TEACHERS' ROLES IN DEVELOPING THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM FROM AN ISLAMIC EDUCATION PERSPECTIVE: A CASE STUDY OF A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation and evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri 12 Malang from the perspective of Islamic Education Management. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews with school leaders and teachers, and document analysis. The findings indicate that teachers play a central role not only as curriculum implementers but also as collaborators, evaluators, and reflective practitioners. Curriculum enactment is characterized by cross-subject collaboration, project-based learning, teaching factory programs, and continuous formative evaluation aligned with industry needs. From an Islamic educational perspective, these practices embody core values such as amanah (accountability), syūra (consultative decision-making), itqān (professional excellence), and muhāsabah (reflective self-evaluation), which strengthen both instructional quality and moral development. However, the study also identifies challenges, including administrative workload, uneven teacher readiness, limited infrastructure, misalignment between vocational learning and academically oriented national assessments, and inconsistent industry participation. The study concludes that successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational schools depends on sustained teacher collaboration, supportive instructional leadership, strong industry partnerships, and value-based reflective practices. This research contributes an empirically grounded and Islamically informed perspective to the discourse on vocational curriculum reform in Indonesia.

Keywords: Merdeka curriculum, Vocational education, Teacher collaboration, Curriculum evaluation, Islamic educational management

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis implementasi dan evaluasi Kurikulum Merdeka di SMK Negeri 12 Malang ditinjau dari perspektif Manajemen Pendidikan Islam. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam dengan pimpinan sekolah dan guru, serta analisis dokumen. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru berperan tidak hanya sebagai pelaksana kurikulum, tetapi juga sebagai kolaborator, evaluator, dan praktisi reflektif. Implementasi kurikulum ditandai oleh kolaborasi lintas mata pelajaran, penerapan project-based learning, program teaching factory, serta evaluasi formatif yang berkelanjutan dan selaras dengan kebutuhan industri. Dari perspektif pendidikan Islam, praktik tersebut merefleksikan nilai amanah, syūra, itqān, dan muhāsabah, yang memperkuat kualitas pembelajaran sekaligus pembentukan karakter peserta didik. Namun demikian, penelitian ini juga menemukan sejumlah kendala, seperti beban administratif, ketimpangan kesiapan guru, keterbatasan sarana prasarana, ketidaksesuaian asesmen nasional dengan karakteristik pendidikan vokasi, serta keterlibatan industri yang belum konsisten. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa keberhasilan Kurikulum Merdeka di SMK sangat bergantung pada kolaborasi guru yang berkelanjutan, kepemimpinan pembelajaran yang suportif, kemitraan industri yang kuat, dan praktik reflektif berbasis nilai.

Kata kunci: *Kurikulum merdeka, Pendidikan vokasi, Kolaborasi guru, Evaluasi kurikulum, Manajemen pendidikan Islam*

INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum represents a significant shift in Indonesian education policy by granting greater autonomy to schools and teachers in designing learning that responds to student characteristics and contextual demands. Under this policy, teachers are repositioned from passive curriculum implementers to key actors in curriculum planning, instructional decision-making, and continuous evaluation, particularly in vocational education where alignment with industry needs is critical (Kemendikbudristek, 2020; Elyus et al., 2025). In Vocational High Schools (SMK), curriculum flexibility is intended to enhance the relevance of learning outcomes to labor market demands while maintaining educational coherence and quality (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022).

Within this context, curriculum development in vocational schools constitutes a strategic managerial process. Schools are expected to produce graduates who are competent, adaptive, and work-ready, which requires systematic coordination among teachers, school leaders, and industry partners (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999). Teachers play a central role in translating national curriculum frameworks into operational curricula through needs assessment, collaborative planning, and the design of contextual learning strategies such as project-based learning and teaching factory models (Kurniawan et al., 2025; Ramdani & Indrawan, 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum thus positions teachers as school-level curriculum managers rather than solely classroom practitioners, reinforcing the principles of school-based curriculum development (Marsh & Willis, 2007; Print, 2020).

