

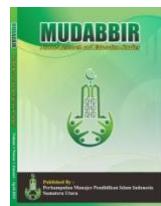


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## Management and Learning Practices in an Islamic School: A Case Study at MTS IRA Medan

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### ABSTRACT

*This research examines how educational management, school facilities, and learning practices are carried out at MTS Swasta IRA Medan, an Islamic junior high school overseen by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Conducted as part of the Field Experience Program (PLP I) for English Education students, this qualitative descriptive study utilized observations and interviews to review the institution's managerial system, infrastructure, and instructional procedures. The findings indicate that the school has implemented management approaches consistent with national education standards and the framework of School-Based Management. Its facilities and infrastructure generally support teaching and learning, though enhancements in laboratory resources and digital learning tools remain necessary. The adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum has begun through structured lesson plans, differentiated instruction, and character education grounded in Islamic values. Overall, the study concludes that MTS Swasta IRA Medan shows a strong dedication to improving educational quality and integrating Islamic principles, even though improvements are still needed in teacher capacity-building and the use of learning technologies.*

**Keywords:** Educational management; Islamic junior high school; learning process; Merdeka Curriculum; facilities and infrastructure; case study.

## INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental pillar of human development, providing individuals with the knowledge, competencies, and moral foundation needed to contribute meaningfully to society. In Indonesia, efforts to enhance educational quality have been closely linked to decentralization and school autonomy. Through the implementation of School-Based Management (SBM), schools are encouraged to independently oversee their resources while adhering to principles of community involvement and institutional accountability (Haryanto, 2020). This policy shift has improved educational effectiveness by giving school leaders greater authority to make contextually responsive decisions and enhance institutional performance.

Indonesia has recently experienced major curriculum changes with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022. This curriculum emphasizes flexible learning, student-centered pedagogy, and the cultivation of higher-order thinking skills, supported by character development aligned with the principles of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*—a framework envisioning learners who are devout, creative, autonomous, cooperative, and reflective (Kemdikbudristek, 2022; Wulandari & Nugroho, 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers to tailor learning objectives and assessment strategies to student needs and local contexts, thereby promoting balanced academic growth and moral development.

Islamic educational institutions (madrasah) hold a crucial role in shaping learners intellectually, spiritually, and ethically. Yusuf and Arifin (2021) highlight that effective management in Islamic schools requires the integration of administrative competence, strong pedagogical practices, and Islamic values within the school culture. The governance of these institutions should reflect principles such as *amanah* (responsibility), *ukhuwah* (collaboration), and *ihsan* (excellence), which correspond with modern leadership theories that endorse ethical, transformative, and value-driven leadership (Asifudin, 2020).

MTS Swasta IRA Medan, under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, exemplifies this dual commitment to academic achievement and moral development. The school applies management practices aligned with national

education standards while consistently integrating Islamic values throughout its learning activities. Its vision to nurture devout, intelligent, and disciplined Muslim youth reflects a comprehensive approach to holistic education. Examining the school's management system, infrastructure readiness, and instructional practices provides meaningful insight into how Islamic schools can effectively operationalize the Merdeka Curriculum without compromising their spiritual mission.

This study forms part of the Field Experience Program (PLP I) under the English Education Department, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University of North Sumatra. The research aims to describe and analyze:

1. The implementation of educational management at MTS Swasta IRA Medan;
2. The adequacy and use of school facilities and infrastructure; and
3. The execution of learning practices within the Merdeka Curriculum paradigm.

The results of this study are expected to contribute to the academic discussion on Islamic education management and to provide evidence-based insights for teachers, educational policymakers, and school leaders seeking to strengthen the quality and character development of Islamic secondary education in Indonesia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Educational Management in Islamic Schools**

Educational management in Islamic institutions underscores the importance of administrative effectiveness while upholding the spiritual purpose of education. Rahmah and Hasan (2020) note that successful management in madrasah involves merging contemporary managerial approaches with Islamic ethical values, emphasizing accountability (*amanah*), cooperation (*ukhuwah*), and professionalism (*itqan*). Consequently, leadership in Islamic schools extends beyond administrative roles to moral stewardship, shaping school culture through exemplary behavior and ethical consistency (Sulaiman & Aziz, 2021).

