

Toward the dehumanization of Islamic Education teachers: A conceptual synthesis of workload complexity in the Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has increased teachers' workload through expanding administrative demands, yet previous studies have examined teacher workload, role strain, and dehumanization separately, leaving the underlying mechanism, particularly for Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, insufficiently explained. This study aims to analyze the mechanism of PAI teachers' dehumanization by examining the relationship between educational regulations, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the professional characteristics of PAI teachers, and the resulting professional consequences. This study employed a *library research* approach using a conceptual synthesis method based on educational regulations, policy documents, and relevant scholarly literature. The findings reveal that the dehumanization of PAI teachers is not merely a consequence of increasing administrative responsibilities but results from the interaction among expanding regulations, transformed professional responsibilities, and the multidimensional pedagogical, moral, and spiritual roles of PAI teachers. This study contributes a conceptual model explaining the mechanism of teacher dehumanization as a foundation for developing a more humanistic implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Keywords: Merdeka curriculum; Islamic Education teachers; Teacher workload; Dehumanization; Educational administration

Abstrak

Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka meningkatkan kompleksitas beban kerja guru melalui perluasan tuntutan administratif, namun kajian sebelumnya masih membahas beban kerja, konflik peran, dan dehumanisasi guru secara terpisah sehingga mekanisme hubungan antarfenomena tersebut, khususnya pada guru Pendidikan Agama Islam (PAI), belum dijelaskan secara komprehensif. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis mekanisme dehumanisasi guru PAI melalui hubungan antara regulasi pendidikan, implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, karakteristik profesi guru, dan konsekuensi profesional yang ditimbulkannya. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan *library research* dengan metode sintesis konseptual melalui analisis regulasi, dokumen kebijakan, dan literatur ilmiah yang relevan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dehumanisasi guru PAI bukan semata-mata disebabkan oleh meningkatnya administrasi pembelajaran, tetapi merupakan konsekuensi dari interaksi antara perluasan regulasi, transformasi pekerjaan guru, dan kompleksitas peran pedagogis, moral, serta spiritual. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dengan menawarkan model konseptual yang menjelaskan mekanisme dehumanisasi guru PAI sebagai dasar evaluasi implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka yang lebih humanis.

Kata Kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka; Guru Pendidikan Agama Islam; Beban kerja guru; Dehumanisasi; Administrasi pendidikan.

Introduction

The paradox of the Merdeka Curriculum lies in the increasing autonomy granted to teachers in designing and delivering instruction, while simultaneously imposing greater complexity in fulfilling their professional responsibilities (Aini & Adiyono, 2023). The curriculum was designed to promote more flexible, student-centered learning by providing teachers with greater discretion to adapt instructional strategies to students' diverse learning needs (Müller et al., 2023). Conceptually, this policy is expected to enhance the quality of education by fostering more meaningful and contextualized learning experiences. However, its implementation has revealed a contrasting reality. The growing demands associated with preparing instructional documents, conducting continuous assessments, maintaining learning documentation, and completing administrative reporting have substantially expanded teachers' professional responsibilities (Safitri & Rokhimawan, 2024). Consequently, teacher professionalism is no longer evaluated solely by instructional quality but also by the ability to meet increasingly complex administrative requirements driven by evolving educational policies.

These developments indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has not merely revised the curriculum structure but has fundamentally transformed the nature of teachers' professional work (Sihotang & Sirear, 2024). Teachers are no longer responsible solely for classroom instruction; they are also expected to design Learning Objectives, Learning Objectives Flow, and Teaching Modules, conduct diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, prepare reflective learning reports, and manage various academic documents through the Merdeka Mengajar Platform and professional learning communities (Siregar et al., 2022). This transformation has shifted teachers' professional orientation from classroom teaching toward a more integrated system of instructional management characterized by administrative accountability and evidence-based educational practices (Peurach et al., 2019). Therefore, the principal challenge of the Merdeka Curriculum extends beyond an increase in teachers' workload to a structural transformation of professional responsibilities that simultaneously demands pedagogical, administrative, and professional competencies throughout the entire instructional process.

