



Analysis of the Alignment of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic Language Learning with Douglas Brown's Theory

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Abstract

The objective of this research is to describe the Merdeka Curriculum and Douglas Brown's theory of language learning, and to analyze the suitability of the Merdeka Curriculum for Arabic language learning in relation to Brown's theory. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexible and project-based learning as well as the development of critical thinking skills. These characteristics are closely related to Brown's theory, which highlights several fundamental principles in language teaching, such as interaction, communicative learning, and the development of authentic language skills. The results of the analysis show that the Merdeka Curriculum approach is in line with Brown's theory, especially in the aspects of increasing student engagement, contextual learning, and task-based learning. However, there are challenges in implementation, especially related to teacher readiness and infrastructure. This research recommends more intensive teacher training and the development of resources that support interactive and communicative language learning. Thus, this study conceptually analyzes the relationship between the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and Douglas Brown's language learning theory, specifically in the context of Arabic language learning, an area that has received limited attention in previous studies.

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learning is one of the important components in the ever-evolving field of education, including in Indonesia. One of the significant educational policies in Indonesia is the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which emphasizes flexibility, project-based learning, and the holistic development of students' potential (Rismi et al., 2025). Several studies indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in language learning has been carried out in various contexts with diverse results, such as the use of project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and the development of formative and authentic assessment (Melani & Gani, 2023). This curriculum is designed to provide greater space for teachers and students to determine the direction of learning according to their respective needs and potentials. Conceptually, the Merdeka Curriculum is also intended to support the development of communicative competence in language learning, although its implementation still requires appropriate strategies to optimize students' language skills (Efendi et al., 2025).

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On the other hand, in the study of language learning, theories proposed by scholars continue to serve as the foundation for developing effective teaching approaches and strategies. One of the most influential theories in language teaching is that proposed by Douglas Brown. Brown a prominent expert in second language acquisition, emphasizes several key principles, such as meaningful learning, communicative competence, student-centered learning, and the importance of task-based learning (Tauchid et al., 2025). These theories highlight the significance of meaning-focused instruction, authentic communication skills, and the active role of students in the learning process (Aldzakhiroh, Nopriansyah, & Arifa, 2024).

Referring to this perspective, it is important to analyze the alignment of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language teaching with the language learning principles proposed by Douglas Brown. Arabic, as one of the foreign languages taught in various educational institutions in Indonesia, has its own complexities in both teaching and learning processes. Therefore, evaluating how the Merdeka Curriculum can support or possibly encounter challenges in implementing Brown's principles in Arabic language instruction becomes both relevant and significant.

Research conducted by Melani and Gani shows that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in language learning requires teachers to be more creative in designing instruction, using various methods, and adapting lesson planning to students' needs. The results of the study also indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for more active and flexible learning, although challenges still exist in its implementation in the classroom (Melani & Gani, 2023). Another study conducted by Assyifa and Hadi found that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in language learning involves the preparation of instructional components such as Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objective Flow (ATP), and teaching modules. However, there are still obstacles in systematically preparing instructional tools and implementing optimal learning strategies (Sofiyanti et al., 2025). The similarity between this study and previous studies lies in the focus on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in language learning. The difference, however, is that this study does not only examine the practical implementation of the curriculum but also analyzes it conceptually through the perspective of language learning theory proposed by H. Douglas Brown within the context of Arabic language learning. Based on this background, this study seeks to strengthen and support the language learning theory proposed by H. Douglas Brown, particularly regarding the principles of communicative learning, meaningful learning, and student-centered learning. This study does not aim to develop a new theory but rather to analyze the extent to which the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum align with Brown's language learning theory in the practice of Arabic language instruction. Previous studies have mostly discussed the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in language learning in general, while studies that specifically connect the Merdeka Curriculum with Douglas Brown's language learning theory in the context of Arabic language learning are still limited.

