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The Relevance Of The *Merdeka* Curriculum In Improving The Quality Of Islamic Education In Indonesia

Mardiah Astuti , Fajri Ismail , Siti Fatimah ,

Weni Puspita  and Herlina 

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang
 Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia

Abstract. The *Merdeka* Curriculum Kurmer is an innovation in the education curriculum in Indonesia after the 2019 COVID pandemic, which was ratified in February 2022. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology's target for 2024 is for all educational units to use the Kurmer as a learning guide, including madrasahs, under the auspices of the Ministry of Islamic Education. This research aims to describe the relevance of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in improving the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia. The research was conducted at the secondary level of Islamic education. The data were collected directly at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Ar-Rahman, and Madrasah Ittifaqiyah Ogan Ilir and several previous findings in Indonesia. Data analysis was carried out descriptively and qualitatively. The research findings indicate that there are obstacles in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. These challenges arise primarily due to administrative unpreparedness and a lack of comprehensive understanding, particularly concerning the co-curricular aspects of the *Pancasila Student Profile* (P5) and the *Rahman Lilalamin Profile* (P2RM). Encouraging implementation can be seen in the operations and administration of curricular and extracurricular learning, in meeting graduation targets, implementing learning and in the assessment process. The visible support is the high work enthusiasm of educators, being united and able to work together, potential students, having a large *Pesantren* area, and support from a decree from the Ministry of Islamic Education. There was relevance in implementing a Kurmer from the aspects of graduation, content standards, process and assessment standards, although there are several weaknesses.

Keywords: Relevance; *Merdeka* Curriculum; education; Islamic education; quality; Islamic education quality

1. Introduction

Curriculum is an essential component of the education system so that the learning process can run optimally. It functions as operational guidance for

educators, education staff, and learning units in teaching and learning activities and as a reference in determining learning outcomes (Akrim et al., 2022). The learning and teaching process becomes directed, measurable and well-planned through the curriculum, so it must be reviewed periodically and continuously. The curriculum is dynamic because it can adapt to current developments, science and technology, changes in thought patterns and the life experiences of individuals and society. It is designed so that educational units have the same goals and flexibility in implementation at all levels of education to increase competitiveness nationally and internationally (Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022). Empirical studies show that the secondary education level curriculum has so far not been able to meet the skills needs in the world of work (Abdi & Kenea, 2022). Therefore, a curriculum is needed to answer these problems. One of them is an environmentally-based curriculum (Damaah et al., 2024). In the Indonesian national education system, this problem is answered by the *Merdeka* curriculum.

The *Merdeka* curriculum is a curriculum innovation designed to address contemporary challenges by integrating technological advancements and *Pancasila* values to meet societal needs in an increasingly integrative future. It features a diverse intra-curricular design and is more student-centered (Aliiyah et al., 2023). The *Merdeka* curriculum has three key features, namely *Merdeka Belajar* Platform as a guide to student activities *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform as a guide for teachers, and *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* Platform as a guide to learning in higher education, all of which can be accessed via the Kemendikbud.go.id website. At the primary and secondary education levels, teachers are asked to prepare activities for the *Penguatan Proyek Profil Belajar Pancasila* (Strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile Project) (P5) for entering the world of work (Munte, 2022). The *Merdeka* curriculum aims to produce skilled students with *Pancasila* character, who can adapt quickly to technological developments, and are ready to compete nationally and globally (Kemendikbud.go.id, 2022). The *Merdeka* curriculum aims to produce graduates who are prepared to meet the demands of the industrial workforce. It provides for collaboration between education and industry because it encourages innovation and technological progress (Areesophonpichet et al., 2024). Conceptually, the *Merdeka* curriculum provides learning freedom for students, which is relevant to John Dewey's concept of progressive education because it directs educational units to explore and develop students' abilities according to their talents and interests (Setyaningsih et al., 2024). It is also the reason for implementation to accelerate the recovery of learning and achievement of national education goals, which were hampered for a long time due to the 2019 COVID pandemic (Kemendikbud.go.id, 2022), besides adapting the *Merdeka* curriculum to relevantly reach schools with low education levels (Setyaningsih et al., 2024).

