

## ***The Role of the Madrasah Head in Implementing the Independent Curriculum at the Madrasah***

### **Peran Kepala Madrasah dalam Mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka di Madrasah**

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#### **News Article**

##### **Keyword:**

*Head Master;  
Independent  
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Madrasah*

##### **Abstract**

*The aim of this policy paper is to find out the role of the Madrasah Head in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The research method used is a qualitative, qualitative is a series of procedures designed to produce descriptive data in written or spoken words. The kinds of research are descriptive, that describes about phenomena, events and incidents in certain groups. The results show that; As Madrasah leaders must work together with educators and education staff to improve the quality of education in Madrasah. The role of the madrasa head in implementing the Curriculum merdeka is to encourage a student-centered learning process and allow flexibility for educators and their education staff. In solving problems related to the Problems of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Madrasahs, the Head of the Madrasah has an active role to answer current problems, related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum effectively and efficiently.*

##### **Kata Kunci:**

Kepala  
Madrasah;  
Kurikulum  
Merdeka;  
Madrasah

##### **Abstrak**

Tujuan dari *policy paper* ini adalah, untuk mengetahui peran Kepala Madrasah dalam mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka di Madrasah. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode kualitatif yaitu merupakan serangkaian prosedur penelitian yang disusun untuk menghasilkan data deskriptif berupa kata tertulis atau lisan dari orang dan perilaku yang diobservasi. Jenis penelitian yang dipakai adalah jenis penelitian kualitatif deskriptif yang menggambarkan dan menguraikan tentang fenomena, gejala, peristiwa dan kejadian yang terjadi pada kelompok tertentu. Hasil dari *policy paper* ini menunjukkan bahwa kepala madrasah berfungsi sebagai pengawas dan agen perubahan di madrasahnyanya. Pimpinan Madrasah harus bekerjasama dengan pendidik dan tenaga kependidikannya untuk meningkatkan mutu pendidikan di Madrasah. Peran kepala madrasah dalam implementasi kurikulum pembelajaran merdeka adalah mendorong proses pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa dan memungkinkan fleksibilitas kerja bagi pendidik dan tenaga kependidikannya. Selain tu, dalam penyelesaian persoalan terkait dengan Permasalahan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di Madrasah, Kepala madrasah berperan aktif dalam implementasi kurikulum untuk menjawab permasalahan terkini, terkait dengan implementasi kurikulum mandiri. Kepala Madrasah

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memberikan pedoman dan petunjuk pelaksanaan kurikulum pembelajaran mandiri agar dapat dilaksanakan secara efektif dan efisien.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background of the Problem

The curriculum is a dynamic educational system and must always be susceptible to change and development to adapt to the changing times and challenges of the times. However, change and development must be implemented in a planned and directed manner, not simply as a mere modification.

During the independence period, the curriculum was often exploited as a political instrument by the government. For example, when Indonesia was still colonized by the Dutch and Japanese, the curriculum had to be adapted to the political goals of both countries (Fauzan, 2017).

After Indonesia's independence in 1945, the school curriculum was revised and adapted to the political goals of the Indonesian nation, which were based on the noble principles of the nation as a reflection of Indonesian society (Hamalik, Oemar, 2008).

Madrasahs have a curriculum that emphasizes religious studies, namely the Qur'an and Hadith, Fiqh, Aqidah (Faith), Islamic Cultural History, and Arabic. However, compared to public schools, which only emphasize general Islamic teaching (Aly, Hery Noer, and Munzier S., 2003).

The Independent Curriculum is a curriculum that focuses on necessary information, character development, and student competencies to help children discover their interests and talents at a young age (Hendri, N., 2017).

The Independent Curriculum can also be defined as a curriculum that includes various intracurricular learning opportunities, optimized content, so that students have sufficient time to explore concepts and build competencies (Abidin, Nurul, 2021).

The Madrasah curriculum has two major mandates: 1) equipping students with the competencies, attitudes, and life skills to face the challenges of their time, and 2) passing on cultural character and noble values to the next generation, so that they can play a role as the next generation. The curriculum cannot be separated from cultural roots, religious values, and the nation's noble values. To achieve these two major goals, the curriculum must continually evolve to meet the demands of the times (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2005).

Transformation will continue. The only constant in this world is change. At the very least, this change occurs in response to the demands of the global world. Because technology has provided the knowledge they need, the modern world and global economy no longer place much value on what they know. However, in today's society, individuals are valued more for their expertise (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2012).

Therefore, the Madrasah Curriculum not only focuses on the knowledge students must master, but also equips students with competencies, attitudes, life skills, and ways of

thinking and acting that enable them to anticipate and respond to ever-changing situations. The Independent Curriculum will guide character development by providing opportunities for critical, creative, and innovative thinking. Furthermore, Islamic principles, such as the madrasah spirit, must be strengthened in an integrated manner alongside curriculum implementation. Consequently, religious values shape the thinking, attitudes, and actions of all madrasah members in implementing educational practices and policies (Arifin, Zainal, 2013).

