

Integration of Religious and Ethical Foundations in Education: A Study of Curriculum Objectives and Content

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Abstract

Education in Indonesia plays a strategic role in shaping students' character by strengthening religious and ethical foundations in the curriculum. This study aims to analyze the integration of religious and ethical values in the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in terms of its objectives, content, and implementation in the context of arts education. The research method used literature study and policy analysis by examining academic sources and relevant education regulations. The results of the study show that the Merdeka Curriculum explicitly places the Pancasila Student Profile as the foundation for character building, with the dimensions of faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble character as the main indicators. The integration of religious and ethical values is realized both through core subjects, such as Religious Education and Pancasila, and across disciplines through the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). In arts education, these values are reflected through the use of local and religious-based artworks that contribute to strengthening students' moral awareness, ethics, and cultural identity. However, implementation in the field still faces challenges in the form of variations in teacher competence, differences in value interpretation, and limited supporting facilities. This study concludes that the integration of religious and ethical foundations in the Merdeka Curriculum plays an important role in shaping the character of students holistically, thus requiring a structured, contextual, and collaborative implementation strategy, especially in arts education.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Character Education, Religious Values, Ethics, Arts Education, Pancasila Student Profile.



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Introduction

The integration of religious and ethical values in education is a fundamental aspect that has long been a concern in Indonesia. Philosophically and juridically, the Pancasila of Indonesian national education is rooted in religious and moral values. Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System emphasizes that the goal of national education is "to develop the potential of students to become people who believe in and fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, skilled, creative, independent, and become democratic and responsible citizens." This formulation places the aspects of faith (religion) and noble character (ethics) as the main expected outcomes of the education system. In other words, the curriculum and learning process at each level must pay attention to the moral-spiritual development of students along with the mastery of academic knowledge and skills. In the history of Indonesian education, efforts to integrate religious and ethical education have been implemented in various forms. Religious Education (according to the religion of each student) is

compulsory at all levels of education, as is Civic Education, which is rich in Pancasila values, morals, and national ethics. In addition, since the 2013 Curriculum era, the government has launched Character Education Strengthening (PPK) which emphasizes five main values: religiosity, nationalism, independence, mutual cooperation, and integrity. These values are in line with the principles of Pancasila and serve as guidelines in shaping students' daily behavior. The transformation to the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022 continues this spirit with a more flexible and contextual framework. The Merdeka Curriculum gives greater autonomy to educational units and educators to develop meaningful learning, while emphasizing essential competencies and the character profile of Pancasila students. One of the main differences is the introduction of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), which is a cross-disciplinary project activity specifically designed to instill Pancasila values (including religious and ethical values) in a tangible way in the learning experiences of students.

Arts education, as part of the curriculum, has a strategic role in integrating religious and ethical values. Art inherently contains aesthetic dimensions, cultural expression, and symbolic values of Pancasila that can be effective means of moral learning. Art education students and art teachers in schools have a unique opportunity to insert moral, spiritual, and ethical messages through artistic activities. For example, Latifatul Naima *et al.* (2025) show that the integration of cultural arts in Islamic Religious Education learning is able to touch on the affective and aesthetic aspects of students, making the learning process more interactive and meaningful. Religious art activities—such as calligraphy, Islamic music, and moral drama—are effective in conveying religious values emotionally. In turn, this kind of integrative approach not only increases students' appreciation of art but also strengthens their religious, creative, and tolerant character.

Although important, the integration of religious and ethical foundations into the curriculum is not without challenges. Many factors influence the effectiveness of character education, including the competence of educators in connecting subject matter with values, the consistency of school policies, and the support of parents and the environment. This is where an in-depth study of how the curriculum is designed and implemented to address these challenges is needed. As a master's student in arts education, the author sees the urgency of reviewing the Merdeka Curriculum from the perspective of integrating religious and ethical values, especially in the context of arts education. The key questions to be answered through this study are: (1) To what extent do the objectives and documents of the Merdeka Curriculum accommodate religious and ethical foundations? (2) How does the content of the curriculum (structure, subjects, projects) incorporate and integrate religious and ethical values? (3) How are these values implemented in educational practice, especially in the field of arts education, and what are the challenges and strategies faced?