The various advantages of the *Merdeka* Curriculum do not necessarily attract schools/madrasas' interest in implementing it. It can be seen from their varied responses to the *Merdeka* Curriculum that some responded quickly, but most responded slowly. Data for July 2022 showed that educational units registered on the *Merdeka Belajar* Platform and *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform at

Kemendikbud.go.id is still minimal, even at the madrasa education level in South Sumatra. Factors causing this problem include human resources who do not want to accept change and persist with old habits (Rahayu et al., 2022), curriculum adjustments, funding, partner care, and academic system adjustments (Kholik et al., 2022). To overcome this problem, consistent and continuous outreach from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology and the Ministry of Islamic Education is needed to provide understanding to educational human resources, especially educators. Understanding can be enhanced through outreach activities, enabling educators and students to adapt to technology. Research on the ability to integrate technology into Islamic education using the *Darsak* Platform in Jordan indicates that educators' perceptions are average, suggesting they have not yet fully embraced these changes. However, educators view this as a significant challenge, reflecting a high level of engagement with the potential for improvement (Al-Talhouni, 2021; Zulaiha & Triana, 2023).

Islamic education in Indonesia requires independence and autonomy to organize education in its institutions based on Islamic teachings summarized in the Al-Quran and Hadith. Islamic education aims to grow students' faith through learning activities regarding aspects of knowledge, skills, and attitudes to appreciate, understand and practice Islamic teachings correctly. In principle, Islamic education creates a generation of Muslims with Islamic character through learning that includes the individual's relationship with himself, human relationships with the environment, relationships with other humans, and relationships with God (Ratnasari et al., 2020). It is crucial for educators at every level of education to share the same vision in order to achieve this goal, thereby ensuring that the quality of Islamic education, in terms of goal attainment, can be effectively realized. The imbalance of educators in developing character education is an obstacle to implementing the Islamic education curriculum (Muhajir, 2022). Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in learning is being considered as it could lead to quality improvements. Research indicates that the quality of Islamic education globally is inconsistent and has not progressed due to a lack of serious institutional management, educators failing to update their teaching strategies, and a community focus on the appearance of buildings rather than on educational quality (Nurjaman et al., 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum encourages students, educators, and madrasas to be active, independent, and innovative, aligning with the unique character of their institutions and the needs of their community stakeholders. This approach aims to enhance competition among Islamic educational institutions, such as *Pesantren*, which traditionally had their own curricula. This research aims to find out and describe the relevance of the *Merdeka* Curriculum to improving the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia. Is it relevant in improving the quality of Islamic education?

2. Literature Review

2.1 The *Merdeka* Curriculum

Merdeka Belajar emphasizes learning activities that allow students to develop their individual interests, talents, and creativity. The *Merdeka* curriculum

promotes enjoyable learning experiences that foster independence, critical thinking, creativity, and innovation (Rahayu et al., 2022). These skills have not yet been fully integrated into the Islamic education system under the current curriculum. Research results show that a multidimensional curriculum has been proven to improve high-level thinking skills in primary and secondary education level students (Yosepha et al., 2023).

The *Merdeka* curriculum is the answer to facing the challenges of the times in all sectors of life in the twenty-first century. It is aimed at creating human resources who are skilled, critical, independent and have high competitiveness both locally and internationally. Therefore, educators must be able to create interesting learning content so that students have critical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and character (5C) skills. All these skills are crucial for students to navigate the advancements in digital technology, such as computers and the internet, which facilitate smooth and efficient accelerated learning. Students and educators must be capable of utilizing the technology of the Society 5.0 era and actively participating in contemporary developments (Indarta et al., 2022).

The *Merdeka* curriculum features a variety of extracurricular learning activities, complemented by comprehensive content, allowing students ample time to deepen their understanding of concepts and enhance their competencies (Zainuri, 2023). Within intra-curricular learning, educators and students can concentrate on essential material while having the flexibility to expand and explore topics, prioritizing superior processes to achieve improved outcomes. The *Merdeka* curriculum was introduced by Nadim Makarim as Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia to enable educators to innovate in creating an ideal and happy learning atmosphere without having to demonstrate achievement of high grades, scores or minimum completion criteria. In the *Merdeka* curriculum, students have the opportunity to engage directly with educators and learn comfortably and efficiently through outdoor learning experiences. This approach aims to develop individuals who are characterful, independent, brave, intelligent, sociable, civilized, polite, competent, and reliable, ultimately benefiting the nation in the future. The curriculum integrates literacy skills, knowledge, and a positive attitude towards mastering technology. Additionally, students are given the freedom to think critically, explore, and acquire knowledge from historical sources (Indarta et al., 2022).

