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The Role of Teachers in Developing a Berbasis Cinta Curriculum for Islamic Education at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda

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Abstract

This study examines the role of teachers in the development of the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda, particularly in the transition from the Merdeka Curriculum toward a value-based approach known as the Berbasis Cinta Curriculum. The research addresses the need for curriculum innovation that not only emphasizes cognitive achievement but also strengthens students' character, empathy, and moral responsibility. This study fills the limitation of previous empirical studies concerning teachers as curriculum developers in Nahdlatul Ulama-based madrasahs, particularly in the context of value-oriented Islamic education. A qualitative case study method was employed through interviews, observation, and document analysis focusing on fiqh learning practices. The findings reveal that teachers demonstrate strong teacher agency by interpreting curriculum policies, adapting learning objectives to students' needs, integrating Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah values into classroom practices, and designing contextual learning through student-centered strategies and authentic assessment. These practices position teachers not merely as curriculum implementers but as active curriculum makers within the madrasah context. The study concludes that value-based curriculum innovation contributes to strengthening students' religious character and social awareness while highlighting the importance of contextual and humanistic Islamic education in contemporary madrasah learning.

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Introduction

Social change, the development of digital technology, and the tide of globalization have shifted the focus of education from the mere transfer of knowledge toward the development of 21st-century competencies that emphasize critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and character. In this context, the curriculum is no longer understood as a static administrative document, but rather as an ideological and pedagogical instrument that reflects the direction of a nation's human development. However, various curriculum changes in Indonesia still face a fundamental issue: a gap between policy design and implementation practices at the school level. Rapid changes are often not accompanied by the readiness of teachers, school culture, or a supportive learning ecosystem, so that curriculum innovations tend to remain at the administrative level and have not fully transformed pedagogical practices in the classroom. In Islamic education, this issue becomes more complex because the Islamic Education (PAI) curriculum is not only required to produce academic achievements but also to build religious character, religious moderation, and students' ability to respond to social realities ethically (Fullan, 2025; Hargreaves, 2020). In line with these needs, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia has, in recent years, begun to promote the strengthening of character-based education through the implementation of the *Berbasis Cinta Curriculum* (KBC) in madrasahs. This policy establishes five main pillars: compassionate leadership, an inclusive culture, deep learning, student-centered classroom management, and social collaboration as the orientation for learning development. The introduction of the KBC reflects an effort to reorient Islamic education policy, moving beyond a focus on academic achievement to emphasize the strengthening of moral character, social empathy, and more contextually relevant educational relationships.

In the context of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), curriculum development has distinct characteristics compared to general subjects because it incorporates normative, spiritual, social, and cultural dimensions simultaneously. At the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, PAI instruction serves as the foundational basis for shaping students' religious identity through the internalization of the values of tawhid, worship, ethics, and Islamic traditions that are contextualized within daily life. Therefore, the success of the PAI curriculum is not solely determined by the quality of the national curriculum document but is significantly influenced by teachers' ability to translate the curriculum into pedagogical practices relevant to students' needs and the social culture of the madrasah. From the perspective of curriculum enactment, teachers are no longer positioned as technical implementers of policy but as key actors who actively interpret, modify, and construct the curriculum in daily teaching practices (Ball et al., 2012; Priestley, Edwards, et al., 2015). Thus, curriculum development at the madrasah level is essentially the result of a negotiation between national policy, institutional culture, and teachers' pedagogical practices in the classroom. The urgency of this research is heightened because, based on initial observations and preliminary interviews at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda, it was found that the madrasah has begun preparing for the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum through teacher training, adjustments to learning materials, and the strengthening of a more humanistic and values-based school culture. PAI teachers stated that the curriculum changes were implemented in response to the phenomenon of

declining student morality, diminishing social empathy, and the challenges of learning in the digital age, which increasingly influence students' daily behavior. Furthermore, based on field observations, PAI instruction in madrasahs still faces challenges such as limited instructional time, heterogeneity in student abilities, and the need to develop more contextual and engaging learning strategies for students. These conditions indicate that curriculum innovation in madrasahs arises not only from national policy demands but also from the schools' genuine need to rebuild students' character and religious culture.

