

TRANSFORMING ISLAMIC EDUCATION THROUGH MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN PESANTREN

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of Islamic education in Indonesia marks a significant shift, with the proactive introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum fostering innovation. This curriculum grants educational institutions the power to tailor their programs to local needs, embodying a dynamic response to contemporary demands. Investigating its implementation at Pesantren Darul Qolam in Banten, this qualitative study involves interviews with Pesantren leaders, teachers, and students, complemented by observational analyses. The findings showcase Pesantren's successful integration of the Merdeka Curriculum, harmonizing it with the national curriculum and designing programs responsive to students' diverse needs. This research advocates for Pesantren institutions to adopt the Merdeka Curriculum, recognizing it as a catalyst for elevating the quality and relevance of Islamic education. Furthermore, it urges a thorough exploration of the curriculum's long-term effects within the Pesantren context and its potential applicability to other Islamic educational institutions. Emphasizing principles of freedom, autonomy in learning, multilingualism, and responsiveness to student needs, the study underscores the crucial role of educational innovation in Pesantren and beyond.

Keywords: Educational Innovation, Islamic Education, Merdeka Curriculum, *Pesantren* Integration

ABSTRAK

Lanskap pendidikan Islam di Indonesia telah berkembang secara signifikan dan mengambil pendekatan proaktif terhadap inovasi melalui pengenalan Kurikulum Merdeka. Kurikulum ini menawarkan institusi pendidikan fleksibilitas dan kemandirian untuk menyesuaikan kurikulum mereka agar selaras dengan kebutuhan lokal, yang mencerminkan semangat perubahan dan tuntutan kontemporer yang terus berkembang. Penelitian ini menyelidiki penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka terhadap kualitas dan relevansi pendidikan Islam di Pesantren Darul Qolam di Banten. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, yang melibatkan wawancara dengan pimpinan Pesantren, guru, dan siswa, serta analisis observasi untuk mengeksplorasi implementasi kurikulum. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Pesantren telah berhasil mengintegrasikan kurikulum dengan memadukannya dengan kurikulum nasional, dan telah mengembangkan program-program penting yang responsif terhadap kebutuhan siswa. Investigasi ini menganjurkan agar

lembaga-lembaga Pesantren mempertimbangkan untuk menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka sebagai sarana untuk meningkatkan kualitas dan relevansi pendidikan Islam mereka, sambil juga menyelidiki dampak jangka panjangnya dalam konteks Pesantren dan lembaga-lembaga pendidikan Islam lainnya. Selain itu, Pesantren harus tetap berpegang pada prinsip kebebasan dan otonomi dalam belajar, multibahasa, dan responsif terhadap kebutuhan siswanya untuk mendorong inovasi pendidikan.

Kata Kunci : Inovasi Pendidikan, Integrasi Pesantren , Kurikulum Merdeka, Pendidikan Islam.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of Islamic education in Indonesia has experienced noteworthy transformations over time, as highlighted by Ainissyifa and Nurseha (2022). This evolution is well-documented in several studies, including those referenced by Amirullah and Hamami (2020), Gumanti et al. (2023), Huda (2020), Latief et al. (2021), Sabila et al. (2020), and Yusra (2018), collectively illustrating significant shifts within the Islamic education sector. Addressing contemporary demands, Islamic educational institutions, especially Pesantren, actively partake in continuous innovation and adaptation to navigate the dynamics of ongoing change, as noted by Zulmuqim et al. (2020). Numerous studies, such as those conducted by Baharun and Adhimiy (2019), Dewi and Wajdi (2022), Hamdanah (2020), Hasan (2015), Kholifah (2022), Multazamy Rohmatulloh et al. (2022), Nurjanah and Amrullah (2021), Wajdi et al. (2022), and Yahya (2021), recognize this challenge and emphasize the pivotal role of innovation in the realm of Islamic education.

In the realm of educational innovation, one of the most significant and contemporary advancements revolves around curriculum development. Particularly, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum holds paramount importance for Pesantren (Islamic boarding schools) in Indonesia. This significant innovation is underscored by several compelling reasons within the Pesantren context (Efendi, 2022; Ekaningrum et al., 2018; Falikul Isbah, 2020; Winata et al., 2021). Curriculum development addresses modern educational needs by extending beyond the traditional religious focus to encompass a broader range of subjects. This ensures that Pesantren graduates are well-equipped for diverse career opportunities (Assa'idi, 2021; Muhajir, 2022; Shaikh & Alam Kazmi, 2022; Soleman et al., 2020).