2.2 Steps in Implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum

The implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum is mandated across all educational institutions, including both schools and madrasas. To facilitate this process, educators and government education officials have issued operational guidelines (IKM) from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. These technical instructions serve as a framework for independently implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum. The IKM guidelines provide foundational guidance, which educational institutions can further develop to enhance their learning outcomes. The operational steps for IKM in

madrasas include five stages, namely: (a) analyzing the context and characteristics of the madrasa; (b) formulating the vision, mission, and goals of the madrasa; (c) determining the organization of learning; (d) preparing a learning plan; and (e) designing mentoring, evaluation, and professional development (Hastasasi et al., 2022). Another opinion revealed that the steps for implementation by subject matter experts are: (a) formulating goal achievement; (b) formation of subjects; (c) preparation of curriculum documentation; and (d) learning processes and assessments (Zainuri, 2023).

The description shows that implementing a *Merdeka* curriculum can be done in five stages. First, analyze the characteristics of the madrasa, both strengths, weaknesses and achievements that have been obtained to determine the right strategy for achieving future goals. Second, formulate the vision, mission and goals to be achieved by the madrasa in a clear, detailed and measurable manner. Third, organize learning so that it can be carried out optimally, including determining appropriate subjects according to the characteristics of the madrasa. Fourth, prepare curriculum documents such as Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) documents. Fifth, design assistance, evaluation and development of learning assessments. These five steps become a reference for schools and madrasas which can be developed by their respective educational units.

2.3 The Quality of Islamic Education

Quality is a condition that shows that goods/services comply with specified quality standards from the input, process and output aspects (Baro'ah, 2020). Quality orientation is measured through its usefulness to customers. Therefore, quality is an overall description of the characteristics of goods or services provided to meet stakeholder needs. The quality of education is a measure of the usefulness of the input, process and output of educational institutions that provide educational services that exceed the educational standards that have been set as the minimal measure of success.

Education standards that have been set by the government provide several indicators that function as measuring tools for educational institutions to evaluate themselves. Research results in Turkey showed that existing educational standards cannot overcome poor-quality educational units (Bahadir & Tuncer, 2020). Similarly, the adoption of educational curricula in Europe encounters challenges involving educators, students, curricula and educational institutions/units (Azmat & Ahmad, 2022; Karakuş, 2021). Educationally, one prevalent issue is that educators in various regions are unprepared for curriculum reforms. Research findings on curriculum reform in Lesotho indicate that educators' lack of readiness stems from their limited involvement in the curriculum design process (Chere-Mashopa et al., 2021).

Education quality standards in IKM refer to Government Regulation Number 57 of 2021 concerning National Education Standards. There are four aspects, namely (a) Graduate Competency Standards (SKL) covering eight student profile competencies of *Pancasila*, literacy and numeracy; (b) content standards include the scope of material developed in the form of mandatory material that

is by legislation, scientific concepts, pathways, levels and types of education; (c) process standards include planning (formulating goals based on learning outcomes, ways to achieve goals, and how to assess learning achievements), implementation (organizing fun, interactive, inspiring, motivating learning, training independence, creativity according to talents, interests, development students' physical and psychological health), and learning assessment (assessment of the planning and implementation of the learning process); and (d) Assessment standards, namely assessing learning outcomes before, during the process, and after learning both qualitatively and quantitatively as outlined in learning progress reports (report cards).

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design

This research included field research, or research whose implementation is carried out directly on the research object. The method used was qualitative. In the process, researchers created a complex picture by researching by uncovering a problem in the form of images, words, or events in natural situations (Mardawani, 2020). To examine the relevance of the *Merdeka* curriculum and the quality of Islamic education, researchers used a descriptive approach.

3.2 Participants

This research was carried out in July 2023 in several Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) in Indonesia. The main research sites were MT Ar-Rahman Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia and MT Ittifaqiyah Ogan Ilir, South Sumatra, Indonesia. These madrasahs were chosen because they have been registered as implementers of the *Merdeka* curriculum on the Si Kurma account of the Ministry of Islamic Education of the Republic of Indonesia in 2023. The sample comprised three people, consisting of the head of the madrasa, the deputy head of the madrasa for curriculum, and the Islamic Religious Education subject teacher. They were used as informants in this research, resulting in six informants who provided information about the *Merdeka* curriculum. In addition, research was carried out on other MTs in various provinces in Indonesia.