Teachers, who are at the forefront of curriculum implementation, must avoid reducing students to mere repositories of knowledge. Teachers must focus on developing students' character, equipping them with 21st-century competencies and life skills in a more innovative manner according to the needs of students in their time, (Abidin, Nurul, 2021).

Consequently, instructors must continuously develop their own capacities. Teachers are expected to collaborate in a spirit of sharing and collaboration with the educational community to hone competencies and broaden current knowledge to provide the best service for students.

The Independent Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) places students at the center of attention. This educational policy primarily benefits students. To accommodate diversity, differentiated learning is used. A truly comprehensive assessment model that incorporates various intelligences, abilities, interests, and other human characteristics is still being developed. Evaluation and assessment findings must now be able to depict a human profile that encompasses various intelligences, not just cognitive achievements. High-achieving students are no longer isolated in this perspective. All madrasah students excel in their respective disciplines, based on their talents, interests, and tendencies (Hendri, Nofri, 2020).

The success of the Independent Curriculum in madrasahs will be measured by how much the curriculum improves the classroom environment, making students happier, learning activities more engaging, and fostering a culture of lifelong learning. This is intended to improve more meaningful learning outcomes in a more effective and efficient manner. Changes in classroom mysticism, in turn, can influence students' character, equipping them with the competencies and life skills necessary for life in their time (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

Improving the curriculum alone is not enough to achieve this ideal; teachers and other components of the school's educational ecosystem also play a crucial role. Therefore, I invite all school components to collaborate to maximize efforts and optimize their roles in providing superior, relevant, and competitive educational services.

There are two legal bases that can serve as guidelines for the Independent Curriculum, as it autonomously determines what and how the Independent Curriculum should be implemented: first, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Decree No. 56 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum, and second, Minister of Education and Culture Decree No. 347 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which will apply to madrasahs (Anjelina, Winda, 2021).

The Merdeka Curriculum will be implemented in 2,471 Islamic schools (madrasah) by 2022. This year, the Merdeka Curriculum is being implemented in 26,169 madrasahs at the RA, MI, MTs, and MA/MAK levels. This data demonstrates the desire of madrasah communities to develop the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as their willingness to undertake reforms (Minister of Religious Affairs Decree, 2022).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs will publish six guidebooks to assist in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (IKM) in Madrasahs, including:

1. Guidelines for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum (IKM) in Madrasahs;
2. Guidelines for the Development of the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM);
3. Learning and Assessment Policies and Procedures (PPA).

These Independent Curriculum (IKM) Implementation Guidelines cover:

1. Implementation techniques;
2. Mentoring; and
3. Monitoring and assessment of curriculum implementation in madrasahs.

The implementation strategy or mechanism for the Independent Curriculum is outlined in the first section. This section explains the roles, responsibilities, and authorities of each relevant party, from madrasahs to the central Ministry of Religious Affairs. The stages of IKM in madrasahs are also explained, as well as various recommended activities for madrasahs to undertake to strengthen IKM, such as participating in IKM socialization activities, technical guidance, and training. These can be conducted online, offline, or hybrid (a combination of online and offline), or using platforms with specific material content (Minister of Religious Affairs Decree, 2022).

Therefore, as Madrasah Principals, teachers must prepare themselves to implement the Merdeka Curriculum by participating in workshops, technical guidance, socialization, and training conducted by the Provincial, Regency/City Ministry of Religious Affairs Offices, and the Training Centers within their respective work units. This ensures that Madrasah Principals and teachers are prepared for implementation.

Therefore, the role of Madrasah Principals in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is to promote a student-centered learning process and offer work independence for educators and education personnel in their Madrasahs.

Based on the explanation above, the issues addressed in this policy paper are: What is the role of the Madrasah Principal in implementing the Independent Curriculum in Madrasahs? The purpose of this policy paper is to understand the role of the Madrasah Principal in implementing the Independent Curriculum in Madrasahs.

### **Identification of the Problem**

1. The Dynamics of Curriculum Adaptation to Global Disruption: There are demands for the madrasah curriculum to continuously transform to meet the challenges of the global economy and technological advances, which now value expertise and practical competencies over mere cognitive mastery.
2. The Challenge of Integrating Religious Values in the Independent Curriculum: A strong integration strategy is needed to ensure that religious values and the madrasah spirit remain the primary foundation (character) amidst the flexible implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which places a strong emphasis on independent learning.
3. Human Resource Capacity Gap (Teachers): There is still a tendency among educators to view students as repositories of knowledge, necessitating extensive

teacher capacity development to enable them to implement differentiated and innovative learning.