A number of previous studies have demonstrated the importance of teachers' roles in the implementation and development of the Islamic Education curriculum. In their study, Alwi and Achadi found that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation is significantly influenced by teachers' ability to adapt teaching strategies to students' needs and to employ flexible, differentiated instruction (Alwi & Achadi, 2024). Furthermore, research by Lambert et al., consistent with that of Rahman, emphasizes that the implementation of the PAI curriculum requires the integration of teachers' pedagogical, professional, and social competencies so that learning is not only oriented toward cognitive achievements but also the character development of students (Lambert et al., 2021; M. L. Rahman et al., 2023). In another study by Aulia et al., supported by research by Penuel et al., it was shown that curriculum innovation in elementary schools is significantly influenced by teachers' creativity in developing instructional materials and contextual learning strategies (Aulia et al., 2025; Penuel et al., 2014). On the other hand, Haj and Marno emphasize that the development of the Islamic Education (PAI) curriculum should be directed toward strengthening multicultural values and religious moderation as a response to the pluralism of Indonesian society (Haj & Marno, 2024). Research by Pujiyanto et al. and Scanlon et al. also found that principal supervision and a collaborative culture among teachers significantly influence the effectiveness of curriculum implementation (Pujiyanto et al., 2025; Scanlon et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, these studies tend to focus on the general implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and largely view teachers as implementers of curriculum policy rather than as active agents in developing the curriculum at the practical level. Furthermore, most previous studies have predominantly examined curriculum innovation solely from administrative and pedagogical perspectives, while the ideological and cultural dimensions of madrasahs particularly those affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama have received limited attention. In fact, NU-based madrasahs have distinctive characteristics, including the integration of *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja)* values, local religious traditions, and the promotion of moderate Islam in teaching practices. In this context, PAI teachers not only implement the national curriculum but also engage in the process of adapting, negotiating, and integrating *Aswaja* values into daily learning. In other words, curriculum development practices in NU madrasahs possess a socio-cultural dimension that has not been fully explored by previous research (Hefner, 2008; F. Rahman, 1982).

The limitations of previous research indicate a clear research gap: there has been little empirical research examining how Islamic Education (PAI) teachers function as curriculum developers in the context of Nahdlatul Ulama-based madrasahs, particularly at the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level. Previous research has predominantly focused on the

effectiveness of implementing the national curriculum, whereas the actual practices of teachers in integrating *Aswaja* values, madrasah culture, and student needs into curriculum development have been relatively under-examined. Furthermore, studies on the initial implementation of the *Berbasis Cinta* Curriculum in regional private madrasahs remain very limited, even though this policy is beginning to gain attention as a new focus in the transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia. Therefore, research is needed that not only describes curriculum implementation but also explains how teachers develop pedagogical practices, learning strategies, and curriculum innovations that are contextual to the madrasah's Islamic identity.

This study focuses on MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda, an Islamic elementary school affiliated with Nahdlatul Ulama that integrates *Aswaja* values into the national curriculum. The research focuses on how Islamic Education (PAI) teachers plan, develop, and implement the curriculum through pedagogical practices in the classroom, as well as how *Aswaja* values are integrated into PAI instruction. This study does not merely view teachers as implementers of curriculum policies but as actors who shape curriculum practices through adaptation to students' needs, madrasah culture, and the demands of modern education. Thus, this study aims to expand the analysis of PAI curriculum innovation from a mere study of implementation toward an analysis of curriculum enactment practices within the context of a religious-based madrasah.

The novelty of this study lies in its empirical analysis of the practice of developing PAI curricula based on *Aswaja* values through the role of teachers as curriculum developers in Nahdlatul Ulama-affiliated madrasahs. Unlike previous studies that have emphasized the general implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy, this study offers the perspective that curriculum innovation in madrasahs cannot be separated from the cultural, ideological, and pedagogical dimensions embedded in teachers' daily practices. This study also makes a conceptual contribution to the development of Islamic Education curriculum studies by demonstrating that curriculum development in NU-based madrasahs occurs through a process of negotiation between national policies, *Aswaja* values, and teachers' contextual pedagogical practices. Thus, this study is expected to enrich the discourse on curriculum innovation in Islamic Education, particularly within the context of Islamic education grounded in religious moderation and the strengthening of local Islamic values.

Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the role of teachers in the development of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda within the context of curriculum implementation at a Nahdlatul Ulama-affiliated madrasah. A qualitative approach was chosen because this study seeks to explore the meanings, experiences, and pedagogical practices of teachers in the curriculum development process in a contextual and natural manner. A case study was used because the research focused on a specific educational institution, allowing the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of curriculum development within the madrasah environment (John W.

Creswell, 2016). This approach is also relevant for uncovering practices of curriculum enactment that is, how curriculum policies are interpreted, negotiated, and implemented by teachers in their daily teaching practices (Ball et al., 2012).

The study was conducted at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda over a period of approximately three months, from February to March 2026. The research subjects consisted of one Islamic Religious Education teacher as the primary informant and one madrasah principal as a supporting informant. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involves intentionally selecting subjects based on their direct involvement in the process of developing and implementing the Islamic Religious Education curriculum at the madrasah (Moleong, 2019). The Islamic Religious Education teacher was selected because they play a central role in the preparation of learning materials, the implementation of fiqh instruction, and the evaluation of learning based on the curriculum in effect at the madrasah. Meanwhile, the madrasah principal was selected to obtain data regarding institutional policies, managerial support, and the curriculum development process at the school level.

Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, participant observation, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers' experiences, perspectives, and strategies in developing the Islamic Education curriculum, including the process of integrating *Ahlussunnah wal Jama'ah (Aswaja)* values into instruction. Observations were conducted during fiqh lessons in the classroom to gather data on teachers' pedagogical practices, learning interactions, and the implementation of teaching materials in real-world settings. Documentation was conducted on teaching modules, assessment tools, syllabi, ATPs, and madrasah curriculum documents to reinforce the results of the interviews and observations. The use of various data collection techniques aimed to increase the depth of the data while strengthening the validity of the research through triangulation of sources and techniques (Bungin, 2007).

Data analysis utilized the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which includes data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions (Miles et al., 2020). The analysis process was conducted simultaneously from the data collection stage until the completion of the study. Interview data were first transcribed, followed by open coding to identify initial themes related to teachers' roles, instructional innovations, and curriculum development practices. Axial coding was then performed to link data categories, revealing patterns of relationships among themes. In the final stage, selective coding was performed to formulate the main research findings related to PAI curriculum development practices in NU-based madrasahs (Saldana, 2021). Data interpretation was conducted reflectively by relating field findings to curriculum development theory and the concept of teacher agency in contemporary curriculum studies.

Data validity was assessed through source triangulation, methodological triangulation, and member checking. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data from interviews with teachers and madrasah principals, while methodological triangulation was performed by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by asking informants to review the interview results to ensure the data aligned with the experiences they had described (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017).

This step was taken to enhance the research's credibility, reliability, and confirmability, ensuring the findings are scientifically accountable.

This study employs Ralph Tyler's curriculum development theory, which emphasizes the interrelationship between learning objectives, learning experiences, instructional organization, and evaluation as a foundational framework for understanding the Islamic Education curriculum development process (Tyler, 2013). In addition, this study also employs the teacher agency perspective proposed by Priestley et al., which views teachers as active agents and curriculum makers in developing learning practices tailored to the social, cultural, and needs of students (Priestley, Biesta, et al., 2015). The use of these two theories aims to analyze how PAI teachers at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda not only implement curriculum policies but also adapt, innovate, and integrate Aswaja values into daily learning practices.