3.3 Data Collection Techniques

Primary data was collected through direct observation and interviews with primary informants, namely the head of the madrasa, the deputy head of the madrasa for curriculum, and madrasa quality guarantors in education units in two cities in South Sumatra Province, Indonesia and by means of focus group discussions with Islamic Religious Education teachers. Additionally, researchers collected secondary data from several IKM research findings in madrasahs in Indonesia, IKM regulations, photos, and other documents on the Si Kurma portal of the Ministry of Islamic Education. The collected data was then analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques.

4. Results

4.1 Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum

The research results on MTs in various regions of Indonesia show that the *Merdeka* curriculum has been implemented in the learning process of secondary-

level education units. Written implementation is demonstrated through a decree from the Ministry of Islamic Education as the implementer of the *Kurmer*. MT Ar-Rahman was one of the madrasas that had implemented the *Merdeka* curriculum in South Sumatra, Indonesia, and received a decree registered as implementing the *Kurmer* at the Directorate General of the Ministry of Islamic Education with Decree Number 3811 on July 13, 2022. This decree shows the *Kurmer* had been implemented for two years running. Documents related to the *Merdeka* curriculum were fulfilled by complying with the directions of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology. The general description of the *Kurmer* at MT Ar-Rahman is known through interview results.

Table 1.
Summary of Interview Results Regarding the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

No	Curriculum Components	Informant Answers
1	Characteristics of madrasas	a. Fulfilled in STP, PD, ADM, and FB aspects. b. Not fulfilled in the KI aspect.
2	Vision, mission and objectives of the curriculum developed by the madrasa	a. IKM is running. b. Relevance to quality is supported.
3	Organizing <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum learning	a. SP fulfilled. b. Implementation of P5 and P2RM is fulfilled. c. IKM facilities are implemented.
4	Learning planning	a. Documents fulfilled. b. Program implemented. c. Input accepted.

Source: (Astuti et al., 2023b)

Table 1 shows that the MT Ar-Rahman generally met the educational standards (STP). Most students (PD) were residents, allowing them to focus more on their studies. Administratively (ADM), the MT was registered and certified by the Ministry of Islamic Education as having implemented the *Kurmer*. Additionally, learning facilities (FB), such as buildings and expansive land, support the continuity of the *Kurmer*. However, the Ar-Rahman revealed weaknesses in implementation readiness (KI) concerning human resources for educators and students, as well as funding for learning operations. The implementation of the vision, mission, and objectives at Ar-Rahman was already underway, with a strong alignment to the quality of Islamic education, particularly through the learning process and material aligned with the independent madrasa curriculum. Organizational implementation was achieved in the aspects of learning structure (SP), P5, P2RM, and IKM facilities. In terms of learning planning, Ar-Rahman had met curriculum documentation requirements, recorded and implemented improvements, and continues to strive for quality enhancement by welcoming suggestions and input.

In another region, the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum was observed at MT Ittifaqiyah. This MT had implemented the *Merdeka* curriculum administratively but was only at the confirmation stage by the Ministry of

Islamic Education. It was waiting for the implementation Decree for the 2023/2024 academic year. In observations on July 10, 2023, the *Kurmer* had been implemented from scheduling and selecting subjects, to implementing P5. Draft documents related to the administration of the implementation of the *Kurmer* already existed and were in the process of being developed and completed by other documents.

Table 2. Interview Results Regarding the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

No	Curriculum Components	Informant Answers
1	Characteristics of madrasas	a. TP, PD and legality are fulfilled. b. ADM is not complete.
2	Vision, mission and objectives of the curriculum developed by the madrasa	a. IKM is running. b. Relevance to quality is supported.
3	Organizing <i>Merdeka</i> curriculum learning	a. SP is applied to intra-curricular and extracurricular aspects. b. SP is not implemented perfectly on P5. c. Has not been implemented yet on P2RM.
4	Learning Planning	a. Documents are fulfilled in the process. b. Program implemented. c. Input accepted.

