

THE IMPLICATIONS OF BEHAVIORISM, COGNITIVISM, AND CONSTRUCTIVISM LEARNING THEORIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF KURIKULUM MERDEKA ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (PAI): A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) investigates the integration of Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) for Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Utilizing the PRISMA-Lite protocol, the study synthesized 25 peer-reviewed articles (2020–2025) to categorize the operational roles of these theories across learning domains. The findings reveal that PAI implementation is characterized by Behaviorism remains vital for rote practical skills (ritual mastery), Cognitivism bridges complex conceptual processing (Fiqh and Aqidah), and Constructivism serves as the philosophical core for Project-Based Learning (P5) to foster critical character and religious moderation. This study advances the discourse on Islamic pedagogy by validating a non-dichotomous, adaptive framework where multiple learning theories coexist functionally rather than competing. Academically, it provides a model for integrating traditional and modern learning theories in religious contexts. Practically, it underscores the urgent need for PAI teacher professional development focused on facilitative cognitive and constructive strategies to meet the holistic demands of student-centered curricula.

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INTRODUCTIONS

Indonesia's education system emphasizes the holistic development of students, articulated recently in the Profile of Pancasila Students (Pelajar Pancasila) (Widana, 2023; Fauziah, 2023). Within this framework, Islamic

Religious Education (PAI) carries the significant responsibility of fostering intellectual understanding, practical skills, and robust moral character (akhlak).

The transition to the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) further catalyzes this change by prioritizing personalized learning and competency acquisition through Project-Based Learning (PBL), specifically via the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (Rachman, 2024; Subiyantoro, 2023). This curriculum promotes personalized learning, deep competency acquisition, and Project-Based Learning (PBL) through the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5). This transition is highly relevant for PAI, which has historically been dominated by the Behavioristic approach, characterized by rote memorization (*hafalan*) and skill drilling.

While PAI has traditionally relied on Behavioristic rote memorization (*hafalan*), the new curriculum necessitates a move toward Cognitivist and Constructivist frameworks to foster student autonomy and critical thinking (Rifki, 2024; Munir, 2024; Hakim, 2024). While this theoretical shift is required, the reality of PAI where certain practices like ritual prayer require precise, repeatable behavior suggests that no single theory can suffice.

Despite this mandated shift, a significant research gap remains: current literature often treats these learning theories as isolated or contradictory paradigms within PAI, failing to provide a cohesive framework for their simultaneous application. There is a lack of systematic evidence on how traditional behaviorist requirements such as precise ritual prayer can be theoretically reconciled with the constructivist demands of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Consequently, the functional synergy between these theories remains underexplored, leaving educators without clear guidance on balancing doctrinal mastery with modern pedagogical autonomy.

Therefore, this Systematic Literature Review (SLR) aims to systematically map, analyze, and synthesize the functional integration of Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism within the development and implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka PAI. The central research question guiding this review is: How are Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism functionally integrated to achieve the holistic learning outcomes of Kurikulum Merdeka PAI.

METHODS

This study utilizes a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method to rigorously and transparently synthesize existing research, focusing on the intersection of learning theory and Kurikulum Merdeka PAI.

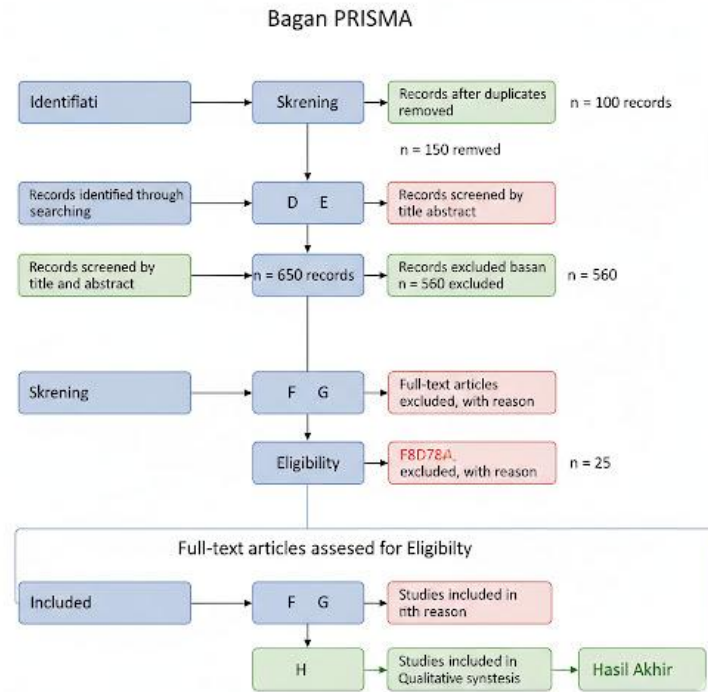
Search Strategy and Protocol (PRISMA-Lite)

