

THE IMPACT OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM CHANGES ON ARABIC LANGUAGE TEACHING QUALITY AT MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the impact of changes introduced by the Merdeka Curriculum on the quality of Arabic language teaching at Madrasah Tsanawiyah. The research employs a qualitative approach with a case study method, collecting data through observations, and interviews with several Arabic language teachers at MTsN 1 Pasaman Barat as the research subjects. Data analysis is conducted using Creswell's method, involving procedures such as categorizing data, direct interpretation, pattern formation, and data analysis. The findings indicate both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, teaching methods have become more interactive and participatory, leveraging technology and digital media to encourage students to learn independently and collaboratively. However, negative impacts include unequal access to technology, additional workload for teachers, and challenges in adapting to new evaluation methods. To ensure effective and equitable implementation, these obstacles need to be addressed by providing comprehensive technology training, administrative support to reduce teachers' workload, development of clear and practical evaluation guidelines.

Keywords: Impact; Independent Curriculum; Arabic Language Teaching.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji dampak yang ditimbulkan oleh perubahan Kurikulum Merdeka terhadap kualitas Pengajaran bahasa Arab pada Madrasah Tsanawiyah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara dengan beberapa guru bahasa Arab di MTsN 1 Pasaman Barat sebagai subjek penelitian. Teknik analisis data menggunakan metode Creswell dengan prosedur mengkategorikan data, interpretasi langsung, membentuk pola dan menganalisis data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat dampak positif salah satunya, metode pengajaran menjadi lebih interaktif dan partisipatif dengan penggunaan teknologi dan media digital, mendorong siswa untuk belajar secara mandiri dan kolaboratif. Sedangkan dampak negatif seperti ketimpangan akses teknologi, beban tambahan bagi guru, dan kebingungan dalam adaptasi terhadap metode evaluasi baru. Oleh sebab itu hambatan perlu diatasi untuk memastikan implementasi yang efektif dan merata melalui pelatihan teknologi yang merata, dukungan administratif untuk meringankan beban guru, pengembangan panduan evaluasi yang jelas dan aplikatif.

Kata Kunci: Dampak; Kurikulum Merdeka; Pengajaran Bahasa Arab.



INTRODUCTION

Curriculum changes have a significant impact on teachers roles as educators. Often, teachers have not fully succeeded in optimally implementing the new curriculum. To ensure that the new curriculum is implemented as expected, teachers must thoroughly understand all aspects of the curriculum (Mawati et al., 2023). The adjustment of this curriculum aims to improve the quality of education to produce competent and high-quality human resources. The journey of curriculum changes has evolved from 1975 to the present, with the latest being the Merdeka Curriculum (Indriani, 2013). The Independent Learning Curriculum is a new policy designed by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture to encourage and motivate students to master competencies that are beneficial for achieving their goals (Rahmadhani et al., 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum was born out of the awareness of the importance of education that is adaptive and relevant to the developments of the times (Hussen et al., 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum plays a crucial role in education because it is closely related to the teaching process and determines the qualifications of graduates from an educational institution. This curriculum encompasses educational plans and activities carried out at the school, classroom, regional, and national levels (Rahmadhani et al., 2022). These changes are also driven by various challenges faced by the Indonesian education system. These challenges include the disparity in educational quality between urban and rural areas, the lack of 21st-century skills among graduates, and the need to create a generation capable of competing globally. The Merdeka Curriculum is expected to be a solution for improving the overall quality of education by emphasizing the development of students' competencies and character, as well as aligning teaching materials with the local context (Nurwiatin., 2022).

The background of this study highlights the significance of curriculum changes in addressing critical issues in the Indonesian education system, such as disparities in educational quality between urban and rural areas, the lack of 21st-century skills among students, and the need to align education with technological

advancements (Rijkiyah et al., 2023). The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum is intended to improve educational quality by emphasizing the development of students' competencies, character, and local-contextual teaching materials (Aryanti, 2023). However, challenges remain in its implementation, such as unequal access to technology, additional teacher workloads, and confusion in adapting to new assessment methods (Soly & Ely Kurniati, 2024).

Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) 1 Pasaman Barat is currently undergoing significant changes due to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, a policy that allows schools to have greater flexibility in shaping their educational programs. This shift has implications for various aspects of teaching, including Arabic language education. With the curriculum changes, teachers face new challenges in adapting teaching methods, materials, and assessments to meet the curriculum's goals. As Arabic is a core subject in the school, it becomes crucial to examine how these changes impact the quality of teaching, particularly in terms of student engagement, language proficiency, and teacher preparedness. This study is important to assess the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in improving or hindering the quality of Arabic language instruction at Madrasah Tsanawiyah, and to provide insights into possible improvements in the teaching process.

Several studies have been conducted on the Independent Curriculum, including research on the Impact of the National Education Transformation from the 2013 Curriculum to the Independent Curriculum. This research indicates that the Merdeka Curriculum creates a pleasant and conducive learning environment, motivates students to learn more effectively, and fosters creativity (Aufaa & Andaryani, 2023). In another study titled 'The Impact of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Readiness of Educators on the Execution of Learning in Schools,' the findings indicate that, in addition to students, teachers also experience significant impacts, particularly concerning their readiness to teach (Hartoyo et al., 2023). In the analysis of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Bina Taruna, Bandung Regency, during the implementation phase, the Merdeka Curriculum also affects students, educators, and other educational staff. These impacts are divided into two categories: positive impacts



and negative impacts (Miladiah et al., 2023). This study seeks to fill the gap in research by focusing specifically on the impact of curriculum changes on Arabic language teaching, a critical subject in Madrasah Tsanawiyah.

The main problem identified is the difficulty in ensuring consistent and effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum across all schools, especially in regions with limited resources. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on Arabic language teaching, an area that has not been extensively studied in relation to the Independent Curriculum. By analyzing how these curriculum changes affect Arabic language instruction, this study aims to provide insights and recommendations to improve the quality of teaching and ensure that the Merdeka Curriculum fulfills its educational objectives effectively across various schools.

METHOD

This research using a qualitative approach with a case study method. A case study involves a series of intensive, detailed, and in-depth scientific activities about a program, event, or activity, whether at the individual level, a group of people, an institution, or an organization, to gain a deep understanding of the event. Data collection techniques include direct observation and semi-structured interviews. Direct observation involves the researcher's observation and experience. Semi-structured interviews are conducted based on a set of open-ended questions (Ridlo, 2023). The instrument used in this research to assess the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum changes on Arabic language teaching quality at Madrasah Tsanawiyah is a combination of structured interviews and observation checklists.

The subject of the study are the Arabic teachers at MTsN 1 Pasaman Barat, the research subjects were selected because they are Arabic language teachers at MTsN 1 Pasaman Barat who are directly involved in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The selection aimed to ensure that the participants possess relevant knowledge and experience to provide insights into the impact of the curriculum changes on teaching quality.

The data analysis technique used by following Creswell's method. Stake (Ardyan et al., 2023) identifies four forms of data analysis and their interpretations

in case study research: (1) Categorizing data, (2) Direct interpretation, (3) Researchers forming patterns and seeking relationships between two or more categories, and (4) Analyzing data (Ananda & Kristiana, 2017).

Table 1 Observation Instrument Guide

Aspect Observed	Indicators	Observation Purpose	Assessment Criteria
Learning Objectives	Shift in learning objectives towards practical skills (oral communication, writing, culture).	Understanding the focus of learning objectives after the curriculum change.	Alignment between learning objectives and students' practical skill needs.
	Relevance of objectives to real-life contexts.	Identifying the shift towards more practical and contextual objectives.	Students' involvement in achieving practical and applicable learning objectives.
Learning Material	Use of authentic and contextual material (texts, articles, videos from Arabic-speaking countries).	Understanding the materials taught related to the curriculum change.	Quality of materials taught, authenticity, and relevance to students' needs.
	Relevance of materials to students' interests and needs.	Assessing the suitability of materials with students' interests.	Use of materials that reflect culture and real-life context for students.
Teaching Methods	Teaching becomes more interactive and participatory.	Observing the teaching methods applied after the curriculum change.	Use of technology (apps, videos, online platforms) in teaching.
	Utilization of technology and language learning applications.	Understanding how technology supports student engagement.	Level of student engagement through technology and digital media in learning.
Learning Evaluation	More comprehensive evaluation, incorporating both formative and summative assessments.	Observing changes in evaluation methods.	Presence of formative (daily tasks, quizzes) and summative (final exams) assessments.



