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SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN ARABIC LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT
Each school faces its own challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction. This study aims to identify the implementation process, challenges, and solutions in applying the Merdeka Curriculum to Arabic language instruction. Using a Systematic Literature Review following the PRISMA model, it searched, selected, reduced, and analyzed 27 articles published between 2022 and 2025 from Google Scholar and Garuda.The findings show three main points. First, implementation in Islamic senior high schools (MA) generally follows three systematic stages: planning (developing teaching modules, Learning Outcomes, and Learning Objective Flows/ATP), implementation (student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project), and evaluation (formative and summative assessments). Project-Based Learning is the most frequently used model. Second, supporting factors include teacher readiness and competence, adequate facilities, madrasah management support, training and workshops, and the use of digital technology. Inhibiting factors include teachers' limited understanding of the curriculum, difficulty developing new teaching materials, low student interest and motivation, shortages of curriculum-based facilities and textbooks, and time allocation problems. Third, proposed solutions include continuous teacher training and mentoring, stronger Subject Teachers' Consultative Forums (MGMP), self-developed teaching materials, optimized digital platforms and differentiated instruction, and synergy among government, madrasahs, and teaching communities.

Keywords: *implementation; merdeka curriculum; arabic; high school; systematic literature review*

INTRODUCTION
To date, numerous studies have been conducted on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction. However, among the existing studies, none have addressed the majority of the issues encountered in its implementation. Since Arabic language instruction is part of madrasah education in Indonesia, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction aims to go beyond a focus solely on the core material in textbooks (Annas et al., 2025). Every curriculum that has ever been implemented in Indonesian education naturally carries certain expectations, just as the launch of the Merdeka Curriculum does. In Arabic language learning, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is oriented toward the achievement of three competencies: first, linguistic competence (*al-kifayah al-lugawiyyah*); second, communicative competence (*al-kifayah al-ittisaliyyah*); and third,

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cultural competence (*al-kifayah al-saqafiyyah*) (Nuraeni, 2023). These competencies can help students achieve their goals in communicating in Arabic and enable them to study Islamic religion with a good understanding of Arabic-language religious texts (Bamualim, 2020).

As stated by Izzudin Musthafa, the quality of education is influenced by external factors such as the school environment, curriculum support, the teaching and learning process, teachers, and facilities and infrastructure, among others (Azzahra & Muhajir, 2023). The implementation of the curriculum in each subject naturally varies. Based on this, it is crucial to review previous studies on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction. Previous research serves not only as a theoretical foundation but also as an empirical basis for mapping trends, research focuses, and findings generated by previous researchers. Through a systematic review of existing research findings, researchers can identify general patterns in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction, covering the aspects of planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning (Snyder, 2019). In addition, a comprehensive literature review allows researchers to assess the extent to which the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum such as learner-centered learning, competency-building, and learning flexibility have been effectively implemented in the context of Arabic language instruction in madrasahs.

However, based on emerging research trends, most existing studies still tend to address the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in a piecemeal mannerfor example, by focusing solely on teachers' perceptions, the readiness of educational institutions, or descriptions of specific teaching practices. There has not yet been much research that systematically summarizes and analyzes the majority of issues arising in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction, such as pedagogical challenges, resource constraints, teacher readiness, and the gap between curriculum concepts and actual practices in the field (Kahfi, 2022). In fact, a comprehensive analysis of the issues is essential to ensure that the implementation of the curriculum is not merely normative, but also responsive to the actual conditions of madrasah education (Manan & Faruqi, 2025). The research gap is becoming increasingly apparent in the context of current education policy dynamics, where discussions about curriculum evaluation and the potential for curriculum replacement or refinement have resurfaced. The relatively rapid changes in curriculum policy call for a reflective, evidence-based review of the current curriculum, including the Merdeka Curriculum (Purnomo et al., 2025). Without a synthesis of previous research findings, the policy-making process risks overlooking empirical findings that could actually serve as the basis for improving the implementation of Arabic language instruction in the future (Damanik et al., 2025).

