



## **Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the Teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Al-Qur'an Hadith instruction at MTsN 1 Palu City. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with one Al-Qur'an Hadith teacher and three Grade VII students, and documentation review. The data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings reveal that while teachers have adopted the required instructional frameworks, the practical application of differentiated instruction is significantly hindered by large class sizes (40 students per class) and disparities in students' Qur'anic literacy. Teachers address these challenges by conducting remedial sessions outside of school hours, maintaining strict instructional control over digital devices, and fostering mentor-like personal relationships with students. The study concludes that the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in a madrasa setting depends not only on administrative adherence but also on the teacher's ability to balance firm classroom management with a humanistic, responsive approach to student needs. These findings offer practical implications for teacher professional development in managing diverse classroom environments.

**Keywords:** Al-Qur'an Hadith learning, classroom management, differentiated instruction, Islamic education, Merdeka Curriculum

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## **A. Introduction**

The Merdeka Curriculum represents an educational transformation that emphasizes student-centered learning, flexibility in the learning process, and character development through the Pancasila Student Profile. This curriculum provides teachers with greater freedom to design learning experiences tailored to students' needs, interests, and abilities. Additionally, learning within the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to be more active, contextual, and meaningful through the application of flexible learning strategies (Kemendikbud, 2022).

In the context of Islamic religious education, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum presents both a challenge and an opportunity to develop learning that is not only focused on cognitive aspects but also on students' character and spiritual development. Islamic religious education plays a vital role in shaping students who are morally upright, religious, and capable of applying Islamic values in their daily lives. Therefore, the teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith must be designed using instructional materials that are systematic, adaptive, and tailored to the characteristics of the students (Kementerian Agama RI, 2022).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the classroom requires teachers to develop various instructional materials, such as learning outcomes (CP), learning objectives (TP), learning objective sequences (ATP), teaching modules, and diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. In addition, instruction focuses on the application of differentiated instruction and the development of students' character. The implementation of PAI instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum is flexible, allowing teachers to adapt teaching methods, strategies, and materials to meet students' needs (Iqtianti et al., 2025).

Several studies have discussed the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education (PAI). Most of these studies focus on curriculum adaptation, student-centered learning, and instructional flexibility in general PAI subjects (Nining, 2024; Umam et al., 2025). Other studies also explain the importance of differentiated learning and assessment in supporting students' learning needs within the Merdeka Curriculum framework (Wibowo et al., 2025).

However, studies specifically examining the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Al-Qur'an Hadith learning at the madrasah level are still limited. Existing research tends to describe the implementation process in general terms, such as the use of teaching modules, assessments, and learning methods, without deeply discussing how teachers apply differentiated learning while simultaneously strengthening students' religious character during classroom instruction.

In fact, Al-Qur'an Hadith learning has characteristics distinct from other subjects. Learning is directed not only toward students' cognitive understanding but also toward the development of spiritual values, attitudes, and religious behaviour. This condition complicates the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Al-Qur'an Hadith learning, especially in adapting learning strategies and assessments to students' diverse abilities and learning experiences. Analyzing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Qur'an and Hadith learning is important because these subjects possess distinctive characteristics that extend beyond cognitive achievement. Qur'an and Hadith instruction aims to develop students' religious understanding, Qur'anic literacy, and spiritual character simultaneously. As a result, implementing student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, and assessment practices may present unique challenges distinct from those encountered in general subjects. Examining how these curriculum principles are applied in the context of

Qur'an and Hadith learning can provide a deeper understanding of both the opportunities and challenges faced by teachers in madrasah settings.

Based on this gap, this study analyzes the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Al-Qur'an Hadith learning at MTsN 1 Palu City, particularly regarding differentiated learning practices, classroom interaction, and the strengthening of students' religious character.

