



JOURNAL OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION
Vol. 8 No. 2 November 2023
P-ISSN 2503-5363; E-ISSN 2528-0465
<http://www.ejournal.stitmuhsbangil.ac.id/index.php/jie>

Dynamics of the Islamic Education Curriculum in Madrasah: Study K-13 and Merdeka Curriculum

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Informasi Artikel	Abstract
Received: 11 November 2023	<i>Since the new order era, the Indonesian education curriculum has undergone eight revisions, from the 1968 curriculum to the most recent, the Merdeka Curriculum. Each curriculum has its unique characteristics, including the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum which are currently being implemented. Madrasas are the subject and aim of the research, namely explaining the dynamics of madrasa curriculum development in 2013-2023. Using a qualitative approach with a type of literature review, data sources from relevant books and journal articles, and data analysis using condensation, presentation and conclusion. The results of the research show that in the 2013 curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum there are certainly developments in terms of curriculum based on the continued development of science and technology. The 2013 curriculum is designed to improve character education, increase locally-focused education, and create a fun and friendly educational environment. The independent learning program is a flexible program focusing on essential material, character development and student abilities. The Islamic education subjects found in madrasas consist of four groups: Al-Qur'an Hadith, Fiqh, Aqidah Akhlak, and SKI, all of which are regulated by Minister of Religion regulations under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion.</i>
Accepted: 20 November 2023	
Published: 17 Desember 2023	
Keywords: <i>Education Curriculum, Madrasah Curriculum, Islamic Education.</i>	

Sejak era orde baru, kurikulum pendidikan Indonesia telah mengalami delapan kali revisi, mulai dari

kurikulum tahun 1968 hingga yang terbaru, yaitu Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. Setiap kurikulum memiliki karakteristik uniknya sendiri, termasuk Kurikulum 2013 dan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar yang sedang diterapkan. Madrasah menjadi subjek dan tujuan penelitian yakni menjelaskan dinamika perkembangan kurikulum madrasah pada 2013-2023. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis kajian kepustakaan, sumber data dari buku dan artikel jurnal yang relevan, serta analisis data menggunakan kondensasi, penyajian dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil dari penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pada kurikulum 2013 ataupun kurikulum merdeka tentunya ada perkembangan dalam hal kurikulum berdasarkan terus berkembangnya ilmu pengetahuan dan teknologi. Kurikulum 2013 dirancang untuk meningkatkan pendidikan karakter, meningkatkan pendidikan yang berfokus pada lokal, dan menciptakan lingkungan pendidikan yang menyenangkan dan bersahabat. Adapun program merdeka belajar dimaksudkan sebagai program fleksibel yang berfokus pada materi esensial, pengembangan karakter, dan kemampuan siswa. Mata pelajaran pendidikan agama Islam yang terdapat pada madrasah terdiri dari empat rumpun Al-Qur'an Hadis, Fiqih, Akidah Akhlak, dan SKI semuanya diatur oleh peraturan Menteri Agama di bawah naungan Kementerian Agama.

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the main foundation of human life, giving every individual the right to obtain knowledge. The transformation from underdeveloped to developed countries relies heavily on a solid education system. The progress of a nation begins with a high level of education and literacy. Education is an essential means of improving each individual's abilities, enabling comprehensive potential development, both cognitively, emotionally and psychomotorically, preparing them for life and the challenges that exist (Fauzia & Ramadan, 2023; Wahyudi et al., 2023).

Education constantly adapts to the needs of the times and contributes significantly to the country's progress. The participation of madrasahs in the transformation of Indonesian education is very significant in education. Even for

lower-class indigenous people, madrasas are often their primary source of education (Atikoh, 2023). Madrasas have become popular because of their connection to the Islamic boarding school tradition and tend to be closely linked to Islamic boarding school institutions. The existence of madrasas has had a significant impact on the Indonesian education system, especially in efforts to reduce Dutch colonial influence by establishing their schools. Even before Indonesia became independent in 1945, the influence of these madrasas was already significant (Swandari & Jemani, 2023; Wahyuni, 2023).