Therefore, this study conducted through a systematic literature review—is relevant and strategic for addressing this research gap by systematically reviewing studies on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction from 2022 to 2025, thereby providing a comprehensive overview of the issues, challenges, and recommendations that can serve as a reference for future curriculum development and instructional practices. The research questions to be examined in this study are as follows.
RQ1: What are the patterns of implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction at Islamic high schools as reported in the literature?
RQ2: What are the factors that support and hinder the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction at Islamic high schools?

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RQ3: What strategies or solutions have previous researchers recommended for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction at Islamic high schools?

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) method. A Systematic Literature Review is conducted for various purposes, including identifying, reviewing, evaluating, and interpreting all available research on the topic under investigation, by formulating relevant research questions (Susilo et al., 2020). According to Richardson (2013), writing an SLR requires a more comprehensive and systematic approach, with the study period limited to the years in which the articles were published (Nursalam, 2020). The SLR method used was the PRISMA method for conducting a systematic review. The systematic review was developed using article selection criteria, a search strategy, data extraction, and data analysis procedures. In general, the PRISMA method is divided into several steps (Tedja et al., 2024). The results of this literature review are expected to provide insight into the importance of thorough preparation for the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in Arabic language instruction. In this study, the researcher utilized data from various published sources from 2022 to 2025, including journal articles and conference proceedings. The collected data will be analyzed descriptively. The research methodology consists of the following stages:

The first and second stages involved identifying research data sources and selecting literature; the search was conducted online using the "Google Scholar" and Garuda research databases. The research was then screened based on the criteria of published articles from 2022 to 2025. Other criteria included keywords relevant to this study ("implementation," "Arabic language learning," "independent curriculum," "madrasah aliyah," "high school").

The third and fourth stages involve the collection and determination of data eligibility criteria; at this stage, the researcher classifies the literature data that meet the inclusion criteria according to the research being conducted. According to Petticrew and Roberts (2006), the inclusion and exclusion criteria for sample selection must clearly describe the study design, population, intervention, and outcomes that are included and excluded from the review (Hadi et al., 2020). The data collection process was conducted manually by reviewing the literature based on criteria such as article title, year of publication, topic, relationships between variables, source, keywords, abstract, and research findings that demonstrate the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in Arabic language instruction. The inclusion criteria (IC) in this study cover several points. First, all literature discussing the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in Arabic language learning at Madrasah Aliyah and high schools in Indonesia. Second, all literature aimed at explaining the stages of implementing the Merdeka curriculum and the preparation of the Merdeka curriculum for Arabic language learning at the Madrasah Aliyah and high school levels in Indonesia.

The fifth stage involves the presentation of data. The data presented in this study consists of data that has been reviewed based on eligibility criteria, categorized as follows: article title, year of publication, topic, relationships between variables, source,

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keywords, abstract, and research findings that demonstrate the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in Arabic language instruction at Madrasah Aliyah.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The search, selection, and analysis were conducted using the following keywords: "implementation," "Arabic language learning," "independent curriculum," "madrasah aliyah," and "high school." The researcher identified 186 relevant scholarly articles. The articles were then screened based on their titles and abstracts, resulting in 58 relevant scholarly articles and 128 irrelevant ones. Subsequently, the articles were analyzed in greater depth by reading the full texts, resulting in 27 relevant articles. The following table outlines the article analysis process from the initial search.

