Bilingual Education and Arabic Language Learning: A Study of Merdeka Curriculum Practices in Indonesian Madrasah

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Abstract

This study aims to explore implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum (MC) in Arabic Language Learning (ALL) through the integration of *Madrasah Diniyah Khusus* (Madinsus) and a bilingual approach at the MT's level within a *pesantren* environment. Conducted at *Pondok Pesantren* Modern al-Falah Jatirokeh, Brebes. This field research employed a qualitative descriptive method to explore strategies, challenges, and impacts of curriculum implementation. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving selected students from classes VII and VIII, Arabic and Madinsus students, and the school principal. The findings indicate that the integration of Madinsus and the bilingual model supports a more adaptive, contextual, and competence-based Arabic learning experience aligned with 21st-century educational needs. This innovation serves as a strategic effort by the *pesantren* to adapt to national curriculum reforms without abandoning traditional Islamic values. This study makes an important contribution to the development of Arabic language learning and serves as a model for future Islamic education policies that can harmonize Islamic traditions with the demands of modern competencies.

Keywords: *Arabic learning, Bilingual, Merdeka Curriculum, Indonesian madrasah*

Introduction

Arabic language learning in Indonesia, especially in modern *pesantren* (Islamic Boarding School), is important in shaping an Islamic generation ready to compete globally. Along with time, the need for adaptive and competency-based Arabic language instruction has increased (Mariyatul et al., 2024). In this context, attempts are being made to respond to these challenges and changes in educational policy, such as curriculum reform. The curriculum design process encompasses student need analysis, formulation of learning goals, and creation of relevant and practical assignments. Changes in educational policy, including curriculum development, are part of the effort to address these challenges (Husna & Inayah, 2023).

Merdeka curriculum is designed to shape students' personalities based on Islamic values, while simultaneously optimizing the development of religious character, critical thinking, creativity, and comprehensive mastery of 21st-century competencies and life skills. The concept of *Merdeka Belajar* (freedom to learn) includes space for students to learn independently, according to their potential and the demands of the times. This curriculum is expected to overcome the limitations of the old curriculum through interactive, contextual, and learner-centered learning (Najmudin, 2023).

In the *pesantren* environment, implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum is parallel with the madrasah system, which offers space for students to develop their potential according to their interests and talents maximally. The availability of facilities and infrastructure is also a key factor in creating a comfortable and effective learning environment (Wafi et al., 2023). The *Merdeka* curriculum has now been implemented in various educational institutions, including both *salafiyah* (traditional) and modern *pesantren*.

Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) al-Falah Jatirokeh, located within a Modern Islamic Boarding School, has implemented the *Merdeka* curriculum in Arabic language learning for Grades VII and VIII. The learning system is divided into two categories: Excellent classes using Student Worksheets (LKS) and Digital classes utilizing online-based modules and e-books. To support foreign language acquisition, the institution integrates Madrasah Diniyah Khusus (Madinsus) with a bilingual approach.

Madinsus is an internal *pesantren* curriculum designed to strengthen students' Arabic and English language skills, both theoretically and practically. The bilingual strategy is implemented by requiring *santri* (student) to use Arabic and English alternately weekly in daily communication. The integration of Madinsus and the bilingual approach within the *Merdeka* Curriculum aims to optimize Arabic language learning in the *pesantren* environment. This approach not only enhances *santri*'s language proficiency and critical thinking skills but also broadens their cultural horizons. Through this strategy, it is hoped that a generation of *santri* will emerge with a strong religious foundation and high competence in foreign languages.

Various studies highlight the effectiveness of Arabic language-learning strategies in educational institutions. Mochammad Abdi Fajariyanto (2024) found that the Arabic language environment at MTs Al Irsyad Tengaran 7, Batu City, effectively improved students' proficiency (Fajariyanto et al., 2024). In his research, Abdul Kharis (2011) reported that the *Ilqâ al-Mufradât, Muhâdatsah,* and *Khathâbah* programs at MTs Assalam Bangilan Tuban contributed significantly to the development of Arabic skills (Abdul Kharis, 2011). Selsa Ihza Febriza (2024) concluded that the management of the language environment at SMPIT Shohibul Qur'an Kampar supports students' competence through structured programs and supervision (Febriza & Wahyudi, 2024). Meanwhile, Marfirah Syam Zebua (2023) noted that at *pondok pesantren* ar-Raudlatul Hasanah Medan, the combination of the *mubâsyirah* (direct) method and non-formal activities such as *muhâdharah* and scouts successfully encouraged the use of Arabic (Zebua & Rakhmadi, 2023). Alfitri (2020) found that the implementation of the morning *muhâdatsah* program at *Pesantren* Al-Munawarah Pekanbaru was suboptimal due

to a lack of regulations, coordination, experts, and supporting facilities (Alfitri et al., 2020).