This complexity becomes even more pronounced for Islamic Education (PAI) teachers because their professional responsibilities extend beyond achieving academic learning outcomes to encompass the development of students' character and spirituality (Komariah & Nihayah, 2023). PAI teachers fulfill the roles of *mu'allim*, who transmits knowledge; *murabbi*, who nurtures students' personal development; *muaddib*, who cultivates moral values; and *uswah hasanah*, who serves as a moral role model within the school community (Thoriquttyas & Rohmawati, 2024). Unlike teachers of other subjects, the success of PAI teachers is evaluated not only by the attainment of

instructional objectives but also by their ability to cultivate students' religious character, guide religious practices, and exemplify moral conduct in everyday school life (Niskaromah et al., 2025). As administrative demands continue to increase while character development remains an essential professional responsibility, PAI teachers experience *role strain*, arising from the simultaneous expectation to fulfill pedagogical, administrative, moral, and spiritual obligations within the same professional capacity. This condition creates a substantial risk of teacher dehumanization.

Research on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been conducted from various perspectives. Research by Kirwin et al. (2019) demonstrated that curriculum reform increases the complexity of teachers' administrative responsibilities through the preparation of instructional materials, continuous assessment, and more systematic reporting of student learning outcomes. Research by Kim (2019) found that increasing administrative demands reduce teachers' opportunities to establish meaningful pedagogical interactions with students, resulting in learning processes that are more oriented toward document completion than educational engagement. Research by Bishop et al. (2020) identified the emergence of *role strain* resulting from the convergence of pedagogical, administrative, and social expectations. Likewise, research by Wilkins et al. (2021) revealed that the growing dominance of educational bureaucracy has the potential to shift teachers' professional orientation from educators to administrative implementers. Nevertheless, these studies have examined teacher workload, role conflict, and dehumanization as separate issues. Few studies have integrated educational regulations, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the professional characteristics of PAI teachers, and their professional consequences into a single conceptual model capable of explaining the mechanism through which teacher dehumanization occurs.

Based on this research gap, the present study aims to analyze the mechanism of dehumanization among Islamic Education (PAI) teachers by examining the relationships among the regulatory framework, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the professional characteristics of PAI teachers, and the resulting professional consequences. This study conceptualizes dehumanization not merely as a consequence of increasing administrative demands but as the outcome of the interaction among multiple dimensions that collectively shape the complexity of the teaching profession. Accordingly, this study proposes a conceptual synthesis, presented through an analytical model, to explain the process by which the dehumanization of PAI teachers develops in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum. The study contributes by developing a conceptual framework that extends the discourse on teacher workload beyond an administrative perspective toward a humanistic perspective, thereby providing an academic foundation for evaluating educational policies that more effectively balance bureaucratic accountability with the fundamental purpose of education as a process of humanization.

Method

This study employed a *library research* approach using a *conceptual synthesis* method to analyze the phenomenon of dehumanization among Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Connaway & Radford, 2021). This approach was selected because the study was designed not only to describe findings from existing literature but also to develop a conceptual framework explaining the relationships among educational regulations, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the professional characteristics of PAI teachers, and the resulting professional consequences. The primary data consisted of educational regulations, including Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Instruction, Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 16 of 2010, Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation No. 11 of 2025, and official Merdeka Curriculum policy documents. Secondary data were obtained from reputable journal articles, academic books, and previous studies addressing teacher workload, teacher professionalism, Islamic education, educational administration, character education, and Paulo Freire's theory of humanization.

Data were analyzed through four interconnected stages (Miles et al., 2019). The first stage involved identifying and selecting educational regulations, policy documents, and scholarly literature relevant to the research focus. The second stage consisted of classifying the collected data into four analytical dimensions: *Regulatory Framework*, *Merdeka Curriculum Implementation*, *Professional Roles of PAI Teachers*, and *Professional Consequences*. The third stage employed comparative analysis and conceptual synthesis to identify patterns, similarities, differences, and interrelationships across the selected sources, thereby generating a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanism underlying the dehumanization of PAI teachers. The final stage involved developing a conceptual model that visualizes the relationships among these dimensions while explaining the process through which teacher dehumanization evolves within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The credibility of the analysis was ensured through source triangulation and systematic comparison of findings from relevant literature, thereby maintaining conceptual consistency and academic rigor throughout the study.

Results and Discussion

Islamic Education teachers' workload in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced as an educational policy that promises more flexible, adaptive, and student-centered learning (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). Behind this orientation, however, its implementation has generated a new challenge in the form of increasing teacher workload complexity. Teachers are no longer expected

solely to deliver instruction but are also required to fulfill various administrative responsibilities, prepare instructional materials, conduct continuous assessments, report learning outcomes, and continuously develop their professional competencies. This complexity is even greater for Islamic Education (PAI) teachers because, in addition to their instructional responsibilities, they are expected to provide character development, spiritual guidance, and moral role modeling. Therefore, the workload of PAI teachers should be examined progressively through the regulatory framework underpinning the teaching profession, the transformation of teachers' work following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and the distinctive professional characteristics that differentiate PAI teachers from teachers of other subjects.