To answer these questions, this study was conducted using a qualitative method based on literature review. Data sources included academic literature (journal articles, proceedings, and research reports) as well as official policy documents related to the curriculum. The analysis was conducted using a descriptive-analytical approach, which involved presenting findings from various sources and linking them to obtain a comprehensive understanding. It is hoped that the results of this study can contribute theoretically and practically to the development of a more humanistic implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, rooted in noble values while remaining relevant to the current context, particularly through the arts education pathway.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach with a *library research* and *policy analysis* design. This approach was chosen because the focus of the research is to map and interpret the integration of religious and ethical foundations in the objectives and content of the curriculum, especially in the Merdeka Curriculum framework and its implications for arts education.

The data sources consist of two groups. First, official policy/regulatory documents that serve as curriculum references, such as the National Education System Law, policies on strengthening character education, national education standards, and documents/guidelines on the Merdeka Curriculum and

the Pancasila Student Profile. Second, scientific literature in the form of books and journal articles relevant to the themes of character education, educational ethics, religious values-based education, and arts education as a medium for internalizing values.

Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation studies, namely the search and collection of policy documents and scientific literature in a purposeful manner based on the following criteria: (1) directly relevant to the keywords religion–ethics–curriculum–arts education, (2) credible (official documents and academic publications), and (3) sufficiently up-to-date for the context of the Merdeka Curriculum policy. All documents were then classified according to theme (curriculum objectives, curriculum content, value integration strategies, the role of arts education, and implementation challenges).

The data analysis technique used content analysis with the following stages: (1) data reduction through coding of concepts and key statements containing religious and ethical values; (2) data display through narrative presentation and mapping (including value integration mapping tables); and (3) drawing conclusions through thematic synthesis to formulate patterns of value integration and their implications for arts learning design. , triangulation of sources was conducted to increase accuracy by comparing findings from policy documents and findings from scientific literature, as well as checking the consistency of terms (e.g., definitions of character, ethics, and Pancasila learner profiles) between sources.

This study has limitations because it is conceptual and document-based, so it does not directly capture field practices. Therefore, the results of this study are interpreted as conceptual mapping and recommendations for implementation design that still require empirical testing through case studies or action research in the school context.

Results and Discussions

1. Results

a. The Objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum related to the Integration of Religion and Ethics

Conceptually, the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to respond to the challenges of 21st-century education without neglecting the philosophical roots of national education. In terms of objectives, this curriculum emphasizes relevant, flexible, and meaningful learning and explicitly carries the mission of strengthening the character of students. The government emphasizes that the Merdeka Curriculum aims to improve the quality of learning to make it more meaningful, give independence to schools/teachers, improve teacher competence, and, last but not least, strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile as the foundation of national character. Thus, the integration of religious and ethical values is directly reflected in the official objectives of the curriculum. Pangkey & Wongkar (2024) note that character education in the Merdeka Curriculum is considered crucial to overcoming the moral crisis in the modern era. According to them, there are two main objectives of character education in the Merdeka Curriculum: First, to build the basic character of students in accordance with the values of Pancasila (religious, nationalistic, integrity, independence, mutual cooperation). Second, to shape students who have religious spiritual strength, self-control, personality, intelligence, and noble character to face future challenges. This statement combines the values of Pancasila with the formulation of national education objectives, demonstrating the continuity between the new curriculum policy and the long-term vision for education.

The integration of religious and ethical foundations at the goal level is also evident in supporting documents for the Merdeka Curriculum, such as implementation guidelines. In various socialization efforts, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) emphasized that the Pancasila student profile must be a reference in every step of learning. This means that every learning plan needs to consider its contribution to the formation of the six dimensions of the profile. This requires teachers to design learning outcomes that are not only cognitive in nature, but also include attitudes and values. Many of the learning outcome indicators in the prototype curriculum (the precursor to the Merdeka Curriculum) are oriented towards the

ability of students to demonstrate behavior in accordance with Pancasila values. For example, in arts and culture subjects, learning outcomes include attitudinal aspects such as "appreciating the diversity of artworks as national cultural wealth" – a statement that contains the ethics of tolerance and nationalism. Similarly, in other subjects such as science and social studies, there are elements of learning outcomes related to responsibility, environmental awareness, and an honest scientific attitude. With these objectives formulated, it can be said that the integration of religious and ethical values is not an "addition" but is inherent in the philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Belajar (Freedom of Learning) policy that underlies this curriculum also places independence and character as outputs on par with academic competence. In the long term, it is hoped that Indonesian education graduates will not only excel in knowledge but also have a strong moral identity. This is relevant to the current global situation where 21st-century skills demand character qualities (such as curiosity, initiative, persistence, adaptability, leadership, social awareness) in addition to literacy skills and foundational knowledge. The Merdeka Curriculum attempts to address this with a combination of strengthening competencies and character based on Pancasila.

