



Transformation of Learning in Madrasah: Best Practices in the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah

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Abstract

This study aimed to document and analyze best practices in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah, focusing on initial challenges and adaptive strategies employed. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, the research involved the school principal, 25 teachers, and 88 students through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Data were analyzed using a thematic approach with triangulation from multiple sources. Results indicate that the implementation was effectively supported by community-based training conducted by Balai Diklat Keagamaan Aceh, which enhanced teachers' understanding and skills. A series of workshops on learning objectives, lesson planning, assessment, and module development contributed to a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. Classroom implementation, accompanied by collaborative reflection with academic supervisors, improved both the quality of teaching and student engagement by up to 70%. Additionally, P5RA projects, namely, Anti-Bullying Seminar, Pottery Making, and Voice of Democracy, successfully integrated Pancasila and Islamic values into meaningful learning experiences. Key supporting factors included transformative leadership by the school principal and robust teacher collaboration, while challenges such as limited infrastructure and varied teacher readiness were mitigated through resource optimization and peer mentoring. The study concludes that community-based training and collaborative reflection are critical to the successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka and offers important implications for similar strategies in other Islamic education institutions.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendokumentasikan dan menganalisis *best practice* dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di MTsN 2 Bener Meriah. Menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus, penelitian melibatkan kepala madrasah, 25 guru, dan 88 peserta didik melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen. Data dianalisis menggunakan pendekatan analisis tematik dengan triangulasi dari berbagai sumber. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di MTsN 2 Bener Meriah didukung oleh pelatihan berbasis komunitas yang diselenggarakan Balai Diklat Keagamaan Aceh, yang berhasil meningkatkan pemahaman dan keterampilan guru. Serangkaian workshop tentang tujuan pembelajaran, ATP, asesmen, dan modul ajar menghasilkan pergeseran paradigma dari *teacher-centered* menjadi *student-centered*. Implementasi di kelas yang disertai refleksi kolaboratif bersama supervisor akademik meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran dan keterlibatan peserta didik hingga 70%. Proyek P5RA seperti Seminar Anti Bullying, Pembuatan Gerabah, dan Suara Demokrasi berhasil mengintegrasikan nilai-nilai Pancasila dan keislaman dalam pembelajaran bermakna. Faktor pendukung utama meliputi kepemimpinan transformatif kepala madrasah dan kolaborasi antar guru, sementara hambatan utama berupa keterbatasan infrastruktur dan kesenjangan pemahaman diatasi melalui optimalisasi sumber daya dan pendampingan sebaya. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa pendekatan berbasis komunitas dan refleksi kolaboratif menjadi kunci keberhasilan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di madrasah, dengan implikasi penting bagi pengembangan strategi serupa di institusi pendidikan Islam lainnya.



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Introduction

The Indonesian education system has undergone significant transformation, particularly in the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to Kurikulum Merdeka a.k.a National Curriculum, which emphasizes autonomy, creativity, and learning flexibility (Indrawati, 2024; Simarmata & Mayuni, 2023). Unlike the 2013 Curriculum, which focused on national standards and content-based assessment often criticized for its lack of contextuality (Anggraena et al., 2022; Farhana, 2023), Kurikulum Merdeka offers a holistic approach centered on experiential learning and individual competency development (Hakim & Abidin, 2024; Madaniyah & Roza, 2024; Rosa et al., 2024). Within the context of madrasah, this implementation presents unique challenges as it must integrate religious values, culture, and local wisdom (Nurhijatina & Santosa, 2024; Sutrisno & Rofi'ah, 2023). Although it has the potential to unify Islamic values with modern learning methodologies, limited resources, teacher readiness, and stakeholder understanding constitute significant barriers to adapting this curriculum (Arjuni & Aristiati, 2024; Atikoh, 2023; Wijayati & Tirtoni, 2024).

To address the implementation challenges of Kurikulum Merdeka, Balai Diklat Keagamaan Aceh plays a strategic role as a supporting agent through community-based training programs. These programs enhance teachers' understanding and capacity to implement new learning methodologies relevant to local contexts (Lowenstein et al., 2010; Sharkey et al., 2016). This approach not only broadens educators' perspectives but also creates a collaborative and adaptive learning environment (Purbasari et al., 2025), enabling each aspect of teaching to develop according to students' needs (Yuan, 2018).

