



A Comparative Analysis of the Implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic Language Learning at a Modern Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

Arabic language learning in modern Islamic boarding schools has developed alongside the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum within Indonesia's national education system. Differences in teaching approaches, learning materials, methods, assessment, and learning outcomes make it important to comparatively examine the implementation of these two curricula. This study aims to compare the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning, focusing on teaching methods, learning materials, assessment, and students' Arabic learning outcomes. This research employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The data were obtained through interviews with two Arabic language teachers at Pondok Pesantren Al-Anwar, Kumpeh, Muaro Jambi City. The participants were selected based on the research focus, namely the comparative implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning. Data collection used structured and semi-structured interviews (in-depth interviews), enabling researchers to obtain both predetermined information and additional information through follow-up questions. Data were analyzed through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or data verification. The results show significant differences between the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in four main aspects: Arabic teaching methods, Arabic learning materials, Arabic language assessment, and students' Arabic learning outcomes. Each curriculum has different characteristics and proportions in its implementation. The 2013 Curriculum emphasizes structured learning and the development of students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, while the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater flexibility in adapting learning to students' needs and potential. Nevertheless, the Merdeka Curriculum is essentially a development of the 2013 Curriculum and represents an educational innovation in Indonesia. It seeks to continue and improve the learning programs of the 2013 Curriculum while addressing aspects that still require evaluation and development.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the traditional educational institutions in Indonesia is the Islamic boarding school (*pondok pesantren*), which plays an important role in shaping the character and knowledge of *santri*. As a traditional educational institution, the existence of Islamic boarding schools is closely associated with a charismatic leader commonly referred to as a *kiai* (Suresman & Faqihuddin, 2026). Arabic language learning occupies an important position in the *pesantren* curriculum because Arabic is the primary language for understanding Islamic religious sources and literature, including the Qur'an, Hadith, and classical Islamic texts (Asmaniah et al., 2024). Along with social and educational developments, traditional Islamic boarding schools have also evolved into modern Islamic boarding schools. These institutions generally integrate the *pesantren* curriculum with the national curriculum because they manage formal schools under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology or the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This integration creates a distinctive context for Arabic language learning, particularly in the implementation of national curriculum policies within modern Islamic boarding schools.

Arabic language learning in Indonesia contributes to students' language development and supports their understanding of Islamic teachings (Asmaniah et al., 2026). The national education system has undergone several curriculum changes, including the transition from the School-Based Curriculum (KTSP) to the 2013 Curriculum and subsequently to the Merdeka Curriculum. The 2013 Curriculum was introduced to strengthen students' competencies in knowledge, skills, and attitudes, while the Merdeka Curriculum was developed to provide greater flexibility in learning and to emphasize essential competencies, character development, and students' learning needs. In Arabic language learning, these curriculum changes influence learning planning, teaching methods, learning materials, assessment, and the organization of learning activities. Therefore, comparing the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum is important for understanding how curriculum changes are reflected in Arabic language learning in modern Islamic boarding schools.

The 2013 Curriculum was officially launched on July 15, 2013, and its implementation began in the 2013/2014 academic year in selected schools. Under this curriculum, syllabus development was primarily the responsibility of the government, while certain subjects could be developed by educational units (Amiruddin Amiruddin et al., 2022). The curriculum is competency-based and emphasizes a scientific approach in the learning process. Students are positioned as active participants who are expected to develop knowledge, skills, creativity, and character (Priawasana & Subiyantoro, 2024). The 2013 Curriculum also emphasizes the development of students' faith, productivity, creativity, innovation, and affective dimensions, as well as their ability to contribute to society and the wider world (Dzata Rahmah et al., 2022). In its implementation, the scientific approach involves observing, questioning, experimenting, associating or reasoning, and communicating. The application of these activities requires teachers to consider learning materials, student characteristics, and appropriate learning methods (Brunner et al., 2024).

Assessment in the 2013 Curriculum covers students' knowledge, attitudes, and skills and is integrated into the planning and implementation of the learning process. Evaluation is used to examine the learning process and students' achievement based on predetermined competencies (Pouw & Mulyanti, 2023). In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum emerged as part of Indonesia's efforts to recover and transform education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially introduced as an option for educational recovery in 2021, the curriculum developed from the prototype curriculum and emphasized flexibility, essential learning materials, competency development, and student-centered learning (Mahmudah, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum also provides

greater opportunities for teachers to adapt learning activities to students' needs, interests, and potential. Project-based and collaborative activities can be used to explore contextual issues while supporting character development and competency formation [(Mahmudah, 2022)]. Thus, the two curricula differ in curriculum structure, learning organization, assessment, and the degree of flexibility provided to teachers and students.