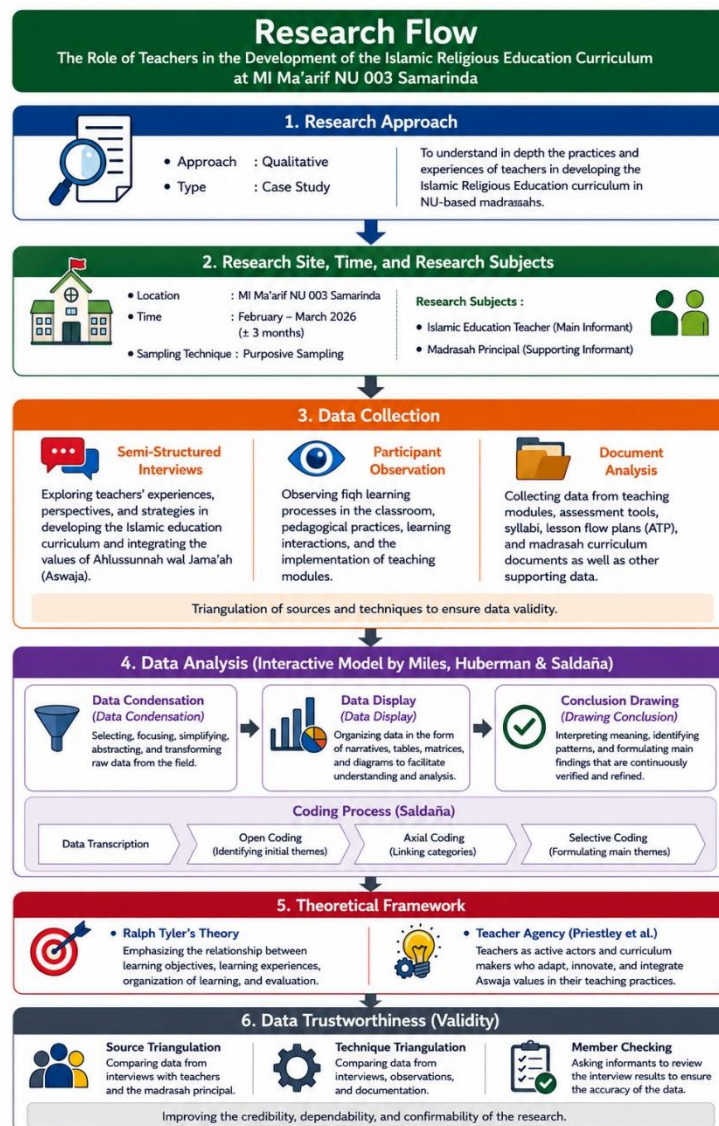


Figure 1. Data analysis flowchart

Results and Discussion

The transformation of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) curriculum at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda demonstrates that curriculum reform is no longer viewed merely as an administrative shift from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum and the Berbasis Cinta Curriculum (KBC), but as an effort to reconstruct the orientation of Islamic education to be more humanistic, contextual, and values-based. Based on interview results, PAI teachers stated that the implementation of the KBC was carried out in response to changes in students' social behavior in the digital age, characterized by a weakening of students' character and social ethics. Teachers emphasized that "the Berbasis Cinta Curriculum is implemented because students are currently experiencing moral degradation, so schools need to re-instill moral values through the five main pillars of the KBC." This statement demonstrates that curriculum development in madrasahs is not only directed toward academic achievement but also toward the formation of students' moral identity. This finding indicates a paradigm shift from knowledge transmission toward a value-oriented curriculum that places character education at the core of contemporary Islamic education (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). From Ralph Tyler's perspective, this orientation is directly related to the first component of the curriculum, namely educational purposes (Tyler, 2013). The learning objectives for fiqh at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda are not only directed toward mastery of Islamic law but also toward strengthening religious attitudes, social empathy, and a culture of religious moderation. Thus, the PAI curriculum functions as an instrument for shaping students' socio-religious identity amid the challenges of globalization and the moral crisis among the younger generation (Hefner, 2008).

The research findings indicate that the curriculum development process is carried out through an adaptive mechanism between national policies and the local needs of madrasahs. Islamic Education teachers explained that every curriculum update is always adapted to teachers' readiness, school facility conditions, and student characteristics so that its implementation does not burden educational institutions. Teachers stated that "schools follow the Ministry of Religious Affairs' policies, but their application is still adapted to the school's capabilities." This finding indicates that curriculum implementation at the school level is a process of policy interpretation and negotiation, not merely administrative reproduction. From a policy enactment perspective, curriculum policies are, in practice, always reinterpreted by educational actors based on each institution's school culture and social realities (Ball et al., 2012).

