

Thematic - Integrative Aqidah Teaching Material Model in the Independent Curriculum

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Abstract

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires the development of Islamic Religious Education teaching materials that are more flexible, contextual, and focused on strengthening students' character. In the context of Aqidah subjects, the main challenge lies in maintaining the depth of theological values while adapting them to thematic and integrative learning approaches. This research aims to develop a conceptual model for formulating thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials aligned with the Independent Curriculum. This study uses a qualitative approach, drawing on literature enriched by conceptual-analytical analysis of Islamic education literature, thematic learning, and Independent Curriculum policies. The results of the study show that the development of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials should be based on the principles of integrating faith values with contextual themes, cross-disciplinary integration, student-centered learning, and orientation toward the formation of character and competencies in the 21st century. This research produced a conceptual model of Aqidah teaching materials that places Aqidah values as the core, a thematic-integrative approach as a framework for organizing materials, and contextual learning as an implementative orientation. As a form of operationalization of the model, this study also presents an illustration of the application of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials. These findings are expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution to the development of relevant, adaptive, and meaningful Islamic Religious Education teaching materials in the context of the Independent Curriculum.

Keywords: *Aqidah, teaching materials, thematic learning, integrative Islamic education, Independent Curriculum.*

Abstrak

Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka menuntut pengembangan bahan ajar Pendidikan Agama Islam yang lebih fleksibel, kontekstual, dan berorientasi pada penguatan karakter peserta didik. Dalam konteks mata pelajaran Aqidah, tantangan utama terletak pada upaya mempertahankan kedalaman nilai teologis sekaligus menyesuikannya dengan pendekatan pembelajaran tematik dan integratif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk merumuskan model konseptual pengembangan bahan ajar Aqidah tematik dan integratif yang selaras dengan arah Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan jenis kajian kepustakaan yang diperkaya melalui analisis konseptual-analitis terhadap literatur pendidikan Islam, pembelajaran tematik, dan kebijakan Kurikulum Merdeka. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa pengembangan bahan ajar Aqidah tematik dan integratif perlu didasarkan pada prinsip keterpaduan nilai keimanan dengan tema kontekstual, integrasi lintas disiplin, pembelajaran berpusat pada peserta didik, serta orientasi pada pembentukan karakter dan kompetensi abad ke-21. Penelitian ini menghasilkan sebuah model konseptual bahan ajar Aqidah yang menempatkan nilai Aqidah sebagai inti, pendekatan tematik-integratif sebagai kerangka pengorganisasian materi, dan pembelajaran kontekstual sebagai orientasi implementatif. Sebagai bentuk operasionalisasi model, penelitian ini juga menyajikan ilustrasi contoh penerapan bahan ajar Aqidah tematik dan integratif. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat memberikan kontribusi teoretis dan praktis bagi pengembangan bahan ajar Pendidikan Agama Islam yang relevan, adaptif, dan bermakna dalam konteks Kurikulum Merdeka.

Kata kunci: *Aqidah, bahan ajar, pembelajaran tematik, pendidikan Islam integratif, Kurikulum Merdeka.*

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INTRODUCTION

The education landscape in Indonesia has undergone a significant transformation with the introduction of the Independent Curriculum, which aims to liberate learning through a flexible, student-centered approach and to strengthen competencies across disciplines. In the context of Islamic education, especially in the subject of Aqidah, the main challenge lies in designing teaching materials that not only maintain the depth of theological substance but also address contextual, thematic, and integrative learning needs in line with the curriculum policy. In line with this, Muliardi¹ emphasized that the Independent Curriculum emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills, creativity, and character values as part of the vision of education that is adaptive to changing times.

The development of material components in the Independent Curriculum, including the subject of Islamic Religious Education, is directed to a thematic and contextual approach so that the learning material is not only theoretical, but also has practical relevance in the lives of students². In this framework, the concept of Aqidah as an integral part of PAI needs to be developed adaptively to align with the Independent Curriculum's character. The thematic and integrative Aqidah approach is seen as a strategic alternative for connecting the principles of faith with students' daily realities. This is in line with the view Buri³, which emphasizes the importance of thematic learning in integrating various competencies across subjects into one meaningful theme.