From the perspective of Islamic Education Management, curriculum development is not merely a technical-administrative activity but also a moral and

ethical responsibility. Core Islamic managerial values *amanah* (trust and responsibility), *syūra* (consultative decision-making), and *itqān* (professional excellence) provide an ethical lens for understanding how curriculum decisions are formulated and enacted within educational institutions (Al-Attas, 1991; Fauzi, 2021). Teachers are entrusted to ensure that curriculum planning serves students' academic, vocational, and character development, while collaborative forums such as MGMPS and in-house training reflect participatory and deliberative management practices (Hidayat & Nugroho, 2020; Saptorini et al., 2024). Within this framework, curriculum development is oriented toward *maṣlaḥah* (educational benefit) rather than mere compliance with policy mandates (Lestari et al., 2025).

However, previous studies indicate that curriculum reform often encounters challenges related to teacher readiness, administrative workload, limited resources, and uneven understanding of curriculum instruments (Marisa, 2021; Munandar, 2018). These challenges are particularly pronounced in vocational education, where curricula must simultaneously respond to national standards and rapidly changing industry demands (Kurniawati, 2023). Despite the growing body of research on the Merdeka Curriculum, limited attention has been paid to teachers' roles in curriculum development when examined through an Islamic Education Management perspective.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore teachers' roles in curriculum development during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri 12 Malang. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study examines how curriculum planning is organized, how collaborative implementation is enacted, and how continuous evaluation is conducted at the school level (Yin, 2019; Miles & Huberman, 1994). By situating these practices within an Islamic Education Management framework, this study seeks to contribute empirically and conceptually to the discourse on vocational curriculum management, particularly in integrating professional practices with ethical values in educational leadership.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to examine teachers' roles in curriculum development during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri 12 Malang. A qualitative case study was chosen to allow an in-depth exploration of managerial processes and institutional practices within their real-life context, particularly in curriculum management where decision-making, coordination, and collaboration are embedded in organizational dynamics (Yin, 2019). This approach aligns with qualitative educational research that emphasizes meaning, process, and interaction rather than variable measurement (Moleong, 2017; Sugiyono, 2018).

The research site, SMK Negeri 12 Malang, was purposively selected due to its early adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum, the diversity of its vocational programs, and its established collaboration with the Business and Industrial World (DUDI), making it a relevant setting for examining curriculum development in vocational education (Finch & Crunkilton, 1999; Kurniawati, 2023). Informants were selected purposively and included the principal and vice principal for curriculum, who hold strategic responsibilities in planning, coordinating, supervising, and evaluating the curriculum at the institutional level. Consequently,

data on teachers' roles were analyzed from an organizational and managerial perspective, consistent with Islamic Education Management studies that emphasize institutional processes rather than individual classroom practices (Hallinger, 2011).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. Interviews explored curriculum planning mechanisms, teacher coordination in implementation, and evaluation practices. Observations captured curriculum-related activities such as coordination meetings and evaluation forums, while document analysis included curriculum guidelines, teaching modules, school policies, and evaluation reports. The use of multiple data sources enabled triangulation and enhanced the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2016; Bungin, 2019).

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data were coded and organized thematically around curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation, and continuously compared with relevant theoretical perspectives in curriculum management and Islamic Education Management. Trustworthiness was ensured through triangulation across sources and methods, member checking with key informants, and adherence to ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and responsible data handling (Yin, 2019).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The Role of Teachers in Curriculum Planning

Teachers play a strategic role in curriculum development planning in vocational schools because they possess direct knowledge of students' learning needs and the dynamics of vocational instruction at the school level (Anggraeni & Narimo, 2023). At SMK Negeri 12 Malang, this role is institutionalized through school policies and leadership-facilitated coordination. Viewed from an Islamic educational perspective, teachers' roles in curriculum planning integrate three interrelated dimensions: *muʿaddib*, ensuring that curriculum design fosters character formation and work ethics; *muʿallim*, developing systematic, relevant, and comprehensible learning tools; and *mursyid*, guiding students to apply vocational competencies responsibly for social benefit (Nisa, 2018). Accordingly, teachers function as operational curriculum developers who translate student needs into coherent curriculum components.

At the initial planning stage, teachers conduct systematic needs assessments to map students' prior abilities, learning readiness, and alignment with targeted vocational competencies. This process is essential to ensure that curriculum design accommodates learner diversity and supports sustainable learning outcomes. From an Islamic perspective, such careful preparation reflects the principle of *amānah*, which requires that educational planning genuinely serves learners' interests and generates *maṣlaḥah* (educational benefit). Teachers' commitment to preparing learning materials, maintaining assessment integrity, and exercising discipline in planning further embodies the value of *itqān* (professional precision), positioning teachers as *uswah ḥasanah* (professional role models) within the curriculum planning process (Utari & Muadin, 2023).

