

Educators' Strategic Roles in the Merdeka Curriculum and Their Impact on Students' Interest in Learning Arabic

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Abstract

This study analyzes the strategic roles of teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and their contribution to developing students' interest in learning Arabic at MTs Nurul Iman, Jambi City. A qualitative case study approach was employed, with data collected through interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, and documentation involving 16 eighth-grade students and one Arabic teacher. Data analysis integrated Teacher Role Theory, Pedagogical Content Knowledge, and Interest Development Theory. The findings show that teachers effectively enacted their roles as facilitators, motivators, learning designers, role models, and assessors providing feedback. These roles contributed to triggering situational interest, maintaining student engagement, and fostering the development of individual interest in Arabic learning. In this context, students demonstrated high and sustained interest, reflected in active participation, awareness of the importance of Arabic, and willingness to engage in independent learning. However, the use of digital-based learning media remains suboptimal due to limited facilities and infrastructure. These findings highlight

that successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum depends on the synergy between teachers' competencies and institutional support.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis peran strategis guru dalam implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka serta kontribusinya terhadap pengembangan minat belajar bahasa Arab siswa di MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus dengan pengumpulan data yang dilakukan melalui wawancara, angket, observasi kelas, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan 16 siswa kelas VIII dan satu guru bahasa Arab. Analisis data mengintegrasikan teori peran guru, pengetahuan konten pedagogis, dan teori pengembangan minat. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru secara efektif menjalankan perannya sebagai fasilitator, motivator, perancang pembelajaran, teladan, serta penilai yang memberikan umpan balik. Peran-peran tersebut berkontribusi dalam memunculkan minat situasional, mempertahankan keterlibatan belajar siswa, serta mendorong berkembangnya minat individu dalam pembelajaran bahasa Arab. Dalam konteks ini, siswa menunjukkan minat belajar yang tinggi dan berkelanjutan, yang tercermin dalam partisipasi aktif, kesadaran akan pentingnya bahasa Arab, serta kemauan untuk belajar secara mandiri. Namun, pemanfaatan media pembelajaran berbasis digital masih belum optimal akibat keterbatasan sarana dan prasarana. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa keberhasilan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka bergantung pada sinergi antara kompetensi guru dan dukungan institusi.

المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل الأدوار الاستراتيجية للمعلم في تطبيق المنهج المستقل، وبيان إسهامه في تنمية اهتمام الطلاب بتعلم اللغة العربية في مدرسة نور الإيمان المتوسطة الإسلامية بمدينة جامبي. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الكيفي بأسلوب دراسة الحالة، حيث جُمعت البيانات من خلال المقابلات، والاستبانات،

والملاحظات الصفية، والوثائق، بمشاركة ١٦ طالبًا من الصف الثامن ومعلم واحد للغة العربية. وتم تحليل البيانات بالاستناد إلى نظرية أدوار المعلم، ومعرفة المحتوى التربوي، ونظرية تنمية الاهتمام. وأظهرت النتائج أن المعلم أدى أدواره بفاعلية بوصفه مُيسِّرًا، ومحفِّزًا، ومصمِّمًا للتعليم، وقُدوةً، ومُقوِّمًا يقدِّم التغذية الراجعة. وأسهمت هذه الأدوار في إثارة الاهتمام الموقفي، والمحافظة على انخراط الطلاب في التعلم، وتعزيز نمو الاهتمام الفردي بتعلم اللغة العربية. وفي هذا السياق، أظهر الطلاب مستوى مرتفعًا ومستمرًا من الاهتمام، تجلَّى في المشاركة النشطة، والوعي بأهمية اللغة العربية، والرغبة في التعلم الذاتي. ومع ذلك، لا يزال توظيف الوسائط التعليمية الرقمية دون المستوى المأمول بسبب محدودية المرافق والبنية التحتية. وتؤكد هذه النتائج أن نجاح تطبيق المنهج المستقل يتطلب تكاملًا بين كفاءة المعلم والدعم المؤسسي.

