokhimawan et al., 2023). As stated by Makarim, research from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology indicates that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant learning gaps and learning loss (Fitriana et al., 2022). Education providers must move quickly to reform and prepare the next generation for the future.

The introduction of this new curriculum is considered relevant to the demands of 21st-century skills education, which emphasises the importance of literacy and numeracy skills as well as 4C competencies (Critical Thinking and Problem Solving, Creative Thinking, Communication, and Collaboration), which are competencies that students must master, especially in today's digital age (Puspitasari & Muadin, 2023). However, its implementation has faced various criticisms, ranging from the lack of

comprehensive evaluation since its trial as a prototype curriculum to the lack of socialisation for teachers, as well as challenges in implementing project-based learning (Sukataman et al., 2023). Jusuf Kalla also highlighted the gap in facilities between regions, saying that this curriculum is more suitable for schools with adequate facilities (CNN Indonesia, 2024). Thus, although the Merdeka Curriculum has great potential to enhance 21st-century skills, the challenges in its implementation must be addressed promptly for the sake of equitable educational success.

In general, there are several problems found in the implementation of the changed curriculum, including: 1) Incomplete understanding by teachers due to a lack of training related to the latest curriculum and the large amount of administration that must be done (Ilmawan, 2024); 2) The background of students, many of whom come from lower-middle-class families and have low motivation to learn (Muslimin, 2023); 3) Incomplete school facilities, ranging from media and infrastructure to limited books (Swandari & Jemani, 2023).

The subject of Islamic Religious Education and Character Education (*PAI* and *BP*) plays an important role in shaping the character and moral values of students in elementary school. Religious education has strategic value in helping students develop a deep understanding of religious teachings (Swandari & Jemani, 2023). Therefore, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in *PAI* and *BP* subjects in elementary schools is a necessary and innovative step that warrants consideration.

SD Muhammadiyah Kleco Kotagede is one of eight schools in Yogyakarta City selected as part of the second batch of driving schools in 2021 (Gusany, 2024). As a Driving School, SD Muhammadiyah Kleco is committed to sharing practices and encouraging other educational units to implement the Independent Curriculum (IKM). This commitment is reflected in collaborative activities, such as a visit by a group of principals and teachers from North Gorontalo in March 2023 to learn about IKM, as well as opportunities to share knowledge and experiences of IKM with SD Muhammadiyah Sapen 1 and SD Muhammadiyah Danunegaran at SD Muhammadiyah Pakel in June 2022 (Gusany, 2022). This experience has made SD Muhammadiyah Kleco a real example of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum that can inspire other educational units. In addition, formal research on learning differentiation based on the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco reinforces the fact that this school has implemented strategies in accordance with the principles of the Pancasila student profile in a concrete manner (Heldayanti, 2024). Therefore, SD Muhammadiyah Kleco was chosen as the object of research because it provides concrete data on implementation.

Based on the results of interviews in a preliminary study with *PAI* and *BP* teachers, grade 4 was the first grade to implement the Merdeka Curriculum (Grade 1 *PAI* Teacher, personal communication, 2024). Therefore, grade 4 has been

implementing the Merdeka Curriculum longer than other grades. According to Suharsimi Arikunto in his book *Evaluasi Program Pendidikan* (2018), program evaluation should be conducted after the program has been running for at least two years. This is because programs need time to show tangible results and impacts. With a period of two years or more, the program will have sufficient data and results to be evaluated, in terms of planning, implementation, and outcomes, allowing for a more comprehensive evaluation (Arikunto & Jabar, 2014). Grade 4 was chosen as the focus of the study because it was the first year of implementation for this program, and the Merdeka Curriculum had been in place for more than two years since its introduction in early 2022.

An evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation is necessary to ensure that its objectives are achieved effectively and in line with students' needs. Curriculum evaluation helps to determine whether the curriculum is fulfilling its objectives and whether students are actually learning (Anderson et al., 2016). Overall curriculum evaluation is important for comparison and advancing understanding of what works and why. Systematic curriculum evaluation is important for determining the relative benefits and effectiveness of educational programs (Lehman, 1973). Learning evaluation is a very important aspect that cannot be separated from the learning activity itself (Mukhdlor et al., 2024). Learning implementation can achieve more optimal results when using the appropriate evaluation model.

