



## Evaluation of the Readiness of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in the Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum

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### Abstract

This study investigates the readiness of Islamic Education (PAI) teachers at MA Mathalibul Huda Mlonggo in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility, student-centered learning, and the development of the Pancasila Student Profile. Using qualitative methods through interviews with teachers, school leaders, and curriculum coordinators, the research reveals that PAI teachers have shown commendable enthusiasm and conceptual understanding of the curriculum. They have participated in workshops, socialization programs, and independent training; however, practical application remains limited, particularly in preparing teaching modules, assessment planning, and the integration of differentiated instruction. Institutional efforts, including training and collaboration with educational stakeholders, have strengthened this transition. Nevertheless, challenges persist in digital readiness, curriculum design skills, and comprehensive pedagogical adaptation. Overall, the findings highlight that successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires continuous professional development, managerial support, and technological integration to align educational practices with national transformation goals in fostering competent, character-driven, and culturally grounded learners.

## Introduction

One of the key indicators of progress in national education development is curriculum reform. The curriculum represents a comprehensive plan and arrangement concerning educational objectives, content, materials, and instructional methods that serve as guidelines in the learning process (Sulistiyani & Mulyono, 2020). According to the Indonesian National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003, the curriculum is defined as a set of plans and regulations regarding objectives, content, learning materials, and methods used to organize learning activities aimed at achieving specific educational goals. Similarly, Government Regulation No. 57 of 2021 Article 35 states that the curriculum serves as a structured framework guiding educational institutions in realizing these objectives. In essence, the curriculum functions as both a philosophical foundation and a practical guide for teachers and learners to conduct effective learning processes (Ngene, 2023; Uthaphan, 2024; Paschal, 2023).

Curriculum changes in Indonesia have occurred in response to shifts in social, cultural, and technological dynamics (Dzunniam & Raikhan, 2025). The curriculum, as the core of the educational system, must evolve in accordance with advancements in science, technology, and societal needs (Junaidi, 2020; Catacutan et al., 2023; Jannah, 2023). In the current era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, educational reforms are essential to equip students with relevant

skills, creativity, and adaptability (Santika, 2022). As knowledge and innovation rapidly expand, Indonesia continues to develop and refine its educational policies, ensuring that the curriculum meets the demands of the digital age and the global workforce.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia identified learning loss as a major challenge that revealed the limitations of the 2013 Revised Curriculum. To mitigate this, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) implemented the Emergency Curriculum, which proved effective in improving learning outcomes. Building upon this success, the Ministry issued Circular No. 56/M/2022 introducing the Merdeka Curriculum as part of the national learning recovery initiative. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes project-based learning, soft skills development aligned with the Pancasila Student Profile, and a flexible structure focused on essential content (Fauzan et al., 2023; Hakim et al., 2024). This approach represents a paradigm shift toward a more inclusive, student-centered, and contextualized learning model.

The shift toward the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (KMB) signifies a transformative moment in Indonesian education. It promotes autonomy, inclusivity, and contextual learning grounded in cultural and social realities. The KMB seeks to empower students to engage actively in constructing knowledge through meaningful experiences, fostering critical, creative, and collaborative thinking key competencies of the 21st century (Bungawati, 2022; Indarta et al., 2022). Within this framework, teachers are not merely transmitters of information but facilitators who design learning environments that encourage inquiry and reflection. Consequently, the success of this curriculum depends largely on the readiness and adaptability of teachers as front-line implementers in classrooms (Lisi, 2025; Alagao et al., 2025).

In the context of Islamic Education (PAI), the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum presents both opportunities and challenges. Studies by Putri & Nural (2022) and Amir et al (2022) emphasize that the KMB aims to align moral and character education with the core values of Pancasila, encouraging the integration of Islamic principles with modern educational approaches. This framework allows teachers to design more contextual learning tools that incorporate local wisdom and religious values (Yuniarto et al., 2022; Fitrianto & Farisi, 2025; Diana et al., 2025). However, Gunawan (2022) and Rindayati et al (2022) highlight the persistent difficulties faced by PAI teachers, such as limited understanding of competency-based design, inadequate training, and the challenge of aligning new pedagogical approaches with religious instruction. Thus, the preparedness of teachers becomes a decisive factor in ensuring that Islamic education remains relevant, engaging, and transformative within the KMB framework.

Adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum requires comprehensive readiness encompassing pedagogical, digital, and cultural dimensions. Pedagogically, PAI teachers must transition from traditional teacher-centered methods to more participatory and differentiated instruction (Pak et al., 2020; Yunita & Widodo, 2023). Digitally, limited ICT literacy and access hinder teachers' ability to integrate technology effectively in their lessons (Asfiati, 2023; Syarifuddin & Benni, 2023). Culturally, teachers are expected to contextualize learning by connecting curriculum objectives with students' sociocultural backgrounds (Adila et al., 2023; Asanza, 2025; Domke et al., 2024). Addressing these dimensions requires continuous professional development, institutional support, and access to resources to ensure effective and meaningful curriculum implementation.