Previous research has analyzed various strategies in learning Arabic in educational institutions, both schools and *pesantren*. However, no research has been found that specifically discusses Arabic learning strategies that integrate Madinsus with a bilingual approach in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Combining the traditional *pesantren* approach through Madinsus and the bilingual approach that is adaptive to the times has great potential in creating a more comprehensive learning system. Therefore, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in Arabic language learning through the Madinsus integration strategy and bilingual approach at the MTs level in a *pesantren* environment. The application of this strategy is expected to improve students' Arabic language competence through a learning model that is more integrative, applicable, and adaptive to educational needs in the 21st century.

Method

This study is a field research, which involves direct observation and in-depth investigation at the actual location to better understand the phenomenon being studied (Shandi, 2020). The research was conducted at *Pondok Pesantren Modern* al-Falah Jatirokeh, Brebes, on April 17 and 19, 2025. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed to comprehensively describe the implementation of the Curriculum *Merdeka* in Arabic language learning through the integration of Madinsus and a bilingual approach. This approach is considered appropriate as the focus of the research lies in understanding the processes, strategies, challenges, and impacts of curriculum implementation within a *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school) environment.

The population in this study included all students in grades VII and VIII of MTs al-Falah Jatirokeh Brebes who participated in the Excellent Program, Digital Program, and were involved in the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, Madinsus, and the bilingual approach. The sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique, with the criterion that students actively participate in these programs. The focus of sampling is directed at students in class VII Digital 1 and class VIII Excellent 6, because these two classes are considered to represent the intensive implementation of Digital and Excellent learning approaches.

Data were collected through three main techniques: observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly in classes VII and VIII to observe the learning process of Arabic based on *Merdeka* Curriculum, including the use of Arabic and English both in the classroom as well as within the *pesantren* environment, as well as the implementation of MADINSUS and bilingual strategies applied by teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the head of a madrasah, Arabic teachers, Madinsus teachers, *Tamyîz* teachers, and students, using a question guide developed to explore implementation strategies, learning constraints, and the impact of the program on students' learning experiences. Meanwhile, documentation was analyzed as supporting data, which included the Madinsus module, the Arabic module based on the *Merdeka* Curriculum, and visual

documentation such as photos of learning activities and language use in the *pesantren* environment.

Data analysis uses an interactive model from Miles and Huberman, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification. Data reduction was conducted to filter and simplify information relevant to the research focus. The data were then presented in the form of a systematic descriptive narrative to facilitate the analysis process. The final stage of conclusion drawing and verification was conducted to identify the main findings that reflect the effectiveness of Arabic learning strategies through the integration of Madinsus and the bilingual approach.

To ensure the validity of the data, a source triangulation technique was used by comparing the results of observations, interviews, and documentation. This approach aims to obtain valid, objective, and accountable data. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of a more effective and contextualized Arabic learning strategy based on the *Merdeka* curriculum, especially at the MTs level in a *pesantren* environment.

Result and Discussion

Profile MTs al-Falah Brebes

Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) al-Falah is located at Jalan Taman Makam Pahlawan No. 01, Jatirokeh, Songgom District, Brebes Regency, Central Java. This madrasah is one of the educational institutions under the auspices of a Modern Islamic Boarding School. MTs al-Falah is well known for its commitment to integrating Islamic values with technological advancement and language development. Within the *pesantren* environment, proficiency in Arabic and English is one of the main priorities, serving as essential skills for students to face the challenges of the times and global competition.