Choosing the right evaluation model for a program depends on factors such as context, objectives, and expected outcomes (Nouraey et al., 2020). The use of the CIPP evaluation model effectively assesses the learning process and informs curriculum development for *PAI* and *BP* learners (Baiti et al., 2023). The application of the CIPP method to evaluate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has yielded improved student learning outcomes and a positive impact on school performance (Reny Azraeny, M., et al., 2023). The CIPP assessment model can help evaluate the implementation of the Islamic Education curriculum for *PAI* and *BP* students, ensuring knowledge, completeness, teaching and learning processes, and assessment (Bulhayat, 2019). This evaluation model provides a comprehensive framework for assessing the success of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in *PAI* and *BP* learning, while also helping to identify strengths and areas that need improvement to support the effective achievement of educational goals.

The application of the CIPP model facilitates the evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum by systematising the context of evaluation, input, process, and product (Khairi et al., 2023). The use of the CIPP model facilitates the evaluation of Islamic education implementation in schools in a scientific, standardised, and authentic manner (Yustiani, 2017). The CIPP evaluation model can help assess the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in *PAI* and *BP*, providing new directions for

madrasas, teachers, and students (Syafaruddin et al., 2022). The CIPP model is often used because it covers the evaluation of context, input, process, and outcome, which can be applied to any subject (Jusar et al., 2023). The CIPP model can assess the quality of education in schools and pinpoint areas that require improvement in the teaching and learning environment (Azis, 2003). The CIPP Evaluation Model is a comprehensive framework designed to guide the evaluation of programs, projects, individuals, products, institutions, and evaluation systems, with the intention of improving teaching and learning (Stufflebeam et al., 2003). The CIPP evaluation model is a comprehensive and systematic framework for evaluating context, inputs, processes, and outcomes, thereby helping to improve the quality of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in *PAI* and *BP*.

The Merdeka Curriculum is a newly implemented policy; therefore, research specifically evaluating learning, particularly in *PAI* and *BP* subjects, remains very limited. Therefore, researchers are interested in examining the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede to contribute new insights to academic literature and educational practice. This study employs the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) framework to comprehensively and holistically evaluate *PAI* and *BP* learning at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede. Based on the above background, the author formulates several research questions:

RQ1: How is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Morality lessons for 4th-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede viewed from the aspects of context, input, process, and outcome?

RQ2: What are the challenges faced and solutions applied in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Morality classes in grade 4 at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede?

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative approach, incorporating field research, which aims to gain a deep understanding of phenomena through data in the form of words, narratives, and observations. The evaluation was conducted using the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model designed by Stufflebeam in the late 1960s to assess programs, curricula, and educational institutions (Akpur, 2016), as well as other fields (Stufflebeam et al., 2003). The purpose of this model is to assist evaluators in assessing school programs, teaching flows, and curriculum design, which covers four dimensions: context, input, process, and product. The main objective is not to “prove but to improve” (Stufflebeam et al., 2003).

The research subjects were selected using purposive sampling techniques, comprising parents, fourth-grade *PAI* and *BP* teachers as the main implementers, six

fourth-grade students chosen based on their highest and lowest learning achievements, and the content coordinator, who was responsible for managing the Merdeka Curriculum. Supporting data was also obtained from curriculum and learning administration documents, such as teaching modules, assessment tools, and implementation records. The research objective was to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in fourth-grade *PAI* and *BP* learning, aiming to gain an in-depth understanding of its implementation and development within the context of elementary schools.

The research was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II, Jalan Tegal Gendu No. 03, Prenggan, Kotagede, Yogyakarta. The research activity spanned six months, from December 1, 2024, to June 1, 2025, encompassing the preparation stage through to the report writing stage.

The evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in *PAI* and *BP* learning was conducted using the CIPP (Context, Input, Process, Product) model. In the Context aspect, the indicators examined included teachers' and schools' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept, the stages of implementation, the suitability of the curriculum to the needs of fourth-grade students, the implementation of program evaluation, and the availability of KOSP documents. In terms of Input, the evaluation focuses on teachers' academic qualifications and competencies, participation in training, the number and characteristics of students, and classroom facilities and infrastructure. The Process aspect assesses the suitability of learning objectives and ATP, the availability of textbooks, the application of learning strategies and methods through teaching modules, active student participation, additional activities that support *PAI* and *BP*, and formative and summative assessment techniques. Meanwhile, the Product aspect focuses on learning outcomes, as reflected in student project products and student perceptions of *PAI* and *BP* learning. Data is obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation, with success criteria adjusted to applicable regulations such as Permendikbudristek No. 12 of 2024, Mendikbudristek Decree No. 56/M/2022, and Permendiknas No. 16 and 24 of 2007.