Table 1. Regulations shaping the workload of Islamic Education teachers

Regulation	Main Provisions	Implications for PAI Teachers' Workload
Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers	Teachers are responsible for educating, teaching, guiding, directing, training, assessing, evaluating, and developing professional competencies.	Teacher workload encompasses pedagogical, administrative, assessment, mentoring, and professional development responsibilities.
Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007 on Religious Education and Religious Instruction	Religious education must be delivered by teachers who share the same religion as the students.	PAI teachers are assigned a specific mandate in the provision of religious education in schools.
Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 16 of 2010 on the Management of Religious Education in Schools	Regulates instruction, supervision, professional development, and educational guidance for PAI teachers.	PAI teachers are responsible not only for teaching but also for religious guidance and professional development under the Ministry of Religious Affairs.
Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation No. 11 of 2025 on the Fulfillment of Teacher Workload	Regulates teacher workload fulfillment, additional assignments, professional development, and workload equivalency.	Teacher workload extends beyond classroom instruction to include broader professional responsibilities.

Source: Adapted from Law No. 14 of 2005; Government Regulation No. 55 of 2007; Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 16 of 2010; and Minister of Primary and Secondary Education Regulation No. 11 of 2025.

Table 1 was developed to map the regulatory foundations that shape the workload of PAI teachers in Indonesia. This mapping is essential because increasing teacher workload is often perceived solely as a consequence of the Merdeka Curriculum, whereas earlier educational regulations had already progressively expanded teachers' professional responsibilities. Accordingly, the table demonstrates that the complexity of PAI teachers' work represents the cumulative outcome of interconnected educational policies. By understanding this regulatory foundation, changes

introduced during the Merdeka Curriculum era can be interpreted more proportionally as an extension of an existing professional system rather than as an isolated policy transformation.

The analysis of educational regulations indicates that the professional role of PAI teachers has evolved from that of classroom instructors into a multidimensional profession integrating pedagogical, administrative, mentoring, assessment, professional development, and religious guidance responsibilities. These findings suggest that the complexity of teacher workload had already been institutionally established at the policy level before the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Consequently, the new curriculum should be understood as accelerating an existing professional structure rather than serving as the sole cause of increasing teacher workload.

These findings are consistent with the research of Normand et al. (2018), which argued that educational regulations have gradually expanded the teaching profession from instructional activities toward comprehensive educational management. Likewise, research by Ben-Peretz and Flores (2018) found that the broader the normative responsibilities assigned to teachers, the greater the challenge of balancing instructional activities, administrative duties, and professional development. Unlike studies that regard regulations merely as administrative guidelines, the present study demonstrates that educational regulations function as structural factors shaping the distinctive characteristics of PAI teachers' workload, thereby providing the foundation for the increasing complexity experienced during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 2. Transformation of PAI teachers' workload before and after the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Aspect	Before the Merdeka Curriculum	During the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum
Instructional Planning	Lesson Plans	Learning Objectives (LOs), Learning Objectives Flow (LOF), and Teaching Modules
Instructional Approach	Content-oriented instruction	Deep learning and differentiated learning
Assessment System	Learning outcome assessment	Continuous diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment
Learning Documentation	Basic administrative documentation	Learning reflection, assessment documentation, and reporting of learning outcomes
Professional Development	Periodic training	Continuous professional development through Ruang GTK/PMM and professional learning communities

Source: Adapted from the PAI Learning Outcomes, Learning and Assessment Guidelines, and Merdeka Curriculum implementation documents.

Unlike Table 1, which explains the regulatory foundation, Table 2 was designed to illustrate the transformation of teachers' work following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Rather than simply comparing the amount of work, the table identifies how the professional orientation of teachers has shifted from classroom instruction toward more comprehensive learning management. Consequently, the table serves as the basis for explaining that the increase in teacher workload is characterized not merely by additional tasks but also by the growing complexity of competencies that teachers are expected to master throughout the instructional cycle.

This study found that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has transformed the professional work of PAI teachers into a more integrated combination of pedagogical responsibilities, administration, assessment, reflection, and professional development. Teachers are no longer expected merely to master subject content; they must also design, implement, evaluate, document, and continuously improve the instructional process. These changes indicate that the center of teachers' workload has shifted from classroom instruction toward data-informed learning management, requiring considerably greater time, expertise, and professional capacity than under previous curricular frameworks.