MTs al-Falah implement the *Merdeka* curriculum in grades VII and VIII, designed to align with advancements in digital technology and 21st-century competency demands. Its implementation aims to equip students to navigate ongoing societal changes and to contribute to national development in a manner consistent with contemporary global progress (Rismaya et al., 2024). This curriculum provides flexibility for madrasahs to design learning according to students' characteristics and local potential. In its implementation, madrasahs divide classes into the Excellent Class and the Digital Class, and also run *pesantren* programs such as Qur'an memorization (*Tahfîzh* al-Qur'an), Madinsus, and the daily habituation of using Arabic and English.
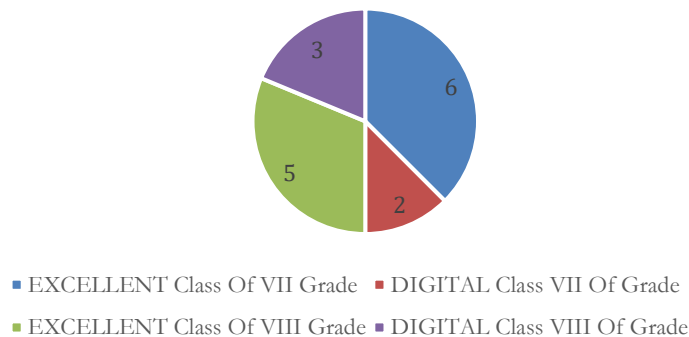
Educational technology plays an important role in creating more interactive and inclusive learning methods, while also supporting students' academic, social, emotional, and creative development (Tamyiz et al., 2025). In the *Merdeka* curriculum framework, technology holds a vital role amid the rapid digitalization, especially in the education sector. Integrating technology into the curriculum is a strategic measure to support and improve the effectiveness of *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation (Wahyuni, 2024). As an innovation in learning, MTs al-Falah introduced the Digital class program in the

2024/2025 academic year as a technology-based learning innovation. This program is designed to tailor the learning process to students' abilities, interests, and learning styles

Student selection for the Digital class is based on academic achievement, discipline, and learning motivation. The class is equipped with tablets, air-conditioned rooms, projectors, internet access, and e-books as the main learning media. Teachers have received special training in technology-based learning, and all processes from assessment to reporting of learning outcomes are conducted digitally and delivered directly to students' parents or guardians.

The Excellent class focuses on enhancing students' academic abilities through the use of Student Worksheets (LKS) and information technology learning in the computer laboratory. The laboratory is utilized by all classes to improve digital literacy under the guidance of qualified information technology educators, ensuring that the learning process runs effectively and optimally.

Chart 1. The Number of VII and VII Grade Classes

- EXCELLENT Class Of VII Grade - DIGITAL Class VII Of Grade
- EXCELLENT Class Of VIII Grade - DIGITAL Class VIII Of Grade

The Implementation of The Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning.

The implementation of Arabic language instruction at MTs al-Falah Jatirokeh, encompassing both the Excellent and Digital classes, commences with an opening activity where students sing songs in Arabic. This practice aims to create an enjoyable learning atmosphere and foster student enthusiasm. Following this, student attendance is recorded: in the Digital class, attendance is taken online via the Google Form platform, whereas in the Excellent class, it is manually noted in an attendance book. Subsequently, the lesson proceeds with a review of previously covered material to reinforce students' comprehension.

The primary method used in the learning process is the lecture method, in which the teacher delivers the material directly, followed by a structured question-and-answer session. Toward the end of the lesson, the final 15 minutes are typically allocated for an open Q&A session beyond the scope of the Arabic material, as a form of humanistic approach to foster closer relationships between teachers and students.

In the learning process of the Digital class, instruction is fully facilitated through the use of tablets as the primary learning medium. Nevertheless, students are still encouraged to take manual notes in notebooks to reinforce their understanding of the material. The learning resources used are e-books distributed via the Google Classroom

platform and often projected using a projector to support the teaching process. Meanwhile, the Excellent class places greater emphasis on the use of Student Worksheets (LKS) as the main learning resource, which are designed to support students' active participation in a direct and structured learning process.

The use of e-books in the Digital class refers to the 2020 KSKK Arabic Language Book, developed to support Islamic Religious Education (PAI) and Arabic learning in accordance with Minister of Religious Affairs Decree No. 183 of 2019. Its content includes grammar, vocabulary, reading exercises, communicative dialogues, and the development of the four language skills: listening (*istimâ*), speaking (*kalâm*), reading (*qirâ'ah*), and writing (*kitâbah*).

