

The Readiness of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum

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ABSTRACT

Despite the rollout of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, its adoption in some madrasas remains incomplete. This study explores the readiness of PAI (Islamic Religious Education) instructors in Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah to implement the Curriculum Merdeka, focusing on the challenges posed by limited socialization opportunities and a general lack of motivation among teachers. Utilizing a qualitative research design, this study employed descriptive methodologies to gather insights. Data was collected through questionnaires from 36 respondents and analyzed using a systematic approach involving data reduction, data display, and verification processes. The findings reveal significant gaps in the readiness of PAI teachers to effectively implement the Curriculum Merdeka. Only 16.67% of teachers demonstrated a high level of awareness of the curriculum's content. About 11.11% of the instructors showed a deep understanding of its fundamental principles and could distinguish it from the previous curriculum. Furthermore, only 16.67% had access to the necessary curriculum and learning documents, and a mere 11.11% possessed adequate learning resources to apply the Curriculum Merdeka effectively. This study underscores the need for enhanced training and resource allocation to ensure the successful adoption of the Curriculum Merdeka in madrasas.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Curriculum change remains a pivotal topic of discussion among educators, particularly in the context of educational innovation and systemic reform. This ongoing debate often highlights the diverse perspectives on the necessity and impact of modifying educational frameworks. Critics argue that curriculum revisions can be perceived merely as ephemeral "projects" that coincide with political shifts, such as changes in ministerial leadership or government turnovers (Angga et al., 2022). This perception can lead to a sense of apathy among some educators, who view these changes as recurring burdens rather

than opportunities for improvement. Such attitudes underscore the challenges of implementing effective curriculum reforms, as they necessitate not only administrative adjustments but also a shift in the pedagogical approach of teachers tasked with applying new educational strategies.

Curriculum changes are influenced by a myriad of factors, notably the rapid advancement in science and technology. Soetopo and Soemanto highlight that these advancements necessitate updates to both the content and the instructional strategies embedded within curricula to ensure that educational practices remain relevant and effective (Fenty Setiawati, n.d.). However, these changes are not universally welcomed. Resistance often emerges from stakeholders who are impacted by the shifts in educational paradigms. For teachers, the curriculum serves as a critical framework that guides their instructional methods and classroom management. Consequently, any changes require teachers to undertake significant adjustments in their pedagogical strategies, which can be seen as an additional burden rather than an enhancement. This resistance is further compounded by the need for continuous professional development and the potential instability it introduces into the established educational environment.

Education in the 21st century, often referred to as the Knowledge Age, has transcended traditional methods that focused primarily on rote memorization devoid of understanding. Instead, contemporary education emphasizes critical thinking and comprehension. However, this shift has not been without criticism, as many argue that the current educational focus remains predominantly on cognitive development as measured by standardized tests. According to Angga et al. (2022), to facilitate this paradigm shift, significant innovations in curriculum, often spearheaded by governments and educational institutions, are essential. These changes should not be met with skepticism or avoidance but should involve all stakeholders, particularly educators, to ensure alignment with contemporary needs.

While the benefits of such curriculum changes include aligning student learning with modern demands, Salma et al. (2022) caution that overly rapid modifications can disrupt student adaptation to new learning models and curricula, potentially deteriorating academic outcomes. Additionally, there may be resistance from teachers who might not fully embrace these changes due to various constraints or disagreements with the policies. Thus, successful curriculum reform requires not only structural changes but also support systems that assist both students and teachers in navigating this transition.

Teachers need to be prepared to deal with changes in both general education policy and curriculum change policy. The education curriculum policy is always associated with the change of education minister (Firdaus et al., 2023). In addition, curriculum changes can occur in educational institutions according to the characteristics of each institution (Subagiya, 2022). Teachers have various perceptions, views, and responses to curriculum changes. The results of research proposed by Djuwariah Ahmad and Mardiana concluded that the perception of English teachers in Makasar City High School is divided into 2, namely some consider that curriculum change is a positive and innovative thing and some consider that curriculum change is a formality, and only conceptual. In addition, teachers assume that curriculum changes will produce the same thing as the previous curriculum.

The findings discussed above suggest that many view curriculum changes as merely superficial adjustments, lacking substantial influence on educational outcomes or student learning. This perspective reveals a persistent skepticism among educators regarding the effectiveness of these reforms. Moreover, frequent and rapid shifts in the curriculum can lead to implementation challenges, as noted by Lince (2022), who emphasizes the importance of adequately preparing teachers for ongoing changes.

