

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN ARABIC LANGUAGE LEARNING AT MAN 11 JAKARTA

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ABSTRACT

Studi ini mengeksplorasi implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Arab di Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 11 Jakarta, sebuah pergeseran penting dalam sistem pendidikan Indonesia yang bertujuan mendorong pembelajaran lebih mendalam dan otonomi guru. Penelitian ini secara primer berupaya memahami bagaimana kurikulum tersebut diimplementasikan, tantangan utama yang dihadapi guru, dan strategi inovatif yang diterapkan untuk mengatasi hambatan. Menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif, data dikumpulkan secara cermat melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dan analisis dokumen komprehensif, melibatkan guru serta siswa. Temuan kunci menunjukkan bahwa guru menghadapi tantangan signifikan, meliputi terbatasnya sumber daya relevan, rendahnya interaksi komunikatif, dan persepsi siswa terhadap Bahasa Arab sebagai kewajiban formal semata, yang diperparah oleh latar belakang siswa yang heterogen. Meski demikian, guru menunjukkan inisiatif luar biasa, mengembangkan strategi diferensiasi inovatif seperti video kontekstual, kelompok studi intensif, dan proyek digital. Pendekatan ini secara nyata meningkatkan motivasi dan kepercayaan diri siswa, menunjukkan potensi adaptif kurikulum. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa keberhasilan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka sangat bergantung pada teacher agency proaktif guru dan kreativitas dalam beradaptasi dengan realitas kompleks, menggarisbawahi pentingnya sinergi dukungan kebijakan, sumber daya, dan pelatihan.

Keywords: Kurikulum Merdeka, Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab, Inovasi Pendidikan, Madrasah

ABSTRACT

This study explores the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) in Arabic language learning at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 11 Jakarta, a pivotal shift in Indonesia's education system aimed at fostering deeper learning and teacher autonomy. The research primarily sought to understand how the curriculum is implemented, the major challenges teachers face, and the innovative strategies employed to overcome these barriers. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach, data was meticulously collected through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and comprehensive document analysis, involving both teachers and students. Key findings reveal that teachers encounter significant challenges, including limited relevant resources, low communicative interaction, and students' perception of Arabic merely as a formal obligation, compounded by heterogeneous student backgrounds. Despite these hurdles, teachers demonstrated remarkable initiative, developing innovative differentiation strategies like contextual videos, intensive study groups, and digital projects. These approaches notably boosted student motivation and confidence, demonstrating the curriculum's adaptive potential. The study concludes that the successful implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka critically depends on proactive teacher agency and creative adaptation to complex realities, underscoring the need for synergistic support in policy, resources, and training.

Keywords: Kurikulum Merdeka, Arabic Language Learning, Educational Innovation, Madrasah

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's education system has been responding to driving paradigm shifts and striving to remain current amidst ever-changing global trends. Here are several creative

policies and specializes being introduced, not only to solve global problems, but to meet students' growing demands. This revolution goes well beyond mere change of curriculum; it is a fundamental reconceptualization of learning, a pursuit of a holistic engagement of cognitive, affective and psychomotor elements. A major milestone on this evolution is that the Indonesian government has finally issued launch the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum) in the academic year 2022-2023. Curriculum Merdeka was developed in response to the criticism of the previous curriculums being too rigid, dense, with little room for teachers' and students' creativity. The new curriculum is designed to give freedom to educators so that the learning process is more in-depth, meaningful, and illustrative of the students' unique characteristics.

Goli and Achadi discuss that the three main pillars of Curriculum Merdeka include, first, student-centric learning, where the role of a teacher is reduced to a facilitator with the right to develop their lesson plans based on the local context. Second, it involves the incorporation of eutheics and critical thinking values, such as inclusivity, diversity, and rational judgment in the form of introducing the five National Principles into the curricular material. This points to the third pillar: flexible learning hours and time allocation for project activities or focused learning on related materials. This curriculum is also offered as a solution to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education. It encourages the adoption of technology by educators along with diagnostic assessments that allow teachers to determine the learning needs of individual students (Ariga 2023). In addition, data from the 2021-2023 National Assessment showed significant improvements in literacy and numeracy among schools that implemented Merdeka Curriculum compared to schools that still adhered to the 2013 Curriculum (Wahyudin et al. 2024).