4. **The Complexity of the Madrasah Principal's Managerial Role:** Madrasah Principals face a significant responsibility to shift from traditional management models to leadership that promotes work independence for educators and creates a student-centered educational ecosystem.
5. **Readiness for Technical Implementation and Mentoring:** The high level of interest among madrasahs (26,169 madrasahs recorded in 2022) in implementing the Independent Curriculum has not been fully matched by a widespread technical understanding, making effective outreach, technical guidance, and monitoring from the central to regional levels crucial.
6. **Transformation of Assessment and Evaluation Models:** The lack of a comprehensive assessment model at the madrasah level that captures the complete human profile (covering various intelligences and interests) beyond purely cognitive achievements within the Independent Curriculum framework.

### **Formulation of the Problem**

1. How effective is the Madrasah Principal's role as an agent of change in facilitating the transition from the conventional curriculum to the Independent Curriculum in Madrasahs?
2. To what extent are Madrasah Principals prepared and competent in implementing differentiated and student-centered learning policies, as mandated by KMA No. 347 of 2022?
3. What are Madrasah Principals' strategies for encouraging teacher work independence and collaboration within the Madrasah learning community to independently enhance educator capacity?
4. What structural and technical obstacles do Madrasah Principals face in synchronizing a 21st-century competency-based curriculum with strengthening the distinctive religious spirit of Madrasahs?

### **Objectives and Benefits of the Study**

#### *Study Objectives*

1. Analyze the effectiveness of the Madrasah Principal's leadership role in overseeing the transition and adaptation of the Independent Curriculum in madrasahs.
2. Evaluate the Madrasah Principal's managerial readiness in implementing differentiated learning policies and student-centered assessments.
3. Identify strategies for strengthening teacher competency implemented by Madrasah Principals through the creation of a culture of independent work and learning communities.
4. Identify barriers and solutions in integrating the values of the madrasah's religious spirit into the structure of the Independent Curriculum.



### *Benefits of the Study*

1. **Benefits for Policymakers (Ministry of Religious Affairs)**  
Provides evaluation materials regarding the effectiveness of regulations (KMA No. 347 of 2022) at the educational unit level. It serves as a basis for consideration in developing more targeted mentoring and technical guidance programs for madrasah leaders.
2. **Benefits for Madrasah Principals**  
It serves as strategic guidance and benchmarking in carrying out their roles as agents of change and instructional leaders. It helps map out practical steps in creating a madrasah ecosystem that is innovative, competitive, and relevant to the needs of the times.
3. **Benefits for Educators and Education Personnel**  
It encourages the creation of an autonomous and collaborative work environment, where teachers' creativity in teaching is fully supported by the leadership.
4. **Benefits for Students**  
It ensures a more enjoyable and meaningful learning environment that accommodates the diverse talents and unique interests of each child.

## **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Madrasah Principal is a teacher who is also tasked with overseeing the implementation of education at the Madrasah. Furthermore, the Civil Servant Madrasah Principal, also known as the PNS Madrasah Principal, is a Madrasah Principal nominated by the government.

The Madrasah Principal is the person ultimately responsible for the operational management of the Madrasah on specific occasions. At the operational level, the Madrasah Principal is the person at the forefront of coordinating efforts to increase the number of high-achieving students (Danim, Sudarwan, and Suparno, 2009).

Meanwhile, according to PMA Number 58 of 2017, the Madrasah Principal is responsible for carrying out managerial activities, developing entrepreneurship, and guiding instructors and educational staff. Furthermore, to meet the needs of the Madrasah's teaching staff, the Madrasah Principal may undertake learning or mentoring duties (PMA, 2017).

The Madrasah Principal is a functional instructor tasked with leading a Madrasah where the teaching and learning process takes place (Wahjosumidjo, 2009).

The highest position in a madrasah organization is the principal, who serves as the educational leader. The principal is a crucial component of education in improving the quality of education (E. Mulyasa, 2013).

The National Curriculum is the curriculum used in public and private schools nationwide. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture develops and oversees the national curriculum.

The term curriculum, spelled "curriculum" in English, comes from the Greek words "curir," meaning "runner," and "curere," meaning "races." Like the meanings of "runner"

and "horse race," the term curriculum was originally used in athletics (runners racing with all their might to quickly reach the finish line) (Oemar Hamalik, 2013).

Meanwhile, the curriculum, as defined in Chapter I, Article 1, Number 19 of Law Number 20 of 2003, is a set of plans and regulations concerning objectives, content, and learning resources, as well as procedures used as guidelines for organizing learning activities in order to achieve the specified educational goals (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003).

**Curriculum Development in Indonesia:** The curriculum plays a crucial and strategic role in the implementation of education, serving as a direction and guideline for educational delivery. Since independence, the Indonesian curriculum has changed approximately ten times. Curriculum development in Indonesia is driven by the Ministry of Education and Culture; curriculum modifications are an inherent element of the political, social, and cultural constellation of the Indonesian nation, which continues to evolve over time.

