



## Development and Training of Islamic Religious Education Supervisors in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Nursikah Intan<sup>1</sup>, Mesiono<sup>1</sup>, Khadijah<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara, Indonesia

\*Corresponding Author: Nursikah Intan

Email: [intannursikah135@gmail.com](mailto:intannursikah135@gmail.com)



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### Abstract

*This study aims to analyze the mechanism of competency development and the supervision patterns of Islamic Education supervisors (PAI) in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Simalungun Regency. Using a qualitative approach with a multi-site study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation involving PAI supervisors, teachers, principals, and related parties from three non-driving public elementary schools. The results of the study indicate that the role of PAI supervisors has contributed to improving teachers' understanding of learning tools, assessment, and the strengthening of religious character, although the communication pattern applied is still predominantly top-down and not yet fully participatory. The main challenges encountered include the limited technological competence of teachers, infrequent supervision due to the wide coverage of mentees, and uneven support in terms of facilities and institutional resources. This study emphasizes the need to develop a coaching and mentoring-based guidance model and to optimize inter-institutional collaboration through the use of information technology as an effort to strengthen supervisors' capacity as agents of change. These findings have implications for formulating a more adaptive, sustainable, and contextual supervisory guidance strategy for PAI supervisors in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in non-pioneer regions.*

## Introduction

The paradigm shift in education in Indonesia continues to experience significant development in line with the demands of globalization and the needs of students to face the challenges of the 21st century (Iskandar, 2021). One of the major transformations undertaken by the government is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes freedom in learning, differentiated instruction, and the strengthening of students' character. This curriculum was introduced as an effort to address learning issues that have so far tended to be rigid, teacher-centered, and insufficiently accommodating of students' individual potential and needs (Abrori et al., 2024; Martin-Alguacil et al., 2024; Ghaleb, 2024; Mendoza, 2024; Akinsanya & Adeosun, 2025). In this context, the success of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on the readiness of teachers and infrastructure but also on the strategic role of education supervisors, particularly supervisors of Islamic Religious Education (PAI), who have an important function in fostering, supervising, and controlling the quality of religious education implementation in schools.

PAI supervisors are key figures who bridge national education policies with educational practices at the school level. They serve as professional mentors for teachers in translating the principles of the Independent Curriculum into learning activities that are contextual and character-oriented (Suharsongko et al., 2023; Fahrurrozi et al., 2025; Lumbanbatu et al., 2026).

However, facts on the ground show that many supervisors still do not fully understand the new approach introduced by the Merdeka Curriculum, such as differentiated learning, diagnostic assessments, and strengthening the Pancasila student profile. This condition indicates a gap between the demands of the curriculum and the competence of supervisors in carrying out academic and managerial supervisory functions.

This phenomenon is also seen in Simalungun Regency, one of the areas in North Sumatra Province that has considerable social, cultural, and geographical diversity. In this region, most public elementary schools are still non-driving schools, so the adaptation process to the Independent Curriculum is relatively slow. PAI teachers in these schools often face difficulties in understanding the curriculum structure, preparing teaching modules, and developing authentic assessments that align with the students' characteristics. In this situation, the presence of PAI supervisors should be the main support for teachers in obtaining guidance, training, and professional mentoring. However, supervisors in the field often face limitations, whether in terms of numbers, competence, or institutional support. Supervision of the supervisors is still formal and administrative in nature, and has not yet touched on the aspect of deeply and sustainably enhancing professional capacity (Nugraha, 2025).

According to Hariyadi et al. (2023), Education supervisors hold a strategic position in maintaining the quality and continuity of the educational process through the functions of guidance, supervision, and evaluation of teachers and school principals. Without directed development and guidance, these functions are difficult to perform effectively, especially in facing the dynamics of the Independent Curriculum, which demands reflective, adaptive, and collaborative abilities. On the other hand, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, as the supervisory institution for PAI supervisors, needs to innovate in the professional development patterns of supervisors, such as through competency-based training, Professional Learning Communities, and continuous field-based mentoring.

