

Strategic Management of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation Based on Religious Moderation: Opportunities, Challenges, and Resilience

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Abstract

Indonesia's educational landscape is undergoing a profound transformation with the nationwide rollout of the Merdeka Curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*), mandated through KMA Number 347 of 2022 for madrasah institutions. At the intersection of this curricular reform and the state's agenda for religious moderation lies a critical yet underexplored terrain: how Islamic junior secondary schools (MTs) in peripheral regions strategically manage, adapt, and sustain this dual mandate. This article examines the strategic management of Merdeka Curriculum implementation grounded in religious moderation values at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong, Garut, West Java. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and document analysis involving the school principal, curriculum coordinators, subject teachers, and students. The findings reveal that MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong has navigated three interrelated dimensions: (1) the descriptive reality of curriculum implementation, including the integration of P5-PPRA (*Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan Rahmatan Lil Alamin*) with moderation values; (2) the critical factors driving and constraining implementation, including teacher readiness, infrastructure limitations, and institutional leadership; and (3) the transformative impacts on student character formation and institutional resilience. The study concludes that strategic leadership, community-based learning, and the embedding of *wasathiyah* (moderate) values within the curriculum framework constitute the primary

drivers of resilience in this context. These findings contribute to the growing literature on madrasah curriculum reform and offer practical implications for policy and practice.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Religious Moderation, MTs, Strategic Management, Resilience, P5-PPRA.

Introduction

In an era when radicalism and religious intolerance have emerged as existential threats to Indonesia's pluralist democracy, the classroom has become the most consequential battleground for the nation's soul (Jailani, 2023). The Indonesian government's decision to embed religious moderation (*moderasi beragama*) as a non-negotiable pillar of the Merdeka Curriculum—particularly within madrasah institutions—represents one of the most ambitious educational policy experiments in the country's post-reformasi history (Ramah & Rohman, 2023). This thesis rests on a foundational premise: that curriculum is not merely a technical instrument of knowledge transmission but a deeply political and ideological apparatus through which the state shapes the moral and civic identity of its citizens (Wahyudi & Ariyani, 2023).

Empirical evidence underscores the urgency of this agenda. Data from the Ministry of Religious Affairs indicate that as of 2023, there are 19,177 Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) institutions across Indonesia, each now required to implement the Merdeka Curriculum under KMA Number 347 of 2022 (Mallewai, 2023). Yet the implementation landscape is profoundly uneven: while urban, well-resourced madrasahs have adapted with relative ease, rural and semi-urban institutions—such as MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong in Garut, West Java—face structural constraints that render straightforward compliance a formidable challenge (Risna & Pelu, 2024). Scholars such as Mallewai (2023) and Ubaidillah (2024) have validated this concern, demonstrating that the synchronization of P5-PPRA values with religious moderation indicators encounters significant pedagogical and institutional obstacles, particularly in terms of teacher literacy and curriculum adaptation. The phenomenon at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong thus serves as a microcosm of a national challenge: how do peripheral Islamic educational institutions strategically manage the dual imperatives of curricular freedom and moderation-based character formation?

Existing scholarship on the Merdeka Curriculum in madrasah contexts can be categorized into three principal streams. The first stream focuses on policy analysis and curriculum design, examining the regulatory architecture of KMA 347/2022 and its implications for madrasah governance. Studies in this category, such as those by Ramah and Rohman (2023) and Anwar et al. (2023), provide valuable macro-level analyses of how the Merdeka Curriculum restructures learning achievements (CP), teaching objectives (TP), and project-based learning (P5-PPRA), but they largely neglect the micro-level dynamics of implementation in specific institutional contexts. The second stream addresses pedagogical implementation, documenting how teachers and school leaders navigate the transition from Kurikulum 2013 to the Merdeka Curriculum in specific madrasah settings (Jailani, 2022; Nurantono et al., 2024; Rohmadi et al., 2023). Research by Wahyudi and Ariyani (2023) at MTs Nurul Huda Banyuputih Batang and by Ubaidillah (2024) at MTs Negeri Jayawijaya Papua illuminates the practical challenges of curriculum adoption, including teacher unpreparedness, inadequate learning modules, and digital infrastructure deficits. However, these studies treat religious moderation as a peripheral concern rather than a central analytical lens. The third stream examines religious moderation in Islamic education, exploring how values of tolerance, balance, and civic commitment are embedded in madrasah curricula and school cultures (Salsabila & Achadi, 2024; Swandari & Jemani, 2023; Yuhasnita & Roza, 2023). Works by Hidayat and Samiaji (2023) and Swandari and Jemani (2023) demonstrate the potential of moderation-based curriculum frameworks to counter intolerance, but they do not engage systematically with the strategic management dimensions of implementation. The critical gap across all three streams is the absence of an integrated analytical framework that simultaneously addresses strategic management, curriculum implementation, religious moderation, and institutional resilience in a single, contextually grounded case study. This article positions itself precisely at this intersection, arguing that the concept of strategic resilience—the capacity of an institution to adapt, absorb, and transform in response to policy demands while maintaining its core identity—provides the most productive framework for understanding the MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong experience.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive, empirically grounded analysis of the strategic management of Merdeka Curriculum implementation based on religious moderation at MTs An-Nur 1

