

Kurikulum Merdeka In Arabic Language Instruction At Madrasah Aliyah: A Narrative Review Of Opportunities, Challenges, And Teacher Readiness

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ABSTRACT

This narrative review examines the pedagogical opportunities, implementation challenges, and dimensions of teacher readiness regarding *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Arabic language instruction at Madrasah Aliyah. Employing a narrative literature review approach, literature records were purposively gathered from Google Scholar, institutional repositories, and reference cross-referencing, covering peer-reviewed publications and policy documents published between 2020 and 2026. A final corpus of 42 sources was selected for thematic analysis. The thematic synthesis reveals that the selected studies frequently report significant pedagogical opportunities, particularly enhanced instructional flexibility, project-based learning via P5-PPRA, and authentic assessment reform. However, these opportunities are reportedly constrained by structural-governance barriers stemming from dual ministry regulations, pedagogical-methodological gaps rooted in the entrenched grammar-translation tradition, and resource-infrastructure limitations that disproportionately affect rural madrasahs. Regarding teacher readiness, the literature indicates an asymmetric interpretive profile: while affective motivation and openness to reform are widely reported as positive, cognitive understanding and technological competence are frequently described as underdeveloped, largely attributed to fragmented institutional support. The study concludes that translating policy aspirations into classroom practice requires harmonised regulatory frameworks and sustained, subject-specific professional learning ecosystems. As an interpretive synthesis, these findings provide a conceptual map for policymakers and madrasah leaders, while highlighting the need for future empirical research to validate these thematic patterns.

Introduction

The Indonesian education landscape has undergone a significant paradigm shift with the introduction of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, officially enacted at the national level through Ministerial Regulation of Education and Culture No. 12 of 2024 (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). This reform emphasises flexible learning outcomes,

differentiated instruction, authentic assessment, and project-based learning designed to cultivate the Pancasila Student Profile (Falahain & Santosa, 2026; Hakim et al., 2024). Within the madrasah system under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), the national curriculum is operationalised through specific ministerial decrees (e.g., KMA No. 34 of 2024) and is further enriched by the *Profil Pelajar Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* (PPRA), which integrates Islamic moderation values into all subjects (Rosyidah & Ali, 2025). This regulatory dualism—where national educational standards intersect with madrasah-specific religious mandates—creates a unique governance landscape. Scholars note that such a large-scale curricular transformation demands not merely structural adjustment but a fundamental reorientation of pedagogical beliefs and classroom practices (Chimbi & Jita, 2022; Yakavets et al., 2022).

Arabic language instruction occupies a distinctive position in Madrasah Aliyah (MA) as both a compulsory subject and a marker of religious-cultural identity (Supardi et al., 2024). The subject is designed to develop four integrated language skills—*istimā'* (listening), *kalām* (speaking), *qirā'ah* (reading), and *kitābah* (writing)—alongside grammatical competence (*qawā'id*) (Haqiqy et al., 2026; Syamsu et al., 2023). However, the transition from competency-based learning outcomes (KD) to the new *Capaian Pembelajaran* (CP) framework requires Arabic teachers to reconceptualise scope, sequence, and assessment strategies in ways that many find unfamiliar (Akmalia et al., 2025). This tension between the subject's traditional grammatical emphasis and the curriculum's communicative-differentiated orientation constitutes a central challenge for implementation specifically at the MA level (Putri et al., 2026).

Emerging studies have identified several opportunities afforded by *Kurikulum Merdeka* for Arabic language pedagogy, including greater flexibility in designing differentiated learning pathways, the integration of project-based tasks through P5-PPRA, and the use of authentic assessment to move beyond grammar-centric evaluation (Ar Ridho et al., 2026; Azzahra & Muhajir, 2023; Ihsan et al., 2025). At the same time, the literature consistently reports structural and pedagogical challenges. Crucially, unlike general subjects, Arabic instruction suffers from the absence of comprehensive, Arabic-specific technical guidelines from Kemenag, limited availability of aligned textbooks, and a persistent reliance on the grammar-translation method (Ismail & Syukron, 2023; Rezi et al., 2026). These concurrent opportunities and obstacles suggest that the success of implementation is contingent upon contextual, institutional, and human factors that require deeper analytical synthesis.