Teacher collaboration constitutes a core mechanism in curriculum planning, particularly through structured forums such as In-House Training (IHT) and the School Subject Teacher Deliberation (MGMPS). IHT strengthens teachers' capacity as curriculum designers by facilitating shared understanding of Learning Outcomes, teaching module development, and the implementation of project-based and contextual learning. This collaborative process reflects the Islamic values of *taʿāwun* (mutual cooperation) and *syūra* (consultative decision-making). Similarly, the MGMPS forum functions as a coordination platform for aligning competencies, organizing subject matter, and designing interdisciplinary vocational projects, ensuring coherence and continuity across subjects (Saptorini et al., 2024).

Curriculum planning in vocational education is closely connected to collaboration with the Business and Industrial World (DUDI). Teachers actively integrate industry input by reviewing competency standards, consulting with industry partners, and adjusting graduate profiles to labor market demands (Rojaki et al., 2021). This integration is operationalized through the design of teaching factory programs, internship schedules, and industry-based teaching modules. The flexibility provided by the Merdeka Curriculum enables teachers to adapt learning strategies, assessment models, and instructional content to the school's specific context, confirming their role as needs analysts, curriculum developers, and mediators between schools and industry in ensuring relevant and work-oriented vocational education (Suyud et al., 2023).

Collaborative Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri 12 Malang constitutes a direct continuation of the collaborative planning phase and is firmly grounded in the values of Islamic Education Management (MPI). Trustworthiness is reflected in transparent and accountable task execution (Fauzi, 2021), deliberation (*musyawarah*) is evident through collegial decision-making processes (Hidayat & Nugroho, 2020), and professionalism is strengthened through continuous reflective practices. This value-based orientation ensures that curriculum implementation not only emphasizes academic and vocational competencies but also supports students' moral and ethical development in line with the principles of *tazkiyatun nafs* and *taʿdīb* (Sukardi & Hasanah, 2022).

Curriculum implementation is not treated as an isolated stage but as an extension of collaboratively formulated plans based on needs analysis, competency alignment, and structured coordination through forums such as MGMPS and In-House Training (IHT). At this stage, teachers' roles expand from curriculum designers to managers of curriculum enactment, characterized by cross-subject synergy, responsiveness to vocational learning dynamics, and continuous professional development. This practice reflects a school-based curriculum development model that positions teachers as central actors in curriculum enactment (Marsh & Willis, 2007) and aligns with national policy granting adaptive authority to teachers within the Merdeka Curriculum framework (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Empirical findings show that implementation is supported by sustained teacher collaboration extending beyond classroom instruction to the preparation of teaching materials, alignment of learning objectives, and design of industry-

based projects. Regular coordination meetings function as reflective spaces to evaluate learning strategies, address technical challenges, and adjust instructional tools to labor market demands. This process supports Fullan's (2007) view that successful curriculum change depends on collective teacher engagement through reflective dialogue and serves as an effective bridge between planning and classroom practice.

Collaboration is further strengthened through partnerships with the Business and Industrial World (DUDI). Productive teachers routinely coordinate with industry partners to ensure alignment with competency standards, technological developments, and workforce needs. This approach is consistent with Finch and Crunkilton's (1999) assertion that vocational curriculum quality depends on intensive school–industry interaction and is reinforced by evidence that DUDI integration enhances the validity of graduate competencies within the Merdeka Curriculum (Ramdani & Indrawan, 2023). Collaboration is particularly evident in project-based learning and teaching factory programs, where teachers jointly design integrated projects across normative, adaptive, and productive subjects, reflecting principles of curriculum integration (Fogarty, 1991; Wrigley, 2016) and national Teaching Factory policy (Permendikbud No. 50/2020).

From an Islamic educational perspective, curriculum implementation at SMK Negeri 12 Malang is oriented not only toward vocational competence but also toward character formation. This orientation aligns with *tazkiyatun nafs* and *taʿdīb* as articulated by Al-Attas (1993) and resonates with the values of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* and the objectives of *maqāṣid al-tarbiyah*. Teachers' collaborative practices also function as a mechanism for addressing pedagogical challenges through shared professional judgment, regular reflection, and mutual reinforcement of student learning, reflecting the characteristics of curriculum enactment (Doyle, 1992) and professional learning communities (DuFour, 2004).