In addition, an integrative Islamic education approach that combines Islamic values with various disciplines can enrich students' learning experiences. Through thematic learning, teachers have the space to integrate Islamic values into learning themes that are relevant to the context of students' lives⁴. However, implementing thematic Aqidah teaching materials in the Independent Curriculum still faces challenges, particularly due to limitations in the conceptual framework that systematically links the principles of integrative Islamic education with the demands of 21st-century competencies. Amin dan Sukari⁵ emphasized that globalization presents challenges as well as opportunities for Islamic education, so adaptation efforts are needed that do not sacrifice fundamental Islamic values.

Given these conditions, studies that specifically develop a conceptual framework for creating thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials within the Independent Curriculum remain relatively limited. Although the Independent Curriculum provides space for flexible, thematic, and integrative learning, the Aqidah teaching materials used today are generally structured in a linear, normative manner, which tends to present religious values as separate content rather than integrating them with the context of cross-disciplinary learning. The study of the integration of the pillars of Islamic teachings shows that the incorporation of religious values in the curriculum requires a more integrated material design in order to be able to encourage the internalization and practice of values in the real lives of students, but such a design is still not widely found in current curriculum practices⁶. Furthermore, thematic-integrative curriculum innovations recorded in Islamic education literature are still rarely explored with a focus on Aqidah subjects, so that the

¹ M Muliardi, "Mengembangkan Kreativitas Dan Karakter Bangsa Melalui Kurikulum Merdeka Di Madrasah," *Takuana: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sains, Dan Humaniora* 2, no. 1 (2023): 1–12, <https://doi.org/10.56113/TAKUANA.V2I1.68>.

² M Cholil Alwi and M Wasith Achadi, "Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar PAI Di Sekolah Dasar Negeri," *Didaktika: Jurnal Kependidikan* 13, no. 1 (2024): 825–32, <https://doi.org/10.58230/27454312.1383>.

³ B Buri, "Model Pembelajaran Tematik Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *Pedagogik: Jurnal Pendidikan* 6, no. 1 (2019): 221–51.

⁴ N H Pulungan and N Hayati, "Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Islam Dalam Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Perspektif Hadis," *Jurnal TILA (Tarbiyah Islamiyah Lil Athfaal)* 4, no. 2 (2024): 528–38, <https://doi.org/10.56874/TILA.V4I2.2011>.

⁵ A Y Al Amin and S Sukari, "Isu Pendidikan Islam Di Era Globalisasi," *Hikmah: Jurnal Studi Pendidikan Agama Islam* 2, no. 1 (2025): 242–50, <https://doi.org/10.61132/HIKMAH.V2I1.598>.

⁶ Sumiati and Mumtahanah, "Konsep Integrasi Pilar-Pilar Ajaran Islam Dalam Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam," *MUDARRISUNA: Media Kajian Pendidikan Agama Islam* 15, no. 2 (2025).

development of conceptual models of teaching materials that support the interconnectedness of themes, religious values, and cross-disciplinary learning remains an important gap that needs to be filled by this research⁷.

Therefore, this research aims to develop a conceptual framework for the creation of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials in line with the Independent Curriculum. The novelty of this research lies in the effort to position Aqidah as a theological foundation that is contextualized thematically and integratively, so that it is expected to make a conceptual and applicative contribution to the development of Islamic Religious Education learning that is more relevant, dynamic, and has an impact on the formation of students' character.

In this study, the term 'thematic' is interpreted operationally as an approach to organizing Aqidah teaching materials around contextual themes close to students' lives, so that the concept of faith is not taught separately but is associated with students' social reality, environment, and learning experiences. Meanwhile, the term integrative is understood operationally as an effort to relate Aqidah values to various disciplines, learning competencies, and dimensions of attitudes and skills, so that Aqidah learning is not partial but holistic and applicable.

This study uses a qualitative approach, with a literature review enriched by conceptual-analytical analysis. This approach was chosen because the research aims to develop a conceptual framework for the development of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials within the Independent Curriculum, without collecting field data. The research data are drawn from Independent Curriculum policy documents, especially those related to Islamic Religious Education, as well as from scientific literature relevant to Aqidah, thematic learning, and integrative Islamic education. Data were collected through documentation studies and analyzed by the stages of principle identification, concept linkage analysis, and conceptual framework synthesis. To strengthen the study's applicability, this study also provides examples of the application of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials based on the results of the conceptual analysis and curriculum documents. The example is presented as an academic illustration to demonstrate conceptual implementation, not as a result of field practice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Unlike previous studies that tended to discuss Aqidah in the Independent Curriculum normatively and descriptively, this study specifically formulated a conceptual model of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials, complemented by application illustrations, to contribute to learning design at the level of concept mapping, not just concept mapping.