Central to these contingent factors is teacher readiness. Distinct from general teaching competence, *teacher readiness for curriculum change* refers to the psychological and skill-based preparedness to adopt and execute new educational policies (Wang et al., 2023). In this study, readiness is conceptualised through a multidimensional framework encompassing four interrelated aspects: (1) cognitive understanding of the curriculum's philosophy and terminology, (2) pedagogical skills in differentiated and project-based

instruction, (3) technological competence for digital integration, and (4) affective-motivational dispositions, such as openness to change and resilience against reform anxiety (Fitrah et al., 2025; Syofyan et al., 2024). Recent empirical studies indicate that Arabic language teachers' readiness remains uneven, with senior teachers and those in rural madrasahs reporting lower levels of preparedness and fewer professional development opportunities compared to their urban counterparts (Kamal, 2025; Muaripin et al., 2026).

Despite the growing body of literature on *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the majority of existing reviews focus on general subjects in mainstream schools (e.g., Falahain & Santosa (2026)) or map Islamic education broadly without isolating language pedagogy (Laila et al., 2025; Zain et al., 2025). Furthermore, findings from MI, MTs, or higher education cannot be automatically generalised to Madrasah Aliyah, given the distinct developmental and curricular complexities of the senior secondary level. To date, no comprehensive synthesis has simultaneously examined the opportunities, challenges, and multidimensional teacher readiness within this specific regulatory and institutional context. This article addresses that gap by conducting a narrative literature review to answer three interrelated questions: (1) What pedagogical opportunities does *Kurikulum Merdeka* offer for Arabic language teaching in Madrasah Aliyah? (2) What are the principal structural and methodological challenges hindering its implementation? and (3) How is teacher readiness characterised in the literature, and what dimensions define this readiness? By consolidating dispersed findings into a coherent thematic analysis, this study aims to provide a testable conceptual map for policymakers and practitioners, while identifying priorities for future empirical research.

Method

Research Design and Justification

This study employed a narrative literature review approach to synthesise existing scholarship on the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Arabic language instruction at the Madrasah Aliyah (MA) level. Unlike a systematic literature review that prioritises exhaustive reproducibility, a narrative review was selected because it allows for a broader, more interpretive synthesis of diverse source types—including empirical studies, policy documents, and theoretical frameworks—necessary to construct a holistic conceptual map of a complex, multi-layered educational reform (Snyder, 2019). This design is particularly suited for exploring the intersection of pedagogical opportunities, structural challenges, and teacher readiness within the specific socio-religious context of Indonesian madrasahs.

Search Strategy and Data Sources

To mitigate the ranking bias and dynamic nature of Google Scholar, the search utilised a multi-database strategy. The primary database was Google Scholar, supplemented by the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), the SINTA (Science and Technology Index) portal, and institutional repositories of major State Islamic Universities

(UIN/IAIN). The phrase "related academic databases" used in the abstract specifically refers to these indexed portals and repositories.

The search was conducted between 1 March and 30 June 2026. To address the discrepancies in initial timeframes, the inclusion period for empirical studies was standardised to 2020–2025 to capture the baseline of the preceding curriculum and the transition period, while policy documents and official guidelines were included up to 2026 (the current year). Publications dated 2026 were included as advance access or early-release publications within the current calendar year.

Boolean search strings were constructed and applied consistently across databases. The primary strings included: (1) ("*Kurikulum Merdeka*" OR "*Merdeka Curriculum*") AND ("*Bahasa Arab*" OR "*Arabic language*" OR "*Arabic teaching*") AND ("*Madrasah*" OR "*Madrasah Aliyah*"); (2) ("*kesiapan guru*" OR "*teacher readiness*") AND ("*Kurikulum Merdeka*") AND ("*Arabic*" OR "*Bahasa Arab*"); (3) ("*P5-PPRA*" OR "*Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Rahmatan lil Alamin*") AND ("*pembelajaran bahasa Arab*" OR "*Arabic pedagogy*"). To manage Google Scholar's dynamic results, the search was limited to the first 100 hits per string, prioritising relevance and citation count. Cross-referencing via the reference lists of included articles and citing articles (snowballing) was conducted in July 2026 to capture additional relevant sources.