Meanwhile, in the Excellent class, the instructional material used consists of Student Worksheets (LKS). The LKS comprises sheets containing learning materials, learning objectives, and outcomes, as well as the development of the four language skills: listening *(istimâ)*, speaking *(kalâm)*, reading *(qirâ'ah)*, and writing *(kitâbah)*. In addition, the worksheets include tasks and exercises designed in alignment with the predetermined basic competencies. As the main learning resource, the LKS plays a crucial role in supporting the implementation of the Lesson Plan (RPP), thereby assisting teachers in managing student learning activities in a systematic, active, and goal-oriented manner (Safriandono & Charis, 2014).

Arabic language instruction in Grade VII, both in the Excellent and Digital classes, essentially uses the same material. This material covers several key aspects, including vocabulary acquisition *(mufradât)*, simple dialogues *(ḥiwâr)*, text reading skills *(qirâ'ah)*, understanding of basic Arabic grammar *(qawâ'id)*, and sentence construction exercises *(tarkîb)*. All of these components are designed in an integrated manner to help students gradually and contextually develop their Arabic language skills. In the first semester of Grade VII, the material focuses on themes related to students' daily lives, such as introductions *(at-ta'âruf)*, school facilities *(al-marâfiq al-madrasiyyah)*, and school supplies *(al-adawât al-madrasiyyah)*. Meanwhile, in the second semester, the themes include addresses *(al-unwân)*, the house *(al-bayt)*, and daily family activities *(min yawmiyyâti al-usrah)*.

The structure and learning approach used in Grade VIII are also similar to those applied in Grade VII, both in the Excellent and Digital classes. The material continues to cover five main skill aspects, namely vocabulary acquisition *(mufradât)*, conversation *(ḥiwâr)*, text reading *(qirâ'ah)*, grammar rules *(qawâ'id)*, and sentence construction *(tarkîb)*. In the first semester, the learning focuses on themes such as time *(as-sâ'ah)*, daily activities *(yawmiyyâtunā)*, and hobbies *(al-hiwâyah)*. Meanwhile, in the second semester, the material includes themes like sports *(ar-riyâdhah)*, professions or jobs *(al-mihnah)*, and visiting the sick *('iyâdat al-marīdh)*.

In the implementation of Arabic language learning in Grades VII and VIII, both in the Excellent and Digital classes, several challenges arise during the teaching and learning activities. In Arabic language learning for Grades VII and VIII, particularly in the Digital class, several challenges arise, such as students' lack of concentration due to using unrelated applications during lessons and difficulty reading Arabic texts without

harakat in e-books. Moreover, the absence of physical books makes some students feel uncomfortable and struggle to follow the lessons effectively.

Meanwhile, in the Excellent class, a common challenge is the decline in students' enthusiasm and motivation to learn. The conventional and monotonous teaching methods make the classroom atmosphere dull. As a result, students easily feel bored and sleepy during lessons. Additionally, the limited use of refreshing strategies or reflective activities, such as educational games or interactive breaks, contributes to a less lively and less engaging learning environment.

Despite various challenges in their implementation, the Digital and Excellent classes each have their advantages that contribute to the effectiveness of Arabic language learning. One of the main strengths of the Digital class is the use of technology as a learning medium, which not only introduces students to the digital world but also promotes mastery of technological skills relevant to contemporary needs (Siti Wardatul Humairoh, 2025).

The use of digital media facilitates access to information and learning materials while supporting education through engaging and interactive audio-visual content. This enhances students' understanding and reduces the teacher's workload, for example, in conducting exams digitally via platforms like Quizizz, which automatically grades the results.

E-book modules with colored images and illustrations help students visually understand vocabulary. The Digital class also involves more interactive activities such as online quizzes and hands-on practice, which increase student motivation and engagement. Additionally, regular use of digital devices helps students develop digital literacy skills, which are essential for their readiness to face technological advancements and to strengthen their Arabic language comprehension.

Meanwhile, the Excellent class demonstrates its advantage through a structured and focused learning process, supported by a conducive classroom environment free from technological distractions, and the use of conventional media such as textbooks and written exercises, thereby significantly enhancing students' understanding of Arabic language material.