Contemporary theories of educational leadership likewise stress the significance of transformational leadership, a model that aligns closely with Islamic teachings that

prioritize motivation, integrity, and service (Nugroho & Rahman, 2022). This leadership approach encourages active teacher and staff involvement in decision-making, promoting a shared sense of mission. Within Islamic educational environments, such leadership mirrors the prophetic example of *uswah hasanah* (noble conduct), where leaders function as moral exemplars for their communities.

Since its widespread implementation in Indonesia in the early 2000s, School-Based Management (SBM) has evolved to support more adaptable and context-driven school governance. Research indicates that SBM increases school autonomy and strengthens stakeholder participation, resulting in improved teaching quality and overall institutional performance (Fitriani et al., 2021). Nevertheless, Islamic schools operate under a dual supervisory framework—by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Religious Affairs—requiring flexible, cooperative, and context-sensitive management arrangements (Amin & Suryani, 2023).

## **Facilities and Infrastructure in Education**

Adequate facilities and infrastructure play a vital role in creating effective learning environments. Numerous studies demonstrate that schools with sufficient and well-maintained resources positively influence students' motivation and academic performance (Kurniawan & Pratiwi, 2020). In madrasah settings, infrastructure supports not only instructional activities but also spiritual formation. Spaces such as prayer rooms, Qur'anic learning areas, and library facilities contribute significantly to students' moral and religious development (Syahril & Mahmudah, 2022).

According to the Indonesian *Standar Nasional Pendidikan* (National Education Standards), school facilities must uphold principles of safety, inclusivity, and accessibility for all learners (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). Hapsari and Widodo (2021) highlight that the incorporation of digital tools—including projectors, online learning platforms, and digitalized library systems—has become a key indicator of a school's readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This transition toward blended and technology-enhanced learning environments is shown to improve both teaching efficiency and student participation.

Nonetheless, Islamic schools continue to face gaps in infrastructure development, particularly between madrasah located in urban centers and those in rural regions. Ensuring long-term investment in the upkeep and improvement of essential facilities—especially science laboratories and ICT resources—is crucial for promoting equitable learning opportunities across diverse educational contexts (Suryani & Huda, 2023).

### **Learning Process and Merdeka Curriculum Implementation**

The Merdeka Curriculum reflects Indonesia's continuous initiative to shift learning from a content-heavy model toward a competency-oriented approach. It encourages educators to develop learning experiences that are student-focused, contextual, and rooted in character development (Putra et al., 2023). This curriculum framework grants teachers flexibility to adjust their instruction based on learners' developmental levels and individual needs, thereby advancing differentiated teaching practices (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

In Islamic educational settings, curriculum implementation aims to harmonize religious learning objectives with broader academic competencies. The *Profil Pelajar Rahmatan lil 'Alamin*, tailored for madrasah, highlights the importance of nurturing piety, ethical behavior, and social responsibility alongside higher-order thinking and creativity (Arifin & Nurhayati, 2020). Activities such as daily Qur'an recitation (*tadarus*), congregational prayer, and discussions on Islamic values serve to strengthen discipline and moral consciousness among students.

The application of active learning methods—such as project-based learning and cooperative learning—has been shown to enhance student engagement and understanding across both religious and general subjects (Hidayat et al., 2021). Rahayu and Setiawan (2022) further note that these instructional strategies effectively support cognitive and affective development, aligning well with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on purposeful, enjoyable, and holistic learning experiences.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Drawing from the literature, this study employs an integrative conceptual framework that links three interconnected elements:

1. **Educational Management** - covering leadership practices, planning mechanisms, supervision processes, and community involvement, aligned with both Islamic educational principles and national policy standards;
2. **Facilities and Infrastructure** - focusing on sufficiency, technological readiness, and operational quality as key factors influencing school performance;
3. **Learning Process** - emphasizing the execution of the Merdeka Curriculum and the incorporation of Islamic values into everyday instructional activities.

These components function in an interconnected manner, collectively shaping institutional effectiveness and supporting the comprehensive development of students within Islamic secondary education.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Design

This research utilized a qualitative descriptive design, intended to portray and interpret phenomena as they naturally unfold within educational environments. This method was selected to gain a comprehensive understanding of how educational management, facilities, and learning practices are carried out at MTS Swasta IRA Medan. As noted by Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative inquiry enables researchers to examine participants' experiences and institutional settings in-depth, generating detailed and context-rich insights.

