



Reconceiving Learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* under the Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah plays an important role in establishing the cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and digital foundations of students within an Islamic educational context. This study aims to analyze the characteristics of learning and relevant instructional strategies in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The study employed a qualitative research design using content analysis of academic literature and educational policy documents published between 2019 and 2025. The data were analyzed through data familiarization, coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation to identify recurring patterns related to learning focus, instructional strategies, assessment, and teacher roles. The findings indicate that learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* should integrate four interrelated domains: cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and digital development. The analysis further identifies three complementary strategies: Islamic project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and continuous formative assessment. These strategies support contextual and student-centered learning while providing opportunities to integrate Islamic values across subject areas. The findings also indicate that teachers need to function not only as learning facilitators but also as *murabbi* who guide students' moral and spiritual development through habituation, exemplary behavior, and classroom interaction. The study concludes that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* requires an integrated learning ecosystem that connects academic development, Islamic values, student diversity, continuous assessment, and teacher professional capacity.

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INTRODUCTION

Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is a formal Islamic elementary education institution that provides general and religious education within an integrated learning framework. Unlike general elementary schools, *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* combines academic subjects with Islamic education and value formation (Basir et al., 2024; Mubarakah & Abdullah, 2025). This distinctive structure requires learning to address not only students' academic development but also their moral, spiritual, social, and practical development (Aini, 2024; Salleh & Karnaen, 2017). Consequently, learning at this level requires approaches that can connect subject knowledge with students' everyday experiences and Islamic values (Mukarromah et al., 2025; Rosyad, 2020).

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The developmental characteristics of elementary school-aged students further strengthen the need for concrete and contextual learning. Students at this level generally learn more effectively when abstract concepts are connected with direct experiences, observable phenomena, and meaningful activities (Gottfried et al., 2005; Roberts, 2017; Sholicha et al., 2023). In *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, this requirement becomes particularly important because learning is expected to develop cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies while also responding to the growing importance of digital literacy. The integration of these dimensions requires learning that connects general knowledge with Islamic values rather than treating religious and general subjects as separate domains (Hidayat et al., 2025).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has provided greater opportunities for such learning transformation. Its orientation toward student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and formative assessment creates opportunities for teachers to design learning experiences that are more responsive to students' needs and characteristics (Alfita et al., 2025; Julianto et al., 2025; Resa et al., 2023). However, the implementation of these principles in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* remains challenging. Teachers need to accommodate diverse levels of student readiness, design meaningful learning experiences, integrate Islamic values across subjects, and conduct continuous assessment while working within varying institutional and resource conditions (Armini, 2024; Taufiq & R, 2025). These challenges indicate that curriculum implementation cannot be addressed merely through changes in instructional techniques but requires a more integrated understanding of learning focus, instructional strategies, assessment, and teacher roles.

The challenges become more complex when Islamic values are expected to be embedded across learning activities rather than confined to specific religious subjects. Effective integration requires teachers to identify meaningful connections between academic content and Islamic principles within students' daily contexts (Afrina et al., 2022; Efendi et al., 2019). For example, mathematical concepts can be connected with the distribution of zakat, science learning can be related to cleanliness and ablution, and language activities can be used to develop communication skills alongside ethical values. Such integration requires careful curriculum planning so that Islamic values function as an integral part of the learning process rather than as additional content attached to general subjects.

Furthermore, the diversity of students at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* level requires teachers to move beyond uniform instructional practices. Students differ in their learning readiness, interests, abilities, and preferred ways of engaging with learning activities. These differences require instructional strategies that provide multiple pathways toward the same learning objectives while maintaining opportunities for collaboration and value formation (Fakhruddin et al., 2024; Hayi et al., 2025; Irhamni & Ashari, 2023). At the same time, teachers need continuous information about students' development to adjust instruction and provide appropriate feedback. Therefore, the effectiveness of learning transformation within the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on the selection of instructional strategies but also on the integration of differentiated learning, formative assessment, and teachers' capacity to facilitate both academic and character development (Insani et al., 2023; Krajcik et al., 2023).