In addition, various problems in the implementation of this new curriculum arise from various factors, such as the lack of innovation and creativity in developing appropriate learning methods and models in implementing the Independent Learning Curriculum, the lack of use of learning media, and monotonous teaching (sumber penulis mahdir jurnal). In general, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Arabic language learning in madrasas faces significant challenges. This curriculum is designed to provide teachers with freedom and flexibility in developing contextual, collaborative, and project-based learning. However, in practice, the reality on the ground shows a significant gap between the curriculum's ideal goals and the actual learning conditions. One of the most prominent obstacles is the limited availability of learning resources and media relevant to the learning outcomes of the Independent Curriculum. Standardized textbooks are still rare, so teachers often have to modify the material themselves, combine multiple references, or seek additional materials from online sources that may not align with the curriculum's requirements.

Furthermore, the Independent Curriculum's requirement to implement differentiated learning based on students' interests and talents has not been fully optimized. Many Arabic teachers have not received in-depth technical training in this method, particularly in integrating learning technology, designing creative projects, and developing authentic assessments. The background of some teachers, accustomed to traditional methods based on memorization and grammatical explanations makes adapting to more interactive and student-centered learning a challenging process. Another problem that exacerbates these barriers is students' low communicative practice outside the context of exams or religious

rituals. Arabic is still perceived solely as a language of worship, thus lacking motivation to use it in everyday conversation or cross-cultural communication. As a result, listening and speaking skills are underdeveloped, while learning often becomes bogged down in understanding texts and translations.

Merdeka Curriculum certainly has a bearing on the learning of Arabic in madrasas, particularly at the Madrasah Aliyah (MA) level. In that curriculum, Arabic is learned not only as a foreign language but also strategically to enhance Islamic understanding, culture, and traditions of Islamic scientific heritage (Muthmainnah et al., 2016). Based on Mufidah (2018), materials for Arabic learners are designed to train these four major skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing; alongside teaching values of tolerance and cultural awareness. This module from phase F of class XI specifically details how discussion activities in groups along with presentations and literacy practices tie in with Arab culture. In this context, MAN 11 Jakarta, being one of the best Madrasah Aliyah Negeri at South Jakarta, has a strong commitment to develop research and innovation learning. The school profile indicates an emphasis on academics, character, and skills (Interview, 2025). Through Merdeka Curriculum, the Arabic language teachers of MAN 11 Jakarta are supposed to create fun and contextualized learning activities like Arabic news making or cultural presentations.

Although numerous studies on the Independent Curriculum (Curriculum Merdeka) have been conducted, most of them discuss general implementation and do not focus on Arabic language learning. Existing studies on Arabic in madrasas (Islamic schools) also generally discuss traditional methods and language skill development, but have not yet linked them to the principles of the Independent Curriculum. Furthermore, research specifically examining the strategies of Arabic language teachers in leading madrasas to overcome obstacles such as limited learning resources, low communicative interaction, and the perception of Arabic as a ritual language is still rare. Documentation of best practices, particularly in the areas of technology utilization, interest-based learning, and creative projects, remains limited. This presents a research gap that this study aims to fill.

However, in field practice, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning at MAN 11 Jakarta still faces various complex obstacles. Firstly, the availability of Arabic learning resources that meet the standards of the Merdeka Curriculum is relatively limited, so teachers must modify the material or look for additional sources. Secondly, students' communicative practice frequency in the Arabic learning process are still low at present, some students has passiveness and not get used to use Arabic in their daily life beyond the classroom exams, or religious faith, and the improvement of speaking and listening is affected deeply. Thirdly, learners' attitudes towards Arabic have been shaped according to some, by ritual obligations and not cross-cultural communication, which results in decreased interest in learning if the material is not linked to real-life experiences.