A descriptive qualitative approach is especially appropriate for studies conducted in school contexts because it documents actual conditions without manipulating the environment (Flick, 2019). Using this design, the researchers examined the interactions of school leaders, teachers, and students within the framework of educational management and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

### Research Setting

The study was conducted at MTS Swasta IRA Medan, situated on Jalan Pertiwi No. 53-B in the Medan Tembung District of North Sumatra, Indonesia. As an institution under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the school also serves as a partner for the English Education Department within the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra. Data collection took place on November 10, 2025, during the Field Experience Program (PLP I). This site was intentionally selected because it demonstrates a robust integration of Islamic educational values alongside the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

## **Participants and Data Sources**

The participants in this study consisted of the school principal, teachers, and students who were actively engaged in the daily teaching and learning processes. Primary data were gathered through direct observation, interviews, and document analysis (Assingkily, 2021). Observations emphasized school management practices, classroom instruction, and the condition of facilities, while interviews explored teachers' experiences and the challenges they faced in applying the Merdeka Curriculum. Document analysis involved reviewing school profiles, activity schedules, and organizational structures.

Secondary data were drawn from academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and official policy documents concerning school-based management, infrastructure standards, and curriculum regulations. Utilizing various sources enabled data triangulation, thereby strengthening the validity and credibility of the findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

## **Data Collection Techniques**

Data were gathered using non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Through observation, the researchers were able to capture actual practices in the school environment without becoming involved in the instructional activities. Semi-structured interviews, guided by open-ended questions, allowed respondents to share their experiences in depth while keeping discussions

aligned with the study's aims (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Document analysis offered additional verification through official school records and administrative documents.

All information was documented in field notes and later organized into thematic categories: (1) educational management, (2) facilities and infrastructure, and (3) learning processes. Ethical procedures were upheld by obtaining informed consent from participants and maintaining the confidentiality of their identities.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

Data were examined using the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2021), which consists of six main phases:

1. Becoming familiar with the data by repeatedly reading field notes and interview transcripts;
2. Developing initial codes that capture emerging concepts;
3. Identifying potential themes that correspond to the research questions;
4. Refining and validating these themes to ensure coherence and accuracy;
5. Defining and labeling the finalized themes that reflect the core findings; and
6. Writing the analytical report by connecting the themes with existing theories.

This analytical approach was selected due to its flexibility and suitability for educational studies, especially those examining implementation processes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Through thematic analysis, the researchers were able to systematically interpret how educational management, infrastructure, and learning practices are enacted at MTS Swasta IRA Medan.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Implementation of Educational Management**

The findings indicate that educational management practices at MTS Swasta IRA Medan are in line with the principles of School-Based Management (SBM) as well as Islamic ethical values. The school maintains a well-defined organizational structure in which the principal, vice principals, teachers, and administrative personnel work

collaboratively in managing the institution. Decision-making is conducted through participatory mechanisms, fostering transparency and shared responsibility.

These results are supported by Fitriani et al. (2021), who highlight that participatory leadership and teacher engagement in school planning enhance organizational trust and overall performance. Additionally, Islamic management values—such as *amanah* (trustworthiness) and *shura* (consultation)—are consistently embedded in the school's governance practices, reinforcing integrity and equity (Hidayat & Yusuf, 2020).

Teacher supervision is carried out in a structured manner through routine academic monitoring, which includes reviewing lesson plans, observing classroom management, and evaluating assessment procedures. The principal's supervisory approach illustrates elements of transformational leadership, motivating teachers to continuously refine their instructional practices. This aligns with the findings of Kusnadi and Rahmawati (2023), who note that transformational leadership encourages teacher motivation and pedagogical innovation.

However, one area requiring attention is the limited frequency of professional development initiatives. Much of the training available to teachers depends on external programs provided either by the Ministry of Religious Affairs or other institutions. This shortcoming underscores the need for more systematic internal development opportunities, consistent with Sulaiman and Aziz's (2021) argument that ongoing teacher capacity-building is crucial for sustained school improvement.

## **Facilities and Infrastructure**

MTS Swasta IRA Medan is equipped with a range of facilities that support daily teaching and learning activities, including nine classrooms, two laboratories, a library, a prayer room (*mushalla*), a teachers' office, and a student health unit (UKS). These facilities help establish a supportive learning environment, although several components—particularly laboratory tools and digital infrastructure—still require improvement.

The availability and quality of school facilities have a substantial influence on student learning. Previous research (e.g., Kurniawan & Pratiwi, 2020; Wicaksono et al., 2022) highlights that well-maintained classrooms, laboratories, and digital technologies enhance students' motivation and participation. In Islamic educational settings, facilities serve not only functional purposes but also embody spiritual and moral values. Dedicated religious spaces, for instance, nurture students' discipline and emotional well-being (Syahril & Mahmudah, 2022).