Observing this phenomenon, an in-depth study on the development and guidance of Islamic Education (PAI) supervisors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is needed, especially in public elementary schools that are not designated as pioneering schools in Simalungun Regency. Research using a multi-site study approach is important to illustrate the variations in practices, strategies, and challenges faced by supervisors in different schools, so that effective and contextual guidance patterns can be identified. The research results are expected to provide theoretical contributions for the development of an Islamic education supervision model that aligns with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as practical recommendations for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Education Office in improving the quality of supervisors as agents of change in the field of education (Posangi, 2024; Yulinar et al., 2023; Sopwan & Erihadiana, 2024; El Widdah, 2022).

Studies on the role and function of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) supervisors have been widely conducted in the context of improving the quality of education and academic supervision. Most previous research has focused on aspects of supervisor performance, the effectiveness of educational supervision, and strategies for guiding PAI teachers in the implementation of the national curriculum, such as the 2013 Curriculum. For example, research by Hassanah et al. (2024) showed that PAI supervisors play a significant role in improving teacher professionalism through competency-based supervision activities. Meanwhile, Yunita et al. (2023) emphasizing that supervisor development is more administrative in nature and less focused on fostering reflective and innovative skills in responding to changes in educational policy.

However, there has not been much research specifically examining the development and guidance of Islamic Education supervisors (PAI) in the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum, especially in public elementary schools that are not designated as driving schools in areas with limited educational resources, such as Simalungun Regency. Most existing studies still focus on driving schools or model education units that have received direct intervention from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek). Thus, there is a research gap in understanding how PAI supervisors in non-driving regions develop themselves and carry out their supervisory functions for teachers under conditions with minimal policy support, facilities, or training.

Furthermore, previous studies generally employed quantitative or simple descriptive approaches that only highlighted the relationship between supervisory competence and teacher performance, without delving deeply into the processes, strategies, and dynamics of coaching that occur in the field. Research on PAI supervisors in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum is also still rare in using multi-site qualitative approaches, even though this approach is important for understanding the variations in policy implementation in different schools with diverse social, cultural, and geographical characteristics. Therefore, this study fills an important gap in the literature by comprehensively examining the mechanisms of development and coaching of PAI supervisors in several non-mover public elementary schools in Simalungun Regency.

From the perspective of novelty, this study offers three main contributions. First, it provides a conceptual contribution through the development of a coaching and mentoring-oriented model for supervising PAI teachers in line with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum, replacing the old administratively-oriented paradigm. Second, it offers an empirical contribution by presenting a real picture of supervisory practices in non-driving schools, thereby broadening the understanding of policy implementation disparities in curriculum at the regional level. Third, it has a practical contribution in the form of strategic recommendations for the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Department of Education regarding patterns of professional development for supervisors based on regional contexts, which can be replicated in other areas with similar characteristics.

Thus, this study not only expands the body of knowledge on supervision and the development of PAI supervisors, but also introduces a new approach that is more contextual, reflective, and sustainable in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This study is expected to strengthen the capacity of PAI supervisors as change agents who play an active role in realizing the transformation of Islamic religious education that is adaptive to curriculum developments and societal needs in the modern era.

## **Methods**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a multi-site study design aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of the development and guidance of Islamic Education (PAI) supervisors in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in non-pioneer public elementary schools in Simalungun Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study not only seeks to identify the supervision and guidance practices occurring in the field but also to explore the meanings, relational dynamics, and structural and cultural conditions that shape these practices. Thus, this study is based on the assumption that the phenomenon of supervision does not stand in isolation technically and individually, but is influenced by the education governance system, resource distribution policies, and the institutional culture that develops in each educational unit. As emphasized (Creswell, 2020), Qualitative research allows researchers

to understand phenomena holistically through direct involvement with participants in their natural social context.

A multi-site study design was used because this research was conducted in several non-magnet public elementary schools that have different social, cultural, and institutional characteristics, even though they face the same policies and curriculum framework. This approach is intended not only to identify similarities and differences in supervision practices across locations, but also to analyze how variations in school culture, leadership orientation, community involvement levels, and socio-economic conditions contribute to differences in the effectiveness of guidance and supervision. Thus, the comparison between sites is positioned as an analytical tool to understand how structural and institutional factors shape different outcomes, rather than just as a contextual description.

The research location was focused on Simalungun Regency, North Sumatra Province, which was purposively selected because this area is still in the adaptation phase of the Merdeka Curriculum and has a number of public elementary schools that are non-pilot schools with varying levels of readiness. Three schools were chosen as research sites considering variations in the availability of PAI (Islamic Education) teachers, institutional support from the schools, and the intensity of supervision received. This selection was intended to provide a space for analysis of how differences in institutional conditions influence schools' responses to supervisory guidance, including why some schools exhibit more adaptive practices compared to others.

