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Project-based learning for Arabic instruction as an innovation of the Kurikulum Merdeka development

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ABSTRACT

This study is grounded in the need for a more contextual and participatory approach to Arabic language instruction that aligns with the characteristics of the Pancasila Student Profile, particularly in non-urban madrasahs. Conventional methods have been deemed insufficient in effectively fostering students' communicative competencies. The objective of this study is to examine the implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model in Arabic language education at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) as part of the ongoing innovation within the Kurikulum Merdeka. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, utilizing participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis for data collection. The findings reveal that PjBL successfully integrates Arabic language content into real-world activities, such as creating family introduction videos and creating vocabulary posters. This approach significantly enhances students' speaking skills (maharah kalām), collaboration abilities, and self-confidence. Moreover, it promotes a shift in the teacher's role from instructor to facilitator, supporting differentiated learning practices. Despite challenges related to limited resources and the need for teacher training, PjBL proves to be a flexible and effective strategy for teaching the Arabic language. This study presents a replicable model for enhancing curriculum and developing 21st-century competencies, grounded in Islamic values.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini didasarkan pada kebutuhan akan pendekatan pembelajaran bahasa Arab yang lebih kontekstual, partisipatif, dan selaras dengan profil pelajar Pancasila, terutama di madrasah non-perkotaan. Pendekatan konvensional dinilai belum mampu mengembangkan keterampilan komunikasi siswa secara optimal. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penerapan model pembelajaran berbasis proyek (Project-Based Learning/PjBL) dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) sebagai bagian dari inovasi pengembangan Kurikulum Merdeka. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan PjBL mampu mengintegrasikan materi bahasa Arab ke dalam aktivitas nyata seperti video perkenalan keluarga dan pembuatan poster kosa kata. Pendekatan ini secara signifikan meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara (maharah kalām), kemampuan kerja sama, dan rasa percaya diri siswa. Guru juga mengalami pergeseran peran menjadi fasilitator pembelajaran yang mendukung pembelajaran terdiferensiasi. Meskipun terdapat keterbatasan fasilitas dan kebutuhan pelatihan guru, PjBL terbukti sebagai strategi yang fleksibel dan efektif dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab. Penelitian ini memberikan model inovasi yang dapat direplikasi dalam penguatan kurikulum dan pengembangan kompetensi abad ke-21 berbasis nilai-nilai Islam.

Kata Kunci: inovasi kurikulum; literasi bahasa Arab; Kurikulum Merdeka; pembelajaran berbasis proyek

INTRODUCTION

According to Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 23 Tahun 2003 regarding the National Education System, the curriculum is a planned arrangement of objectives, content, subjects, and teaching methods that schools direct to achieve educational goals (Qolbi & Susiawati, 2024). In this context, the Kurikulum Merdeka presents as a response to the challenges of globalization, technological developments, and the demands of holistic student development. Additionally, this curriculum features an innovative and student-focused approach, enabling educational units to tailor the learning experience to the specific needs of each student. This approach not only focuses on achieving curriculum targets, but also on efforts to develop student potential holistically. In the context of Arabic language learning, the Kurikulum Merdeka provides a vast space to integrate various teaching methods, such as Project-Based Learning and differentiated learning, which can accommodate the diverse abilities, interests, and needs of students (Achmad & Hikmah, 2025).

This curriculum offers flexibility for educational units to tailor the learning process to the unique characteristics of students, while emphasizing flexibility, contextual learning, and character development through the Pancasila Student Profile (Nurphi et al., 2024). Nadiem decided to implement the policy of independent learning for a strong reason. This is because the results of the 2019 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluation show that the achievements of Indonesian students rank 6th from the bottom in mathematics and literacy subjects, and are in the 74th position out of 79 countries. In this case, teachers play a role in the development and implementation of the curriculum (Mufti, 2022). Teachers can contribute effectively and collaborate in curriculum development, such as designing and compiling materials, textbooks, and learning content (Yulianti et al., 2022).