Keywords: Arabic language learning; interest development theory; merdeka curriculum; students' learning interest; teacher strategic roles

Introduction

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning aimed at fostering independence, active engagement, and meaningful learning experiences. This shift requires teachers to move beyond their traditional role as knowledge transmitters and function as designers and managers of learning environments that accommodate students' diverse needs and characteristics. In this context, teachers play a central role in determining the effectiveness of instructional processes, including the depth of content and the selection of appropriate teaching strategies.¹ As a regulatory framework, the curriculum guides educational goals, materials, and methods, while also serving as a strategic

¹ Yunita Yunita et al., "Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar," *Jambura Journal of Educational Management* 4, no. 1 (2023): 16-25, <https://doi.org/10.37411/jjem.v4i1.2122>.

instrument for improving the quality of human resources and enhancing national competitiveness.²

In Arabic language learning at the Madrasah Tsanawiyah level, these demands are particularly relevant, as Arabic is often perceived as a difficult and abstract subject. Such perceptions may lead to low levels of student interest, especially when instruction is not delivered contextually or fails to actively engage learners. As a result, students tend to participate in learning activities merely to fulfill academic requirements rather than out of genuine interest. Previous studies have shown that student motivation plays a key role in determining learning outcomes and can be enhanced through instructional innovation, including the use of relevant media, appropriate learning models, and adaptive materials.³ However, in practice, Arabic instruction in many madrasahs remains dominated by teacher-centered approaches that

² Delly Wardhana et al., "Enhancing Arabic Proficiency through Structured Language Planning and Curriculum Integration," *Jurnal Al Bayan: Jurnal Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 17, no. 2 (2025): 329–48, <https://doi.org/10.24042/dh71p593>; Chairul Azmi et al., "National Curriculum Education Policy: Curriculum Merdeka and Its Implementation," *International Journal of Educational Dynamics* 6, no. 1 (2023): 303–9, <https://doi.org/10.24036/ijeds.v6i1.437>.

³ Ety Nur Inah and Aeni Khairunnisa, "Hubungan Motivasi Belajar dengan Prestasi Belajar Bahasa Arab Mahasiswa Bidikmisi," *Al-Ta'dib: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Kependidikan* 12, no. 1 (2019): 36–51, <https://doi.org/10.31332/atdb.v12i1.1220>; Elvia Susanti et al., "Pengaruh Penggunaan Media Powerpoint Terhadap Minat Belajar Bahasa Arab Siswa," *Arabiyatuna : Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 4, no. 1 (2020): 179–192, <https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v4i1.1406>; Zahra El Aouri and Badia Zerhouni, "Motivation and Language Learning Strategies Used by Moroccan University EFL Science Students: A Correlational Study," *Arab World English Journal* 8, no. 2 (2017): 52–73, <https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no2.4>; Mahyudin Ritonga et al., "Arabic Language Learning Reconstruction as a Response to Strengthen Al-Islam Studies at Higher Education," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE)* 10, no. 1 (2021): 355–63, <https://doi.org/10.11591/ijere.v10i1.20747>.

emphasize memorization of vocabulary and grammatical rules, thereby limiting students' active participation.

These conditions highlight the need to examine how teachers' strategic roles contribute to the development of students' learning interest. Accordingly, this study addresses two research questions: (1) How do teachers perform their strategic roles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Arabic language learning at MTs Nurul Iman, Jambi City? and (2) How do these roles contribute to the development of students' learning interest across the phases of Interest Development Theory?

Previous research has explored the relationship between teacher roles and student motivation in Arabic learning contexts. For instance, Baharuddin et al. found that instructional strategies involving varied methods, motivational support, and effective classroom management significantly influence students' learning interest.⁴ Similarly, Ariyanti and Syarifah reported that active learning strategies enhance student engagement,⁵ while Rianawati et al. emphasized the importance of teachers' motivational roles in sustaining participation in religious education.⁶ Despite these contributions, prior studies have largely treated teacher roles and learning interest as separate constructs, with limited attention to how specific dimensions of teacher roles relate to

⁴ Baharuddin Baharuddin et al., "Strategi Mengajar Guru dalam Meningkatkan Minat Belajar Bahasa Arab Peserta Didik pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19," *Lughat Arabi: Jurnal Bahasa Arab dan Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 3, no. 1 (2022): 55–68, <https://doi.org/10.36915/la.v3i1.42>.

⁵ Hari Ariyanti and Syarifah Syarifah, "Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab dalam Meningkatkan Minat Belajar Bahasa Arab Siswa Kelas VII MTs Nurul Muttaqin Simpang Tiga," *Al-Mu'arrib: Journal of Arabic Education* 1, no. 1 (2021): 45–55, <https://doi.org/10.32923/al-muarrib.v1i1.2080>.

⁶ Rianawati Rianawati et al., "Role of Teachers as Motivators in Learning Islamic Religious Education in Elementary School of Negeri 05 Pontianak Timur," *International Journal for Educational and Vocational Studies* 2, no. 5 (2020): 501–9, <https://doi.org/10.29103/ijevs.v2i5.2460>.

the sequential development of learning interest. Moreover, existing research has predominantly focused on online learning environments or English language contexts, leaving face-to-face Arabic instruction within the Merdeka Curriculum framework relatively underexplored.