Previous studies have discussed individual aspects of learning in Islamic elementary education, including project-based learning, differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and teacher competence. Nevertheless, these elements are often examined separately (Brassler & Dettmers, 2017; Kuppuswamy & Mhakure, 2020). A more integrated perspective is needed to explain how the characteristics of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* students can be translated into appropriate learning domains, how

learning strategies can respond to student diversity, and how teachers can simultaneously facilitate learning and foster Islamic values. This gap is particularly relevant in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires greater flexibility in learning while maintaining the distinctive identity of Islamic education (Hayi et al., 2025; Insani et al., 2023).

Based on this context, this study analyzes learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* through four interrelated dimensions: the cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and digital domains. It further examines three learning strategies that are relevant to these characteristics, namely Islamic project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and continuous formative assessment. The study also examines the changing role of teachers as facilitators and *murabbi* in supporting students' academic, moral, and spiritual development. The findings are expected to contribute to a more integrated framework for understanding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* and to provide practical considerations for developing contextual, adaptive, integrative, and student-centered learning.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using content analysis to examine scholarly literature and policy documents related to learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to identify, interpret, and synthesize recurring themes concerning learning characteristics, instructional strategies, assessment practices, and teacher roles rather than to measure the effectiveness of a particular instructional intervention (Gergen, 2020; Lindgren et al., 2020; Selvi, 2019).

The data consisted of relevant academic articles, books, and educational policy documents published between 2019 and 2025. The literature was identified through searches of Google Scholar, the Directory of Open Access Journals, Portal Garuda, and Scopus using combinations of keywords such as “*Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* learning,” “Merdeka Curriculum in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*,” “differentiated instruction,” “project-based learning,” “formative assessment,” and “Islamic education.” The inclusion criteria comprised publications that discussed learning practices, curriculum implementation, instructional strategies, assessment, student characteristics, or teacher competencies relevant to *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*. Publications that were unrelated to elementary Islamic education, lacked substantive discussion of the research focus, or were inaccessible in full text were excluded (Kleinheksel et al., 2020; Neuendorf, 2019; Renz et al., 2018; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019).

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis involved four stages: data familiarization, coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation. First, the selected literature was read repeatedly to identify information relevant to the research objectives. Second, meaningful units of information were coded according to their substantive content. Third, related codes were grouped into broader categories. Finally, the categories were interpreted to identify recurring patterns and relationships across the literature (Engkizar, Jaafar, Hamzah, Syafril, Oktavia, et al., 2026; Julianto et al., 2025).

The analysis generated four major dimensions of learning focus: cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and digital. The analysis then identified three interconnected instructional strategies, namely Islamic project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and continuous formative assessment. In addition, the literature was examined to identify the changing role of teachers as facilitators and *murabbi* (Engkizar et al., 2019). The findings from different sources were compared and synthesized to identify areas of convergence, complementary perspectives, and challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*.

To strengthen the credibility of the analysis, the interpretation was based on comparison across multiple sources rather than relying on a single publication. Academic literature was also examined alongside relevant educational policy documents to distinguish conceptual arguments from curriculum-related policy provisions. The final themes were retained when they demonstrated sufficient relevance and recurrence across the selected sources and contributed directly to the research objectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of Learning Focus in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*

The analysis indicates that learning at the *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* level should be directed toward learning experiences that are concrete, contextual, and closely related to students' everyday lives. This orientation is associated with the cognitive development of elementary school-aged students, who still require direct experiences to understand abstract concepts. Therefore, learning should not be limited to the mastery of subject matter but should also provide opportunities for students to observe, experience, practice, and reflect on the knowledge they acquire.

The learning focus in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* can be categorized into four interrelated domains: cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and digital.

Domain	Learning Focus	Forms of Islamic Value Integration
Cognitive	Literacy, numeracy, basic science, and Quranic literacy	Using the distribution of zakat as a context for understanding fractions
Affective	Morality, empathy, responsibility, and social awareness	Role-playing etiquette for visiting others based on hadith
Psychomotor	Religious practices and simple experimental skills	Practicing ablution and conducting simple water-filtration experiments
Digital	Basic digital literacy and ethical media use	Creating simple offline da'wah posters

These four domains indicate that learning at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* cannot be rigidly separated into general knowledge and religious knowledge. Mathematics, science, language, arts, and technology can all serve as contexts for developing students' understanding and practice of Islamic values. For example, the concept of fractions in mathematics can be related to zakat distribution, while science lessons on water can be connected to ablution practices and awareness of maintaining cleanliness. Such integration positions Islamic values not merely as additional learning content but also as a perspective through which students understand everyday phenomena (Samsudin & Iffah, 2019; Subedi, 2022).