As part of the case study, MTsN 2 Bener Meriah is introduced as the research locus. This institution possesses unique characteristics as a madrasah facing initial challenges in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka. While Kurikulum Merdeka has been implemented in schools under the Ministry of Education since 2021 through the Pioneer Schools program in 111 districts/cities, and independently expanded in 2022, in madrasah, this curriculum was only officially implemented in the 2023/2024 academic year. This implementation is based on the Minister of Religious Affairs Decree (*Keputusan Menteri Agama, KMA*) Number 347 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in Madrasah. Subsequently, KMA Number 450 of 2024 was issued to replace the previous KMA, becoming the latest reference in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in madrasah at all educational levels, from RA, MI, MTs, MA, and MAK. This delay reveals a gap between central policy and field implementation, necessitating in-depth research within local contexts. Preliminary studies in schools under the Ministry of Education and Culture demonstrate successful transformation of learning systems; however, existing literature remains limited to macro policy analysis without exploring challenges and innovative practices at the madrasah level (Aliyah et al., 2024).

In Indonesia's educational transformation, Kurikulum Merdeka represents a paradigm that prioritizes freedom and flexibility in teaching and learning, enhancing teacher autonomy to adapt methods and materials according to local needs, thereby making learning more contextual and student-centered (Ihsan et al., 2025; Polidiya & Qomaria, 2024). Unlike the rigid 2013 Curriculum, Kurikulum Merdeka creates space for pedagogical innovation and is essential for integrating Islamic values with modern learning through a shift from content-based instruction to competency-based learning (Kurniawan, 2025; Maisaroh & Untari, 2024; Santoso, 2023).

The successful implementation of this curriculum heavily depends on stakeholder readiness and structural support from various educational institutions. Strategies such as continuous training, community-based mentoring, and development of local materials have proven effective in supporting this transition (Mubaraq et al., 2025). Enhancing educator capabilities through intensive training, workshops, and professional learning communities also strengthens teachers' confidence to effectively adapt new methods (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; DuFour & DuFour, 2010). The adoption of formative assessment

as periodic evaluation receives strong support as it enables teachers to monitor progress and adjust methods in real-time (Rodrigues & Oliveira, 2014; Spector et al., 2016), making learning more responsive to student needs (Fuller & Dawson, 2017). Initiatives for developing materials relevant to local contexts, both culturally and in terms of community needs, contribute to creating an inclusive and contextual learning environment (Assefa & Mohammed, 2022).

Documentation of best practices typically refers to experiences in formal schools or leading institutions. However, madrasah demonstrates significant differences due to its organizational structure, values, and unique challenges, necessitating that best practice implementation be adapted to its local characteristics (Yahya, 2024). This emphasizes the importance of adapting specialized training strategies and mentoring that integrate local wisdom, Islamic values, and the structural challenges of madrasah. These findings imply that responsive curriculum implementation models require synergy between national policies and contextual strategies in material development and assessment implementation according to the needs of each madrasah.

Within the framework of Kurikulum Merdeka, assessment plays a crucial role as an indicator of learning success, encompassing continuous evaluation at each learning stage, not merely final outcomes. Formative assessment, which provides direct feedback to students, is vital for developing deep understanding and encouraging continuous improvement, while summative assessment continues to function as the final benchmark for competency achievement. Various studies affirm that synergy between formative and summative assessments can optimize learning outcomes and support the implementation of more adaptive and personalized learning methods (Kulasegaram & Rangachari, 2018; Sahito et al., 2025; Tempelaar, 2020; Yang et al., 2022).

The Strengthening Pancasila Student Profile and *Rahmatan lil-Alamin* Project (*Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Rahmatan lil-Alamin*, P5RA) represents a strategic initiative to internalize Pancasila values and *Rahmatan lil-Alamin* principles in education, resulting in strong character formation and integration of Islamic values with modern learning practices. However, P5RA implementation faces significant challenges, such as method adaptation, resource limitations, and resistance to change in traditional systems. Literature emphasizes the importance of systematically integrating this project with Kurikulum Merdeka so that these noble values can be genuinely reflected in the practice (Brutu et al., 2023).