In the context of pesantren, Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility and customization to enable Pesantren to tailor their programs to local characteristics and student-specific needs. This results in a more relevant and effective education (Islam, 2021; Muhammad et al., 2021; Pribadi, 2014; Sauri et al., 2018). Furthermore, it empowers students by emphasizing autonomy and the freedom to choose their educational paths, fostering self-directed learning and personal growth. It also facilitates adaptation to technological advances, ensuring that students are well-versed in technology. Additionally, the curriculum encourages diverse teaching methods, thereby enhancing educational quality and competitiveness. This not only benefits religious fields but also expands opportunities in secular careers, making pesantren more appealing to a broader student base and enabling collaboration with global educational standards.

The Merdeka Curriculum has been developed with the aim of contributing to national development by providing students with diverse skill sets, aligning with Indonesia's progress and development objectives. This initiative, emerging within the Indonesian education landscape, is designed to grant flexibility and independence to educational institutions in crafting curricula that resonate with local characteristics and needs (Dewey et al., 2022). The Curriculum encourages a more adaptive and responsive approach to the swiftly evolving landscape of education. Researchers have delved into the findings related to this curriculum, which was launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and

Technology. This issue has attracted scholars include A Sadat et al. (2022), Devian et al. (2023), Triyatno et al. (2022), Manalu et al., (2022), and Setia Siregar (2023). The genesis of this curriculum can be traced back to the challenges posed by the emergency situation during the COVID-19 pandemic, as elucidated in the research conducted by Alawi et al. (2022), Jojor & Sihotang (2022), Melvil (2023), and Vidieyanti (2022).

The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum has sparked interest in educational discussions across Indonesia. However, questions linger regarding how these innovations can be effectively integrated and diffused within the context of Pesantren, which boasts rich educational traditions and profound Islamic values. Numerous researchers have delved into this issue. Jailani (2022) scrutinized the implementation of the concept of "independent learning" in Pesantren. Zainuri et al. (2023) conducted an examination of the management of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at Pesantren Latansa Palembang Darussalam, providing an initial overview of the challenges and similarities among Pesantren in adopting the Merdeka Curriculum.

In a related study, Wafi & Faruk (2023) underscored significant parallels between the curriculum implemented in Pesantren and the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. These included aspects such as *takhasus* programs, santri autonomy, and the freedom to choose learning programs. It is crucial to note that this research not only seeks to describe the current state of affairs or report social facts but also aims to comprehend the impact of educational innovations, such as the Merdeka Curriculum, on Pesantren.

This study distinguishes itself from prior research by offering a more profound exploration of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation within the distinct context of Pesantren Darul Qolam Banten. Focusing on a single Pesantren allows for a deeper comprehension of the challenges and transformations occurring within this environment, as well as the extent of integration of the Merdeka Curriculum across all levels of educational institutions within the Pesantren. Additionally, the study aims to draw comparisons with previous research findings, providing insights into both similarities and differences in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum across various Pesantren. Consequently, this research significantly contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of educational transformation within Pesantren, specifically examining the implementation of educational innovations within the unique context of Darul Qolam Banten Pesantren.

This research is designed to address existing knowledge gaps regarding the diffusion and integration of the Merdeka Curriculum, an educational innovation, within Pesantren. The selection of Pesantren Darul Qolam Banten as the focus of this study is based on its rich history and tradition of Islamic education, offering a unique opportunity to observe changes and innovations within a culturally vibrant context. This Pesantren has demonstrated a noteworthy capacity to adapt and innovate, enhancing the quality of Islamic education and positioning itself as a potential model for the development of adaptive and innovative Islamic education. The anticipated outcomes of this study include providing practical insights that can guide other Pesantren in the development of high-quality Islamic education that is responsive to contemporary needs.

To comprehend these transformations, this study employed the Educational Innovation theory (Rogers et al., 2019). This theoretical framework will enable an exploration of the factors influencing the diffusion of the Merdeka Curriculum in Pesantren, along with an examination of the innovation's impact on Islamic education in Darul Qolam Banten. By scrutinizing the diffusion process of the Merdeka Curriculum within Pesantren, this research anticipates offering more profound insights into the adoption and implementation of innovative educational policies, especially in institutions with robust religious and cultural foundations. As such, this study bears significance in the context of educational advancement

in Indonesia and contributes to the comprehension of educational innovation within the framework outlined.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing descriptive methods within a case study framework to discern innovations within the curriculum of Pondok Pesantren Darul Qolam Banten. In investigating curriculum innovation at the Pesantren, the study adopts the theoretical framework of educational innovation (Rogers et al., 2019). The research explores data primarily through interviews, observations, documents, and audio-visual materials associated with curriculum innovation at Pesantren Darul Qolam in Banten. Additionally, secondary data, such as books, literature, articles, and journals relevant to the research theme, is also utilized to provide supporting information.