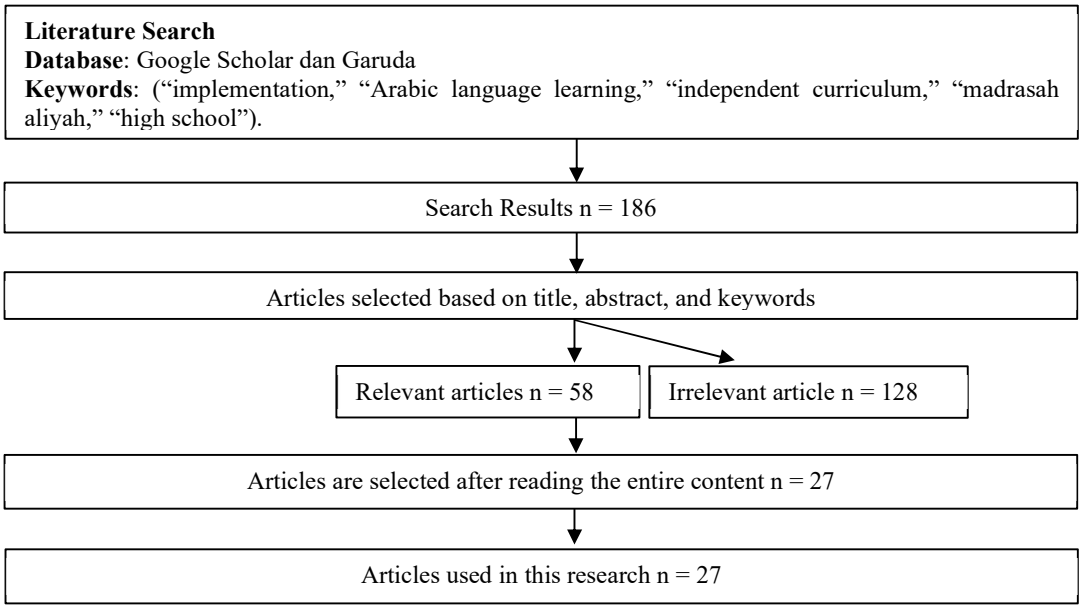


Figure 1. Article Analysis Process

After conducting an academic literature review, the researcher found that there were 186 articles discussing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction at the Madrasah Aliyah and Indonesian high school levels between 2022 and 2025. Based on these findings, the following 58 articles are included in the appendix detailing the literature search process using the Google Scholar and Garuda databases. The data obtained were reanalyzed and adjusted according to the predetermined inclusion criteria. Based on the analysis of the 58 articles, 27 were used in this study; these articles tended to employ descriptive qualitative methods, with data collected through interviews and observations.

Table 1: Articles Cited

NO	Code	Author/Year	Focus	Method
1	AN	(Anwar et al., 2024)	Strategies and challenges in 10th-grade Arabic instruction, Islamic High School 2 Kediri	Descriptive Qualitative
2	SI	(Sidik et al., 2024)	Challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction	Descriptive Qualitative
3	QO	(Qomaruddin, 2022)	Challenges and efforts to address them, Islamic High School Nasyi'in Sidoarjo	Qualitative Case Study
4	KI	(Kartini, 2023)	Challenges faced by Arabic teachers in 10th grade, Islamic High School Pangkep	Descriptive Qualitative