At Islamic elementary school (MI), the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka presents both opportunities and challenges. One of them is related to learning Arabic, which holds a strategic position as both a means of communication and a medium for understanding Islamic teachings (Bahrun et al., 2024). However, the approach to learning Arabic at MI still tends to be conventional, emphasizing memorization and grammatical structure without involving the student's real-life experience. This leads to low interest, participation, and mastery of active language skills, especially aspects of maharah kalam and istima' (Fitria & Abidin, 2023; Harianto et al., 2024). While Arabic, as a subject in madrasas, has distinctive characteristics, it serves not only as a means of communication but also as a means of understanding the sources of Islamic teachings (Bahrun et al., 2024).

Various studies have shown that the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) model can address these challenges. This model emphasizes real, collaborative, and relevant experiential learning in students' lives. BL is also aligned with the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, and can be contextualized in Arabic subjects, for example, by creating a family introduction video project in Arabic or a vocabulary-themed poster (Rachmawati & Husin, 2022).

MI Nurul Falah, an Islamic-based educational institution in Bangka Regency, has attempted to integrate the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka into its learning management, including Arabic lessons. This effort is realized through the design of project-based learning that emphasizes active student engagement and the achievement of meaningful learning objectives. However, to date, there have been few studies that describe in detail the implementation of this model in the local context of madrasas, especially in non-urban areas such as Bangka Regency. Therefore, it is important to conduct research that explores the forms of implementation, constraints, and impacts of project-based Arabic learning as part of curriculum innovation.

The application of PjBL in Arabic subjects at MI is an innovative strategy that warrants further research. In addition to giving students room for creativity, this approach can also relate Arabic materials to real-life experiences and the environment around them (Rachmawati & Husin, 2022). For example, students are invited to create a simple project, such as a family introduction video in Arabic, or design a thematic vocabulary poster based on their experiences. These activities not only improve language skills functionally, but also foster confidence, cooperation, and other 21st-century skills, as stated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs in regulation titled "KMA No. 450 Tahun 2024 - Pedoman Implementasi Kurikulum Pada Madrasah" such as critical thinking skills, creativity, digital literacy, and effective communication (Qolbi & Susiawati, 2024).

This research has a scientific novelty because it contextually integrates the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the PjBL model in Arabic language teaching at the MI level, with a qualitative descriptive approach in areas that have not been widely researched. The problem addressed in this research is: How is the implementation of project-based Arabic learning carried out at MI Nurul Falah, and to what extent can this approach improve students' Arabic literacy in accordance with the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka?

This study aims to describe the implementation of project-based Arabic language learning at MI Nurul Falah, as well as analyze how this approach supports the development of the Kurikulum Merdeka in a contextual manner. The primary focus of the research is to reveal teachers' strategies in designing and implementing projects, students' responses to these activities, and the actual contribution of this learning model to enhancing students' Arabic literacy. This research is expected to contribute to the development of innovative and contextual Arabic learning theories and practices.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Kurikulum Merdeka Development

The curriculum is a set of learning plans that consist of well-structured, programmed, and planned content and lesson materials. In the Indonesian education system, several changes to the curriculum have been implemented with the aim of improvement. The government's efforts to improve are focused on changing and innovating the curriculum. One of them is by enforcing the Kurikulum Merdeka initiated by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture. Independent Learning helps students prioritize their interests and talents, fostering creative and enjoyable attitudes. The purpose of this Kurikulum Merdeka is to train independence in students' thinking (Nadiya et al., 2024).

The concept of the Independent Learning Curriculum is a curriculum with free learning, in the sense of providing space for students to develop more, be creative, provide opportunities for students to learn more flexibly, learn in situations that are not always formal, more interactive, and are expected to be able to improve graduate competencies, improve soft skills and hard skills, so that students will be more prepared and relevant according to the needs of the times and have appropriate character with the values of Pancasila (Masturoh & Mahmudi, 2023). The concept of this curriculum also integrates literacy skills, knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as mastery of technology. In developing the Kurikulum Merdeka, several approaches can be employed, including developing materials, digitizing schools, implementing teacher training programs, and introducing project-based learning.

Implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in Arabic Language Lessons

Arabic language learning, based on Keputusan Menteri Agama Nomor 183 dan 184 Tahun 2019, concerning the PAI Curriculum and Arabic in Madrasah, aims to guide, develop, and enhance both

receptive and productive skills in Arabic. Arabic in madrassas is prepared for the achievement of basic language competencies consisting of listening skills (*mahārat al-istimā'*), speaking (*mahārat al-kalām*), reading (*mahārat al-qirā'ah*), and writing (*mahārat al-kitābah*), reinforced by language elements such as sounds, vocabulary, meaning, and grammar that are taught implicitly in the four language skills. The theme or topic of material in Arabic learning that relates to students' real lives is presented in a simple format tailored to the students' initial skills (Mufti, 2022).

The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in Arabic subjects includes adjusting the curriculum to suit the special needs and characteristics of students. The primary goal is to create a more engaging and practical learning experience in mastering the Arabic language. This can be achieved through the use of interactive learning methods, culturally relevant materials, and scenarios that incorporate language use in daily life, thereby improving students' language skills and cultural understanding. In addition, the Kurikulum Merdeka provides flexibility in learning planning, allowing educators to tailor teaching strategies to students' diverse learning styles and interests. Overall, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in Arabic language learning aims to enhance students' more profound understanding and mastery of Arabic (Nadiya et al., 2024).

Project-based Learning (PjBL)

Project based Learning (PjBL) is a learning process that centers learning on students and involves students to produce a work or project, and provides them with the opportunity to explore, interpret, and synthesize problems and information related to real-world problems, then design, create, and display a product to overcome these problems (Monalia & Khoiri, 2023). This learning model is based on the principle that learning should be student-centered, as it utilizes real-life problems organized by themes and topics. Experiments and research are conducted to produce real products according to the students' abilities (Aziz & Nurachadijat, 2023). The steps in PjBL include determining key questions, planning projects, preparing schedules, monitoring progress, testing results, and reflecting on and evaluating the learning experiences that have been carried out (Harianto et al., 2024).

Table 1. Steps of project-based learning model

No	Steps of project-based learning model
1	Basic question
2	Designing Product Planning
3	Prepare a Manufacturing Schedule
4	Monitor Project Activity and Development
5	Evaluation of Learning Experiences

Sources: Tinenti in a book titled "Model Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek (PBP)"

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at exploring in depth the implementation of project-based Arabic learning (PjBL) as an innovation aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI). The research process was conducted sequentially as follows:

Research Setting and Participant Selection

The study was conducted at MI Nurul Falah, located in Kimak Village, Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province. The site was purposefully selected because the madrasah independently implemented

the Kurikulum Merdeka and adopted project-based Arabic learning since the 2023/2024 academic year. Participants included grade IV Arabic teachers responsible for designing and implementing PjBL, grade IV students participating in the learning activities, the madrasah head overseeing curriculum policy and supervision, and homeroom teachers. This diverse group was chosen to provide a comprehensive perspective on curriculum innovation in Islamic primary education.

Data Sources

Data were gathered from two primary sources.

1. Primary data: obtained through direct classroom observations, in-depth interviews with key informants, and documentation during the project implementation.

2. Secondary data: collected from relevant institutional documents, including the Operational Curriculum of the Education Unit (KOSP), Arabic teaching materials (modules, student worksheets, assessment rubrics), and student portfolios consisting of project outcomes, photographs, and group reports. The triangulation of these data sources enhanced the validity and richness of the information.

Data Collection Techniques

1. **Participatory Observation** focused on critical phases such as project introduction, collaborative task execution, presentations, and reflection sessions. The researcher documented teacher-student interactions, student engagement, and emotional and cognitive responses during learning activities.

2. **Semi-structured interviews** were conducted with Arabic teachers, madrasah heads, and students, exploring planning, implementation challenges, and perceptions of the PjBL approach. All interviews were recorded and transcribed with the informants' consent.

3. **Documentation Study** included the collection of written and visual materials supporting observational and interview data, such as project designs, student works, and teacher evaluation records.