b. Curriculum Content: Religious and Ethical Content in the Merdeka Curriculum Structure

The curriculum content covers various components, ranging from the structure of subjects, the material or content of each subject, to special learning activities such as projects. In the Merdeka Curriculum, religious and ethical content appears in the following layers:

- a. Compulsory Subjects: Religious Education and Morality, as well as Pancasila and Civic Education (PPKn) remain part of the curriculum structure at every level (elementary, junior high, high school/vocational high school). These subjects directly discuss religious and ethical themes. Religious Education content covers faith, worship, morals, and religious history, which instill the foundations of faith and ethics for each religion. Meanwhile, PPKn teaches Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution, the rights and obligations of citizens, legal norms, and democratic culture, all of which are related to moral values, civic ethics, and national character. In the Merdeka Curriculum, the syllabus for these subjects is adjusted to support the Pancasila Student Profile. For example, Religious Education does not only test doctrinal knowledge, but is oriented towards encouraging students to practice the teachings in their lives (through religious project assignments, such as community service based on places of worship). Similarly, Civic Education learning is expected to be more contextual, such as case studies of current events involving moral dilemmas or discussions of issues of tolerance in society.
- b. Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5): As explained, P5 is an innovation in the Merdeka Curriculum that explicitly serves as a vehicle for integrating values across subjects. Each P5 theme is related to a specific value. For example, the theme of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* emphasizes the values of tolerance and diversity; *Sustainable Lifestyle* emphasizes the values of environmental responsibility and social awareness; *Local Wisdom* emphasizes respect for traditions and cultural identity (which often contain local religious/ethical values). In these projects, students are actively involved in discovering the meaning of these values through experience. Dini Setiasih (2025) describes P5 as learning that makes students "not only learn theory, but face real problems, work together, and understand the noble values of the nation." In other words, P5 shifts the instillation of values from classroom lectures to action and reflection in the field. This is consistent with experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984), in which learning to be a person of value should involve the stages of experiencing, observing, reflecting, and applying.
- c. Integration in Other Subjects: Although only PAI and PPKn explicitly focus on religious and ethical values, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages all subject teachers to contribute to the formation of the Pancasila Student Profile. This can be done by linking subject material to relevant values. For example, Indonesian language teachers can choose literary readings that are rich in moral messages for students to analyze; history teachers can highlight the exemplary

character of national figures with integrity; science teachers can discuss research ethics and the moral impact of scientific discoveries (e.g., ethics in biotechnology, the issue of global warming as a shared human responsibility, etc.). The Merdeka Curriculum does not regulate this rigidly, but rather gives teachers the freedom (through the principles of teaching at the right level and context) to incorporate values according to the needs of their class. This flexibility is an advantage over the previous curriculum, which was so structured that teachers sometimes found it difficult to innovate in instilling values outside of "religion/civics subjects."

- d. Textbooks and Teaching Materials: Textbooks compiled for the Merdeka Curriculum generally include values in each chapter. For example, science textbooks feature profiles of national scientists with noble character, or begin chapters with reflective introductions (such as verses from holy books or quotes) that are relevant to the topic as a catalyst for ethical discussion. Language and literature textbooks contain fables/narratives that contain moral messages and comprehension questions that encourage students to articulate values. The government also provides Pancasila Student Profile project modules and reflection sheets that guide teachers and students in evaluating their character development throughout their learning. The following table summarizes several aspects of the curriculum and examples of the integration of religious and ethical values in it, namely:

Table 1.
Mapping the Integration of Religious and Ethical Foundations in the Merdeka Curriculum (Focus on Arts Education)