Research data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Non-participatory observation was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede to observe classroom conditions, teacher-student interactions, and *PAI* and *BP* learning support facilities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with fourth-grade *PAI* and *BP* teachers, six students with the highest and lowest learning achievements, and the content coordinator, focusing on CIPP aspects. Documentation, including teaching modules, learning tools, evaluation results, and administrative records, was used to supplement and verify the data. These three techniques complemented each other, resulting in comprehensive and valid data for evaluating the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in *PAI* and *BP* learning.

The validity of the data in this qualitative study was assessed using four main criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Husnullail et al., 2024). Credibility testing was conducted through source triangulation (with *PAI* and *BP* teachers, content standard coordinators, and fourth-grade students) and technique triangulation (utilising observation, interviews, and documentation) to ensure data consistency and accuracy (Sugiyono, 2017).

Data analysis in this study employed an interactive model developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which was conducted cyclically and continuously until the data reached saturation (Saldana, 2014). The data analysed were derived from interviews, observations, field notes, and supporting documents. The analysis process consists of four main stages: data collection, simplification and grouping according to the CIPP model, narrative presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification, thus providing a comprehensive picture of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in *PAI* and *BP* learning at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II, Yogyakarta.

RESULT

1. Evaluation Results of the Independent Curriculum Program

a. Context Evaluation

First, the interview results show that Islamic Education and Morality (*PAI* and *BP*) teachers understand the direction of the Merdeka Curriculum policy. Teachers stated: "In general, regarding the new curriculum ... in the Merdeka Curriculum, character building is further explored ... the development of students' potential independently ... they are given the opportunity to develop their independent potential" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). From this statement, the Merdeka Curriculum is seen as an extension of the 2013 Curriculum with several key characteristics: first, an emphasis on learning flexibility and a holistic approach; second, the use of initial diagnostic assessments to tailor learning to the needs of students; third, freedom in choosing learning methods and techniques to enable teacher innovation; fourth, character building, especially affective aspects such as morals, manners, and spiritual attitudes; and fifth, supporting the development of students' independent potential, which was previously underaccommodated.

The results of interviews with the Content Standards Coordinator show that schools disseminate information about the Merdeka Curriculum through parent meetings at the beginning of the school year and social media: "We convey information about the Merdeka Curriculum through social media, and at the beginning of each school year, we hold parent meetings for grades 1-6 ... At each class meeting, we explain what curriculum we will use, how teachers

will be assigned, and so on. We convey all of this to parents at the meeting at the beginning of the school year" (Coordinator of Content Standards, personal communication, 2025). In addition, students demonstrated their understanding of the curriculum being implemented by responding:

"Yes, we know how to use the Merdeka Curriculum" (personal communication, 2025).

Second, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II was carried out in stages, starting in 2022 for grades I and IV, continuing to grades II and V the following year, until it finally covered all grades I–VI, in accordance with the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 56/M/2022. One teacher stated:

"At the beginning of 2022, during the pandemic, we started with grades 1 and 4 first. In the second year, grades 2 and 5 were added, followed by grades 3 and 6. It was only last semester that all grades began implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Now, grades 1–6 have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. It was done gradually, not all at once" (Iffah Nailul Munna, S.Pd., personal communication, 2024). In the initial stage, SD Muhammadiyah Kleco I was the only school designated as a pilot school, starting from January 23, 2022, followed by SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II on August 10, 2022. The Coordinator Teacher for Content Standards explained: "The teaching and learning process, even though there are three schools, is the same for all. ... Although the Merdeka Curriculum uses phases A, B, and C, at the time the first batch of the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented, we only had phases A and B. Phase A was introduced in grade 1, and phase B was introduced in grade 4. In contrast, phase C did not exist yet" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025).

The initial steps taken by the school to become a Driving School were driven by a commitment to Muhammadiyah's vision and mission for the advancement of education:

"Because the school aspires to be progressive in line with Muhammadiyah's vision and mission, Kleco took the initiative to join the second batch of the Driving School program ... the principal also had to go through a rigorous selection process" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025). This selection refers to the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture Decree No. 1177/M/2020, which sets criteria for curriculum readiness, teaching staff, and facilities and infrastructure. The teacher added:

"Everything was prepared from the beginning through various training programs, especially in terms of readiness to face the new curriculum ... We

even created two versions of the curriculum because out of three school units, only one had the status of a Driving School. So in the first year we had six different curriculum documents" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025).