	Continuous feedback that supports students' holistic development.	Assessing the quality and frequency of feedback given.	Quality and completeness of feedback provided to students.
Challenges in Implementation	Teachers face difficulties in adapting to new teaching and evaluation methods.	Identifying the challenges faced by teachers.	Barriers related to teacher training and technology access.
	Technological barriers in rural areas (limited access to devices and internet).	Assessing the technology access available for teaching Arabic.	Technological limitations in rural areas hindering the learning process.

Table 2 Interview Guidelines

Instrument Contents	Question	Valuation	Assessment Criteria
This section contains questions for teachers to obtain information about the impact of curriculum changes on the quality of Arabic language teaching at the MTs level	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Are the learning objectives in the Merdeka Curriculum more focused on practical skills than theory? 2. Does the material taught in the Merdeka Curriculum include authentic and contextual content? 3. Will teaching methods become more interactive and participatory with the Independent Curriculum? 4. How does learning evaluation change with the implementation of the Independent Curriculum? 5. Do teachers face challenges in adapting to new teaching and evaluation methods? 	The assessment was carried out based on the answers from the informants to the interview questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Truth: Accuracy of the informant's answers to the interview questions. 2. Completeness: Completeness of information provided by the informant. 3. Clarity : Clarity of the informant's explanation. 4. Depth: The depth of the informant's understanding of the Independent Curriculum

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data collected through observations and interviews was carefully analyzed to evaluate the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum changes on the quality of Arabic

language teaching at Madrasah Tsanawiyah. The analysis focused on both positive and negative outcomes, as outlined in the introduction and research questions.

The Positive Impact of the Merdeka Curriculum Changes on the Quality of Arabic Language Teaching

Research Observation Sheet

Research Title : **The Impact of Independent Curriculum Changes on Arabic Language Teaching Quality at Madrasah Tsanawiyah**

Researchers : Silvia Rahma Yanti

Observation Location : Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri 1 West Pasaman

Date of Observation : 16 June 2024

No.	Aspects Observed	Indicator	Field Findings	Information
1.	Learning Planning	RPP in accordance with the Independent Curriculum	The RPP has been prepared with the format of the Independent Curriculum	Teachers need training for the preparation of more complete lesson plans
2.	Teaching Methods	Use of interactive methods	Teachers use group discussion methods, but students are less active	Additional strategies or approaches are needed to increase student engagement.
3.	Use of Learning Media	Digital based or contextual learning media	Teachers use digital technology such as video through projectors in the learning process.	Madrasah needs to improve technological facilities such as computers to support learning
4.	More Authentic Learning Materials	Learning materials lead to the real-life context of students	The material already covers some authentic aspects, but not yet in all meetings	Teachers need to consistently relate context-based material in every learning
5.	Learning Evaluation	Applying authentic assessments	Learning evaluation combines formative and summative and project-based assessments	An assessment rubric that covers all aspects is needed proportionately

Figure 1 Research Observation Sheet

Based on observations of the changes brought by the Merdeka Curriculum at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, it has been found to have a positive impact on Arabic language teaching. From the perspective of learning objectives, the focus has shifted from theoretical aspects such as grammar and vocabulary to the development of practical skills, such as oral and written communication and cultural understanding. This shift makes learning more relevant to global needs and enhances students' confidence in communicating in Arabic. The learning materials have also become more authentic and contextual, utilizing articles, videos, and



original texts from Arabic-speaking countries that are designed to be engaging and aligned with students' interests. Additionally, interactive and participatory teaching methods that leverage digital technology, such as language learning applications and online platforms, have successfully increased student engagement in the learning process. Learning evaluation has also become more comprehensive, incorporating both formative and summative assessments that provide continuous feedback and support students' holistic development (Juwanda, Wagiran, & Subyantoro, 2024).