Figure 1. Arabic language learning in the DIGITAL class

Figure 2. Arabic language learning in the EXCELLENT class

Madinsus at the Modern Islamic Boarding School al-Falah Brebes

Madinsus is a *pesantren* curriculum to improve students' skills in Arabic and English. It runs Monday to Thursday and Saturday from 7:00 to 8:30 AM. Madinsus uses the Excellent class system without Digital classes, as all learning is non-digital. Grade VII has eight Excellent classes, and Grade VIII has six. In both grades, some Excellent classes (VII: 1 and 2; VIII: 1, 2, and 3) are also Digital classes.

In Grade VII, the Madinsus learning focuses on mastering basic Arabic in the first semester and strengthening English skills in the second semester. A similar pattern is applied in Grade VIII, where the first semester emphasizes Arabic through *Muhâdatsah* and *Tamrîn* materials along with additional English lessons, while the second semester focuses on English, covering Grammar, Conversation, and Reading. The subject of *Tamyîz* is taught consistently every semester as an important part of understanding nahwu and sharf. Additionally, every Saturday, students participate in structured *tajwîd* lessons with instructors to improve their Qur'anic recitation by applying *tajwîd* rules and maintaining *tartîl*.

The Madinsus learning in the first semester focuses on strengthening basic Arabic language skills, particularly in mastering vocabulary and fundamental language structures. This focus is established considering that most students at this level, especially those in Grade VII, do not yet have an adequate foundation for comprehensively understanding Arabic. Therefore, vocabulary mastery is the primary foundation for developing language skills, which will later serve as the basis for improving oral and written communication in Arabic.

Learning is carried out gradually using the *al-Lughat al-'Arabiyyah* textbook, which was compiled by qualified teachers in their respective fields. The book is systematically designed and tailored to the abilities of beginner-level students, making the material easier to understand and apply. The content includes *mufradât* (vocabulary), *muhâdatsah* (conversation), *qawâ'id* (grammar), *qirâ'ah* (reading), and practice exercises. All materials are thematically structured and relevant to students' daily lives. Each theme introduces new vocabulary, which is then used in simple conversations to train language comprehension and contextual communication skills.

The focus of learning in Grade VII is reading *(mahârah al-qirâ'ah)* and speaking *(mahârah al-kalâm)*. Students learn and memorize vocabulary, then practice it through *muhâdatsah* and daily application in the *pesantren* environment to make learning more contextual. Evaluation is conducted after each chapter through exercises, assessment of pronunciation and vocabulary use, and observation of daily communication. At the end of the semester, students take an oral exam, and those who face difficulties receive additional guidance outside of Madinsus hours.

In the second semester, learning focuses on improving English skills using a special textbook prepared by teachers based on students' proficiency levels. Although the program runs well, challenges remain, such as the habit of using the mother tongue and difficulties in reading and pronouncing English. With systematic and interactive methods, Madinsus serves as an important foundation for developing students' language skills.

In class VIII, Madinsus learning is focused on strengthening Arabic language skills through *muhâdatsah* and *tamrîn* materials. In addition, English is also taught as a complement to support the mastery of foreign languages needed in the global era. While in the second semester, Madinsus learning is transferred to English learning, which includes reading, speaking, and conversation learning.

Muhâdatsah learning in Grade VIII uses *Kitâb Muhâwarah* Volume 1, which contains contextual Arabic conversations related to daily life. The learning process applies the *mubâsyirah* method (direct method), a direct interactive approach between teachers and students. The teacher reads the text, followed by student imitation, then joint translation to ensure understanding, and paired dialogue practice. This method is effective in improving students' confidence, fluency, and speaking skills in Arabic. Evaluation is conducted monthly through tests on material comprehension, pronunciation, language practice, and active student participation.

The support of the *pesantren* environment contributes significantly to the effectiveness of the Madinsus program. The habit of using Arabic and English is fostered through various routine activities, such as morning conversation every Sunday, language speech every Saturday night, and *ilqâ' al-mufradât* every Monday to Thursday. The teachers are also instructed to insert foreign languages into the learning process according to the language schedule each semester. This effort aims to form the habit of speaking foreign languages in the daily lives of students. However, some learning obstacles, such as tardiness, lack of focus, and sleepiness, are addressed through educational games and interactive activities to enhance students' concentration and motivation.