Curriculum Components	Integration of Religious and Ethical Values
National Education Goals	To foster the formation of individuals who are faithful, devout, and of noble character
Merdeka Curriculum Objectives	Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile as the foundation of character (religious, mutual cooperation, integrity, etc.).
Subject Structure	Includes PAI and PPKn as core subjects (directly teaching religion and ethics).
Learning Outcomes (CP)	LC formulations include behaviors consistent with Pancasila values (e.g., demonstrating honesty and discipline).
Pancasila Profile Project (P5)	Contextual learning themes instill values (e.g., Local Wisdom projects foster tolerance and love for culture).
Teaching Materials and Textbooks	Inspirational stories, role models, or religious quotes are included to foster ethical discussion.
Extracurricular Activities & School Culture	Regular group worship, flag ceremonies (nationalism), school code of conduct, etc., reinforce values learning

Source: Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning National Education System, Presidential Regulation No. 87 of 2017 concerning Strengthening Character Education, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Decree No. 262/M/2022 (Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation/Merdeka).

2. Discussions

From the above explanation, it is clear that the Merdeka Curriculum strives to present holistic educational content: not only the transfer of knowledge, but also the transformation of values. Its advantage is that values are not placed in one or two subjects, but are integrated in an integrated and contextual manner in various parts of the curriculum. This requires creativity and high awareness from educators to always look for opportunities to link lessons with character education.

a. The Application of Religious and Ethical Values in Arts Education

In this section, the focus will be on how religious and ethical values are manifested in the practice of arts learning, in line with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Arts education in schools (generally through the subject of Cultural Arts or local arts content) can be a laboratory for character building, if teachers are able to manage aesthetic experiences into educational experiences that have moral value.

- 1) Integrated Arts Learning Planning: Arts teachers in developing the Merdeka Curriculum's Lesson Plan (RPP) are encouraged to include the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile. For example, in the learning objectives (TP), in addition to artistic skills, teachers can write down attitude targets such as "through the practice of regional music ensembles, students are expected to learn cooperation (mutual assistance) and mutual respect". Success indicators are not only measured by the quality of students' artwork, but also by observing their behavior during the creative process (whether they are patient, disciplined, able to work together, etc.). Thus, from the planning stage, teachers have already intended to integrate values. This is in line with the recommendations of Nijma et al. (2025), who emphasize the importance of a structured approach to value integration in children's education; that is, teachers must deliberately design activities that promote the internalization of values, not just casually.
- 2) Contextual and Reflective Learning Implementation: In art classes, active learning methods are very common, such as students drawing, sculpting, playing music, dancing, or acting. Teachers can incorporate values by: (a) choosing themes for work that contain values, (b) exemplifying and emphasizing attitudes during the process (e.g., fair play in role-playing, or helping each other in performances), and (c) conducting reflective discussions after activities. As an illustration, in art class, the teacher gives the assignment of making a poster with the theme of "religious tolerance." Students indirectly learn the concept of tolerance when they express it in their posters. After the assignment is completed, the teacher invites students to present the meaning of their posters and how tolerance can be applied at school. This reflection process is very important because, according to experiential learning theory, experiences become meaningful lessons when they are reflected upon. Field research shows that children who are invited to discuss moral values after art activities tend to better understand and remember the message. Conversely, without reflection, students may enjoy drawing/playing but fail to grasp the essence of the values.
- 3) Utilizing Local Wisdom in Art: The Merdeka Curriculum encourages schools to incorporate local wisdom into learning. Traditional art is a part of local wisdom that is rich in value. Art teachers can invite traditional art practitioners (e.g., puppeteers, traditional dancers, calligraphers) to share stories about the philosophy behind their work. Students will learn that traditional art is often created as an expression of gratitude to God or moral advice for the community. For example, Balinese carving art is laden with Hindu religious symbols and teachings of harmony, rendang (Minang cuisine which is also an art of cooking) contains the philosophy of patience and togetherness, and the Saman dance of Aceh trains unity and high discipline as a reflection of the value of mutual cooperation. By understanding this context, students do not merely learn artistic techniques but also absorb the inherent virtues. This supports Zainal's (2023) finding that value integration can be achieved by leveraging local culture, making learning contextual and relevant to students' lives.
- 4) Value-Based Art Projects: Schools can design collaborative cross-curricular projects involving art to reinforce religious and ethical values. For example, in celebration of Independence Day, art, civics, and Indonesian language teachers collaborate to hold a heroic art performance: students create a musical drama about the national struggle. From this activity, in addition to developing their artistic talents, students also internalize patriotism (national ethical values) and heroic role models (moral values). Another example is the P5 project with the theme "Voice of Democracy," which can be implemented by making a short film about honesty in student

council elections, involving art teachers for technical training. There, students learn democratic ethics (honesty, fairness) while developing their creativity in acting and cinematography. The involvement of art in the project makes the learning atmosphere more enjoyable and engaging, so that values are easily internalized. As revealed by Setiasih (2025), the project approach is able to make students more active, creative, and understand values in a real context.

