

Breaking Barriers: Examining Inclusive Education in Islamic Schools through the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

Khofidotur Rofiah, Farida Isroani, Muhammad Nurrohman Jauhari*

Corresponding Author: mnjauhari@unipasby.ac.id

Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland

Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sunan Giri Bojonegoro, Indonesia

Universitas PGRI Adi Buana Surabaya, Indonesia

ABSTRACT

This study analyses how inclusive education is being implemented in Madrasah in Indonesia through the "Merdeka Belajar" program. The research uses document and content analysis to examine the Decree of Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia about guidelines for the implementation of the "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum in madrasahs (KMA RI No. 347 of 2022) policy document as a means to comprehend the intricate essence and origin of the issue, particularly in relation to inclusive education. The study reveals that the policy document mentioned the term diversity, students with disabilities, and inclusive education, however, the terms are limited and still need more specific explanations about inclusive education. The result shows that the "Merdeka Belajar" program is an important initiative that seeks to create inclusive classrooms where all students can receive a quality education in Madrasah setting.

Keywords: Inclusive Education; Madrasah; Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education is a concept that seeks to create equal educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, backgrounds or any other factors that may pose a barrier to their learning (World Bank Group, 2019; WHO, 2017; UNESCO, 2017). This means that schools must provide appropriate support and resources to ensure that all students can succeed (Disability Rights International, 2019). In Indonesia, inclusive education is becoming increasingly important as the country strives to provide quality education to all of its citizens (UNICEF, 2017). One such initiative that seeks to promote inclusive education in Indonesia is the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) program (Wagino; Rofiah, K 2020).

Merdeka Belajar was launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture in 2021, as a response to the growing need for inclusive education in the country. The program aims to create inclusive classrooms where all students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities, can receive a quality education. The Merdeka Belajar program is focused on providing support to teachers, who are the front-line workers in creating inclusive classrooms. The program provides training and resources to help teachers understand the needs of students with disabilities, and how to create inclusive learning environments. This includes providing support for physical accessibility, such as ramps and accessible

restrooms, as well as ensuring that students with disabilities are able to participate in all aspects of the learning process (Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021).

In addition to providing support to teachers, the Merdeka Belajar program also aims to increase the number of students with disabilities in the classroom. This is done by providing support and resources to families, to help them understand the importance of inclusive education, and to encourage them to enroll their children in school. The program also provides support to schools, to help them create inclusive learning environments, and to provide support to students with disabilities.

One of the key benefits of the Merdeka Belajar program is that it helps to create a more inclusive society. By providing equal educational opportunities to all students, regardless of their abilities, disabilities or backgrounds, the program helps to break down the barriers that may have prevented some students from participating in the learning process. This in turn helps to create a more inclusive society, where everyone has the opportunity to reach their full potential (Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). The Merdeka Belajar program is an important initiative that seeks to promote inclusive education in Indonesia. By providing support to teachers, families and schools, the program is helping to create equal educational opportunities for all students, regardless of their abilities, disabilities or backgrounds. This will not only help to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, but also help to create a more inclusive society.

The implementation of inclusive education in Madrasahs in Indonesia has been a topic of interest for researchers. Recent studies have focused on the challenges and opportunities of inclusive education in the country. One study found that the lack of teacher training and support, inadequate facilities, and negative attitudes towards students with disabilities are major barriers to implementing inclusive education (Abdullah & Rumiati, 2019). Another study explored the perspectives of Madrasah teachers on inclusive education and found that while most teachers are aware of the importance of inclusion, they lack knowledge and skills on how to effectively include students with disabilities in their classrooms (Aini, 2021).

However, some studies have also identified potential strategies to promote inclusive education in Madrasahs. A study by Rofiqoh et al. (2020) proposed a model of inclusive education that includes community involvement, collaboration between stakeholders, and capacity building for teachers. Another study by Hamdan et al. (2021) highlighted the importance of providing adequate accommodations and support for students with disabilities, including assistive technology and individualized education plans.