As educational institutions, Madrasas have their roots in the changes and dynamics of the evolution of mosques. Initially, the *khan* mosque (mosque with a dormitory) served as an informal place of learning, which later developed into a formal learning institution that we know as a madrasa. This transformation inspired the madrasah's goal to contribute to advancing civilisation recognized in various parts of the world. George Makdisi explains the history of madrasas through three main phases: mosques, *khan* mosques, and madrasas (Gaus, 2017; Rahman & Mahmudah, 2020).

The curriculum is a crucial element in the madrasa structure and general and religious education. This is an essential foundation for achieving educational goals, inspired by philosophical thoughts and values, especially state philosophy, which harmonises with developments and social needs. As a core element in the educational process, the curriculum has a significant role in determining and shaping the learning process in madrasas. Curriculum preparation mistakes can cause education failure and affect student development (Ikhwan, 2018; Rusnawati, 2022; Sucipto et al., 2023).

The curriculum, which is a development of curriculum development, has undergone seven significant changes since the new order era began in 1966. This series of changes includes the 1968 Curriculum, 1975 Curriculum, 1984 Curriculum, 1994 Curriculum, KBK Curriculum or 2004 Curriculum, KTSP (Education Unit Level Curriculum) 2006, and 2013 (Abubakar, 2019; Ikhwan, 2019). In response to the pandemic emergency in 2020, an emergency curriculum was implemented when work and study activities shifted to an online format. After

the pandemic subsided, changes to the curriculum occurred with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum as an initiative of the Indonesian government. Madrasas, which are part of the Ministry of Religion, have also begun implementing the Merdeka Curriculum by government directions (Fathurohim, 2023).

The education curriculum in Indonesia has been in the main spotlight since the Old Order era until 2023, with eight changes occurring during that time. Although Madrasas under the Ministry of Religion adopt a curriculum similar to the Ministry of Education and Culture, some still carry the Independent Learning Concept which is planned to be fully implemented in 2024. In addition, the field of Islamic Religious Education, which includes four main aspects: Al-Quran Hadith, Fiqh, Akidah Akhlak, and SKI, continues to adapt to the evolution of the curriculum in Indonesia. As an integral part of educational development, implementation and adaptation continue to be carried out to provide relevant and quality education in Indonesia.

II. METHOD

The research method employed is a qualitative technique utilising a library-based method. Library research refers to systematically gathering data from library sources, which is subsequently examined, documented, and analysed. Data for research purposes is collected through documentation techniques, which involve collecting information from official or unofficial documents. This data encompasses opinions, theories, concepts, and propositions that offer relevant information about research problems (Hardani et al., 2020; Ikhwan, 2021). The data researchers acquire is corroborated with theoretical facts, concepts, and opinions from other literature. Researchers triangulated theories and concepts to develop legitimate and reliable data. The data analysis was conducted utilising the Miles Huberman analysis technique, which involved data condensation, data presentation, and generating conclusions. Condensation is the act of transforming data into a more concentrated and intricate format. The subsequent stage in data presentation involves organising information more systematically. This entails generating visual representations, such as tables, graphs, or diagrams, and

categorising the discoveries or trends that arise from the data. Effective data visualisation facilitates the identification of correlations, trends, or motifs that occur from the analytic findings. The ultimate phase entails deriving conclusions from the analysed data. The process involves identifying salient patterns or discoveries, elucidating connections between data, and deriving conclusions or critical results from the conducted analysis (Huberman & Johnny, 2014; Miles et al., 2014).

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Madrasas in the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum

The 2013 curriculum is an ambitious step in transforming education in Indonesia. Designed to answer modern-day needs, this curriculum aims to produce graduates who are better prepared to face global challenges. Changing the educational paradigm from the previous one which focused solely on academic aspects, the 2013 Curriculum emphasizes the holistic development of character, skills and knowledge for students. One of the most striking things is the introduction of solid character education as a deep-rooted foundation in every aspect of the curriculum (Purwasatria, 2023).

Built on principles oriented towards the comprehensive development of students, the 2013 Curriculum provides room for greater learning independence. Learning is no longer solely based on a strictly structured curriculum but encourages students to participate in their learning process actively (Coil et al., 2023). This means embracing the diversity of students' interests, talents and abilities. Skills development is at the heart of this approach. The 2013 curriculum emphasizes the importance of critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration. Education is more than just remembering facts, it is also about applying knowledge in real life. A thematic and contextual approach is used to support this, allowing students to see the connections between the subject matter and their everyday lives (Basuki, 2022; Ikhwan, 2019).