Source: (Astuti et al., 2023b)

Table 2 outlines the characteristics of MT Ittifaqiyah. The aspect of teaching staff (TP) is well-met, as they collaborate effectively and maintain good relationships with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, facilitating access to information about curriculum developments. Another characteristic is that MT Ittifaqiyah has many students (PD) and meets legal requirements, being registered on the Islamic Education Ministry's Sikurma account in 2023. However, weaknesses arise from incomplete administrative aspects of the *Kurmer*.

The implementation of the vision, mission, and objectives of IKM was underway, strongly supporting the quality of Islamic education, particularly in the co-curricular aspects of P5 and P2RM. Intra-curricular activities were conducted according to the guidelines of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religious Affairs, following the classical system. While P5 co-curricular learning had been implemented informally, P2RM had not been implemented due to insufficient TP readiness. Extracurricular learning was offered in various formats, allowing students to choose activities that aligned with their talents and interests.

Learning planning was executed by preparing documents, though they had not been recorded systematically. The program had been implemented according to directions and feedback from other madrasas.

The advantages and disadvantages of implementing the *Kurmer* were experienced by all the madrasas studied. While the curriculum implementation met administrative and learning process requirements, it was not fully optimized within the madrasas. Consequently, there is a need for continuous

quality improvement. The *Merdeka* curriculum at MTs Ittifaqiyah started in 2022 but was only administratively implemented in the 2023 academic year.

4.2 The Relevance of Implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Improving the Quality of Islamic Education

The curriculum is designed as a guide in finding material that students will study so that educators can design appropriate learning activities. The expected final implication is that students obtain learning outcomes according to their needs, abilities, talents and interests. To realize this goal, in the *Merdeka* curriculum, there are additional types of learning, namely co-curricular implementation of the P5, literacy and numeracy. The profile of *Pancasila* students includes faith, piety and noble character, global diversity, independence, cooperation, critical reasoning and creativity. In the SKL of the Ministry of Islamic Education, the character competencies of *Pancasila* students are complemented by the P2RM student profile, which includes attributes such as civility, exemplary behavior, citizenship and nationality, moderation, balance, integrity, equality, deliberation, tolerance, and a dynamic and innovative approach.

The relevance of the *Merdeka* Curriculum to improving the quality of Islamic education can be seen from aspects of education quality, such as SKL, process standards, planning standards, vision, mission, goals and assessment standards. From the madrasas studied, the graduation standards in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum formulated, include first, the SKL P5 at MT Ar-Rahman is the dimension of global behavior, local wisdom and critical reasoning. Second, SKL P5 at MT Ittifaqiyah is cooperation, independence and creativity. The SKL are formulated through P5 and P2RM learning activities, literacy and numeracy.

Content standards cover the scope of material developed in the form of mandatory material based on legislation, scientific concepts, pathways, levels and types of education. At MT Ar-Rahman, the *Merdeka* Curriculum content standards have been met from intra-curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular aspects. According to the interview results, the content standards in developing lesson materials at MT Ar-Rahman are based on the *Kurmer* and have been based on the directions of the *Merdeka* Curriculum of the Ministry of Islamic Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture. At the MT Ittifaqiyah content standards in implementing the *Kurmer* have been met, including intra-curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular aspects.

At the MT Ittifaqiyah, the *Merdeka* Curriculum content standards have been met operationally and administratively in intra-curricular subjects. Co-curricular learning has been fulfilled in its implementation, specifically for P5 learning, but has not been structured yet, and no administration has been recorded. It is still limited to notes from subjects, and P2RM activities have not run yet. Content standards for extracurricular aspects have been implemented well from both operational and administrative aspects. The application of learning in terms of the P5 and the P2RM is a means of providing learners with the ability to interact, to be sensitive to the environment, to think critically, creatively and

innovatively, to hone talents and interests as well as to help and support each other in the progress of life with full awareness and sincerity for happiness in this world and the hereafter. A study explains that positive social-environmental support has been proven to be able to foster a high sense of happiness in individuals (Kurniawati, 2021).

Madrasa education quality process standards can be seen from three angles: planning, implementation and assessment standards. From the results of interviews and observations conducted at MTs Ar-Rahman and MTs Ittifaqiyah, the learning process in the *Kumer* engages students as active learning actors, but independent in determining their learning needs. Educators facilitate their learning needs using appropriate learning approaches. Apart from educational support and facilities, the student's independent learning process is based on their consistency and high motivation to achieve learning success.