At MA Mathalibul Huda Mlonggo, the Merdeka Curriculum will be officially implemented in the 2024/2025 academic year. As a faith-based institution under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the readiness of PAI teachers becomes crucial in this transition. Preliminary

observations indicate that many teachers still lack comprehensive understanding of the new curriculum's structure and application, highlighting the need for training and collaborative learning forums. This research therefore aims to evaluate the readiness of PAI teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at MA Mathalibul Huda Mlonggo, identify challenges and opportunities in the process, and provide insights that can enhance teacher preparedness and improve the overall effectiveness of curriculum implementation in Islamic education settings.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative evaluative design with an interpretive–descriptive orientation, a methodological stance selected to engage more deeply with the lived realities surrounding teachers' readiness for the Merdeka Curriculum. Rather than limiting itself to presenting surface-level descriptions, the study seeks to understand how teachers interpret new curricular expectations, how they position themselves within the transition, and how institutional dynamics shape their preparation. This design offers the flexibility to explore nuanced meanings, contradictions, and aspirations that might remain obscured in a purely descriptive framework. By grounding the inquiry in interpretation, the study is able to capture the subtle ways in which readiness emerges not as a static condition but as an evolving process influenced by professional identity, organizational culture, and policy awareness.

This interpretive descriptive orientation is essential in the context of curriculum reform research, where teachers' perceptions and reasoning processes play a crucial role in shaping implementation outcomes. Through this design, the study is able to move beyond procedural compliance and examine readiness as a multi-layered construct involving pedagogical understanding, personal confidence, collaborative engagement, and institutional support. In this sense, the research design mirrors the complexity of the change it seeks to evaluate and provides a conceptual frame that aligns naturally with the data generated from the field.

### Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at MA Mathalibul Huda Mlonggo, a faith-based educational institution preparing for its first official implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Because readiness is shaped not only by individual actions but also by the broader ecosystem in which teachers operate, participant selection intentionally included those who influence curriculum decision-making at different levels. Thus, PAI teachers were engaged as primary informants due to their direct pedagogical responsibilities, while the vice principal for curriculum affairs and the school principal were included to represent strategic and managerial perspectives.

The use of purposive sampling ensured that all participants possessed relevant, first-hand experience with curricular preparation. Each individual had been involved directly or indirectly in early training, planning meetings, and institutional discussions about implementation. This allowed the study to capture readiness as a collective process rather than an isolated, teacher-centered phenomenon. The inclusion of multiple positionalities also enabled the researcher to trace how interpretations of the Merdeka Curriculum circulate within the school, how shared understandings are formed, and where gaps or inconsistencies may still exist.

### Data Collection Techniques

Data were generated using semi-structured in-depth interviews, direct observations, and document analysis, all conducted in ways that allowed participants to articulate their perspectives with minimal constraint. The semi-structured format supported a conversational

flow, encouraging teachers to narrate their hopes, concerns, and practical strategies while still enabling the researcher to probe emerging themes and clarify ambiguities. These interviews provided insight into how participants conceptualize readiness in pedagogical terms ranging from CP–TP–ATP alignment to modul ajar development and differentiated instruction.

Observation complemented these narratives by allowing the researcher to witness how readiness manifested in everyday school routines. Although the curriculum had not yet been officially implemented, early signs of preparation such as internal training sessions, discussions during meetings, collaborative resource review, and the organization of implementation teams provided valuable context. Document analysis added another dimension by offering tangible evidence of institutional processes. Curriculum meeting notes, planning drafts, training materials, and assessment-related documents helped corroborate interview findings and situated teacher narratives within the school's broader managerial practices. These three techniques generated a rich, triangulated body of data that reflects readiness not as a simple checklist but as an evolving interaction between policy understanding, professional development, and institutional coordination.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

To guide the analytical process, the study employed the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which emphasizes an iterative cycle of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This model was especially appropriate because it allowed the researcher to continually revisit earlier interpretations as new insights emerged, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded while still responsive to the evolving complexity of the data.

During the data reduction phase, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded and organized into thematic clusters such as conceptual understanding, pedagogical readiness, digital preparedness, institutional support, and anticipated challenges. These clusters did not function merely as descriptive labels but served as analytical anchors for interpreting how individual and institutional factors interacted. The data display stage involved mapping these themes visually and narratively, identifying convergence zones, tensions, and patterns that revealed how readiness was experienced across roles.

The final stage, conclusion drawing, synthesized these analytic trajectories into evaluative insights, interpreting readiness as a continuum rather than a binary state. This process allowed the researcher to situate teacher preparation within broader curricular and institutional dynamics, ensuring that conclusions reflected both the complexity of participants' experiences and the intent of the Merdeka Curriculum reform itself.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Background and Research Materials**

During the first scoping, in September 2023, MA Mathalibul Huda Mlonggo was found to be yet to implement the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in the 2023/2024 academic year; the institution was in the preparatory stage to do so in 2024/2025. This provisional report was not just a descriptive report, it marked a shift of transition where the institution was bargaining between the current teaching practices and the requirements of an upcoming curricular change. These types of transitions are often revealing of institutional weaknesses, especially in relation to pedagogical readiness, understanding of internal policy orientation and the congruence between teacher competence and the requirements of the curriculum. Considering these weaknesses, the research intentionally designed its work on the analysis of the preparedness of PAI teachers who were defined as the driving force of the reform process. Through teacher preparation, the study was also designed to know how ready the teachers

were not merely in terms of the technical preparation but also in terms of the teachers interpretive positions, their sense making in relation to the curriculum change and the institutional circumstances which predisposed teachers enthusiasm or reluctance.

