



## The implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum policy at state Islamic senior high school (MAN) Wajo

**Abdul Wahid Hasyim<sup>1</sup>, Syarifuddin Ondeng<sup>2</sup>, A. Marjuni<sup>3</sup>, & Andi Achruh<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>UIN Alauddin Makassar Doctoral Program Student/MAN Wajo Teacher

Correspondence Email: [wahyd501@gmail.com](mailto:wahyd501@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

This qualitative field research aims to analyze the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum policy and identify its supporting and inhibiting factors at MAN Wajo. The research adopts sociological, theological, pedagogical, and psychological approaches. The data sources include the madrasa principal, policy makers, teachers, and students who participated in the assessment. The findings reveal that the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum policy at MAN Wajo falls short of expectations. Teachers lack understanding of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and struggle to maximize its development due to the absence of teaching achievement and learning guidelines, leading to suboptimal teaching processes. Furthermore, students' motivation at MAN Wajo is low as the assessment system fails to determine their interests and talents, and class management based on these aspects is less. As a result, students' efforts in answering madrasa assessments are minimal, resulting in unsatisfactory outcomes. On the supporting side, government regulations favor the program, while the inhibiting factors include challenges in preparing diverse learning content that suits the students' learning styles. Additionally, the absence of a guiding framework for implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum causes delays in learning and understanding the curriculum. Limited facilities, teaching aids, and reference books at MAN Wajo also hinder the implementation. Therefore, it is crucial that the Ministry of Education and Culture use this research as a recommendation to improve *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum policy. Policymakers within madrasas should also take these insights into account to enhance the quality of education and foster an environment conducive to *Merdeka Belajar* at MAN Wajo.

**Keywords:** *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum policy; madrasa

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Merdeka Belajar* is a transformative approach to education, embracing change and progress while maintaining the essence of true education: to humanize and liberate individuals. In this concept, both teachers and students are active participants in the learning process. Rather than being the sole source of truth, teachers collaborate with students in the pursuit of knowledge. Their role is not to impose their beliefs but to encourage exploration, reasoning, and critical thinking in understanding the world and its phenomena.<sup>1</sup> The advent of the internet and technology has provided a unique opportunity for *Merdeka Belajar* to flourish. It challenges rigid and non-liberating educational systems, enabling reforms that free teachers and madrasas from burdensome administrative tasks. This newfound freedom fosters innovation, independent learning, and creativity among education units, teachers, and students. *Merdeka Belajar* redefines education, fostering an environment where everyone becomes a lifelong learner. It encourages a dynamic exchange of ideas, empowering students to actively engage with the subject matter rather than passively receiving information. In this way, education becomes a process of mutual discovery and growth, promoting critical and independent thinking skills. The transformational nature of *Merdeka Belajar* heralds a new era in education, one that adapts to the changing times and empowers individuals to become confident, informed, and adaptable members of society. Therefore, the freedom to innovate, learn independently, and be creative can be exercised by education units, teachers, and students.<sup>2</sup>

If the goal is for students to be able to do the exam, the teacher simply teaches ways to answer exam questions. If the goal is for students to be able to learn and respond to life's challenges, as educators, we need to teach them to learn independently. A meaningful learning process requires the independence of teachers and students in determining goals and effective ways of learning. Independent teachers find the right mix between curriculum demands, student needs, and local situations. Independent students set meaningful learning goals, choose effective ways of learning, and open to reflecting with the teacher.<sup>3</sup>

Minister Nadien Makarim, in his *Merdeka Belajar* policy, implied in his message that students are given the freedom to determine their future in accordance with their

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<sup>1</sup>Mulyasa, H. E. (2021). *Menjadi guru penggerak merdeka belajar*. Bumi Aksara. p 34.

<sup>2</sup>Alaika M. Bagus Kurnia PS, et al., *Menyorot Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar*, p.14.