The quality of education from the aspect of assessment standards is seen from three aspects: the assessment of learning outcomes before learning, during the process, and after learning both qualitatively and quantitatively as outlined through learning progress reports (report cards). Appropriate measuring tools and assessment techniques are needed to carry out assessments so that the results provide an accurate picture of students' abilities. The observations, interviews and documentation results show that the assessment system is according to national education quality expectations.

The *Kurmer* in madrasas in *Pesantrens* in South Sumatra Province began in the 2022/2023 academic year. The *Merdeka* Curriculum within the Ministry of Islamic Education was relatively slow because the regulations came out after the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Technical instructions for implementing the *Kurmer* are provided on Kemendikbud.go.id website for the android-based *Merdeka Belajar* and *Merdeka Mengajar* applications. Unlike schools, technical instructions for implementing this curriculum are on the *Si Kurma* account belonging to the Ministry of Islamic Education, which can be accessed via the address <https://sikurma.kemenag.go.id>.

The interviews show that the characteristics of the MT Ar-Rahman in terms of strengths and weaknesses in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum are high teacher work enthusiasm, teacher cohesion and cooperation, student enthusiasm for learning, owning large land and registration as a *Sikurma* account through the Decree of the Ministry of Islamic Education since 2022. The weakness is that the regulations for technical instructions for implementing the *P5* and *P2RM Merdeka* Curriculum are slow, causing them not to work as expected.

The characteristics of MT Ittifaqiyah from the aspect of strengths are teacher collaboration, extensive relationships, and good relations with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and potential students, and it has been registered on the *Sikurma* account of the Ministry of Islamic Education, 2023. The weakness is that it does not yet have a complete *Kurmer* administration. The *Merdeka* Curriculum

was implemented to answer the problems after the COVID-19 pandemic, and the challenges of the times and prepare students to become human resources who are ready to compete nationally and internationally. Therefore, the *Kurmer* development program must begin with a vision, mission, and goals that are in line with the objectives of the *Kurmer* and its characteristics. Based on the research results, the application of the *Kurmer* relates to aspects of vision, mission and objectives below.

Organizing learning is the subsequent step after formulating the vision, mission, and goals of the madrasa in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum within Islamic education institutions. Effective planning in curriculum development is crucial, as it significantly increases the likelihood of a successful learning process. Thus, learning activities must begin with thorough and strategic planning.

The *Merdeka* curriculum is a new policy in education that aims to improve the quality of education through the teaching and learning process, teacher commitment, and the creativity and support of madrasa heads (Baro'ah, 2020). Education quality includes SKL, content, process and assessment standards. The SKL in the P5 program at MT Ar-Rahman were formulated in activities, drama performances in 2022, and daily Arabic language activities in 2022/2023. Meanwhile, the P2RM SKL has not been formulated yet. The SKL formulated in P5 drama performance are (a) recognizing perspectives and emotions/feelings from the perspective of other people/groups that one has never met/known; (b) prioritizing similarities and respecting differences as a means of unification; (c) asking questions critically in the process of creating a drama script; and (d) identifying, clarifying and processing information and ideas from the results of group discussions in making drama scripts (Astuti et al., 2023a).

5. Results and Discussion

The *Merdeka* curriculum (*Kurmer*) has generally been implemented in several madrasas in Indonesia, especially in intra-curricular learning. It is because there are few differences from the content of previous subjects. Changes have occurred in simpler administration of writing lesson plans and recommendations for learning processes outside the classroom to respond to students' creativity, curiosity and learning innovation. Judging from Arabic language activities, the SKL formulated in P5 learning are (a) participating in determining choices and decisions for selecting words in Arabic in everyday life; (b) understanding the concept of rules for using Arabic in everyday life; (c) asking questions critically in Arabic; and (d) identifying and clarifying the process of information and ideas from observations. The dimensions developed are local wisdom and critical reasoning.