Table 1. Teacher Profile Data

<b>Teacher Code</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Teaching Experience (Years)</b>	<b>Certification Status</b>	<b>Trainings Related to <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i></b>
G1	32	Bachelor's Degree in Islamic Education	8	Not Certified	<i>IKM</i> Socialization (Ministry of Religious Affairs), P5G Webinar
G2	41	Master's Degree in Islamic Education	15	Certified	<i>Modul Ajar</i> Technical Guidance, CP–ATP Workshop
G3	29	Bachelor's Degree in Islamic Education	5	Not Certified	Internal <i>IKM</i> Socialization at the Madrasah
G4	36	Bachelor's Degree in Islamic Education	10	Certified	<i>Merdeka</i> Assessment Training
G5	30	Bachelor's Degree in Islamic Education	6	Not Certified	Webinar on Differentiated Learning

In order to get the multifaceted dynamics in play, primary data were recaptured using the intensive face-to-face interviews with PAI teachers. The interview guide was designed in such a way that it focused on obtaining the instructional ideologies of the respondents, how they perceived the challenges as well as the adaptive strategies and the level to which they internalised the Merdeka Curriculum pedagogical doctrines. Additional interviews with the vice principal of curriculum and the school principal provided organisational-level information that enhanced the accounts of the teachers. The vice principal had insights into operational views of the programme planning, coordination within the institution, and the practicality of how the national policy could be converted into practical school procedures, whereas the principal gave a wider strategic approach that elucidated how leadership priorities, allocation of resources, and institutional preparedness would determine the rate and quality at which the curriculum would eventually be rolled out. All these perspectives enabled the research to triangulate data, evaluate coherence or fragmentation between stakeholder views, as well as explain the interaction of institutional leadership and teacher capacity within the broader ecology of curriculum reform.

The period of the intensive fieldwork came between 14 and 26 March 2024, which happened to be particularly fruitful due to the fact that the institution was actively discussing the upcoming curriculum change and internally deliberating on the issue. The observations made in the period helped the researcher to record the lesser aspects of readiness like the interaction

of teachers in meetings, the reference and use of the curricular documents, and the emergence of anticipatory adaptations in classroom planning. A later review of documentary data further corroborated these findings by allowing the researcher to follow the correspondence or non-correspondence between the official school policies, strategic directions and internal memos with the overall ethos of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

Key informants were chosen on a completely purposive and theoretically based approach. Primary informants were chosen as teachers in PAI since they are the front-line implementers, who transform the curricular aspirations into tangible pedagogical practice; their opinions offer perspectives of how policy expectations are framed, negotiated or opposed at the classroom scale. The curriculum vice principal was selected due to the role of the position as an internal policy making body charged with the responsibility of arranging programme design, regulatory adherence and balancing between the national provisions and the local limitations. Lastly the principal was determined to be a critical informant due to the fact that strategic leadership is the essential element that synthesizes the success of curricular reformation by the way of vision-setting, resources mobilisation, and development of an institutional culture that fosters innovation. A combination of these informants gave a comprehensive view of readiness, which included personal teacher competence, operational preparedness, and institutional leadership relationships.

Table 2. School Profile and Infrastructure

Component	Details
Total Students (MA)	467
Students in Grade 10	162
Number of Islamic Education (PAI) Teachers	5
Accreditation	B
Computer Laboratory	15 functional units
Internet Quality	Moderate (stable but uneven coverage)
LCD/Projectors	8 units
School Library	Available, collection of more than 1,500 books
Facilities for Project-Based Learning	Multipurpose hall, library, open area

### Generally, Readiness Actions Taken

In interviews, employees talked about a well-organized and systematically changing preparation process, which meant that the school did not take the transition to Kurikulum Merdeka as a one-time administrative directive but a learning process that needed to be allowed to evolve. They identified a mixture of socialization led by the ministry, in-house trainings and various technical courses like BIMTEK and webinars that formed a scaffold on the interpretation of the philosophical basis and the operational requirements of the new curriculum. These actions were not just required tasks; the participants positioned them as the chance to renew their pedagogical suppositions, refresh their teaching plans, and foresee the changes in testing practices. The creation of a specific implementation department at the institutional level represented a sign that curricular reform had to be not only supported by an organized framework but also not to be left at the initiative of individual teachers. The vice principal expounded, that these preparations also served to self-paced learning modules of BDK Komenag, which permitting the teachers to learn the material in a more flexible and reflective way. This action was accompanied by a premature evaluation of assessment formats and instructional equipment needed by Merdeka and was a sign of an active attitude towards the knowledge of the technical tools that define the practice in the classroom every day. The

sum of these comments was a kind of socialization with Kemendiknas and Kemenag, coming up with a team of school implementation, becoming a member of the BIMTEK, webinars, and learning assessment and teaching instruments of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The reflection of teachers mostly agreed with the voice of administrators but they added the other layer of experience, i.e. to what extent these systematic activities were converted into individual preparedness and cognitive clarity. One of the PAI teacher said, we have participated in socialization and trainings pertaining to Merdeka, so I already have a rough idea of the way implementation will appear. This quote shows that it was not a purely informational process but a transformational one, as teachers were now able to start building mental images of how their teaching practices, evaluations, and classroom dynamics would change with Kurikulum Merdeka. The cumulative effect of repeated exposure is another important point brought into the attention of the other teacher who said: The school has instructed us to go through a number of rounds of socialization on implementation. It was also the frequency of training sessions which were used to reduce ambiguity, reinforce the key ideas and gradually instill confidence in the teachers. Rather than a one-time experience that would result in an immediate understanding, one would find awareness earned by a series of touchpoints where each touchpoint brings subtlety and integration to a seemingly intricate reform.