Previous research has reviewed the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in general (Wahyudi and Ariyani 2023) and several studies discuss Arabic language learning (Ayuni, Wijaya, and Muchtar 2023). However, there are still few that specifically examine the adaptive and innovative strategies of Arabic language teachers in overcoming unique obstacles in superior madrasas with the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly related to limited learning resources, poor communicative exchange, and students attitudes. In an effort to fill

this gap, this research will shed light on the actions of the teachers at MAN 11 Jakarta, who have experimented with interest and talent-based learning differentiation in the form of tailor-made learning videos, formation of the study groups, and the use of guided projects closely related to the world of digital media through content creation in the target language (e.g., generating Arabic-language content on the social media).

Based on the background and research gaps, the research problem formulation in this study covers three aspects. First, how is the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Arabic language learning at MAN 11 Jakarta, from planning, implementation, to evaluation? Second, what obstacles do teachers face in implementing this learning, both in terms of learning resources, student involvement, and teaching competencies. Third, what adaptive and innovative strategies do teachers employ to overcome these obstacles, including the use of technology, interest- and talent-based learning, and creative projects relevant to students' lives. Therefore, this study will provide the following research questions: (1) How is the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning at MAN 11 Jakarta? (2) What are the major difficulties of the teachers in making it work? And (3) How do teachers' subverting strategies escape these barriers? This research is aimed at comprehensively describing the process of the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum for the teaching of Arabic language in MAN 11 Jakarta, and at uncovering the problems and interpreting the creative strategies adopted by the teachers in addressing these issues. The results of this study are expected to provide practical recommendations for lesson plan planning, selection of teaching modules, and evaluation of learning outcomes to strengthen the quality of Arabic language learning according to the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Types and Methodology

Employed the research method of a case study in conjunction with a qualitative style. The qualitative method was selected, as this research aims to learn the phenomenon of the enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum in learning Arabic at MAN 11 Jakarta. Case studies, from the perspective of a research methodology, are useful for addressing the questions 'how' and the 'why' of event in a genuine universe situation (Muthmainnah, W., 2016). By Madi, F. N. B. and Rosid The objectives of this descriptive-exploratory study is to explicate and study in detail how the Merdeka Curriculum is applied in the teaching of the Arabic language. This methodology enables researchers to learn more about the the process, barriers, and effects of introducing the new curriculum (Merriam, S. B. & Tisdell 2016).

Time and Location of Research

The location of this study is Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 11 Jakarta in South Jakarta. MAN 11 Jakarta was chosen because it is one of the schools that has adopted the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning and has characteristics that are suitable as a case study subject. This study was conducted on 19 May 2025, covering the planning, data collection, data analysis, and research report writing phases.

Research Participants

The research participants were selected through purposive sampling, which entails selecting participants according to set criteria and in line with the research aim (Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell 2016). Subjects of the Research The research subjects are several parties who involved in policy making, curriculum implementation and school-based management in the madrasah, and they are different in the number and qualification and this is an intentional sample since they use purposive sampling as in Kemenpan & RB's approach (2003) and based on purpose of the study This research involved the head of the madrasah (1 person) as the policy holder and the responsible person for the implementation of the curriculum; the vice-head of the madrasah on curriculum (1 person) as the person who coordinated the implementation of the curriculum; Grade X, XI and XII students (105 students, 35 students per class) as the people who learn; the Arabic Language Subject Coordinator (1 person) as the person who learns supervisory. The sample comprised 111 respondents, who were chosen based on their immediate involvement in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for Arabic language learning.

Data Source

Data Collection Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with Arabic teachers and students, classroom observations of Arabic language learning experience, and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with Arabic teachers. Secondary data was collected from different sources of access as the sources of all the information collected were not at the field site such as curriculum documents, learning resources, school profiles and student data, relevant literature and research and government policies related to the Merdeka Curriculum (Patton 2015).

Data Collection Techniques

Participatory Observation

Observations were conducted to directly observe the Arabic language learning process using the Merdeka Curriculum in the classroom. Observations included teaching methods, teacher-student interactions, use of learning media, and assessment. Observations were conducted twice in different classes to obtain a comprehensive picture (Spradley 2016).