Malangbong Garut, with particular attention to the institutional processes, causal dynamics, and transformative consequences of this implementation. Three research questions guide the inquiry: What is the actual form and content of Merdeka Curriculum implementation based on religious moderation at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong, including the specific strategies, programs, and activities deployed by the institution? Why do particular opportunities and challenges characterize the implementation process at this institution, and what structural, pedagogical, and leadership factors account for the patterns observed? What are the effects and consequences of this implementation on student character formation, institutional identity, and the broader resilience of the madrasah as an educational community? These three questions will be systematically addressed in the Results and Discussion section, drawing on field data and theoretical frameworks to produce a layered and nuanced account of the phenomenon.

The central argument of this article is that successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on religious moderation in peripheral madrasah institutions is not primarily a function of resource availability but of strategic leadership capacity and the depth of institutional commitment to *wasathiyah* values. This argument is theoretically grounded in the convergence of strategic management theory—particularly the resource-based view and dynamic capabilities framework—with Islamic educational philosophy, which positions the madrasah as a site of character formation (*tarbiyah*) rather than mere knowledge transmission (Alkatiri et al., 2022; Nisa & Ghifary, 2023). The hypothesis follows: institutions that possess strong principal leadership, a coherent vision of religious moderation, and adaptive curriculum management practices will demonstrate greater resilience in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, even under conditions of resource constraint. This argument will guide the analytical structure of the article, with each sub-section of the Results and Discussion testing and elaborating this hypothesis through empirical evidence from MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong.

Method

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, selected for its capacity to generate rich, contextually embedded understandings of complex social phenomena (Kanza et al., 2024; Rohmadi et al., 2023). The unit of analysis is MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong Garut, a private Islamic junior secondary school operating under the auspices of the

Ministry of Religious Affairs and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in accordance with KMA Number 347 of 2022 (Ramah & Rohman, 2023). The research focus is deliberately bounded to the strategic management dimensions of curriculum implementation—specifically, the planning, execution, and evaluation of Merdeka Curriculum programs grounded in religious moderation values—and does not extend to comparative analysis across multiple institutions or quantitative measurement of student learning outcomes.

The research participants were selected through purposive sampling, a technique appropriate for qualitative case studies where the goal is to identify information-rich cases rather than statistically representative samples (Rohmadi et al., 2023; Salsabila & Achadi, 2024). The primary participants comprised: (1) the school principal (*kepala madrasah*), who serves as the primary strategic decision-maker; (2) the curriculum coordinator (*waka kurikulum*), responsible for the technical implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum; (3) five subject teachers from PAI-cluster subjects (Al-Qur'an Hadith, Aqidah Akhlak, Fiqh, SKI, and Arabic Language), selected for their direct involvement in P5-PPRA activities; and (4) twelve students from Class VII and VIII, selected to represent diverse demographic backgrounds including gender, academic performance, and family religious background. Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent procedures, anonymization of participant identities in the research report, and assurance of voluntary participation. The total number of participants was twenty, comprising one principal, one curriculum coordinator, five teachers, and twelve students.