These findings are consistent with the research of Tomasouw et al. (2024), which identified the preparation of instructional materials as one of the principal challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding is further supported by García-Alberti et al. (2021), who demonstrated that continuous assessment increases teachers' workload because every instructional activity must be systematically designed and documented. Unlike studies concluding that digitalization simplifies teachers' administrative responsibilities, the present study suggests that technology does not automatically reduce workload when the range of professional responsibilities continues to expand. Therefore, the transformation of teacher workload reflects a qualitative change in the teaching profession rather than merely an increase in the quantity of assigned tasks.

Table 3. Comparison of workload characteristics between PAI teachers and teachers of general subjects

Dimension	General Teachers	Subject	Islamic Education (PAI) Teachers
Primary Orientation	Subject-matter competency		PAI competency combined with religious character development
Scope of Responsibilities	Instruction and administration	and	Instruction, administration, spiritual guidance, and moral role modeling
Professional Development	Ministry of Education		Ministry of Religious Affairs in coordination with schools
Social Expectations	Instructional professionalism		Instructional professionalism combined with exemplary religious conduct

Workload Consequences	Predominantly pedagogical	Simultaneously pedagogical, administrative, moral, spiritual, and social
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Source: Adapted from Minister of Religious Affairs Regulation No. 16 of 2010 and other regulations governing Islamic Education teachers.

Table 3 was developed to demonstrate that the complexity of PAI teachers' workload differs fundamentally from that of teachers of other subjects. This comparison is necessary to ensure that the analysis focuses not only on the quantity of work but also on the breadth of professional responsibilities associated with the PAI teaching profession. Accordingly, the table illustrates that the workload characteristics of PAI teachers are shaped by the simultaneous integration of pedagogical, moral, spiritual, and social responsibilities, making their professional complexity substantially different from that of teachers in general.

The findings indicate that the distinctive nature of the PAI teaching profession lies in the convergence of multiple professional roles performed simultaneously. In addition to delivering classroom instruction, PAI teachers are expected to guide religious practices, cultivate students' moral character, serve as ethical role models, and fulfill diverse administrative and professional responsibilities. Consequently, the workload of PAI teachers cannot be adequately measured solely through teaching hours or administrative obligations but must also consider the moral and spiritual responsibilities inherent in their profession. This multidimensional complexity distinguishes PAI teachers from teachers of other academic subjects.

These findings are consistent with the research of Muzaki et al. (2025), which explained that PAI teachers simultaneously fulfill the roles of *mu'allim*, *murabbi*, and *uswah hasanah*. Likewise, research by Tuna (2022) found that society places higher expectations on PAI teachers because they are regarded as representatives of religious values within schools. Unlike studies that conceptualize teacher workload solely as an administrative issue, the present study demonstrates that the complexity of the PAI teaching profession stems from the accumulation of pedagogical, spiritual, moral, and social responsibilities that must be fulfilled simultaneously. These findings provide an important foundation for understanding why PAI teachers are more vulnerable to experiencing *role strain* during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the three tables presented above, this study concludes that the workload of PAI teachers is shaped through three interconnected processes: regulatory construction, the transformation of professional work following the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and the multidimensional characteristics of the PAI teaching profession. This synthesis demonstrates that increasing teacher workload is driven not merely by the addition of tasks but by the convergence of multiple professional demands within a single profession. These findings further suggest that the primary challenge faced by PAI teachers lies not simply in fulfilling administrative

obligations but in maintaining a balance between bureaucratic demands and their responsibilities for students' character development and spiritual guidance. This condition provides the foundation for examining the tension between administrative responsibilities and the vocation of character development discussed in the following section.

Dehumanization of Islamic Education teachers: Between administrative demands and character development

The paradox of the Merdeka Curriculum lies in the growing demand for instructional accountability, which is not necessarily accompanied by a stronger commitment to educational practices that humanize learners. Teachers are expected to prepare instructional materials, conduct continuous assessments, document every stage of the learning process, and fulfill various professional performance indicators as manifestations of educational accountability. For Islamic Education (PAI) teachers, however, professionalism is measured not only by the completeness of administrative responsibilities but also by their ability to cultivate students' moral character, foster spiritual awareness, and serve as ethical role models. When these two sets of expectations must be fulfilled simultaneously within the same professional context, a fundamental question emerges: do teachers still have sufficient space to perform their humanistic role as educators? This question provides the point of departure for analyzing the dehumanization of PAI teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.