According to an interview with Informant 1, Mrs. H, an Arabic language teacher at MTs, she stated

“The Independent Learning Curriculum has indeed had a significant impact on Arabic language teaching, particularly in terms of learning objectives. Previously, the objectives for learning Arabic were more focused on cognitive aspects such as grammar and vocabulary. However, with this new curriculum, the objectives have become more holistic and oriented towards practical skills. Now, learning objectives are not just about understanding theory but also about how students can use Arabic in real-life situations. The Independent Learning Curriculum emphasizes the development of effective communication skills, both oral and written, as well as cultural understanding. Students are expected to interact and communicate in Arabic with greater confidence and relevance to the global context”.(16/06/2024)

Based on the interview results, the Independent Learning Curriculum has a significant impact on Arabic language teaching, particularly regarding learning objectives. Previously, the primary focus of Arabic language learning was on cognitive aspects such as grammar and vocabulary, which were more theoretical. However, with the Independent Curriculum, the learning objectives have become more holistic and oriented towards practical skills. Now, learning is not only centered on understanding theory but also on students' ability to use Arabic in real-life situations. The Independent Learning Curriculum emphasizes the development of effective communication skills, both oral and written, as well as enhancing cultural understanding (Sari et al, 2022). This enables students to interact and communicate in Arabic with greater confidence and relevance to the global context. This approach reflects a significant shift towards more practical and functional use

of Arabic, preparing students to be more competent in both local and international contexts.

In addition to learning objectives, the learning materials have also been adjusted in the Independent Curriculum, with the inclusion of more contextual and authentic content, and a focus on texts that reflect everyday life and Arab culture (Amelia, 2022). As stated by Informant 1 in the interview:

“The materials taught now contain more authentic and contextual content. For example, we use articles, videos, and original texts from Arabic-speaking countries. This helps students not only learn the language but also understand the culture and way of life in those countries. These materials are designed to be more engaging and aligned with students' interests, making them more motivated to learn”. (H/16/06/2024)

Based on the interview results, the materials taught in the Independent Learning Curriculum contain more authentic and contextual content. For example, the use of articles, videos, and original texts from Arabic-speaking countries is an important part of the learning process. This approach not only helps students learn the language but also understand the culture and way of life in those countries. The materials are designed to be more engaging and aligned with students' interests, which in turn enhances their motivation to learn. With more relevant and interesting materials, students are more encouraged to actively participate in the learning process and develop a deeper understanding of the Arabic language and culture (Parihin et al, 2023).

The teaching methods have also been adjusted in the Independent Curriculum. The teaching approach has shifted to a more interactive and participatory model, encouraging the use of technology and digital media to enhance student engagement (Idhartono et al, 2022). According to the interview with Informant 2, Mrs. IR, an Arabic language teacher at MTs, she stated:

“The teaching methods have also shifted to being more interactive and participatory. We use various technologies and digital media to make learning more engaging and interactive. For example, we often use language learning apps, educational videos, and online platforms for discussions and assignments. This approach helps students learn independently and collaborate with their peers”. (IR/16/06/2024)



Based on the interview results, the teaching methods in the Independent Learning Curriculum have shifted to be more interactive and participatory. The use of various technologies and digital media is now integrated to make learning more engaging and dynamic (Astrini Eka Putri, 2024). For example, language learning apps, educational videos, and online platforms are frequently used for discussions and assignments. This approach not only makes learning more engaging but also helps students learn independently and collaborate with their peers. With this method, students are more actively involved in the learning process and have access to a variety of learning resources that enrich their experience. This transformation aims to enhance student engagement and strengthen their ability to use technology for learning.

In addition, assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum is more holistic, incorporating both formative and summative evaluations, and allowing for self-assessment and continuous feedback. All these changes aim to create a more dynamic, relevant, and meaningful learning experience for students in studying Arabic (Putra et al, 2023). As stated by Informant 2 in the interview, she mentioned:

“The Independent Learning Curriculum indeed has a significant impact on various aspects of teaching, including the evaluation process. In terms of evaluation, the approach now used is much more comprehensive and flexible compared to the previous curriculum. This comprehensive approach means that evaluation not only focuses on the final results but also on the learning process itself. We use various types of evaluations, ranging from formative to summative assessments. Formative assessments are conducted continuously throughout the learning process, such as through daily assignments, quizzes, and small projects. This helps us understand students' progress on an ongoing basis and provide constructive feedback”. (IR/16/06/2024)

Based on the interview results, the changes brought by the Independent Learning Curriculum have significantly impacted various aspects of teaching, including the evaluation process. In terms of evaluation, the approach now is much more comprehensive and flexible than the previous curriculum. This comprehensive approach means that evaluation not only focuses on the final results but also the student's learning process. Various types of evaluations are implemented, ranging from formative to summative assessments (Efendi, 2024).