The *Merdeka* curriculum in Islamic educational institutions aims to train students, teachers and schools to be independent in teaching and learning to achieve national goals. In operational learning, these three resources are expected to be able to think critically and holistically according to the values of Islamic education. They can work together to help each other realize the goals of

Islamic education in Indonesia, which are supported by the local culture of the Malay Islamic community, which is familial, friendly, fair and wise. The research results show that local culture influences critical and holistic thinking skills in Islamic education. Additionally, it is also supported through the P2RM, which is guided by Islamic concepts. Islamic values can support quality assurance in the concepts and practices of Islamic educational institutions. These institutions serve as platforms for the educational process, facilitating efforts to enhance their quality. Improved institutional quality directly correlates with better educational outcomes (Nurjaman et al., 2022). The environment also plays a role in improving the quality of Islamic education by supporting the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum aspects P2RM and P5, which are integrated with application-based digital learning tools such as Zoom. Research findings show that the learning environment has an impact on students' academic achievement and motivation (Rizqi, 2023; Schweder & Raufelder, 2024).

From the administrative documentation of the *Merdeka* curriculum at MT Ar-Rahman, it is known that P5 and P2RM have run according to the *Kurmer* from operational and administrative aspects. The researcher saw that the implementation of intra-curricular, P5 and P2RM, as well as extracurricular activities was carried out in one separate learning activity according to their category, but the researcher looked at the document as one, where intra-curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular became one flexible document. Co-curricular learning activities are guided by the technical instructions for the *Kurmer*, combined into one project. Activities include drama performances to Commemorate National Santri Day, 2022 with the theme: Resolution of the Jihad Role of NU for the Independence of the Republic of Indonesia, which was held over six (6) weeks, from 10 September 2022 to 22 October 2022. In 2022/2023, the P5 and P2RM programs were carried out with the theme of local wisdom with the topic of civilizing the Arabic language in everyday life.

From the SKL of MTs Ittifaqiyah in the *Merdeka* curriculum co-curricular, P5 and P2RM have only been implemented operationally in **scout activities**, processing waste into compost, and *Tadarus* Quran activities. P5 and P2RM activities at MT Ittifaqiyah have not been implemented in a structured manner because proper information has not been obtained regarding technical instructions for curriculum administration (Interview results, July 2023). At MT Ittifaqiyah, the implementation of P5 and P2RM encourages educators to be innovative and creative in developing learning programs within their respective subjects. One lesson hour is allocated for project-based activities that emphasize collaborative skills, such as scouting, making compost fertilizer, and *Tadarus* Quran. While some of the P5 and P2RM activities have only been partially introduced, they will be fully developed over time (Interview results, July 2023).

Literacy in the *Merdeka* curriculum includes language literacy, numeracy literacy, scientific literacy, cultural and civic literacy, and digital/scientific literacy. From the literacy program, the literacy learning in madrasas in South Sumatra Province is relatively the same, namely focusing on language literacy,

whereas SKL means that students have appropriate and correct language knowledge and skills, both Indonesian and Arabic. Meanwhile, P2RM is implemented in the form of SKL to get used to reading the Quran every day. The activities are arranging wall panels, making literacy trees and reading the Quran before learning activities.

Numeracy is the ability needed for individuals to calculate accurately. Numeracy aims to sharpen and strengthen knowledge and skills in integrating numbers, data, tables, graphs, and diagrams and applying knowledge and numeracy literacy skills to solve problems in everyday life so that individuals can think rationally, systematically and critically and solve problems in the twenty-first century. The SKL in numeracy at MTs in South Sumatra have not been implemented in an organized manner but are more focused on project-based learning in Mathematics subjects through subject teachers.

The *Merdeka* curriculum is relevant to the quality of Islamic education. The *Merdeka* curriculum by improving the quality of MT Ar-Rahman through content standards has been met, where the lesson material is provided by the *Kurmer* of the Ministry of Islamic Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture. At the MT Ittifaqiyah, *Merdeka* curriculum content standards have been met operationally and administratively in intra-curricular and extracurricular subjects but have not been met in the implementation and administration of P5, and P2RM activities are not yet running. Content standards for extracurricular aspects have been implemented well from both operational and administrative aspects.

Planning is the initial activity that must be carried out in the learning process. Without clear planning, the learning process cannot happen optimally, and it is hard to achieve the goals. Learning planning in the *Merdeka* curriculum at MT Ar-Rahman has been formulated by the *Kurmer* structure, which contains a formulation of objectives, methods used to achieve the objectives, and ways to assess the achievement of intra-curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular learning. The KBM plan is outlined in the lesson plan (RPP) and extracurricular program. The *Merdeka* curriculum planning includes a focus on the following quality components: (1) having clear quality policies, goals, and objectives; (2) having resources available and ready to use; (3) competent and highly dedicated staff; (4) having high expectations of achievement; (5) focus on customers (especially students); and (6) management input (Yasin, 2022).