Selection Process and Corpus Reconciliation

The selection process followed an adapted PRISMA flow. The initial search yielded 412 records. After removing 87 duplicates using reference management software, 325 records underwent title and abstract screening. Of these, 168 were excluded for being outside the scope (e.g., focusing solely on general subjects, non-madrasah contexts, or pre-2015 publications). The remaining 157 full-text documents were assessed for eligibility. A total of 115 documents were excluded due to: (a) lack of empirical data or clear policy analysis (n=45); (b) focus on MI/MTs without transferable insights for MA (n=38); (c) methodological flaws or lack of clarity regarding *Kurikulum Merdeka* implementation (n=32). This resulted in a final corpus of 42 sources (28 peer-reviewed journal articles, 6 conference proceedings, 5 official policy documents, and 3 methodological/theoretical books).

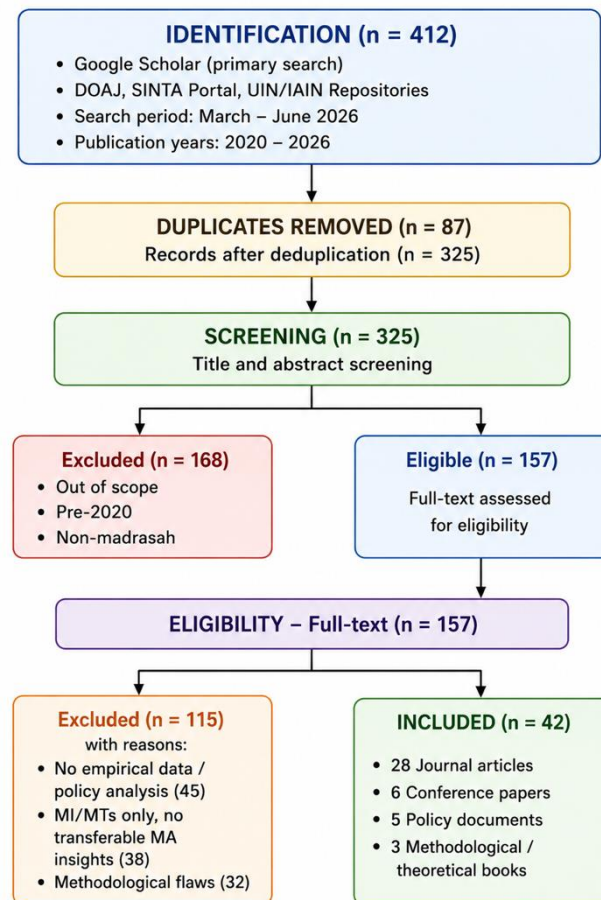


Figure 1. PRISMA flow

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were included if they: (1) were published between 2020 and 2025 (empirical) or up to 2026 (policy); (2) addressed at least one of the three focal themes (opportunities, challenges, teacher readiness) in the context of Arabic language education or madrasah curriculum reform; and (3) were peer-reviewed articles, conference proceedings, official policy documents (e.g., KMA, Kemendikbudristek regulations), or academic books. Studies conducted outside Indonesia or entirely outside the madrasah context were excluded, except for foundational theoretical works on teacher readiness and curriculum change. Conference proceedings and policy documents were explicitly included because, in the Indonesian context, they often contain critical, timely data on curriculum implementation and regulatory dualism not yet published in peer-reviewed journals.

Quality Appraisal and Data Extraction

Given the heterogeneous nature of the corpus (qualitative, quantitative, policy analysis, and theoretical), a unified quality appraisal tool was inappropriate. Instead, sources were appraised based on their design-specific criteria: empirical studies were evaluated for methodological clarity and data saturation; policy documents were verified

for official issuance and relevance; and theoretical works were assessed for conceptual rigour. Each source was assigned an interpretive weight during synthesis based on this appraisal. Data extraction was performed using a standardised form capturing: author(s), year, research design, context (e.g., MA, MTs), sample characteristics, and key findings related to the three thematic areas.