- 5) **Character-Based Evaluation and Feedback:** The implementation of values in art classes also depends on how teachers evaluate. The Merdeka Curriculum implements a more formative and humanistic assessment, meaning that the assessment is not only a number but also a description of attitude development. Art teachers can give appreciation to students who show good attitude during the process (e.g., "Ananda A helped his friend carry the stage props, showing a very good attitude of mutual cooperation"). This kind of feedback reinforces the message that moral aspects are valued equally with the results of the work. In addition, students' art portfolios can be supplemented with self-reflection in which students write about their experiences, including values, during the creative process. Thus, evaluation is not only about the art product, but also the character-building process.

Through the above strategies, art education can become an effective integrative vehicle. Research by Naima et al. (2025) provides evidence that innovative learning models such as project-based learning, experiential learning, and contextual teaching in Madrasah Aliyah have succeeded in increasing students' religious understanding, active participation, and emotional involvement in learning. Students become more active and delve deeper into the lessons because the medium of art makes them feel comfortable and morally touched. Their findings clearly state: "the integration of arts and culture in PAI learning can improve the aesthetic value of learning and strengthen students' religious, creative, and tolerant character." Furthermore, this integration is seen as a learning solution that is relevant to the times but remains rooted in Islamic values and local culture. In other words, combining art with values education addresses two needs at once: 21st-century pedagogical innovation and the preservation of students' moral and cultural identity.

b. Challenges and Solutions for Implementation

Realizing the integration of religious and ethical foundations in the curriculum, including through arts education, certainly faces various challenges. Several findings from studies and field reports reveal issues that need to be addressed:

- 1) **Teacher Competence and Mindset:** Not all teachers feel confident or accustomed to integrating values into learning, let alone using art media. Nijma et al. (2025) emphasize that the lack of teacher competence is one of the main challenges in character education at the early childhood education level. The same applies at other levels—teachers need a holistic understanding of pedagogy. Some teachers may still focus on academic (cognitive) achievement because that is what has been tested so far. The Merdeka Curriculum demands a change in mindset: teachers as character educators as well as content teachers. One possible solution is continuous teacher training and mentoring (in-service training) related to value integration methods. For example, Merdeka Curriculum workshops specifically for the arts and civics clusters that introduce cross-value lesson plans, share good practices among teachers, and create a bank of character-oriented activity ideas. In addition, support from school principals is needed to encourage teachers to innovate without fear of failure, given that new approaches will inevitably require adjustments.
- 2) **Variations in the Interpretation of Religious and Ethical Values:** Indonesia is very diverse in terms of culture and religion. One value can be manifested in different practices in different communities. Nijma et al. (2025) also mention variations in the interpretation of religious values as a challenge. For example, the concept of "noble character" can be interpreted differently by teachers with different cultural/religious backgrounds. To overcome this, the curriculum and schools need to have a basic understanding—perhaps through a school code of ethics or vision and mission statement—that refers to universal values. The Pancasila Student Profile is actually

already a common platform, but its implementation in schools needs to be agreed upon. The approach to values must be inclusive: religious values, for example, must be taught universally (honesty, compassion, etc.) so that they encompass all religions, rather than being narrowly dogmatic. Art teachers also need to be sensitive, for example, in choosing religious symbols or stories to be presented in classes with multi-religious students, choosing those that are universal or rotate between cultures.