Arabic language learning involves the acquisition and application of language knowledge and skills, beginning with basic vocabulary, sentence structures, and progressing to the four fundamental skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Asmaniah et al., 2024). At higher levels, Arabic learning also encompasses linguistic disciplines such as *nahwu*, *tasrif*, and *balaghah*, including *ma'ani*, *bayan*, and *badi'*. The position of Arabic in Islamic education is closely related to its function as a language for understanding Islamic sources and scholarly literature. Historical discussions of Islamic education also indicate that Arabic received an important position in institutions such as Madrasah Nizamiyah because of its relationship with the study of the Qur'an and Hadith (Siompu, 2019). Within the current curriculum context, the implementation of Arabic language learning therefore requires attention to the relationship between curriculum structure, learning objectives, teaching methods, learning materials, and assessment. The 2013 Curriculum emphasizes a structured scientific learning process, whereas the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater flexibility for teachers to organize learning according to students' needs and competency development.

Several previous studies have compared the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. Hamzah Usaid Uzza and Dwi Setia Kurniawan found differences in Arabic language learning between the two curricula, particularly in curriculum competencies, phase-based learning outcomes, learning objective pathways, teaching modules, and assessment. The 2013 Curriculum separates knowledge and skills assessment and uses KKM, whereas the Merdeka Curriculum applies formative and summative assessment and uses KKTP. Martatiana et al. found that both curricula are oriented toward the objectives of the national education system, although the 2013 Curriculum emphasizes cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies through a scientific approach, while the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the Pancasila Student Profile, P5, and differentiated learning. Angga et al., examined curriculum implementation in elementary schools and identified differences between the intended curriculum concepts and their implementation in educational practice (Angga et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Mardiana and Emmiyati, compared the implementation of the two curricula at SMA Abdussalam and identified differences in their implementation and the challenges encountered by the school. These studies provide a basis for further examining curriculum implementation, particularly in the specific context of Arabic language learning in modern Islamic boarding schools (Mardiana & Emmiyati, 2024).

Based on the discussion above, this study focuses on comparing the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning in modern Islamic boarding schools. The comparison focuses on four aspects, namely teaching methods, learning materials, assessment, and students' learning outcomes. This study seeks to identify similarities and differences in the implementation of the two curricula and to examine how curriculum changes are reflected in Arabic language learning practices. The findings are expected to provide a contextual description of curriculum implementation and contribute to discussions on the organization of Arabic language learning within the changing Indonesian national curriculum.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design. The study describes the findings obtained from interviews in order to arrive at results and conclusions. This phenomenon is consistent with the theoretical framework used by the researcher, namely the theory of Lexy John Moleong (Lexy John Moleong, 2021). Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information (Fitri et al., 2026). The researchers also monitored ongoing activities and related them to the relevant findings (Asmaniah, 2026). Meanwhile, data analysis was conducted using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

The data sources in this study were two Arabic language teachers who teach Arabic at Pondok Pesantren Al-Anwar, Kumpeh, Muaro Jambi City, in accordance with the research focus, namely analyzing the comparison of the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning. The validity of the data was examined through source triangulation and technique triangulation by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation, as well as cross-checking the information obtained from the school principal, educational staff, and teachers (Sugiyono, 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following are the findings obtained to address the objectives of this study, based on interviews with Arabic language teachers (ustadz/ustadzah) at Al-Anwar Modern Islamic Boarding School, Kumpeh, Muaro Jambi.

1. Arabic Language Teaching Methods

In general, teaching methods refer to various approaches or strategies used by teachers or educators to deliver learning materials to students. Effective teaching methods can help improve students’ understanding and engagement in the teaching and learning process. These methods include lectures, discussions, demonstrations, group work, inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, online learning, and other teaching methods.

Arabic language teaching methods are approaches or strategies designed to help students master various aspects of the language, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In this regard, the researcher compares Arabic language teaching methods implemented under the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on interviews with Arabic language teachers, it was found that the 2013 Curriculum tends to employ conventional and structured teaching methods, with the use of prescribed textbooks. In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the use of more varied and contextual methods, such as task-based projects and the integration of technology into the learning process.

The effective methods used at this Islamic boarding school include memorization, repetition, and exercises, particularly for Arabic vocabulary and other Arabic language materials. Under the Merdeka Curriculum, project-based and collaborative learning strategies are considered more effective because they actively engage students and provide learning experiences that are more contextual and relevant to their needs.