Third, the learning program at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II is evaluated thoroughly at the end of each semester and academic year, involving teachers, the entire school community, and external parties such as the school committee, PDM, the education office, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The evaluation is carried out using various methods, including both digital methods, such as Google Forms, and face-to-face meetings. One teacher explained:

"At the end of each semester, we invite not only teachers but also the entire school community ... from the school supervisory agency and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. We also conduct evaluations, although the most comprehensive one is typically at the end of the school year. We can do this through Google Forms... We can also invite them to come directly. Every year, we hold an open forum with the authorities, and they provide input" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025). The input received from various parties is used as consideration in the preparation of the next curriculum: "Alhamdulillah, every time we prepare the curriculum, we always open our notes... we also receive input from many parties" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025).

Fourth, based on interviews, *PAI* and *BP* teachers assessed that the Merdeka Curriculum is relevant to students' needs because it provides space for the development of creativity and character building. One teacher stated:

"It can be said to be in line with the Merdeka Curriculum because this curriculum provides space for students to learn according to their interests, talents, and stage of development" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). In addition, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has received full support from the school: "The school is very supportive because initially only a few schools implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, but as the need for capacity and quality of education increased, this curriculum became necessary, so its existence is truly needed at this time, especially given the varying conditions of the children." (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025).

Fifth, *PAI* and *BP* teachers consider the Merdeka Curriculum relevant because it provides space for the development of students' creativity and character: "It can be said to be in line with the Merdeka Curriculum because this curriculum provides space for students to learn according to their interests, talents, and stage of development" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal

communication, 2025). Its implementation also receives full support from schools: "Schools are very supportive because initially only a few schools implemented the Merdeka Curriculum ... its existence is truly needed at this time, especially given the varying conditions of children" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025).

b. Input Evaluation

First, efforts to improve the quality of PAI teachers are an important part of educational transformation, covering aspects of learning as well as academic and administrative requirements: "As the need to improve the quality of teachers arises, it eventually leads to that, and with the addition of teacher certification, it automatically requires a minimum of a bachelor's degree ... I got my teaching license there" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). PAI teachers carry a heavy workload with structured teaching hours per class: "I teach 24 hours a week... There are four PAI teachers for grades 1 and 2. Grades 3 and 4... Grade 5... Grade 6 is taught by..." (Iffah Nailul Munna, S.Pd., personal communication, 2024). The PAI learning system in schools implements a cross-school model and collaboration between teachers, so that one teacher handles several levels and locations: "In grade 4, I have actually only been there for the last two years ... One teacher can get 24-27 teaching hours because we have additional subjects of Kemuhammadiyah and Arabic ... Currently, I teach PAI in grades 3 and 4 at Kleco 1, 2, and 3 because there are four parallel classes in grade 3 and 3 parallel classes in grade 4" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). Additionally, the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) increases teachers' teaching hours: "Our teaching hours have increased... every week, several teachers have an additional 1 JP for P5" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025).

Second, to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, SD Muhammadiyah Kleco Kotagede regularly holds teacher training activities. At the beginning of each school year, the school holds a curriculum workshop consisting of several sessions. This training covers various aspects, ranging from curriculum introduction and assessment preparation to teaching module preparation. The content standards coordinator said, "At the beginning of the year, there is always a curriculum workshop. This year, we held it in July. We had five meetings, sometimes inviting external speakers and at other times our own teachers. The training is comprehensive, featuring a range of materials and assignments. After submitting the assignments, participants receive a certificate. We start from the beginning with an introduction to the curriculum, because we have to prepare all teachers; all teachers must know what

curriculum we are using this year." (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025).

Additionally, some teachers received training in deep learning, although not all of them. The supervision process is also conducted once a semester to assess the overall readiness of teachers. Support for teacher professional development does not stop at initial training at the beginning of the year, but is also complemented by mentoring activities and involvement in teacher working groups (KKG). Every teacher is also required to use the Merdeka Belajar and Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) platform, which is a means of reporting and monitoring teacher activities. PAI and BP teachers explained: "There has been training, plus ongoing mentoring activities, and when using PMM, we have to upload training certificates, technical guidance, and other things related to the independent curriculum. The capacity or quota for offline training is usually shared, so not everyone can participate immediately. Usually, we collaborate with teacher working groups (KKG) to maximise training workshops and other activities. Every teacher is required to use the Merdeka Belajar and Merdeka Mengajar platforms and be monitored. And as announced by the new Minister of Education, there is a Rumah Pendidikan Portal that is almost the same, which can also be accessed with a learning account." (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025).