The review process followed the core stages of the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) protocol for systematic reviews, adapted for a qualitative synthesis (Thematic SLR).

Identification, Initial searches were conducted across academic databases (Scopus, Google Scholar, DOAJ) using a combination of Indonesian and English keywords, (“Kurikulum Merdeka” AND PAI AND “Teori Belajar”), (“Islamic Education” AND “Merdeka Curriculum” AND Constructivism), (Behaviorism AND Cognitivism AND PAI Implementation 2020-2025). This process yielded an initial pool of 800 records. Screening, duplicate records were removed (Supramono, 2023; Solehuddin, 2024).

Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, resulting in the exclusion of studies not focusing on PAI or the Kurikulum Merdeka context. Eligibility, the full text of the remaining 90 articles was assessed against the inclusion criteria. 65 articles were excluded (e.g., purely conceptual papers, non-peer-reviewed). Inclusion, a final total of 25 articles were included for qualitative synthesis. The full process is summarized in the PRISMA Flow Diagram (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: PRISMA Flow Diagram of Study Selection



Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Content Focus	Studies specifically discussing PAI/Islamic Education in Indonesia, the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> , and the application/implication of at least two of the three targeted learning theories.	Studies focusing only on general education, other subjects, or non-Indonesian contexts.
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and empirical research reports.	Opinion articles, book reviews, or grey literature (e.g., non-published theses).
Timeframe	Publications dated 2020–2025 to ensure contemporary relevance to the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> launch.	Publications prior to 2020.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data from the 25 included studies were extracted and categorized into a synthesis matrix (similar to Table 1). Thematic synthesis was then applied to identify recurring patterns regarding: (1) the primary theory used, (2) the PAI domain targeted (cognitive, affective, psychomotor), and (3) the resulting pedagogical implication in the Kurikulum Merdeka context.

RESULT

The synthesis of the 25 selected studies reveals a distinct pattern of theoretical usage, demonstrating a shift toward Functional Eclecticism in PAI under the Kurikulum Merdeka.

Synthesis of Included Studies

Table 1 summarizes 10 representative articles that clearly articulate the theoretical framework and implementation context, illustrating the core findings of the full set of 25 studies.

Table 1: Synthesis of Representative Studies on Learning Theory Implementation in Kurikulum Merdeka PAI

No.	Author	Learning Theory	Implementation of Islamic Religious Education in the Independent Curriculum	Affected Domains of Islamic Religious Education
1	Puspita, D., et al. (2024)	Constructivism	Uses project methods (P5) to build critical understanding of religious moderation issues in SMA.	Affective (Character)
2	Anugrah, A. T. (2025)	Behaviorism & Cognitivism	Employs positive reinforcement for religious habituation, supported by mind maps for conceptual meaning.	Psychomotor & Cognitive
3	Ruslan, H., & Karim, A. (2024)	Constructivism	Curriculum design mandates students addressing social-religious problems through authentic projects.	Affective (Value Application)
4	Fitri, M., & Hidayat, R. (2023)	Eclecticism (B, C, K)	Uses a sequential model : Behaviorism (basic drill), Cognitivism (conceptual understanding), Constructivism (reflection/action).	Holistic (C, A, P)
5	Setiawan, S. A. (2024)	Constructivism (Critique)	Notes PAI teachers' difficulty transitioning from the old Behavioristic approach to the required Constructivist facilitator role.	Affective (Teacher Pedagogy)(Wardani, 2025)
6	Nugroho, P. (2024)	Cognitivism	Utilizes Advanced Organizers (Ausubel) to link new religious knowledge to students' existing cognitive structure.	Cognitive (Conceptual Understanding)
7	Masruri, M. S., & Azizah, N. (2023)	Behaviorism	Applies a measurable reward and punishment system to enforce mandatory religious discipline (e.g., attendance for <i>Dhuha</i> prayer).	Psychomotor (Compliance)
8	Mulyani, T., & Raharjo, S. (2025)	Constructivism	Uses Socratic discussions and conflict case studies to encourage students to independently formulate tolerant religious views.	Affective (Attitude)
9	Ahmad, F., & Arifin, S. (2024)	Cognitivism	Promotes learning based on Bruner's Iconic phase (visual aids, religious symbols) before moving to abstract concepts (Symbolic phase).	Cognitive (Information Processing)
10	Suryani, L., & Hakim, L. (2023)	Eclecticism (B, C)	Advocates for Behaviorism for basic practice and rote skills , and Constructivism for moral and value internalization .	Holistic (Practice and Values)(Benawa, 2023)