<sup>3</sup>Suharti, S. P., Sumardi, M. K., Hanafi, M., & Hakim, L. *Strategi belajar mengajar*. (Jakarta; Media Publishing, 2020), p.125

competencies, not based on pressure that causes students to stress and lose their self-confidence, as was the case due to the implementation of the national exam.<sup>4</sup>

The concept of “*Merdeka Belajar*” is as follows:

1. Project-based learning with the aim of developing soft skills and character building, according to the Pancasila student profile
2. Elimination of the UN system and replacement with a new system, namely the Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey
3. Form students who are competent and intelligent to the nation's human resources and virtuous
4. Focusing on essential material so that there is time for in-depth learning of basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy
5. The flexibility of the teacher to carry out differentiated learning based on the abilities of the students
6. The learning process using this curriculum is carried out through project activities, which will provide students with wider opportunities to actively explore actual issues.

There are four key new policies of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, namely:<sup>5</sup>

1. The National Examination (UN) is replaced by a Minimum Competency Assessment and a Character Survey. This assessment emphasizes literacy and numerical reasoning skills, which are based on the best practices of the PISA test (Program for International Student Assessment). Unlike the National Exam, which is carried out at the end of the education level, this assessment will be carried out in grades 5, 8, and 11. The results are expected to be the input for madrasas to improve the learning process further before students complete their education.
2. The National Standardized Madrasa Examination (USBN) will be submitted to madrasas. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, madrasas are given flexibility in determining the form of assessment, such as portfolios, papers, or other forms of assignments.
3. Simplification of Learning Implementation Plans (RPP) According to Minister Nadiem Makarim, is sufficient to make only one page of the RPP. Through administrative simplification, it is expected that the teacher's time spent on administration can be diverted to learning activities and increasing competence.

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<sup>4</sup>Alaika M. Bagus Kurnia PS, et al., *Menyorot Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar*, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Belajar, 2020), p.14.

<sup>5</sup>Kurniati, P., Kelmaskouw, A. L., Deing, A., Bonin, B., & Haryanto, B. A. (2022). Model proses inovasi kurikulum merdeka implikasinya bagi siswa dan guru abad 21. *Jurnal Citizenship Virtues*, 2(2), 408-423.

4. With the acceptance of new students (PPDB), the zoning system is expanded (excluding 3T areas). For students who go through the affirmation and achievement pathways, they are given more opportunities through the PPDB system. The local government is given the technical authority to determine this zoning area.<sup>6</sup>

However, there are several points that need to be considered. Unlike the 2013 curriculum, where teachers received continuous training organized by the government, the *Merdeka Belajar* approach requires teachers to engage in independent study through the government-provided *Merdeka Belajar* platform. This shift in the way teachers acquire knowledge and skills represents a significant change in the education system. Instead of relying solely on formal training sessions, teachers are now encouraged to take charge of their professional development through self-directed learning. In the early stages, during the implementation of the curriculum, serious problems actually emerged. According to the latest data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, 60% of teachers still have limited ability to master technology. This is demonstrated by how ineffective distance learning has been over the last two years. Online learning goes hand in hand. As a result, students experience deep learning loss. Based on the data from the Ministry of Education and Culture, only about 40% of teachers can easily learn *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. The rest need a touch from the other side.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, it is important that it is studied in depth to examine and examine more deeply whether this *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum can have a good impact on improving the quality of education, especially at MAN Wajo considering that there are still many educators who are still limited in their mastery of technology.

## 2. METHODS

### Type of Research

The type of research that the researchers used is qualitative research. Qualitative research is research that produces descriptive data in the form of written words from people, phenomena, events, social activities, attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and thoughts of people individually or in groups.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Ainia, D. K. (2020). Merdeka belajar dalam pandangan Ki Hadjar Dewantara dan relevansinya bagi pengembangan pendidikan karakter. *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia*, 3(3), 95-101.