Third, SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II has adequate facilities and infrastructure to support grade 4, including classrooms, a library, a mosque, and learning tools: "Alhamdulillah ... almost 100% of the facilities, from places of worship (mosques), meeting rooms, classrooms, and even the library, are equipped with a collection of books that support the learning process" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). Textbooks are selected systematically and flexibly in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum phases: "The Merdeka Curriculum is phased ... the important thing is that when the phase is complete, they are finished" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025). Good character values are instilled through daily activities and affectionate books that involve student reflection and the role of parents:

"Children are asked to be honest in filling out the affection book..." (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025); students confirm, "We fill out the affection book, which is collected and checked every Friday" (Grade 4 Student, personal communication, 2025).

Fourth, the number of fourth-grade students who were the subjects of the study was relatively small due to a decline in interest during the pandemic. The teacher explained:

"We currently teach fourth grade because of the PPDB (New Student Admission) during the pandemic ... each class has a maximum of 28 students, and the rest have 23 students ... the ideal standard is 25 students" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025).

c. Process Evaluation

First, Islamic Religious Education teachers develop lesson plans based on Learning Outcomes (CP) and Learning Objective Flow (ATP), with more flexible and contextual teaching modules than previous lesson plans. This enables the adjustment of learning to individual student characteristics and the implementation of differentiation and active learning. The teacher explained: "The syllabus is in book form because it is published directly by the Foundation. So the Foundation has its own guidelines; all that remains is to develop the teaching modules" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025).

Second, PAI teachers employ interactive and enjoyable learning methods, including discussions, educational games, mini-projects, and extracurricular activities. The teacher explains: "Coincidentally, PAI involves more descriptive literacy, so we become lecturers, but in our lectures, we try to innovate by storytelling and playing games. Game techniques and sometimes the material are also delivered using LCD multimedia monitors if needed, because if we use IT all the time, it becomes boring. Sometimes they also get bored telling stories on their own. Sometimes we also take them outside the classroom, even if it's just to the mosque, they are already happy" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). This approach maintains student motivation, reduces boredom, and makes PAI and BP learning more meaningful, while also reflecting the teacher's adaptation to the students' character.

Third, learning assessment at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco Kotagede is conducted regularly and systematically through Daily Assessments (PH), mid-Semester Summative Assessments (STS), End-of-Semester Summative Assessments (SAS), and End-of-Year Summative Assessments (SAT). The PAI and BP teacher explained: "For assessments: Daily Assessment (PH), Mid-Semester Summative Assessment (STS), End-of-Semester Summative Assessment (SAS), and End-of-Year Summative Assessment (SAT). These are conducted regularly. For Daily Assessment, each chapter is usually assessed through PH by agreement" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). Assessment techniques are combined to suit the students' abilities, with collaboration with homeroom teachers to understand the students' characters

more deeply: "We try to combine assessment techniques because, with the varying capacities of our students, we try to collaborate with homeroom teachers, because compared to subject teachers, homeroom teachers have more frequent meetings with students, so regarding assessment, we collaborate with homeroom teachers." (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025).

Fourth, the evaluation of the PAI learning process at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco Kotagede emphasises that religious activities are an important part of character building for students. Routine activities such as BTAQ, congregational duha prayers, and tahfiz are carried out every day to familiarise students with worship practices and train their mental and spiritual abilities: "Additional activities include BTAQ every day during the five school days, and every morning there is a routine tadarusan before KBM. Before classes, there is congregational Duha prayer... The recitations are spoken clearly to train them to memorise the recitations for prayer" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025).

d. Product Evaluation

First, the product evaluation in the CIPP model highlights the final impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on PAI students at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco Kotagede. Teachers reported an increase in student engagement, courage to express opinions, cooperation, independence, and creativity: "If we look at the priority scale, there are significant changes... the children are more active and enthusiastic in class" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). The Merdeka Curriculum enables students not only to understand religious concepts but also to apply religious values in their daily lives: "The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum certainly has the potential to improve student learning outcomes... applying religious teachings in daily life" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). Although there were initial challenges in adapting the material and methods, teachers stated that in the second and third years, the learning process became more stable:

"...after the second and third years, everything started to run smoothly, and the children also began to get used to this way of learning" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025). This curriculum also encourages the development of 21st-century skills through the integration of soft skills and the P5 Project, although the material coverage is broader but not too in-depth: "...the material is indeed broader but not as in-depth as the previous curriculum... children are introduced to many things but cannot go into depth yet" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025).