These findings reinforce Priestley's view that teachers possess teacher agency in curriculum development practices because they actively determine how the curriculum is implemented in classroom learning experiences (Priestley, Biesta, et al., 2015). International research also indicates that the success of curriculum reform is significantly influenced by teachers' capacity to adapt educational policies to the local school context (Lambert et al., 2021). Thus, the curriculum innovation at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda demonstrates that teachers are not merely implementers of the curriculum but key actors in the curriculum-making process.

Regarding learning experiences, the observation results show that PAI teachers employ a student-centered learning approach, reflective discussions, fun learning, and experience-based learning through religious practices and educational games. Teachers stated that fiqh instruction is conducted by “using two to three teaching methods in a single session so that students do not become bored.” Additionally, teachers consistently connect fiqh material to students’ daily lives through pre-tests, post-tests, and social reflections in the classroom. This approach demonstrates that learning experiences in fiqh instruction are no longer purely textual and doctrinal but are directed toward contextual and participatory learning. In Tyler’s theory, learning experiences are a crucial component because educational goals can only be achieved if students gain meaningful and relevant experiences in their lives (Tyler, 2013).

The findings of this study indicate that fiqh instruction at MI Ma’arif NU 003 Samarinda has shifted toward a constructivist paradigm that positions students as active agents in constructing knowledge. This aligns with Hattie’s research, which emphasizes that students’ active engagement is a key factor in the effectiveness of learning (Hattie, 2023). Furthermore, experience-based learning has been shown to enhance students’ reflective abilities and character development in religious education (Penuel et al., 2014). However, this study also identified an epistemological challenge in implementing a values-based curriculum: a tendency to reduce fiqh content to mere moral indoctrination without critically deepening Islamic scholarly arguments. This challenge is important to note because contemporary Islamic education requires not only the internalization of values but also the strengthening of students’ critical reasoning and reflective abilities in understanding religious texts (Sahin, 2013).

Regarding the organization of learning experiences, the research findings indicate that PAI teachers play a central role in developing lesson plans, teaching modules, and assessments tailored to students’ needs. Teachers stated that “every child’s abilities differ, so learning materials must be adapted without deviating from the curriculum’s primary objectives.” This statement indicates that the organization of learning at MI Ma’arif NU 003 Samarinda is flexible and adaptive to the students’ context. From Tyler’s perspective, the organization of learning must consider the principles of continuity, sequence, and integration so that learning experiences systematically foster student development (Tyler, 2013). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and preparations for the Berbasis Cinta Curriculum (KBC) at this madrasah demonstrate efforts to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects through religious practices, religious habits, and social reflection. Empirically, observations show that the practices of wudhu, prayer, memorization of short surahs, and attitude assessment are integral parts of fiqh learning; thus, the organization of learning is not solely directed toward academic achievement but also toward the formation of the madrasah’s religious culture.

Nevertheless, research findings indicate that the integration of values into fiqh instruction is not entirely free from pedagogical and epistemological challenges. On the one hand, the KBC approach provides space for learning that is closer to students’ life experiences through humanistic and contextual teacher–student relationships. On the other hand, however, there is a risk that an excessive emphasis on moral habituation and affective

experiences may undermine the epistemological depth of fiqh itself. Observation results indicate that some teaching practices place greater emphasis on the aspects of ritual practice and religious attitudes rather than the exploration of Islamic legal reasoning (*istinbāt al-aḥkām*), the logic of inter-school differences, or the rational dimensions of fiqh studies. This situation reveals a tension between the orientation of value-based education and the need to strengthen argumentative and critical Islamic scholarly literacy. Sahin explains that modern Islamic education faces a serious challenge when moral values are separated from the intellectual tradition of Islam, as this risks producing a religiosity that is normative but epistemologically unreflective (Sahin, 2013). Thus, love-based learning requires a balance between instilling values and strengthening religious reasoning so that fiqh is not reduced to mere moral education.

These findings suggest that the implementation of the KBC curriculum needs to be understood more critically than simply as a form of character building. International research explains that a values-based curriculum is indeed effective when learning experiences are integrated with the school's social and cultural practices in a sustainable manner (Alvunger, 2018). However, this effectiveness heavily depends on the teacher's ability to maintain a balance between supportive pedagogical relationships and the depth of the academic content being taught. In the context of MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda, PAI teachers appear to strive to maintain this balance through the use of teaching modules that remain aligned with fiqh learning outcomes while adapting them to students' needs. This finding suggests that the organization of learning in madrasahs is not merely a technical process of developing instructional materials, but rather a space for negotiation between the demands of curriculum policy, Aswaja values, and local pedagogical needs.