Thematic Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data were analysed using thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The unit of analysis was the *thematic finding or policy directive* rather than the individual article. A preliminary codebook was developed deductively based on the research questions, followed by inductive coding of the extracted data. For instance, the "teacher readiness" dimension was coded inductively, and the readiness levels (Low, Moderate, High) presented in Table 2 were synthesised based on the preponderance of evidence, consensus across multiple studies, and the contextual nuances reported by the authors.

To address the inherent selection bias of a single-author narrative review and ensure dependability, several trustworthiness measures were implemented. First, an audit trail was maintained, documenting all search iterations, inclusion/exclusion decisions, and codebook revisions. Second, peer debriefing was conducted with two senior scholars in Islamic education and Arabic pedagogy who reviewed the thematic categories and the synthesis of teacher readiness levels to challenge interpretations and mitigate researcher bias. Finally, conflicting findings across studies were not suppressed but were explicitly reported as contextual divergences (e.g., urban vs. rural madrasah readiness).

Results and Discussion

Pedagogical Opportunities of Kurikulum Merdeka for Arabic Language Instruction

The reviewed literature identifies four principal opportunity domains afforded by *Kurikulum Merdeka* for Arabic language instruction at the Madrasah Aliyah (MA) level. First, pedagogical flexibility enables teachers to differentiate instruction according to students' diverse proficiency levels across *istimā'* (listening), *kalām* (speaking), *qirā'ah* (reading), and *kitābah* (writing), allowing teachers to adjust content, process, and product based on diagnostic assessment results (Azzahra & Muhajir, 2023; Saputri et al., 2024). Second, the integration of project-based learning through the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* (P5-PPRA) provides authentic contexts for Arabic use in cultural, religious, and community-oriented activities, which creates conditions conducive to developing communicative competence and Islamic moderation values (Ihsan et al., 2025; Luhulima, 2024; Rosyidah & Ali, 2025). Third, the shift toward diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment allows teachers to evaluate not only grammatical knowledge but also communicative, pragmatic, and cultural competencies through authentic tasks such as presentations, portfolios, and multimedia projects (Lei & Lei, 2025; Putri et al., 2026). Fourth, the policy's openness to digital integration creates space for technology-enhanced Arabic pedagogy, including the use of language

applications, multimedia materials, and online collaborative platforms, particularly where institutional infrastructure permits (Akmalia et al., 2025; Suwono et al., 2026). Collectively, these four domains create opportunities for Arabic instruction that is more differentiated, communicative, contextual, and learner-centered, though it must be emphasised that these are structural opportunities rather than guaranteed instructional outcomes.