Overall, these studies emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to implementing inclusive education in Madrasahs in Indonesia, which involves teacher training, community involvement, and adequate accommodations and support for students with disabilities. While there are challenges to overcome, there are also potential strategies that can be implemented to create more inclusive classrooms and promote quality education for all students in Madrasah settings.

Based on the previous studies mentioned, it can be inferred that research on inclusive education in the context of Madrasahs in Indonesia is still in its early stages. Most of the previous studies have focused on the challenges and barriers to implementing inclusive education in general educational settings, rather than specifically in Madrasahs. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature regarding the implementation of inclusive education in Madrasahs, particularly in relation to the "Merdeka Belajar" program. Furthermore, the existing literature on inclusive education in Madrasahs has largely focused on the experiences of students with disabilities, rather than the broader concept of inclusive

education that encompasses diversity and equality for all students. This gap in the literature highlights the need for research that examines the implementation of inclusive education for all students in Madrasahs, including those from diverse backgrounds.

In this paper, it is important to look at important curriculum policy documents such as the KMA RI number 347 of 2022 to see how inclusive education is mentioned in these documents. By using document analysis, terms related to inclusive education, diversity, children with special needs are looked at quantitatively as the main objective in this research.

METHOD

The research method used in this study is document and content analysis. This method involves analyzing documents, such as policy documents, to identify patterns, themes, and meanings. In this study, the researchers used this method to examine the "merdeka Belajar" program in KMA RI number 347 of 2022, a policy document related to inclusive education in Islamic schools in Indonesia. By analyzing this document, the researchers aimed to gain insights into the implementation of the program and the approach to inclusive education in the context of Islamic schools.

The current research involved an analysis of the KMA RI number 347 of 2022, which outlines Islamic education practices in Indonesia for the "Merdeka Belajar" education program. The focus of the analysis was on inclusive education, which was conducted using the content analysis method. Content analysis is a research approach that allows researchers to indirectly study human behavior by analyzing their products, such as policy documents, textbooks, articles, newspapers, songs, political statements, novels, and images. Additionally, content analysis enables the study of evolving education trends by examining professional and general publications (Fraenkel, et al 2012). According to Cardno (2018), research that addresses issues in education can benefit from the use of policy documents to gain insight into the complex nature and sources of these problems. Policy document analysis is a research tool that allows for an investigation of the content and underlying factors of a policy document. This method is particularly suited for use in qualitative research projects.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the KMA RI document analysis research number 347 of 2022 are described as follows:

1. Inclusive Education in KMA RI number 347 of 2022

In the regulation issued by the Minister of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, KMA RI number 347 of 2022, some terms about inclusion, diversity and children with special needs are mentioned (graphic 1), but they are very small and tend to refer to specific rules about inclusive education itself.

From graphic 1, it is illustrated that people with disabilities are mentioned 5 times, special needs children are mentioned 3 times, inclusive education is mentioned 3 times, diversity is mentioned 7 times, and gifted and talented is mentioned 2 times. The importance of counting the number of terms is to quantify the focus and consent of the policy document.