The research subjects were supervisors of Islamic Religious Education responsible for guiding public elementary schools in the Simalungun Regency. Supporting informants included PAI teachers, school principals, and officials at the Ministry of Religious Affairs Office of Simalungun Regency. The selection of informants was carried out using purposive sampling techniques, taking into account experience, structural position, and direct involvement of informants in the supervision process and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The determination of the number of informants followed the principle of data saturation, which occurs when the information obtained shows recurring patterns and no longer yields new substantive findings.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation studies (Moleong, 2000). Semi-structured interviews are used not only to identify the challenges and supporting factors of supervision, but also to explore how educational actors perceive supervisory relationships, institutional authority, and the resource limitations they face. Observations are conducted to capture supervisory practices in real contexts, including patterns of interaction, communication, and power dynamics between supervisors, teachers, and school leaders. These two techniques are used in an integrated manner to allow for triangulation of sources and methods, while also providing room for analysis of the connections between individual experiences and institutional structures.

Data analysis was carried out interactively and continuously with reference to the model (Miles & Saldaña, 2024) which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. In the data reduction stage, researchers not only group data based on surface themes, but also identify structural patterns, contradictions between informants, and cause-and-effect relationships that arise from differences in context across sites. Data presentation is carried out in the form of thematic narratives and comparative matrices that allow cross-site analysis, so that differences and similarities do not stop at the descriptive level, but are directed towards understanding why these conditions emerge and persist. Drawing conclusions is done through

a process of repeated verification to ensure that the findings reflect the complexity of supervision reality influenced by individual, institutional, and policy factors.

The validity of the data is maintained through the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as stated by (Sugiyono, 2022). Credibility is strengthened through source and method triangulation as well as member checking to ensure that the researcher's interpretations align with the informants' experiences. Transferability is maintained by providing detailed contextual descriptions so that readers can assess the relevance of the findings to similar contexts. Dependability is achieved through the systematic recording of the research process, while confirmability is ensured through the researcher's critical reflection and cross-data comparisons to minimize subjective bias.

Through this methodological approach, the research is expected not only to provide an overview of the practices of coaching and supervision of PAI supervisors, but also to reveal how structural factors, institutional culture, and educational policies interact in shaping the success or limitations of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Thus, the research findings are expected to offer a theoretical contribution to the development of Islamic education management studies, as well as practical contributions for formulating more contextual, fair, and sustainable supervision policies at the regional level.

## Results and Discussion

### **Synergy and Coordination Among Institutions in the Development of Islamic Education Supervisors**

As observed in SD 095201 and SD 091550, the synergy and coordination among the institutions concerned with advancement of the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) supervisors have been implemented in a planned and sustainable way, but there are still a few constraints at the implementation level. In this regard, PAI supervisors are administrative assessors as well as strategic mediators linking the government with the school instructions.

PAI supervisors in the two schools are proactive in defining coordinated relations with local Office of Religious Affairs, principals, PAI teachers and school committees. As observed at SD (SD095201), the supervisors are directly involved in reflective dialogs with the teachers after the classroom observations. Such discussions have not only addressed the achievement of learning objectives but also the methods of instruction like the use of group discussions in moral and worship related materials.

This observation corroborates the finding that supervision is done in a dialogic and collaborative way. A supervisor explained:

*“We always try to maintain communication with principals and teachers, not only during official supervision. Usually, after observations, we sit together to discuss weaknesses and improvement plans.”*

In the light of structural coordination, PAI administrators perform academic and managerial supervision on a regular basis, and this involves examination of lesson plans, teaching resources and assessment tools. Supervisors at SDNegeri091550 gave instructions on how religious character values are incorporated in project based learning activities. The principal of SD Negeri 095201 stated:

*“The presence of the supervisor greatly helps us in guiding teachers, especially in preparing learning tools. We often follow up the supervision results through internal meetings.”*

This implies that the internal school mechanisms are systematic in promoting supervisory coordination.