Table 3. Summary of Interview Findings with PAI Teachers

Teacher Code	Curriculum Understanding	Module Development Readiness	Assessment Readiness	Attitude Toward Merdeka Curriculum	Main Challenges
G1	General understanding	Not yet able to create full module	Low	Positive & enthusiastic	Digital literacy
G2	Understands both concept & structure	Able to design TP-ATP	Medium	Very positive	Time constraints
G3	Surface-level	No practice yet	Low	Positive	Lack of module examples
G4	Strong understanding via workshop	Able to adapt modules	Medium	Optimistic	Consistency of implementation
G5	Basic familiarity	Replicates samples	Low	Positive	Limited ICT facilities

These statements by both the leadership and teachers show that they are not only sharing words but also sharing the direction they are heading to in the upcoming reform. Their parallel consistency indicates that preparedness was forming on the individual and institutional level and carried out through the coordinated efforts as opposed to disjointed or inconsistent adoption. As a result, it seems that the school has been able to set a preliminary orientation phase where teachers were encouraged to pass by familiarity to preliminary mastery. This stage occurred long before the 2024 / 2025 roll-out, which was a sign of a strategic effort to internalise the principles of the curriculum, preempt challenges in the implementation, and create a shared sense of readiness that would buffer the turbulence inherent in curricular change.

Table 4. Training Participation Related to Kurikulum Merdeka

Training Type	Organizer	Year	Total Participants	Key Materials	Perceived Benefit
<i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> Socialization	Ministry of Religious Affairs, Jepara	2023	5 Islamic Education Teachers	Philosophy of <i>Merdeka Belajar</i>	Understanding of basic concepts
<i>Modul Ajar</i> Technical Guidance	Provincial Ministry of Religious Affairs	2024	3 Islamic Education Teachers	CP–TP–ATP, Teaching Module	Improved technical understanding
<i>Merdeka</i> Assessment Workshop	MGMP Islamic Education	2023	4 Islamic Education Teachers	Formative and Summative Assessment, Rubrics	Basic assessment knowledge
P5G Webinar	Merdeka Platform	2023	5 Islamic Education Teachers	P5, Social Projects	Initial insights on project-based learning
Digital Pedagogy Training	Internal School Program	2024	5 Teachers	Digital media, LMS	Slight improvement in ICT readiness

### Understanding of Merdeka Characteristics and Structure

The overall perception of the hallmark features that made Kurikulum Merdeka more distinctive than the past models of curriculum development showed that the preparatory activities were able to make teachers acquainted with the very essence of the reform. They all talked about project-based character education in line with the Pancasila Student Profile, learner-centered teaching which presupposes and anticipates the agency of students, and the greater flexibility of the curriculum both in time management and curriculum content adaptation. These recurring themes suggest that teachers have started internalizing the language and orientation of Kurikulum Merdeka although this process might still be on an introductory level. This interpretation was upheld by the vice principal who clarified that the main aim of socialization and training is to make teachers acquainted with such guiding principles and assist them in placing the curriculum in the special cultural and institutional environment of the school. According to his words, the purpose is to make teachers realize that learning is project-based, student-centered, and flexible, providing schools and educators with the freedom to create materials that meet the local requirements; in the context of the differentiated learning and P5 framework. As his summary demonstrates, leadership does not only aim at passing policy information, but also creating a mindset that will prompt teachers to break out of their standard teaching patterns and embrace a more flexible, student-centered approach to teaching.

Nevertheless, even with this increased familiarity, teachers admitted freely that their understanding is still merely superficial and does not go deeper, which indicates a perception of reality of the gaps that still have to be overcome before being fully implemented. One of the teachers replied with the frank comment: “I have the general idea of the attributes and organization, the P5 focus and adaptation, but not the depth. This observation implies some in-between period where the teachers are aware of the important conceptual indices of the

curriculum, but have not yet applied them to actual instructional decision-making or planning in the classroom. Their sincerity is indicative of a professional accountability: instead of pretending to be more ready than they are, they admit that further pedagogical and technical understanding will involve lifetime professional growth, practice, and possible more collaborative experiences of unpacking the demands of the curriculum.

These cogitations bring out an effective conflict at the core of the preparatory stage of the school. On the one hand, teachers reflect new conceptual congruity with the main principles of Kurikulum Merdeka, on the other, they understand that they have to continue learning to leave the stage of shallow acquaintance with the new ideals and acquire a deeper understanding of their practical implementation. This conflict is a virtue rather than a sign of weakness and it is a natural and even healthy sign that the awareness has already penetrated but has not yet developed into confidence in the implementation. It is also a marker that the school leadership should further support, including more intensive workshops, mentoring of cycles, and joint lesson planning, will be essential in the 2024/2025 implementation.

### **Readiness for Lesson Planning (CP–TP–ATP–Module)**

Respondents displayed a growing sensitivity of the structural changes realized by Kurikulum Merdeka, and especially in the area of instructional planning, where KI and KD components are being replaced by CP, TP and ATP. What they explain is that this knowledge is not just theoretical although it is expressed within the practical context of everyday instruction. One teacher of PAI explained this shift by saying that the government now provides CP and teachers create TP and ATP, and RPP is a teacher-design module which can be adjusted to fit students and school setting. This narration demonstrates an important shift in concept where the teachers start appreciating the extended role into curriculum designers as opposed to being curriculum implementers. The turn to teacher designed modules requires a new approach to planning, one that requires a process of competency interpretation, pre-visioning student needs and helping turn the general policy expectations into organized learning routes.

In addition to this conceptual transparency, teachers openly admitted to their current state of readiness limitations as they admitted themselves not being very far in the field of learning the technicalities of module preparation. One of the teachers told me that they have been studying examples and processes of developing a module, but they have not yet run the process of creating a complete module. It is in this confession that the difference between knowing how planning structures work and the possibility of generating an entire contextually based module is pointed out. Looking at sample documents might familiarize teachers with the format and logic of module development, but is not a sure way of developing the more fundamental design sensibilities needed to fit the learning objectives, formative assessment, project work, and student differentiation together into a working whole. Their reflective honesty is a sign of a transitional stage of awareness as the full procedural competency has not been attained yet.