However, not all teachers feel equipped to embrace these changes. Siregar's 2014 study found that elementary school teachers were not fully prepared to implement the 2013 curriculum, a situation exacerbated by inadequate training and insufficient socialization about the changes. Furthermore, a survey by the Ministry of Religious Affairs indicated a tepid response from the teaching community, with only 19.1% of teachers expressing enthusiasm for adapting to the new Kurikulum Merdeka. This underscores the need for more comprehensive training and better communication strategies to ensure that educators are both informed and motivated to implement new curricular standards effectively.

However, it is important to clarify that not all teachers express dissatisfaction with curriculum changes. The point here is that a segment of educators remains unprepared to adapt to these shifts.

Contrarily, other studies highlight a different perspective, indicating a significant level of readiness among teachers for curriculum reform. For instance, research conducted by Kristiantari, which involved 74 teachers in Bali province, found that these educators displayed high motivation towards embracing curriculum innovations in 2013. Nevertheless, their enthusiasm is often hindered by the lack of sufficient facilities, which poses a challenge to the effective implementation of these changes.

By referring to the results of the research stated above, it can be concluded that some teachers do not have a positive perception of curriculum change, while some have a positive perception and readiness to face and implement the new curriculum. (Lince, 2022) Therefore, researchers need to provide a perspective on the importance of change or innovation in a curriculum. All parties need to realize that curriculum change and innovation are something that cannot be avoided because of the development of the times both from social, cultural, science, and technology and the development of digital-based activities that have never been imagined before.

Referring to the background above, the problem of this research is that teachers are not fully prepared to accept curriculum changes. With various factors, the government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, made a significant change, namely the change to a Kurikulum Merdeka in early 2020. But of course, curriculum changes do not always get a positive response from educators as described above. Therefore, it is necessary to examine teachers' readiness to implement the Kurikulum Merdeka in Madrasah. Conceptually, curriculum changes must aim to make education better, but in reality, not all parties are ready to accept the curriculum changes well. (Afwa Tamama A'fiah, 2023)

Teachers have a crucial role in the teaching and learning process. Teachers need to be sufficiently ready to follow curriculum policy changes. Various definitions of teacher readiness including Chai define teacher readiness as teacher optimism in using technological devices flexibly. Previous research shows that teacher readiness emphasizes more on aspects of self-efficacy and readiness to use technology. Referring to Ruswandi's research, only 4.76% of Islamic Religious Education teachers are very ready to implement e-learning-based learning. This figure shows that Islamic Religious Education teachers are not fully ready to accept information and communication technology development in learning.

Rogers stated that a person's readiness to implement or not implement an innovation goes through the stages of knowledge, persuasion (attitude), decision, implementation, and verification (affirmation). A person's readiness to become a professional teacher depends on the ability to master the field as well as the goals to be achieved and the attitude towards the professional field. Wati & Jailani emphasized that teacher preparation to implement the curriculum includes preparation of teacher knowledge and attitudes, teacher self-development efforts, and preparation of facilities and infrastructure.

Research with the title "Readiness of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Implementing the Independent Curriculum" can find several research gaps that require deeper understanding. One of the research gaps that can be identified is related to curriculum alignment. Even though the Merdeka Curriculum has been introduced as an innovation in education in Indonesia, it is still unclear to what extent the Islamic Religious Education curriculum has been adapted to the principles and objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum (Hr & Wakia, 2021).

The central question in this discussion concerns the integration of values and approaches from the Independent Curriculum into Islamic Religious Education. Specifically, it examines whether there is a discrepancy between the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and the content of Islamic religious instruction, and whether educators in this field receive sufficient guidance to align their teachings with this new framework. Additionally, there is a notable research gap regarding the professional development and training provided to Islamic Religious Education teachers. Questions arise as to whether they have been adequately trained to adopt teaching methods that correspond with the Merdeka Curriculum, the degree of their readiness and acceptance of these changes, and whether further training or support is necessary. Another critical area of investigation is the accessibility of educational resources. This includes evaluating whether Islamic Religious Education teachers have access to adequate teaching materials and resources that facilitate the adoption of the Independent Curriculum. Future research could assess the sufficiency of textbooks, learning media, and other educational tools in supporting the

curriculum within the context of Islamic Religious Education (Suryaman, 2020). Apart from that, evaluation and performance measurement are also aspects that need to be paid attention to. How the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in increasing students' understanding of Islamic values and critical and creative thinking abilities needs to be measured. Are there appropriate evaluation tools to measure these achievements, and how can the results of these evaluations help further improvement and development? By delving into these aspects, this research can provide a more comprehensive picture of the readiness of Islamic Religious Education teachers to adopt and implement the Kurikulum Merdeka and identify areas that require further attention (Holst et al., 2020).

