Comparison of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Between Islamic Elementary School and Islamic Junior High School

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	Modern curricula emphasize flexibility, student-centered learning, 21st-century competencies, character education, and collaboration, but they still face design, training, and implementation challenges. This study aims to analyze and compare the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 in Bekasi, including their conditions, similarities, and differences. This quantitative ex post facto research used a saturated sample of 52 teachers. Data were collected through a Likert-scale questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the help of SPSS, including normality testing, homogeneity testing, and a t-test. The results show that the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at both Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 is categorized as "appropriate," with average scores of 3.80 and 3.76, respectively. Attaqwa 35 excels in curriculum planning, while Attaqwa 16 stands out in integrated learning assessment. A significant difference is indicated by a t-value of 4.965, which is greater than the t-table value of 1.796. Attaqwa 16 demonstrates a more comprehensive implementation of the curriculum, with a valid percentage of key aspects reaching 91.7%, compared to only 33.3% at Attaqwa 35. Conclusion: The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum is more mature at the secondary level than at the primary level, influenced by planning, teacher collaboration, and community involvement.

A. INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is now designed to be more flexible, student-oriented, and adaptive to socio-economic contexts, yet it continues to face challenges related to design, accountability, and teacher professionalism (Sinnema et al., 2020; Tong Li & Fernandez, 2022). In Kenya, the curriculum emphasizes active learning and the development of various competencies to support the vision of individualized learning and a smooth transition to secondary school (Fomiškina et

al., 2020). It highlights the importance of needs analysis, authentic materials, task-based learning, and student-centered pedagogy to improve student competencies (Pramila et al., 2025). The curriculum also urges teacher education reform in India through various models to prepare qualified 21st-century educators (Ghosh, 2024).

A good curriculum is characterized by a future-oriented approach, 21st-century skills-based content, and integrated learning that balances academic achievement with students' emotional well-being (van der Walt et al., 2020; Jakavonytė-Staškuvienė & Mereckaitė-Kušleikė, 2023). As an example of interdisciplinary and student-centered learning using interactive methods, the STEAM curriculum can increase student engagement, understanding, and interest in future careers (Gao et al., 2020; Kim, 2022). Lastly, a holistic approach covering moral, social, creative, and academic development is essential for shaping well-rounded students and strengthening relationships among students, families, and communities (Gordon, 2022).

Curriculum implementation is the process of realizing a learning plan through strategies that take into account design, development, adaptation, and evaluation to improve education quality (Callahan, 2021; Marjuki & Baidowi, 2023). Effective implementation requires the roles of teachers, training, school-family collaboration, and a focus on life-skills-based curriculum design and execution (Önal et al., 2023; Aditya et al., 2025). It also faces challenges in integrating character, skills, and wisdom, influenced by teacher commitment, training, autonomy, and managerial constraints (Baidowi, 2020; Aswale et al., 2024; Vergara, 2025).

Curriculum implementation in schools influences students' social interactions and periodontal instrumentation skills, where clinical experience is a key factor in competency outcomes (Anderson, 2024; Oh et al., 2024). The curriculum affects students' learning activities and graduates' readiness for a constantly changing job market, highlighting the need to align education with contemporary demands (Namkung et al., 2022; Pattison et al., 2023). It also supports workplace-based assessments through supervision and professional competency evaluation, necessitating alignment between educational goals and learning outcomes (Harvey et al., 2022; Samadhi et al., 2025).

The 2022 Merdeka Curriculum for elementary schools emphasizes character education, the Pancasila Student Profile, and gradual innovation. Although its implementation is still evolving, it has shown positive impacts (Wardani et al., 2023; Nur Hakim et al., 2024). Merdeka Curriculum is relevant for Islamic education, yet its implementation depends on teacher readiness, environmental support, and the need for training, outreach, and mindset transformation (Astuti et al., 2024; Syofyan et al., 2024; Mustofa et al., 2023). Implementation also faces systemic challenges at the regional government level, though it enhances teacher competencies and offers a knowledge management-based policy model to strengthen the government's role (Alhapip et al., 2024; Kusuma & Umam, 2025).