To address this gap, this study adopts Teacher Role Theory as the primary framework for analyzing teachers' strategic roles in curriculum implementation.⁷ This framework is complemented by the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge,⁸ which explains how teachers transform subject matter into forms that are accessible and engaging for students. In addition, this study draws on Interest Development Theory,⁹ which conceptualizes learning interest as a progressive process encompassing four phases: triggered situational interest, maintained situational interest, emerging individual interest, and well-developed individual interest. These phases provide an analytical lens for understanding how students' interest evolves through instructional experiences.

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' strategic roles in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and their contribution to the development of students' learning interest in Arabic. The study was conducted at MTs Nurul Iman, Jambi City, on January 23, 2026, involving one Arabic language teacher and 16 eighth-grade students as participants. These participants were selected purposively to represent a typical

⁷ Ronald M. Harden and Joy R. Crosby, "AMEE Guide No 20: The Good Teacher Is More than a Lecturer - the Twelve Roles of the Teacher," *Medical Teacher* 22, no. 4 (2000): 334-47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/014215900409429>.

⁸ Lee S. Shulman, "Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching," *Educational Researcher* 15, no. 2 (1986): 4-14, <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X015002004>.

⁹ Suzanne Hidi and K Ann Renninger, "The Four-Phase Model of Interest Development," *Educational Psychologist* 41, no. 2 (2006): 111-27, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15326985ep4102_4.

classroom context in which the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented.

Data were collected through multiple techniques, including semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, classroom observations, and document analysis, to ensure data richness and triangulation. Interviews were conducted with the teacher to explore instructional strategies, role enactment, and pedagogical considerations, while questionnaires were administered to students to capture their perceptions and levels of learning interest. Classroom observations were carried out to examine actual teaching practices, teacher-student interactions, and student engagement during the learning process. In addition, relevant documents, such as lesson plans and learning materials, were analyzed to support and contextualize the findings.

Data analysis was conducted using an interactive qualitative analysis model, involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The analysis was guided by Teacher Role Theory, the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge, and Interest Development Theory, which served as analytical lenses for coding and categorizing the data. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, this study applied data triangulation across sources and methods, as well as systematic coding procedures to ensure the consistency and transparency of the analytical process.

Result

The presentation of the results of this study describes field findings regarding the strategic role of teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and its impact on the development of students' learning interest in the Arabic language subject at MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi. The data presented are the result of a synthesis of the data collection process through interviews, classroom observations, documentation, and questionnaires conducted on 23 January

2026, involving an Arabic language teacher and 16 eighth-grade students as research subjects. Systematically, the presentation of the results is organized into two main focuses, namely the analysis of six strategic teacher roles based on Teacher Role Theory by Harden & Crosby¹⁰ and the mapping of the phases of students' learning interest development referring to Interest Development Theory by Hidi & Renninger.¹¹ To provide a clearer overview of the analytical process, the qualitative data mapping is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

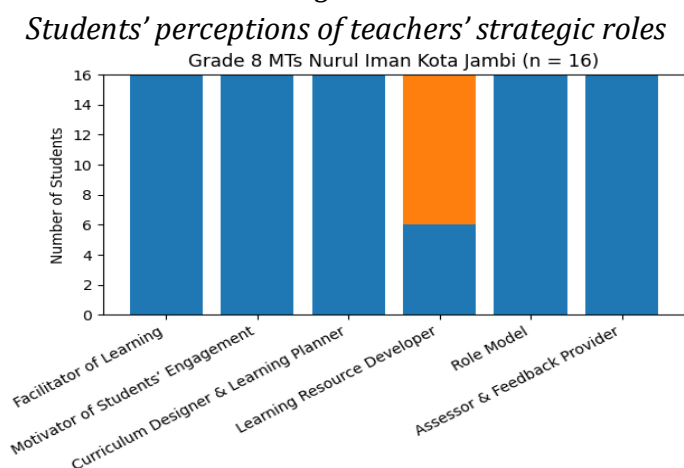


Figure 1 presents the qualitative data mapping that underpins the thematic analysis in this study. It illustrates the systematic process from raw data sources through coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation across all six teacher role themes identified in this research.

To further detail the results of the analysis, a summary of the qualitative data mapping by teacher role theme is presented in Table 1.

¹⁰ Harden and Crosby, "AMEE Guide No 20: The Good Teacher Is More than a Lecturer - the Twelve Roles of the Teacher."

¹¹ Hidi and Renninger, "The Four-Phase Model of Interest Development."