In light of the aforementioned issues, this research aims to investigate the readiness of Madrasah teachers in adopting the Kurikulum Merdeka within their educational practices. The study seeks to assess the teachers' comprehension and knowledge of the Kurikulum Merdeka, as well as their preparedness in terms of the availability of necessary documentation and learning resources. This exploration is vital for understanding how well-equipped Madrasah educators are to implement this curriculum and to identify potential areas where additional support may be required.

2. METHODS

The research method should be included in the Introduction. The method contains an explanation of the research approach, subjects of the study, the conduct of the research procedure, the use of materials and instruments, data collection, and analysis techniques. (Syahfutra et al., 2020)

This research design uses qualitative research. The method used in this research is descriptive research (A. Muri Yusuf, 2015). The purpose of this research method is to determine the value of independent variables. The data source of this research is teachers in 12 Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah in West Java, totaling 36 respondents. Respondents who filled out the questionnaire were selected voluntarily.

The data collection technique used is a questionnaire. Researchers collect data by giving questionnaires to data sources. The data obtained will be organized and processed so that later it can be determined to find a conclusion. The following interpretation table is used to reference the interpretation of the Madrasah teacher readiness questionnaire.

Table 1. Interpretation Reference for Madrasah Teachers' Readiness to Implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka*

| Score Interval | Readiness Category |
|-----------------|--------------------|
| 75,00 > <100,00 | Full Readiness |
| 50,00 > <74,99 | Ready |
| 25,00 > <49,99 | Less Ready |
| 0 > <24,99 | Not Ready |

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Teachers' Knowledge about Curriculum Merdeka Information

Curriculum change is something that cannot be avoided in education. Along with the times, cultural, social, and information technology demands change and curriculum development (Ramadina et al., n.d.). The curriculum is developed to improve the quality of education in a country because the essence of education is the curriculum. Curriculum changes and developments are based on several factors, such as changes in national policies, changes in social phenomena, and changes in life needs (Kholik et al., 2022).

For teachers to implement the Curriculum Merdeka, they need to have comprehensive knowledge and various pieces of information about the Curriculum Merdeka. The results of research on Madrasah teachers' knowledge of the Curriculum Merdeka are tabulated in the following table:

Table 2. Teachers' Knowledge About Kurikulum Merdeka Information

| Criteria | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Total Score |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|-------------|
| Very Informed | 6 | 16,67 | 24 |
| Informed | 18 | 50,00 | 54 |
| Less Informed | 12 | 33,33 | 24 |
| Do Not Know | 0 | 0,00 | 0 |
| Total | 36 | 100% | 102 |

Based on the provided table, it is evident that the level of familiarity among Madrasah teachers about the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is not universally high. Just 16.67% of the participants possess a high level of knowledge of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Madrasah. Approximately 50.00% of individuals possess knowledge of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Madrasahs, whereas approximately 33.33% lack sufficient knowledge about it. The cumulative score in this particular area is 102. Based on the provided interpretation table, Madrasah instructors' readiness in the information part of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* falls under the "Ready" category.

The figure above shows that 33.33% of respondents still do not know information about the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. *Merdeka Belajar* is a breakthrough policy launched by the Minister of Education that aims to return education management authority to schools and local governments. *Merdeka Belajar* policy is implemented to accelerate the achievement of the national goal of education, increasing the quality of Indonesia's human resources, which have advantages and competitiveness compared to other countries. Socialization is important and should continue to be carried out by related parties so that information about the *Kurikulum Merdeka* for Madrasah is available. (Vhalery et al., 2022) Tania's research (2022) shows that Madrasah Ibtidaiyah teachers are not ready for the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in the 2022-2023 academic year, with one of the factors being the uneven socialization of Madrasah teachers.