Despite these strengths, implementation challenges persist, including high administrative workloads and limited time for instructional preparation, a common issue in curriculum reform contexts (Darling-Hammond, 2020), as well as coordination constraints with industry partners reflecting boundary-crossing challenges between educational and workplace settings (Billett, 2011). Nevertheless, the overall findings indicate that sustained teacher collaboration, strong DUDI partnerships, and continuous professional reflection are key determinants of successful Merdeka Curriculum enactment. This conclusion supports previous studies highlighting collaboration as a central pillar of vocational curriculum implementation (Adiningrum, 2023) and underscores the role of organizational culture and instructional leadership in facilitating adaptive and differentiated learning practices (Schein, 2010; Hallinger, 2011; Tomlinson, 2014; Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Evaluation of the Curriculum and the Role of Teachers in Revision & Reflection

The curriculum evaluation process at SMK Negeri 12 Malang demonstrates that teachers function not only as implementers but also as evaluators and reflective practitioners in ensuring effective Merdeka Curriculum enactment. Evaluation is positioned as a strategic mechanism for maintaining learning quality, particularly in vocational education, which demands strong

alignment between school-based competencies and industry standards. This orientation is consistent with Permendikbud No. 21 of 2022, which mandates continuous curriculum evaluation through systematic reflection at both teacher and institutional levels.

From an Islamic educational perspective, curriculum evaluation embodies a moral and spiritual responsibility. Classical scholars emphasize continuous improvement through introspection and refinement of educational practice. Al-Ghazali frames evaluation as *tahdzīb al-nafs*, Al-Zarnuji underscores the obligation to ensure that knowledge leads to tangible student benefit (*al-'ilm al-nāfi'*), and Al-Attas situates curriculum review as essential to the attainment of *adab* through the proper ordering of knowledge and action. Accordingly, evaluation within the Merdeka Curriculum ecosystem can be understood not merely as an administrative requirement, but as an ethical endeavor aimed at cultivating competent, responsible, and morally grounded learners. This value-based interpretation explains why teachers at SMK Negeri 12 Malang perceive evaluation as an iterative and morally anchored process integrating pedagogical, vocational, and character objectives (Munandar, 2017; Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Empirical findings indicate that evaluation practices are systematically embedded in teachers' professional routines through regular internal forums, such as weekly meetings, project evaluations, MGMPS, and In-House Training (IHT). As confirmed by school leaders, weekly reflective reviews are conducted to assess learning progress and identify necessary improvements (Interview, November 11, 2025). These practices reflect core Islamic ethical principles, including *muhasabah* (reflective self-examination), *amanah* (professional accountability), and *syūra* (consultative decision-making), which parallel contemporary models of formative and collaborative evaluation. Indonesian studies further affirm that such ethically grounded, data-informed evaluation strengthens teacher professionalism and institutional responsiveness (Marisa, 2021; Rahmawati & Lestari, 2024).

The evaluation model applied is predominantly formative and process-oriented. Teachers assess the effectiveness of instructional strategies, student engagement, project outcomes, and the achievement of learning objectives, consistent with the principles of assessment for learning (Black & Wiliam, 2010). Evaluation also incorporates student feedback, authentic assessments, project rubrics, and reflection sheets to capture cognitive, psychomotor, and affective dimensions comprehensively, in line with Permendikbud No. 16 of 2022 on educational assessment standards. In addition, teachers evaluate curriculum structure, including the suitability of teaching modules, allocation of productive hours, and the relevance of project activities to vocational contexts, reflecting the comprehensive evaluation framework proposed by Ornstein and Hunkins (2018).