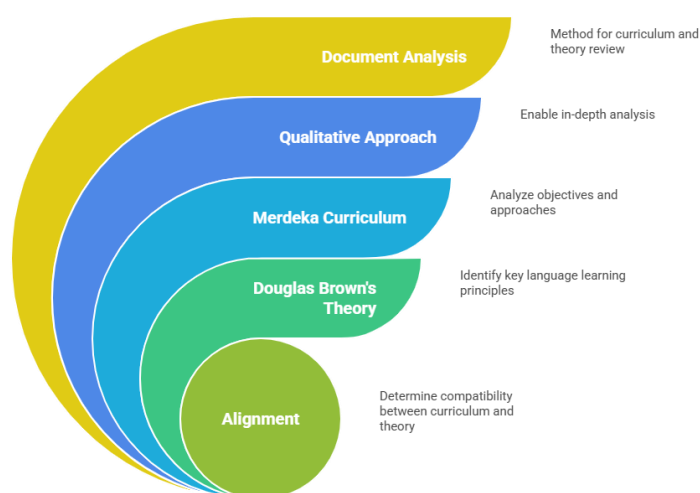
This study aims to examine the extent to which the Merdeka Curriculum aligns with Douglas Brown's language learning theory in the context of Arabic language education. This analysis is expected to provide a clear overview of the strengths and weaknesses of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in supporting effective pedagogical approaches, as well as to offer recommendations for future curriculum development. Through this analysis, it is hoped that the compatibility between the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and the communicative, participatory, and contextual approaches advocated by Brown can be identified, along with potential challenges or opportunities to enhance the quality of Arabic language learning in Indonesia.

METHODS

To analyze the alignment of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning based on Douglas Brown's language learning theory, a qualitative approach can be employed. This approach enables an in-depth analysis of concepts, policies, and theories through critical interpretation (Dalimunthe et al., 2025). It allows for a comprehensive evaluation of the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and their alignment with the key theories proposed by Douglas Brown.

The method that can be applied is document analysis, the first step is to analyze the Merdeka Curriculum in detail to understand its objectives, approaches, and principles, particularly in the context of language learning. The second step is to identify the main principles of Douglas Brown's language learning theory. The purpose of this analysis is to determine the similarities and differences between the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum and Douglas Brown's language learning theory (Aldzakhirah, Nopriansyah, Nasution, et al., 2024).

Figure 1. Merdeka Curriculum Alignment Analysis



RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Merdeka Curriculum

Definition of Curriculum

In Arabic, curriculum is referred to as *manhaj*, which means a clear path followed by individuals in various aspects of life. Etymologically, the term curriculum originates from the Greek words *curir*, meaning runner, and *curere*, meaning “a racecourse” or “a place for running.” Initially, this term was used in the field of sports to denote a distance that must be covered in a competition. According to Harold Rugg, curriculum is a sequence of experiences that provides maximum benefit for learners in developing their abilities so that they can adapt to and face various life situations (Hasibuan, 2019). Several other scholars have also defined curriculum as follows: According to Cow, curriculum is an instructional plan consisting of several subjects that are systematically arranged with the aim of completing a program in order to obtain a degree or certificate. According to Arifin, curriculum encompasses all learning materials that must be completed within the educational process in an institutional education system. According to Mac Donald, curriculum is a plan used as a reference in implementing the teaching and learning process (Hermawan et al., 2020).

Thus, curriculum can be understood as an instructional plan or a set of systematically organized subjects designed to complete a program leading to

certification. Traditionally, curriculum was viewed as merely a collection of subjects to be delivered by teachers or studied by students. This perspective dates back to ancient Greek times and, in certain contexts, continues to be used today (Sukmadinata, 2010).

Curriculum Objectives

In the educational perspective, objectives refer to the targets set to be achieved through educational activities. The expected outcomes and results are formulated within agreed-upon objectives. These objectives guide and direct every step and action to ensure they remain on the right path and do not deviate. Therefore, besides determining direction, objectives also function as mechanisms of supervision and control within educational activities. Furthermore, objectives serve as guidelines for developing more specific goals (objectives), learning activities, curriculum implementation, and evaluation processes to obtain feedback (Hermawan et al., 2020).

Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that emphasizes diverse intraclass learning, in which the content is optimized so that students have sufficient time to deepen their understanding of concepts and strengthen their competencies. Teachers are given the flexibility to choose various teaching tools so that learning can be adjusted to students' learning needs and interests. The Merdeka Curriculum provides educators with the freedom to create quality learning experiences that are appropriate to students' needs and learning environments. The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational policy aimed at giving schools and teachers the autonomy to develop curricula that suit students' needs and local contexts. According to Novak, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes responsive, inclusive, and student-centered learning approaches. This curriculum is designed to help students develop 21st-century competencies such as problem-solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum involves various interconnected components. According to Haryanto, the success of its implementation largely depends on the active role of teachers as learning facilitators who are able to assist students in developing skills, knowledge, and attitudes. In addition, Widodo et al. state that the Sekolah Penggerak program is an important part of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This program aims to serve as a model or center of excellence in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and to provide inspiration and guidance to other schools.

In terms of curriculum structure, the Merdeka Curriculum tends to integrate various subjects and combine interdisciplinary learning. According to Kemdikbud, this curriculum structure is designed to provide flexibility for schools in determining learning content that is relevant and appropriate to students' needs. In its implementation, the government has adopted various strategies and mechanisms. One example is the development of the digital platform ID Belajar, which provides access to various learning resources and teaching tools. According to Setiawan, ID Belajar can be an effective means of supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and facilitating technology-based learning.

According to Hermawan, the main objective of the Merdeka Curriculum is to produce graduates who are globally competitive, morally upright, and capable of facing the challenges of the times (Hermawan, 2020). The strategies include emphasizing project-based learning, developing local curricula, utilizing information technology, and strengthening 21st-century skills. The study of the success and failure of the Merdeka Curriculum policy implementation is conducted to evaluate the extent to which the policy's goals and strategies are achieved. According to Fitriani et al, several factors influencing successful implementation include teacher commitment and readiness, support from principals and the government, as well as the availability of supporting resources and infrastructure. Successful implementation can be seen from

improvements in learning quality, active student participation, and the development of students' skills in accordance with contemporary demands (Tuerah & Tuerah, 2023).

In the Merdeka Curriculum, evaluations are conducted periodically and independently by educational institutions. These evaluations aim to determine the steps for curriculum development in each educational unit. The curriculum components evaluated in the Merdeka Curriculum include curriculum structure, learning and assessment, the use of teaching tools, and the operational curriculum of the educational unit. The Merdeka Curriculum uses formative, diagnostic, and summative assessments. These assessments are directed toward projects that strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile. In the Merdeka Curriculum, the Minimum Mastery Criteria (KKM) is replaced with the Learning Objective Mastery Criteria (KKTP). KKTP is used to identify students who need additional enrichment or remedial support.

Douglas Brown's Curriculum Development Model

Curriculum Development

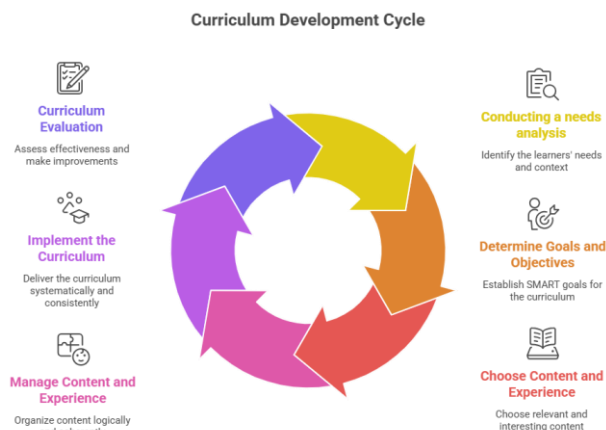
Curriculum development is a process of planning, implementing, and evaluating a curriculum that ultimately results in a curriculum design. According to Howson, Keitel, and Kilpatrick, curriculum developers cannot ignore the social, political, and educational systems embedded within the school curriculum (Ardianti & Amalia, 2022). This greatly influences the success of replicating well-implemented programs in other environments or schools. In curriculum studies, models are often used graphically to illustrate program components, the relationships among components, and the processes of building and implementing programs. In principle, curriculum development concerning advances in science and technology must be balanced with educational development. On the other hand, society often has limitations in receiving, transmitting, and processing information. Therefore, a selective, appropriate, and highly relevant program development process is required. To achieve this, a program development model with an appropriate approach is necessary (Hermawati et al., 2024).