The *Merdeka* curriculum is highly relevant to improving the quality of madrasa education, particularly concerning the desired implementation standards of the *Kurmer*. The learning has used an enjoyable, interactive, inspiring, motivating approach, developing independence and creativity by emphasizing students' talents, interests and physical and psychological development. In general, the approaches used by MT Ar-Rahman are problem-based learning, project-based learning, inquiry, observation and question and answer. Similarly, MT Ittifaqiyah generally applies a scientific approach, problem-based learning, inquiry, jigsaw, question and answer and discussion.

The *Merdeka* curriculum is designed to meet quality assurance standards in that there will be regular assessments on aspects of planning and implementing learning. Learning assessment standards are said to meet the standards of planning documents, and ongoing learning processes are assessed. Learning assessment is not only in the cognitive domain, but also the emphasis is on the affective domain by emphasizing aspects of emotions, attitudes, talents, values, appreciation, and feelings of social adjustment. Learning assessment at MT Ar-Rahman regarding the RPP and the learning process is carried out by teachers, madrasa heads and internal madrasa quality assurance units. Assessments at MTs Ittifaqiyah are carried out on the planning and implementation of the learning process periodically by teachers, madrasa heads and madrasa quality guarantors. The *Merdeka* curriculum in madrasas aims to achieve definite goals, including improving student learning outcomes. By emphasizing a superior learning process, for example, by innovating learning to face future challenges (Astuti & Ismail, 2021), it is hoped that high learning outcomes can be achieved. However, in both intra-curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular activities, the emphasis is on developing the ideal individual as described in the P5 and the P2RM student profile.

Assessment is an essential component of the learning process. In the output aspect, the quality of education is from graduates or the results of a process within a definite time, such as the achievements obtained, both academic and non-academic achievements. The *Merdeka* curriculum assessment should be relevant to the goals of the madrasa. Therefore, the assessment must be carried out on student progress before, during and after learning. The interview results show that the assessment standards met by MT Ar-Rahman from planning are carried out in a pretest for each subject before teaching and learning, equipped with instruments for assessing intra-curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular learning outcomes. The planning assessment at MT Ittifaqiyah is a pretest on intra-curricular learning complete with instruments. During the *Merdeka* curriculum learning process, the assessments carried out by MT Ar-Rahman are trigger assessments to respond to thinking abilities, and formative assessments are equipped with instruments for assessing intra-curricular, co-curricular and extracurricular learning outcomes. Assessment at MT Ittifaqiyah is in introductory and formative assessments on extracurricular activities complete with assessment instruments. In learning, assessment is at the end, or assessment after learning. The assessment activities at MT Ar-Rahman include summative assessments for intra-curricular subjects, self-reflection, enrichment, and remedial activities for P5, as well as extracurricular activities. At MT Ittifaqiyah, post-learning assessments encompass both summative and remedial evaluations for intra-curricular subjects and self-reflection for P5.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

The conclusions of this research are: (1) The *Merdeka* curriculum at Islamic educational institutions at the secondary education level in Indonesia has been implemented in the 2022/2023 academic year. The madrasa that has been implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum for the longest time in South Sumatra, Indonesia, is MT Ar-Rahman, followed later by MT Ittifaqiyah and several other

madrasas in various regions of Indonesia. (2) The advantages and disadvantages of implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum at MTs can be seen from the characteristics of the madrasa, vision, mission, and goals, organizing learning and implementing assessments in terms of each madrasa's individual characteristics. (3) The implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum in enhancing the quality of Islamic education in Indonesia aligns with the standards for educational quality improvement. This includes meeting the SKL competencies, content, processes and assessments.

The suggestion from this research is that all madrasas can implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum, especially P5 and P2RM co-curricular learning, in a structured, well-organized manner. All madrasas can work together in continuously analyzing their strengths and weaknesses to develop learning programs. In every madrasa, educators and curriculum leaders can improve the quality of the madrasa through implementing a *Merdeka* curriculum.

7. References

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