## **B. Literature Review**

### **1. The Merdeka Curriculum Concept**

The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that emphasizes learning flexibility, the strengthening of competencies, and the development of students' character through student-centered learning. This curriculum gives teachers the freedom to design learning processes tailored to students' needs, interests, and characteristics, thereby making learning more active, contextual, and meaningful (Kemendikbud, 2022). In practice, teachers serve not merely as knowledge transmitters but also as facilitators who foster a collaborative learning environment that adapts to students' developmental needs.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia signifies a paradigm shift from standardized instruction toward personalized learning (Hidayat & Patras, 2024). At the heart of this transformation lies differentiated instruction, which, according to Tomlinson (2014), is not merely a teaching strategy but a philosophy of responding to learners' needs by adjusting content, process, and product. In the national educational context, this approach has been proven to significantly enhance student engagement (Ap et al., 2025). Furthermore, Nurhidin and Habibah (2024) assert that the flexibility afforded by the Merdeka Curriculum provides educators with the necessary space to transition from traditional transmission-based pedagogy toward genuine student-centered learning.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum also encourages the development of innovative and flexible instructional designs. The Merdeka Curriculum provides teachers with the freedom to develop more creative and adaptive teaching strategies tailored to students' needs (Umam et al., 2025). This flexibility encourages the implementation of differentiated instruction as part of student-centered learning in classroom practice. Differentiated learning is important because students have different levels of readiness, interests, and learning profiles during the learning process (Tomlinson, 2014). In the madrasah context, differentiated instruction is also associated with strengthening students' character and Islamic values within learning activities (Pranajaya et al., 2023). Several previous studies have examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian educational settings. Hidayat and Patras (2024) found that the curriculum encourages greater instructional flexibility and supports student-centered learning practices. Ap et al. (2025) identified large class sizes, diverse student learning needs, and limited teacher readiness as common obstacles in applying differentiated learning effectively.

These findings indicate that the success of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on curriculum design but also on teachers' ability to adapt instructional strategies to classroom realities. Instruction is not only focused on delivering content but also on developing students' critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration skills.

## **2. Teaching the Qur'an and Hadith in the Merdeka Curriculum**

In the context of Islamic religious education, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum aims not only to develop cognitive skills but also to foster students' religious, spiritual, and social character. Al-Qur'an Hadith learning is also directed toward strengthening students' spiritual values, religious attitudes, and daily behaviour. Therefore, classroom learning activities are expected to encourage students' active participation, reflection, and interaction during the learning process. In the madrasah context, religious values become an important part of curriculum implementation and classroom practices (Pranajaya et al., 2023). Therefore, Islamic religious education, including the Qur'an and Hadith, must be designed using teaching materials that are systematic, flexible, and appropriate to students' developmental stages (Kementerian Agama RI, 2022).

Islamic Religious Education, particularly Al-Qur'an Hadith subjects, faces distinct pedagogical challenges. Unlike general subjects, learning the Qur'an requires the integration of cognitive proficiency (reading and writing) with deep spiritual character development (Albaab & Thobroni, 2025). Within the madrasah environment, the effectiveness of this learning is often hindered by disparities in students' baseline abilities (Chasanah, 2021). As noted by Hasnahwati et al. (2025), differentiation-based innovation in Islamic Religious Education is essential to balance national curriculum requirements with the humanistic and flexible essence of Islamic teachings, in accordance with the principle of *lā yukallifullāhu nafsan illā wus'ahā* (Albaab & Thobroni, 2025).

The teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith in the Merdeka Curriculum is designed so that students not only understand the material theoretically but also apply the values of the Qur'an and Hadith in their daily lives. This is in line with Iqtianti et al. (2025), who explain that the implementation of PAI learning in the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out flexibly, allowing teachers to adjust teaching methods, strategies, and materials according to students' characteristics.

In addition, Nining explained that implementing a heart-to-heart-based PAI learning model can foster a more humanistic and student-centered learning experience (Nining, 2024). Learning is no longer focused solely on the transfer of knowledge, but also on character development and the reinforcement of students' spiritual values. Previous studies have highlighted several differences between the Merdeka Curriculum and the previous Curriculum 2013 (K13). Silvia Dwi found that the Merdeka Curriculum offers greater flexibility in curriculum structure, learning processes, and assessment practices, enabling teachers to adapt instruction more effectively to students' needs than the more standardized K13 approach (Dwi, 2023). In the context of Al-Qur'an Hadith learning, recent studies indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to implement differentiated learning, adjust instructional strategies based on students' characteristics, and promote more active student participation in the learning process (Ridha et al., 2024). These differences suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum offers broader opportunities for contextual and student-centered learning in madrasah education.