The key sources in this study are the research participants, encompassing the management of Pesantren Darul Qolam, such as *ustadz* and *ustadzah* (cluster program teachers), community leaders, parents of students, and santri. Additionally, the Principal and Vice Principal at the research location are included as subjects in this investigation. These research subjects were selected for their representativeness and perceived ability to provide comprehensive insights into questions pertaining to the research focus, specifically Pesantren curriculum innovation.

This study employed multiple data collection methods, including observation, interviews, and document studies. The observational component involved direct observation, documenting events, occurrences, and activities at Pesantren Darul Qolam to acquire data pertinent to curriculum innovation. Interviews were conducted through direct and oral question-and-answer sessions with research subjects, utilizing a semi-structured interview format and predefined guidelines for systematic data collection. Additionally, document studies were conducted to gather diverse data related to the research, such as Pesantren profiles, activity profiles, activity schedules, and other relevant information to complement the data on curriculum innovation at Pesantren Darul Qolam.

The data analysis phase in this study encompasses several key stages. The initial stage is Data Collection, involving the utilization of observation, interview, and document study techniques to gather data relevant to Pesantren curriculum innovation. Subsequently, the Data Condensation Stage involves the analysis and reduction of collected data from various sources for increased focus. The steps in this stage include categorizing data by theme, eliminating irrelevant data, summarizing data to create a more concise overview, establishing categories or themes that encapsulate crucial elements, and organizing data based on the analytical framework. Following this, in the data presentation stage, the condensed data is presented in a narrative and systematic format to comprehend phenomena associated with pesantren curriculum innovation. Lastly, in the conclusion drawing and testing stage, the results of data analysis are utilized to draw conclusions addressing the research focus on pesantren curriculum innovation, and these conclusions are subject to testing and verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The developmental initiatives undertaken at Pesantren Darul Qolam underscore the institution's capacity to adapt to educational transformations and innovations. Through interviews, the researcher discovered that Kiyai Ahmad Syahiduddin, the leader of the Pesantren, has embraced various innovations, including structural modifications within the institution and alterations to the Pesantren curriculum. These changes involve the restructuring of the Pesantren Darul Qolam representing a strategic move for leadership regeneration and a response to the evolving internal and external environment of the

Pesantren. Furthermore, Darul Qolam Pesantren views itself as an Islamic educational institution that must remain pertinent and competitive in the face of global challenges.

Taking inspiration from Pesantren Darussalam Gontor, where the Pesantren's founder, Kiyai Rifa'i Arief, is an alumnus, Pesantren Darul Qolam adopts the educational model of Gontor Pesantren. Despite this influence, Pesantren Darul Qolam is committed to innovation while upholding traditional Pesantren values. An adaptation initiative involves the introduction of formal education programs such as madrasah and high schools, integrating the Pesantren curriculum with the national curriculum. In doing so, Pesantren Darul Qolam seeks to harmonize the Pesantren tradition with the preparation of graduates capable of excelling across various educational levels and institutions, including general education. This underscores how Pesantren can preserve traditional values while innovating to meet the demands of modern education and changes in the national education landscape.

The institutional development initiative at Pesantren Darul Qolam, aimed at enhancing students' knowledge and skills, aligns with the innovation introduced by the Merdeka Curriculum. In recognizing the aptitude of certain santri as "smarter," the Pesantren has instituted special programs that offer added value and allow these students to explore their capabilities. Within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, these Pesantren adopt an approach that is attuned to the needs and potential of the santri, providing avenues for the development of specialized knowledge and skills. These programs exemplify the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, granting Pesantren the freedom and autonomy to tailor a curriculum that suits their unique characteristics and requirements.

Additionally, the utilization of Arabic and English as official languages of communication underscores Pesantren's commitment to equipping santri with multilingual skills, in line with the Merdeka Curriculum's vision that emphasizes 21st-century skills. Consequently, this institution's development program contributes to the innovation of the Merdeka Curriculum by amalgamating Pesantren traditions with modern approaches that are responsive to the evolving landscape of education (Amarullah, personal communication, March, 2023).