Table 1. Summary of the Comparison between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic Language Learning

No	Aspect	2013 Curriculum	Merdeka Curriculum	Main Finding/Trend
1	Teaching Methods	Tends to use conventional and structured methods, with an emphasis on textbooks, memorization,	Uses more varied and contextual methods, including project-based learning, task-based	A shift from structured and conventional learning toward active, varied, and contextual learning.

		repetition, and exercises.	activities, technology, creativity, and collaborative learning.	
2	Learning Materials	Materials are structured according to basic competencies and mainly rely on textbooks and worksheets (LKS).	Materials are more flexible and can be adapted to the local context, students' needs, and interests.	A shift from uniform and structured materials toward flexible and adaptive materials.
3	Assessment	More formal and structured through written examinations, oral examinations, and <i>imtihan</i> .	More diverse, including project-based assessment, portfolios, self-assessment, and other forms of assessment.	A shift from test-oriented assessment toward more diverse and comprehensive assessment.
4	Arabic Language Learning Outcomes	Emphasizes theoretical understanding and mastery of textbook materials, measured mainly through written and oral examinations.	Emphasizes practical learning, projects, application of materials, students' interests, and motivation.	A shift from material mastery toward practical application and contextual learning experiences.

The interview findings clearly reveal a comparison between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. The 2013 Curriculum tends to employ conventional and structured methods based on prescribed textbooks. Meanwhile, the learning methods in the Merdeka Curriculum represent a new innovation implemented by educational institutions by utilizing varied and contextual approaches, such as task-based learning projects, the use of technology, and other creative activities.

2. Arabic Language Learning Materials

In general, learning materials consist of a collection of information, concepts, and skills designed to help students achieve specific educational objectives. These materials may take various forms, ranging from written texts and visual media to practical and interactive learning experiences. Arabic language learning materials encompass various aspects designed to help students develop comprehensive Arabic language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Therefore, in this study, the researcher compares Arabic language learning materials implemented under the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the interview findings (Questions 2, 5, and 15), Arabic language learning under the 2013 Curriculum is structured around basic competencies that must be achieved at each educational level. Meanwhile, the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater opportunities for innovation in teaching methods and allows learning materials

to be adjusted to the local context and students' needs. There has been a significant change in the learning materials under the Merdeka Curriculum, as they are more closely aligned with local needs and students' interests and are more flexible in their implementation compared with the 2013 Curriculum, which is more structured and uniform.

The comparison between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum can be clearly observed from the interview findings above. In terms of Arabic language learning materials, there has been a significant change. Under the 2013 Curriculum, Arabic learning materials mainly rely on conventional and structured materials presented in textbooks or, more commonly, in student worksheets (LKS). Meanwhile, the Merdeka Curriculum employs more varied learning approaches, including direct practical learning through task-based projects. For example, students may carry out an Arabic *muhadatsah* project by creating conversation videos or vlogs, as well as developing other innovative learning activities that are flexible and responsive to students' needs. Thus, the differences between the two curricula are clearly evident.

3. Assessment in Arabic Language Learning

In general, learning assessment is a systematic process of measuring, evaluating, and documenting students' understanding, skills, attitudes, and performance. Assessment aims to determine the success and impact of a learning program. It is conducted to understand and ensure the extent to which students have achieved the intended learning objectives. Similarly, assessment in Arabic language learning is an evaluation process designed to measure students' understanding and skills in various aspects of the Arabic language. In this regard, the researcher compares Arabic language assessment under the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the interview findings, assessment under the 2013 Curriculum is more formal and structured, involving written examinations, oral examinations, and an *imtihan*, a form of examination commonly implemented in Islamic boarding schools. Meanwhile, assessment under the Merdeka Curriculum is more varied and includes project-based assessment, portfolio assessment, and self-assessment. Therefore, the comparison between the two curricula clearly demonstrates differences in the assessment process.

4. Arabic Language Learning Outcomes of Santri

In general, learning outcomes refer to the achievements obtained by students after participating in the learning process. Learning outcomes may encompass various aspects, including knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that students are expected to master after completing a particular curriculum or subject. Learning outcomes are generally measured through various evaluation methods, such as tests, quizzes, assignments, projects, and observations.