Second, students' views on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum exhibit diversity, which PAI teachers acknowledge. Students' perceptions of PAI learning with the Merdeka Curriculum reveal a shift in roles, from teachers as the primary source of information to students as active participants. Teachers stated: "Children's views are relative, although there are multiple interpretations of the term 'Merdeka Curriculum'... Children are now the centre of learning, not teachers... they are dynamic" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). This change makes students more creative and initiative. However, challenges arise in motor skills and discipline: "The obstacles and challenges are when there are children with poor motor skills, but overall it is more fun and enjoyable" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). Affective aspects, such as manners and etiquette, are also a concern because the alpha generation tends to be more independent outside of parental supervision: "...children of the alpha generation are extraordinary... we try to instil manners along with etiquette... we never tire of reminding them" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). Students find PAI lessons exciting and useful, especially when practising prayers and memorisation: "The stories are the most exciting part... Some are applied, such as prayers for prayer, daily prayers, and so on" (4th-grade student, personal communication, 2025).

2. Challenges and Solutions in Implementing the Independent Curriculum

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Ethics classes for fourth graders at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede has generally been in line with the plan, but still faces challenges. As one informant noted, "It is in line with the plan, but it cannot be perfect," which confirms that implementation in the field is not immune to various obstacles (Coordinator for Content Standards, personal communication, 2025).

a. Lack of learning hours

Time constraints are a major challenge in learning. As stated, "ideally 35 minutes, but in practice, it takes more than 5 minutes to get the children settled when they first arrive, especially those whose motor skills are not yet fully developed" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). As a result, less material is covered. The solution is to employ more efficient learning strategies, interactive methods, and flexible and adaptive planning approaches.

b. Differences in PAI teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum

This is a challenge because its status is still relatively new. As stated, "not all PAI teachers have the same understanding, so there is a need for further teacher training and professional development ... not as a weakness but to complement and adapt further with training" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag.,

personal communication, 2025). Therefore, teacher training and professional development are needed to align perceptions and strengthen curriculum adaptation.

c. Parental understanding

Parental understanding is an important factor in the success of the Merdeka Curriculum. Informants emphasised, "Parents' response to the Merdeka Curriculum is still seen as the same as the previous curriculum ... what needs to be improved is mutual understanding with parents" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). Intensive socialisation and communication are needed so that parents understand the differences in the curriculum and can support their children's development optimally. Furthermore, continuity of education between school and home is also crucial. As stated, "the weakness is when it is taught at school but not followed up at home; there are parents who just leave their children to the school" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). This highlights the importance of parental involvement in reinforcing the habits instilled at school.

d. Changes to the learning schedule

Schedule flexibility poses a challenge, especially when there are additional holidays or extracurricular activities. An informant explained, "For example, when we plan the number of teaching hours but there are additional holidays ... we end up shifting the schedule ... what is clear is that we will all complete the material on time" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025). Although the schedule often changes, teachers remain committed to covering the material according to the learning objectives. This emphasises the need for a dynamic and flexible planning system to ensure that curriculum implementation continues to run optimally.

e. Curriculum transition in the Merdeka Curriculum

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in grade 6 only began this year, so there are challenges related to standardising the format of the certificate. The informant explained, "Grade 6 only started implementing the Merdeka Curriculum this year ... so the certificates will be standardised by including IPAS/IPA and IPS" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025). In addition, the application of the material has not been fully implemented. "We have not used the material in its entirety ... Last year, I was still using IPA and IPS, not yet fully implementing P5 ... When we presented our work, we also harvested the results of our work" (Irham Nisaur Rohim, S.Pd., personal communication, 2025). Thus, grade 6 has begun to follow several aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum, such as report cards and work exhibitions.

However, the implementation of P5 and the material is still limited, so it is not yet fully in line with other grades.

- f. Some students have difficulty understanding written material, but are able to absorb information orally.

The informant said: "If we give them written and reading material, they don't understand... but if we give it orally, they listen and understand... they can't understand written material because they only know a few letters" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). The school does not yet provide special assistance, but is trying to collaborate with classroom teachers:

"We collaborate with the classroom teacher... to date, there has been no special assistance for children with these criteria... they like to play, but when it comes to opening and reading a book, after 2 or 3 minutes, maximum 5 minutes, they lose interest" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025).