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NO	Code	Author/Year	Focus	Method
5	NI	(A. K. Nisa & Al Ghifary, 2023)	Implementation in religious studies and Arabic courses based on KMA No. 183 and No. 184 of 2019, Islamic High School 1 Kendari	Descriptive Qualitative
6	MU	(Muhammad, 2024)	Implementation and strategies, Ummul Ayman Foundation Islamic High School, Samalanga, Bireuen, Aceh	Descriptive Qualitative
7	YU	(Yunita et al., 2024)	Implementation and challenges, Islamic High School Kota Sorong	Descriptive Qualitative
8	SA	(Sakinah & Wahyuningsih, 2025)	Actual field conditions of implementation as a perspective for students, teachers, and schools	Descriptive Qualitative
9	AF	(Afiaturrahmah et al., 2024)s	Preparation, strategies, challenges, and solutions of teachers, Islamic High School 2 Cirebon	Qualitative Case Study
10	HA	(Habib & Kabalmay, 2025)	Appropriateness of implementation, learning outcomes (CP), ATP, and teaching modules, MAN 1 Gresik	Descriptive Qualitative
11	MI	(Mila, 2025)	Implementation of Ministerial Decree No. 347 of 2022 (Madrasah Merdeka Curriculum) in learning activities	Descriptive Qualitative
12	GU	(Gunawan & Gumiandari, 2024)	Challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language classes	Qualitative Case Study
13	RA	(Rafi et al., 2023)	Alignment between planning, implementation, and learning outcomes (Congruence model)	Descriptive-Analytical Qualitative
14	YA	(Yanto et al., 2025)	Implementation of differentiated instruction in Arabic language instruction	Descriptive Qualitative
15	QU	(Qurrota A'yun & Ammar, 2024)	Teachers' strategies in 10th-grade Arabic instruction, Muhammadiyah 2 High School Sidoarjo	Descriptive Qualitative
16	NIS	(A. W. Nisa & Hikmah, 2024)	Implementation, supporting factors, obstacles, and solutions, pilot school Muhammadiyah Islamic High School 1 Jombang	Descriptive Qualitative
17	AN	(Ansori et al., 2023)	Students' responses to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum	Descriptive Qualitative
18	HE	(Herdiani et al., 2025)	Curriculum implementation, teachers' main challenges, and innovative strategies	Descriptive Qualitative
19	IH	(Ihsan et al., 2025)	Project-Based Learning (PjBL) implementation and its influencing factors, Islamic High School 2 Kutai Kartanegara	Qualitative Case Study
20	SY	(Syafe'i et al., 2026)	Arabic learning assessment (planning, formative and summative, instruments, follow-up), senior high schools in West Java	Qualitative Case Study
21	AK	(A. K. Nisa et al., 2025)	TPACK integration in digital technology-based Arabic language learning	Qualitative Case Study
22	AH	(Ahyar, 2025)	21st-century skills (4Cs) and digital technology integration, Islamic High School 4 Jakarta	Qualitative Case Study
23	TH	(Thoriq et al., 2025)	Adaptation of pesantren-based schools to the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic instruction	Qualitative Case Study
24	FNS	(F. Nisa & Indriana, 2023)	Planning, implementation, evaluation, supporting factors, and obstacles	Qualitative Case Study

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NO	Code	Author/Year	Focus	Method
25	SU	(Sunarko et al., 2024)	Nahwu (Arabic grammar) learning: planning, media and methods, and assessment in state senior high schools	Qualitative Case Study
26	IF	(Iftitah, 2023)	Merdeka Curriculum materials and learning process in 10th grade, Islamic High School 2 Mojokerto	Descriptive Qualitative
27	LA	(Latifa et al., 2024)	Implementation and evaluation in 10th-grade Arabic language learning	Qualitative Case Study

The 27 articles in Table 2 were published in 2022 (1 article), 2023 (6 articles), 2024 (10 articles), 2025 (9 articles), ans 2026 (1 article). Most of the articles were therefore published in 2024 and 2025, which suggests growing scholarly attention to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction. All of the articles use a qualitative approach: 15 are descriptive qualitative studies, 11 are qualitative case studies, and one (Rafi et al., 2023) is a descriptive-analytical qualitative study based on the Congruence model. This distribution is consistent with the tendency of these studies to collect data through interviews and observations.

The studies were conducted at Islamic senior high schools (Madrasah Aliyah) and general senior high schools in various regions of Indonesia. Among the studies that specify a location, most were carried out on Java, including Kediri, Sidoarjo, Cirebon, Gresik, Jombang, Mojokerto, Jakarta, and West Java Province, while others took place outside Java, namely in Bireuen (Aceh), Pangkep and Kendari (Sulawesi), Kota Sorong, and Kutai Kartanegara. Five studies focus specifically on 10th-grade classes (Anwar et al., 2024; Iftitah, 2023; Kartini, 2023; Latifa et al., 2024; Qurrota A'yun & Ammar, 2024).