- 3) **Limited Resources and Facilities:** The integration of values through art is sometimes constrained by facilities. Not all schools have complete art equipment or access to local artists. Especially in remote or disadvantaged areas, teachers may find it difficult to obtain art teaching materials with values. Nijma et al. (2025) mention limited resources in rural areas as an obstacle that needs to be overcome. As a solution, teachers can utilize simple or local materials. For example, using natural materials for symbolic crafts with religious value (leaves, stones for calligraphy mosaic collages), or using local oral stories as material for drama. Equal distribution of facilities from the government is also important—for example, the provision of traditional musical instruments in schools and ready-to-use P5 modules—to assist teachers. The use of technology can also be a solution: in the digital age, teachers can access videos of cultural arts with moral values from the internet to watch with students, if it is difficult to bring in authentic speakers.
- 4) **The Influence of the Digital Age and Media:** The current generation is greatly influenced by gadgets, social media, and information overload. In terms of value integration, this has two sides: on the one hand, digital media can be a creative tool (e.g., short films, educational animations for values), but on the other hand, negative content on the internet can undermine character education efforts. Nijma et al. (2025) refer to the influence of the digital age as a challenge for moral education. Children can be exposed to online violence or pornography, which is counterproductive to the values taught in school. Therefore, current value integration strategies must be integrated with digital literacy. Art teachers, for example, when teaching graphic design, should also instill digital ethics (not violating copyright, not creating SARA content). Schools also need to involve parents in monitoring media use at home, so that the values instilled are consistent between school and home.
- 5) **Sustainability and Collaboration Evaluation:** Often, value integration programs run well at the beginning, but it is difficult to monitor their sustainability. The challenge of character education evaluation is its qualitative and long-term nature. Students may behave well at school but not necessarily outside of school. The solution is a tripartite character education collaboration: school, family, and community. Parents are actively involved through regular communication about their children's behavioral development. School committees can create parenting programs about instilling values at home. In the community, schools can partner with cultural/religious leaders to jointly reinforce values (e.g., Service Learning programs where students practice social work in places of worship or local arts communities). With this network, character education does not stop at the school gate. Ultimately, the implementation of religious and ethical integration in the curriculum requires the commitment of all parties. The findings of the study by Nijma et al. (2025) emphasize the importance of a structured and collaborative approach so that character education is in line with the national vision. Structured means deliberately planned in the curriculum and learning; collaborative means involving teachers, schools, parents, and the community. If the above challenges can be overcome with the right strategies, the integration of religious and ethical values will produce tangible results: students who are highly knowledgeable and virtuous.

Conclusion

The integration of religious and ethical foundations in education is not merely a supplement, but rather the essence of the national education objectives as mandated in the constitution and legislation. The Merdeka Curriculum, as the latest curriculum innovation in Indonesia, has accommodated this essence by placing the Pancasila Student Profile—particularly the dimensions of faith, piety, and noble character—at the heart of the curriculum. An analysis of the curriculum objectives shows continuity between curriculum policy and the vision of developing Indonesians who excel academically and morally. In terms of content, the Merdeka Curriculum explicitly includes religious and ethical values through compulsory subjects (Islamic Education, Civics) and implicitly through integration in various subjects and especially through the contextual Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5).

In its implementation, arts education has proven to be a strategic vehicle for integrating religious and ethical values. Aesthetic experiences in arts learning can touch students' affective realm, enabling deep internalization of values. Studies and practice show that involving local arts and culture in learning increases the effectiveness of character education—students learn with their hearts and minds. Artwork, stories, music, and dance with moral nuances can strengthen students' empathy, tolerance, cooperation, and faith. This integration also makes learning more lively and relevant to the times, while remaining rooted in the nation's identity.

However, the challenges in implementation should not be overlooked. Various obstacles, such as the readiness of educators, limited resources, and the negative influence of digital media, need to be addressed with the right strategies. Teachers, as the spearhead, must be equipped with integrative pedagogical competencies and supported by a conducive school environment. A collaborative approach with families and communities is also crucial to ensure consistency in instilling values. Only through joint efforts can the noble goal of shaping a generation with character be realized.

Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum has provided a framework and great opportunities for the integration of religious and ethical foundations in Indonesian education. It is now up to all stakeholders to make the most of it. For arts education, this curriculum opens up a wide space for creativity to make art not only a medium of aesthetic expression but also a medium for internalizing ethics. It is hoped that in the future, more value-based arts learning innovations will emerge, supported by empirical research that tests their effectiveness. This literature review is also limited to policy and literature analysis; field research in arts classrooms would be very useful to complete the picture of implementation. Hopefully, the integration of religious and ethical values in the curriculum can continue to be strengthened so that the educational goal of producing intelligent individuals with character can truly be realized.

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