In institutional sense, the vice principal gave a wider perspective of the planning expectations in Kurikulum Merdeka because he focused on the choice of methods, models, and media, which concur with the project-based aspects. In his explanation, it is affirmed that the school recognizes the multi-layeredness of planning under the new curriculum. Knowing the design of CP, TP, and ATP is not enough when teachers do not at the same time think of how the mentioned will be operationalized using proper pedagogical strategies and technological/material supports. The school reaction to this difficulty is to make teachers attend the pertinent training and to organize the internal committees to control the planning, coordination, and quality assurance. These institutional aids are indicative of an effort to

provide an environment whereby teachers can over time develop their planning skills in an organized exposure and a facilitated teamwork.

### **Readiness for Teaching–Learning Processes**

Teachers expressed their desire to shift pedagogical practices gradually, not only in a content coverage approach, but also to more responsive assignments that are placed within their daily lives and contextualized therein. Their idea was to transition to more than covering the syllabus with a goal of designing purposeful activities that would ensure alignment of learning objectives and real life situations as well as what grade-five students are like. One of the statements made by a teacher proves that this transition is not viewed as the compulsory change that has to be implemented at once and replace the current practice, but as the discovery-based and stepwise process, sensitive to the classroom dynamics, which is reflected in the following statement of one of the teachers: I will make changes, involve students in selecting activities, and relate lessons to everyday life so that we meet Pancasila standards.

The practical reports by teachers highlight the fact that the transition is based on pragmatism and resource issues. One of the teachers accentuated the adaptation strategy when she said, we will change the old textbooks and material by making them fit Merdeka, in case we are well prepared enough then the classroom process will be easy and this is a step by step and the realistic approach. There are two points that are relevant in this statement: first, it is clear that the goal is to re-tools some current materials so that they could be relevant to the principles of Merdeka; second, it is evident that the success of the change is extremely dependent on the preparedness of teachers and institutional support. In turn, teachers also view reform as a contextualization of work that may be effected in stages as long as the supporting conditions are observed.

Programmatically, the claim of the vice-principal concerning the diagnostic scheme of the student characteristics and the application of the Merdeka guide to choose the appropriate models highlights the dimension of differentiation that is intended. This step in diagnosis is critical, as it allows the policy to change the general assumptions of the program in response to the local information. By selecting learning models depending on the profile of learners, it is possible to improve the possibility of creating contextualized and relevant assignments, and the adaptation burden on instructors can be adjusted to the classroom situation. This method also emphasizes the need to balance innovation and the reality on the ground, meaning that the changes can be implemented in stages.

### **Readiness for Module and Material Development**

Teachers described a developmental pathway of learning about procedures that combines exposure to formal socialization experiences and independent reading on the relevant literature. This learning is described as progressive and reflective as opposed to immediate whereby the initial familiarity is through the research readings and observed module procedures in the course of the socialization sessions. They have testified that this initial learning stage has already laid down a functional approach to entry into the module design process whereby the available resources first get adapted and then made to meet Merdeka demands. According to one of the instructors, I have read research articles and learned how modules work, both through socialization and I would first be adjusting existing modules and materials and then matching them with the needs of Merdeka. This assertion summarizes an intellectual direction and an expedient route, in which a theory guides a progressive exercise that seems plausible under the existing workload limitations.

In addition to this explanation of preparation work, teachers were transparent on the amount of practical experience to be gained in creating entire teaching units. Some of the respondents underlined that being familiar with the procedure steps does not mean having been through the entire loops of design on the ground. A single teacher described this gap rather concisely when he told me, I know what to do, all I need to do is practice; I will create a module using what there is available, and adjust the learner to the specific module. His words show that he has a realistic strategy of capacity building starting with small, contextual adaptations instead of creating them out of the entirety. Such position is indicative of an ethic of cautious experimentation, where teachers are more willing to hone old material by cycles of deployment and critique until they are ready to devote themselves to new designs.

On an institutional level, the leaders outlined a combination of enabling conditions that aimed at transforming procedural knowledge into stable classroom products. The school had been documented with regular in-house training and external workshops that invite expertise, a peer-system of mentoring that disseminates practical knowledge amongst colleagues, and early logistical planning like teaming with printing partners in ensuring supply of material on time. Such organizational actions suggest the desire to form an ecology of iterative development where teachers have the opportunity to experiment, get feedback and eventually enhance the quality of their courses. By so doing the school is also an indicator of a dedication not to individual study alone but also to collective production, and it is an understanding that the development of high-quality pedagogical materials is not usually the result of solitary work but rather of supported cycles of revision.

The testimonies of the instructors and the leaders create a logical image of the preparatory advancement that is encouraging but still prudent enough. Teachers obtained conceptual and process map in the process of socialization and reading and report a wise intention to adjust and customize the available resources as the initial step of action. This process is supported by institutional scaffolds, which focus on training, mentoring, and logistical preparedness to ensure that the iterative design process does not degenerate into ad-hoc improvisation. In the next step it will be worthy to continue with such cycles of trial, feedback and refinement so that procedural knowledge develops into a routine practice and the adapted modules become not only pedagogically sound but also contextually responsive.

### **Facilities and Infrastructure**

The Teachers and the institutional leaders described the physical and material infrastructure of the school, in their characteristics, more than positively, but simultaneously noted a serious limitation in relation to digital resources. The classrooms, library, multipurpose hall and general learning tools were all considered to be adequate in normal instructional practices as well as a multiplicity of elements of the Kurikulum Merdeka. These basic abilities are allegedly the foundational grounds through which a functional level is created, with the help of which project-based activities and collaborative work, which do not directly require intensive technology, may be executed. However, respondents cautiously added that sufficiency does not imply comprehensiveness and that there are some resources which will need gradual and specific investment with the gradual implementation of the curriculum.