This research aims to analyze and compare the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 Bekasi and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi. The study seeks to understand the current state of curriculum implementation in both madrasahs and to identify differences and similarities in its application. The research is expected to provide a concrete picture of the effectiveness of Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary and junior high school levels and to assist policymakers in improving the quality of education. The results are assumed to show differences in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum between Islamic Elementary School and Islamic Junior High School regarding teaching methods and

material adjustments.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

The research is quantitative with an ex post facto design, meaning it studies something that has already occurred regarding the research variables (implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum) without any intervention from the researcher. The study was conducted at Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 Bekasi and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi with the following population:

Table 1. Research Population

School Name	Number of Teachers
Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35	28
Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16	24
Total	52

The sample was determined using purposive sampling because teachers play a central role in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in schools. The sample was chosen using a saturated sampling approach, i.e., 52 samples, since the population is under 100. Data collection was carried out through a survey using a Likert scale questionnaire with the following ratings: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (neutral), 4 (agree), and 5 (strongly agree). The instruments used are as follows:

Table 2. Research Instruments

Stages of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia)	
Stage	Indicator
Curriculum Design	Curriculum is developed contextually in line with the aspirations and reflections of the education unit, involving students, parents, and the community.
Learning Objectives Design	Learning objectives are structured according to the achievements and coordinated by the curriculum coordinator for planning and evaluation.
Learning Process and Assessment Design	Learning, planning, and assessment are tailored to the needs of students.
Use and Development of Teaching Framework	I combine teaching materials based on needs and context, and collaboratively develop and share teaching modules.
Pancasila Profile Project Design	Project ideas and modules are developed based on local context and student interests, involving their ideas and opinions.
Implementation of Pancasila Profile Project	The Pancasila Profile Project is carried out according to guidelines, starting with student initiatives and facilitated by teachers or partners for problem-solving.
Student-Centered Learning	I adapt teaching methods to suit students' needs and interests, encouraging independence and responsibility in learning.
Integrated Learning Assessment	I use formative assessments to design differentiated learning to ensure all students meet learning objectives.
Learning Based on Student Development	Students are grouped according to learning achievements and facilitated with additional programs or enrichment as needed.
Collaboration Among Teachers	I collaborate in planning, implementing, and reflecting on learning and Pancasila projects according to school policies and mechanisms.
School-Parent Collaboration	I, students, and parents routinely provide feedback to support the learning

	process and outcomes.
School-Community/Environment Collaboration	My school involves the community and the industry sustainably to support both curricular learning and Pancasila projects.

Data analysis will use inferential statistics with the assistance of SPSS. Descriptive analysis will be conducted to explain the current condition of Merdeka Curriculum implementation in each school by determining the mean score for each research result. Normality tests will be carried out with a significance value of ≥ 0.05, and homogeneity will be tested if the significance value (2-tailed) ≥ 0.05. For hypothesis testing, a t-test will be used, and the decision rule is if the significance value (sig.) ≤ 0.05, there is a difference in the Merdeka Curriculum implementation between the two schools. The research hypothesis is: There is a difference in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum between Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi. The research questions are as follows:

1. How is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35, Bekasi?
2. How is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16, Bekasi?
3. Does implementing the Merdeka Curriculum differ between Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi?
4. How does the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum compare between Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi?

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 Bekasi

Table 3. Survey Results – Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35

Stage	Total Score (28 Teachers)	Average
Curriculum design	123	4.39
Learning objectives design	92	3.29
Learning process and assessment planning	104	3.71
Use and development of teaching framework	106	3.79
Pancasila profile project planning	103	3.68
Pancasila profile project implementation	107	3.82
Student-centered learning	110	3.93
Integrated learning assessment	120	4.29
Learning based on student development	112	4.00
Collaboration among teachers	93	3.32
School-parent collaboration	105	3.75
School-community collaboration	103	3.68
Total Score	106.50	3.80

The survey results on implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 Bekasi show an overall average score of 3.80 on a Likert scale of 1–5. This score indicates that the curriculum implementation falls into the "appropriate" category. The highest-scoring aspects were curriculum design (4.39) and integrated learning assessment (4.29), while the lowest were learning objectives design (3.29) and teacher collaboration (3.32). These results suggest that while the implementation is generally going

well, there is room for improvement, especially in planning learning objectives and enhancing teacher collaboration. Effective school curriculum management requires strong leadership, particularly from principals who actively engage teachers, monitor instructional practices, and promote continuous improvement (Alias & Nasri, 2019). Training programs are essential to enhance principals' competencies in planning, assessment, and providing pedagogical support (Morales et al., 2021). Evidence-based practices ensure that instructional strategies align with learning goals and are grounded in proven methods (Bawa, 2017; Tinterri et al., 2024).