## **3. Assessment and Differentiated Instruction in the Merdeka Curriculum**

The Merdeka Curriculum positions assessment as an integral part of the learning process. Assessment is not only used to measure student learning outcomes but also to determine learning readiness, skill development, and the effectiveness of the learning process (Kemendikbud, 2022). Therefore, diagnostic, formative, and

summative assessments are crucial components of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation.

In addition to assessment, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the use of differentiated instruction tailored to students' needs and abilities. Differentiated instruction helps students gain learning experiences better suited to their individual characteristics, making the learning process more effective and meaningful (Wibowo et al., 2025).

Interactive learning is also a crucial component in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Interactive learning enhances students' active participation through discussions, collaboration, and problem-solving activities. Several studies indicate that differentiated learning can increase students' motivation, classroom participation, and learning engagement because teachers adapt instructional strategies according to students' abilities and learning needs. In Islamic education, differentiated instruction also supports more inclusive and meaningful learning experiences for students (Astuti et al., 2025). The success of integrating the Merdeka Curriculum into Islamic Religious Education is contingent upon the interplay of three key variables: (a) Innovative Strategies: The use of interactive media and diverse approaches has proven effective in overcoming student motivation issues (Nurlaili et al., 2023). (b) Teachers as Facilitators: Educators in madrasas are expected to possess high managerial capabilities to implement differentiated strategies supported by technology integration (Dinana et al., 2024). (c) Responsive Assessment: Tomlinson (2014) argues that assessment in a differentiated classroom must serve as a tool to guide instructional decisions rather than merely as a summative measure of achievement.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces various challenges, particularly in the development of instructional materials, the application of assessments, and the implementation of differentiated instruction (Syahda & Wahyuningsih, 2024). However, implementing differentiated instruction in classroom practice is not always easy. Several studies indicate that teachers often experience difficulties in managing large classes, accommodating students' diverse learning abilities, and consistently implementing meaningful differentiation. In some cases, differentiated learning is still understood only as grouping students or varying teaching methods without deeper instructional adjustments (Rahmawati et al., 2024). Despite this robust theoretical foundation, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding how these principles are applied within the unique religious and cultural constraints of an Islamic madrasah, particularly when addressing the diverse levels of Al-Qur'an literacy among students. Consequently, this study fills this gap by exploring how these theoretical principles, particularly differentiated content and responsive assessment, are translated into daily teaching practices at MTsN 1 Palu City, where students exhibit varying levels of Al-Qur'an literacy.

## **C. Method**

### **1. Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Al-Qur'an Hadith instruction at MTsN 1 Palu City. The research was conducted during a Field Experience Practice program from September to October 2024. The analysis of instructional planning was based on the teacher's teaching documents, while classroom implementation and assessment practices were observed during the Field Experience Practice period.

## **2. Data Sources**

The primary data were derived from two main sources: classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Observations focused on teacher-student interactions, learning strategies, and student participation in Grade VII classes. Meanwhile, semi-structured interviews were conducted with one Al-Qur'an Hadith teacher and three Grade VII students. The students were purposively selected for their active participation in the observed learning activities and willingness to share learning experiences related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The interviews were intended to complement observation data and provide a deeper understanding of classroom experiences related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Secondary data were collected from instructional documents, including Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), Learning Objective Flow (ATP), teaching modules, and assessment instruments, as well as relevant scholarly literature on Islamic Religious Education, curriculum studies, differentiated instruction, and assessment practices.

## **3. Data Collection Techniques**

Data were collected through three integrated techniques. First, classroom observations were conducted to record instructional practices, teacher-student interactions, and student engagement. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teacher and students to explore classroom experiences and pedagogical reflections that could not be captured through observation alone. Third, documentation review was used to examine instructional artefacts, such as teaching modules and assessment reports, in order to verify the alignment between planning and implementation.

## **4. Data Analysis Techniques**

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, this study employed triangulation by cross-referencing observational findings, interview transcripts, and instructional documents. Data were organised and presented thematically according to the main research foci: instructional planning, classroom implementation, assessment practices, and differentiated learning.

## **D. Findings**

### **1. Planning and Classroom Implementation of Al-Qur'an Hadith Learning under the Merdeka Curriculum**

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith at MTsN 1 Palu City has been carried out through the development of instructional materials, including lesson plans, teaching guides, teaching activity plans, teaching modules, and learning assessments. Teachers use more interactive teaching methods, such as group discussions, presentations, question-and-answer sessions, and learning reflections. Additionally, instruction is delivered through a student-centered approach, enabling students to be more active throughout the learning process. Teachers have also begun implementing differentiated instruction by providing support tailored to students' abilities.