Specifically, Arabic language learning outcomes refer to the abilities achieved by students after participating in the Arabic language learning process. These outcomes include various aspects, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as students' understanding of Arabic grammar and vocabulary. Therefore, in this study, the researcher compares the Arabic language learning outcomes of *santri* under the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the interview findings, the learning outcomes under the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at the Islamic boarding school differ significantly. Under the 2013 Curriculum, *santri* primarily acquire theoretical knowledge and material presented in textbooks. Consequently, their learning outcomes are measured mainly based on their understanding of the materials that have been studied.

Meanwhile, under the Merdeka Curriculum, learning involves more practical activities and real-world applications. Therefore, students' learning outcomes are assessed based on their understanding and ability to apply their knowledge through practical Arabic language learning projects. The Merdeka Curriculum is considered

more effective because students' interest and motivation tend to increase when learning activities are aligned with their interests and everyday contexts. Thus, the Merdeka Curriculum places greater emphasis on practical learning and the application of Arabic language skills.

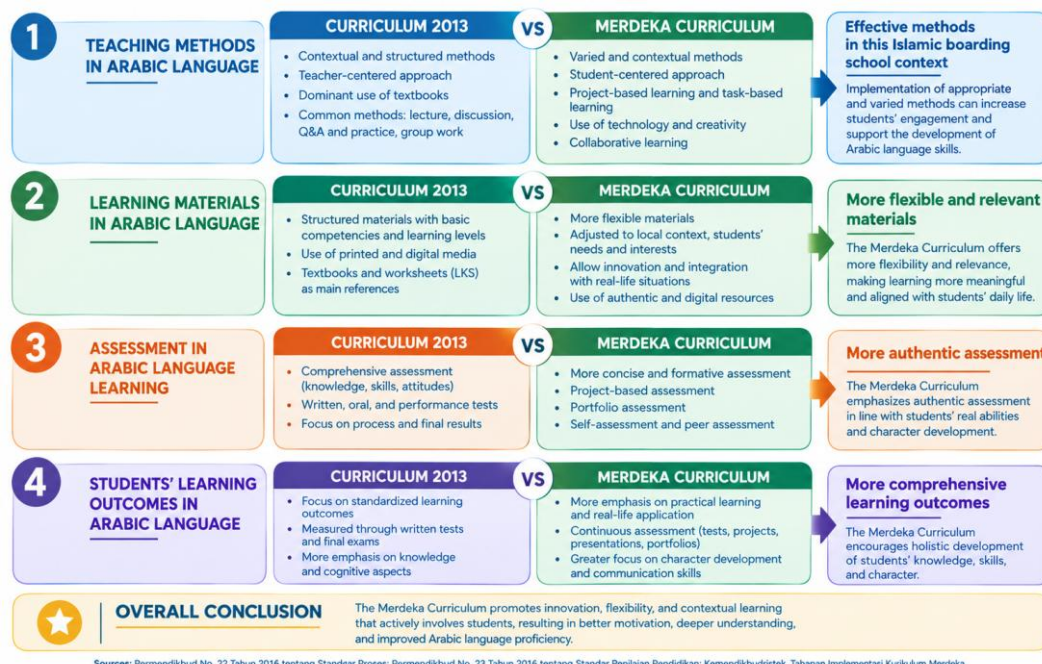


Figure 2. Comparison of Arabic Language Learning: Curriculum 2013 Vs. Merdeka Curriculum In Islami Boarding School

The interview findings also clearly reveal differences in students' learning outcomes based on a comparison of the two curricula. Under the 2013 Curriculum, students' learning outcomes are primarily assessed based on their understanding of the materials presented in textbooks, with their achievement measured through written and oral examinations. Meanwhile, under the Merdeka Curriculum, learning outcomes are assessed more comprehensively through students' ability to apply their knowledge and skills in practical learning activities, projects, and contextual learning experiences.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there are significant differences between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum at Al-Anwar Modern Islamic Boarding School, Kumpeh, Muaro Jambi. These differences can be identified across the four main aspects examined in this study: Arabic language teaching methods, Arabic language learning materials, assessment in Arabic language learning, and the Arabic language learning outcomes of *santri*. Each of these four aspects has a different emphasis and proportion under the two curricula. However, the Merdeka Curriculum can be regarded as a development of the 2013 Curriculum and represents a new innovation in Indonesia's education system. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum aims to continue, improve, and advance the learning programs established under the 2013 Curriculum, particularly by addressing areas that still require evaluation and improvement.

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Author Contribution

Hermiwati: Writing-Preparation of original manuscript, Conceptualization Data accuracy, Visualization, Methodology, Improve Language, Investigation.

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Conflict of Interest

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

Ethical Clearance

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

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