2. **Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi**

Table 4. Survey Results – Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16

Stage	Total Score (24 Teachers)	Average
Curriculum design	94	3.92
Learning objectives design	84	3.50
Learning process and assessment planning	86	3.58
Use and development of teaching framework	86	3.58
Pancasila profile project planning	88	3.67
Pancasila profile project implementation	91	3.79
Student-centered learning	92	3.83
Integrated learning assessment	108	4.50
Learning based on student development	82	3.42
Collaboration among teachers	90	3.75
School-parent collaboration	87	3.63
School-community collaboration	94	3.92
Total Average Score	90.17	3.76

The survey results from 24 teachers at Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi show an overall average score of 3.76, which falls into the "appropriate" category on the Likert scale. The highest score is in the integrated learning assessment (4.50), indicating excellent implementation. Meanwhile, the lowest score is in learning based on student development (3.42), suggesting a need for improvement in tailoring instruction to students' individual developmental needs. The curriculum has been implemented well, although certain aspects, such as planning of learning objectives and collaboration among school stakeholders, can still be strengthened. A curriculum design that is responsive to contextual needs and involves both internal and external stakeholders can enhance curriculum quality and student satisfaction, especially when using a competency-based approach supported by online applications (Concepción García & Rodríguez Expósito, 2016; Radliyah et al., 2024). However, low-performing schools often face multi-level barriers that hinder optimal curriculum implementation, which necessitates strengthening pedagogical leadership and alignment between curriculum guidelines and their practical application (Leiva-Guerrero et al., 2024). Integrating digital technology can also support ongoing, efficient curriculum planning, execution, and evaluation (Revano & Juanatas, 2023).

3. **Differences in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Between Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi**

Before explaining the results of the hypothesis test, several prerequisites must be fulfilled, namely, the normality and homogeneity tests. The results of the normality test are as follows:

Tests of Normality

	Attaqwa 16 Islamic Junior High School	Kolmogorov–Smirnov[a]			Shapiro–Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Attaqwa 35 Islamic Elementary School	first school	.185	12	.200[*]	.942	12	.519
	scondschool	.203	12	.187	.857	12	.045

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The analysis shows that the significance values from the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test are 0.200 and 0.187. Since both values are greater than the 0.05 threshold, it can be concluded that the data are normally distributed. Next, the homogeneity test results are:

Test of Homogeneity of Variance

		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Attaqwa 35 Islamic Elementary School	Based on Mean	.731	1	22	.402
	Based on Median	.644	1	22	.431
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	.644	1	20.774	.431
	Based on trimmed mean	.727	1	22	.403

The analysis indicates that the significance values from Levene's Test are 0.401, 0.431, and 0.403. Because all values are greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that the data have homogeneous variances. The hypothesis test results are explained as follows:

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
Attaqwa 35 Islamic Elementary School	Equal variances assumed	.731	.402	4.965	22	.000	16.333	3.290	9.511	23.156
	Equal variances not assumed			4.965	20.270	.000	16.333	3.290	9.477	23.190

The t-count is 4.965, while the t-table value is 1.796. Since the t-count is greater than the t-table (4.965 > 1.796), the decision is to reject H$_0$. This result is also supported by the significance value (2-tailed) of 0.000, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum between Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi. The success of curriculum implementation is determined by student satisfaction and ongoing evaluation through learning design, teaching effectiveness, and achievement of learning outcomes (Yu et al., 2025; Hwang et al., 2015). Additionally, teacher capacity and support are key, including professional training, consistent reform-aligned support, stakeholder involvement, and active parental participation in the curriculum implementation (Dang et al., 2023; McLure & Aldridge, 2023; Taole, 2015). The availability of resources and a technology-based systemic framework is crucial in supporting learning, teaching, and comprehensive monitoring at all education levels (Mulwa et al., 2023; Law et al., 2016). However, curriculum implementation still faces challenges such as cultural change, administrative barriers, and the need for accurate evaluation tools to improve teaching quality continuously (Fomiškina et al., 2020; Vergara, 2025; Stojadinovic, 2021).