The selection of a curriculum development model is not only based on its strengths, quality, and ability to achieve optimal success, but must also be aligned with the educational system, educational management system, and the instructional design model being used (Mubarok et al., 2021).

Douglas Brown's Curriculum Development Model

Douglas Brown is a well-known figure in the field of language teaching and learning. He proposed a language curriculum development model consisting of six steps:

Figure 2. Curriculum Development Cycle



There are several insights into how Brown's model has been applied in the context of Arabic language teaching. For example, a study used Brown's model to develop an Arabic language performance curriculum based on the standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (Hasanah et al., 2021). Douglas Brown argues that language skills learning must adhere to three main principles: cognitive, affective, and linguistic. In the cognitive principle, language learning should connect instructional material with students' personal experiences. In the affective principle, language skills learning should encourage students to confidently use applied language in interaction and communication situations. Meanwhile, in the linguistic principle, language learning must include understanding and examining cultural aspects related to language learning (Brown, 2019).

According to Khoiril Huda, Douglas Brown states that language learning is not a series of easy steps that can be programmed into a quick do-it-yourself package (Ilmiani et al., 2020). This implies that language learning cannot be considered an activity with a fixed and standardized approach. From this statement, it can be concluded that there is no single language teaching strategy that is considered the best, most effective, or most appropriate. In other words, language teaching approaches must vary and should not be limited to a single strategy.

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic Language Learning

In this study, we found that a school institution is considered ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in accordance with the directives of the Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, aiming to improve learning and provide greater freedom for students in terms of their learning and skills. The Arabic language curriculum itself has undergone many changes throughout its development process. These include changes in curriculum objectives, characteristics, content, methods or approaches, and evaluation (Wahdah et al., 2023). To implement the curriculum in a Madrasah educational institution, teachers should use the KMA 183 of 2020 textbook as a guideline. This textbook was issued by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and updated from previous teaching materials. KMA 183 is somewhat similar to KMA 165 of 2016, which focuses on religious subjects and Arabic language learning as standards for madrasahs.

The purpose of this adjustment and implementation is to prepare the nation with religious and Islamic thinking. In addition, KMA 184 of 2020, which serves as a curriculum guideline to encourage innovation and quality in madrasahs, is designed to help madrasahs instill character development and enable them to implement the Pancasila Student Profile in their education (Nisa & Ghifari, 2023). In KMA 183 of 2020, the rationale for Arabic language learning within the Merdeka Curriculum aims to prepare students to possess Arabic language competencies that include: The ability to express feelings, thoughts, and ideas in Arabic. The internalization of Arabic language skills so that they can be used in various situations. The use of Arabic to study religion, science, and culture. Language proficiency accompanied by moderate behavior and critical thinking. KMA 183 of 2020 also outlines the orientation of Arabic language learning: The ability to use Arabic as a tool for global communication. The ability to use Arabic to study religion from authentic sources.

Unlike KMA 183 of 2019, the characteristics of Arabic language learning in KMA 183 of 2020, which is widely used by madrasah institutions, show many differences.