Research Instrument

The primary instrument was the researcher, acting as the key human instrument responsible for data focus, informant selection, data collection, and interpretation. Supplementary instruments included observation guides, interview protocols, documentation checklists, and field notes, all of which were developed based on PjBL theory, Kurikulum Merdeka principles, and relevant literature.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed thematically following the model by Miles and Huberman, involving three phases: data reduction (filtering and summarizing key information), data display (narratives, thematic tables, concept maps), and conclusion drawing/verification. The analysis was conducted inductively, examining relationships among categories, informants, and contextual factors within the Kurikulum Merdeka policy.

Data Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility and dependability, multiple verification techniques were applied: source triangulation (cross-checking data from teachers, students, and madrasah heads), method triangulation (comparing

observation, interview, and documentation data), member checking (validating findings with informants), and audit trail (systematic documentation of the research process).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Project-Based Learning Planning in the Framework of the Kurikulum Merdeka

Based on the researcher's field observation, it was found that teachers prepare project teaching modules aligned with Arabic learning outcomes (CP) at the grade IV level. The module contains project objectives, activity flows, assessment rubrics, and integration of character values. One of the projects designed is "Getting to Know the Family in Arabic" for grade 4 students, which integrates mufradat (vocabulary) material on family members, simple sentence structure, and the use of Arabic in a real-world context. This aligns with the benefits of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which provides teachers with the freedom to design learning according to their students' needs. This project aims to develop speaking skills (maharah al-kalam), collaborative skills, and students' confidence in actively using the Arabic language (Salsabila & Setiyawan, 2024).

Planning is a crucial initial stage in the successful implementation of project-based learning. Based on interviews with Arabic teachers and madrasah heads, it is evident that the planning process is carried out collaboratively among subject teachers, homeroom teachers, and the madrasah curriculum development team. This planning refers to the main principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka, namely learning differentiation, student independence, and strengthening the profile of Pancasila students (Ahsanuddin et al., 2024).

Project planning also takes into account initial diagnostic assessments, student interests and needs, and the availability of learning resources within the madrasah environment. Teachers use visual teaching materials, such as pictures and photos of students' families, as a stimulus for activities. Additionally, project planning is conducted with consideration for the principles of inclusivity and differentiated learning, enabling each student to engage according to their unique potential and learning style.

Implementation Of Project-Based Arabic Learning

In the context of Arabic language learning at MI Nurul Falah, the module is adapted contextually to be relevant to the needs of madrasah students and local content. Based on the results of class observations, interviews, and project documentation conducted over two months, the project implementation process is divided into five main stages, namely 1) project orientation, 2) preparation of work plans, 3) implementation of project tasks, 4) presentation of project results, and 5) reflection and final assessment. Each stage shows the dynamics of interaction between students, teachers, and learning content in an integrative manner (Ikanubun et al., 2025). The implementation of the project in this Islamic elementary school is carried out in stages, according to the flow outlined in the Kurikulum Merdeka teaching module. The module is designed to guide teachers in integrating the principles of student-centered learning through project-based learning (Alfalah et al., 2023).

The first stage, project orientation, begins with a class discussion facilitated by the teacher. The teacher opens the learning by stimulating the students through triggering questions such as "Who are your family members?" and "How can you introduce them in Arabic?" This question is intended to establish a connection between the project and the student's real life. The teacher then explained the purpose of the project, which is to create a family presentation media in Arabic. Learning expectations are explicitly explained so that students understand the direction and expected outcomes. In this session, teachers also showed examples of posters and short videos as inspiration for projects. This is done as a form of teaching

in the 21st century that prioritizes the use of digital technology in learning (Amarullah et al., 2025). This activity helps students understand the concept of family descriptions in Arabic in a contextual and fun way.

At the stage of preparing the work plan, students are grouped heterogeneously based on academic and social abilities. Each group consists of four to five people who are given the freedom to discuss project ideas and concepts. In observation, students are beginning to demonstrate communication, negotiation, and leadership skills in arranging work steps. Teachers play an active role in guiding the group in compiling the project structure, from collecting family data (photos and information) to preparing descriptive sentences in Arabic, and designing the final media to be used for presentations. Students also learn to determine the completion time of each part of the project, which fosters time management skills early on. This process is a place to apply the values of cooperation and responsibility.