Three primary instruments were employed. First, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to elicit detailed accounts of curriculum planning, implementation challenges, moderation-based activities, and institutional responses to policy mandates. The interview guide was validated through expert review by two specialists in Islamic educational management and curriculum studies. Second, an observation protocol was designed to document classroom practices, P5-PPRA project activities, school culture manifestations of religious moderation, and leadership behaviors. Third, a document analysis checklist was used to systematically review institutional documents including the *Kurikulum Operasional Madrasah* (KOM), P5-PPRA project plans, teacher teaching modules (*modul ajar*), student assessment records, and school policy documents. The triangulation of these three instruments provides methodological robustness and reduces the risk of single-source bias.

The research was conducted over a period of four months (September–December 2024), encompassing three phases. The preparation phase (September 2024) involved literature review, instrument development, ethical clearance, and initial site visits to establish rapport with participants. The data collection phase (October–November 2024) involved systematic interviews, observations across multiple school days, and document collection. The analysis phase (December 2024) employed thematic analysis following the Miles and Huberman model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Specifically, interview transcripts were coded using an initial codebook derived from the theoretical framework, followed by iterative refinement through constant comparison. Observational field notes and document analysis findings were integrated with interview data to produce triangulated thematic accounts. Member checking was conducted with key participants to validate the accuracy of interpretations.

Results and Discussion

The Form and Content of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation Based on Religious Moderation

MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong formally adopted the Merdeka Curriculum in the 2023/2024 academic year, following the mandatory implementation timeline established by KMA Number 347 of 2022 (Ramah & Rohman, 2023). The school's *Kurikulum Operasional Madrasah* (KOM) was developed through a collaborative process involving the principal, curriculum coordinator, and subject teachers, with external facilitation from the District Office of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag Kabupaten Garut). The KOM document explicitly incorporates the dual framework of *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) and *Profil Pelajar Rahmatan Lil Alamin* (PPRA), reflecting the distinctive character of madrasah curriculum under the Merdeka framework (Pujiani, 2024; Ubaidillah, 2024).

The school's P5-PPRA implementation is organized around four thematic projects per academic year, each designed to embed specific religious moderation values. The first project, themed "Harmony in Diversity" (*Harmoni dalam Keberagaman*), focuses on the moderation indicators of *tasamuh* (tolerance) and *tawassuth* (taking the middle path), engaging students in community-based activities that celebrate local cultural diversity while affirming Islamic identity (Yuhasnita & Roza,

2023). The second project, "Environmental Stewardship as Worship" (*Menjaga Alam sebagai Ibadah*), integrates the *tawazun* (balance) value with environmental education, reflecting the school's commitment to holistic character formation (Ihtiari et al., 2023). The third project, "Civic Responsibility and National Commitment" (*Tanggung Jawab Warga Negara*), addresses the *muwathanah* (love of country) dimension of religious moderation, a value explicitly mandated by KMA 347/2022. The fourth project, "Dialogue and Deliberation" (*Dialog dan Musyawarah*), cultivates the *syura* (deliberation) value through structured inter-group discussions on contemporary social issues.

The school's teachers have developed customized teaching modules (*modul ajar*) that integrate religious moderation values into subject-specific learning objectives. In the Al-Qur'an Hadith subject, for example, the teaching module for Class VII incorporates Quranic verses and hadith that explicitly address tolerance, justice, and the prohibition of extremism, aligning with the moderation-based curriculum framework advocated by Bahraen (2023) and Hidayat and Samiaji (2023). The Aqidah Akhlak module similarly embeds the ten PPRA values—*ta'adub*, *qudwah*, *tawassuth*, *muwathanah*, *tawazun*, *i'tidal*, *musawah*, *syura*, *tasamuh*, and *tathawwur wa ibtikar*—as explicit learning outcomes (Rahman et al., 2021).

The principal of MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong plays a pivotal role in the strategic management of curriculum implementation. Consistent with findings by Risna and Pelu (2024) regarding the capacity of Islamic school principals in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* program, the principal at this institution demonstrates high enthusiasm for the curriculum reform, actively communicates the vision of moderation-based education to all stakeholders, and coordinates with the District Kemenag office for technical guidance and training. The principal's leadership style is characterized by participatory decision-making, regular curriculum review meetings, and a commitment to professional development for teachers.