- g. Religious laboratory

School facilities are generally adequate; however, there is no dedicated room for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) classes. PAI classes are currently integrated with religious activities at the school mosque:

"We have been trying to establish a special room for PAI, but there isn't one yet. So we include activities at the mosque ... even though it is located in the same building as the school" (Nur Faizin Wibowo, S.Ag., personal communication, 2025). Plans are in place to build an IR room, but implementation has been delayed due to other more urgent priorities.

DISCUSSION

This study evaluates the Merdeka Curriculum program using the CIPP model. For the first problem formulation, the results of the evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum program in Islamic Religious Education and Morality (PAI and BP) for 4th-grade students at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede, Yogyakarta, reveal several important findings based on the CIPP model. In terms of context, PAI and BP teachers understand the Merdeka Curriculum in accordance with Permendikbudristek RI No. 12 of 2024 (2024), which emphasises flexibility, character building, and learner-centred learning. This implementation is a development of the 2013 Curriculum with a holistic approach, initial diagnostic assessment, and differentiated learning (Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021; Ditya et al., 2023; Pratomo et al., 2024; Umam, 2022). A good understanding of the school community is also influenced by adequate teacher management and training (Mahmudi, 2011; Sullanmaa et al., 2019).

The curriculum implementation phase is carried out gradually in accordance with Fullan's theory of educational change, which emphasises the importance of

leadership, stakeholder involvement, and sustainability of change (Fullan, 2016). The designation of schools as Driving Schools demonstrates visionary leadership and institutional commitment (Senge et al., 2012), although challenges remain in terms of curriculum adaptation, subject integration, and administrative complexity (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

Program evaluation involves stakeholders and utilises technology, such as Google Forms, to increase transparency and accountability (Kartika & Sirozi, 2024; Ndari et al., n.d.). The evaluation results serve as the basis for developing a reflective and sustainable curriculum, in line with the principle of curriculum development based on the real needs of students (Tyler, 2010).

The Merdeka Curriculum is considered suitable for fourth-grade students because it supports meaningful learning, fosters the development of noble character, and cultivates students' creativity, taste, and initiative as lifelong learners with Pancasila values (Permendikbudristek RI No. 12 Tahun 2024, 2024). The curriculum document was systematically developed by the PIJAR team, covering four main divisions (Content Standards, Graduation, Assessment, and Process), with a collaborative and participatory approach that encourages teachers to play an active role in learning design (Annisa Alfath et al., 2022; Bush & Ng, 2019).

The competencies and workload of PAI teachers align with bachelor's degree qualifications (Endang Mulyasa, 2013), with a proportional distribution of tasks and collaborative support among teachers (Furqon Syarief Hidayatulloh, 2023; Shofwatul Fikriya et al., 2024). Teacher training is conducted regularly through workshops, supervision, and the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) to improve pedagogical and professional competencies (Thaariq & Karima, 2023; Windrawanto, 2015).

Facilities and infrastructure support PAI and BP learning, including step-by-step learning media and affectionate books to strengthen religious character (Nasrudin & Maryadi, 2019; Yasin et al., 2024). The ideal number of students in grade 4 is 23–28 students per class, which facilitates the implementation of differentiated and learner-centred learning (Wang & Calvano, 2022).

Teachers plan flexible teaching modules based on CP and ATP, incorporating interactive methods such as discussions, educational games, mini-projects, and out-of-class activities (Hafizah et al., 2024). Assessment is carried out systematically through PH, STS, SAS, and SAT, with a combination of assessment techniques and cooperation with homeroom teachers (Ginanto et al., 2024). Additional religious activities, such as BTAQ, tadarusan, dhuha prayer, Ramadan recitation, and socio-religious activities, strengthen the internalisation of PAI values and collaboration with the community (Achadah et al., 2022; Annisha, 2024; Syahrudin et al., 2024; Tomlinson, 1999).

Product evaluations have a positive impact on student learning outcomes, as evidenced by increased courage to express opinions, independence, creativity,

cooperation skills, and the development of soft skills and P5 (Gifari & Arifin, 2024; Maulida et al., 2024). Students rated the learning process as more enjoyable, dynamic, and participatory; however, challenges in maintaining politeness and discipline still require the active role of teachers as role models (Asfiati, 2023).

Furthermore, regarding the second problem formulation, the results of the study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Ethics classes for fourth graders at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede faces various challenges, but also gives rise to adaptive strategies and solutions applied by teachers and the school. Time constraints, especially due to the need to accommodate students with active motor development, became an obstacle in the learning process. This reduced the effective time for delivering material, so teachers needed to adapt more interactive learning methods and flexible classroom management. These findings are consistent with previous research, which shows that learning in lower grades requires an approach that is responsive to students' motor skills and attention to maintain optimal learning (Yuliana, 2024). The solutions implemented, such as adaptive planning and the use of interactive methods, demonstrate teachers' efforts to maintain learning effectiveness despite time constraints.