Based on their focus, the articles can be grouped into four themes. The first and largest group (11 articles) examines challenges, supporting factors, and strategies for overcoming obstacles (Afiaturrahmah et al., 2024; Anwar et al., 2024; Gunawan & Gumiandari, 2024; Herdiani et al., 2025; Kartini, 2023; A. W. Nisa & Hikmah, 2024; F. Nisa & Indriana, 2023; Qomaruddin, 2022; Qurrota A'yun & Ammar, 2024; Sidik et al., 2024; Yunita et al., 2024). The second group (10 articles) describes how the curriculum is implemented, adapted, and evaluated, including the planning documents (CP, ATP, and teaching modules), the alignment with ministerial regulations, and students' responses (Ansori et al., 2023; Habib & Kabalmay, 2025; Iftitah, 2023; Latifa et al., 2024; Mila, 2025; Muhammad, 2024; A. K. Nisa & Al Ghifary, 2023; Rafi et al., 2023; Sakinah & Wahyuningsih, 2025; Thoriq et al., 2025). The third group (4 articles) concentrates on specific pedagogical aspects, namely differentiated instruction (Yanto et al., 2025), Project-Based Learning (Ihsan et al., 2025), learning assessment (Syafe'i et al., 2026), and nahwu instruction (Sunarko et al., 2024). The fourth group (2 articles) addresses digital technology and 21st-century skills (Ahyar, 2025; A. K. Nisa et al., 2025). These four themes provide the basis for the answers to RQ1 to RQ3 presented in the following sections.

Answer to RQ1: What are the patterns of implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction at Islamic high schools as reported in the literature?

The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in Arabic language instruction at Madrasah Aliyah is carried out systematically and in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka curriculum. In an article written by (Sakinah & Wahyuningsih, 2025) (Habib & Kabalmay, 2025) and (A. W. Nisa & Hikmah, 2024) The implementation of the

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Merdeka curriculum in Arabic language instruction begins with the preparation of modules, Learning Outcomes, and Learning Objective Sequences in accordance with the Merdeka curriculum. The instructional process includes opening activities, core activities, closing activities, and assessment (Qurrota A'yun & Ammar, 2024). Outside of class, students carry out projects to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile (P5). Teachers have already implemented authentic assessment. However, the affective and psychomotor assessment instruments still need to be adjusted.

This is consistent with the research (Yunita et al., 2024) which found that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum was carried out in accordance with its principles and in a phased manner, with student-centered teaching methods applied, resulting in students who were more confident in expressing their opinions. Research by (Afiaturrahmah et al., 2024) adds that before systematic implementation, thorough preparation for the Merdeka Curriculum was carried out. First and foremost, teachers and school administrators engaged in thorough preparation by attending seminars and training sessions on the Merdeka Curriculum organized by the Ministry.

The findings of a study (Muhammad, 2024) indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, integrated with the Ministry of Education and Culture's curriculum, KMI, Salafiyah, and Quran memorization programs, supports the achievement of Arabic language learning outcomes. Research by (Ihsan et al., 2025) highlights the application of Project-Based Learning (PJBL); since the Merdeka Curriculum promotes project-based learning, the PJBL model has become a frequently used approach.

Answer to RQ2: What are the factors that support and hinder the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction at Islamic high schools?

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction certainly involves both supporting and hindering factors. To ensure the smooth implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, training sessions are held for teachers on the administration, principles, and objectives that form the core of the Merdeka Curriculum (Gunawan & Gumiandari, 2024). This statement is supported by research (Thoriq et al., 2025) which indicates that schools provide specialized training for pesantren teachers and develop teaching materials tailored to the flexibility of government policies within the Merdeka curriculum. They also optimize training and supporting facilities and infrastructure (Qurrota A'yun & Ammar, 2024), and conduct ongoing evaluations of obstacles encountered in the field (F. Nisa & Indriana, 2023).