The most crucial aspect of schools is the curriculum. In line with the continued advancement of education at all levels and forms in Indonesia, the curriculum has officially been implemented in schools since the Dutch colonial era (Fitri Wahyuni, 2015).

The curriculum is a set of tools used to achieve educational goals, serving as a guideline for the implementation of education in educational units. The curriculum serves as the foundation, foundation, or outlook on life of a developed nation. The curriculum used in that country serves as a benchmark and determines the lifestyle of modern humans, which develops in accordance with the curriculum used in educational institutions (Lismina, 2019).

The Madrasah Curriculum, referred to as "Madrasah curriculum," refers to religious education administered by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Madrasahs, like schools, are a type of religious-based educational institution that has long existed in Indonesia. Their goal is to implement learning activities and processes so that students can actively develop their potential, developing spiritual, intellectual, and spiritual life skills, emotional intelligence, and noble morals, as well as all the talents needed for society, the nation, and the state (M. Qurniawan, 2014).

The madrasah curriculum in Indonesia is considered crucial because it contains moral content and religious attitudes that shape students' character (akhlak karimah) and provide them with an education based on Islamic values (A. Almutasim, 2018).

### *Independent Curriculum in Madrasahs*

The Independent Curriculum (IKM) is implemented in madrasahs in accordance with the policies of the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Ministry of Religious Affairs is solely adapting to the demands of madrasah learning to strengthen Islamic Religious Education and Arabic, two of its distinctive characteristics. The Independent Curriculum will be implemented in 2,471 madrasah institutions by 2022. This year, the Independent Curriculum is being implemented in 26,169 madrasah institutions at the RA, MI, MTs, and MA/MAK levels. This data demonstrates the desire of madrasah residents to develop the Independent Curriculum, as well as the madrasahs' willingness to undertake reform.

According to the General Definitions section of the KMA Appendix Number 347 of 2022, the Independent Curriculum in Madrasahs is a curriculum for subjects other than Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Arabic, developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Arabic

Language Curriculum are specifically developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and the distinctive values of Madrasahs are developed by the Madrasahs (Minister of Religious Affairs Decree, 2022). In its implementation, the legislation provides space for creativity and innovation in madrasahs implementing the Independent Curriculum. This is carried out in stages over several phases with the following provisions:

1. Phase A (Grades I and II of Elementary School/Package A);
2. Phase B (Grades III and IV of Elementary School/Package A);
3. Phase C (Grades V and VI of Elementary School/Package A);
4. Phase D (Grades VII–IX of Junior High School/Islamic Junior High School/Package B); 5) Phase F (Grades X–XII of Senior High Schools/Vocational High Schools/Islamic Senior High Schools/Package C), (Ministry of National Education, Republic of Indonesia, 2022).

Differentiated learning, or the process of learning through various methods to achieve goals, is one of the characteristics of the autonomous curriculum. In this situation, students are enabled to learn independently, either individually or in groups, to achieve their goals. Intracurricular and extracurricular activities, Pancasila student profiles, local content (*mulok*), and project-based learning are mandatory components of the autonomous curriculum. It is crucial to incorporate the enhancement of Pancasila student profiles into the implementation of this project-based learning. In this scenario, there is a specific term in schools/madrasahs of the Ministry of Religious Affairs entitled "Profile of *Rahmatan lil Alamiin* Students." This term relates to the instilling of religious moderation, which can be achieved through planned activities in the learning process and habits that favor moderate attitudes. This project-based learning aims to develop students who can describe the noble values of Pancasila and act in a manner that reflects *tafaqquh fiddin* as a characteristic of madrasah life, possess knowledge and critical thinking skills, and demonstrate a strong, moderate sense of nationalism, while upholding tolerance to achieve national unity and world peace. This will, of course, align with the principle of global diversity in Indonesian society. Those who accept differences without judgment feel superior to others. If managed appropriately, students will benefit from increased personal resilience (Rusnaini, R., Raharjo, R., Suryaningsih, A., & W. Noventari, 2021).

## Conceptual Framework

**Madrasah Principal:** The term "Principal" can refer to the head or leader of an organization or institution. A madrasah, on the other hand, is an institution where lessons are received and delivered. Therefore, a madrasah principal can be defined as a functional teacher tasked with leading the madrasah and managing the teaching and learning process, as stated in Surah An-Nisa, verse 59 of the Qur'an, which reads: "O you who believe! Obey Allah and His Messenger and those in authority among you. Then, if you differ about anything, refer it to Allah (the Qur'an) and the Messenger (the Sunnah), if you truly believe in Allah, and the next day is more important (for you) and has greater implications." (Ministry of Religious Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia, 2008).

The curriculum is the complete program of an educational or training institution, including facilities, and activities to achieve the vision, mission, and mission of the institution. Therefore, curriculum implementation to support the success of an educational institution must be supported by the following factors. First and foremost, qualified personnel. Second, appropriate facilities are available. Third, the availability of complementary facilities as backup. Fourth, the availability of instructional support staff



such as administrative staff, supervisors, librarians, and laboratories. Fifth, adequate financial resources are available; and sixth, good management is required. Seventh, support for culture, religion, morals, nationality, and other values; and eighth, honest and accountable visionary leadership (Hasbullah, 2007).