The task implementation stage is the longest and most challenging phase for students. At this stage, they begin to implement a concrete work plan. Some groups chose to make hiwar sentences about family members, while other groups began to practice hiwar to display family images with Arabic narratives. In the process, students actively search for Arabic vocabulary related to family members, kinship relationships, and simple verbs such as "cooking," "reading," and "playing." Teachers provide mini dictionaries and vocabulary modules to support this activity. During the implementation, it was seen that some students had difficulty in composing grammatically correct descriptive sentences. This is where the role of the teacher as a facilitator is crucial in providing both individual and group feedback.

The classroom atmosphere during the project's implementation was dynamic and collaborative. Students help each other in translating vocabulary, checking spelling, and making correct sentences. They are actively involved in group discussions, exchange ideas, and complete tasks in a spirit of togetherness. Teachers act as facilitators who guide and direct the learning process without dominating, thus creating a space that encourages students' independence and a sense of responsibility for their work. These activities not only improve Arabic language skills practically, but also strengthen students' social and emotional skills, such as empathy, effective communication, and teamwork. Classroom dynamics like this reflect the real-world implementation of 21st-century learning, which places students as active subjects in a meaningful and contextual learning process (Alfalah et al., 2023; Rosita et al., 2024).

In the fourth stage, students were asked to present their project results to the class. This activity is designed to develop Arabic speaking skills functionally. Each group presented their family members by mentioning names, kinship relationships, and key characteristics in Arabic. The presentation is done with the help of pre-made visuals. Teachers assess presentations based on rubrics that include language accuracy, clarity of information, vocabulary use, visual creativity, and teamwork. The results of the observation showed that most students were able to convey basic information effectively, although some phonological and syntactic errors remained.

Presentation activities also have a positive impact on student confidence. As was also found by many students who were initially embarrassed to speak in public, but because of the group's support and the supportive classroom atmosphere, they dared to come forward and show the fruits of their hard work. This finding aligns with the results of research conducted by Sulaiman and Nurachadijat, who obtained similar findings. This demonstrates that project-based learning not only hones cognitive competence but also enhances students' social and affective competencies, which support the skills required in 21st-century education (Ilmawan, 2024). Some students even add elements of humor and expression in their presentations, reflecting their creativity and understanding of the context of language use (Maulana & Royal, 2024).

The fifth stage is reflection and evaluation, which is carried out together at the end of the project cycle. The teacher invited students to sit in a circle and discuss their experiences during the project. Students are asked to describe the challenges they faced, the strategies they used to overcome these difficulties,

and the new things they learned as a result. This reflection activity provides students with space to think metacognitively and evaluate their learning process. The teacher also gave general feedback to the entire group, highlighting positive aspects and areas for improvement.

The reflection process concluded with an expression of appreciation to all students. Teachers give symbolic awards, such as "Compactest Group" or "Best Pronunciation", to motivate students and reinforce a sense of pride in their work. Although simple, this award has a positive psychological impact on students' motivation to learn. Some students even expressed their desire to create advanced projects independently outside of class hours. This indicates that the learning undertaken has been successful in fostering long-term learning interests.

Overall, the implementation of the Arabic language project at MI Nurul Falah demonstrates that a project-based approach is highly relevant to support the development of the Kurikulum Merdeka. This aligns with research that suggests the project stages not only train language competence but also build character, critical thinking skills, and the ability to work in a team. This is also the purpose of the Kurikulum Merdeka, as PjBL is highly relevant to the learning process within this curriculum (Suradika et al., 2023). Systematic and structured project implementation, supported by simple technological media, creates interactive, contextual, and meaningful learning. These results confirm that innovation in Arabic language teaching is feasible in Islamic elementary schools if supported by the right teaching modules and pedagogical strategies that align with the characteristics of the students.