In-depth Interview

The semi-structured interview had been conducted that aimed to express in depth the experiences, opinion and perception/subject view related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Interviews, as a qualitative research approach, generate verbal descriptions (in written and spoken languages) of people. Informants were interviewed one-on-one between 45 to 60 minutes each person. The interview guide was designed from research constructs and customized to the informant's role (Seidman 2019). However, it must mentioned that the original interview transcripts or tapes could not be preserved for all interviews, as a result of practical limitations regarding the methodology through which the data were collected. Hence interview data used in this study is based on the researcher's strong memory of the respondents responses and that is backed up by data triangulation with document study and observations.

Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

FGDs were conducted with Arabic teachers to obtain collective information about their experiences implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. FGDs enable interactive discussions among participants, resulting in richer data (Krueger, R. A., & Casey 2015). FGDs were conducted twice with the participation of four Arabic teachers.

Document Study

Document analysis was conducted on various documents related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, including Arabic Language Learning Outcomes, Learning Objective Flow, Teaching Modules, Learning Assessments, and Learning Evaluation Reports (Yin 2018).

Research Instruments

Research instruments The research instruments used were observation guidelines, interview guideliness and FGD guidelines. Aspects witnessed throughout the learning process that were observed included the application of the Kurikulum Merdeka principles, the implementation of studentcentered learning, differentiated learning, formative and summative assessments, and the use of technology in learning. The interview guides were prepared according to the research focus with open-ended questions designed to enable the informants to respond freely and in depth, adapted to the specific role and level of the informants. The FGD outlines items of discussion conducted with the teachers of Arabic language, such as implementation procedures, in addition to the problems and procedures of solutions.

Data Analysis Techniques

The research employs an interactive analysis model which Miles (M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña 2020) developed. The model contains three interconnected and iterative components which form its structure. The first stage of data condensation requires researchers to choose relevant field data then focus it before simplifying and abstracting and transforming it to match the research focus. The second stage of data presentation transforms condensed information into narrative text and matrices and diagrams and graphs to help researchers understand and draw systematic conclusions about the research focus. The third stage of drawing conclusions uses the condensed and presented data to verify initial findings through data triangulation for research result validation and reliability.

Data Validity Test

The purpose of data validity testing is to improve data credibility through the use of triangulation and verification by informants. Data validity testing through triangulation involves three methods: source triangulation (data from multiple informant sources), technique triangulation (different data collection methods), and time triangulation (data collection at different times) (Denzin 2017). Verification by informants is done by checking the results of data analysis with informants to ensure that the researcher's interpretation is correct. In addition, discussions with peers and supervisors are also conducted to get input and criticism on the research process and results.

Research Ethics

This research follows the principles of research ethics (Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba 1985): obtaining informed consent from all research subjects, maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of informants, not harming research subjects, and providing benefits for educational development to produce the findings. This section must show the coherent scientific procedures carried out by the author to produce conclusions. The method contains research approaches and methods, data sources/populations and samples, how to select samples/determine data sources, data collection instruments and methods, and data analysis techniques. The length of the method section ranges from 10-15% of the total length of the manuscript.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part discusses some of the findings from the study on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in learning of Arabic language at Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) 11 Jakarta that can be viewed from in-depth interview with the teachers of Arabic language. These quasi-experimental findings will be examined in detail and integrated with the recent research on the theoretical comparisons and similarities between findings from related studies to illuminate their broader significance.

Overview of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the Role of Teachers in Arabic Language Learning

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 11 Jakarta has triggered a paradigm shift in Arabic language learning, giving educators greater autonomy. Ms. Chaiza explained that this curriculum provides a greater sense of freedom in teaching (Teacher Interview, 2025). This freedom not only reduces reliance on completing all module chapters but also shifts the focus to students' essential understanding, enabling teachers to design adaptive assessments tailored to individual students' comprehension levels (Sugiri, W. A., & Priatmoko, 2022).