The Independent Curriculum in Madrasahs is a project-based co-curricular activity, specifically aimed at enhancing the profile of Pancasila students and rahmatan lil alamin students. This project aims to develop students who can define the noble values of Pancasila and act in a manner that reflects the quality of life in the madrasah, possessing knowledge and critical thinking skills, strong nationalism, moderation, and high tolerance to achieve national unity and world peace. Of course, this initiative will embrace the concept of global diversity in Indonesian society, which recognizes that as individuals, we must value and tolerate diversity and differences. This means that a person can tolerate differences without condemning others or feeling superior to others, (Juliani, A. J., & A. Bastian, 2021).

## **Literatur Review**

**Relevant Previous Research:** Researchers used relevant previous research to identify previous research that served as a guide for analyzing research and research results, including:

1. Research conducted by (Alhamuddin, 2014) showed that: The curriculum of an education system is dynamic and must always be susceptible to change and development to keep pace with the changing times and challenges of the times. However, change and development must be implemented in a planned and directed manner, not simply by modification. The history of the curriculum in Indonesia spans decades, with changes occurring in 1947, 1952, 1964, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, and the most recent being the 2013 curriculum. Curriculum change should not be allowed if the mindset remains unchanged; it should remain the same. Teachers must be actively involved in research, trials, and evaluation of various curricular areas. Furthermore, teachers should be empowered to develop their professionalism as continuous curriculum resources. Furthermore, the curriculum is not presented as a new, more significant reform method for teachers, which reduces teachers to mere components of curriculum implementation. On the other hand, changes are needed at the level of curriculum formulation; the curriculum must be formulated comprehensively, taking into account the philosophical, pedagogical, sociological, social, cultural, technical, and political foundations as the foundation of the curriculum, as well as the actual conditions in society and the world of education.
2. Research conducted by (Muhammedi, 2016). The results show that Indonesia has experienced frequent curriculum changes, including those of 1947, 1964, 1968, 1973, 1975, 1984, 1994, 1997, 2004, 2006, and 2013. Finally, future education needs to be designed to address expectations and challenges. Based on these changes, the education system needs to be built sustainably, starting from preschool education, primary education, secondary education, and higher education. The Islamic education curriculum must address the elements of monotheism, religion, the development of human potential as God's vicegerent, the development of interpersonal relationships, and the development of oneself as an individual. Like the principles in formulating an Islamic education curriculum, the principle of a perfect relationship with religion, including its teachings and values, is inclusive (universal).

3. Research conducted by (Hanif Fathoni, 2020) shows that: Madrasahs, as formal educational institutions based on religion, have long existed in Indonesia. Active efforts are made to develop the potential of students to develop life skills with spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and moral intelligence, as well as all skills that may be needed in society, nation, and state. The development of the madrasah curriculum in Indonesia cannot be separated from the early history of Islamic conversion and its evolution from the pre-independence era to the present. In general, madrasah curricula vary according to the situations and conditions prevailing in various locations. Curriculum modifications are classified into three periods: 1) Madrasah Curriculum Before Independence, 2) Madrasah Curriculum After Independence, and 3) Madrasah Curriculum After Independence. Before independence, the madrasah curriculum was often unstructured because the focus was on spreading Islam. Madrasahs in Sumatra, especially Aceh, already had a structured curriculum, although it was still relatively simple, especially after the push for large-scale reform brought by national figures who studied in the Middle East. After independence, the national madrasah curriculum had a structured form and was developed according to the demands and developments of the times to become a contemporary curriculum.
4. Research conducted by (Madhakomala, Layli Aisyah, Fathiyah Nur Rizqiqa, Fransiska Desiana Putri, Sidiq Nulhaq, 2022), the results of the study show that: Education strives to survive as a crystallization of values contained in psychological, sociological, social, and cultural dimensions. The study of an educational science must be linked to ontological, epistemological, and axiological considerations. This article intends to present a discussion of Paulo Freire's educational thoughts and their application in the independent learning curriculum so that readers can gain increased knowledge that can also be applied in their respective education where Independent Learning will be intensified by the Minister of National Education as a new curriculum that is starting to be practiced in the world of education in Indonesia. The presence of the Independent Learning curriculum which is still in the experimental stage has similarities with Paulo's educational idea that education must feel free both in terms of thought and expression. Students are freer in their learning activities with the Independent Learning curriculum; they can express their thoughts and engage in discussions with other students and teachers. This practice is similar to what Paulo Freire did in liberation education; Students are allowed to share their thoughts.
5. Research conducted by (Eni Andar, 2022) shows that: The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum is linked to the LMS (Learning Management System). The Merdeka learning curriculum is implemented using interconnected LMS (Learning Management System)
6. Research conducted by (Nurul Swandari, 2023) shows that: The concept of the Merdeka education curriculum takes into account the cognitive talents and individuality of individual students in each school. However, obstacles to implementing the Merdeka curriculum in the field include students, teaching staff, facilities and infrastructure, leadership, and collaboration within the educational institution itself. Consequently, loyalty, a shared mindset, and strong collaboration are needed within these institutions to ensure the Merdeka curriculum is implemented appropriately in each school. Although the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia has issued Decree Number 56/M/2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Learning Recovery, the implementation of the curriculum in special circumstances has not yet addressed learning delays. As a result, the Merdeka