Under the leadership of K. Zahid Purna Wibawa, Pesantren Darul Qolam Tiga aspires to be an Islamic educational institution that nurtures cadres embodying belief, piety (*muttaqîn*), and proficiency in knowledge (*râsikh fi al-'ilm*). This vision underscores the commitment to cultivating graduates with a well-rounded blend of character, knowledge, and skills. The accelerated education program, particularly at the high school level, organized by this Pesantren is a direct response to the aspirations of the santri, aiming to produce high-caliber Muslim cadres. This program enables santri to acquire knowledge and skills within a condensed timeframe, aligning with the ethos of the Merdeka Curriculum that emphasizes flexibility in learning.

Furthermore, the Pesantren's vision and mission encompass a mastery of science and technology, aligning with the Merdeka Curriculum's objective of equipping students with 21st-century skills. The Pesantren also advocates for active participation of santri in societal affairs, resonating with the social and civic values emphasized by the Merdeka Curriculum. Consequently, Pesantren Darul Qolam Tiga's strategic programs and goals are intricately linked to the innovation brought by the Merdeka Curriculum. This integration blends traditional Islamic education with a modern approach, demonstrating responsiveness to the evolving needs of students and the educational landscape.

Drawing from the outcomes of observations, interviews, and documentation, this study found that Pesantren Darul Qolam operates three branches, each offering distinct educational programs. However, a common thread across all branches is the integration of the Pesantren curriculum with the national curriculum, ensuring a comprehensive education for students.

The subsequent overview provides insights into the curriculum development within each branch (Amarullah, personal communication, March, 2023).

Distinguished by its three branches catering to various educational levels, Darul Qolam exemplifies an educational philosophy that skillfully blends the traditional Pesantren curriculum with the national curriculum. Through in-depth interviews with key figures at Darul Qolam, a nuanced understanding emerges, highlighting that this integration is not merely theoretical but intricately woven into the ethos and operational framework of each branch.

The focus on cultivating a scientific culture among students through research, ICT-based learning, and proficiency development in natural and social sciences represents a purposeful approach to nurturing analytical and critical skills. What distinguishes Darul Qolam is the deliberate incorporation of the Ministry of Education and Culture's curriculum, aspiring to cultivate students grounded in local and Islamic values while also arming them with broad and pertinent knowledge to tackle the demands of contemporary science and technology (Amarullah, personal communication, March, 2023).

The paramount importance of reinforcing substantial Islamic values takes precedence. Ferdinal Lavendri underscores that these values extend beyond the academic sphere, serving as a profound foundation for character and morality. The deliberate orientation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Darul Qolam towards the practical application of Islamic teachings in daily life is emphasized, fostering an environment characterized by respect, responsibility, and morally grounded leadership. This comprehensive approach is designed to mold individuals with resilient character and ethical conduct (Lavendri, personal communication, April, 2023).

The flexibility embedded in the learning program, providing insights into the progressive educational philosophy at Darul Qolam. According to Mada Indramawan, the Merdeka Curriculum's provision for customized curriculum development empowers educators to address the distinctive needs and potentials of each student effectively. Beyond its flexibility in content, the curriculum promotes innovative teaching methods, striving to enhance student interest, motivation, and overall learning experiences. This adaptability forms the cornerstone of a sustainable education model that dynamically responds to the evolving needs of students (Indramawan, personal communication, May, 2023).

Fundamentally, Darul Qolam's dedication to incorporating, customizing, and adapting its curriculum is not just a theoretical concept; it is a vibrant philosophy woven into the daily experiences and aspirations of both educators and students. This approach underscores the school's commitment to delivering an education that is not only academically demanding but also profoundly grounded in values, equipping students to navigate the multifaceted challenges of the modern world.

Pesantren Darul Qolam has implemented significant innovations in both institutional structure and curriculum, responding to the evolving educational landscape both internally and externally. This restructuring underscores the responsiveness required to meet the challenges and changes of the times. Through the establishment of multiple branches, the Pesantren grants each autonomy to administer and enhance its educational programs in alignment with their specific characteristics and needs. This approach aligns with the ethos of the Merdeka Curriculum, which empowers educational institutions with the freedom to formulate curricula tailored to their contextual requirements.