The preparation and socialization of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at the Madrasah are not as intense as the socialization at the public-school level. This raises a problem that is very important to study and find a solution to so that Madrasah can be immediately ready to face the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* was officially introduced in 2020, but in Madrasah it has only started since the publication of KMA 347 of 2022 Guidelines for Implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Madrasah. Thus, it is reasonableness that there is currently no information about the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

3.2 Teacher's Understanding About Kurikulum Merdeka

To be able to implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Madrasah, teachers need to understand the basic concepts of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* both theoretically and in practice. The results of research on teachers' understanding of the concept of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* are tabulated in the following table.

Table 3. Teacher's Understanding About Concept of *Kurikulum Merdeka*

| Criteria | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Total Score |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|-------------|
| Very Informed | 4 | 11,11 | 16 |
| Informed | 18 | 50,00 | 54 |
| Less Informed | 14 | 38,89 | 28 |
| Do Not Know | 0 | 0,00 | 0 |
| Total | 36 | 100% | 98 |

Referring to the data presented in the table above, it is evident that only 11.11% of teachers have a clear understanding of the basic concepts of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, while a significant 38.89% are still unfamiliar with its principles. This indicates that Madrasah teachers have not yet received thorough information about the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This gap in understanding could stem from two

primary issues: firstly, a general deficiency in curriculum literacy among the teachers, and secondly, an insufficient provision of training or socialization concerning the Kurikulum Merdeka concepts for Madrasah teachers.

The development of science, information, technology, and the needs of the times develop periodic curriculum development (Sanusi, 2014). In the 21st century, a teacher carrying out the teaching and learning process is expected to be able to innovate learning, have teaching skills that can balance with current conditions, and be able to design learning that is interesting, fun, and meaningful for students. (Holst et al., 2020) Another research reveals the same thing. Nurhayati's research (2022) that Madrasah Teachers have not fully understood information about the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

Curriculum changes are often considered a new problem for some teachers. Teachers need to adapt to the new curriculum in concepts, approaches, teaching materials, lesson plans, and assessment instruments. For this reason, PAI teachers need to understand the differences between the existing curriculum and the previous curriculum. The results of research on teachers' understanding of the differences between the Kurikulum Merdeka and the previous curriculum are tabulated in the following table.

Table 4. Teacher's Understanding About Differences Between The Existing Curriculum and The Previous Curriculum

| Criteria | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Total Score |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|-------------|
| Very Informed | 4 | 11,11 | 16 |
| Informed | 22 | 61,11 | 66 |
| Less Informed | 10 | 27,78 | 20 |
| Do Not Know | 0 | 0,00 | 0 |
| Total | 36 | 100% | 102 |

Usually, in curriculum changes teachers need to adapt to the new curriculum both from learning tools and learning processes. Often, teachers still use the old way of teaching without adapting to the latest curriculum. The table above shows that only 11.11% of teachers are very informed about the differences between the curriculum they are learning and the previous curriculum. For now, educational institutions can still choose for themselves which curriculum they will use in their respective schools. Education units are given the choice of choosing the curriculum, in the Kurikulum 2013, or the Kurikulum Merdeka. However, teachers still need to understand the difference between the two to implement the curriculum properly.

Among the most striking differences in the Kurikulum Merdeka is the existence of the Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5). This is almost the same as the 2013 curriculum which aims to strengthen character with a scientific approach. However, this does not mean that P5 negate character strengthening, instead the P5 program strengthens character education in the previous curriculum. Other differences between the two curricula include subject units, lesson hours, learning implementation, learning strategies and the graduation competency standard assessment process.

3.3 Document Completeness of Kurikulum Merdeka

Curriculum documents and learning support tools are important for teachers to have, both in printed and digital form. The results of research regarding the completeness of the Kurikulum Merdeka documents owned by teachers in Madrasah are tabulated in the following table.

Table 5. Document Completeness of Kurikulum Merdeka

| Criteria | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Total Score |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|-------------|
| Very Complete | 6 | 16,67 | 24 |
| Complete | 16 | 44,44 | 48 |
| Less Complete | 14 | 38,89 | 28 |
| Non Complete | 0 | 0,00 | 0 |
| Total | 36 | 100% | 100 |

For teachers to teach according to the Kurikulum Merdeka, teachers need to have complete curriculum documents as guidelines as well as instruments. The curriculum documents referred to in this study include annual programs, semester programs, lesson plans, and assessment instruments according to the Kurikulum Merdeka. But unfortunately, the results of this study show that only 16.67% of teachers have very complete curriculum documents.