Conceptual Foundations of Thematic and Integrative Aqidah Teaching Materials

The conceptual foundation outlines the main principles underlying the development of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials within the Independent Curriculum. In Islamic education, understanding Aqidah is not merely theoretical; it must also be grounded in real-life contexts and across disciplines, so that students can understand and internalize Islamic values in depth. The thematical-integrative approach offers a relevant paradigm for bridging Aqidah learning with other content in a contextual and integrated manner, so that it does not stand apart from students' daily learning experiences.

Several studies show that the thematic-integrative paradigm in Islamic Religious Education can strengthen students' internalization of values and character by incorporating Islamic values into a broader learning theme. For example, the thematic-integrative model allows Islamic values to be integrated with a range of other subjects or learning themes to create a more holistic, contextually

⁷ Kiki Anita Rahmawati et al., "Islamic Curriculum Innovation in Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools as an Integrative Approach in Learning Jurisprudence, Akidah, and Tajweed," *Indonesian Journal of Innovation Studies* 26, no. 3 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.21070/ijins.v26i3.1404>.

rich learning experience⁸. In addition, the study of the concept of integration of the pillars of Islamic teachings (including Aqidah) shows that an integrative approach can combine Islamic values in a balanced manner between cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects, so that students not only understand the theory, but also are able to appreciate and practice Islamic teachings in real actions⁹.

The thematic-integrative paradigm can be seen as a response to the needs of contemporary Islamic education, which demands learning that is not fragmented but integrated into meaningful and relevant educational themes. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, the flexibility of the curriculum provides space for teachers to design learning based on the needs of students and their socio-cultural context, including in the development of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials¹⁰.

Principles of Development of Aqidah Teaching Materials in the Framework of the Independent Curriculum

The development of Aqidah teaching materials in the context of *the Independent Curriculum should be based on several main principles to ensure they are relevant, contextual, and integrative. First*, teaching materials must be developed within a thematic-integrative paradigm that connects Islamic values (including Aqidah) to other learning themes and students' real experiences. This paradigm not only enhances the internalization of values but also creates more meaningful cross-disciplinary linkages¹¹.

Second, good teaching materials must integrate Islamic values holistically and across subjects. Integration not only means adding religious content to general lessons but also connecting the concept of faith with students' academic content and socio-cultural life in a synergistic manner. This kind of integration can support the creation of a more complete and relevant learning experience in accordance with the dynamics of contemporary life¹².

Third, the development of thematic Aqidah teaching materials must align with a curriculum that is adaptive to students' needs. The Merdeka Curriculum gives educators the freedom to tailor learning according to the local context and the dynamic needs of students. This means that teaching materials must be designed so that they can be modified according to class characteristics, local culture, or the development of the times, without losing the substance of Aqidah values¹³.

Fourth, the development of teaching materials should consider a student-centered learning approach. Teaching materials that place students at the center of learning will encourage active engagement, problem-solving, and high-level thinking skills, while providing space for students to relate the values of Aqidah to the real situations they face. This kind of learning approach is in line with thematic and integrative principles that emphasize authentic learning experiences¹⁴.

⁸ Nurmasihin Nurmasihin, Ifah Khadijah, and Usep Suherman, "THEMATIC-INTEGRATIVE PARADIGM OF CURRICULUM AND PAI LEARNING DEVELOPMENT IN MADRASAHS OR SCHOOLS (THEORETICAL STUDY)," *FAJAR Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 2 (2025), <https://doi.org/10.56013/fj.v5i2.4519>.

⁹ Sumiati and Mumtahanah, "Konsep Integrasi Pilar-Pilar Ajaran Islam Dalam Kurikulum Pendidikan Agama Islam."

¹⁰ Endang Sulistyowati, "Pembelajaran PAI Di Sekolah Dasar Dengan Pendekatan Tematik," *Al-Bidayah: Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Islam* 4, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.14421/al-bidayah.v4i1.9006>.

¹¹ Nurmasihin, Khadijah, and Suherman, "THEMATIC-INTEGRATIVE PARADIGM OF CURRICULUM AND PAI LEARNING DEVELOPMENT IN MADRASAHS OR SCHOOLS (THEORETICAL STUDY)."