4. **Comparison of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation Between Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 and Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi**

To explain the differences as well as the comparison of Merdeka Curriculum implementation in Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 and Islamic Junior High School

Attaqwa 16 Bekasi, the following table presents the data:

Table 5. Comparative Descriptive Data of Research Results

Descriptive Statistics – Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	92	1	4.2	8.3	8.3
	93	1	4.2	8.3	16.7
	103	2	8.3	16.7	33.3
	104	1	4.2	8.3	41.7
	105	1	4.2	8.3	50.0
	106	1	4.2	8.3	58.3
	107	1	4.2	8.3	66.7
	110	1	4.2	8.3	75.0
	112	1	4.2	8.3	83.3
	120	1	4.2	8.3	91.7
	123	1	4.2	8.3	100.0
	Total	12	50.0	100.0	
Missing	System	12	50.0		
Total		24	100.0		

Descriptive Statistics – Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	82	1	4.2	8.3	8.3
	84	1	4.2	8.3	16.7
	86	2	8.3	16.7	33.3
	87	1	4.2	8.3	41.7
	88	1	4.2	8.3	50.0
	90	1	4.2	8.3	58.3
	91	1	4.2	8.3	66.7
	92	1	4.2	8.3	75.0
	94	2	8.3	16.7	91.7
	108	1	4.2	8.3	100.0
	Total	12	50.0	100.0	
Missing	System	12	50.0		
Total		24	100.0		

Attaqwa 35 Islamic Elementary School

Attaqwa 16 Islamic Junior High School

In Table 5, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 shows two aspects scoring 103, namely the Pancasila Profile Project Design and School Community/Environmental Collaboration, with a valid percentage of 16.7% and a cumulative percentage of 33.3%. This indicates that while some implementation occurs, it remains limited and uneven across various curriculum components. In contrast, Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 demonstrates a more comprehensive implementation. Two key areas, Learning Process and Assessment Design and Use and Development of the Teaching Framework, scored 86, and other areas, such as Curriculum Design and Community Collaboration, reached 96, with a valid percentage of 33.3% and a cumulative percentage of 91.7%. These results reflect a more mature and holistic implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Attaqwa 16 compared to Attaqwa 35.

From the data in Tables 3, 4, and 5, it can be concluded that there is a notable difference in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum between the two schools. Attaqwa 35, although showing high scores in select areas, still reveals limited overall application. Attaqwa 16, on the other hand, exhibits stronger curriculum planning, teacher collaboration, and integration with the local community, indicating a broader institutional commitment to the Merdeka Curriculum.

Curriculum reform and technological integration significantly impact quality and equity in education, although infrastructure limitations in rural areas remain major obstacles (Nathan et al., 2025; Vega et al., 2022). The use of digital peer assessment has been shown to improve student engagement and academic performance, thereby enhancing education quality

(Valente, 2023; Choi et al., 2023). Implementing new curricula often faces challenges including infrastructure, coordination, and structural complexity; however, the Outcome-Based Education approach using lean tools has shown promising results in improving educational quality (Torres-Barchino et al., 2022; Hariyani et al., 2025).

D. CONCLUSION

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic Elementary School Attaqwa 35 Bekasi shows relatively good results, particularly in curriculum planning and integrated learning assessment. However, there are notable weaknesses in the design of learning objectives and teacher collaboration, indicating the need to improve instructional strategy development and internal teamwork. In contrast, at Islamic Junior High School Attaqwa 16 Bekasi, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum appears to be more comprehensive. The aspects of integrated assessment and the use and development of teaching frameworks reflect a more mature application. Furthermore, the school's engagement with the community and environment is better established than Attaqwa 35. A comparison of data from both schools reveals a clear difference in curriculum application. Statistical analysis supports the conclusion that Attaqwa 16 demonstrates a higher and more consistent level of implementation. These findings indicate that even within the same educational network, the quality of curriculum implementation can vary significantly depending on internal factors such as planning, collaboration, and external stakeholder involvement.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1	:	Designed the conceptual framework and research methodology, developed the research instruments, conducted data collection and analysis, and wrote the results and discussion sections.
Author 2	:	Conducted the literature review and instrument validation, processed data using SPSS, drafted the introduction, conclusion, and recommendations, and performed the final editing of the research manuscript.

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