3.4 Availability of Learning Resources of Kurikulum Merdeka

Learning resources are important for teachers and learners to have, both in printed and digital form. Teachers should at least have the main learning textbook, student paperwork, assessment instruments, or other books to support learning. The results of research on the completeness of the Kurikulum Merdeka learning resources owned by teachers in Madrasahs are tabulated in the following table.

Table 6. Availability of Learning Resources of Kurikulum Merdeka

| Criteria | Frequency | Percentage (%) | Total Score |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|-------------|
| Very Complete | 4 | 11,11 | 16 |
| Complete | 8 | 22,22 | 24 |
| Less Complete | 24 | 66,67 | 48 |
| Non Complete | 0 | 0,00 | 0 |
| Total | 36 | 100% | 88 |

Referring to the data presented in the table above, it is observed that merely 11.11% of Madrasah teachers possess comprehensive learning resources, while a notable 22.22% report that their resources are insufficiently complete. Learning resources encompass a diverse range of data sources, including various forms and people, which are utilized by students to enhance their educational experiences. These resources can be employed either individually or in combination to effectively support students in reaching their learning objectives. The limited availability of adequate learning materials not only hinders the instructional capability of teachers but also impacts the overall quality of education provided. This underscores the urgent need for a systematic improvement in the provision and distribution of educational resources, ensuring that all teachers have the tools necessary to facilitate an optimal learning environment.

Numerous studies have highlighted that insufficient learning resources are a critical barrier to the successful implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in both schools and universities. Additionally, research suggests that Madrasah teachers are not fully equipped to adopt this curriculum. According to Apriatni (2023), Madrasah teachers show moderate readiness in planning and conducting learning processes, but their readiness in assessment remains low.

In exploring these issues further, interviews were conducted with several educators to discuss the challenges they face with the Kurikulum Merdeka. One Islamic Religious Education teacher highlighted the lack of sufficient resources and learning materials as a significant hurdle despite efforts to integrate Islamic values with a contextual and critical approach. Another teacher felt reasonably prepared but recognized the need for more extensive training and specific guidance to better align teaching materials with the curriculum's principles, noting that fostering an open, creative learning environment requires deeper preparation in terms of knowledge and skills.

Makbul (2021) reports a mixed readiness among educators in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. While some teachers feel adequately prepared, a notable number highlight the deficiency in ongoing professional development as a significant barrier, particularly in their capacity to effectively integrate the curriculum's innovative approaches into Islamic religious education. This underscores the pressing need for more robust support systems and enhanced collaborative efforts among teachers to ensure that the curriculum's full potential is realized. Further, the establishment of regular training sessions and workshops could help bridge the knowledge gap, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the curriculum. Additionally, creating a community of practice among educators could facilitate the sharing of best practices and collective problem-solving, thereby enhancing the implementation of the curriculum across different educational contexts.

The responses indicate a diverse level of readiness among Islamic Religious Education teachers, with consistent challenges, including the need for more training, better resources, and enhanced collaborative support. These findings underscore the necessity for strategic measures such as increased training opportunities, development of appropriate teaching materials, and strengthened cooperation among educators to enhance readiness and effectiveness in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in the realm of Islamic Religious Education.

4. CONCLUSION

The research findings indicate that Islamic religious education teachers in Madrasahs are not fully equipped to implement the Kurikulum Merdeka effectively. Only 16.67% of the teachers are highly informed about the Kurikulum Merdeka, and a mere 11.11% have a profound understanding of its fundamental concepts and how they differ from those of the previous curriculums. Additionally, just 16.67% of the teachers possess the necessary curriculum and learning documents, while only 11.11% have access to comprehensive learning resources required to successfully implement the Kurikulum Merdeka. This study has several limitations that could affect the generalizability of the findings. The sample size was relatively small, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences and perspectives among Madrasah teachers across different regions. Additionally, the study primarily focused on teacher readiness from a resource and knowledge perspective, potentially overlooking other factors such as institutional support, student readiness, and community involvement, which could also impact the successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

Future research should consider a larger and more diverse sample to better understand the varied challenges and successes in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka across different educational settings. Studies could also explore the impact of institutional support and community engagement on curriculum implementation. Further research might investigate different professional development models' effectiveness in enhancing teacher readiness and competency in integrating the new curriculum. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into the long-term effects of the Kurikulum Merdeka on student outcomes and teacher development.

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