Curriculum is expected to be a viable approach for restoring learning in Indonesia after the pandemic.

7. Based on the relevant results of previous research above, the researcher only examined the role of Madrasah Heads in implementing the Independent Curriculum in Madrasahs.

## **METHODOLOGY**

A research method is a scientific method used by someone to obtain data and information scientifically by preparing instruments. According to (John Creswell, 2016), a research method is a procedure of steps used to collect and analyze information to increase understanding of a topic or issue. The method used in this study is qualitative research. Where the researcher presents data by describing it in sentences. According to Bodgan and Taylor (in Sutrisno Hadi, 2015), a qualitative research method is a series of research procedures designed to produce descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior.

Meanwhile, the type of research used by the researcher is descriptive research. The purpose of this type of descriptive research is to describe and explain phenomena, symptoms, events, and incidents that occur in certain groups. According to (John Leksi Moleong, 2013), descriptive aims to accurately describe the properties or characteristics of an individual, condition, symptom or certain group, at a certain time or to see the existence of a certain relationship between a symptom and other symptoms in society, (Hanafi Pelu & Muh. Zainal, 2022).

## **ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The educational curriculum is the most significant and strategic component, occupying a unique position that cannot be ignored. The curriculum embodies the vision, mission, and objectives of education. This means that the educational curriculum serves as the central point for transmitting educational values (character, morals, and ethics) to students.

The current 21st-century learning paradigm can serve as a model for developing students' life skills. Equipping or developing students' attitudinal competencies can also be done by incorporating character, moral, moral, and attitude education values into the learning process across all core curriculum subjects. The learning process can take place not only in the classroom (intra-curricular) but also outside the classroom (co-curricular and extracurricular).

The Independent Curriculum is the latest curriculum currently in use. It will be implemented in stages throughout the 2022/2023 academic year. After evaluation and modification, the Independent Curriculum will be implemented evenly across all levels of primary and secondary education, including madrasahs, in the 2024/2025 academic year.

Based on the research conducted by the researcher, the researcher found that:

1. Madrasah principals lack experience with independent learning;
2. Limited references;
3. Unequal access to learning;

4. Time management;
5. Adequate competencies (skills).

## **Discussion**

The independent curriculum is a must-implementation in Islamic schools. Therefore, as principals, they must possess the competency to implement it.

1. Madrasah principals lack experience with independent learning;

Personal experience of Madrasah principals and teachers with Independent Learning (Merdeka Belajar) or independent learning is still limited. In fact, many government programs aim to promote a paradigm shift from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. Therefore, the process of organizing and implementing an independent curriculum can be carried out through education centers and training centers (Pusdiklat) as venues for education and training. Additionally, madrasah principals can utilize the services of subject teacher guidance groups (MGMP) and teacher working groups (KKG).

2. Limited references;

The availability of textbooks as references currently used is considered to be of substandard quality. Teacher and student books published by book centers or private publishers lack appropriate references, and the provision of resources to support Madrasah principals and teachers lacks guidance on how to facilitate student-centered learning effectively. The challenge of receiving guidance on how to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is what teachers will use to create appropriate learning activities.

3. Unequal access to learning resources.

The diverse use of digital resources and uneven internet connectivity also pose obstacles for Madrasah Principals and teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The smooth implementation of online learning is highly dependent on the digital and internet connectivity of teachers and students. Some Madrasahs that lack adequate facilities, or those with limited access for teachers and students, face challenges. Disparities in facilities, infrastructure, and ease of use of technology are challenges for Madrasah Principals and teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

4. Time Management.

Madrasah Principals and teachers are attempting to transform their learning, requiring more time to relearn and adapt to the demands of the expected curriculum changes. Some Madrasahs must design rigorous programs that involve teachers for active participation in various activities. Furthermore, the duties and responsibilities of Madrasah Principals as leaders and teachers include continuously implementing as many changes as possible and finding creative and innovative ways to learn. Madrasah principals and teachers are required to manage their time effectively to implement the Independent Curriculum.