The *tamrîn* learning session, a primary focus on mastering vocabulary *(mufradât)* and applying it in sentence form using the textbook *Durûs al-lughah al-Arabiyyah 'ala at-Tharîqah al-Hadîtsah* Volume 1. The learning process begins with the teacher delivering the material. Once the material has been presented, the session continues with exercises *(tamrîn)* to strengthen students' understanding of the vocabulary and its structure. During practical activities, students take turns coming forward to explain their comprehension of the material studied. Additionally, in conversation practice, students are paired up to engage in Arabic dialogues based on the taught material.
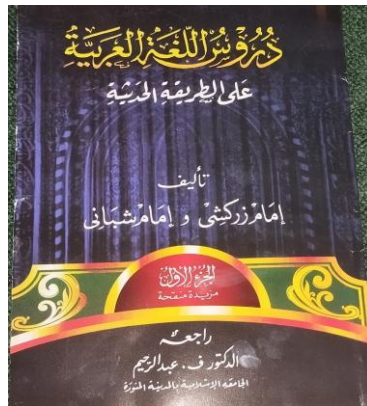
Figure 3. The *Tamrîn* Textbook

Learning in Grade VIII uses the direct method, with review of previous material and a question-and-answer session to ensure understanding. The Madinsus program habituates students to using Arabic in daily life.

In the second semester, Madinsus focuses on strengthening English through reading, speaking, and conversation, using a contextual and interactive approach to improve students' comprehension, pronunciation, and confidence in communicating both inside and outside the classroom. English learning here aims to develop oral and written skills, master the basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as introduce language structure and enrich vocabulary in a contextual and relevant manner for daily life.

Tamyîz learning, both in grades VII and VIII, is still carried out in every semester as an integral part of the Madinsus curriculum. The aim is to equip students with strong grammatical foundations of the Arabic language, as well as train their ability to understand and analyze sentence structures systematically.

Tamyîz is a practical approach in learning to translate the Qur'an and classical Islamic texts that uses special songs or chants to make learning Arabic more enjoyable, interactive, and easy to remember. This method was developed by Abaza, M.M. in 2010 in Indramayu, West Java, and according to Akhsin Sakho Muhammad, *Tamyîz* summarizes the basic theories of Nahwu and Sharaf using a Quantum approach. This method is included in the Arabic for Specific Purpose (ASP) category and is presented in the form of worksheets that are practical, fun, and easy to understand, so that learning results can be achieved in a short time (Wildan & Fuad, 2019).

The *Tamyîz* learning principle utilizes the integrated strengths of the left brain, right brain, and subconscious mind. The left brain aids in understanding the material, the right brain supports long-term memory, and the subconscious mind enhances information absorption. By combining these three capabilities, students can more easily comprehend the translation of the Qur'an and *Kitab Kuning* (Alfi Fauziyah, Ulfiah, 2018).

The vision and mission of *Tamyîz* are to make this program a learning medium that enables children from an early age not only to be proficient in reading the Qur'an and Kitab Kuning but also to be able to translate, write (*imlâ'*), and teach the Qur'an,

thereby shaping a generation of Muslim families who are skilled in Qur'an literacy from childhood (Syahriyanto & Fatimah, 2024).

Figure 4. The *Tamyîz* Textbook

Tamyîz learning in class VII of Madinsus is focused on introducing the basics of the Arabic language with a method that is fun and easy to understand for beginner students. In the early stages, students are introduced to Arabic songs related to basic vocabulary, such as the names of months and days, to support memorization. Furthermore, they memorize and deposit 26 columns of letters in the *Tamyîz* book in groups with a certain rhythm. Once the columns are mastered, learning continues on *isim* and *fi'il*, including their types: *fi'il mâdhî, mudhâri'*, and *amr*. In Grade VIII, the focus shifts to the study of *i'rab* and the discussion of *awîmil al-fi'il al-mudhâri*.