Cultural and religious aspects of school life also show synergy besides academic supervision. At SD 095201, supervisors were also actively involved in the rollout of Quranic literacy programs that were undertaken before the actual lessons. On the other hand, the formation of the religious character at SD 091550 was reinforced by training the young imams and bilal along with the community involvement. A school committee member explained:

*“Supervisors often invite us to discuss religious programs. We are involved in planning, so school activities receive stronger community support.”*

These practices demonstrate that institutional coordination extends beyond classroom instruction to character development and community engagement.

From the teachers’ perspective, supervision is perceived as professional mentoring rather than mere performance evaluation. A PAI teacher stated:

*“After supervision, we usually receive direct feedback. We are not only criticized but also guided on how to improve. This makes us more confident in teaching.”*

This finding reinforces the role of supervisors in supporting teachers’ pedagogical development.

Nevertheless, several challenges affect the effectiveness of coordination. The frequency of supervision remains limited due to the wide supervisory coverage area and administrative demands, resulting in uneven mentoring intensity. A supervisor acknowledged:

*“We supervise many schools, so it is not possible to provide intensive mentoring for all of them. Sometimes coordination can only be done through short messages.”*

A teacher from SD Negeri 091550 added:

*“Coordination already exists, but it is not very frequent. If supervisors could visit more often, mentoring would be more effective.”*

Besides, direct interaction between supervisors and schools has not completely utilized digital media to use systematic reporting and follow-up instructions. The differences in the provision of learning facilities, especially digital-based instructional media also determine the application of supervisory recommendations.

All in all, on the basis of the observations and interviews, it can be stated that inter-institutional synergy and coordination in the creation of quality of Islamic Education (PAI) supervision at SD 095201 and SD 091550 have been realized efficiently and in collaboration. PAI supervisors serve both in administrative supervisor roles and professional mentor and mediator roles in the educational policy. However, the shortcomings associated with frequency of supervision, use of technology, and availability of resources are still a big problem; therefore, better coordinational systems and institutional grounds should be enhanced to maximize the growth of PAI supervision.

### **Communication Patterns and Implementation of Guidance for PAI Supervisors in Non-Driving Schools**

According to the observations in SD 095201 and SD 091550-schools, which could be referred to as non-driving, it was observed that the communication strategies between Islamic Education (PAI) supervisors and school stakeholders ought to be fair, but they could use a better approach

that would help them ensure the processes of mentoring are sustainable. The dominant communication scheme is mainly vertical, where supervisors are dominant in terms of giving instructions, directions, and reviews, whereas PAI teachers and principals are expected to be more of policy and supervision recommendations.

As a practice, face-to-face communication is the main mechanism that is used by PAI supervisors, particularly during predetermined monitoring and evaluation (M&E) exercises. In such visits, supervisors would focus on inspecting instructional preparedness which includes lesson plans, teaching journals as well as assessment records. The discussions usually follow the form of already set supervision rules and checklists. A supervisor explained:

*“During supervision visits, we usually focus on reviewing documents first, such as lesson plans and reports, because these are required by the system.”*

This observation supports the finding that supervisory practices still remain highly administrative compliance oriented.

In one instance, the supervisor conducted a review of completed instructional documents and gave feedback on diversifying student-centered learning techniques during one of the M&E activities at SD095201. In SD 091550, the supervision process was more inclined to the achievement of administrative needs without further reflective in-depth discussions. A teacher from SD Negeri 091550 stated:

*“Most of the time, the supervisor checks our documents. There is not much opportunity for discussion.”*

This confirms that interactive dialogue remains limited in certain contexts.

In addition to face-to-face communication, supervisors utilize digital communication media, particularly WhatsApp groups and private messages, to disseminate information related to supervision schedules, reporting requirements, and institutional programs. However, this digital communication remains largely one-way and informational in nature. A teacher from SD Negeri 095201 explained:

*“We usually receive information through WhatsApp, such as schedules and instructions, but rarely use it for discussion.”*

This finding indicates that digital platforms have not yet been optimized as spaces for professional dialogue.

Limited utilization of digital platforms is also reflected in teachers' engagement with online systems such as SIMPATIKA and e-supervision platforms. Several teachers reported accessing these systems only when explicitly instructed. One teacher stated:

*“I usually open SIMPATIKA only when the supervisor asks us to submit reports.”*

This shows that digital tools are still perceived primarily as administrative instruments rather than learning resources.