The school has implemented a structured program of teacher capacity building to support Merdeka Curriculum implementation. This includes participation in technical guidance (*Bimtek*) sessions organized by the District Kemenag, self-directed learning through the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*, and school-based workshops facilitated by the curriculum coordinator (Ariyanti et al., 2024; E. Nisa, 2022). However, consistent with findings by Zarkasi et al. (2023) regarding Al-Qur'an Hadith teachers in Demak, many teachers at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong report

that training has been general in nature and has not adequately addressed the specific challenges of implementing moderation-based learning in PAI-cluster subjects.

The school has transitioned from the Minimal Completeness Criteria (*Kriteria Ketuntasan Minimal/KKM*) system to the Learning Objective Achievement Criteria (*Kriteria Ketercapaian Tujuan Pembelajaran/KKTP*) framework mandated by the Merdeka Curriculum (Herwanti et al., 2022). Assessment of P5-PPRA projects employs a process-based evaluation model, consistent with the project-based assessment principles described by Alkatiri et al. (2022). Teachers report that the shift to formative and portfolio-based assessment has been both liberating and challenging: liberating in that it allows for more authentic evaluation of student character development, and challenging in that it requires significant additional time and pedagogical skill.

MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong has actively engaged parents and the local community in P5-PPRA activities, recognizing that the success of moderation-based education depends on alignment between school and home environments (Nuwairah, 2023). Community figures, including local religious leaders (*ulama*) and village heads, have been invited to participate in project presentations and cultural events, reinforcing the school's positioning as a center of moderate Islamic education in the Malangbong sub-district.

The implementation profile of MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong reflects a pattern of adaptive compliance—a strategic orientation in which the institution accepts the broad framework of the Merdeka Curriculum while creatively adapting its specific content and methods to the local context. This pattern is consistent with the theoretical framework of curriculum localization advanced by Munawaroh et al. (2023), who argue that the *Kurikulum Operasional Madrasah* (KOM) serves as a critical bridge between national curriculum mandates and the distinctive educational identity of individual madrasahs. The integration of P5-PPRA with religious moderation values at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong also resonates with Mallewai's (2023) finding that the synchronization of these two value frameworks is both necessary and achievable, provided that teachers receive adequate support and that institutional leadership maintains a coherent vision. The school's approach exemplifies what Putri and Nural (2022) describe as the "actualization of religious moderation in PAI curriculum development based on Merdeka Belajar"—a process that requires not merely technical compliance but genuine pedagogical transformation.

The theoretical significance of these findings lies in their demonstration that the Merdeka Curriculum, when implemented with strategic intentionality and a deep commitment to *wasathiyah* values, can serve as a powerful vehicle for character formation in Islamic educational institutions. This aligns with the broader argument advanced by Sinulingga and Dalimunthe (2024) that curriculum implementation based on religious moderation can produce students who are "neutral, empathetic, and balanced in developing inter-religious interactions." The MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong case thus provides empirical support for the theoretical proposition that curriculum reform and religious moderation are mutually reinforcing rather than competing imperatives.

Factors Driving and Constraining Implementation: Opportunities and Challenges

The issuance of KMA Number 347 of 2022 created a clear regulatory mandate for Merdeka Curriculum implementation in all madrasahs, providing MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong with both the legitimacy and the institutional framework to pursue curriculum reform. This regulatory context is significant because it transforms what might otherwise be a voluntary innovation into a non-negotiable institutional obligation, thereby mobilizing resources and attention that might not otherwise be directed toward curriculum development. As Ramah and Rohman (2023) observe, the KMA 347/2022 framework explicitly requires madrasahs to integrate moderation values through P5-PPRA activities, creating a structural alignment between the school's religious identity and its curricular obligations.

The most significant challenge identified by participants at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong is the unpreparedness of teachers to implement the Merdeka Curriculum effectively. This finding is consistent with a broad pattern documented across multiple studies: Salsabila and Achadi (2024) found that teachers at MI Salafiyah Tanjungsari lacked deep understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum; Ubaidillah (2024) documented similar challenges at MTs Negeri Jayawijaya; and Swandari and Jemani (2023) identified teacher mindset and collaboration deficits as key obstacles to implementation. At MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong, teacher unpreparedness manifests in three specific ways: difficulty in developing moderation-integrated *modul ajar*; uncertainty about the KKTP assessment framework; and limited capacity to facilitate project-based learning activities that authentically embed PPRA values.

MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong faces significant infrastructure constraints that complicate Merdeka Curriculum implementation. The school has limited access to digital learning platforms, including the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*, due to unreliable internet connectivity in the Malangbong sub-district. This constraint is particularly acute given that the Merdeka Curriculum's support ecosystem is heavily digitally mediated (Ariyanti et al., 2024; Utami, 2020). The school's limited physical infrastructure—including inadequate classroom space for project-based activities and insufficient laboratory facilities—further constrains the scope and ambition of P5-PPRA projects.

Despite these constraints, the Merdeka Curriculum's inherent flexibility represents a significant opportunity for MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong. Unlike the more prescriptive Kurikulum 2013, the Merdeka Curriculum grants madrasahs considerable autonomy in designing their KOM, selecting P5-PPRA project themes, and adapting learning objectives to local contexts (Munawaroh et al., 2023; Walid, 2024). This flexibility has enabled MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong to design P5-PPRA projects that draw on the rich local cultural and religious heritage of the Malangbong community, including traditional Sundanese Islamic practices and local environmental knowledge.

The strong community support enjoyed by MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong—rooted in its historical identity as a pesantren-affiliated institution with deep ties to the local Muslim community—constitutes a significant enabling factor for curriculum implementation. Parents and community members express strong support for the school's moderation-based educational agenda, viewing it as consistent with the traditional Nahdlatul Ulama values of *tawassuth*, *tawazun*, and *tasamuh* that characterize the religious culture of the Malangbong area (Anwar et al., 2023; Yuhasnita & Roza, 2023). This community support provides the school with social capital that partially compensates for its material resource deficits.

Participants report significant challenges in coordinating with the District Kemenag office regarding the technical implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Specifically, the socialization of KMA 347/2022 was perceived as delayed and insufficiently detailed, leaving teachers uncertain about specific implementation requirements. This finding resonates with Risna and Pelu's (2024) observation that Islamic school principals believe socialization and training for the *Merdeka Belajar* program need to adhere more closely to guidelines set by the Ministry of Religious Affairs.

The principal's strategic leadership capacity emerges as the critical mediating variable between structural constraints and implementation outcomes. The principal of MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong has adopted a proactive stance toward curriculum reform, actively seeking external partnerships, organizing school-based training, and maintaining a consistent institutional narrative about the importance of moderation-based education. This leadership orientation is consistent with Walid's (2024) analysis of managerial strategies in MTs DDI Pacongong, which identifies planning, supervision, and evaluation as the three pillars of effective madrasah leadership.

The causal structure underlying the implementation challenges at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong can be understood through the lens of institutional isomorphism—the process by which organizations adopt structures and practices in response to external pressures, even when internal capacity is insufficient to support genuine transformation (Suwandi & Widodo, 2021). The school's formal adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum framework represents a form of normative isomorphism driven by regulatory mandate, but the depth of implementation is constrained by the gap between formal compliance and substantive capacity. This gap is most evident in the domain of teacher professional development, where the school's limited resources and the general nature of available training have produced a situation in which teachers understand the Merdeka Curriculum in theory but struggle to implement it in practice (Alfarisi & Bakar, 2022; Asriadi & Yusfiana, 2024).

The theoretical framework of dynamic capabilities provides a complementary lens for understanding why some institutions navigate these constraints more effectively than others. Dynamic capabilities—the ability to sense, seize, and reconfigure resources in response to environmental change—are particularly relevant in the context of curriculum reform, where institutions must continuously adapt their practices to evolving policy requirements (Hamid, 2022). MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong's principal demonstrates several dynamic capability behaviors: actively scanning the policy environment for new guidance and resources; mobilizing community support to compensate for material deficits; and reconfiguring the school's curriculum development process to incorporate moderation values more systematically. These behaviors suggest that institutional resilience in the face of curriculum reform is not simply a function of resource endowment but of strategic agency and adaptive capacity.