¹² Hasan Basri and Alamin Abdullah, "Curriculum Integration Constructs in Integrated Islamic Elementary School," *Tafkir: Interdisciplinary Journal of Islamic Education* 5, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.31538/tijie.v5i1.873>.

¹³ Rahmawati et al., "Islamic Curriculum Innovation in Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools as an Integrative Approach in Learning Jurisprudence, Akidah, and Tajweed."

¹⁴ Awaludin Baharshah, "Implementation of Integrative Thematic Learning to Teach Aqidah Akhlak (Moral Education): A Case in an Islamic Primary School in Indonesia," *Tadibia Islamika* 2, no. 2 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.28918/tadibia.v2i2.6440>.

Finally, the teaching materials developed should focus on character development and 21st-century competencies, including creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. Aqidah, as a spiritual foundation, not only strengthens students' faith but also promotes values such as social responsibility, ethics, and global awareness. The development of teaching materials that address 21st-century competencies will help students become religious individuals and adapt to social and technological changes.

Conceptual Model of Thematic and Integrative Aqidah Teaching Materials

The conceptual model of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials in the framework of the Independent Curriculum is designed as a systematic framework that connects the substance of faith (aqidah) with the theme of contextual learning, a cross-disciplinary integrative approach, and learning outcomes oriented towards strengthening character and competence in the 21st century. This model places Aqidah not only as doctrinal material but also as a foundation for living, relevant values in learners' learning experience. Conceptually, this model is built on three main components: the foundation of Aqidah values, the thematic-integrative approach, and the orientation of contextual and applicative learning. The three components are intertwined in a single teaching material design unit.

First, the foundation of Aqidah values is the core of this conceptual model. Aqidah is positioned as a spiritual and ethical basis that shapes students' perspectives on themselves, the environment, and social reality. In the context of contemporary Islamic education, aqidah is not enough to be taught as an abstract theological concept, but needs to be associated with the formation of attitudes, moral awareness, and social responsibility of students¹⁵. Therefore, Aqidah teaching materials must be designed to encourage the internalization of faith values in a reflective and meaningful manner.

Second, the thematic-integrative approach functions as a framework for organizing the material. This approach allows Aqidah concepts to be integrated into learning themes relevant to students' lives, such as humanity, the environment, social justice, or technological developments. This thematical-integrative model is in line with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes cross-subject learning and the linkage between knowledge, values, and real experiences¹⁶. Research shows that the metric-integrative learning in PAI can increase students' engagement and help them understand religious teachings more holistically¹⁷.

Third, this conceptual model is directed at contextual and applicative learning. Aqidah teaching materials not only contain objectives and materials, but are also designed to encourage students to associate faith values with real-life situations. This approach aligns with the concepts of learning by doing and contextual learning, positioning students as active subjects in the learning process¹⁸. Thus, Aqidah is understood not just as normative knowledge but also as a guideline for life that can be applied across various social and cultural contexts.

In this model, teachers serve as learning designers, integrating Aqidah values, learning themes, and learning activities. Teachers are given the flexibility to adapt teaching materials to the characteristics of students and the local context, as emphasized in the Independent Curriculum¹⁹.

¹⁵ N Siregar et al., "Dampak Pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Terhadap Pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Islam," *Pendas: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 9, no. 4 (2024): 231–50, <https://doi.org/10.23969/JP.V9I04.14560>.

¹⁶ Kemendikbudristek., "Panduan Implementasi Pembelajaran Kurikulum Merdeka.," *Kementerian Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan RI*, 2021, 1–143.

¹⁷ Baharshah, "Implementation of Integrative Thematic Learning to Teach Aqidah Akhlak (Moral Education): A Case in an Islamic Primary School in Indonesia."

¹⁸ D N Firdhaus, I Isti, and N Aflah, "Integrasi Nilai-Nilai Agama Islam Dalam Pembelajaran Tematik Peserta Didik Kelas V MI/SD," *JEMARI: Jurnal Edukasi Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 3, no. 2 (2021): 58–65, <https://doi.org/10.30599/JEMARI.V3I2.991>.

¹⁹ Kemendikbudristek., "Panduan Implementasi Pembelajaran Kurikulum Merdeka."

This conceptual model also opens up space for the use of learning media and technology as a means of strengthening understanding and reflection on faith values²⁰.