From a mentoring perspective, supervisors focus their guidance on improving teachers' professional and pedagogical competencies, particularly in implementing student-centered learning and strengthening religious values. Supervisors encourage teachers to integrate moral values into thematic learning and daily religious routines. A PAI teacher stated:

*“The supervisor often gives examples of how to connect lesson materials with students' daily religious practices.”*

This supports the finding that mentoring is directed toward character-oriented instruction.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of mentoring is strongly influenced by each school's level of responsiveness. SD Negeri 095201 demonstrates relatively stronger follow-up mechanisms, including internal coordination meetings and documentation of action plans. In contrast, SD Negeri 091550 faces obstacles related to limited facilities and weak post-supervision coordination. The principal of SD Negeri 091550 explained:

*"We understand the recommendations, but sometimes it is difficult to follow them up because of limited resources."*

This statement reinforces the link between institutional capacity and mentoring effectiveness.

Interviews with supervisors reveal that time constraints, large supervisory coverage areas, and reporting obligations contribute to the dominance of instructive communication patterns. A supervisor stated:

*"Because we supervise many schools, communication often becomes more directive. There is not enough time for long discussions."*

This condition limits opportunities for participatory interaction.

On the whole, the combined results of observations and interviews suggest that the communication and mentoring practices of the supervisors working at SD 095201 and SD 091550 have been actualized according to the supervisory functions but are still characterized by the one-way, vertical, communication. The most common supervision is face-to-face communication and the use of digital media is seen as an administrative coordination mechanism. The responsiveness of schools plays a key role in the effectiveness of the mentoring process, and SD 095201 has greater ability to adhere to the supervisory instructions than SD 091550 which depends almost entirely on facilities, intensity of coordination, and digital literacy. Therefore, two-way communication reinforcement and digital platform optimization are critical towards improvement of sustainable professional mentoring in non-driving schools.

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for PAI Supervisors in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

As observed in the field, the realisation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Education (PAI) in SD 095201 and SD 091550 is not only affected by the technical aspects of the instruction but also by structural, institutional and cultural processes which influence the supervisory practice and school reaction. In this regard, the work of the supervisor of PAI becomes critical, but its efficiency depends mainly on the school ecosystem where the work of the supervisor is performed.

In terms of facilitating factors, it can be seen that PAI supervisors are highly committed towards facilitating the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum. Such commitment can be seen through the ongoing technical guidance, especially with regards to helping teachers to come up with teaching modules, carrying out diagnostic tests, and the formulation of student-centered learning plans. A supervisor explained:

*"We always try to guide teachers in preparing modules and assessments, especially according to the new curriculum, so they can adjust their teaching."*

This statement supports the finding that supervisors actively facilitate teachers' adaptation to curriculum changes.

Institutional leadership also serves as an important supporting factor. At SD Negeri 095201, the principal consistently provides space and time for teachers to discuss supervisory

recommendations. Internal coordination forums enable systematic follow-up on supervision results. The principal stated:

*“We allocate special time for teachers to discuss supervision feedback, so it can be implemented properly.”*

This indicates alignment between external supervision and internal school management.

Teachers’ positive attitudes toward supervision further strengthen curriculum implementation. PAI teachers at SD Negeri 095201 reported that mentoring helps clarify instructional directions and increases their confidence. One teacher stated:

*“After receiving guidance, we understand better how to apply differentiated learning in our classes.”*

This response reflects growing pedagogical awareness among teachers.

In addition, collaborative school culture supports the effectiveness of supervision. Teachers, principals, and supervisors cooperate in organizing religious and character-building activities, creating a conducive environment for curriculum implementation. A teacher explained:

*“We often work together to apply the supervisor’s suggestions in religious activities.”*

Despite these supporting conditions, several inhibiting factors constrain the optimization of supervision. One major obstacle is teachers’ limited understanding of core Merdeka Curriculum concepts, particularly differentiated instruction and formative assessment. A teacher from SD Negeri 091550 stated:

*“Sometimes we are still confused about differentiated learning because we have not received enough training.”*

This indicates insufficient professional development opportunities.

Low digital literacy also hinders the use of technology-based supervision and learning innovation. Observations show that many teachers rely on basic communication tools and experience difficulties accessing digital platforms. A teacher explained:

*“I am not very confident using online systems, so I need more guidance.”*

This limitation reduces the effectiveness of digital supervision.