Furthermore, in the realm of curriculum innovation, Pesantren develops strategies that align with the needs and potential of their santri. This includes establishing formal education programs, such as madrasahs and senior high schools, and integrating the Pesantren curriculum with the national curriculum. As a result, Pesantren effectively blends traditional Pesantren values with the preparation of graduates ready to excel across diverse educational

levels and institutions, including general education. The utilization of Arabic and English as official communication languages reflects Pesantren's dedication to nurturing santri with multilingual skills, in accordance with the vision of the Merdeka Curriculum, emphasizing the significance of 21st century skills.

This innovation also seeks to enhance the quality of education offered by Pesantren. By crafting a curriculum that is attuned to advancements in the realm of education, Pesantren can guarantee that its graduates possess knowledge, skills, and robust character. In essence, the innovations in the institutional structure and curriculum at Pesantren Darul Qolam serve as evident illustrations of how educational institutions can uphold traditional values while introducing innovations that align with the requirements of contemporary education and the evolving national education landscape.

Pesantren Darul Qolam has introduced substantial innovations in both institutional structure and curriculum, responding proactively to developments in the educational landscape, both internally and externally. This involves the division of the Pesantren into three branches, granting autonomy to each branch for the development of educational programs tailored to their specific characteristics. Additionally, there's an integration of the Pesantren curriculum with the national curriculum, showcasing adaptability to contemporary challenges. These endeavors highlight the leadership's role in interpersonal communication and the application of the concept of relative advantage, essential element theory of educational innovation.

In essence, these innovations illustrate how Pesantren effectively upholds traditional values while introducing changes pertinent to the demands of modern education and shifts in the national education environment. This aligns with Yahya's perspective, emphasizing the consideration of national, institutional, and learning objectives in curriculum design. Moreover, the curriculum redesign involves reconstructing some Pesantren books, such as those on *Nahw*, *Ṣarf*, and *Fiqh*. The learning process adopts a student-centered approach, fostering active student participation and incorporating various programs like *takrâr sugrâ*, *takrâr kubrâ*, and *syâvir*. Finally, the evaluation methods in this curriculum encompass both formative and summative assessments.

The amalgamation of the Pesantren curriculum with the national curriculum, particularly evident in Darul Qolam, underscores the Pesantren's dedication to producing graduates prepared to excel across diverse educational levels and institutions, aligning seamlessly with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. The significance of embracing innovations in education to enhance its quality and relevance. The incorporation of the Pesantren curriculum into the national curriculum exemplifies the adoption of educational innovations tailored to the evolving changes and demands in the educational landscape. In this research, Pesantren has embraced the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, affording autonomy to educational institutions to formulate a curriculum that aligns with their unique characteristics and needs (Rogers et al., 2019).

Leaders at Pesantren, such as Kiyai Ahmad Syahiduddin, assume a crucial role in elucidating the concept and advantages of this curriculum integration to various stakeholders, including teachers, santri, and the Pesantren community. The effective communication regarding innovations is pivotal for the successful adoption of innovation.

Furthermore, curriculum integration underscores the Pesantren's endeavors to cultivate graduates equipped with knowledge and skills pertinent to the requirements of contemporary education and the evolving national education landscape. By amalgamating components of the Pesantren curriculum, emphasizing traditional and religious values, with components of the national curriculum encompassing diverse subjects, Pesantren can mold graduates possessing a harmonious blend of character, knowledge, and skills. This aligns with the findings of

Maduningtias (2022), emphasizing the need to revitalize the Pesantren curriculum to enhance the quality of santri education. This revitalization includes curriculum integration, incorporating various curriculum types such as the Ministry of Education and Culture curriculum, the Ministry of Religious Affairs curriculum, and the Pesantren curriculum. The primary focus of this integration lies in harmonizing learning materials and managing the curriculum as an integrated entity. In its execution, this integrated management aims to prevent any division between Pesantren and schools. The amalgamation of the Pesantren curriculum with the national curriculum at Pesantren Darul Qolam exemplifies how educational innovation can foster positive transformations in the education system and equip graduates for success in diverse educational and professional arenas (Rogers et al., 2019).

The responsive approach to santri needs, involving the creation of outstanding programs to address their requirements and potential, constitutes a pivotal facet of educational innovation. The integration of innovations in education plays a central role in enhancing the quality and pertinence of education. Initiating the development of exceptional programs in Pesantren, as a forward-looking measure, commences with the identification of prevalent challenges or needs and the exploration of innovative and effective solutions.