However, the school continues to face challenges in integrating digital learning technologies. Limited access to projectors, stable internet connections, and e-learning platforms constrains its ability to fully implement the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes blended learning and differentiated instruction. This aligns with the findings of Hapsari and Widodo (2021), who assert that digital readiness is essential for schools to adapt to curriculum reforms.

To move forward, the school requires targeted investments in ICT infrastructure alongside professional development programs that strengthen teachers' digital literacy. These initiatives would not only enhance instructional quality but also support the development of students' independent learning abilities, a key objective of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

### **Learning Process and Curriculum Implementation**

The teaching and learning practices at MTS Swasta IRA Medan aim to harmonize academic progress with the cultivation of religious character. Teachers consistently follow structured instructional routines aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, beginning with greetings, prayers, attendance monitoring, and motivational activities before proceeding to core lessons and end-of-session reflections.

The school adopts various active learning strategies—including group discussions, peer collaboration, and contextualized activities—to enhance student engagement. These approaches are consistent with the findings of Putra et al. (2023) and Rahayu and Setiawan (2022), who highlight that student-centered and project-based

methodologies foster greater participation and promote critical thinking within Islamic school settings.

Religious practices are embedded throughout the school day, such as daily Qur'an recitation (tadarus), congregational dhuhr prayer, and BTQ (Qur'an literacy) classes. These routines support students' spiritual and moral development while cultivating discipline, aligning with the holistic educational framework described by Yusuf and Arifin (2021), which underscores the integration of intellectual and spiritual growth.

However, observations indicate that the use of formative assessments and digital media remains limited. Teachers predominantly depend on written and oral tests, which may not adequately assess higher-order thinking skills. As emphasized by Wulandari and Nugroho (2023), the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the use of authentic, performance-based assessments that mirror real-world competencies. Therefore, strengthening teachers' skills in assessment design and digital integration is essential for maximizing learning effectiveness.

### Discussion: Integration and Implications

The synergy of effective governance, sufficient facilities, and dynamic instructional practices at MTS Swasta IRA Medan reflects a cohesive model of contemporary Islamic educational development. The integration of participatory decision-making and values-driven leadership has enhanced teacher professionalism and reinforced institutional accountability. At the same time, the Merdeka Curriculum offers room for pedagogical innovation and contextual learning, enabling the school to blend national academic expectations with Islamic moral formation.

These findings correspond with Amin and Suryani (2023), who argue that adaptive leadership in Islamic educational institutions can harmonize regulatory demands with spiritual missions through context-sensitive governance. Similarly, Rahmah and Hasan (2020) emphasize that sustaining high-quality madrasah education requires balancing state requirements with core Islamic values.

The experience of MTS Swasta IRA Medan illustrates that the modernization of Islamic education in Indonesia is advancing toward a deeper integration of religious ethics, academic knowledge, and educational innovation—conditional on ongoing investment in teacher development and technological support systems.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusion

The study concludes that MTS Swasta IRA Medan has effectively implemented its educational management, infrastructure provision, and instructional practices in accordance with both School-Based Management (SBM) principles and Islamic educational values. The school exhibits a well-structured administrative system, participatory leadership, and accountable financial practices. Overall, its facilities and infrastructure adequately support instructional activities, though enhancements—particularly in laboratory resources and digital learning technologies—are still necessary.

The school's integration of the Merdeka Curriculum with Islamic character education demonstrates a strong commitment to holistic student development, encompassing academic proficiency, spiritual growth, and disciplined behavior. However, sustained improvements in teacher professional development and technological readiness remain essential to ensuring continuous quality advancement over the long term.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed:

1. For the School Administration — periodic training and workshops should be institutionalized to strengthen teachers' competence in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and utilizing educational technology.
2. For Teachers — it is essential to apply varied and formative assessment strategies that emphasize students' higher-order thinking and creativity.

3. For Policy Makers and Stakeholders – increased investment in facilities, especially in science laboratories and digital infrastructure, will significantly enhance the learning environment.
4. For Future Researchers – further studies can explore the impact of Merdeka Curriculum implementation on students' achievement and character formation across different madrasah settings.

The integration of strong educational management, adequate facilities, and innovative learning practices rooted in Islamic values is key to advancing the quality and competitiveness of Islamic education in Indonesia.

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