<sup>7</sup>Ibrahim, N. L. Identifikasi Faktor Penghambat Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Pada Tingkat Sekolah Menengah Atas (Studi Kasus pada SMAN 1 Telaga Biru dan SMAN 3 Gorontalo).

<sup>8</sup>Ibrahim, N. L. Identifikasi Faktor Penghambat Penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Pada Tingkat Sekolah Menengah Atas (Studi Kasus pada SMAN 1 Telaga Biru dan SMAN 3 Gorontalo).

## Approach

### 1. Methodological Approach

Referring to the methodology used by the researchers, which is a type of qualitative research that does not promote theory as a tool to be tested, the approach in this case is directed at disclosing the mindset used by researchers in analyzing their objectives, namely by using theological and sociological approaches.

### 2. Scientific Study Approach

The study approach describes the perspectives used in discussing research objects, namely disciplines that are a reference for researchers in conducting research, while the scientific study approach that is considered relevant to the title discussed is an interdisciplinary approach, namely a pedagogical and psychological approach.<sup>9</sup>

## Data Source

### 1. Primary Data

Primary data was obtained directly by conducting interviews with several informants who were involved institutionally and outside the institution and were considered to have knowledge and capabilities with the research object, namely: Madrasa principal, teachers, and students.

### 2. Secondary Data

Secondary data was obtained through a review of literature, documents, and archives related to the subject matter of the research. Some of them are in the form of books, documents, and photographs of related documentation.<sup>10</sup>

## Data Collection Methods

### 1. Observation

As for the type of observation in this study, it can be done with 2 types of observation, namely, participatory observation and non-participatory observation. Observation is data collection by making direct observations of the professionalism of

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<sup>9</sup>Tim Penyusun Pedoman Penulisan Karya Ilmiah, *Pedoman Penulisan Karya Tulis Ilmiah; Makalah, Skripsi, Tesis, Disertasi dan Laporan Penelitian.*, p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>Rachmat Kriyantono, *Teknik Praktis Riset Komunikasi, dengan kata pengantar oleh Burhan Bungin, Edisi Pertama* (Cet. IV; Jakarta: Kencana, 2009), p. 93.

educators and policymakers in implementing the independent learning curriculum, as well as making direct observations of students.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. Interview

The interview technique begins with preparing questions in accordance with the formulation of the problem under study, then designing the questions in a structured, unstructured manner, according to the psychological conditions of the informants (informants) with the help of a notebook, tape recorder, or other recording devices.<sup>12</sup> The interview mechanism was carried out by means of in-depth interviews conducted individually and discussions.

## 3. Documentation

Documentation comes from documents which mean something written that can be used as evidence or information to obtain<sup>13</sup> official documents, both in pictures and narrative documentation that can support this research.

## Data Processing and Analysis Techniques

Testing the validity of data in qualitative research includes testing, credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity), dependability (reliability), and confirmability (objectivity). In testing the validity of the data, researchers used a triangulation technique, which is a data validity checking technique that utilizes things outside the data to test the validity of the data that has been obtained. The researchers checked the validity of the data by comparing the interview data with the observation data.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and survey, the following findings were obtained:

### The Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum Policy at MAN Wajo

#### 1. Planning Stage

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<sup>11</sup>Sudaryono, *Metodologi Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan Mix Method*, Edisi Kedua, (Cet. II; Depok: Raja Grafindo Persada 2019), p. 226

<sup>12</sup>Jalaluddin Rakhmat, *Metode Penelitian Komunikasi: Dilengkapi Contoh Analisis Statistik* (Cet. XIII; Bandung: PT Remaja Rosdakarya, 2007), p. 83.