This flexibility will further make the teacher more adaptable, and capable of getting to know students' interests, talents, needs, and abilities (Azzahra, T. A., & Muhajir 2023). "Independence" of teacher is conceptually in creative freedom to interpret the curriculum and develop as well as in the teaching autonomy emerged (Azzahra, T. A. & Muhajir 2023). One example of this freedom is that teachers may give basic vocabulary (mufradat) and let the students loose to develop them into short conversations in the forms of videos; or through games of vocabulary puzzles (Azzahra, T. A., & Muhajir 2023). This system proves that teachers are more innovative in generating the materials as well as the methods based on the student nature (Teacher Interview, 2025). The initial response from students was very positive; they did not feel burdened, making the learning atmosphere more enjoyable and effective due to the freedom to choose and develop their interests (Azzahra, T. A., & Muhajir 2023). Students showed great enthusiasm in welcoming this approach (Teacher Interview, 2025).

Mrs Fatimah also commented that the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 11 Jakarta is basically built on skills, not only cognition (Teacher Interview, 2025). The programme ostensibly emphasises summative and formative assessments as essential evaluation tools (M. A. Sari, D. P., & Putri 2023). Providing formative feedback would help a teacher to assess

students' performance in real time and modify the strategies. The skills-based approach is consistent with the vision of MAN 11 Jakarta which emphasizes research, innovation, and 21st century skills (Teacher Interview 2025). Coupled to this is the teachers' role becomes the designer and facilitator of innovative learning by constructing meaningful and authentic learning (Syafi'i 2017). The realization of the principles of the merdeka curriculum has depended on the teachers' participation in the selection of the essential knowledge, in the creation of local-learning plans for their lessons.

Student Engagement Levels and P5 Integration in Arabic Language Learning

While the Merdeka Curriculum promotes active learning, the active student participation in learning Arabic language, especially in oral communication at MAN 11 Jakarta as yet has been far from satisfactory. Mrs. Fatimah (2025) on the other hand, reported that the integration of Arabic in the Merdeka Curriculum has not been very effective in promoting students' involvement in active communication, specifically speaking and listening, since students can accept weak and poor standards. Learners are passive and see learning Arabic as difficult and uninteresting, because, Arabic, as a language, constitutes four separate complex (Azzahra, T. A., & Muhajir 2023).

This pervasive student passivity, noticeable when only a handful participate actively in discussions or presentations, is predominantly observed among those without extensive prior Arabic language training. Interestingly, the few who do engage often possess a background in Arabic studies (Teacher Interview, 2025). This situation is further compounded by the fact that not all students come from pondok pesantren or Islamic schools, institutions where Arabic is typically integrated. Consequently, their mother tongue remains the primary language of daily communication, severely impeding the emergence of a truly bilingual environment (Surur 2022). As a direct result, many students find new vocabulary (mufradat) unfamiliar, leading to a palpable fear of making mistakes when speaking. This in turn complicates their ability to comprehend and apply basic mufradat effectively (Ma'wa, A. 2023). Indeed, the absence of a pervasive bilingual environment coupled with a limited vocabulary bank presents a substantial challenge to cultivating a truly conducive Arabic language classroom (Surur 2022). Ultimately, this widespread passivity significantly hinders the overall improvement of students' Arabic speaking and listening proficiency, thereby restricting their capacity to express thoughts and ideas freely.

There is also a necessity to improve the P5 integration in Arabic Language Learning at MAN 11 Jakarta. While teachers do not find it difficult to implement (Teacher Interview, 2025), the major problem stems from the diverse Arabic levels among students as a result of their varied backgrounds. P5 promotes transdisciplinary learning opportunities, enabling students to investigate the solutions to problems and provide input in projects (Samin et al. 2025). However, when most students are still struggling with mastering basic vocabulary and building confidence in oral communication, designing P5 projects that substantially involve active Arabic language use and encourage critical thinking becomes complex. This is because P5 projects ideally require effective participation and communication, which is difficult to achieve if students' Arabic language proficiency varies significantly.