The conceptualization of the lack of computer lab facilities by both the vice-principal and the principal was that it was a manageable constraint and not a lethal defect in the planning process. The vice-principal commented that the general facilities are sufficient and prepared, however, the number of computer units are still insufficient in comparison with several students, which also means that the lack of a single resource may impact the speed and extent of operations, including those that require individual or small-sized group access to the digital

devices. The principal added more insight to this view by admitting that 'Facilities are not ready but ready to have grade 10 in 2024/2025 and then finish whatever we lack in phases, so we will take the phased implementation as a deliberate risk-reduction measure of the institution.

There are a number of realistic benefits the staged approach provides, which the interviewees suggest, though they do not mention outright. Starting with a single cohort helps eliminate overlap in resource demands and creates a living laboratory in which the logistical, scheduling, and support needs can be tested at a reduced risk. In addition, it allows the school to focus professional growth activity and material acquisition to those areas, which have the highest short-term effect, and to tune the strategies according to short-term responses of teachers and students. The planned implementation, therefore, comes out as a realistic way of matching the dreams with the capacity available and ensuring that the quality of early executions is not compromised.

The inadequacy of facilities also says that there is need of complementary adjustments that will reduce the dependency on the computers and yet maintain the spirit of the curriculum. Teachers and administrations can view blended solutions that involve low-tech project scaffolding combined with intermittent shared access to computer resources, form collaboration with the proximate institutions to assure access to scheduled computer time, or implement mobile-based solutions which attract on devices already owned by students. At the same time, spending on training of teachers to enable the effective utilization of limited digital resources will be vital to ensure that should access be provided, it is used strategically to perform high-value activities instead of arbitrary activities.

This data in the interview expresses a balance between practical and philosophical institutional reaction. The school is not only conscious of its enabling conditions, but also conscious of its limitations and its senior leadership has developed a staged approach that reduces risk without sacrificing momentum. The salient next action derived out of such accounts includes the deliberate sequence of rollout, specific investment to correct the lack of computer lab, and creative instructional design that can perpetuate Merdeka ideals even without the total technological capacity.

Table 5. Institutional Readiness Overview

<b>Component</b>	<b>Current Condition</b>	<b>Readiness Level</b>	<b>Description</b>
Leadership Support	Strong	Ready	Principal and curriculum vice-principal actively facilitate preparation.
Digital Infrastructure	Limited	Not Ready	Only 15 computers; internet stability uneven.
General Facilities	Adequate	Ready	Classrooms, library, multipurpose hall supportive.
Access to Training	Good	Ready	Teachers attend various socializations and workshops.
Implementation Team	Active	Ready	Team coordinates planning and monitoring.
Teaching Material Resources	Moderate	Developing	Teachers rely on online examples and training materials.

## Readiness for Assessment

An operational understanding of the multilayered assessment framework as espoused by Kurikulum Merdeka was evidenced in the responses of the participants in the whole school where it is observed that diagnostic, formative and summative assessments are part of an overlaying system that is geared towards guiding learning rather than just towards recording achievements. This acknowledgment means that the teachers have already understood the general rationale of the assessment reform and that the leadership has been able to transmit the basic meaning of the policy. Simultaneously, the interviews also show that this understanding is still conditional to several practitioners, a candid and practical state of affairs which determines where professional learning needs to be focused during the course of its implementation.

The uncertain position of the teachers was expressed in very forthright and practical language. One of the teachers stated, that having assumed it to be similar to the previous one, I will figure out as we go, which can be interpreted as an acceptance of the necessity of an adaptive learning in the job, but it also shows that the teacher is more of an experiential learner than a master of the subject at hand. The explanation of an additional teacher was that several types of assessment were only explained by Socialization, but I did not fully understand this and I will approach peers that do as a way of highlighting the limitations of a single socialization experience as well as the primary place of learning networks as a means of immediate resource. The utterances are reflective professional rather than defensive and they also direct towards concrete learning behaviors that can be purposefully supported.

Organizationally, the fact that the vice principal indicates that they are going to undertake further training is an affirmation that the leadership recognizes that they have gaps that need to be addressed with institutional responses being incorporated. The next important step is to plan further capacity building but according to the interviews, the form of such capacity building will determine the speed and depth of the teaching professionals to transform conceptual awareness into reliable assessment practice. In particular, the data suggest the necessity of practice-focused learning opportunities that are directly related to the real tasks that teachers have to complete, e.g., developing rubrics, creating formative checks that can be used to make instructional changes, and utilizing assessment evidence to adjust the complexity of the project.

The combination of these factors implies a chronological process of implementation of practical measures, which can be prioritized by the school. Longer workshops, which build up to practice, will be useful especially in cases where they involve the construction of rubrics, and the practice of exemplar moderation. Peer observation and coaching cycles will be used to convert the knowledge into the classroom practice by enabling the educators to view the assessment in practice, as well as to get the feedback on how they apply the instruments in practice on time. Common standards and minimized variability in summative decision making Structured moderation meetings where teachers compare student work and accord similar judgments on scoring can create common standards and reduce variability in summative judgments. Lastly, by integrating the concept of assessment design into the module developmental cycles, it will be possible to make sure that diagnostic, formative, and summative moments will not become one of the additions when they will be incorporated into the sequence of learning activities.