Effects on Student Character, Institutional Identity, and Resilience

Teachers and the principal at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong report observable changes in student attitudes toward religious diversity and tolerance following the implementation of moderation-based P5-PPRA projects. Students who participated in the "Harmony in Diversity" project demonstrated increased willingness to engage respectfully with peers from different religious backgrounds and greater awareness of the importance of *tasamuh* (tolerance) as an Islamic value (Hidayat & Samiaji, 2023). These observations are consistent with findings by Wahid and Fauzi (2024) at TMI Al-Amien Prenduan, who document that systematic implementation of religious moderation values in Islamic educational settings produces measurable shifts in student attitudes toward radicalism and intolerance.

The project-based learning model embedded in the Merdeka Curriculum has produced notable improvements in student agency and critical thinking at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong. Students report greater confidence in expressing their opinions, engaging in deliberative discussions, and applying Islamic values to contemporary social issues (Desnita & Salminawati, 2024; Sinulingga & Dalimunthe, 2024). This finding aligns with Wahyudi and Ariyani's (2023) observation that the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning produces positive effects on student motivation and learning interest.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on religious moderation has reinforced MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong's institutional identity as a center of moderate Islamic education in the Malangbong sub-district. The school's P5-PPRA projects have generated positive community recognition, with local religious leaders and parents expressing appreciation for the school's commitment to cultivating students who embody the values of *rahmatan lil alamin* (Azmi et al., 2024; Nuraeni et al., 2024). This enhanced institutional identity has practical consequences: the school has experienced an increase in student enrollment over the two years since Merdeka Curriculum implementation began, suggesting that the community perceives the curriculum reform as a quality improvement.

The process of developing moderation-integrated *modul ajar* and facilitating P5-PPRA projects has produced significant professional growth among teachers at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong. Teachers report that the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum have pushed them to deepen their understanding of religious moderation values, develop more creative and student-centered pedagogical approaches, and engage more

collaboratively with colleagues (Asriadi & Yulfiana, 2024; Roni et al., 2022). This finding is consistent with Rohmadi et al.'s (2023) observation that training in the Merdeka Curriculum produces dramatic improvements in teacher understanding and capacity.

Despite these positive developments, MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong faces ongoing challenges to its institutional resilience from external pressures, including the rapid pace of curriculum change, the financial burden of curriculum development activities, and the risk of teacher burnout from the demands of simultaneous curriculum reform and regular teaching responsibilities (Ariyanti et al., 2024; Azahra & Kosim, 2024). These pressures are particularly acute in the context of a private madrasah with limited financial resources and a small teaching staff.

The Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on community-based learning and parental engagement has strengthened the relationship between MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong and its surrounding community. P5-PPRA projects that involve community members as resource persons and audiences have created new channels of communication and collaboration between the school and local stakeholders (Pangeresa et al., 2024; Winasih & Fuadi, 2024). This strengthened school-community relationship constitutes a form of social capital that enhances the school's resilience by expanding its resource base beyond formal institutional channels.

At the macro level, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on religious moderation at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong contributes to the national agenda of strengthening religious moderation as a bulwark against extremism and intolerance. The Ministry of Religious Affairs has identified madrasahs as strategic sites for the dissemination of moderation values, and the experience of MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong demonstrates that even resource-constrained peripheral institutions can make meaningful contributions to this agenda when supported by strong leadership and community engagement (Fani & Mawardi, 2023; Swandari & Jemani, 2023).

The transformative impacts documented at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong can be theorized through the framework of educational resilience, which Azahra and Kosim (2024) define as the capacity of educational institutions to adapt, absorb, and transform in response to policy demands while maintaining their core identity and mission. The evidence from this case study suggests that MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong has achieved a form of resilience that is not merely reactive—surviving the demands of curriculum reform—but genuinely transformative: using

the Merdeka Curriculum as a catalyst for institutional renewal and community engagement.

The concept of *wasathiyah* (Islamic moderation) provides the normative foundation for this transformative resilience. As Hidayat and Samiaji (2023) argue, the strengthening of religious moderation in madrasah environments is not simply a matter of curriculum content but of institutional culture—the creation of a school environment in which moderate values are lived and practiced rather than merely taught. The evidence from MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong suggests that the Merdeka Curriculum's P5-PPRA framework, when implemented with genuine commitment to moderation values, can serve as a powerful mechanism for cultivating this institutional culture.