This study addresses the multifaceted challenges in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka within the unique context of madrasah education. The central problem extends beyond mere curriculum adoption to encompass strategic implementation challenges that require synchronization between national policy directives and localized educational

practices. At MTsN 2 Bener Meriah, these challenges are particularly pronounced due to the institution's distinctive organizational structure, value system, and operational constraints as a madrasah navigating educational transformation within Indonesia's evolving educational landscape.

A significant research gap exists in the empirical documentation and systematic analysis of best practices in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka specifically within madrasah contexts. While substantial literature addresses implementation in conventional schools under the Ministry of Education, there remains limited scholarly attention to the unique adaptation processes required in madrasah settings. This gap is particularly evident regarding MTsN 2 Bener Meriah, which represents an important case study as a madrasah confronting initial implementation challenges following the relatively delayed formal adoption of Kurikulum Merdeka in madrasah institutions (officially implemented in 2023/2024 per Ministerial Decree Number 347 of 2022). Research indicates persistent difficulties in integrating Islamic values with contemporary pedagogical approaches (Ibrahim et al., 2024), highlighting the need for contextually sensitive implementation frameworks.

This research aims to document and analyze best practices in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah through two primary objectives; (1) to investigate the initial challenges faced by MTsN 2 Bener Meriah before and during Kurikulum Merdeka implementation, with particular attention to structural, pedagogical, and cultural adaptation processes; (2) to provide an in-depth analysis of effective implementation practices that successfully integrate Islamic educational values with contemporary learning methodologies while addressing local contextual requirements. The fundamental research question guiding this investigation is: How can best practices in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah be systematically applied to enhance learning quality and address existing local challenges?

By integrating empirical findings with theoretical perspectives, this research seeks to make significant contributions to developing innovative and adaptive learning strategies while strengthening synergy among relevant stakeholders in transforming madrasah education. The findings aim to bridge the documented gap between policy formulation and practical implementation, providing transferable insights for other madrasah institutions navigating similar educational transformations.

Methods

Research Approach

This research employs a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore in depth the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to obtain a comprehensive

understanding of phenomena in their natural context, as well as to uncover the meaning and processes underlying educational practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design is utilized to intensively investigate the specific experiences of the madrasah in implementing the new curriculum, taking into consideration the complexity of social, cultural, and institutional contexts that influence this process (Pope & LePeau, 2023).

Research Subjects and Location

This research was conducted at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah, as one of the communities in the Community-Based Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation program (IKM-BK) selected by BDK Aceh. Research subjects include (1) 25 teachers representing various fields of study, including general and religious subjects; and (2) 88 students selected from grades VII and VIII, considering the diversity of academic abilities and social backgrounds. Additionally, the School Principal, Vice Principal for curriculum affairs, supervising lecturers, and school supervisors serve as both subjects and researchers in this study. The selection of research subjects was conducted using purposive sampling techniques to ensure representation of various perspectives and experiences in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through several techniques to ensure depth and breadth of information. First, participatory observation techniques were employed. Researchers observed classroom learning processes, activities related to the Strengthening Pancasila Student Profile and *Rahmatan lil-Alamin* Project (P5RA), and teacher coordination meetings. Observations were conducted over a 3-month period with a frequency of 2-3 times per week. Second, researchers utilized in-depth interview techniques. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the madrasah principal, vice principals, and teachers to explore experiences, challenges, and strategies in curriculum implementation. Interviews with students were conducted through focus group discussions (FGDs) to understand their perceptions and experiences. Third, document analysis was performed, wherein researchers analyzed relevant documents such as Lesson Plan (MA/RPP), assessment instruments, learning outcome reports, and madrasah policy documents related to Kurikulum Merdeka implementation. Finally, visual documentation techniques were used, including photographs and videos of learning activities and P5RA projects to document innovative practices being implemented.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this research employed a thematic analysis approach with the following stages:

- 1) Data organization. All data collected from observations, interviews, and documents were systematically organized based on categories and chronology.