Curriculum evaluation further emphasizes alignment with industry competency standards through consultation and feedback from DUDI partners, supporting the relevance of graduates' skills (Rojaki et al., 2021). Although administrative workload and reporting deadlines occasionally constrain in-depth reflection (Putra, 2023), teachers mitigate these challenges through digital platforms such as Google Docs and Google Forms, enhancing efficiency and collaboration (Rahmawati & Lestari, 2024). This evaluation process is reinforced

by academic supervision conducted by school leaders through classroom observation and reflective dialogue, consistent with Glickman's (2010) clinical supervision model. Overall, continuous evaluation at SMK Negeri 12 Malang has fostered adaptive curriculum implementation, evidenced by the regular revision of teaching modules based on reflective feedback, underscoring the flexible and contextual nature of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 1
Summary of Curriculum Evaluation Findings at SMK Negeri 12 Malang

Findings	Description
Weekly Evaluation	Teachers conduct a systematic weekly review to assess the progress and alignment of learning activities with the planned goals.
Revision of Teaching Modules	The teaching modules are revised and refined based on the results of reflection and evaluation of instructional effectiveness.
Collaborative Evaluation	Achievement analysis is carried out collaboratively through the MGMP-S forum to ensure shared understanding and coordinated improvement efforts.
Student Feedback	Students provide feedback on learning challenges and classroom experiences, which are used to support instructional adjustments.
School Supervision	The principal supervises and monitors the implementation of the curriculum to ensure alignment with school standards.

Source: Author's observations and processed data (2025)

To provide a clearer conceptual understanding of how reflective practices are operationalized in the curriculum evaluation process, it is important to describe the systematic stages carried out by teachers at SMK Negeri 12 Malang. Following the summary of the evaluation findings presented in Table 1, the following visual representation offers a procedural depiction of how teachers identify instructional problems, analyze evidence, and formulate data-driven improvements.

The diagram illustrates the curriculum evaluation process, which is cyclical and intertwined between stages. Through these stages, the teacher's reflection process can be understood as a continuous series and becomes the basis for decision-making about improving learning. This cycle evaluation model is in line with the curriculum evaluation cycle model developed by Ornstein & Hunkins (2018), which emphasizes that curriculum improvement must be sustainable and data-driven.

Overall, the evaluation and reflection of the curriculum at SMK Negeri 12 Malang shows that teachers carry out their evaluative role systematically, collaboratively, and with a focus on continuous improvement. Evaluations help teachers adapt learning to student needs and industry demands, while strengthening the relevance of the Independent Curriculum in vocational contexts. These findings are in line with the view of Darling-Hammond et al. (2017), who affirm that teachers' reflective capacity is the key to the successful implementation of the curriculum at all levels of education.
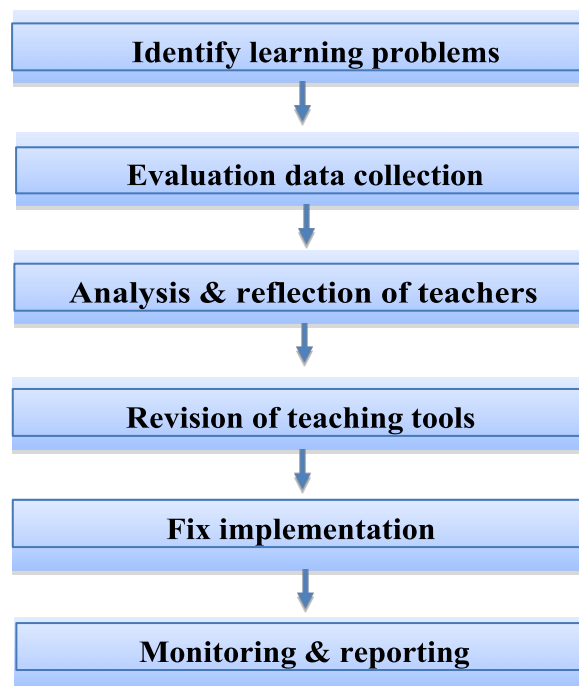
Figure 1. Curriculum Evaluation Flow Diagram at SMK Negeri 12 Malang
Source: Author's observations and processed data (2025)

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

The curriculum constitutes a central determinant of educational direction and quality at the school level (Munandar, 2017). Within Indonesia's education reform agenda, the Independent Curriculum introduced in 2019 seeks to enhance flexibility, autonomy, and responsiveness in learning by reducing administrative rigidity and fostering pedagogical innovation. This policy aligns with Marisa's (2020) conception of the Independent Curriculum as part of the Society 5.0 paradigm, which integrates technology and human-centered learning to address contemporary educational challenges. Accordingly, the curriculum is designed to enable teachers to adapt instruction to students' characteristics and the evolving demands of the workplace.