5. Adequate Competence (Skills).

Madrasah principals lack experience implementing the Independent Curriculum in their madrasahs. Furthermore, the quality and competence of teachers are crucial. Some madrasah principals and their teachers struggle to master or apply basic skills

to meet the needs of digital-era learning, enabling them to design and deliver engaging and engaging teaching materials. As madrasah principals implementing the Independent Curriculum, madrasah principals expect their teachers to be creative and innovative, incorporating various media and learning models that engage students. This limited competence also hinders teachers' ability to implement independent learning quickly. As top leaders who expect their teachers to be at the forefront of various curriculum changes, madrasah principals must be prepared to take various initiatives and be willing to learn and experiment. This will not only ensure adaptation but also prepare students as the nation's next generation to meet future challenges.

The success of the educational process in madrasas is greatly influenced by their curriculum. To improve the competency of madrasa principals in the Merdeka curriculum, it is essential to participate in Merdeka curriculum implementation training. This is crucial for madrasa principals, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of how to implement the Merdeka curriculum in their madrasas. Teachers, on the other hand, can ensure a high-quality learning process. The Merdeka Curriculum is an optional curriculum that can be implemented by educational units starting in the 2022/2023 academic year.

The Merdeka Curriculum continues the development direction of the previous curriculum. Madrasa principals and teachers are the most important individuals in the curriculum development and implementation process in madrasas. With their knowledge, experience, and competence, madrasa principals and teachers are at the center of every curriculum development effort. The madrasa principal serves as the manager of the educational unit, and the teachers conduct teaching practices and are responsible for introducing the curriculum in the classroom.

Madrasah principals and teachers generally have negative perceptions and lack appreciation for the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum (IKM) that will be implemented in madrasas.

The Independent Curriculum is expected to replace learning lost during the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning loss is the reduction in students' academic knowledge and skills due to prolonged home-based learning. This academic and skill decline is accompanied by a loss of character/ethics, critical thinking skills, creativity, and innovation.

The Independent Curriculum serves as a guideline for madrasas in determining the character/morals/ethics that will be instilled, cultivated, and shaped in students. The spirit of the madrasah is the Islamic religious values that define the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (IKM) in madrasas.

Psychologically, the Independent Curriculum must inspire madrasas to improve quality and foster resilience in critical, creative, and innovative thinking to compete with educational institutions at the regional and global levels. It should be emphasized once again that the implementation of IKM in madrasas must be linked to Islamic religious beliefs.

The integration of Islamic Religious Education (IKM) with Islamic values is expected to shape students' morals and ethics based on Islamic principles. The outcomes of education and learning in madrasas, including character, morals, and ethics, can be reflected in ways of thinking, acting, behaving, innovating, creating, and possessing 21st-century competencies and life skills.

The IKM is being implemented in stages by the Ministry of Education and Culture starting in the 2022/2023 academic year. The Ministry of Religious Affairs automatically



follows suit, regulating the IKM in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Arabic language disciplines. Meanwhile, the IKM in general topics in madrasas follows the Ministry of Education and Culture's guidelines. As we all know, the subject content in the madrasah education curriculum is divided into two groups: general subjects and PAI plus Arabic.

One of the most pressing challenges facing IKM in madrasas is resuming learning that was interrupted due to the COVID-19 outbreak. When students stop learning, their interest in learning and character, morals, and ethics suffer. Through the IKM (Independent Curriculum), the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religious Affairs aspire to develop students' character as lifelong learners.

In accordance with the IKM guidelines for Madrasahs, IKM will be implemented in stages in madrasas starting in the 2022/2023 academic year. It was also announced that madrasas in IKM have two options: first, they can continue to adopt the 2013 Curriculum while incorporating some principles of the Independent Curriculum. Second, madrasas that have been designated as Independent Curriculum implementers will implement this phase. First, the Independent Curriculum will be introduced at the elementary and secondary levels in the first year. The pilot madrasah is the only one that covers RA, MI, MTs, MA, and MAK levels.

IKM is for students aged 4 to 5 at the RA level, grades 1 and 4 at the MI level, grade 7 at the MTs level, and grade 10 at the MA and MAK levels. Meanwhile, students in MI grades 2, 3, 5, and 6, MTs grades 8 and 9, and MA and MAK grades 11 and 12 continue to use the 2013 Curriculum.

Second, in the second year, the Independent Curriculum was implemented at the RA level for students aged 4 to 6 in MI grades 1, 2, 4, and 5, MT grades 7 and 8, and MA and MAK grades 10 and 11. Meanwhile, students in grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 continued to follow the 2013 Curriculum.

Third, the Independent Curriculum has been implemented in all madrasah educational units, both elementary and junior high schools, for all grade levels in the third year. The IKM is implemented at the Islamic elementary school (MI) level for students in grades 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, at the Islamic junior high school (MTs) level for students in grades 7, 8, and 9, and at the Islamic senior high school (MA/MAK) level for students in grades 10, 11, and 12.

This indicates that starting in the 2024/2025 academic year, all madrasah educational units (RA, MI, MTs, and MA/MAK) will use the Independent Curriculum exclusively or will not use either curriculum.