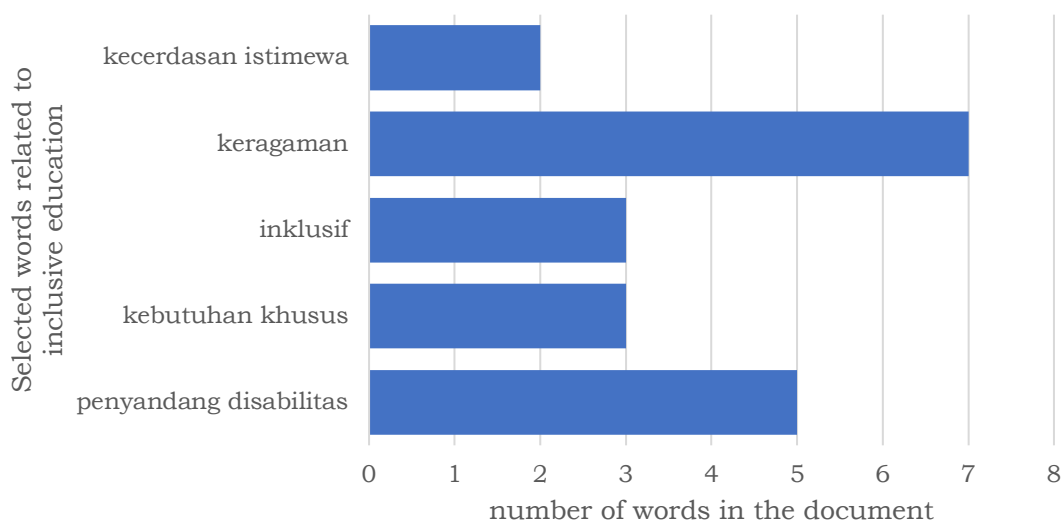


Figure 1: Analyse the quantity of specific words in the KMA RI number 347 of 2022

2. The diversity

Diversity in this policy is intended to be more about the diversity of traditions, culture and local wisdom that is the wealth of the nation's culture as illustrated in the following KMA RI number 347 of 2022. According to KMA RI number 347 of 2022, the policy on diversity aims to celebrate the richness of Indonesia's cultural traditions and local wisdom. Students are encouraged to develop an understanding and appreciation of the diversity of traditions, cultures and local wisdom that contribute to the nation's cultural wealth. The policy promotes inquiry and exploration of local culture and wisdom and encourages learners to play a role in preserving it. In addition, learners are expected to learn about the concepts and values that underpin local arts and traditions and to reflect on how these values can be applied in their own lives (KMA RI number 347 of 2022, p. 7).

KMA RI number 347 of 2022 highlights the importance of diversity as a graduate competency standard in madrasah education. The competency descriptions for elementary, middle, and senior high school levels integrate the elements of diversity into the curriculum. Learners are expected to know and express their identity and culture, recognize and appreciate cultural diversity, engage in intercultural interactions, and promote the unity of the Republic of Indonesia (KMA RI number 347 of 2022, p. 10-12).

Furthermore, the policy emphasizes the government's efforts to promote diversity in the curriculum to strengthen the Pancasila learner profile. Learners are encouraged to understand and accept the differences in ethnicity, race, religion, and culture in Indonesia as a source of wealth for the nation. They are expected to promote mutual respect and avoid conflict and violence (KMA RI number 347 of 2022, p. 52).

3. Disability students

KMA RI number 347 of 2022 uses the term "disability" in reference to students with special needs in various sections of the policy document. According to the policy, students with special needs may have disabilities, difficulties, obstacles, disorders, or other conditions that require special attention and support. The content standard for

Islamic Religious Education and Arabic for students with disabilities is designed with flexibility in mind to accommodate the unique characteristics and conditions of these students based on assessment results (KMA RI number 347 of 2022, p. 7, 16).

The statement is related to the Content Standards for Islamic Religious Education and Arabic Language in Madrasahs which were developed referring to the Graduate Competency Standards and Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021 concerning National Education Standards and has been amended by Government Regulation Number 4 of 2022 concerning Amendments to Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021 concerning National Education Standards which states that for students with disabilities, teachers should consider the principle of flexibility in standards and practically adjust to the conditions of students.

According to the policy document, the content standards in Islamic education and Arabic language for madrasah are designed to cover the minimum criteria needed to achieve graduate competencies. The materials are adapted dynamically to address the current challenges faced by the community, and they consider the individual characteristics and social environment of learners. Moreover, the content standards also provide flexibility and adaptation to meet the specific needs of learners, including those with special situations such as disabilities and those living in remote communities (KMA RI number 347 of 2022, p 19, 22 and 24).

4. Inclusive Education

According to the policy document, the Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia highlights its commitment to inclusive education by providing customized services for students with disabilities who attend madrasahs, as exemplified in the following excerpt: "Education units that provide inclusive education in madrasahs (according to level) offer special needs programme services based on the condition of the students according to assessment results" (KMA RI number 347 of 2022, p. 33, 35, and 40).