The obstacles encountered in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum are highly diverse. This is because the transition from the K-13 curriculum and its associated policies to the Merdeka curriculum involves significant differences. To explain these obstacles, the researcher has categorized them into external and internal factors. Internal factors faced by schools and Arabic language teachers in implementing the Merdeka curriculum include the following: 1) according to several studies, a lack of facilities or infrastructure (Sidik et al., 2024) (Kartini, 2023) (Yunita et al., 2024) (Latifa et al., 2024) (F. Nisa & Indriana, 2023) and the limitations of instructional materials (Sakinah & Wahyuningsih, 2025), (Sidik et al., 2024); 2) determining teaching methods in accordance with the Merdeka curriculum, developing instructional modules, and adapting summative and formative assessments (Qomaruddin, 2022) (Gunawan & Gumiandari,

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2024); teachers' limitations in using technology (A. K. Nisa & Al Ghifary, 2023) (Thoriq et al., 2025).

External factors hindering the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum include: 1) the shift away from traditional teaching methods and time constraints (Anwar et al., 2024) (Mila, 2025); 2) students' lack of interest in learning Arabic (Kartini, 2023) (A. W. Nisa & Hikmah, 2024); 3) teachers' class schedules (A. K. Nisa & Al Ghifary, 2023); 4) the lack of Arabic textbooks based on the Merdeka curriculum (Rafi et al., 2023); 5) the inability to create a bilingual environment (Herdiani et al., 2025)(Ansori et al., 2023); an overly complex workload (Thoriq et al., 2025); and a lack of student creativity, which leads to difficulties in completing learning projects (Sunarko et al., 2024).

Answer to RQ3: What strategies or solutions have previous researchers recommended for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction at Islamic high schools?

In addition to the many internal and external obstacles, there are several possible solutions, including: 1) improving inadequate facilities and infrastructure, and holding meetings with Arabic language teachers (Qomaruddin, 2022); 2) using the administrative manual as a guideline for organizing administrative tasks, setting targets for material delivery, and preparing textbooks based on the Merdeka curriculum (Afiaturrahmah et al., 2024); 3) providing additional training for teachers to help them understand all elements of the Merdeka curriculum (Latifa et al., 2024); 4) forming smaller groups to be assigned tasks in the creation of learning projects (Mila, 2025); 5) creating a more conducive learning environment and optimizing learning media (Rafi et al., 2023); 6) adapting learning strategies to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles (Yanto et al., 2025); 7) optimal use of e-report cards; individual guidance using various methods such as drills, role-playing, discussions, etc (Syafe'i et al., 2026); 8) fostering collaboration among teachers in the development of assessments and syllabi (A. K. Nisa & Al Ghifary, 2023); 9) conducting regular supervision, establishing honors classes to boost student motivation, integrating foreign languages, and adjusting time allocations (Sunarko et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language instruction at Madrasah Aliyah has proceeded through three systematic stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. During the planning stage, teachers developed instructional modules, Learning Outcomes (CP), and Learning Objective Sequences (ATP) as the foundation for instruction. The implementation stage was characterized by student-centered learning, the application of differentiated instruction, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5), with the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model being the most widely used approach. Meanwhile, evaluation was conducted through formative and summative assessments, although assessment instruments for the affective and psychomotor domains still require refinement.

In terms of supporting factors, teacher readiness and competence, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, support from the madrasah, training and workshops related to the Merdeka Curriculum, and the use of digital technology have proven to be key to the success of the implementation. However, this study also revealed a number of significant obstacles, both internal (teachers' limited understanding of curriculum concepts, difficulties in developing new teaching materials, and limited technological

proficiency) and external (low student interest and motivation in learning Arabic, a lack of Merdeka Curriculum-based textbooks, limited allocation of instructional time, and teachers' complex workloads). To address these challenges, this study recommends several strategies, including: continuous improvement of teacher training and mentoring; strengthening Subject Teacher Working Groups (MGMP); the development of self-created teaching materials by teachers; the optimization of digital learning platforms and differentiated instruction; and the need for stronger synergy between government policies, madrasahs, and the teaching community.

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