- 2) Coding and categorization. Data were analyzed through a coding process to identify patterns, themes, and categories that emerged. Coding was conducted iteratively, taking into consideration theoretical frameworks and empirical findings.
- 3) Data triangulation. To ensure the validity and reliability of findings, researchers conducted data triangulation from various sources (madrasah principal, teachers, and students) and collection methods (observation, interviews, and document analysis).
- 4) Comparative analysis. Curriculum implementation practices at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah were compared with national standards and guidelines as well as practices in other educational institutions based on existing literature.
- 5) Interpretation and conclusion drawing. Analysis results were interpreted to identify best practices, challenges, and adaptation strategies in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in madrasah.

Data Validity

To ensure data validity, this research implemented several strategies. First, prolonged engagement, wherein researchers were involved for a sufficiently extended period (6 months) at the research site to build rapport and understand the context in depth. Second, member checking, wherein findings and interpretations were confirmed with research participants to ensure accuracy and alignment with their experiences. Third, peer debriefing, wherein discussions with colleagues were conducted to obtain alternative perspectives and minimize researcher bias in data interpretation. Finally, an audit trail was also conducted, where systematic documentation of the research process was performed to ensure transparency and traceability of the data collection and analysis processes.

Result and Discussion

Stages of the Implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka

The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah is carried out through a series of structured and interconnected strategic stages. The research findings indicate that the application of the Kurikulum Merdeka begins with the implementation of the Community-Based Kurikulum Merdeka (*Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka–Berbasis Komunitas, IKM-BK*) training, organized by the Balai Diklat Keagamaan (BDK) Aceh. This training was designed to provide a foundational understanding of the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka while fostering networks among educational practitioners. The training activities led to an increase in awareness and a shared understanding among participants, particularly the teachers and madrasah administrators. This finding aligns with research, which emphasizes that intensive training is a key factor in enhancing teachers' readiness to face curriculum changes (Ali et

al., 2023). Numerous researchs also supports the idea that community-based training strengthens collaboration and professional networking among educators.

After the training, the Kurikulum Merdeka was socialized to teachers through face-to-face sessions and online discussions. In this phase, facilitators (lecturer from a local university and trainer from BDK) played a central role in providing technical and academic guidance to the teachers. This approach aimed to facilitate the adaptation process for educators to the curriculum changes, allowing contextual and student-centered learning methods to be applied optimally. They facilitated a deeper understanding of the concept and technical aspects of curriculum implementation while helping teachers identify and address obstacles encountered during the adaptation process. The socialization also included the communication of madrasah policies and implementation strategies at the educational unit level, ensuring that all elements of the madrasah shared a unified understanding. This finding is supported by (Nkolika, 2024), who highlight the importance of continuous guidance in accelerating teachers' adaptation to new curricula. Conversely, studies suggests that without adequate guidance, the adaptation process tends to be slow and generates resistance among teachers (Parsons et al., 2018; Robinson, 2012).

Several workshops have been organized, focusing on learning objectives, the development of Learning Objective Pathways, assessments, the preparation of teaching modules, and the strengthening of the *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* (P5RA) student profile project. The accompanying lecturers played the role of primary facilitators in these workshops, ensuring that each session not only enhanced the teachers' capabilities in designing lessons but also encouraged collaboration among peers. Each workshop session was designed to provide teachers with practical experiences so that they could develop learning tools that were contextual and aligned with students' needs. This outcome is supported by research states that collaborative workshops are effective in enhancing teachers' pedagogical skills and innovation (Ramos et al., 2022; Udovychenko et al., 2021). However, (Day et al., 2016; Holland, 2023; Honingh & Hooge, 2014) warns that the success of workshops is highly influenced by active participation and school management support.

The roles of the head of the madrasah and the vice head for curriculum were highly prominent in the development of the Madrasah Operational Curriculum. The preparation of the Madrasah Operational Curriculum was carried out participatively by the head of the madrasah along with the development team, with support and input from accompanying lecturers. This process ensured that the operational curriculum not only adhered to national policies but also reflected the local context and the needs of students. The resulting Madrasah Operational Curriculum served as the main reference for the implementation of teaching and the development of innovative programs in the madrasah. Maisaroh's research supports the importance of school leadership in the development of operational curricula (Maisaroh & Untari, 2024), which has been shown to enhance the

relevance and effectiveness of curriculum implementation at the educational unit level.