The evaluation system in the 2013 Curriculum has also changed. More than just testing memorization, competency-based evaluation emphasizes understanding and applying learned concepts (Suriswo, 2019). Character

education is inseparable; teaching moral and ethical values is an integral part of the curriculum (Anwar, 2021; Faridi, 2021). Inclusivity is also an important highlight in the 2013 Curriculum. By paying more attention to the needs of students with diverse backgrounds and abilities, education becomes more embracing and accommodating and provides opportunities for all students.

Even though it has big goals, implementing the 2013 Curriculum is not easy. Harmonizing the understanding and application of this curriculum at all levels of education requires a lot of time and support from various parties. Lack of resources, prepared educators, and awareness and support from all stakeholders are the main challenges that must be overcome (Juliana & Ermayani, 2023). The 2013 curriculum offers great hope for improving Indonesia's education quality. However, to achieve this goal, there needs to be good coordination between the government, educational institutions, educators, parents and the wider community. Only with solid collaboration can this curriculum significantly impact forming a generation that is better prepared to face the future.

The 2013 Curriculum (K-13) emerged as an educational milestone emphasising transformation and change in the learning process in Indonesia. Built on the foundation of holistic student development, K-13 marks a paradigm shift from education focused solely on academic aspects to a broader approach, prioritizing holistic development of character, skills and knowledge. Among the characteristics of the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) are (Hidayatullah, 2023; Nuwairah, 2023); *First*, character education, the previous curriculum focused on developing students' character with a focus on moral aspects and noble character. However, the curriculum has been re-examined and is considered to have several weaknesses that need to be corrected. Therefore, competency-based curriculum adaptation is carried out to build a more sustainable education system, provides tangible benefits, and becomes a valuable asset for the nation's progress.

Second, education with a local insight, lack of attention to local values and distinctive culture often leads to the eroding of the power of traditional culture by more dominant modern culture. This approach tries to overcome the decline in concern for the cultural heritage of ancestors rich in noble values. In the 2013

Curriculum, there is a more transparent effort to include elements of local culture that were previously forgotten or considered unimportant. Through this curriculum system, the hope is to revive and enrich local cultural heritage in society. The aim is for local culture to remain relevant and become a strong identity in everyday life. *Third*, cheerful and friendly education, the 2013 curriculum aims to create a learning environment that is not only academically effective but also offers students a cheerful and enjoyable experience. The focus on developing student potential is not only limited to academic achievement but also on talent, creativity and other competencies. A friendly, attractive and talented educational approach can spur innovation and optimize students' overall potential, both in academic and non-academic aspects. In this way, each student can develop fully according to their uniqueness and talents.

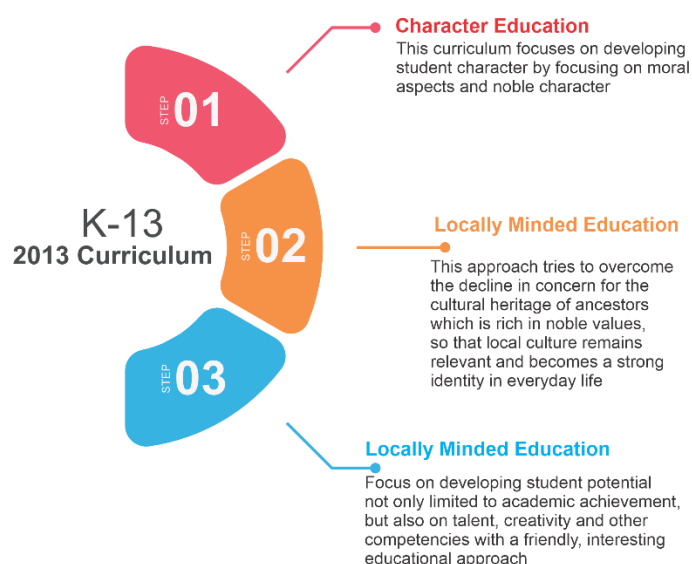


Figure 1. Characteristics of the 2013 curriculum

Meanwhile, the Merdeka Curriculum is the latest effort in the evolution of Indonesian education which aims to improve the existing education system. Merdeka Belajar focuses on independence, flexibility and innovation in learning. This is an essential milestone in education transformation in Indonesia, aimed at providing more significant opportunities for students to explore their full potential (Muckromin et al., 2023).