The observation results showed that the teacher conducted learning activities based on the teaching modules prepared prior to instruction. Learning activities

were conducted interactively through discussions, presentations, and question-and-answer sessions, enabling active engagement between teachers and students throughout the classroom process. To operationalize differentiated instruction, the teacher employs a multi-modal approach. Mrs Karyati explained that she integrates audio-visual materials for diverse learners and provides a "quiet area" for individual reading alongside a "collaboration corner" for group discussions (Interview with Mrs Karyati, September 5, 2024). Students were divided into several groups to discuss the learning materials, and the classroom atmosphere was conducive because students actively participated in the discussions.

Another interesting finding was observed in Grade VII digital classes. Although students were allowed to bring tablets and laptops into the classroom, the learning process remained conducive because the teacher managed classroom discipline effectively. Before instruction began, students were told not to use their devices until the teacher permitted it. Mrs Karyati highlighted that digital tools such as Quizizz significantly enhance engagement through immediate feedback; however, she strictly mandates that Qur'anic verses be handwritten to preserve fundamental writing skills (Interview with Mrs Karyati, September 5, 2024). This strategy helped students remain focused on the learning process and minimized distractions during classroom instruction.

## **2. Differentiated Learning and Assessment Practices**

Teachers have also begun implementing differentiated instruction by providing support tailored to students' abilities. The implementation of differentiated learning was reflected in the teacher's efforts to accommodate students' different learning abilities. Students who needed more time to understand the material were still given opportunities to complete the learning process at their own pace. The teacher also conducted repeated reflections at the end of learning activities to help students strengthen their understanding of the material. In several cases, students who experienced difficulties received additional guidance after classroom instruction.

In terms of assessment, teachers use diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to monitor students' learning progress. However, implementing differentiated instruction and adapting assessments to students' diverse characteristics remains a challenge in the learning process.

The findings indicate that implementing differentiated learning in Al-Qur'an Hadith instruction is more complex than in general subjects because teachers are required not only to address cognitive differences but also students' spiritual engagement and religious attitudes. This condition positions Qur'an Hadith learning within the Merdeka Curriculum as both an academic and character-oriented learning process.



**Figure 1. Digital Learning Activities in Grade VII Al-Qur'an Hadith Class**

Figure 1 illustrates the implementation of digital learning in Grade VII classes. The documentation confirms the integration of digital devices as learning tools while maintaining teacher supervision and classroom discipline.

### **3. Challenges and Teacher Strategies in Supporting Students' Religious Learning**

However, this implementation presents unique challenges. Mrs Karyati, the Al-Qur'an Hadith teacher, highlighted the difficulty of managing eight Grade VII classes, with approximately 40 students in each. She explained:

*"I teach eight Grade VII classes, and each class has different characteristics. With around 40 students in each class, I need to understand their individual learning needs and abilities. It is a meaningful challenge to teach according to students' needs"* (Interview with Mrs Karyati, September 5, 2024).

Beyond classroom-based differentiation, the teacher recognized that the disparity in Qur'anic literacy requires a more intensive approach. Based on observations, differences in students' Qur'anic reading abilities persisted, though only among a small number of students. To address this condition, Mrs Karyati explained that the afternoon tutoring program was conducted in collaboration with Mr Supardi, who mentored male students, while she mentored female students (Interview with Mrs Karyati, September 5, 2024). While the madrasah also implemented morning Qur'an recitation, this afternoon tutoring serves as a critical remedial bridge for students struggling with basic fluency. These activities were guided directly by the homeroom teachers as part of efforts to strengthen students' religious learning habits.

Although assessment compliance remains a challenge, qualitative feedback from students presents a positive outlook. Students reported feeling supported rather than pressured, perceiving the teacher as a mentor who provides consistent guidance. This nurturing environment facilitates stronger teacher-student rapport, a critical driver of the successful implementation of the student-centered spirit inherent in the Merdeka Curriculum (Interview with students, September 24, 2024).

## **E. Discussion**

### **1. Planning for the Teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith in the Merdeka Curriculum**

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith at MTsN 1 Palu began with the development of instructional materials, including learning outcomes (CP), learning objectives (TP), learning objective sequences (ATP), teaching modules, and assessment tools. The ability of teachers to develop instructional materials indicates their readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding may be associated with the availability of curriculum guidelines and professional development programs that support teachers in designing learning tools aligned with student needs.