Structural constraints further inhibit supervision practices. The limited number of supervisors and the wide geographical coverage reduce the frequency and intensity of mentoring. A supervisor acknowledged:

*“We supervise many schools, so it is difficult to provide continuous assistance to each one.”*

As a result, follow-up monitoring is often limited.

Resource limitations also affect curriculum implementation. Inadequate learning facilities, limited access to training, and unstable internet connectivity restrict teachers’ ability to apply innovative teaching methods. The principal of SD Negeri 091550 stated:

*“We want to improve learning, but facilities and training opportunities are still limited.”*

This confirms the impact of infrastructure constraints.

The combined findings from observations and interviews demonstrate that supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in PAI instruction are interconnected and systemic. Supervisory commitment, leadership support, collaborative culture, and positive teacher attitudes function as key enabling factors. Conversely, limited pedagogical competence, low digital literacy, structural workload, and inadequate resources act as major barriers. While supervision serves as an important catalyst for curriculum implementation, its effectiveness ultimately depends on institutional readiness and equitable access to professional development support. Therefore, strengthening capacity-building programs, improving infrastructure, and reducing supervisory workload are essential to enhance sustainable curriculum implementation.

### **Synergy and Coordination Among Institutions in the Development of Islamic Education Supervisors**

The results of the observations and interviews taken together indicate that both facilitating and inhibited processes in the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in the teaching of PAI are interrelated and structural. The enabling factors are supervisory commitment, leadership support, collaborative culture and positive teacher attitudes. On the other hand, poor pedagogical competence, poor digital literacy, structural workload, and insufficiency of resources are significant barriers. Although supervision is a valuable trigger in the implementation of the curriculum, its efficiency later relies on the readiness of the institution and fair access to the resources of professional development. As such, the capacity-building programs, infrastructure and supervisory workload need to be reinforced to increase the sustainable implementation of curriculum.

This study results suggest that the synergy and coordination among institutions in developing the quality of Islamic Religious Education (PAI) supervisors at SD'egri'095201 and SD'egri'091550 are in good category and are capable of helping in developing the quality of the PAI learning. These conclusions coincide with the studies (Warsono, Sriyanto, Harahap, & Murtafiah, 2022) according to which a significant component of the role of PAI supervisors is the effective cooperation between the educational stakeholders on both school and City/Regency Ministry of religious Affairs Office levels.

As will be noted in the interview findings with AS, the technical support given by the supervisors in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has contributed to the teachers in enhancing their skills in the development of the teaching modules and diagnostic assessment. This reinforces the results (Zubaidi & Saidah, 2025) that affirm that academic supervision is always associated with a higher level of pedagogical competence of PAI teachers. Supervisor support can be either guidance or direct mentoring, as the educational and collaborative principles of supervision direct.

Moreover, the presence of good institutional coordination can also be traced on the part of the role played by the principal in the promotion of different character-based religious programs. The fact that the supervisors promote learning innovations to empower the Pancasila Student Profile as stated by HR aligns with the results of the research conducted by Alfania et al. (2025), which rationalized the idea that supervisor guidance helped to enhance the quality of the implementation of religious character education in elementary schools. This cultural cooperation is a significant reason of the effective application of the Independent Curriculum in the PAI subjects.

The other type of synergy is demonstrated in collaboration with the school committee and the community to arrange religious services like Quran literacy, training of young imams. Akhyar et al. (2022) concluded that the community engagement in Islamic education enhances the background of religious values and character building of students. Results in field research in this study demonstrate that there were some signs of support to the notion that external support also reinforces the role of supervisors to develop religious character.

Despite this, this paper has found that there are a number of barriers to the effective synergies in implementation. Among the barriers, the weak nature of supervision can be identified due to a large number of supervisees, which was directly mentioned by MF. This fact is supported by the results of Wahyuni (2023) who stated that the high workload reduces the ability of supervisors to monitor the learning process. Another hindrance is the fact that not all teachers are technologically literate as reported by informant IN. This is linked to the results of Arwitaningsih et al. (2023) that emphasizes the uneven spread of digital transformation in the PAI supervision, and, more importantly, elementary-schools that are not adequately equipped with the necessary infrastructures. Moreover, administrative factors represent the technical barriers, which is brought out by RN. Siregar, Hanani, Sesmiarni, Ritonga, and Pahutar (2024) prove that the effectiveness of supervision depends on how the organizational structures of teaching staff are organized in line with the standards of learning evaluation, thus making the flaws in handling documents a problem that should be remedied systematically.