The broader theoretical significance of these findings lies in their challenge to the deficit narrative that often characterizes discussions of curriculum reform in peripheral Islamic educational institutions. Rather than framing resource constraints as insurmountable barriers to quality implementation, the MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong case demonstrates that strategic leadership, community engagement, and a coherent institutional vision can generate forms of resilience that transcend material limitations. This finding resonates with Salas's (2024) argument that the development of character education in madrasahs based on the Merdeka Curriculum requires not primarily financial resources but a coherent integration of values across all dimensions of institutional life—intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the individual institution. The MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong experience suggests that the Merdeka Curriculum, when implemented with strategic intentionality and a deep commitment to religious moderation, can serve as a vehicle for the broader transformation of Islamic education in Indonesia—producing graduates who are not only academically competent but also morally grounded, civically engaged, and committed to the values of tolerance, balance, and national unity that are essential for Indonesia's pluralist democracy (Bahraen, 2023; Sinulingga & Dalimunthe, 2024).

Conclusion

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum based on religious moderation at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong Garut takes the form of a structured, institutionally coherent program that integrates P5-PPRA project activities with the ten PPRA values mandated by KMA 347/2022. The school has developed a *Kurikulum Operasional Madrasah* that

explicitly embeds moderation values across all PAI-cluster subjects, designed four thematic P5-PPRA projects per academic year, and established assessment practices aligned with the KKTP framework. The implementation is characterized by adaptive compliance—formal adherence to the national curriculum framework combined with creative local adaptation—and is driven by strong principal leadership and active community engagement.

The opportunities and challenges characterizing implementation at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong are shaped by a complex interplay of structural, pedagogical, and leadership factors. The primary opportunities include the regulatory mandate of KMA 347/2022, the inherent flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum design, and the strong community support rooted in the school's pesantren-affiliated identity. The primary challenges include teacher unpreparedness, digital infrastructure deficits, and coordination difficulties with the District Kemenag office. The critical mediating variable is the principal's strategic leadership capacity, which determines the extent to which the school can leverage opportunities and mitigate constraints. Institutions with strong, proactive leadership demonstrate greater capacity to navigate the implementation landscape, even under conditions of resource scarcity.

The transformative impacts of Merdeka Curriculum implementation based on religious moderation at MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong are multidimensional and mutually reinforcing. At the student level, implementation has produced measurable shifts in attitudes toward religious diversity, enhanced agency and critical thinking, and deeper internalization of *wasathiyah* values. At the institutional level, implementation has strengthened the school's identity as a center of moderate Islamic education, improved school-community relations, and generated professional growth among teachers. At the macro level, the school's experience contributes to the national agenda of religious moderation and demonstrates that peripheral madrasah institutions can serve as effective sites of character formation and civic education.

The qualitative case study approach, combined with the theoretical frameworks of educational resilience, dynamic capabilities, and *wasathiyah*-based Islamic education, has proven highly effective in generating nuanced, contextually grounded insights into the strategic management of curriculum reform in Islamic educational institutions. The triangulation of interview, observation, and document analysis data has produced a robust and internally consistent account of the MTs An-

Nur 1 Malangbong experience, validating the methodological choices made at the outset of the research.

This study is subject to several limitations. First, as a single-site case study, its findings cannot be generalized to all MTs institutions in Indonesia; the specific contextual features of MTs An-Nur 1 Malangbong—including its pesantren affiliation, its location in the Malangbong sub-district, and the particular characteristics of its principal and teaching staff—may not be representative of the broader population of private MTs institutions. Second, the study's reliance on self-reported data from participants introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, particularly in accounts of teacher readiness and student attitude change. Third, the four-month research period may be insufficient to capture the full trajectory of curriculum implementation, which is an ongoing and evolving process. Future research should address these limitations through multi-site comparative studies, longitudinal designs, and the incorporation of quantitative measures of student learning outcomes and attitude change. Particular attention should be paid to the role of digital infrastructure in mediating the relationship between curriculum policy and implementation quality, and to the development of context-sensitive professional development programs for PAI teachers in peripheral madrasah institutions.

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