Tamyîz's teaching methods in grades VII and VIII are adjusted to the level of ability of the students. In class VII, learning is done through memorization and column deposit in groups, where students sing the columns they have mastered in front of the class, creating an interactive and fun learning atmosphere. While in class VIII, the approach is individualized and analytical. Students are asked to perform *tarkîb* on certain verses, such as Surah Al-Baqarah verse 2, by identifying grammatical elements such as *"dzâlika al-kitâbu lâ raiba fîh"* as *isim isyârah*. The learning process continues in group discussions guided by the tutor and students. After the group understands the material, the teacher gives a new verse to analyze the *i'râb*. Although the singing method is effective for memorization, some students still have difficulty understanding the material, explaining it orally, or remembering the sequence of songs and lessons taught.

The implementation of Madinsus at the MTs level has been proven to enhance students' Arabic language competence, including vocabulary mastery, speaking skills, and text comprehension, through a structured and contextualized approach. The *Tamyîz* program supports the implementation of Madinsus by using a song-based method that facilitates vocabulary memorization while also improving reading skills and accurate text translation (Musdelifa Abu Samad, 2022). This approach not only creates a fun learning atmosphere but also encourages the active involvement of students.

The Implementation of Bilingualism at Pondok Pesantren Modern al-Falah Brebes

The language environment plays a crucial role in second language acquisition, where its quality directly influences the level of language competence. According to

behaviorist theory, this process occurs through environmental influence and repetitive habituation (Rochmat et al., n.d.). An environment that supports language use encourages students to actively communicate in that language, and language proficiency is characterized by the ability to speak it orally (Martina et al., 2024).

The bilingual approach is a language strategy applied in the form of a language environment (*bi'ah lughawiyah*), where students are accustomed to communicating using Arabic and English in everyday life. The implementation of this system is carried out alternately every week; one week using Arabic, and the next week using English. The main objective of this program is to form the habit of actively speaking foreign languages, as well as improving the communication skills of the students in the *pesantren* environment.

Edward Sapir stated that the environment has a huge influence on a person's language ability, especially in children. The environment not only plays a role in supporting the implementation of language programs directly, but also becomes a practical means for students to produce the language they have learned (Nur Habibah, 2016). This means that an individual is considered bilingual if they have good proficiency in understanding and actively using two languages. In the context of foreign language learning, the bilingual approach can be used as an effective alternative method because it not only improves language skills but also develops students' cognitive abilities (Hafiz, 2022).

To support the implementation of the language environment program, the *pesantren* enforces a monitoring system known as "*Jasusah*" (Maintaining the Language Atmosphere). This program involves selected students who serve as language monitors daily from Monday to Saturday. Violations of the language rules are met with educational sanctions, such as memorizing vocabulary or conversations, cleaning the dormitory, or paying a fine. Although the program is implemented systematically, several challenges remain, including some students' habit of using local languages, low compliance with the rules, and a lack of consistency in actively using Arabic or English.

Overall, the implementation of the bilingual approach in the *pesantren* environment has been proven to have a positive impact on improving students' language skills. Students show significant progress in vocabulary mastery and speaking skills (conversation) in both Arabic and English. This improvement not only supports their success in learning foreign languages but also fosters sustainable language habits in daily life. The bilingual approach in *pesantren* enhances students' vocabulary and speaking abilities in Arabic and English, establishes daily language habits, and strengthens active communication skills, which serve as an essential foundation for continuing education and facing global challenges (Fitranti, 2021).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum at MTs al-Falah Brebes, integrated with the Madinsus program and a bilingual approach in Arabic language learning, represents a significant innovation in addressing the challenges of modern Islamic education. This integration not only aligns the institution with national curriculum policies but also strengthens the scientific and adaptive

character of the *pesantren,* particularly in enhancing students' foreign language literacy and Islamic character development.

The use of Excellent and Digital class models reflects the school's capacity to provide personalized learning tailored to students' interests and potential, while simultaneously leveraging technology to improve the quality of the learning process. Theoretically, this study underscores the importance of an integrative approach in Islamic education that combines traditional *pesantren* values with the demands of 21st-century competencies.

For further research, it is necessary to analyse the long-term impact of this model on students' academic achievement and character development, evaluate the effectiveness of technology utilization in Digital classrooms, and test the application of this method in madrasahs with diverse characteristics to assess the scalability and flexibility of the model in a broader context.

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