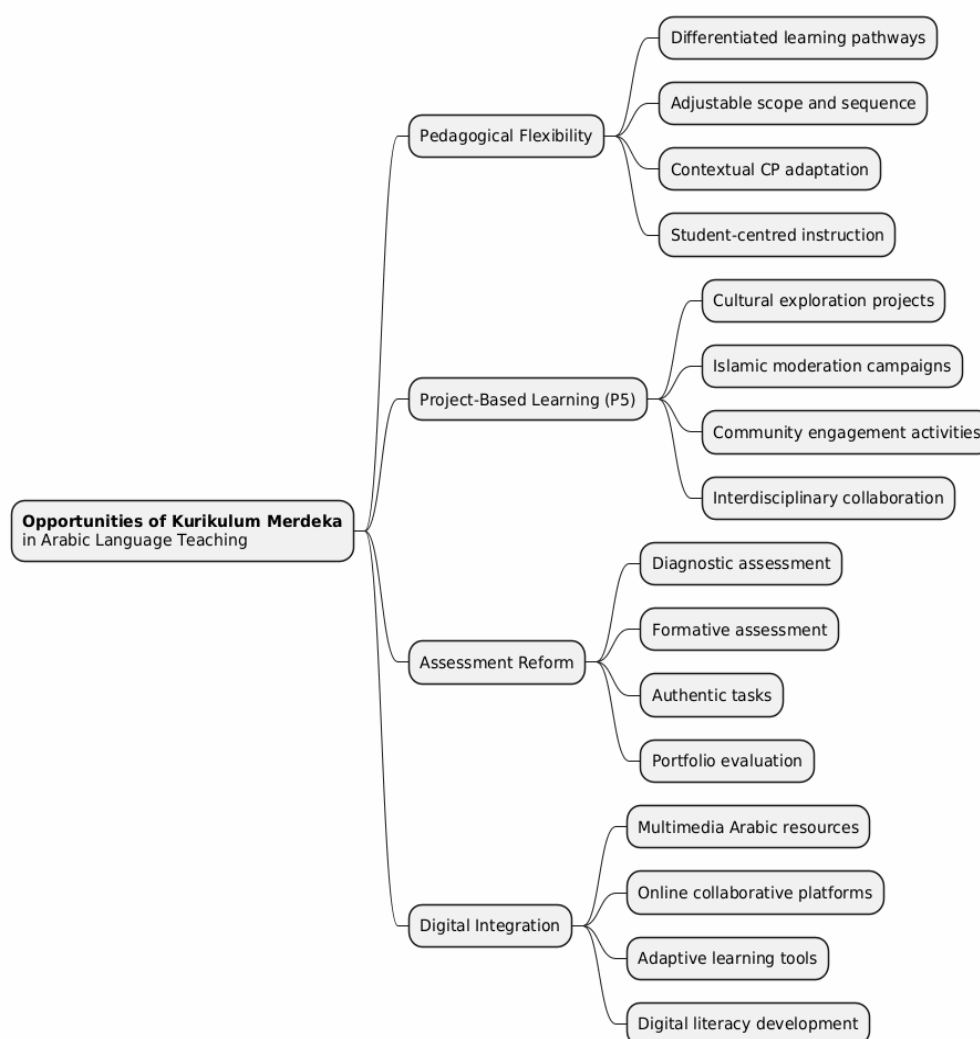


Figure 2. Mind map of the key opportunity domains of Kurikulum Merdeka for Arabic language instruction at Madrasah Aliyah

Figure 2 synthesises the four principal opportunity domains identified across the reviewed literature, illustrating how Kurikulum Merdeka creates a multidimensional space for pedagogical innovation in Arabic language instruction. The mind map reveals that these opportunity domains are not isolated but mutually reinforcing; pedagogical flexibility provides the structural conditions for project-based learning, while assessment reform and digital integration supply the methodological and technological tools necessary to

operationalise differentiated instruction. The convergence of these four domains suggests that Kurikulum Merdeka offers a comprehensive reform architecture rather than a set of disconnected policy changes, provided that teachers and institutions possess the capacity to leverage these opportunities effectively. This holistic opportunity structure distinguishes Kurikulum Merdeka from previous incremental curriculum adjustments and underscores its transformative potential for Arabic language education in the madrasah context.

Challenges in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka for Arabic Language Instruction

The reviewed literature identifies three principal categories of challenges encountered in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* for Arabic language instruction at the Madrasah Aliyah (MA) level. First, structural-governance challenges arise from the dual regulatory framework between the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag) and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), which creates policy ambiguity, delayed dissemination of technical guidelines, and inconsistent administrative requirements across madrasahs (Hayati et al., 2026; Rezi et al., 2026). Second, pedagogical-methodological challenges include teachers' difficulties in transitioning from grammar-translation approaches to communicative and differentiated instruction, the absence of Arabic-specific teaching modules aligned with the new *Capaian Pembelajaran* (CP) framework, and the cognitive load associated with designing authentic assessments while managing increased administrative demands (Farisia et al., 2025; Ismail & Syukron, 2023; Putri et al., 2026). Third, resource-infrastructure limitations—particularly in rural and under-resourced madrasahs—encompass weak internet connectivity, insufficient language laboratories and multimedia facilities, shortages of qualified Arabic teachers, and limited access to sustained professional development opportunities (Akmalia et al., 2025; Muaripin et al., 2026).

It is important to note that these challenge categories are interrelated rather than hierarchically ordered. For instance, governance ambiguity may delay the distribution of pedagogical resources, while infrastructural limitations may constrain teachers' ability to implement differentiated instruction even when they possess the requisite pedagogical knowledge. The literature does not provide sufficient evidence to claim that one category is universally more "dense" or "upstream" than others; rather, the salience of each challenge varies according to institutional context, geographic location, and available support systems.