Critical Challenges and Adaptation of Differentiated Learning in Arabic

Arabic language teachers at MAN 11 Jakarta encounter a number of problems that are complex that have an impact on the effectiveness of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. An example of these challenges and how teachers are forced to adapt in creative ways.

Firstly, learning resources of the teachers only consist of teaching modules, with no variety of textbooks, dictionaries, or online learning materials that are arranged for the Merdeka Curriculum (Widodo, A., & Nurhadi 2023). This constraint requires that teachers create their own teaching materials by themselves so that the learning process can be more interesting and interactive (Teacher Interview, 2025; Azzahra & Muhajir, 2023). This is related to the idea of the Merdeka Curriculum, which is based on the freedom of teachers to select teaching materials in order to enable adjustments of the learning process to the students' needs and capabilities (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (2022)). The teacher should be more active in preparing the material and an adaptive and contextual method of teaching (M. A Sari, D.P., & Putri 2023). Ali & Hakim (2018) stress that an effective model of learning of the Arabic language for the millennial is adaptive, interactive and digital-based in order to raise learning motivation.

Secondly, communicative interaction in Arabic language learning remains notably low. Both Ibu Fatimah and Ibu Chaiza observe that students often exhibit passivity and lack consistent exposure to Arabic beyond exams or religious contexts, significantly hindering their speaking and listening proficiency. The absence of a truly supportive Arabic-speaking environment also impedes progress. This is exacerbated by limited class time and large student numbers, making individualized attention difficult. While teachers sometimes use engaging methods like Arabic songs to encourage non-verbal participation, cultivating spontaneous speech remains challenging due to students' fear of making mistakes and insufficient basic vocabulary.

Thirdly, students' perception of Arabic instruction is often limited to a formal religious obligation, rather than a tool for cross-cultural communication. Consequently, their learning interest wanes if material isn't linked to real-life application. This view stems from minimal daily Arabic exposure outside madrasahs and a traditional focus on grammar memorization and translation. Such an approach leads students to see Arabic as an academic burden, not a means for social interaction or cultural understanding.

In response, MAN 11 Jakarta's teachers implement differentiated learning strategies based on student interests and talents. This initiative, largely driven by teacher creativity due to limited formal training specific to Arabic, compels teachers to independently seek resources. Despite only an initial workshop, teachers largely continue self-directed learning to foster engaging environments. Strategies include contextual learning videos, intensive study groups, and guided digital project tasks. This aligns with Ahmadi's (2019) findings on digital technology boosting Arabic learning motivation.

Assessment System and Impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on Students

The Kurikulum Merdeka assessment system at MAN 11 Jakarta balances learning processes and outcomes (Teacher Interview, 2025). Teachers use formative assessments (observations, quizzes, feedback) for ongoing improvement, and summative assessments (unit tests, final projects) for overall objective achievement (Kementerian Pendidikan dan

Kebudayaan RI, 2022). This aligns with KM's philosophy of authentic, continuous assessment for holistic competency monitoring.

While Kurikulum Merdeka implementation is adaptive, its impact on Arabic learning motivation shows positive indications, though not yet optimal. Motivation notably rises with interest-based digital projects (Teacher Interview, 2025), boosting enthusiasm in previously less interested students (Teacher Interview, 2025). However, overall speaking proficiency still needs improvement due to communicative interaction challenges and student heterogeneity. Implementation success hinges on teacher effort and school support (Azzahra, T. A., & Muhajir 2023). Regular evaluation remains crucial for identifying weaknesses and prompting adjustments (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2022).

Discussion: Interpretation of Results and Their Relevance to the Structure of Science

The issue of low communicative interaction and students' perception of Arabic merely as a formal obligation represents a classic challenge consistently observed in the Indonesian Arabic language learning literature, especially among non-native speakers (Ma'wa, A. 2023). This finding is exacerbated by the heterogeneous backgrounds of students at MAN 11 Jakarta; many are unaccustomed to daily Arabic use, as they do not come from pondok pesantren or madrasahs with a bilingual environment (Samin et al. 2025).