In terms of evaluation, the research findings indicate that PAI teachers do not rely solely on cognitive assessments but also employ affective and psychomotor assessments through observations of students' attitudes, religious practices, and religious habits. Teachers explained that "PAI assessment is not limited to the cognitive domain but must also consider students' attitudes and religious practices." This evaluative approach indicates that madrasahs view PAI learning as a character-building process requiring holistic and ongoing evaluation. In Tyler's theory, evaluation serves to determine the extent to which educational objectives are achieved through the learning experiences provided (Tyler, 2013). Therefore, evaluation is not merely an administrative tool but a reflective component in curriculum development and instructional improvement.

However, this study also found that values-based evaluation faces significant methodological challenges. Teachers acknowledge that changes in students' attitudes occur gradually and are often influenced by family and social environments outside of school, making it difficult to conduct affective assessments objectively. This problem highlights the potential for subjectivity in moral evaluation, particularly when indicators of religiosity and moral character rely heavily on teachers' interpretations of students' behavior. Scanlon et al. demonstrate that character and moral values assessment in education is one of the most complex forms of evaluation because it involves social, emotional, and cultural dimensions that are difficult to measure quantitatively (Scanlon et al., 2023). Thus, the implementation of KBC requires the development of more systematic

and transparent evaluation instruments so that moral assessment does not stop at the teacher's personal perception but is based on accountable pedagogical indicators.

Furthermore, the implementation of the Berbasis Cinta Curriculum at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda demonstrates a transformation in Islamic education toward a paradigm that emphasizes compassion, moderation, and respect for human values. The five pillars of the Berbasis Cinta Curriculum compassionate leadership, an inclusive culture, deep learning, humanistic classroom management, and social collaboration represent a shift in Islamic education from a predominantly normative approach toward a relational and contextual one. Theoretically, this approach is relevant to the concept of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, which places compassion as the foundation of Islamic educational relationships (Azra, 2019). International research on compassion-based education indicates that a compassionate approach can enhance students' empathy, psychological well-being, and social engagement (Gilbert, 2017). However, the results of this study indicate that the success of the KBC cannot be automatically assumed to result solely from a shift in value paradigms. Limitations in teacher training, institutional readiness, and the potential for reducing fiqh to mere moral education suggest that curriculum transformation requires the simultaneous strengthening of scientific epistemology, school culture, and pedagogical capacity. Thus, the development of the PAI curriculum at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda demonstrates that curriculum innovation is not merely the implementation of national policy, but a complex process of negotiation between Islamic values, madrasah traditions, and the challenges of contemporary Islamic education.

Conclusion

This study shows that Islamic Education teachers at MI Ma'arif NU 003 Samarinda play a strategic role as curriculum developers through the process of planning, implementing, and evaluating instruction that integrates students' needs, *Aswaja* values, and the policy directions of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Love-Based Curriculum. This role underscores that teachers do not merely function as implementers of curriculum policies but as active agents who adapt, interpret, and innovate learning practices in accordance with the context of a Nahdlatul Ulama-based madrasah.

Theoretically, this study reinforces the perspectives of curriculum enactment and teacher agency by demonstrating that the development of the Islamic Education curriculum occurs through a process of negotiation between educational policies, madrasah culture, and teachers' pedagogical practices. These findings expand the study of Islamic education curriculum development, which has traditionally positioned teachers primarily as policy implementers, by affirming the teacher's role as a curriculum developer who plays a crucial part in integrating pedagogical, cultural, and moderate Islamic values into teaching practices.

This study is still limited to the context of a single madrasah, so the findings cannot yet be broadly generalized. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand the scope of the study to include various levels and types of madrasahs and to incorporate the perspectives of students, madrasah principals, and parents in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of value-based Islamic Education (PAI) curriculum development practices and the implementation of the Love-Based Curriculum in Islamic educational settings.

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