In the conceptual perspective, the success of inter-agency synergy observed can be seen as supporting the theoretical model of educational synergy, in which the quality of supervision is mediated by a harmonious relationship among the supervisors, teachers, and principals (Hidarya, Sudarna, Febriliana, and Suhendri, 2024). As a result, the increasingly popularized approaches of mutual coordination and participatory mentorship imply that the professional growth of PAI supervisors at the school level is shifting along with the reforms in the national curriculum that focus on staff working in teams, being independent, and strengthening the character of students. Overall, the current results not only expand the empirical state of knowledge concerning the importance of institutional synergy but also confirm its relevance to the paradigm of the Independent Curriculum that places more emphasis on transformative collaborative learning and the support of religious values in basic schooling.

### **Communication Patterns and Implementation of Guidance for PAI Supervisors in Non-Driving Schools**

The results of this study indicate that the communicative styles of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) supervisors, at SD Negeri 095201 and SD Negeri 091550 will mostly be effective in aiding the establishment and the supervision of the PAI development, however, their effectiveness will be faced with some hindrances. These findings support the existing studies that highlight the importance of a strong communication between supervisors and teachers as a factor that significantly contributes to improved the quality of PAI instruction and teacher professionalism.

The study by Lasmiany and Yuliansyah (2025) found out that a carefully planned and consistent supervisor-teacher communication helps in enhancing the quality of curriculum implementation and lesson planning. This can be seen to be the case at SD Negeri 095201 whereby, refinements in teaching materials and student religious activities were brought about due to supervisory guidance. Timely arrangement of follow-up meetings in the school hastens the implementation of supervisory recommendations, which is expounded by HR who noted that the creative abilities of teachers changed after regular administration of coaching.

Furthermore, Muani, Cholid, HR, Ulumuddin, and Sa'idah (2024) emphasize that a top-down model of communication still dominates the educational supervision in Indonesia, but often limits the possibilities of teachers to share their feedback. Informant AN proved this phenomenon by stating that, in many cases, the communication that is initiated by a supervisor seems to be unidirectional. This piece of evidence further supports the opinion that guidance success is not just dependent on the clarity of instructions, but also the active role of teachers as collaborators in the supervisory process.

Communication technology, especially WhatsApp Groups, has become an important aspect of co-ordination. This is in line with what Tou (2023) argues that the digital media are quickening the information flow and supervisory reporting. However, the obstacles at SD Negeri 091550 suggest that follow-up of coaches cannot be effective due to low technological literacy of teachers. As reported by SL informants, there were constant challenges with the platform of SIMPATIKA and e-supervision, which caused the inefficiency of administering learning and reporting of supervisors. The next study by Illah, Mansur, Hidayatullah, Sariman, and Seena (2022) revealed infrastructure preparedness and digital competence as the critical determinants of the success of technology-based supervision.

In the view of the supervisors, MF maintained that, due to the heavy workload coupled with the wide scope of schools they had to manage, there is need to focus on the instructional communication. This finding is in line with that of Putri and Iskandar (2023), who state that the effect of reduced supervisor visit intensity can reduce the continuity of development, thus producing a strong argument on why more powerful bidirectional collaboration model is required. The participatory type of supervision can also be used to strengthen the responsibility of teachers towards increasing the quality of Islamic Education.

The guidance of supervisors, besides, strengthening the religious character of students, helps to develop their professional competencies. Empirical studies like Qur'an literacy and instilling moral virtues with the help of supervisors, have been associated with positive results as Sitorus et al. (2025) state that PAI supervision plays a crucial role in creating a school culture with a religious feel.

In theory, the current research supports the educational communication theory that suggests information clarity, continuity of coordination, active involvement of stakeholders, and technological readiness determine the effectiveness of supervisors. Therefore, it is crucial to maximize the patterns of two-way communications and encourage fair use of digital media so that PAI supervisors could have a significant impact on the quality of learning, especially, in non-industrial schools, in the context of the promotion of the Merdeka Curriculum development.