This finding demonstrates that learning integration at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* is more appropriately directed toward functional connections across subjects. Islamic values should not simply be added at the end of a lesson but should be incorporated from the formulation of learning objectives and the selection of activities and learning resources to the assessment process (Ansari, 2017; Sari, 2021; Selvia, 2024). This approach is consistent with the integrative-interconnected paradigm in Islamic education, which positions religious and general knowledge as complementary domains.

Thus, the characteristics of learning at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum can be understood as an educational process that develops academic abilities while simultaneously fostering students' dispositions and practical skills. This orientation is important because learning success at the elementary level is not determined solely by students' ability to solve academic problems but also by their ability to apply knowledge in everyday life.

Leading Learning Strategies in the Merdeka Curriculum

The analysis identifies three strategies that are particularly relevant to the characteristics of learning at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* within the Merdeka Curriculum: Islamic project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and continuous formative assessment. These strategies do not operate independently but can form an integrated learning process that enables students to learn through experience, receive support according to their individual needs, and obtain continuous feedback.

Islamic Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning has considerable potential to connect knowledge with students' real-life experiences. In the context of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, this approach can be developed into Islamic project-based learning by incorporating Islamic values and experiences into the learning process. Projects should not merely be designed to produce a particular product but should also promote thinking skills, collaboration, creativity, responsibility, and the application of Islamic values.

One possible implementation is a project entitled "Daily Prayers Pocketbook." This project allows several competencies to be developed in an integrated manner. Indonesian language learning can be used to develop students' ability to compose and communicate texts, arts can be incorporated into the design process, and Islamic creed and morality can provide the values and content underlying the project. This approach demonstrates that projects can function as a space for interdisciplinary integration while simultaneously serving as a medium for internalizing Islamic values.

The strength of project-based learning in this context lies in shifting students' position from passive recipients of information to active participants in the learning process. Students are involved in developing ideas, gathering information, designing products, collaborating with peers, and presenting their work. Therefore, project success should not be measured solely by the quality of the final product but also by the learning process and students' development throughout the project.

This finding supports Sugiarto (2025), who reported improvements in students' motivation and conceptual understanding through the implementation of Islamic project-based learning. However, the implementation of project-based learning at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* needs to consider students' age and level of independence. Projects that are overly complex may increase cognitive demands and cause learning activities to become dominated by teachers or parents. Therefore, projects should be designed to be manageable, have clearly defined objectives, use learning resources available in students' environments, and provide sufficient opportunities for individual participation.

Differentiated Instruction

The heterogeneity of students at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* indicates that applying a single instructional approach to all students does not necessarily produce optimal learning experiences. Differentiated instruction provides an alternative by adapting learning to students' readiness, needs, interests, and characteristics. Differentiation can be implemented in terms of content, process, and learning products.

In Islamic Religious Education, for example, students can be provided with different options for demonstrating their understanding. Students who are more comfortable with visual representations may create a concept map of Surah Al-Fatihah, whereas students who learn more effectively through physical activities may participate in a simulation of congregational prayer. Although the forms of activity differ, both remain directed toward the same learning objectives.

This finding indicates that differentiation does not mean providing entirely different materials to every student. Rather, its essence lies in providing several learning pathways that enable students to achieve the targeted competencies through approaches appropriate to their individual needs. Consequently, differentiation can

reduce the tendency toward uniform instruction while creating greater opportunities for students with diverse abilities to participate meaningfully in learning.

This finding is consistent with Fakhruddin et al (2025), who emphasized the importance of adapting learning processes to students' characteristics. In the context of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, differentiation also has pedagogical and inclusive dimensions because it enables students with different levels of readiness to participate in achieving common learning objectives. Nevertheless, the implementation of differentiated instruction requires teachers to conduct an initial diagnosis of students' learning needs. Without adequate mapping of students' readiness and learning needs, differentiation may be reduced to variations in activities without a clear pedagogical foundation. Therefore, diagnostic assessment and systematic classroom observation are important for determining appropriate forms of differentiation.