Table 1. KMA 183 of 2019 and KMA 183 of 2020

No.	KMA 183 of 2020	KMA 183 of 2020
1.	Language Competence (al-kifāyah al-lughawiyah), which is a fundamental competence in language covering four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These language skills must be carried out based on proper and correct language elements, including sounds, vocabulary, and grammatical rules.	Improving the Arabic curriculum by enhancing students' language skills (al-mahārah al-lughawiyah) in various situations within the madrasah environment or the wider community.
2.	Communicative Competence (al-kifāyah al-ittiṣāliyah), which is the competence to perform speech acts in the target language across various social contexts, both orally and in writing. Arabic should be viewed from the perspective of its functionality as a means of communication.	Arabic as a medium for developing thinking skills
3.	Cultural Competence (al-kifāyah al-thaqāfiyah), which refers to Arabic language learning that incorporates cultural elements, including Islamic culture, global culture, and local culture. These elements are reflected in the themes or topics presented in learning.	The presentation of Arabic is not focused on grammar (qawā'id, naḥwu, and ṣarf) in a theoretical sense, but rather on functional or applied grammar

In the Arabic language subject, it is clear that it aligns with the competencies outlined in KMA 183 of 2020.

Figure 3. There are four language skills presented in each chapter discussion.



Figure 2. The integration of local culture and academic culture.



Arabic language learning in a particular madrasah institution that implements the Merdeka Curriculum should refer to KMA 183 of 2020, which clearly provides space for students to develop and refine the three characteristics mentioned in Table 1. There are differences in the assessment columns for Arabic language learning between the K13 curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, as shown in the following table:

Table 2. Skills score in the K13 curriculum.

No.	NISN	Name	M/F	Report	Predicate	Description
1.	00075***	DAB	M	85	B	Skilled, especially in the profession (<i>al-mibnah</i>).
2.	00053***	BCL	F	90	B	Skilled, especially in the profession (<i>al-mibnah</i>).

Table 3. Knowledge score in the K13 curriculum.

No	NISN	Name	M/F	Daily	PAS/PAT	Report	Predicate	Description
1.	00075***	DAB	M	88	95	90	B	Having good competence, especially in the profession (<i>al-mibnah</i>).
2.	00053***	BCL	F	86	86	90	B	Having good competence, especially in the profession (<i>al-mibnah</i>).

Table 4. Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum.

No.	NISN	Nane	Sumatif	PAS/PAT	Raport	Competency Achievement
1.	00075***	DAB	98	88	90	Demonstrates excellent mastery of the profession (<i>al-mibnah</i>).
2.	00053***	BCL	85	100	91	Demonstrates excellent mastery of the profession (<i>al-mibnah</i>).

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in a madrasah educational institution, it should comply with the regulations of the Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, which stipulate 1,512–1,692 hours per year for the equivalent of Grade XI, with a breakdown of 5 lesson hours (JP) per week or 180 JP per year. A maximum of 2 JP per week or 64 JP per year may be allocated in certain contexts. The total lesson hours do not include Local Content subjects and/or additional subjects organized by the educational unit. The time allocation for 1 JP is 45 minutes (Roziqin & Hotima, 2022).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in a madrasah institution should differ from the K13 curriculum. In the Merdeka Curriculum, compulsory subjects are adjusted according to each specialization, with nine subjects that must be fulfilled outside the core compulsory subjects. However, in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasahs, there are eleven compulsory subjects. In public schools, religious subjects are allocated only two hours, whereas under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (KEMENAG), there are eleven subjects, including Al-Qur'an Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, and Islamic Cultural History (SKI). The subjects mentioned generally have only a two-hour allocation in public schools. Teaching materials are usually completed within 5–6 meetings per chapter, and it is estimated that one or two topics need to be repeated due to their high level of difficulty.

In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, students carry out learning as usual in their respective classrooms for compulsory madrasah subjects. However, they separate themselves to join their chosen elective learning groups in what is referred to as a *moving class* system. In this system, students can learn comfortably according to their selected subjects, so they do not feel bored with monotonous learning (Nurmalina & Hasnadi, 2022). It should be noted that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum does not only affect students but also impacts the school by enhancing the competitiveness of madrasahs and improving the management of learning processes (Zarkasi et al., 2022).

In practice, many students and parents initially feel confused due to the curriculum changes in madrasahs. Therefore, the madrasah institution should first conduct extensive discussions to provide understanding to students and parents regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. After such discussions, parents can offer guidance in choosing the best options for their children's future, and students will no longer feel burdened by the obligation to master all subjects (Khusni et al., 2022).