In the implementation of this project, the role of teachers as facilitators is prominent and key to the success of the activity. Teachers no longer play the role of the sole source of information, but rather as active companions who direct, provide feedback, and help students reflect on their learning process. On some occasions, teachers also differentiated learning, such as providing additional help for students with linguistic difficulties, and providing additional challenges to students who showed faster progress. This strategy reflects the spirit of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes student-centered learning, as well as paying attention to individual potential and needs (Haryanto et al., 2024).

Likewise, the results of the student-generated projects show a variety of quality and interesting approaches. Likewise, the results of the student-generated projects show a variety of quality and interesting approaches. Each group features unique characteristics in their work, from the use of diverse vocabulary and creative sentence structure to visual design that supports the delivery of messages. Some students excel in artistic aspects and visual presentation, while others excel in language accuracy and narrative power. This diversity reflects different potentials and learning styles, which are given room to develop through the Project-Based Learning approach. This also demonstrates that the model can accommodate learning differentiation and encourage students to express their understanding authentically. The results of the project are not only the final product, but also a reflection of an in-depth and collaborative learning process (Fazarini et al., 2024).

Impacts and Challenges of PjBL Implementation on the Development of the Kurikulum Merdeka and Learning Outcomes

The results of the study show that the implementation of PjBL has a positive impact on the development of the Kurikulum Merdeka at MI Nurul Falah. This positive result was also found in SMA Negeri 1 Pontianak (Ramadhan et al., 2024). First, PjBL strengthens the learning orientation in the development of holistic competencies, encompassing not only cognitive aspects but also social skills, collaboration, and creativity. This aligns with the values in the Pancasila Student Profile, which embodies the spirit of the Kurikulum Merdeka. Second, the project approach enables differentiation of learning, allowing students to learn at their own pace and according to their individual learning style. Teachers can provide individualized interventions while also facilitating interest-based learning. This is one of the advantages of

curriculum innovation at the level of Islamic basic education units. Third, project-based learning enhances student participation and motivation for learning. Based on interviews with students, they feel happier and more motivated to learn Arabic because they are directly involved in real and meaningful activities. The project offers a broader space for expression, while promoting the contextual use of Arabic.

However, the implementation of PjBL in curriculum development also faces several challenges. Within the Kurikulum Merdeka itself, several challenges arise during its implementation, including inequality in the availability of facilities, an unbalanced division of study time, and pressure in choosing subjects, which also cause mental burdens for students. This condition is exacerbated by the potential for a breakdown of social dynamics in the classroom due to differences in study choices, which can affect students' confidence and interaction. Although the Kurikulum Merdeka embodies the spirit of freedom and flexibility, its implementation still faces complex challenges and requires systematic handling to achieve the curriculum goals optimally (Nurphi et al., 2024).

Additionally, research also revealed problems in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah. The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah still faces various problems that hinder its effectiveness (Atikoh, 2023). Limited resources, such as the number of teaching staff, facilities, and teaching materials, are the primary obstacles to implementing the learning process in accordance with the principles of this curriculum. In addition, the difficulty in adapting the curriculum to the diverse local context of madrassas demands a more adaptive approach to the culture and needs of the local community. Teacher competence is also a crucial issue, particularly in the implementation of differentiated learning and project-based assessments, which are still not fully understood.

On the other hand, the lack of digital literacy skills and limited access to the internet and technology add to the burden of integrating digital learning, which is part of the spirit of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The procurement of relevant and affordable teaching materials, as well as coordination between educational institutions, is also not optimal. The complexity of assessments that require creativity and deep understanding from teachers is also a challenge in itself; therefore, innovation and improvement of teacher competence through training and learning communities are an indispensable solution to overcoming this problem.

Likewise, in the implementation of PjBL in the Kurikulum Merdeka in Arabic at the Ibtidaiyah Nurul Falah madrasah, several other challenges arise. First, teachers require ongoing training and support in designing practical projects that align with learning outcomes. Some teachers expressed difficulties in integrating Arabic content into relevant and contextual projects. Second, limited infrastructure facilities and access to technology pose obstacles to implementing digital projects, particularly in creating videos or interactive media. Although madrassas have sought support in the form of laptops and limited internet connections, developing technology skills among students and teachers remains a challenge. Third, the project implementation time is often insufficient because it must accommodate the schedule of lessons and other madrasah activities. Teachers must be able to manage their time effectively so that projects do not interfere with the learning of other subjects.