Table 1. Categorisation of Implementation Challenges with Evidence Mapping

Challenge Category	Specific Challenges Identified	Supporting Studies (n)	Type of Evidence	Context / Location	Contradictory or Nuanced Findings
Structural-Governance	Dual ministry regulation; policy	7 studies (4 MA-specific, 3	Policy analysis (3), Qualitative	Java (4), Sumatra (2),	Some studies note that madrasah

	ambiguity; delayed guideline dissemination; conflicting administrative requirements	MTs/general madrasah)	interviews (4)	Sulawesi (1)	leaders in urban areas report better access to informal policy networks that mitigate ambiguity (Hayati et al., 2026)
Pedagogical-Methodological	Shift from grammar-translation to communicative approaches; lack of Arabic-specific modules; assessment design difficulties; heavy administrative burden	12 studies (6 MA Arabic, 4 MTs Arabic, 2 general subjects)	Classroom observation (3), Teacher surveys (5), Qualitative interviews (4)	Urban (7), Rural (5)	Teachers with prior training in communicative language teaching report smoother transitions; administrative burden is perceived as lower in madrasahs with dedicated curriculum coordinators (Farisia et al., 2025; Putri et al., 2026)
Resource-Infrastructural	Limited digital infrastructure; insufficient language laboratories; teacher shortages; inadequate continuing professional development;	9 studies (3 MA-specific, 4 MTs, 2 higher education)	Infrastructure audits (2), Teacher surveys (4), Qualitative case studies (3)	Rural (6), Urban (3)	Some rural madrasahs report creative adaptation using offline digital resources and community partnerships; teacher shortages are

	urban-rural disparities				partially offset by multi-grade teaching arrangements in smaller madrasahs (Akmalia et al., 2025; Muaripin et al., 2026)
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Table 1 presents a consolidated categorisation of the implementation challenges identified across the reviewed literature, organised into three principal domains: structural-governance, pedagogical-methodological, and resource-infrastructural. The table reveals that these challenge categories are hierarchically ordered, with structural-governance barriers functioning as upstream constraints that generate and exacerbate downstream pedagogical and resource-related difficulties. The pedagogical-methodological category emerges as the most densely documented in the literature, reflecting the direct impact of curriculum reform on teachers' daily instructional practice and professional autonomy. Importantly, the table also highlights the intersectionality of these challenges, as resource limitations compound pedagogical difficulties while governance ambiguity impedes the coordinated allocation of resources necessary to address both pedagogical and infrastructural gaps simultaneously.

Teacher Readiness: A Multidimensional Analysis

The literature identifies teacher readiness as the most immediate determinant of successful *Kurikulum Merdeka* implementation in Arabic language instruction at the Madrasah Aliyah level. Teacher readiness includes curriculum understanding, pedagogical competence, technological skills, and positive attitudes toward reform (Fitrah et al., 2025). Although many teachers show enthusiasm, their understanding of key concepts such as *capaian pembelajaran*, *tujuan pembelajaran*, and *alur tujuan pembelajaran* remains uneven, while skills in differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and project-based learning vary considerably according to access to training and mentoring (Azmaliah et al., 2025). Teachers also face anxiety related to administrative demands and unfamiliar teaching approaches, which may weaken initial motivation without sustained institutional support (Xiao, 2026). Thus, effective implementation requires continuous subject-specific professional development, mentoring, peer collaboration, and an institutional culture that supports innovation and teacher experimentation.