Based on observations during the field experience practice, teachers have developed instructional materials in accordance with the structure of the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding suggests that teachers have developed sufficient pedagogical readiness to translate curriculum policies into classroom practice. The successful preparation of CP, TP, ATP, and teaching modules may reflect teachers'

understanding of the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility and student-centered learning.

This finding is consistent with Hidayat and Patras (2024), who argue that the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to redesign learning plans to align with students' characteristics and learning needs. Similarly, Hasnahwati et al. (2025) found that instructional planning is a critical foundation for implementing differentiated learning in Islamic educational settings.

In developing the teaching modules, teachers not only included learning objectives and instructional content but also the steps of learning activities, teaching methods, learning media, and the forms of assessment used. Teachers also adapted the instructional content to the students' circumstances to make learning easier to understand and less monotonous. Additionally, the development of instructional materials aimed to create more active, student-centered learning.

Based on the observations, teachers used various teaching methods, including group discussions, question-and-answer sessions, presentations, and learning reflections. This planning indicates that teachers are striving to create more flexible and interactive learning experiences in line with the characteristics of the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding aligns with the Ministry of Education and Culture's explanation that the Merdeka Curriculum grants teachers the freedom to develop learning experiences tailored to students' needs (Kemendikbud, 2022). Furthermore, this planning process mirrors Tomlinson's (2014) principles of adaptive instructional design, where planning is not merely an administrative requirement but a strategic blueprint to address student diversity.

However, the practical reality of this planning faces significant logistical hurdles. As noted by Mrs Karyati, the Al-Qur'an Hadith teacher, managing eight parallel classes with 40 students each demands a high level of adaptive planning—a workload she reframes as an 'enjoyable challenge' in mapping individual student needs (Interview with Mrs Karyati, September 5, 2024). This pedagogical struggle underscores the findings of Umam et al. (2025), which suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum compels teachers to craft innovative, contextual designs that prioritize student engagement despite the logistical constraints of large classrooms.

## **2. Implementation of the Qur'an and Hadith Curriculum in the Merdeka Curriculum**

The teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith at MTsN 1, Palu City, is conducted through student-centered learning. Based on observations, learning activities begin with an introductory activity and the teacher's presentation of the learning objectives. Next, the teacher relates the learning material to the students' daily lives, making the learning more contextual and easier to understand.

During the learning process, students are divided into several discussion groups to understand the content of the Quranic verses and hadiths being studied. Each group is given the opportunity to discuss, express opinions, and present the results of their discussion in front of the class. The teacher then reinforces the students' answers and understanding through question-and-answer sessions and learning reflections.

The lesson's implementation showed that students were more active in expressing their opinions and interacting during the learning process. Additionally, the learning atmosphere became more communicative because students did not merely listen to the teacher's explanations but were directly involved in the learning process. This finding reflects the student-centered orientation promoted by the

Merdeka Curriculum, in which students are encouraged to actively construct knowledge through participation and interaction. Similar findings were reported by Hidayat and Patras (2024), who found that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum requires learning activities that actively engage students and accommodate their learning needs. Likewise, Nining emphasised that student-centred approaches in Islamic Religious Education can increase student participation and create more meaningful learning experiences (Nining, 2024).

Another interesting finding was identified in the Grade VII digital class. Although students were allowed to bring tablets and laptops into the classroom, the learning process remained conducive and focused. Before the lesson began, the teacher instructed students not to use their devices until they were permitted to do so during learning activities. This classroom management strategy helped minimize distractions and encouraged students to remain actively involved in classroom discussions and presentations. This finding indicates that the use of digital devices in learning does not necessarily reduce students' concentration during classroom instruction. Instead, effective classroom management and clear instructional control from the teacher play an important role in supporting the successful implementation of technology-based learning within the Merdeka Curriculum. This result suggests that technology integration becomes effective when accompanied by appropriate pedagogical supervision. The presence of digital devices alone does not guarantee meaningful learning; rather, teachers' ability to regulate learning activities determines whether technology supports or distracts students from the learning objectives.