The creation of exceptional programs mirrors Pesantren's acknowledgment of the distinct needs and potential of its students, providing them with opportunities to discover and cultivate their unique abilities. This aligns with the ethos of the Merdeka Curriculum, which underscores flexibility in learning and the nurturing of student potential. The Merdeka Curriculum empowers educational institutions with the autonomy to craft a curriculum that is attuned to the individual needs of students and their specific environment.

The effective communication and the diffusion of innovations constitute crucial elements in the adoption of new practices. Leaders and teachers at *Pesantren* assume a pivotal role in elucidating the advantages and goals of flagship programs to the *santri*. Proficient communication concerning these innovations facilitates the adoption and utilization of outstanding programs by the *santri*.

The responsive approach to addressing santri needs through the development of outstanding programs exemplifies Pesantren's application of educational innovations to enhance the educational journey of santri. This ensures that they have enhanced opportunities to explore their potential and achieve success across various educational domains. In harmony with Romdhoni's (2022) research on the santri development program, Pesantren leaders and their staff lead strategic planning innovations. This process commences with a thorough assessment of the current conditions of both students and the boarding school, forming the basis for designing innovative strategies to surmount new challenges faced by the students and introducing a novel paradigm for them. The implementation of these innovations aims to amplify the potential and creativity of the *santri*, fostering increased confidence in their societal interactions. Continuous evaluation and assessment gauge the success of the development program, with the aspiration of formulating more effective strategies in the future. Hence, *Pesantren* Darul Qolam is dedicated to fostering an environment that is attuned to the individual needs and potential of each santri, nurturing growth, and facilitating their positive contributions to society.

The adoption of Arabic and English as official communication languages at Pesantren Darul Qolam exemplifies a tangible instance of innovative endeavors. This strategic innovation is crafted to equip santri with multilingual proficiency, particularly in Arabic and English. The implementation of Arabic and English languages for daily communication showcases Pesantren's responsiveness to contemporary demands and the skills required in the 21st century. This initiative aligns seamlessly with the vision of the Merdeka Curriculum, placing emphasis on 21st century skills, notably proficiency in diverse languages. The adoption

of multilingual communication is regarded as an innovative measure that aligns with the objectives of modern education.

The diffusion of innovation entails the communication and dissemination of innovative ideas to other individuals or groups. Within Pesantren, leaders and teachers play a pivotal role in elucidating the advantages and objectives of incorporating Arabic and English to the *santri*, thereby facilitating the adoption of this innovative practice. Effective communication stands out as a crucial step in promoting and supporting the integration of innovations within educational settings. This resonates with findings from various researchers. Rochmat et al. (2022) delved into the utilization of a language patrol system called *Jasus* (spy) to regulate language use among *santri*. Moreover, to enhance students' proficiency in Arabic and English, Pesantren Darul Qolam employs vocabulary enrichment programs such as *Mufradât* (Vocabularies), *Muhadaṣah* (conversation), and *Muḥâdarah* (speech practice). All these programs are specifically designed to bolster students' competence in Arabic and English languages.

The adoption of Arabic and English as official communication languages in Pesantren exemplifies the institution's adaptive response to contemporary needs, employing an innovative approach that aligns with the vision of the Merdeka Curriculum and the principles of 21st-century skills. This underscores the significance of adaptability and evolution in education to enhance the quality and relevance of the educational process.

CONCLUSION

The present study found that *Pesantren* Darul Qolam Banten has effectively embraced and incorporated the Merdeka Curriculum into its educational framework. The curriculum affords Pesantren the flexibility and autonomy to tailor the curriculum to local characteristics and specific needs. The successful implementation of features such as the *takebaṣṣuṣ* program (granting autonomy to students), curriculum integration across all Pesantren educational levels, and the freedom to choose learning programs highlights the effective incorporation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Pesantren. Key factors highlighted in the theory, including effective communication, resource support, fitting innovation characteristics, and considerations of the Pesantren and local community's characteristics, are pivotal in the diffusion process of this innovation. The theory offers valuable insights into the adoption and adaptation of educational innovations within distinctive educational settings. The findings of this study positively contribute to the advancement of Islamic education within Pesantren, particularly in Pesantren Darul Qolam Banten. The innovation of the Merdeka Curriculum has facilitated the adaptive growth of Pesantren in response to contemporary demands. This research offers practical insights for other Pesantren institutions seeking to enhance their education with responsiveness and quality. Consequently, this study has the potential to serve as an inspirational and guiding resource for other Pesantren institutions navigating forthcoming educational transformations.

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