Formative assessments are conducted continuously throughout the learning process, such as through daily assignments, quizzes, and small projects. This helps teachers understand students' progress on an ongoing basis and provide constructive feedback. Consequently, evaluation in the Independent Learning Curriculum is better able to capture students' overall development and promote more effective learning improvement.

The Negative Impact of the Merdeka Curriculum Changes on the Quality of Arabic Language Teaching

Based on interview results, the changes brought by the Merdeka Curriculum have also had negative impacts on Arabic language teaching. Teachers face additional burdens in adapting to rapid changes, including implementing new teaching methods and assessments that they have not yet fully mastered, while additional training is not always evenly available. Furthermore, the use of technology as part of the curriculum poses challenges in rural areas where access to devices and internet networks is limited. This situation creates a gap in the quality of learning between students with access to technology and those without. The rapid changes can also confuse students who are accustomed to previous approaches, disrupting the consistency of their learning process (Ariga, 2023).

As stated by Informant 1 in the interview, she mentioned:

“Personally, I see a negative impact that needs attention from this change, namely the rapid shift, which requires us as teachers to adapt to new teaching methods and evaluations that we may not be fully prepared for. This requires time and additional training, which is not always available at every school (HR/16/06/2024).

Based on the interview results above, the Independent Learning Curriculum changes have a negative impact due to the rapid shift in teaching methods and evaluations. The teacher expressed that adapting to these new methods requires time and additional training, which is not always available in every school (Herlina et al., 2023). This creates its challenges for teachers in preparing effective teaching materials and strategies. In line with this, the perception is reinforced by the interview results with Informant 2, who stated:



“The use of technology has indeed become an important part of this change, but in our school, which is located in a rural area, access to technology is often still limited. Many students do not have their own devices or stable internet access. This makes it difficult for them to participate in learning that relies on digital media, creating disparities in learning opportunities between students who can access technology and those who cannot (IR/16/06/2024)”

Based on the interview results above, the Independent Learning Curriculum has a negative impact related to the use of technology. Although technology is an important component of this change, access to technology in rural schools is still limited. Many students do not have their own devices or stable internet access, which hinders their ability to participate in digital-based learning. This condition creates disparities in learning opportunities between students who have access to technology and those who do not, thereby exacerbating educational disparities in rural areas (Fauziah et al, 2018). This teacher's perspective highlights the need for special attention to the readiness of educators and equitable access to technology to ensure the successful and uniform implementation of new teaching methods.

The analysis of this research data answers the problems and objectives of the research, by showing the positive and negative impacts of the Merdeka Curriculum on Arabic language teaching. The switch towards practical skills and technology integration is considered beneficial, improving student engagement and communication skills. However, the challenges faced by teachers, such as the lack of adequate training and inequality of access to technology, need to be addressed to ensure effective and equitable curriculum implementation at MTsN 1 Pasaman Barat.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion above, the changes brought by the Merdeka Curriculum have both positive and negative impacts on the quality of Arabic language teaching at Madrasah Tsanawiyah. On the positive side, these adjustments have resulted in significant improvements to learning objectives, learning materials have been adapted to be more authentic and contextual, teaching methods have been transformed to become more interactive and participatory. Additionally, learning

evaluation has become more comprehensive. On the negative side, teachers face difficulties in adapting to new teaching methods and evaluations. The integration of technology in learning encounters obstacles in rural areas. To ensure the effective and equitable implementation of this curriculum, intensive training and mentoring for teachers are required to help them master the new methods. Additionally, equal access to technology, especially in rural areas, is urgently needed to minimize disparities in education quality. Future research is recommended to explore strategies for enhancing teacher training and providing more equitable access to technology to support the optimal implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

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