Next, the preparation of teaching materials by teachers was carried out systematically, considering the teaching modules and innovative teaching strategies introduced during the workshops. The preparation of these materials was accompanied by support from lecturers (Polidiya & Qomaria, 2024) and madrasah supervisors to ensure alignment with the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The facilitator also reviewed and provided constructive feedback on the materials prepared by the teachers. This finding is consistent with (Polidiya & Qomaria, 2024), who emphasizes that continuous guidance and feedback have a significant impact on the quality of the teaching materials produced by teachers.

The implementation of classroom learning showed a significant improvement in the application of flexible and adaptive teaching methods. This activity was supported by joint reflections between teachers and academic supervisors, which served as an internal evaluation mechanism to improve teaching quality. The reflection process revealed ongoing adjustments needed to overcome initial challenges, such as limited resources and differing interpretations of the curriculum. The facilitator lecturers conducted regular classroom observations to monitor the implementation of teaching and provide recommendations for improvement. At the end of each learning cycle, a joint reflection with academic supervisors, including accompanying lecturers, was conducted to evaluate the process, identify obstacles, and formulate future improvements. Lowe's research supports the importance of continuous reflection and evaluation in improving teaching effectiveness (Lowe et al., 2007), while Ohlsson's study highlights that collective reflection can accelerate the improvement of teaching practices (Ohlsson, 2013).

Additionally, the implementation of the Pancasila and *Rahmatan lil-Alamin* (P5RA) Student Profile Project has been integrated into the learning process. The P5RA activities not only support the development of students' character but also provide a platform for teachers to reflect on the learning practices they have carried out. The accompanying lecturers participated in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the project, and facilitated joint reflections to assess the success, challenges, and impact of the program on students' development. This finding is in line with Yulianti's research, which confirms that integrating character-strengthening projects into the curriculum has a positive impact on the development of students' soft skills and national values (Yulianti et al., 2025).

Overall, the findings of this study support previous research emphasizing the importance of training, guidance, school leadership, and reflection in the successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Maisaroh & Untari, 2024; Mubaraq et al., 2025; Nkolika, 2024; Ohlsson, 2013). While challenges in adjusting and aligning methods remain, the results are consistent with prior recommendations,

while also contributing new insights, particularly within the context of madrasahs with their unique characteristics.

Successes and Challenges in Community-Based Training

Community-based training organized by the Balai Diklat Keagamaan Aceh served as the foundational stage in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah. Research findings indicate that the training received a positive response from the teachers. Those who participated in the training reported an enhanced understanding of the principles and strategies for implementing Kurikulum Merdeka. This enthusiastic response was reflected in active participation during discussions, interaction among participants, and the direct application of the concepts introduced throughout the training. Many teachers identified the training as a crucial opportunity to update their teaching practices to be more contextual and student-centered.

The community-based approach proved to offer a range of benefits. Firstly, this method created a collaborative space that allowed teachers to exchange experiences and identify solutions to the challenges they faced. The community not only strengthened the professional capacities of each teacher but also fostered solidarity among educators within the madrasah environment. Active involvement in the training also encouraged the formation of a network that supports the ongoing implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. Additionally, group discussions and reflections helped clarify new concepts, such as formative assessment and the integration of P5RA values into learning, thus making the adaptation process to the new curriculum more directed.

The role of technology was crucial in supporting the mentorship and training process. The use of platforms such as Zoom Meeting enabled the training to be conducted online, allowing teachers to attend sessions despite limitations in time or location. Furthermore, AI-based technological tools, such as adaptive learning applications and educational chatbots, helped teachers access information, learning resources, and solutions to issues quickly and efficiently. This technology also facilitated online discussions, material sharing, and real-time reflection. A research supports these findings, stating that the integration of technology in teacher training can enhance access, flexibility, and the effectiveness of professional development (Sari et al., 2021). Huang further emphasizes that the use of digital platforms accelerates the adaptation process for teachers to curriculum innovations (Huang, 2025).