Table 2. Dimensions of Teacher Readiness and Key Findings from the Reviewed Literature

Readiness Dimension	Level of Readiness	Key Findings
Cognitive Understanding	Low to Moderate	Superficial grasp of CP, TP, ATP concepts; frequent confusion with K-13 modifications; limited understanding of philosophical underpinnings
Pedagogical Skills	Moderate (highly variable)	Higher competence among trained teachers; significant difficulties in designing PBL and authentic assessment; uneven distribution of skills across regions
Affective-Motivational	Moderate to High	Positive attitude toward reform flexibility; tempered by anxiety about workload and assessment uncertainty; risk of motivational erosion over time
Technological Competence	Low to Moderate	Limited digital literacy among senior teachers; constrained by infrastructure gaps; insufficient integration of technology in Arabic pedagogy

Table 2 presents a multidimensional profile of teacher readiness synthesised from the reviewed literature, revealing a pattern of asymmetry across the four readiness dimensions. The most striking finding is the divergence between the relatively high affective-motivational readiness and the comparatively low cognitive and technological readiness, suggesting that teachers are willing but not yet fully equipped to implement the curriculum reform effectively. The pedagogical skills dimension shows the highest variability, indicating that readiness is strongly mediated by access to structured professional development and institutional support rather than being an inherent teacher characteristic. This asymmetric readiness profile has significant implications for professional development design, suggesting that interventions should prioritise deepening cognitive understanding and building technological competence while preserving and nurturing the existing affective enthusiasm that teachers bring to the reform process.

Synthesis: The Interplay of Opportunities, Challenges, and Teacher Readiness

The preceding analysis reveals that opportunities, challenges, and teacher readiness do not operate as isolated phenomena but are dynamically interconnected within a complex implementation ecosystem. To synthesise these interrelationships, a conceptual model that maps the multidirectional interactions among the four principal dimensions identified in this review: (1) pedagogical opportunities, (2) implementation challenges, (3) teacher readiness, and (4) institutional mediators. It is important to emphasise that this model is an interpretive synthesis derived from thematic analysis of the reviewed literature, not a

causal model tested through empirical research design. The relationships depicted should therefore be treated as provisional propositions that require future empirical validation.

1. Theoretical Grounding and Positioning

The proposed model draws on and extends three established theoretical frameworks in curriculum implementation and organisational change literature. First, it aligns with Ziervogel et al's (2022) change theory, which emphasises that successful implementation depends on the interaction between policy characteristics, local context, and individual capacity building. Second, it incorporates elements from Andriyati et al (2025) Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM), which highlights that teachers' readiness and willingness to adopt innovations are mediated by their perceptions of personal adequacy and institutional support. Third, it extends Rohmawati et al's (2026) Organisational Readiness for Change framework by explicitly incorporating the dual regulatory context of Indonesian madrasahs and the multidimensional nature of Arabic language pedagogy.

However, the present model diverges from these established frameworks in two key ways. First, it explicitly addresses the regulatory dualism unique to the Indonesian madrasah context, where national curriculum standards intersect with ministry-specific religious mandates—a factor not adequately captured in Western-centric implementation theories. Second, it integrates the subject-specific complexities of Arabic language instruction, including the tension between traditional grammatical emphasis and communicative-differentiated orientation, which general curriculum implementation models do not address.

2. Propositions and Boundary Conditions

Based on the thematic synthesis, we formulate the following provisional propositions about the implementation ecosystem:

Proposition 1: Opportunities and challenges are not simply opposing forces but dynamically interact. While opportunities (e.g., pedagogical flexibility, P5-PPRA projects) create conditions for innovation, they simultaneously generate new demands (e.g., assessment design complexity, administrative burden) that can become challenges if not adequately supported. Conversely, challenges (e.g., infrastructure limitations) can stimulate adaptive innovation when teachers and institutions possess sufficient agency and resources. Boundary condition: This bidirectional interaction is more pronounced in contexts with high institutional autonomy and teacher agency; in highly prescriptive or under-resourced settings, challenges may dominate and suppress opportunity realisation.

Proposition 2: Teacher readiness functions as a proximate determinant of implementation quality, but is itself shaped by institutional mediators. Teacher readiness (cognitive, pedagogical, affective, technological) directly influences how effectively opportunities are leveraged and challenges are navigated. However, readiness is not a fixed individual trait; it is continuously shaped by institutional mediators—specifically: (a) institutional leadership (defined as madrasah leaders' capacity to provide strategic direction, allocate resources, and foster a culture of innovation), (b) professional learning

communities (defined as structured collaborative spaces where teachers engage in peer observation, lesson study, and reflective practice), and (c) curriculum support materials (defined as Arabic-specific teaching modules, assessment exemplars, and technical guidelines aligned with *Kurikulum Merdeka*). Boundary condition: The strength of this mediation effect varies according to madrasah size, geographic location, and pre-existing organisational capacity; in small or isolated madrasahs, informal peer networks may substitute for formal PLCs.