<sup>13</sup> Muhammad Ali, *Penelitian Kependidikan Prosedur dan Strategi* (Cet. III; Bandung: Angkasa, 1985), p. 85.

a. Licensing Administration Planning for the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MAN Wajo

In the early stages, madrasas independently carried out various preparations for implementing *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum (IKM), including:

- 1) Holding or participating in IKM socialization activities;
- 2) Analyzing/identifying madrasa resources that support IKM;
- 3) Submitting proposals online through the PDUM application;
- 4) Taking letter of recommendation from the Regency/Municipal Ministry of Religion.<sup>14</sup>

After being appointed as the implementer of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, madrasas made various capacity building efforts for educators and education staff, by participating in socialization activities, technical guidance, or training on the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. After that the central Ministry of Religion, the Regional Office of the Provincial Ministry of Religion, and the Regency/City Ministry of Religion provide assistance to madrasa for implementing IKM in stages and continuously to optimize the role of all madrasa residents in IKM. Then the central Ministry of Religion, the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Religion, and the Regency/City Ministry of Religion carry out monitoring and evaluation on a regular basis for implementing IKM in madrasas to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of IKM and its impact on improving the quality of education in madrasas. Madrasas that have been designated as implementing *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum carry out the implementation stages.<sup>15</sup>

b. Planning for the Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at MAN Wajo

- 1) Designing Madrasa Operational Curriculum (KOM)
- 2) Designing learning objectives (TP) and learning objectives flow (ATP)
- 3) Learning planning and assessment
- 4) Preparation/Development of teaching modules or devices
- 5) Project planning for strengthening Pancasila student profiles and *Rahmatan Lil Alamin* student profiles (P5 PPRA)
- 6) Collaboration between educators, educational staff, parents, students, and stakeholders in implementation, curriculum development, and learning
- 7) Reflection, evaluation, and improvement of the IKM quality in madrasa<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Muh. Ali (36 years old) Educational Staff of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 19 January 2023

<sup>15</sup> Muh. Ali (36 years old) Educational Staff of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 19 January 2023

<sup>16</sup>Salmiya (57 years old) Wakamad bidang Kurikulum/Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 1 January 2023

## 2. Implementation Stage

### a. Preparation/Development of teaching modules or devices

The implementation of preparing these learning modules or devices is entrusted to the respective subject teachers, granting them the freedom to explore self-taught learning through various means such as YouTube, the Internet, or discussions with other teachers in the same subject. This approach has both positive and negative impacts. On the positive side, teachers can be motivated to learn from online resources, thereby enhancing their knowledge and teaching methods. However, there are also negative consequences, particularly for teachers who are not proficient in using technology. Those who lack technological skills may struggle to keep up with the curriculum changes and may feel hesitant to accept new teaching methods that involve technology.<sup>17</sup>

### b. Implementation of Learning

The implementation of learning in *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum tends to stagnate. This stagnation occurs due to a lack of socialization about how to teach using *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum compared to the 2013 curriculum.<sup>18</sup>

### c. Assessment Implementation

The implementation of the assessment at MAN Wajo was unsatisfactory due to the lack of preparation from the students to work on the assessment questions, both because this assessment was something new for them and the results of this assessment were not visible when they finished the exam, so the students thought this assessment was not too much impact on what they learn.<sup>19</sup>

### d. Implementation of projects to strengthen Pancasila student profiles and *Rahmatan Lil Alamin* student profiles (P5 PPRA)

The implementation of P5 PPRA has been causing confusion among many teachers at MAN Wajo, as it introduces a new approach that involves three teachers from different backgrounds collaborating to create modules based on a predetermined

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<sup>17</sup>Salmiya (57 years old) Wakamad bidang Kurikulum/Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 1 January 2023

<sup>18</sup>Ahmad Husair (36 years old) Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 4 January 2023

<sup>19</sup>Andi Reski (16 years old) Student of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 5 January 2023



theme. Furthermore, these three teachers are required to teach the same theme to the same students in the same class.<sup>20</sup>

### 3. Evaluation Stage

Based on the results of observations, interviews, and in-depth analysis, the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum at MAN Wajo is very limited to the evaluation area, and this is the biggest weakness in the implementation of this *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, both in the evaluation area in the internal madrasa and evaluation in the mentoring area.<sup>21</sup>

## Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at MAN Wajo

### 1. Supporting Factors

The supporting factor for the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is the support by the government with the spirit of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum to improve the quality and competitiveness of madrasas. This support is contained in many regulations that have been made by the policy makers with the issuance of Kepmendikbudristek No. 56 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for Implementing *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum,<sup>22</sup> Ministerial Religion Decree No. 347 of 2022,<sup>23</sup> and the decree of the Directorate General of Islamic Education, No. 3811 of 2022 in South Sulawesi,<sup>24</sup> even MAN Wajo is the only Madrasa Aliyah selected in Wajo Regency as the madrasa for implementing the first *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Wajo Regency.

### 2. Inhibiting Factors

#### a. Internal factors

The internal factors inhibiting the implementation of the independent learning curriculum come from the motivation, attitudes, and interests of the students.

#### 1) Motivation

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<sup>20</sup>Salmiya (57 years old) Wakamad bidang Kurikulum/ Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 5 January 2023

<sup>21</sup>Sitti Hasnah (29 years old) Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 6 January 2023

<sup>22</sup>Sitti Hasnah (29 years old) Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 6 January 2023

<sup>23</sup>Keputusan Menteri Agama No. 347 Tahun 2022 tentang Pedoman Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Pada Madrasah

<sup>24</sup>Surat keputusan Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam, No 3811 Tahun 2022 tentang penunjukan madrasah-madrasah piloting pertama kurikulum merdeka pada madrasah

Learning motivation is of utmost importance in any learning activity. Without initial motivation to learn, students may find it challenging to comprehend or retain the material presented during the learning process.

This *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum should be assessed in the form of a psychological test conducted by a third party, so that Madrasas and teachers already know the interests and talents of students and can choose a climate and learning style according to the needs of the students.<sup>25</sup> This is what can increase student motivation when participating in *Merdeka Belajar*. From the results of the initial survey, several informants said that the psychological test had never been carried out, so it was difficult to map the interests and talents of students which would influence the teaching methods and strategies of educators.

So, from these several opinions, it can be concluded that the lack of student motivation in learning based on *Merdeka Belajar* is due to the absence of a psychological assessment system that has not been implemented by madrasas to determine students' interests and talents and the absence of management and grouping of classes based on interests and talents.

## 2) Students' Attitudes

Attitude/behavior is an internal psychological factor that has an important role in the learning process. A student will want and study hard or not really depends on his attitude. In this case, the attitude in question is the student's positive attitude/response to the lesson, the teacher who teaches, and to the environment in the classroom.

Based on the results of initial questions distributed via google form to 4 (four) informants, it was found that in the learning process, there were some students who were not focused when receiving lessons. This indicates that there are still student barriers when receiving *Merdeka Belajar*-based lessons.

Based on the follow-up interviews, it was found that the negative attitude of students in receiving lessons was due to the effect of studying from home during the Covid-19 pandemic for 2 (two) years causing students to feel lazy to study in class.<sup>26</sup> Then there is still a lack of classroom management carried out by the teacher when learning takes place causing students difficult in focusing on receiving the material. Meanwhile, other informants argued that the obstacles in dealing with students' attitudes were *Merdeka Belajar* processes and styles of learning tended to be more free,

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<sup>25</sup>Salmiya (57 years old) Wakamad bidang Kurikulum/ Teacher of MAN Wajo, Interview, Belawa 1 January 2023

<sup>26</sup>Nur Hasanah (31 years old) Teacher of MAN Wajo, Interview, Belawa 27 January 2023

so it was sometimes difficult to control students during the learning process, especially during the group discussions or project assignments because many students use gadgets for interests out of the learning or make it an opportunity to go outside the classroom.<sup>27</sup>

Based on the opinions presented above, it can be concluded that there are certain obstacles in addressing students' attitudes. Some students may lack focus when receiving material, as *Merdeka Belajar*-based styles tend to be more flexible. Additionally, the pandemic has led to a lazy attitude towards studying outside of class at home, and there may be less engaging class management by the teachers.