A critical aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum is encouraging students' ability to learn independently. Students are free to determine the course of their learning, creating a more personalized learning experience that suits their interests and

talents. This curriculum shifts the traditional paradigm which places more emphasis on teacher-centred learning, to more respect for the role of students as the leading agents in the teaching-learning process. Besides providing space for student independence, Merdeka Belajar also emphasizes the importance of innovation in learning methods. Teachers are encouraged to use more creative approaches, integrated technology, and contextual cross-disciplinary learning. The goal is to ensure students are engaged in learning relevant to the real world (Azzahra & Muhajir, 2023; Fathurohim, 2023).

Flexibility is key in the Merdeka Curriculum. This means flexibility not only in the choice of subject matter but also in the timing and manner in which education is delivered. This system allows students to study outside the classroom, outside school hours, and even outside the conventional curriculum. Students are free to determine the tempo, method and focus of their learning. In line with its innovative spirit, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the application of technology as a learning support tool. Technology integration is important in providing a more interactive and up-to-date learning experience (Ndari et al., 2023; Suhendra & Suprianto, 2023).

However, the implementation of freedom to learn is challenging. Adequate infrastructure is needed, as teachers are ready to adopt a more flexible approach and support from all relevant parties to realize this curriculum vision effectively. The Merdeka Curriculum hopes to improve the overall quality of education, producing a generation that is more adaptive, creative and ready to face future challenges. Its success will depend on the commitment and cooperation of all stakeholders in the world of education in Indonesia (Sulistyo et al., 2022; Wahyudiono, 2023).

Through this approach, the freedom to learn curriculum offers a wider space for students to take an active role in managing their learning, accommodates various learning styles, and allows adaptation to the challenges and changes of the times. The following are the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum, namely; *First*, project and character-based. Practice or experimentation is the Merdeka Curriculum's primary focus. In terms of learning by doing (learning from

experience). Therefore, students not only memorize concepts but are also involved in seeing examples. For children, this learning will make learning more meaningful. Inquiry, problem-based learning, project-based learning, and discovery learning are commonly used learning. Projects and experiments will help students improve soft skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, time management, and leadership. This lesson implicitly includes the Pancasila student profile. Ability in many ways will not be beneficial to society. The six values of Pancasila are as follows: faith, devotion to God and noble character, global diversity, mutual cooperation, independence, critical thinking and creativity. Students can learn about important things such as technology, culture, entrepreneurship, democracy, tolerance, sustainable lifestyles and mental health. Students will be given the knowledge to take action after learning this.

Second, focus on essential material. Even though school has minimal time, all the lessons are crucial to learn. As a result, it is more profitable to focus on the more critical lessons (essential material). Students will have sufficient time to learn basic skills such as numeracy and literacy. Regardless of what profession they choose in the future, students will often use these two abilities in everyday life. Even though it covers less subject matter, the learning in the Merdeka Curriculum is very in-depth. So, learning many things this way is better than knowing a lot but quickly forgetting because you need to study it more deeply. Each teaching material has essential questions to help students understand the material. It is hoped that students' learning experiences will answer this question.

Third, flexibility for teachers and students. Teachers have different capacities to teach and various capacities for each student. Assessing students' initial abilities and assisting them in achieving them is one of the responsibilities of a teacher. Demonstrations or experiments are the primary sources of the kinesthetic learning style. If students lack skills, teachers can ask for help from their peer tutors. Students have the right to choose subjects or courses they like and are interested in during secondary education. The subjects chosen are of course also related to their goals. For example, a student will select Physics and Mathematics as subjects to become a civil engineering student.