Discussion

The findings of this study strengthen Piaget's argument in his constructivist theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is meaningful when it is sought and discovered by students. From childhood, each individual tries to develop their knowledge through the schemas that exist in their cognitive structure. That schema is continuously updated and modified through the processes of assimilation and accommodation. Project-based learning enables increased student involvement in the learning process through meaningful and challenging activities. In the context of the Kurikulum Merdeka, this approach aligns with the principle of

"student-centered learning," which positions students as the primary subjects of learning (Mahfud & Budi, 2025). In addition, the study's results also support the previous findings by Rosita et al. that PjBL is effective in developing 21st-century skills, including communication, collaboration, and creativity (Ilmawan, 2024).

In the context of Islamic education, the implementation of PjBL provides a space for integration between Islamic values and 21st-century learning. This is reflected in the use of projects that build students' character, such as responsibility, cooperation, and respect for differences. An innovative madrasah curriculum must be able to answer the challenges of the times without abandoning Islamic values (Nisa & Al Ghifary, 2023).

Therefore, the innovation in the development of the Kurikulum Merdeka through a project approach at MI Nurul Falah is a strategic step in transforming Arabic language learning to be more meaningful, contextual, and competency-oriented. Policy support from the madrasah and strengthening of teacher capacity are necessary to enable the adoption of this approach on a broader and more sustainable scale (Fazarini et al., 2024). The implementation of the Project-Based Learning (PjBL) approach in Arabic language learning at MI Nurul Falah has shown a significant increase in students' language competence mastery, both orally and in writing. This can be observed in the students' ability to express ideas, create simple descriptions, and explain daily activities in Arabic using the project media they produce, such as family posters, video games, or thematic conversations. This project activity provides an exploratory space that is not limited to book texts or grammatical exercises alone, but emphasizes contextual and applicative communicative practices.

Project-based learning in Arabic Language instruction also encourages students' critical and creative thinking skills. The project approach can create an active and challenging learning environment as students are encouraged to solve problems, collaborate in groups, and present their work (Suradika et al., 2023). In this study, it was seen that students who were previously passive in the classroom became more active when they were given the responsibility of drafting a learning project. It aligns with the purpose of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes competency-based and student-centered learning, as stated by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs in 2022.

One of the other important findings of this study is the success of teachers in relating Arabic material to the reality of students' daily lives. Through projects designed based on local contexts, such as creating home descriptions in Arabic or introducing family members through Arabic images and narratives, students feel closer to and understand the function of Arabic in their lives. This aligns with the opinion and research that the success of PjBL is primarily determined by the relevance of the project to students' lives (Rahman et al., 2024).

This also reinforces the importance of the principle of locality in curriculum development. In the context of MI Nurul Falah, located in a rural area with a strong Malay Islamic cultural background, the use of a project that combines local cultural values with Arabic language learning not only strengthens linguistic competence but also reinforces students' Islamic identity. Projects such as creating professional introduction videos for family members with diverse backgrounds that align with the geographical context of Bangka Malaya.

Implementation Barriers: Teacher Readiness and Supporting Facilities

Although the implementation of PjBL showed a positive impact, the study also identified some significant barriers. First, not all teachers have an adequate understanding of the philosophy of the Kurikulum Merdeka and the technicalities of implementing PjBL. Some teachers are still fixated on achieving vocabulary memorization targets and adhering to rigid grammatical structures, which limits their ability to

design authentic and meaningful projects. This highlights the necessity for intensive and ongoing training for madrasah teachers, particularly in the areas of project-based learning planning and authentic assessment (Marwa et al., 2024).

Second, limited infrastructure and access to technology are challenges in the implementation of digital-based projects. In some classrooms, devices such as laptops, cameras, and internet connections are not available evenly, thus limiting students' creativity in creating videos or other digital media. According to the research findings, the gap in learning facilities is the primary obstacle to implementing innovative learning in Islamic elementary schools (Kartini, 2023).