The mention of special services and programs for students with disabilities in this policy document is not accompanied by an explanation of this. Assessments is also mentioned as the basis for the provision of special needs services. Despite the challenges and difficulties faced in practice, it is heartening to learn that the government is committed to supporting the implementation of inclusive education in madrasah settings in Indonesia.

Developing a learning curriculum for a large, diverse, and developing country such as Indonesia requires careful consideration. The country's diversity in terms of culture, social levels, and uneven economy, along with the competition of personal and group interests, pose challenges in creating a unified curriculum (Anas, et al 2023). However, the central government establishes national standards, which serve as the main guidelines in implementing the learning curriculum (Uno, 2020). Madrasahs, as local educational institutions, have the authority to innovate and develop their own curriculum, as long as it aligns with the national standards (Mesiono, 2018).

The Merdeka Curriculum, established in 2022 through KMA RI No. 347, aims to improve the quality of education in madrasahs by granting them independence in managing and implementing their own education. The curriculum focuses on developing the students' skills to find and process information and strengthening their love for their country by

emphasizing the values of Pancasila (Anas, et al 2023)., Jauhari, M. N., Mambela, S., Shanty, A. D., Nurmasari, D., Usfinit, A. H., & Batlyol, A. (2022)

The Merdeka Curriculum has several key components, including graduation standards, content standards, implementation guidelines, and monitoring and evaluation. Teachers are expected to keep up with the times by incorporating technology into their teaching methods and inspiring students to think deeply and find solutions wisely. Professionalism and competence are crucial in creating a positive learning environment that motivates students (KMA RI number 347 of 2022). The graduation competency standards for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah students include developing noble character based on faith and piety, guiding students based on Pancasila values, and providing literacy and numeracy skills for future education (KMA RI number 347 of 2022).

The KMA RI number 347 of 2022 policy document reflects the Indonesian government's commitment to promoting diversity, inclusive education and support for students with disabilities in madrasah settings. This is in line with previous research that highlights the importance of inclusive education and support for students with disabilities.

Research has shown that inclusive education can benefit all learners, including those with disabilities, by promoting social inclusion, improving academic performance, and fostering positive attitudes towards diversity (Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2014; UNESCO, 2017). Inclusive education is also considered a human rights issue, as all children have the right to education that meets their individual needs and abilities (United Nations, 2006).

Similarly, research has also emphasized the importance of supporting students with disabilities in education settings. Students with disabilities are at higher risk of academic underachievement, social exclusion, and limited future opportunities (UNESCO, 2014). Thus, providing tailored support and accommodations for students with disabilities is critical for ensuring that they can access education and reach their full potential (Gordon, Kaufman, & McKeown, 2016).

The KMA RI number 347 of 2022 policy document recognizes the importance of diversity, inclusive education, and support for students with disabilities. However, it is important to note that the implementation of such policies in practice may face challenges. Research has shown that challenges in implementing inclusive education include limited resources, lack of teacher training, negative attitudes towards disability, and inadequate policies and laws (Mitra & Sambamoorthi, 2014; United Nations, 2018).

Therefore, it is important for the Indonesian government to continue to prioritize and invest in inclusive education and support for students with disabilities, while also addressing any challenges that may arise in the implementation process. By doing so, Indonesia can work towards ensuring that all learners have access to education that meets their needs and abilities, promotes diversity and inclusion, and supports their future success.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the "Merdeka Belajar" program in Indonesia is playing a significant role in promoting inclusive education in the Madrasah. Through the KMA RI No. 347 policy document, the Indonesian government is prioritizing equality in education, providing resources and support, and offering teacher training programs. The policy document mentions diversity and inclusive education, but the terms are limited and mainly refer to specific rules about inclusive education. The analysis of the policy document using content

analysis showed the significance of document and content analysis as a method for investigating the nature of a policy document in qualitative research projects. Inclusive education is crucial in creating a positive learning environment that motivates students and promotes equality in education, regardless of their abilities, disabilities, backgrounds, or any other factors that may pose a barrier to their learning. The "Merdeka Belajar" program is an important initiative that seeks to create inclusive classrooms where all students can receive a quality education.

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