Figure 1. Conceptual framework of Islamic Education teachers' workload complexity in the Merdeka Curriculum era

Source: Developed by the authors.

Figure 1 was developed to address an issue that has received limited attention in previous studies, namely how educational regulations, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the professional characteristics of PAI teachers, and their professional consequences interact to generate the risk of teacher dehumanization. Most previous studies have examined these factors independently, leaving their causal relationships insufficiently explained. Therefore, this conceptual model serves not only as a visual representation of the synthesized findings but also as an analytical framework that explains the mechanism underlying changes in the professional orientation of PAI teachers. Through this model, dehumanization is understood as the cumulative outcome of progressively expanding professional demands rather than as a direct consequence of increasing administrative workload alone.

Figure 1 consists of four interconnected dimensions. The *Regulatory Framework* illustrates that the complexity of the PAI teaching profession is shaped by educational regulations that expand pedagogical responsibilities, administrative duties, professional development, and institutional obligations. *Merdeka Curriculum Implementation* demonstrates the transformation of teachers' work through the development of *Learning Objectives*, *Learning Objectives Flow*, *Teaching Modules*, diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, learning reflections, and continuous professional development through the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM). *Professional Roles of PAI Teachers* emphasizes that PAI teachers serve not only as instructors but also as *mu'allim*, *murabbi*, *muaddib*, spiritual mentors, and moral role models. Finally, *Professional Consequences* describe the resulting outcomes, including increasing workload complexity, time pressure, *role strain*, diminished pedagogical interaction, professional identity conflict, and the risk of teacher dehumanization.

The synthesis presented in Figure 1 demonstrates that the dehumanization of PAI teachers does not originate solely from increasing administrative workload but rather from the convergence of these four dimensions within the same professional setting. Educational regulations broaden the scope of the teaching profession, the Merdeka Curriculum transforms the nature of teachers' work, while the distinctive role of PAI teachers as character educators and spiritual mentors remains unchanged. When all these responsibilities must be fulfilled simultaneously, teachers face an accumulation of obligations that extends beyond conventional pedagogical functions. These findings indicate that the primary issue lies not in the quantity of work itself but in the gradual shift in teachers' professional orientation from nurturing human development to complying with bureaucratic educational requirements. In this context, dehumanization is understood as the erosion of teachers' humanistic role resulting from the increasing dominance of complex administrative systems.

The first dimension in Figure 1, namely the *Regulatory Framework*, demonstrates that the complexity of the PAI teaching profession is rooted in educational policies that have progressively expanded teachers' professional responsibilities. Regulations no longer position teachers solely as instructional practitioners but also as instructional designers, evaluators, student mentors, professional developers, and institutional actors. For PAI teachers, this complexity is further intensified because educational regulations also assign responsibilities for religious guidance and character development within schools. These findings indicate that regulations function not only as the legal foundation of the teaching profession but also as structural mechanisms shaping teachers' professional work from the outset. These findings are consistent with the research of Goodwin (2021), which argued that educational policy reforms expand teacher professionalism by introducing responsibilities beyond classroom instruction. Research by Snoek et al. (2019) likewise found that the broader the regulatory framework governing the teaching profession, the more complex teachers' professional responsibilities become. Nevertheless, this regulatory foundation alone does not fully explain the increasing professional pressure experienced by PAI teachers. Such complexity undergoes a fundamental transformation only when these regulatory provisions are translated into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Building upon this regulatory foundation, the second dimension in Figure 1 illustrates how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum transforms the professional work of PAI teachers at the operational level. This transformation is reflected not only in changes to instructional materials but also in the expansion of professional responsibilities that must be carried out continuously, ranging from the preparation of *Learning Objectives*, *Learning Objectives Flow*, and *Teaching Modules* to diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, learning reflections, and continuous professional development through the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) and professional learning communities. Thus, while educational regulations broaden the scope of the teaching profession, the Merdeka Curriculum intensifies the workload that teachers must complete throughout every instructional cycle. These findings are consistent with the research of Hatija et al. (2025), which demonstrated that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum increases teachers' workload complexity through the expansion of instructional planning requirements. Research by Shepard et al. (2018) likewise found that continuous assessment represents one of the most time-consuming aspects of teachers' work. The present study further demonstrates that digitalization has not reduced workload complexity because every instructional activity must still be systematically designed, implemented, and documented. Nevertheless, these transformations alone do not fully explain why PAI teachers experience greater professional pressure than teachers of other subjects.