The Significance of Contextual Learning in the Kurikulum Merdeka

The application of PjBL in Arabic language lessons at MI Nurul Falah also reflects the essence of contextual learning, which is the basis of the Kurikulum Merdeka. This curriculum encourages subject matter to be delivered in a way that is not separate from students' reality, but is instead integrated into their daily lives. Learning Arabic, which was previously considered "foreign" and "distant" from local reality, is now perceived as more relevant and enjoyable thanks to a contextual project approach based on students' hands-on experience. Through various projects, they can actively participate in using Arabic to communicate, solve problems, and interact with their surrounding environment (Salsabila & Setiyawan, 2024).

That meaningful learning must start from a deep understanding of the context of students and lead to the strengthening of high-level thinking skills (Suradika et al., 2023). In the Arabic language projects implemented at MI Nurul Falah, students are not only asked to translate or memorize, but also to create products based on their own experience. This not only improves language competence but also fosters critical, reflective, and creative thinking skills.

The findings in this study reflect the synergy between the PjBL and the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka in the context of Islamic basic education. Theoretically, PjBL is rooted in the theory of constructivism developed by Piaget and Vygotsky, as stated by Tinenti's book titled "*Model Pembelajaran Berbasis Proyek*", which emphasizes that knowledge is built through direct experience and social interaction. In the Kurikulum Merdeka, this constructivism is manifested through a learning approach that provides students with the freedom to explore, build knowledge from experience, and solve real-world problems independently and collaboratively, as stated in Peraturan Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Nomor 65 Tentang Standar Proses.

In the context of Arabic language learning, the application of PjBL allows the strengthening of the communicative approach, which has long been advocated in the teaching of second languages (Zaid et al., 2024). Projects designed at MI Nurul Falah emphasize the contextual and functional use of Arabic, not just grammatical mastery. This makes the learning process more meaningful and relevant to students' lives.

Furthermore, the successful implementation of PjBL in the context of MI shows that madrasas have great potential as a space for pedagogical innovation. Although madrassas have often been associated with conservative and traditional approaches, they have not been limited to these. This research demonstrates that with the support of madrasah heads, teacher training, and the implementation of a flexible curriculum, pedagogical transformation can be achieved. Thus, madrassas are not only the preservers of Islamic values, but also pioneers in the implementation of progressive national education policies.

The implementation of PjBL at MI Nurul Falah also reflects the principles of flexibility and contextuality in the Kurikulum Merdeka. Instead of standardizing materials and approaches, the curriculum provides room for adaptation based on local characteristics, culture, and student needs. This is reinforced by the results

of this study, which shows that projects adapted to the local context (such as Malay-Islamic culture, worship activities, and family life) have been shown to improve student motivation and learning outcomes.

By linking PjBL and the characteristics of the Kurikulum Merdeka, it can be concluded that project-based Arabic learning is not only a methodological strategy but also a philosophical representation of 21st-century learning rooted in the value, relevance, and independence of learning (Mahfud & Budi, 2025). This approach encourages learners to actively construct knowledge through meaningful, real-world projects that foster critical thinking and collaboration. This model encourages learners to actively construct knowledge through meaningful, real-world projects that foster critical thinking and collaboration. Moreover, it aligns with the core principles of student-centered education by promoting autonomy, contextual understanding, and lifelong learning skills.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the implementation of project-based Arabic learning at MI Nurul Falah is carried out effectively by integrating contextualized projects that align with local culture and the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The approach significantly improves students' Arabic literacy in both oral and written skills, while also fostering character development, 21st-century skills, and the internalization of Islamic values. Additionally, the teacher's role shifts to that of a facilitator, contributing to increased student motivation and independence in learning. Despite challenges such as limited facilities and the need for ongoing teacher training, project-based learning proves to be a flexible and effective model worthy of wider adoption in madrasas. Stronger policy support, continuous capacity building, and further research are recommended to ensure the sustainability and scalability of this approach in diverse educational settings.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article. All data, analysis, and content presented are original and free from any form of plagiarism. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and authenticity of the research findings reported in this manuscript.

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