Despite several successes, community-based training also faced some challenges. One major challenge was the gap in teachers' ability and readiness. Some participants had difficulty understanding the terminology and innovative concepts introduced, requiring more time to absorb the material presented. Additionally, resource limitations, such as access to technology that supports digital learning, posed a barrier for some teachers. This

challenge was exacerbated by differences in educational backgrounds and teaching experiences, leading to variations in the consistent application of new methods.

Coordination between training activities and routine tasks at the madrasah also often proved to be a constraint. Teachers faced difficulties balancing their teaching commitments with active participation in the training, resulting in varying attendance levels for some sessions. However, efforts to address these challenges were made through flexible scheduling and the use of online communication platforms that facilitated discussions between face-to-face sessions.

To overcome the challenges related to teacher readiness and capability disparities, the head of the madrasah implemented several strategies. First, a competency mapping of teachers was conducted to identify specific needs for further training. Second, the head encouraged the formation of small peer groups among teachers, allowing more prepared teachers to assist those facing difficulties. Third, the head facilitated access to digital learning resources and additional training, both online and offline. These strategies proved effective in accelerating the adaptation process and boosting teachers' confidence in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka. Research by Banwo supports these findings, affirming that responsive and collaborative school leadership plays a key role in addressing disparities in teachers' abilities and strengthening a learning culture within the school environment (Banwo et al., 2022).

The discussion of these findings aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of training (Battersby & Verdi, 2015; Mubaraq et al., 2025), mentoring (Nkolika, 2024), and the integration of technology (Huang, 2025) in empowering teachers to implement curriculum innovations. These findings also confirm that community-based approaches can enhance the effectiveness of professional development, although additional efforts are necessary to address challenges related to aligning teachers' readiness levels and providing adequate resources. No previous research contradicts the effectiveness of this approach; however, some studies highlight the need for ongoing support to minimize disparities in teachers' capabilities.

Effectiveness of Mentoring and Workshops

The evaluation of the training success at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah was carried out systematically and comprehensively to ensure that the training objectives were achieved and had a tangible impact on the improvement of teachers' competencies. This evaluation process not only focused on quantitative aspects but also involved a qualitative approach to obtain a complete picture of the effectiveness of the mentoring and workshops that had been conducted.

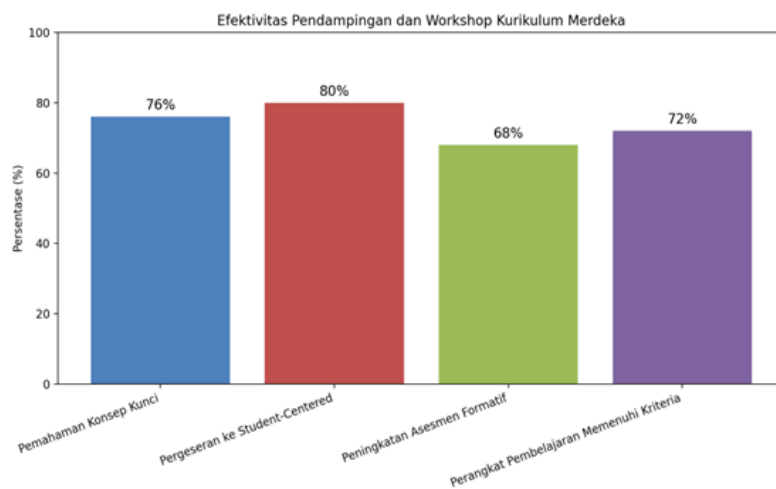


Figure 1. Effectiveness of Mentoring and Workshop

One of the main indicators of training success was the improvement in teachers' understanding of Kurikulum Merdeka. Based on observations and comprehension tests, 76% of teachers were able to articulate key concepts of the new curriculum, such as project-based learning and formative assessment, after attending the training. This improvement indicates that the majority of teachers have understood the direction of curriculum changes and are beginning to internalize its core principles. This finding also suggests that the socialization and mentoring strategies implemented were able to reach most teachers, although there were still variations in understanding among subject groups.