In addition, madrasah management can undertake various IKM mentoring initiatives. First, the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Madrasah Working Group (KKM), the Subject Teachers' Conference (MGMP), the Education Office, professional educator associations, the Center for Religious Education and Training, and other relevant institutions competent in organizing IKM socialization.

To achieve a unified perspective on IKM in madrasahs, all components of the madrasah educational unit must participate in IKM socialization. Coordination and participation in the development and implementation of the IKM will be facilitated by the involvement of all school components. The Madrasah Committee will participate in IKM outreach to ensure maximum support for Madrasah IKM projects and innovations.

Second, all components of the school educational unit will participate in training aimed at acquiring and deepening technical understanding of IKM. This includes participating

in technical guidance (Bimtek), IKM training, and exchanging best practices on IKM in Madrasahs.

The Madrasah principal, vice-principal, and madrasah teachers are the primary stakeholders required to follow the IKM technical guidelines. However, other stakeholders, such as educational staff, the Madrasah committee, and the foundation (for Madrasahs run by foundations), will be given priority. Furthermore, Madrasah educational units can independently conduct technical guidance, such as in-house training (IHT) on IKM.

Resources for Bimtek are available through the Research and Development Center for Training of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education and Culture. Officials from the central/provincial/district/city Ministry of Religion, learning technology developers (PTP), curriculum development teams, instructors, lecturers, madrasah supervisors, madrasah principals, teachers, and other education practitioners can be resource persons or facilitators for independent IKM training activities in Madrasahs.

Third, educational units establish Independent Curriculum Development Teams (TPKM) in Madrasahs to facilitate coordination in the development of the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM). The madrasah principal, vice principal, teaching staff, education staff, madrasah committee members, the community, and the business and industry (DU/DI) all contribute to the TPKM. DU/DI is tailored to the characteristics and needs of the madrasah.

The chairperson, curriculum development coordinator, and members are all filled by the TPKM organization. The chairperson's duties, according to the guidelines for implementing the Independent Curriculum in Madrasahs, include (a) being responsible for all actions related to the madrasah curriculum development process, from planning to evaluation and follow-up. b. Assigning tasks and responsibilities to team members.

The curriculum development coordinator's responsibilities include (a) researching guidelines related to the madrasah curriculum development process, and (b) participating in workshops or similar activities to broaden their knowledge of madrasah curriculum development.

Members' responsibilities also include (a) supporting the coordinator in collecting data and preparing the KOM. (a) Prepare supporting facilities. The fourth step, educational units create an Independent Curriculum Implementation Plan (PIKM).

It is also important to understand the important aspects of developing a PIKM plan, which include: (a) developing the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM), (b) developing Learning Objectives (TP) and Learning Objective Flow (ATP), (c) preparing an assessment plan, (d) developing teaching materials, (e) developing teaching modules, (f) developing the P5&PPRA module, and (g) developing the P5&PPRA module. (i) Fostering collaboration between educators (teachers), education personnel, parents, students, and stakeholders in curriculum implementation and development, and learning; and (j) Conducting evaluation, reflection, and improving the quality of IKM in madrasahs.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Madrasah principals serve as supervisors and agents of change in their educational institutions. Madrasah leaders must collaborate with educators and staff to improve the

quality of education in their madrasas. The role of madrasah principals in implementing the independent learning curriculum is to encourage a student-centered learning process and enable flexible work schedules for educators and staff.

Based on the results and discussion above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Madrasah principals highly appreciate the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in madrasas;
2. Madrasah principals play a crucial role in the development and implementation of the independent curriculum in madrasas, and success in implementing the curriculum depends largely on the principal's commitment to implementing the independent curriculum in their madrasas;
3. Madrasah principals feel that the socialization, training, and technical guidance processes specific to the independent curriculum must comply with the guidelines issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religious Affairs;
4. A small proportion of madrasahs are implementing the Independent Curriculum;
5. The availability of IT and teachers' IT skills are still very lacking;

In addressing issues related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Madrasas, the Madrasah Principal plays an active role in curriculum implementation to address current issues related to the implementation of the independent curriculum. All actions related to the implementation of the autonomous curriculum are planned in advance. The Madrasah Principal provides guidelines and instructions for implementing the independent learning curriculum so that it can be implemented effectively and efficiently in accordance with the independent curriculum policy.

## **Recommendation**

Stakeholders should provide conceptual and practical understanding of the Independent Curriculum to Madrasah Principals and teachers. Furthermore, provide opportunities for Madrasahs, especially Madrasah Principals and teachers, to prepare their infrastructure and themselves before implementing the Independent Curriculum. For example, involve Madrasah Principals and teachers in workshops, technical guidance, and socialization on the Independent Curriculum. Provide opportunities for Madrasah Principals and teachers to manage finances for implementing the Independent Curriculum.

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