## Opportunities and Challenges Anticipated

The flexibility remained the most promising affordance of Kurikulum Merdeka by the respondents, as it represented a source of more contextualised, engaging, and skills-based learning experiences that were in line with the vocational and value-oriented mission of the madrasah. Flexibility was not just an abstract principle of policy but a practical tool that can be used to redesign tasks in such a way that they will be relevant to the life of students and the community around them. A teacher of PAI summarized this optimism by saying that flexibility would enhance the student enthusiasm and would enable me to polish my competencies. This statement connects the student motivation and teacher professional development and suggests that by providing teachers with experimental room, one can develop their practice whereas the students will be more engaged in learning.

Closely associated with this pedagogical possibility is the expectation that relevance will transform the nature of classroom interactions and cognitive interactions. Some of the respondents proposed that learners understand concepts more easily when there is familiarity of the content and tasks being studied and they also enjoy the process of learning. One of the teachers remarked that, more to do with the daily life of students, the easier to comprehend and more pleasant to listen to. This observation is indicative of a series of effects that the curriculum aims to generate, i.e. that the contextual tasks have the ability to enhance comprehension, foster inquiry, and enhance more profound transfer of the classroom-based skills. Educationally this would translate to the shift between the superficial recall and the application and solution of problems.

Table 6. Anticipated Opportunities and Challenges

Aspect	Opportunities	Challenges
Teaching and Learning	Flexibility, contextual learning, increased student motivation	Limited understanding of differentiation and P5
Module Development	Freedom to design contextual materials	Lack of hands-on experience producing full modules
Assessment	Encourages authentic and formative assessments	Teachers unfamiliar with rubric creation and performance assessment
Technology	Potential for blended learning	Scarcity of computers, inconsistent internet
Institutional Support	Strong leadership & coordination	Need for more structured mentoring cycles

Simultaneously informants were cautious and enhanced the zeal with wisdom since the full scale implementation was still not in progress. Most of them claimed that they had no actual difficulties as yet, partly because they were not required to lead complete Merdeka laps with students under real circumstances. However, they expected a number of pressure points that will probably emerge as soon as the enactment begins. According to the teachers, it is likely that more knowledge about Merdeka concepts will be needed, especially when it comes to designing and running differentiated P5 projects that would acknowledge individual learning journeys. They also anticipated the computer-laboratory deficit as a tangible limitation which might be a hassle to some project forms that presuppose the routine use of digital tools.

These pre-implementation lessons are good since they are able to determine the point at which targeted supports will reach maximum returns in the initial year of implementation. The correspondence of the perceived opportunity with the perceived challenge is indicative of a

set of priorities. The professional development, with emphasis on project design and scaffolding to support differentiation and practical means of integrating low-tech and high-tech tasks, will help teachers to transform what can be flexible into high quality practice. Similarly, logistic preparations, which increase common access to digital resources or realign project anticipations with prevailing capacity, will ensure that good ideas are not sabotaged by unnecessary bottlenecks. The interviews provide the image of cautious optimism. Flexibility is seen as an educator of engagement and skill building that fits the madrasah orientation, whereas the teachers and the leaders are already thinking about pacing and facilitating that promise to come true. Their considerations can be viewed as a viable roadmap to be followed in the initial implementation, the roadmap that would provide an appropriate balance between creative experimentation and realistic planning and project the teacher learning and student experience as the key indicators of success.

Table 7. Capacity-Building Needs for PAI Teachers

Competency Area	Primary Needs	Expected Support
Module Development	Practice producing full modules	Project-based intensive workshops
Assessment	Rubric construction, formative assessment design	Authentic assessment training & moderation practice
Differentiated Instruction	Multi-level instructional strategies	Modeling & mentoring
Digital Literacy	Practical use of digital learning tools	Improved ICT facilities & targeted digital pedagogy training
P5 Integration	Designing value-based community projects	Collaboration across subjects and external partners

Findings of the current research suggest that the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) teachers readiness at MA Mathalibul Huda can be best understood as a developmental curve instead of the status quo, which moves over time as the teachers in the school attempt to come to terms with the conceptual, technical and contextual imperatives of the Merdeka Curriculum. This fluid nature of readiness is consistent with a developing pattern in the current body of Indonesian research, suggesting that educators usually initiate curriculum changes with a conceptualized understanding of policy systems but need extended periods of practice and reflection before they can securely transfer that conceptualization into consistent instructional and assessment practices (Ndomondo et al., 2022; Singh-Pillay, 2024; Vieluf & Klieme, 2023). The difference between the current situation and the previous one is in how teachers themselves define this transformation as being not as opposition to change but as a continuous adaptation process and limited by structural realities but enabled by institutional commitment. This kind of experiential detail adds additional nuance to the larger theoretical literature on curriculum enactment that is becoming more focused on the potential significance of teacher agency and situated learning in mediating the existence of reform outcomes.

In this respect, the preparedness of the teachers can be described as a set of emerging competences, which are unevenly spread in fields. There is a high familiarity of teachers with the philosophical basis of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially with regard to its flexibility, competency-based learning and student-centred experiences. This familiarity has, however, not yet grown into a regular level of technical proficiency in areas like the development of modules, diagnostic evaluation, and varied learning courses. Research done in the past five years in the schools of Indonesia has consistently recorded the same trends. An example of a multi-site survey conducted by Colwell et al. (2021) discovered that teachers were

conceptually literate, but they had difficulties operationalising CPTPATP alignment in classroom planning. Similarly, a case study in Pekanbaru revealed that first-mover socialisation allowed teachers to have more confidence but had little structured design capabilities that might support long-term implementation. The fact that these findings overlap with the current one indicates that the difference between the philosophical awareness and pedagogical implementation is not isolated and school-specific problem.