### 3) Students' Interests

If the students' interests well developed, it can increase students' motivation. Learning activities will also run well, so that learning objectives can be achieved easily. Based on the results of observations and interviews, it was obtained from the informants that the obstacle in class management based on students' interests was that the assessment system for managing students' interests and talents was still in the design process because *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum was still relatively new.<sup>28</sup> In other words, there is no way/system to classify students based on their interests and talents.

From the results of the interviews above, it can be concluded that there is a discrepancy between the results of the Madrasa's assessment and the expectations of students.

## **b. External Factors**

The external factors inhibiting the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum come from the parental support, the leadership of the Madrasa's head, Madrasa's facilities, learning systems, learning methods, and teacher competence.

### 1) Parental Support

Parents play the important roles in supporting student learning. Parents' attention can provide encouragement and motivation for the children to study hard because the children need good time, place, and conditions to study. Based on the results of the interviews, information was obtained that there were obstacles to the area of attention of parents towards students, once in a committee meeting, all parents of students were invited to hold meetings with madrasa stakeholders, but it turned out that out of 365

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<sup>27</sup>Nurul Mukminin (32 years old) Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 28 January 2023

<sup>28</sup>Salmiya (57 years old) Wakamad bidang Kurikulum/ Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 1 January 2023

parents of students who were invited to meetings, only 34 people were present, so representatively only 10% are present.<sup>29</sup> Absolutely, this is a form of parental indifference to the existing system at the madrasa. The results of the interview above show that there are obstacles that come from parents of students who are apathetic towards all the rules and important delivery from the madrasa.

## 2) Leadership of the Madrasa Principal

Effective leadership of the Madrasa principal will create the achievement of the goals and quality of the Madrasa. If the Madrasa principal has good characteristics, attitudes, and skills to lead a Madrasa organization, the goals can be achieved. As a leader, the Madrasa principal must be able to influence all parties involved in the education process, especially teachers.

The results of interviews with several informants show the fact that there is support from the Madrasa Principal in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum at MAN Wajo.<sup>30</sup>

Based on the interview results, the madrasa principal of MAN Wajo gave full support to the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. The teachers are required to always innovate in developing learning styles and methods. The teaching style of each teacher is required to be innovative in accordance with their respective characters. Thus, there is enthusiasm and motivation from every teacher to teach in class using the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.

## 3) Madrasa's Facilities

Madrasa's facilities can help teachers, students, and other Madrasa's members simultaneously access and convey learning information without space and time barriers. In addition, Madrasa's facilities enable students to learn faster because they are taught better.

The results of the study showed that several informants stated that learning facilities and tools in Madrasa were already able to support learning based on *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, even though they were not optimal.<sup>31</sup> After conducting more in-depth interviews, it was found that there were obstacles to learning facilities and devices, namely teaching aids for kinesthetic learning styles and laboratory equipment

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<sup>29</sup>Ramli (52 years old) Wakamad bidang kesiswaan/ Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 18 January 2023

<sup>30</sup>Bakri (55 years old) Head of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 3 February 2023

<sup>31</sup>Abdul Kadir (57 years old) Wakamad bidang Sarana dan Prasarana/ Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 2 January 2023

which were still incomplete because other laboratory equipment was in damaged condition.

Meanwhile, other informants stated that the learning equipment and facilities at the Madrasa to support the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum were not bad. The Madrasa has reading gardens, classrooms, and other facilities that can support learning. However, there are a few facilities and classrooms that are currently under renovation. While LCD projectors are available in limited numbers, they can still be used.<sup>32</sup> However, the biggest weakness lies in the fact that there is no *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum book available for any subjects. As a result, teachers still rely on the 2013 curriculum book as the main supporting material, even though the learning process is now part of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.