This type of learning demonstrates a shift from teacher-centered instruction toward a more participatory approach. In practice, teachers also implement differentiated instruction by providing tailored support based on students' abilities. Students who struggle receive additional guidance from the teacher, while those who grasp the material more quickly are given reinforcement and advanced assignments. This demonstrates that teachers strive to adapt instruction to students' learning needs. These findings are consistent with Tomlinson (2014), who argues that differentiated instruction requires teachers to modify learning experiences according to students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Similarly, Nurlaili et al. (2023) found that differentiated learning in Islamic Religious Education helps accommodate diverse student abilities and promotes more inclusive learning experiences.

The findings indicate that implementing differentiated learning in Al-Qur'an Hadith instruction is not always easy in classroom practice. Although teachers attempted to adjust learning to students' abilities, the large number of students in one class became one of the main challenges. Managing nearly 40 students with varying levels of Qur'anic reading ability required teachers to carefully divide their attention during the learning process. As a result, the implementation of differentiated learning could not always be carried out optimally for all students. This challenge demonstrates that the successful implementation of differentiated learning is influenced not only by teachers' pedagogical competence but also by classroom conditions and student-teacher ratios. Similar obstacles have been reported by Syahda and Wahyuningsih, who identified class size and student diversity as significant challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum (Syahda & Wahyuningsih, 2024). Wibowo et al. likewise found that accommodating individual

learning needs remains difficult when teachers are responsible for large classes with varying student abilities (Wibowo et al., 2025).

However, teachers continued to make various efforts to accommodate students' learning needs, such as providing repeated reflections, additional guidance after class, and strengthening students' religious literacy through morning recitation and memorization activities. This finding shows that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Al-Qur'an Hadith learning is not only related to instructional flexibility, but also to teachers' ability to balance academic learning, classroom management, and students' spiritual development simultaneously. This finding reinforces the view that implementing differentiated learning in Islamic education extends beyond cognitive achievement to include the cultivation of religious attitudes and spiritual development. Such characteristics distinguish Al-Qur'an Hadith learning from many general subjects because teachers are expected to support both academic progress and character formation simultaneously (Nurhidin & Habibah, 2024; Hasnahwati et al., 2025).

The implementation of student-centered learning in this study highlights a shift toward participatory approaches. In practice, differentiation is operationalized through a multimodal approach; Mrs Karyati integrates audiovisual materials and provides specific learning zones, such as a "quiet area" for reading and a "collaboration corner" for group discussions (Interview with Mrs Karyati, September 5, 2024). This aligns with Wibowo et al. (2025), who argue that differentiated instruction allows students to gain learning experiences better suited to their individual abilities.

Furthermore, to address disparities in Qur'anic literacy that could not be fully resolved within the standard 40-minute classroom session, the teacher implemented an exclusive afternoon tutoring program. By utilizing gender-segregated mentoring for Iqra and basic reading skills, the teacher ensures more focused and personal guidance (Interview with Mrs Karyati, September 5, 2024). Regarding the digital classroom, while the use of Quizizz enhances engagement through immediate feedback, the teacher still required students to write Qur'anic verses by hand, even when using digital devices in learning activities. This approach indicates that technology was used to support learning without neglecting the development of students' basic Qur'anic writing skills. This finding suggests that the use of digital technology in the classroom did not interfere with the learning process. Clear classroom rules and teacher supervision helped students remain focused on learning activities despite having access to tablets and laptops. Instead, it underscores that technology in the madrasa setting is used as a complementary tool to preserve fundamental traditional skills, rather than replacing them. As suggested by Nurlaili et al. (2023), integrating technology does not necessitate abandoning traditional disciplines but rather complements them to preserve fundamental skills. These findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic education involves not only instructional flexibility but also effective classroom management and the reinforcement of students' spiritual character (Iqtianti et al., 2025).

On the other hand, Al-Qur'an and Hadith instruction is not only focused on cognitive aspects but also on fostering students' religious character. During the learning process, teachers encourage students to collaborate, respect their peers' opinions, and connect the content of verses and hadiths to daily behaviour. Thus, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Al-Qur'an and Hadith education

emphasizes not only content understanding but also the reinforcement of students' character and spiritual values.