Thus, the conceptual model of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials serves as a theoretical-practical framework that bridges the theological values of Islam and the learning needs of the 21st century. This model not only strengthens students' spiritual dimension but also supports the development of character, critical thinking skills, and social awareness within a relevant and sustainable Islamic education context.

Examples of the Application of Thematic and Integrative Aqidah Teaching Materials

As a form of operationalizing the conceptual model formulated, the following is an example of the application of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials in the context of the Independent Curriculum. This example is not intended as a field implementation report but rather as an academic illustration of how the concepts and principles of teaching material development can be applied systematically. This application example is presented as a conceptual elaboration to demonstrate the model's feasibility, not as a report of empirical implementation results.

1. Learning Theme

“Protecting Nature as a Trust of Faith”

Elements of Aqidah

Faith in Allah SWT (Tauhid Rububiyah)

Learning Outcomes:

Students can understand the meaning of faith in Allah SWT as the Creator and Maintainer of the universe, and demonstrate a sense of responsibility towards the environment as a form of practicing aqidah in daily life.

Thematic and Cross-Disciplinary Integration

In this theme, the concept of Aqidah is integrated with;

- a) Natural Sciences: an introduction to ecosystems and the balance of nature
- b) Pancasila Education: social responsibility and concern

Pancasila Student Profile Project: Faith, Fear of God, and Noble Character

This approach is in line with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes cross-disciplinary learning and the relevance of real-life contexts²¹.

2. Learning Activities

Students are invited to:

- a. Analyze the verses of the Qur'an related to the creation and preservation of nature (e.g., QS. Al-A'raf: 56).
- b. Observe environmental phenomena around the school or home (cleanliness, waste management, greening).
- c. Discuss the relationship between faith in Allah SWT and the responsibility to protect the environment.
- d. Compile a brief reflection on the form of practicing aqidah in protecting nature as the mandate of Allah.

This activity reflects contextual and student-centered learning, which encourages the internalization of aqidah values through real experience (Firdhaus et al., 2021).

3. Learning Evaluation

Evaluation is carried out authentically through:

- a. Written reflection of students,
- b. Observation of attitudes and participation in discussions, and
- c. Simple project assessment based on environmental concerns.

²⁰ Rahmawati et al., “Islamic Curriculum Innovation in Integrated Islamic Elementary Schools as an Integrative Approach in Learning Jurisprudence, Akidah, and Tajweed.”

²¹ Kemendikbudristek., “Panduan Implementasi Pembelajaran Kurikulum Merdeka.”

This evaluation model emphasizes the balance between cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects, as recommended in the development of Islamic Religious Education learning based on the Independent Curriculum (Idris & Asyafah, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes that the development of Aqidah teaching materials within the framework of the Independent Curriculum requires an approach that is not only oriented towards strengthening theological aspects, but also able to answer the demands of contextual, thematic, and integrative learning. Aqidah is not enough to be considered doctrinal material; it needs to be developed as a foundation of values that are alive and relevant to students' realities. Through a conceptual-analytical study, this study formulated principles for developing thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials aligned with the characteristics of the Independent Curriculum, namely learning flexibility, cross-disciplinary integration, and orientation toward the formation of students' character and competencies. These principles are then elaborated into a conceptual model of teaching materials that place the values of Aqidah as the core, a thematic-integrative approach as a framework for organizing the material, and contextual learning as an implementive orientation.

The novelty of this research lies in the development of a conceptual model of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials, complemented by illustrative examples of application as a form of concept operationalization. Thus, this article not only stops at the mapping of theory but also provides an applied overview of how Aqidah teaching materials can be systematically designed and developed in the context of the Independent Curriculum. The results of this study are expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of contemporary Islamic education studies, especially in the field of the design of Islamic Religious Education teaching materials. In practice, the conceptual model offered can serve as an initial reference for educators and curriculum developers in designing Aqidah teaching materials that are more contextual, integrative, and relevant to students' needs in a dynamic educational era.

Although this research has produced a conceptual model of thematic and integrative Aqidah teaching materials, this study is still limited to conceptual analysis and application illustrations. Therefore, further research is recommended to test the model through empirical studies, including research and development, implementation case studies in educational units, and limited experiments to assess its effectiveness in understanding Aqidah and in the formation of students' character. In addition, further research can also examine the development of thematic-integrative Aqidah teaching materials at different levels of education or in the context of the project to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile in the Independent Curriculum

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