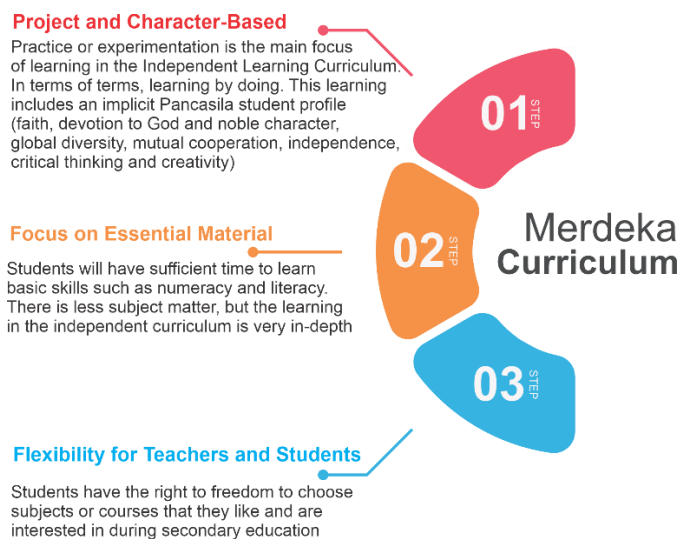


Figure 2. Characteristics of an merdeka curriculum

It can be underlined that the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum have significantly impacted Islamic religious education, especially in madrasas. Competency is the main foundation in the operationalization of this education. Even though the 2013 Curriculum emphasizes students as the centre of learning, the dominant use of lectures by some teachers indicates challenges in implementation. Teachers' unpreparedness in adopting new learning methods can hurt learning outcomes. As stated by Stronge, improving the quality of education can only be achieved with the role of qualified and talented teachers. Only teachers with high qualifications can ensure success in the teaching and learning process (Gumilar et al., 2023; Suyanto, 2018).

Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Indonesia Number 56/M/2022 provides guidelines for implementing the curriculum in learning recovery situations. Even though the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 719/P/2020 concerning Guidelines for Implementing the Curriculum in Education Units in Special Conditions has been implemented, it turns out that this curriculum has yet to be fully effective in overcoming the learning lag. Therefore, further improvements are needed. The Merdeka Curriculum, which only applies in pilot Madrasahs that the Director General of Islamic Education has determined, is implemented in *Raudhatul Athfal* (RA), Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs), *Madrasah Aliyah*

(MA), and *Vocational Madrasah Aliyah* (MAK) (Kepmendikbudristek No. 56, 2022; Swandari & Jemani, 2023).

Islamic Education Curriculum in Madrasas

In the past, madrasah curricula displayed diversity, reflecting multiple institutions' various types and purposes. This causes significant differences between these madrasa institutions. For example, some madrasas focus on da'wah and provide comprehensive religious education such as MA-PK, while others emphasize the formation of different spiritual teachers. Apart from variations in institutional orientation, the structure and curriculum materials used in daily learning activities also vary. Several Islamic education thinkers often criticize the reality of contemporary madrasa curriculum.

The influence of modernization, globalization and changes in national education policies have created variations in the development of madrasas in various regions of Indonesia. Although some areas have shown an increase in quality and quantity, other regions have also experienced a decline. Based on data from the Ministry of Religion in 2023, the number of Madrasahs reached 86,608 institutions, with details of *Raudlatul Athfal* (RA) at 31,055, *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* (MI) at 26,528, *Madrasah Tsanawiyah* (MTs) with 19,177, *Madrasah Aliyah* (MA) with 9,848 institutions (ayomadrasah.id, 2023; Malfi et al., 2023).

As educational institutions, Madrasas are considered an ideal place to balance religious values and technological knowledge. This means that the curriculum in Madrasas always needs to be adapted to each level of education because every change in the curriculum requires the development of the perspectives of teachers and educational staff. In the evolution of education, regulations governing curriculum changes, from the KBK, KTSP, and Curriculum 2013 to the Merdeka Curriculum, have a crucial role in improving students' abilities to suit educational developments in the country and globally.

In addition to transformations in curricula, the technological revolution has changed the business and employment landscape to a large extent. Many business processes have shifted to the digital realm and automation, replacing the role of humans with machines and computers. This change occurs in various sectors such

as finance, agriculture, industry, and education. The Computer-Based National Examination (UNBK) is one of the essential changes in modern education, where examinations are carried out from MI, MTs, MA, or equivalent levels by adopting special software as a substitute for conventional written examinations.