Proposition 3: Institutional mediators function as both enablers and constraints, depending on their quality and consistency. High-quality institutional leadership, active PLCs, and comprehensive support materials can amplify teacher readiness and buffer against challenges. However, weak or inconsistent institutional support can exacerbate readiness gaps and amplify perceived challenges. Boundary condition: This proposition assumes that institutional mediators are under some degree of local control; in contexts where mediators are determined by external policy mandates (e.g., centralised guideline dissemination), their impact may be less predictable.

Proposition 4: The implementation ecosystem is path-dependent and historically contingent. Current implementation outcomes are shaped not only by present conditions but also by prior curriculum reforms (e.g., K-13 transition), accumulated teacher experiences, and institutional memory. Boundary condition: This path-dependency is stronger in contexts with high teacher turnover or where prior reforms were poorly implemented, leaving unresolved pedagogical and organisational legacies.

3. Clarification of Causal Claims and Evidence Strength

The relationships depicted in Figure 2 are supported by varying levels of evidence from the reviewed literature:

- a. Solid lines represent relationships supported by direct evidence from multiple studies with consistent findings (e.g., the positive association between teacher readiness and implementation quality).
- b. Dashed lines represent relationships that are inferred from thematic patterns across studies but not directly tested (e.g., the bidirectional interaction between opportunities and challenges).
- c. Dotted lines represent hypothetical relationships that are theoretically plausible but lack sufficient empirical evidence in the reviewed literature (e.g., the long-term sustainability effects of institutional mediators).

It is crucial to note that none of these relationships have been established through causal research designs (e.g., experimental or longitudinal studies). The reviewed literature consists predominantly of cross-sectional surveys, qualitative case studies, and policy analyses, which can identify associations and thematic patterns but cannot establish causality. Therefore, the model should be interpreted as a heuristic framework for organising future research rather than a validated causal theory.

Conclusion

This narrative review indicates that *Kurikulum Merdeka* offers four pedagogical opportunity domains for Arabic instruction at Madrasah Aliyah—flexibility, P5-PPRA project-based learning, authentic assessment, and digital integration—while revealing three interrelated challenge categories: structural-governance ambiguity, pedagogical-methodological gaps, and resource-infrastructure limitations. Teacher readiness is consistently characterised as asymmetric, with relatively high affective motivation but lower cognitive and technological competence. Beyond mapping these patterns, the review advances a provisional theoretical contribution: a mediation proposition suggesting that institutional mediators—leadership, professional learning communities, and curriculum support materials—mediate the relationship between teacher readiness and curriculum enactment quality, extending established implementation frameworks by addressing the regulatory dualism unique to Indonesian madrasahs. This proposition remains indicative rather than empirically verified and requires validation through causal research designs.

Translating these findings into practice requires tiered interventions: policymakers should harmonise inter-ministerial regulations and develop Arabic-specific curriculum exemplars; madrasah leaders should cultivate active MGMP and sustained mentoring; and teacher education institutions should embed *Kurikulum Merdeka* principles into pre-service programmes. However, several limitations constrain generalisability: reliance on Google Scholar and selected repositories introduces potential selection bias; the reviewed literature exhibits significant methodological and contextual heterogeneity; most studies are cross-sectional or qualitative and cannot establish causality; and the inclusion of non-MA studies as indirect evidence raises transferability caveats. Future research should therefore prioritise longitudinal, design-based studies across diverse madrasah contexts to test the provisional propositions advanced here and to refine Arabic language instruction in the Indonesian madrasah system.

Declarations

Author contribution

Moh. Ilyas Iskandar is the sole author of this manuscript. He was responsible for the conceptualisation of the research framework, the design of the literature review methodology, the narrative literature review and selection of relevant sources, the thematic data analysis, the interpretation of findings, and the drafting and revision of the entire manuscript. The author has read and approved the final version of this paper and agrees to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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