In addition to understanding, changes in teaching practices served as an important benchmark for assessing the effectiveness of the training. Post-training survey data indicated that 80% of teachers had begun to implement more interactive and student-centered teaching strategies. This paradigm shift signals the success of the workshops in encouraging teachers to move away from teacher-centered approaches and adopt more student-centered models of learning. The workshops on learning objectives and the development of Learning Objective Sequences (*Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran*, ATP) proved effective in helping teachers formulate more measurable and contextual learning outcomes, making the learning process more relevant to students' needs.

The quality of teaching materials produced by teachers also showed significant improvement. Internal evaluations of the teaching materials developed indicated that 72% of the materials met the criteria of Kurikulum Merdeka, both in terms of clear objectives, measurable outcomes, and the integration of P5RA values. This reflects that the training and workshops not only enhanced teachers' theoretical understanding but also had a practical impact on their ability to design teaching materials that align with the demands of the new curriculum.

The frequency of providing formative feedback to students also increased noticeably. 68% of teachers reported an increase in providing feedback during the learning process. This improvement is an important indicator in learning based on Kurikulum Merdeka, as formative feedback plays a crucial role in helping students understand their learning process and improve their outcomes continuously.

From a qualitative evaluation perspective, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions revealed several key findings. Teachers reported that continuous mentoring was very helpful in understanding and implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, particularly in terms of designing teaching materials and conducting formative assessments. Many teachers felt more confident and motivated to try new approaches in teaching. However, some teachers also expressed challenges, such as limited time for developing teaching materials, a heavy administrative workload, and the need for more specific follow-up training, especially for religious studies teachers. Furthermore, teachers noted that discussion forums and collaboration among colleagues were highly effective in sharing experiences and finding solutions to challenges faced in the classroom. These qualitative evaluation results were used as the basis for designing further mentoring and improving future training programs, ensuring that the process of professional development for teachers can continue in a sustainable and adaptive manner in response to the dynamics in the field.

This finding aligns with the research, which emphasize that continuous training, intensive mentoring, and professional collaboration are essential for supporting the implementation of the new curriculum (Retnowati et al., 2024). Ajani also supports the idea that the use of technology in mentoring and workshops can expedite teachers' adaptation to curriculum changes (Ajani, 2024). Conversely, a research highlights that without adequate mentoring, disparities in adaptation among teachers tend to increase, reducing the effectiveness of curriculum implementation (Kardos & Johnson, 2010). Thus, the mentoring and workshop strategies applied at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah have proven effective in accelerating teachers' adaptation and enhancing their competencies regarding Kurikulum Merdeka, while also addressing the challenges present in the field. Comprehensive and ongoing evaluation is key to ensuring the success of educational transformation within the madrasah environment.

Classroom Implementation and Reflection

The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah has been systematically integrated into the classroom learning process. Teachers consistently apply more flexible and interactive teaching approaches, focusing on student-centered models to enhance student engagement. Various innovative strategies have been adopted, such as group discussions, mini-projects, and self-reflection, which emphasize the application of

learned concepts in real-life contexts. The shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to more participatory approaches marked a significant transformation in teaching practices at the madrasah.

The impact of Kurikulum Merdeka on the learning process and student engagement is undeniably apparent. Based on observation data, active student participation in class discussions and group activities increased by up to 70% compared to the period before the curriculum was implemented. Students showed higher enthusiasm, especially when encouraged to collaborate and solve problems relevant to their daily lives. Project-based learning activities, incorporating P5RA values, also contributed positively by integrating Islamic and Pancasila values into learning activities, helping students develop their personality and character holistically.

However, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in the classroom is accompanied by several challenges. Teachers face disparities in student readiness, limited time for designing project-based learning, and limited access to digital learning resources. Managing heterogeneous classrooms and high administrative burdens also present challenges that require special attention. To address these issues, teachers employ strategies to increase student engagement through collaborative project assignments, small group discussions, presentations of student work, and the use of digital technology and interactive media. Formative feedback is provided regularly to help students understand their strengths and areas for improvement in their learning process.