Since the 2022/2023 academic year, SMK Negeri 12 Malang has implemented both the 2013 Curriculum (K13) and the Independent Curriculum in parallel. This transition underscores substantive differences in instructional structure, learning outcome orientation, assessment approaches, and degrees of pedagogical flexibility. Observational findings indicate that the school is gradually adapting to the Independent Curriculum, particularly through productive subjects and project-based learning that emphasize contextual, industry-relevant competencies and the strengthening of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*.

Several enabling factors support the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SMK Negeri 12 Malang. Effective coordination between teachers and the Deputy Principal for Curriculum facilitates alignment among curriculum agendas, teaching tools, and learning targets, reflecting sound curriculum management practices (Sanjaya, 2021). This coordination is reinforced by a

dedicated curriculum development team that reviews national standards and contextualizes them to the school's vocational profile, consistent with school-based curriculum development principles (Print, 2020). In addition, strong collaboration with the Business and Industrial World (DUDI) enhances curriculum relevance through internships, competency assessments, and the synchronization of professional standards, which are widely recognized as critical to vocational curriculum success (Rojaki et al., 2021). Continuous formative evaluation, as mandated in Permendikbudristek No. 21 of 2022, together with a collaborative teacher culture, further supports adaptive curriculum enactment.

Despite these enabling conditions, several constraints limit optimal implementation. A key challenge lies in the partial misalignment between centrally prescribed curriculum standards and the contextual needs of vocational education, particularly in productive subjects that require close correspondence with industry practices (Kurniawati, 2023). Uneven teacher understanding of Independent Curriculum instruments also contributes to variability in classroom practices and learning quality, as acknowledged by school leadership (Interview, November 11, 2025). These internal challenges are compounded by external constraints, including inconsistent DUDI engagement resulting from organizational or policy changes within partner industries.

Additional barriers stem from systemic and infrastructural factors. The Academic Ability Test (TKA), which prioritizes academic and theoretical competencies, is not fully aligned with the practice-oriented nature of vocational education, creating difficulties for both teachers and students (Kemendikbudristek, 2021). Moreover, limited laboratory facilities and practical resources constrain the implementation of contextual and applied learning, particularly in science-related subjects. Taken together, these findings indicate that while the Independent Curriculum offers substantial opportunities for innovation and relevance in vocational education, its effective implementation requires sustained institutional support, targeted professional development, strengthened industry partnerships, and improved infrastructure to bridge contextual gaps.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMK Negeri 12 Malang has significantly transformed the role of teachers from mere curriculum implementers into central actors in curriculum planning, collaborative enactment, and continuous evaluation. Teachers actively engage in needs assessment, curriculum synchronization through MGMPS and In-House Training (IHT), and alignment with industry demands through partnerships with the Business and Industrial World (DUDI). These practices confirm that effective curriculum development in vocational education depends on sustained teacher collaboration, adaptive decision-making, and strong institutional coordination.

The findings further indicate that curriculum implementation and evaluation at SMK Negeri 12 Malang operate as an integrated and cyclical process. Collaborative teaching practices, project-based learning, teaching factory programs, and formative evaluation mechanisms enable continuous refinement of instructional strategies and teaching modules. From the

perspective of Islamic Education Management, these practices reflect core values such as *amanah* (accountability), *syūra* (consultative decision-making), *itqān* (professional excellence), and *muhāsabah* (reflective self-evaluation). The integration of these values reinforces the moral and ethical dimensions of curriculum development, ensuring that vocational education not only enhances technical competence but also supports character formation and student welfare (*maṣlaḥah*).

Despite these strengths, the study also identifies persistent challenges, including administrative workload, uneven teacher readiness, limited infrastructure, misalignment between vocational learning and academically oriented national assessments, and inconsistent industry participation. These constraints highlight the need for targeted policy support, continuous professional development, infrastructure enhancement, and more flexible assessment systems that better reflect the characteristics of vocational education. Overall, this study concludes that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational schools is contingent upon teacher-led collaboration, supportive instructional leadership, strong industry partnerships, and value-based reflective practices. These findings contribute to the discourse on curriculum reform by offering an empirically grounded and Islamically informed model of curriculum development that is relevant for vocational education contexts in Indonesia.

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