Based on the opinions above, it can be concluded that the main obstacle to the Madrasa's facilities in supporting the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is the lack of classroom learning facilities such as LCD projectors, various teaching aids, and laboratory equipment. Additionally, the Madrasa does not have the necessary book facilities in accordance with *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. These deficiencies pose challenges to fully realizing the potential of *Merdeka Belajar* approach in the Madrasa.

#### 4) Learning system

The learning system is a well-organized blend of individuals, materials, facilities, equipment, and procedures that interact to achieve a goal. The results of observations and interviews with informants revealed that there are challenges in developing learning procedures, particularly in preparing content that caters to the diverse learning styles of students. Additionally, some teachers may require more time to adapt to the expected changes, considering the busy schedule of activities in Madrasas and the difficulty in managing time effectively.

Based on the above explanation, it can be concluded that there are obstacles in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum-based learning system. These obstacles include the need to prepare learning content that suits various learning styles of students and the lack of a guiding framework for the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, which leads to longer learning and understanding time.

#### 5) Learning Materials

By mastering the learning material, the learning process in the classroom can become more productive and improve student achievement. Alongside this, the teacher

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<sup>32</sup>Bakri (55 years old) Head of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 3 February 2023

must also carefully plan learning activities, including the preparation of learning materials, methods, and materials used during the learning process.<sup>33</sup>

The concept of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum adheres to a qualitative approach, emphasizing in-depth understanding of the material rather than covering a wide range of topics like in the 2013 curriculum. In *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, the number of chapters has been reduced, resulting in a more focused exploration of each topic compared to the previous curriculum. However, according to the informant, while the concept is valid, there is a concern that the omitted chapters have been merged into other chapters, rather than being explored in greater depth.

According to the informant, the concept is true, but the problem is that the learning material chapters are reduced in this *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, for example, there were 8 chapters before when we still adhered to the 2013 curriculum, but now there are only 5 chapters when moving to *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, but the omitted chapters are still included into the chapter that was pursued earlier. As a result, this approach might not truly deepen the teaching material but simply streamline it.<sup>34</sup>

#### 6) Teacher Competency

In order to achieve targeted and engaging learning experiences, teacher support plays a crucial role. Based on the interviews with several informants regarding students' comprehension of the lessons, it was revealed that only some students fully grasped and responded well to the teachings. This indicates that the classroom management by the teachers is not yet optimal, resulting in the overall teaching effectiveness being affected. Furthermore, follow-up interviews with other informants highlighted significant obstacles in the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum at MAN Wajo. One major issue is that teachers do not fully understand the scope of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. This can be attributed to the relatively recent implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, leaving teachers still in the process of adapting to it. Unfortunately, there have been no specialized training or guidance provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Religion, or the Education and Training Center for all teachers. This lack of support makes it challenging for teachers to study and develop *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. The only available reference material is the official *Merdeka Belajar* platform from the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Other informant also mentioned that over time, teachers have shown progress in understanding and implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum-based teaching. Students have started to receive exploratory teaching beyond the classroom, and assignments

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<sup>33</sup>Maemunah (33 years old) Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 1 January 2023

<sup>34</sup>Nurul Arifah Sofyan (29 years old) Teacher of MAN Wajo, *Interview*, Belawa 1 January 2023

have become technology-based.<sup>35</sup> However, the informant personally prefers the 2013 Curriculum as it is considered more suitable, effective, and efficient to implement in Madrasas. The reason behind this preference is that the 2013 curriculum provides specific guidelines for teachers to achieve their learning objectives. Meanwhile, *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum lacks such guidelines, and teachers have not received any debriefing on how to compile learning materials.

Overall, the results of the interviews above indicate that the main obstacle to teacher competence in providing *Merdeka Belajar*-based teaching is the suboptimal learning process in the classroom. This is attributed to the fact that teachers are still adapting to the changes in the curriculum, and they lack a comprehensive understanding of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Additionally, the absence of teaching achievement guidelines or learning guidelines further hinders the development of an effective *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and contributes to the less-than-optimal teaching process.

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