Facilities and infrastructure are supporting factors that enhance students' motivation to learn and ensure that learning runs effectively to achieve the desired educational goals. Adequate facilities can also increase teachers' enthusiasm for teaching (Sinta, 2019). Facilities and infrastructure are tools directly related to teaching and learning activities that provide comfort in classroom or outdoor learning. Proper

and high-quality management of facilities and infrastructure can make learners feel more comfortable and engaged in the learning process (Indrawan, 2015).

Table 5. Stages of Curriculum Development and Their Implementation in the Merdeka Curriculum

No	Curriculum Development Stage	Description	Implementation in the Merdeka Curriculum
1	Conducting Needs Analysis	Before developing a curriculum, it is necessary to identify learners' needs and the context in which the language will be used. This process can be conducted through surveys, interviews, and observations.	The Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for schools and teachers to design learning based on students' needs and local contexts. In Arabic language learning, contextual elements and local culture are incorporated into the learning materials.
2	Determining Goals and Objectives	After identifying the needs, clear goals and objectives must be formulated. These objectives should follow the SMART principles (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound).	The Merdeka Curriculum aims to develop 21st-century competencies such as problem-solving, creativity, communication, and collaboration. According to KMA 184 of 2020, the curriculum also supports innovation in madrasas, character development, and the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile.
3	Selecting Content and Learning Experiences	Learning content and experiences should be selected based on the curriculum goals. The materials must be relevant to learners' needs and interests, and learning activities should be interactive and engaging.	The curriculum structure allows schools to determine relevant learning content. The government also supports implementation through digital platforms such as ID Belajar. According to KMA 183 of 2020, Arabic learning aims to develop students' ability to express ideas, internalize language skills, use Arabic to study religion and knowledge, and develop critical and moderate attitudes.
4	Organizing Content and Learning Experiences	Learning content must be organized logically and coherently through sequencing, scaffolding, and the integration of language skills.	The Merdeka Curriculum integrates different subjects and promotes interdisciplinary learning. In KMA 183 of 2020, Arabic language competence includes four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, supported by language elements such as sounds, vocabulary, and grammar.
5	Implementing the Curriculum	The curriculum must be implemented systematically and consistently. Teachers are	The Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers to choose teaching methods and tools according to students' needs. However, the

		expected to apply various strategies and techniques to accommodate diverse learning styles and needs.	broad flexibility sometimes creates additional administrative burdens for teachers, making the implementation not fully optimal.
6	Curriculum Evaluation	Curriculum evaluation is necessary to determine whether the objectives have been achieved. It can be conducted through tests, observations, and feedback from teachers and students.	In the Merdeka Curriculum, evaluation is conducted periodically by each educational unit. It includes diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments and is often linked to projects that strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to assess the alignment between the Merdeka Curriculum and Douglas Brown's language learning theory in the context of Arabic language education. The results of the analysis indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes flexible, project-based learning and critical thinking, is aligned with the theory proposed by Douglas Brown, which focuses on language teaching principles such as interaction, communicative learning, and the development of authentic language skills. Challenges in implementation have been identified, particularly regarding teacher readiness and infrastructure. Intensive teacher training and the development of resources that support interactive and communicative language learning are recommended. The Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility and autonomy for educators, encouraging quality learning tailored to students' needs and local contexts. However, effective implementation depends on active teacher facilitation, supportive school initiatives, and digital learning resources such as the ID Belajar platform to enhance interactive and technology-based education. To ensure successful implementation, commitment from teachers, school leaders, and government support, along with adequate resources and infrastructure, is essential.

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Statement

Authors' Contributions

Sri Jomila Oktari & Al Magfira Jumahir: Original manuscript writing and compilation, conceptualization, data accuracy; Ilman Mahbubillah & Beri Nopriansyah: Visualization, methodology; Idrus Muchsin bin Agil: Language enhancement, investigation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this research was conducted without any conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval

The place or location studied has agreed to conduct the research and is willing to have the results of this research published.

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