Reflection sessions with academic supervisors play a key role in enhancing the quality of teaching. Reflection is conducted periodically through discussions, classroom observations, and direct feedback, allowing teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses in their teaching practices and formulate more effective improvement strategies. Academic supervisors serve as professional partners who assist teachers in designing learning innovations that are relevant to students' needs. This reflective approach has been proven to improve teachers' pedagogical competencies, strengthen professional collaboration, and foster an adaptive learning culture within the madrasah environment.

The interview excerpts from two teachers reinforce the picture of implementation and reflection in the classroom. Teacher 1 states,

"Since implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, I have seen students much more active and willing to express their opinions. The small projects I assign make them more enthusiastic and help them feel that the learning is more meaningful. Reflection with the supervisor has also been very helpful in improving my teaching methods and adjusting the material to meet the students' needs."

Additionally, teacher 2 adds,

"The biggest challenge for me is managing a class with such varied abilities. However, with regular mentoring and reflection, I was able to find more effective strategies, such as dividing students into learning groups and giving assignments according to their abilities. I feel more confident and open to trying new innovations."

The findings at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah align with the research that emphasizes that project-based learning and formative assessment can increase student engagement and motivation (Schaddelee & McConnell, 2018). Another research also supports the importance of reflection with academic supervisors in improving teaching quality and teacher professionalism (Elliana et al., 2021; Nababan et al., 2020). On the other hand, a study highlights that without adequate mentoring and innovative strategies, the implementation of the new curriculum tends to face resistance and low student involvement (Cooper, 2017).

Thus, the strategies implemented at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah have proven effective and are supported by relevant research findings, strengthening the argument that the synergy between learning innovations, reflection, and professional mentoring is key to the successful implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in the classroom.

This contradiction shows that although most teachers experience positive benefits and changes from Kurikulum Merdeka, not all feel the same direct impact in their teaching practices. Critical views from teachers against the changes highlight that administrative changes and learning documentation have been more prominent, while the essence of classroom interaction and the teaching-learning process is considered not to have undergone significant transformation. This emphasizes the importance of continuous evaluation and open dialogue among educators to ensure that curriculum implementation truly brings substantial change, not just administrative shifts.

These differing perceptions also provide important input for policymakers and curriculum developers to continue improving mentoring, training, and reflection strategies, so that the transformation in learning can be felt equally by all teachers and students.

Conclusion

This study reveals several key findings related to the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 2 Bener Meriah. First, the community-based training organized by the Balai Diklat Keagamaan Aceh proved effective in enhancing teachers' readiness and understanding of the principles of Kurikulum Merdeka. This community-based approach created a collaborative space that allowed teachers to exchange experiences and identify solutions to the challenges they faced. Second, a series of workshops on learning

objectives, ATP, assessment, and teaching modules successfully transformed the learning paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered. Third, the implementation of classroom learning, accompanied by collaborative reflection with academic supervisors, significantly improved the quality of teaching and student engagement. Fourth, P5RA projects such as the Anti-Bullying Seminar, Pottery Making, and Voices of Democracy successfully integrated the values of Pancasila and Rahmatan lil-Alamin into meaningful learning activities.

These findings have important implications for other madrasahs wishing to implement Kurikulum Merdeka. The community-based approach and collaborative reflection can be adopted as key strategies in preparing teachers and improving the quality of implementation. Transformative leadership from the head of the madrasah and collaboration among teachers are essential factors that should be prioritized. Additionally, the development of contextual P5RA projects that are relevant to local needs can serve as a model for other madrasahs in integrating the values of Pancasila and Islam into their teaching.

However, this study has several limitations. The focus on just one madrasah restricts the generalization of the findings to a broader context. Furthermore, the study has not measured the long-term impact of Kurikulum Merdeka on students' learning outcomes and character development. The limited timeframe of the study also means that the sustainability of the innovative practices that have been implemented has not been measured.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies to measure the long-term impact of Kurikulum Merdeka on students' learning outcomes and character development. Comparative studies involving several madrasahs with different characteristics are also needed to identify variations in implementation and the factors influencing them. Additionally, research on the effectiveness of various teacher mentoring models in the context of implementing the new curriculum could provide valuable insights for developing strategies to enhance educator capacity in madrasahs.

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