From a psychological viewpoint, the fear of making mistakes when speaking can trigger language anxiety, significantly impeding active participation and willingness to take communicative risks (Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope 1986). This apprehension, combined with a limited basic vocabulary, renders students passive and reluctant to engage communicatively, thereby slowing the development of their speaking and listening skills.

The phenomenon is further aggravated when students perceive Arabic solely as a "ritual" or "obligation" rather than a practical subject, which diminishes their intrinsic motivation. Crucially, transforming the perception of Arabic from a religious language to a universal communication tool is key to boosting students' intrinsic motivation (Rohman 2019). Furthermore, passive and less contextualized Arabic learning strategies can lead to a decline in student motivation. Our findings align with various studies that assert an unsupportive learning environment and insufficient active language practice are major impediments to foreign language acquisition (Siregar 2020).

Teachers at MAN 11 Jakarta have embraced innovative strategies, such as using contextual videos, establishing intensive study groups, and assigning digital projects. These adaptive responses are proving highly relevant and find strong theoretical support. This approach aligns with constructivist learning theory, emphasizing students actively constructing knowledge through hands-on experience and direct interaction (Vygotsky 1978). Crucially, the integration of digital technology plays a key role in capturing the interest of millennial learners, making Arabic language instruction pertinent to their daily lives. Indeed, numerous studies confirm the effectiveness of interactive media and digital learning applications in significantly boosting student motivation and engagement (Febriani 2020). Furthermore, leveraging digital-based projects supports a project-based learning paradigm, allowing students to learn through tangible, real-world activities directly relevant to their individual interests (Putri Wulan Teresa Posumah, Widdy H.F. Rorimpandey 2022). For instance, successful ventures like creating Arabic-language vlogs

or Instagram Reels vividly demonstrate how these methods can effectively combat student disengagement and reshape their perceptions of Arabic into something much more appealing (Teacher Interview, 2025). This self-reliant and proactive initiative from teachers in cultivating innovative learning approaches reflects an enhanced sense of autonomy, stemming from limited formal training, which ultimately fosters genuinely joyful learning experiences (Teacher Interview, 2025).

This study significantly contributes an in-depth analysis of Kurikulum Merdeka's implementation in Arabic language learning within a specific advanced madrasah (MAN 11 Jakarta), revealing unique challenges stemming from student heterogeneity. While existing studies have addressed the Kurikulum Merdeka and Arabic language instruction generally, this research specifically highlights a combination of latent obstacles (including student perceptions, low interaction, and the absence of a bilingual environment) not yet comprehensively explored in a single case study.

A significant new finding is how teachers' independent initiative and creativity, driven by strong teacher agency despite limited formal training, became the primary force for developing innovative differentiation strategies (such as using songs, contextual videos, and interactive digital projects) to overcome these hurdles. The success of these strategies, evidenced by increased student motivation and self-confidence (even among those previously disengaged with Arabic), provides empirical proof of the Kurikulum Merdeka's adaptive potential in real-world settings, an area not yet fully documented in literature.

CONCLUSIONS

This research investigated Kurikulum Merdeka implementation in MAN 11 Jakarta's Arabic language learning, identifying key challenges and innovative adaptive strategies employed by teachers. The study confirms that KM's flexibility fosters innovation, enabling teachers to design adaptive, student-centered experiences, demonstrating remarkable initiative in developing micro-curricula despite limited standardized resources.

However, findings reveal a significant gap: persistent low communicative interaction and a formal perception of Arabic among students, largely due to heterogeneous backgrounds and an undeveloped bilingual environment. Despite these hurdles, teachers' independent initiatives (particularly using contextual videos, study groups, and digital projects) effectively boost student motivation and confidence.

These results underscore that while KM offers flexibility, its success hinges on proactive teacher agency adapting to complex realities. Recommendations include continued teacher development in innovative, tech-integrated pedagogies, enhanced school support for diverse resources and a conducive bilingual environment, and policymaker focus on developing adaptive modules and targeted teacher training. Ultimately, teacher creativity is paramount in bridging the gap between curriculum theory and classroom practice, thus enhancing national Arabic language education quality.

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