Continuous Formative Assessment

The third strategy identified through the analysis is the strengthening of formative assessment. Learning that emphasizes process requires an assessment system that is conducted throughout the learning process rather than only at the end. Reflection journals, portfolios, observations, oral questioning, and performance-based tasks can be used to obtain information about students' learning development. In *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* learning, formative assessment serves a broader function than merely measuring mastery of subject matter. It can be used to identify misconceptions, learning difficulties, attitudinal development, and students' ability to apply acquired values. For example, students' understanding of ablution should not be assessed solely through their ability to explain its required elements but also through their ability to perform the practice correctly (Defriyanto et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2026; Htay et al., 2025).

This approach demonstrates that assessment should be positioned as an integral component of learning rather than as a separate activity. Teachers can use information obtained from observations and student assignments to provide feedback and adjust subsequent learning strategies. Thus, assessment functions as an instrument for continuously improving the learning process. This principle is consistent with the orientation of assessment for learning within the Merdeka Curriculum. In the context of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*, strengthening formative assessment also enables teachers to obtain a more comprehensive picture of student development because the data are not derived solely from written tests. This is particularly important for competencies related to affective and psychomotor development, which are difficult to adequately represent through conventional testing (Mutiaramses et al., 2025; Sriwahyuni et al., 2025).

The Role of Teachers as Facilitators and *Murabbi*

The analysis indicates that the implementation of experiential learning, differentiation, and formative assessment requires a transformation in the role of teachers. Teachers at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* should not function merely as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators who organize learning experiences and as *murabbi* who provide guidance and serve as role models in students' moral and spiritual development. The facilitator role is reflected in teachers' ability to design activities that allow students to explore, discuss, experiment, and produce learning outcomes. Teachers provide guidance and support when necessary without taking over the entire learning process. This role is particularly important within the Merdeka Curriculum because it provides greater opportunities for students to participate actively in learning.

At the same time, the characteristics of *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* as an Islamic educational institution position teachers in a role that extends beyond academic facilitation. Teachers also function as *murabbi*, namely educators who guide students' moral and spiritual development through habituation, exemplary behavior, and

everyday interactions. Therefore, the integration of Islamic values cannot be achieved merely by inserting religious content into lessons but must also be reflected in teachers' behavior and classroom culture (Engkizar, Jaafar, Hamzah, et al., 2025). This finding indicates that teacher competencies at *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* need to be understood in an integrated manner. Pedagogical competence is required to design and implement learning that responds to students' needs, while personal and spiritual competencies are necessary to ensure that the educational process also contributes to character development. Case-based microteaching can serve as one strategy for developing these competencies, particularly in preparing teachers to manage classrooms with diverse levels of student ability.

Engkizar et al (2025) demonstrated that case-based microteaching can improve teachers' abilities to manage heterogeneous classrooms. This finding reinforces the argument that professional development for *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* teachers should not be limited to theoretical knowledge of instructional approaches but should focus on teachers' ability to apply these strategies in authentic classroom situations. Overall, the findings reveal an interconnected relationship among student characteristics, learning strategies, assessment, and teacher roles. Concrete and contextual learning requires strategies that enable students to experience the learning process directly. Islamic project-based learning provides learning experiences through the completion of projects or products, differentiated instruction provides learning pathways that respond to student diversity, and formative assessment provides information for continuously adjusting instruction. All of these processes require teachers who can function simultaneously as facilitators and *murabbi*. Therefore, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* involves not merely changing instructional methods but also transforming the learning ecosystem toward education that is more contextual, adaptive, integrative, and oriented toward the holistic development of students.

CONCLUSION

The analysis indicates that learning in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* within the Merdeka Curriculum should be oriented toward the integrated development of cognitive, affective, psychomotor, and digital competencies. These dimensions need to be connected with Islamic values through concrete and contextual learning experiences that are relevant to students' developmental characteristics. Three complementary strategies emerge as particularly relevant: Islamic project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and continuous formative assessment.

The findings further indicate that curriculum flexibility alone is insufficient to support meaningful learning transformation. Teachers play a central role as facilitators who organize responsive learning experiences and as *murabbi* who guide students' moral and spiritual development through habituation and exemplary practice. Thus, strengthening teacher capacity and integrating academic learning with Islamic values, student diversity, and continuous assessment are essential for developing a contextual, adaptive, and holistic learning environment in *Madrasah Ibtidaiyah*.

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