In 2013, Indonesia, Singapore and Malaysia responded to the need to embrace the Computer-Based National Examination by integrating it into their national education systems. The selection of schools as pilots in implementing UNBK was based on the availability of computer resources and the schools' willingness to take part in the initiative. This step responds to the Ministry of Education's request to improve the national exam process from the previous written format. However, there are challenges faced, especially by students in remote areas, such as a lack of understanding and limited access to and use of information technology such as computers (Irawan, 2022; Pohan et al., 2022; Wardany & Istikomah, 2022).

Madrasas in Indonesia can achieve a higher quality of education by carefully facing the dynamics of the times. One of these opportunities is their ability to provide Islamic religious education that is substantial and relevant to current developments. With increasing awareness of the importance of religious education, madrasas can take advantage of this situation to provide spiritual learning that meets community needs. They can develop more modern and efficient learning methods to improve the quality of their education (Abdullah, 2013; Basyit, 2019; Ilmamuna et al., 2023).

The 2013 curriculum aims to simplify and integrate learning themes. The focus is on giving students optimal abilities in observing, thinking critically, asking questions, and communicating effectively about the material studied inside and outside the classroom. This curriculum targets students to achieve several competencies, including religious skills, knowledge and social aspects. Each of these competencies carries different character-building values. Islamic religious education in this curriculum strengthens Islamic ethics through three pillars of character: morals, manners, and example. Exemplary refers to the moral qualities demonstrated by the Prophet Muhammad Saw. The morality aspect in this

curriculum focuses on actions by moral norms, while adab reflects attitudinal values that encourage a good lifestyle.

Islamic religious education materials can be an effective forum for implementing and developing the values of Islamic teachings and integrating these values through all stages of the Islamic education process, from planning to evaluation. At the planning stage, this includes the preparation of Graduate Competency Standards and Core Competencies, as well as curriculum design and implementation of materials in Islamic Religious Education subjects, both in the classroom and outside the classroom. Apart from that, the evaluation stage is also an essential part of the Islamic Religious Education subject.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Religious Education curriculum in Madrasah implemented in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum aims to strengthen character education, form students with solid Islamic religious competencies, and encourage the development of critical and creative abilities in understanding religious values. The main aim is to provide a strong foundation of faith, hone a comprehensive understanding of religion, and form individuals who can apply religious values in everyday life. This curriculum also aims to build high social and moral awareness and increase student participation in social activities based on Islamic religious values.

Of course, the Independent Learning Program at Madrasah is to produce students who have a strong understanding of Islamic teachings, not only theoretically but also in the practical context of everyday life. This includes strengthening students' character and morality based on religious values, forming inclusive attitudes, developing critical thinking skills in understanding religious teachings, and increasing participation in social activities inspired by Islamic principles. The essence of this curriculum is to provide a strong foundation in the Islamic religion while encouraging students to apply these values in their real lives.

Decree of the Minister of Religion (KMA) Number 347 of 2022 provides direction regarding the curriculum in Madrasah, regulating the Merdeka Curriculum which includes curriculum fields other than Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Arabic which are prepared or developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture,

Research and Technology. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Religion created the PAI and Arabic Curriculum specifically for Madrasas, describing the typical madrasa values developed by each school. In its implementation, this regulation allows educational institutions that implement the Merdeka Curriculum to show their creativity and innovation in several stages, such as Classes I to VI at the SD/MI/Package A level, Classes VII to IX at the SMP/MTs/Package B level, and Class X to XII at the SMA/SMK/MA/Package C level. This process is carried out in stages according to each level of education (KMA No. 183 dan 184, 2019; KMA No. 347, 2022; Nuwairah, 2023; Rosfiani et al., 2023).

IV. CONCLUSION

The 2013 curriculum was designed in response to the need for education that teaches academic material and pays attention to aspects of character and local wisdom. Through the 2013 Curriculum, the main goal is to form students who excel in academics have strong character and respect local values in their learning process. The Merdeka Belajar curriculum, as one of the initiatives, introduces a more flexible approach, focusing on essential material, character development, and empowering students to manage their learning process. This approach aims to create a friendlier learning environment, not only for students but also for educators. The 2013 curriculum and the Merdeka Belajar program emphasize character development, enable students to learn more independently, and highlight the essence of local values in the teaching and learning process. This requires a more flexible and adaptive teaching approach and space for students to take a more active role in their educational process. Another implication is the increased responsibility of educators to support and guide students' character development in line with teaching academic material.

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