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for PAI Supervisors in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**

The findings of the observations and interviews, that were carried out in SD Negeri 095201 and SD Negeri 091550, show that the process of the Merdeka Curriculum application to the subjects of Islamic Religious Education has gone well, even though some technical and structural challenges remain. Overall, the most common aspects that contribute to the persistence of this new curriculum implementation are the guidance and help given by PAI supervisors. These results are consistent with Abdillah et al. (2023) who stress that academic supervision is an important tool to facilitate the success of educational innovation in schools.

To emphasize the role of supervisors in motivation, the informant AN pointed out that motivation is largely achieved through active involvement of the supervisors especially when

it comes to the development of student-centered learning. This statement supports the existence of observational data about the intense devotion of supervisors to the delivery of technical support, which supports the relevance of the Merdeka Curriculum framework, which is based on the ability of teachers to design meaningful learning experience to students, particularly the use of diagnostic assessment and differentiated instruction (Soro et al., 2023).

In addition to competence of supervisors, synergy among school stake holders has also been identified to be a major contributor as opined by the HR informant. The administration of SD Negeri 095201 assisted in the management aspect by offering specific time to follow up on the results of supervision which had a positive effect in increasing the number of students attending the PAI activities. These results are also consistent with the findings of the study by Posangi (2024), who argues that collaborative school leadership enhances the performance of supervision and speed up the process of localizing curriculum policies in the educational units.

However, both of the observation and interviews prove that teacher preparedness is a significant challenge to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. According to SL informants, the knowledge of teachers on differentiated instructions and formative assessment is still not as broad as it can be, which can hinder the shift towards a paradigm shift between teacher-oriented and participatory learning in accordance with the curriculum policy direction. This barrier aligns with the study conducted by Khalifaturrahmah (2022) who notes that pedagogical literacy of teachers on the main ideas of the curriculum strongly determines the success of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The other challenge that has been identified is the low level of distribution of technology literacy and training among teachers, as informed by teacher ND. The poor skills that teachers have in using digital platforms leads to inefficient supervision and barriers to the execution of technology based learning innovation. This observation is consistent with the analysis by Romdhoni (2023), who assumes that the digital transformation of the educational process will not work without the further enhancement of the ICT skills of the teachers.

In respect to the supervisors themselves, intensive supervision is also problematic due to the relatively small number of staff to be supervised and the large geographical areas that need supervision as reported by informant MF. The situation has implications on the effectiveness of follow-up procedures and subsequently hinders ongoing observing the learning gains. The challenges are also reflected in the work by Supadi and Fauzi (2024) that states that the unequal number of supervisors to schools can influence the quality of guidance dramatically.

Generally, this discussion implies that the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Education (PAI) subjects in non-pilot schools has received a good structural and moral support with the active involvement of the supervisors and school development of new schools. Nevertheless, these successes still need to be supported in a number of aspects, especially, the development of teachers in terms of their pedagogic and digital skills, the equalization of training opportunities, and the tightening of the planned supervision. Meeting these difficulties is likely to allow implementing the Merdeka Curriculum more optimally and directly affect the improvement of the quality of learning PAI in accordance with the requirements of the 21st century competencies.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of supervision by Islamic Religious Education (PAI) supervisors at SD Negeri 095201 and SD Negeri 091550 shows that synergy and coordination between institutions, especially between the Ministry of Religious Affairs, schools, and PAI supervisors, have made a positive contribution to the implementation of the Merdeka

Curriculum in PAI subjects. A structured communication pattern in guidance can enhance teachers' competencies in lesson planning, assessment, and strengthening students' religious character values. However, the effectiveness of supervision is still hindered by teachers' limited readiness in implementing differentiated learning, low technological literacy, the broad scope of supervisor guidance which results in suboptimal frequency of assistance, and inadequate learning support facilities in several schools. These findings imply the need to strengthen ongoing support based on two-way communication, ensure equitable training on the Merdeka Curriculum for PAI teachers, optimize learning facilities, and implement policies to reduce the workload in supervisors' assigned areas to enhance the intensity of monitoring and evaluation. Nevertheless, this study has limitations as it only involved two non-driving schools and has not deeply included the perspectives of students and school committees. Therefore, future research is recommended to broaden the range of subjects, involve more diverse stakeholders, and use a longitudinal design so that the development of supervision and teachers' adaptation to the Merdeka Curriculum can be seen more comprehensively.

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