In the course of further analysis, it becomes clear that assessment literacy is one of the most vulnerable and delicate aspects of teacher preparedness. Though the teachers in this research accept the importance of the diagnostic, formative and summative assessment in assisting the student learning, they also realise that they lack the confidence to design such assessment in more reliable and coherent measures. Recent research shows that this is a common issue that is not going away. Research by Stevens (2023) demonstrates that educators are usually familiar with assessment types on a conceptual level but need to be shown how to build a rubric, moderation strategies, and other feedback mechanisms and allowed to practice before they can use them in practice. Moreover, empirical research has shown that the assessment practice of teachers tends to be stuck in the traditional written assessment even in the context of the policy that promotes more authentic, project-based, and performance-based assessment. Considering these trends, this paper confirms the hypothesis that assessment is not a technical art but rather a complex pedagogical judgement that needs to be developed by systematic, practical professional training and not just a short informational seminar.

The other important dimension that cuts across both pedagogical and institutional issues is the digital consciousness of teachers. Respondents cited limited facilities, poor internet connectivity and different degrees of digital confidence as being a significant barrier to implementation. However, a more critical examination indicates that instructors do not view technology as a weight, but it is an obligatory field that must be conquered. This sentiment has been supported by national studies conducted in the last five years. Taufiqurrahman (2024) points out that digital preparedness of PAI teachers is not determined by the simple availability of hardware, but through the ability to incorporate technology through learning in a meaningful way. On the same note, Burns (2023) prove that teachers are the fittest beneficiaries of the training models that incorporate the technological knowledge with the instructional design, thus enabling the digital tools to facilitate the curriculum instead of making it veil. These observations are reflected in the experiences of MA Mathalibul Huda: teachers show readiness to use technology but are willing to receive well-organized, practice-based training that will provide digital tools with links to the achievement of curricular objectives. This alignment is necessary since the Merdeka Curriculum is progressively relying on blended and multimedia-based and student driven learning experiences which cannot be successful without an acceptable level of digital competence.

The institutional setting too is a key factor that influences the preparedness of teachers. The establishment of an implementation team, the regular BIMTEK meetings, and the step by step implementation starting with the grade 10 are an indication of a leadership strategy in line with the institutional strategies proposed in the recent literature on educational reforms. According to research conducted by Willems & van Houten (2022), the presence of stable organisational scaffolds such as organised mentorship, joint planning, and institutional routine to facilitate professional learning can often be the key to the successful implementation of a curriculum. Much more recent research in the field of management (Pinheiro et al., 2025) anotes that the curriculum reforms are better going to establish themselves with the schools organizing the leadership functions with the distributed teacher responsibilities and clear operational goals. In this regard, MA Mathalibul Huda shows encouraging alignment with

national best practices, but the institution can reinforce its approach to making role descriptions more explicit within the implementation team, including appointing particular leads that moderate the assessment develop modules and digitally integrate.

The last, but also a crucial, level of discussion is cultural and religious contextualisation. In this study, there was a resounding feeling that teachers wanted to reconcile the Merdeka Curriculum and the Islamic values by making sure that innovation did not interfere with the clarity of doctrine. This view is in line with the modern academic literature that states that effective curriculum change in madrasah haunches has to occupy an intermediate between pedagogical modernisation on one hand, and the retention of religious identity on the other hand. Recent empirical research also notes that PAI teachers have a unique opportunity to enhance the features of the curriculum in terms of project based learning and Pancasila Student Profile, by providing projects that combine community service, moral development and religious reflection. It is especially applicable to the case with MA Mathalibul Huda, in which the teachers imagine modules that will extract meaningful learning experiences out of local traditions and strengthen the school religious mission. This contextual integration does not only improve the relevance of curriculum, but also improves the holistic approach taken by students to learning.

The trends identified in all of these related areas, assessment literacy, digital confidence, institutional scaffolding, and cultural contextualisation, imply that teacher preparedness to the Merdeka Curriculum cannot be narrowed down to single competencies. Rather, preparedness is a relational entity that is to be co-created with the teachers developing knowledge, and under institutional and socio-cultural pressures. This description corresponds to modern theoretical models according to which curriculum reform is a process of revision, adjustment, and social mediation, and not a technical change in a straight line (Fullan, 2020; Tan, 2021; Cifuentes, 2025). The results of the current research thus support the significance of crafting the professional development models in a manner that preempts the co-design, collaborative reflection, ongoing mentoring and context-specific pedagogy.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that the readiness of PAI teachers at MA Mathalibul Huda Mlonggo to implement the *Merdeka Curriculum* is at a preparatory and developing stage. Teachers have demonstrated awareness of the curriculum's principles particularly its focus on project-based learning, flexibility, and the Pancasila Student Profile but their practical ability to design and implement the new components such as *modul ajar*, CP–TP–ATP alignment, and authentic assessment remains limited. Institutional support, through socialization, BIMTEK, and IHT activities, has laid an essential foundation, yet ongoing training and guided practice are needed to bridge the gap between conceptual understanding and classroom execution. This indicates that while pedagogical awareness has been successfully cultivated, operational competence must still be strengthened before full implementation in the 2024/2025 academic year. Overall, the transition toward the *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum* represents a broader educational transformation that redefines teaching roles, digital engagement, and cultural contextualization within Islamic education. The readiness of PAI teachers depends not only on individual competence but also on systemic supports that integrate pedagogical innovation, digital literacy, and cultural sensitivity. Sustainable implementation will require continuous professional development, resource enhancement, and adaptive school leadership. If these elements are harmonized, the Merdeka Curriculum can truly fulfill its promise of nurturing students who are not only intellectually capable but also morally grounded, socially responsive, and culturally resilient in the face of the evolving educational landscape.

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