Differences in understanding among teachers regarding the Merdeka Curriculum also pose a significant challenge because this curriculum is still new and has terminology and principles that are not yet fully understood uniformly. This highlights the need for ongoing teacher training and professional development to align perceptions and enhance competence. These findings align with the literature that emphasises the importance of teacher training in the successful implementation of new curricula, as well as intensive socialisation and mentoring to enhance the effectiveness of implementation (Fadillah et al., 2023; T et al., 2024).

Parents' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum is a key factor in the success of its implementation. Many parents still equate the new curriculum with the previous one, making intensive socialisation and communication between schools and parents crucial. This finding aligns with research that emphasises the importance of parental involvement in supporting learning, ensuring consistency between education at home and at school (Nurwidyayanti et al., n.d.). Additionally, continuity of learning between home and school is crucial to ensure that the character traits taught at school can be sustained at home, in line with research by Surikova & González (2022).

Flexibility in arranging learning schedules is also a challenge, especially when there are additional holidays or disruptions to activities outside the classroom. Nevertheless, teachers remain committed to dynamically adjusting plans to complete all material in accordance with learning objectives. This condition highlights the importance of an adaptive planning system to prevent schedule changes from

compromising the quality and achievement of student learning, as supported by previous research (Sukarno, 2017).

The transition period in grade 6 poses administrative challenges and suboptimal program implementation, particularly in terms of standardising certificates and comprehensively applying P5 material. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasising the need for intensive support and monitoring to ensure uniformity and successful curriculum implementation (Husna & Rigianti, 2023).

Additionally, some students struggle with understanding written material but are able to absorb information orally. This need for special assistance is not yet formally available in schools, so teacher collaboration has become a temporary solution. These findings align with research that emphasises the importance of support for students with diverse learning needs to prevent academic regression and increase engagement in the learning process (Budianto, 2023).

Although school facilities are generally adequate, there are no special rooms for Islamic Religious Education (PAI) classes, so integrated learning takes place through activities at the school mosque. Plans to build an IRP laboratory are still on hold due to other priorities. This situation highlights the need for increased attention to the provision of special facilities, enabling optimal IRP learning, in line with other research findings that emphasise the importance of representative religious laboratories in supporting the effectiveness of religious learning (Wijaya, 2018).

Overall, these findings suggest that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum necessitates adjustments to methods, teacher training, parental involvement, flexible time management, administrative support, attention to students' special needs, and the provision of supporting facilities. The solutions implemented by the school reflect adaptive efforts that enable the curriculum to continue to be implemented despite various obstacles.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education and Ethics classes for fourth graders at SD Muhammadiyah Kleco II Kotagede performed quite well in all four aspects of the CIPP model evaluation. In terms of context, there is support and understanding from the entire school community; in terms of input, teachers are well-prepared, facilities and infrastructure are adequate, and training is sufficient; in terms of process, learning is flexible, creative, and collaborative; and in terms of output, there has been an increase in student participation, understanding, and character building, despite the challenges of adjustment. Overall, the success of curriculum implementation is largely determined by the adaptability, cooperation, and commitment of all parties involved.

This study has limitations in terms of scope, as it covers only one school, focuses on a single subject in a single grade level, and has a relatively short research period. In addition, the use of the CIPP model is descriptive. It does not measure effectiveness quantitatively, while most of the data are derived from interviews and observations that rely on the subjectivity of the informants.

Further research should be conducted longitudinally to observe the long-term impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on student competencies and character. Furthermore, a more in-depth study is necessary to explore practical strategies for overcoming implementation obstacles, thereby enriching perspectives and contributing more broadly to curriculum development in elementary schools.

DECLARATIONS

Author contribution statement

Nurhaliza, as the first author, contributed to the conceptualisation, investigation, and writing of the original draft. Nur Munajat, as the supervisor, was responsible for supervision. Ikhsan Rifai contributed to the conceptualisation and methodology.

Funding statement

The authors declare that no funds, grants, or other support were received during the preparation of this manuscript.

Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation at Muhammadiyah Kleco II Elementary School. To protect participant confidentiality, the datasets are not publicly available. Data may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, provided that permission is obtained from the school.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this study.

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