Thematic Findings

The thematic synthesis yielded three key findings regarding the functional roles:

Behaviorism for Precision and Habituation

Behaviorism's role is narrowly focused on the psychomotor domain. Studies confirm its necessity for activities demanding precision, such as the correct performance of wudu or shalat movements (Ayub, 2022; Adi, 2024). The

system of reinforcement is not eliminated; rather, it is used strategically to build religious habits (*habituasi*) before the moral significance (*Constructivism*) is explored.

Cognitivism as the Conceptual Mediator

Cognitivism serves as the intellectual bridge (Suwandi, 2025; Wahyuni, 2024). When PAI subjects deal with dense conceptual material, educators rely on Cognitive strategies to ensure meaningful learning. The use of visual aids, hierarchical mapping, and structured problem-solving is essential for effective encoding, which supports the later application required in P5 projects.

Constructivism as the Core Philosophy for P5 and Character

Constructivism is the most prominent theoretical framework aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka (O'Connor, 2022; Almulla, 2023; Tan, 2017; Clark, 2018). It drives the affective domain, focusing on: (1) Contextualization: Moving religious learning from the text to real-world issues (Mohammed, 2020; Boyd, 2023); (2) Criticality: Encouraging students to construct nuanced views on controversial topics like religious moderation (Fossen, 2019; Barger, 2018); and (3) Autonomy: Positioning the student as the active builder of their own religious understanding (*ma'rifah*).

DISCUSSION

The Shift to Functional Eclecticism

The primary theoretical contribution of this SLR is confirming the existence of a Functional Eclecticism in Kurikulum Merdeka PAI. This model rejects the dominance of a single theory, instead adopting an adaptive approach where the theory is selected based on the specific learning outcome:

Behaviorism (Input or Habit): When the goal is measurable, repeatable action.

Cognitivism (Process or Understanding): When the goal is the logical processing and comprehension of complex information.

Constructivism (Output or Character): When the goal is the internalization of values, critical reflection, and contextual application.

This integration (Taber, 2018; Jones, 2020) is vital because PAI, unlike many other subjects, simultaneously demands strict precision in ritual (Behaviorism) and critical flexibility in social ethics (Constructivism).

Bridging the Pedagogical Gap

Despite the philosophical alignment of Kurikulum Merdeka with Constructivism, the literature highlights a significant challenge: teacher readiness (Wardani, 2025). PAI teachers, often trained in Behavioristic pedagogy, struggle to assume the role of a Constructivist facilitator, which requires mastery in managing complex group dynamics, facilitating Socratic dialogue, and assessing non-linear learning outcomes (Suwandi, 2025). The success of this theoretical transformation hinges on continuous professional development that addresses this pedagogical inertia.

Implications for Curriculum Development

The findings validate the Kurikulum Merdeka as a strategic theoretical intervention. By formally integrating P5 and project-based learning, the curriculum mandates Constructivism, forcing the PAI classroom away from its purely traditional model. This framework ensures that PAI graduates are not only compliant in ritual but also capable of applying Islamic values critically and contextually, fulfilling the mandate of the Pelajar Pancasila.

CONLUSSION

This Systematic Literature Review concludes that the development of Kurikulum Merdeka PAI is supported by a sophisticated model of Functional Eclecticism. Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism are integrated tools, each indispensable for different learning domains. Constructivism, specifically through Project-Based Learning, serves as the defining theoretical characteristic of the new curriculum, ensuring that PAI focuses on producing students who are both pious and critically engaged citizens.

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