### **3. Assessment in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum**

Assessment in the teaching of the Qur'an and Hadith is conducted through diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. Based on observation results, teachers conduct diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the learning process to determine students' initial abilities and readiness to learn. Teachers identify students' abilities through initial questions and observations throughout the learning process. This practice is consistent with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize the importance of identifying students' readiness, learning needs, and prior knowledge as a foundation for planning appropriate learning experiences and instructional strategies (Hasnahwati et al., 2025).

Next, formative assessment is conducted during learning activities through discussions, Q&A sessions, assignments, presentations, and observations of student engagement. Teachers not only evaluate final learning outcomes but also monitor students' learning processes throughout learning activities. Through formative assessment, teachers can determine the students' level of understanding and identify necessary follow-up learning strategies. This finding suggests that assessment functions not only as a tool for measuring achievement but also as a means of providing feedback that supports continuous learning improvement. Such practices are in line with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on assessment for learning rather than merely assessment of learning (Nurlaili et al., 2023).

Summative assessment, on the other hand, is conducted at the end of the learning process to determine whether students have achieved the learning objectives. In its implementation, teachers evaluate students' cognitive, affective, and participatory aspects throughout the learning process. Assessment focuses not only on the ability to understand the material but also on students' attitudes, cooperation, and responsibility in participating in the learning process (Ismail et al., 2023; Purwanti et al., 2024; Suharti et al., 2024).

Based on classroom observations, assessment activities focused not only on students' cognitive achievement but also on their participation, responsibility, and learning attitudes during class. Teachers observed students' involvement during discussions, presentations, and question-and-answer sessions as part of formative assessment practices. This condition reflects the Merdeka Curriculum principle that assessment should support the overall learning process rather than merely measure final learning outcomes. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that learning outcomes in Islamic Religious Education are influenced by the learning model implemented in the classroom (Apdoludin & Martinisyamin, 2022; Arnilawati & Khermarinah, 2026; Ijudin et al., 2022; Nurpratiwi et al., 2021). Student-centered and participatory learning models encourage greater student engagement and provide broader opportunities for teachers to assess both learning processes and outcomes comprehensively (Murharyana et al., 2024).

The implementation of these assessments demonstrates that assessments within the Merdeka Curriculum serve as an integral part of the learning process. This aligns with the Ministry of Education and Culture's explanation that assessments are used to track students' learning progress and assist teachers in designing instruction that better meets students' needs (Kemendikbud, 2022).

However, the implementation of assessment still faced several challenges in practice. Differences in students' learning abilities and Qur'anic reading skills

required teachers to continuously adjust their assessment approaches. In large classes, teachers sometimes experience difficulties in providing equal attention and conducting comprehensive assessments for all students during limited instructional time. Based on observation results, teachers still face several challenges in conducting assessments, particularly in adapting assessment formats to students' diverse abilities and implementing differentiated instruction effectively. This finding aligns with research indicating that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum still faces challenges in designing assessments and applying differentiated instruction in the classroom (Syahda & Wahyuningsih, 2024).

Beyond academic assessment, the findings suggest that teacher–student rapport plays a significant role in supporting the implementation of student-centered assessment practices. Students' perceptions of being supported rather than pressured indicate that assessment can function as a formative process that encourages participation and open communication. In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, such rapport is particularly important because assessment is intended not only to measure achievement but also to facilitate learning and student development. The findings indicate that assessment was used not only to measure learning outcomes but also to provide teachers with a means to offer guidance and feedback throughout the learning process. Students perceived assessment activities as part of their learning experience rather than merely as a grading mechanism. Through continuous feedback and teacher support, students reported feeling more comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification during classroom activities. This positive learning atmosphere encouraged students to participate more actively in discussions and engage more confidently in the learning process.

## **F. Conclusion**

This study demonstrates that the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Al-Qur'an Hadith instruction goes beyond mere curriculum compliance and largely depends on teachers' ability to create responsive, student-centered learning environments. The findings imply that effective implementation requires teachers to integrate differentiated instruction, adaptive assessment practices, appropriate use of technology, and continuous support for students' religious development. These findings contribute to the growing discussion on curriculum reform in Islamic education by highlighting the importance of balancing pedagogical flexibility with classroom management and spiritual guidance. However, this study was limited to one teacher and a small number of student participants in a single madrasah, which may limit the transferability of the findings to other educational contexts. Future research should involve multiple madrasahs, teachers, and student groups to further explore differentiated learning, assessment practices, and technology integration in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic Religious Education.

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