The answer to this issue can be understood through the third dimension in Figure 1, namely *Professional Roles of PAI Teachers*. Unlike teachers of other subjects, whose primary responsibility is achieving academic learning outcomes, PAI teachers simultaneously perform the roles of *mu'allim* (knowledge educator), *murabbi* (mentor), *muaddib* (moral educator), spiritual guide, and *uswah hasanah* (moral role model) for their students. This broad spectrum of responsibilities means that the professional success of PAI teachers is evaluated not only by the achievement of instructional objectives but also by their ability to cultivate students' religious character, guide religious practices, and exemplify ethical conduct within the school environment. These findings are consistent with the research of Succarie (2024), which explained that the professional identity of PAI teachers is constructed through the integration of pedagogical, moral, and spiritual functions. Research by Saada (2020) likewise found that society places significantly higher expectations on PAI teachers because they are regarded as representatives of Islamic values within schools. Unlike studies that measure teacher professionalism primarily through administrative indicators, the present study demonstrates that the professionalism of PAI teachers is determined by their ability to balance administrative responsibilities with their vocation of character development. The cumulative effects of expanding regulations, transformed professional work, and the distinctive characteristics of the PAI teaching profession ultimately generate a series of interconnected professional consequences.

These consequences are illustrated in the final dimension of Figure 1, namely *Professional Consequences*. The synthesis demonstrates that increasing workload complexity develops into *time pressure*, *role strain*, *professional identity conflict*, reduced teacher-student interaction, greater challenges in character development, and ultimately the risk of dehumanization among PAI teachers. From Paulo Freire's perspective, this condition reflects an educational process in which compliance with bureaucratic mechanisms takes precedence over the dialogical relationships that constitute the essence of humanistic education. These findings reinforce the research of Lau et al. (2024), which argued that the bureaucratization of education has the potential to shift teachers' professional orientation from pedagogical practice toward administrative compliance. Research by Heinla and Kuurme (2024) also demonstrated that administrative pressure adversely affects the quality of teacher-student relationships. Unlike studies that regard dehumanization as a direct consequence of administrative workload alone, the present study shows that teacher dehumanization represents the cumulative outcome of expanding regulations, curriculum transformation, and the multidimensional professional roles of PAI teachers operating simultaneously.

The analysis of the four dimensions presented in Figure 1 reveals a consistent pattern. Educational regulations establish the professional foundation of teachers, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum intensifies their professional

responsibilities, and the distinctive characteristics of PAI teachers extend these responsibilities into moral and spiritual domains. When these three dimensions converge within the same professional capacity, multiple professional consequences become inevitable. These findings confirm that the dehumanization of PAI teachers does not arise from administrative responsibilities themselves but from the imbalance between bureaucratic demands and the fundamental purpose of education, which positions teachers as central actors in the process of human development. Therefore, Figure 1 functions not only as a conceptual model illustrating the relationships among these dimensions but also as a theoretical synthesis explaining the mechanism through which the dehumanization of PAI teachers develops during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Conclusion

This study found that the increasing workload of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum cannot be understood merely as a consequence of expanding administrative responsibilities but rather as the outcome of the interaction among expanding educational regulations, the transformation of curriculum implementation, and the multidimensional characteristics of the PAI teaching profession. These three dimensions collectively create a more complex professional environment that intensifies time pressure, *role strain*, and the gradual shift in teachers' professional orientation from pedagogical practice toward bureaucratic compliance. Accordingly, the dehumanization of PAI teachers is understood not as the loss of their professional identity but as the progressive reduction of their humanistic role, in which character development, spiritual guidance, and meaningful educational relationships are increasingly displaced by the dominance of administrative accountability. These findings suggest that the central challenge of the Merdeka Curriculum lies in the imbalance between bureaucratic demands and the fundamental purpose of education as a process of humanization.

The primary contribution of this study lies in the development of a conceptual model that explains the mechanism of PAI teachers' dehumanization through the relationships among the regulatory framework, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, the professional characteristics of PAI teachers, and the resulting professional consequences. This model extends previous discussions of teacher workload, which have largely focused on administrative responsibilities, by providing a humanistic perspective on the transformation of teachers' professional orientation. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its *library research* approach, meaning that the proposed conceptual relationships have not yet been empirically validated. Future research is therefore encouraged to employ qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods approaches to examine the proposed conceptual model across different educational levels, geographical contexts, and school settings, thereby providing a

more comprehensive and contextual understanding of the dehumanization of Islamic Education teachers.

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