Table 1
Summary of Qualitative Data Mapping by Teacher Role Theme

Theme	Representative Data Source	Key Evidence
Facilitator of Learning	Student Questionnaire	All students (16/16, 100%) stated the teacher helped them understand material clearly and provided ample space for participation
Motivator of Students' Engagement	Student Interview	Students reported that the teacher's varied and encouraging teaching style made Arabic learning enjoyable and motivating
Curriculum Designer & Learning Planner	Lesson Plan Documentation	Learning objectives, materials, and activities were consistently aligned with Merdeka Curriculum principles
Learning Resource Developer	Student Questionnaire and Teacher Interview	Only 6/16 students (37.5%) reported regular use of digital media; teacher cited facility constraints as the primary inhibiting factor
Role Model	Student Questionnaire and Classroom Observation	All students (16/16, 100%) perceived the teacher as fair, disciplined, and patient; observational data confirmed equal treatment of students
Assessor & Feedback Provider	Student Questionnaire and Teacher Interview	All students (16/16, 100%) reported objective assessment; teacher provided constructive oral and written feedback aligned with learning objectives

Table 1 illustrates the systematic analytical process from raw qualitative data (interviews, observations, questionnaires, and documentation) through coding, categorization, and thematic interpretation, making the analytical trail from data

to theme explicit, traceable, and enhancing the transparency and rigor of the qualitative analysis.

Theme 1 Learning Facilitator

Based on the results of interviews and classroom observations conducted on 23 January 2026 at MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi, the eighth-grade Arabic language teacher stated that he/she plays an active role as a learning facilitator in increasing students' interest in learning. The teacher consistently provides opportunities for students to ask questions, express their opinions, and actively participate throughout the learning process. This finding is reinforced by the results of the questionnaire, which show that all students (16 out of 16) stated that the teacher provides ample space for participation and helps students understand the material through clear and easily comprehensible explanations.

Furthermore, classroom observation results indicate the presence of intensive two-way interaction between the teacher and students, in which the teacher not only delivers the material but also guides discussions, responds to students' questions, and ensures students' active involvement throughout the Arabic language learning process. These findings are also supported by documentation from the eighth-grade classroom observations, which show students' active participation in learning activities, both verbally and nonverbally.

Empirically, these field findings are in line with previous studies which emphasize that the role of teachers as communicative and responsive facilitators contributes significantly to increasing students' engagement and learning interest in language learning. These findings suggest that in the context of face-to-face Arabic learning at the madrasah level, facilitative teacher behavior, characterized by open questioning, responsive guidance, and active involvement, is a primary driver of students' initial engagement with the subject.

Theme 2 Learning Engagement Motivator

Based on the results of questionnaire responses and interviews with eighth-grade MTs students, the majority of students stated that they feel happy and enthusiastic in participating in Arabic language learning because the teacher presents learning activities that are interesting and not monotonous. Students perceived that the teacher's communicative and varied teaching style, accompanied by encouragement and appreciation, motivates them to be actively involved throughout the learning process. These findings indicate that the teacher effectively plays a role as a motivator of learning engagement, strengthening students' intrinsic motivation through an enjoyable learning atmosphere and extrinsic motivation through positive reinforcement of students' participation. These interview findings are reinforced by documentation conducted on 23 January 2026, which shows students' active involvement, positive responses to the teacher's instructions, and a conducive classroom atmosphere during Arabic language learning.

Thus, the teacher's role as a motivator is proven to contribute significantly to increasing students' active engagement in the learning process.

Theme 3 Curriculum and Learning Designer

Based on the results of questionnaire responses and interviews with the eighth-grade MTs Arabic language teacher, the teacher stated that learning has been designed and implemented in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the formulation of learning objectives and the selection of materials tailored to students' needs and characteristics. The teacher emphasized that learning objectives are explicitly conveyed at the beginning of learning activities to help students understand the direction and expected learning outcomes. This finding is reinforced by classroom observation results showing a clear alignment

between learning objectives, the materials delivered, and students' learning activities. Empirically, these findings are in line with previous field studies emphasizing that clarity of planning and the relevance of materials to students' contexts are key elements in the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. These findings highlight that alignment between learning objectives, materials, and activities, as mandated by the Merdeka Curriculum, is not merely an administrative requirement but a pedagogical condition that directly shapes the relevance and meaningfulness of students' Arabic learning experience.

Theme 4 Learning Resource and Digital Media Developer

Based on questionnaire results, the indicator of learning resource development and the use of digital media shows the lowest level of agreement compared to other indicators. Of the 16 students, only 6 students (37.5%) stated that the teacher uses engaging learning media and utilizes digital technology, while 10 students (62.5%) stated otherwise. This finding indicates that the use of digital-based learning media in eighth-grade Arabic language learning is still not optimal.

These results were further explored through interviews with the eighth-grade MTs Arabic language teacher, which revealed that limitations in facilities and infrastructure are the main inhibiting factors in the development of learning media. The teacher stated that the availability of supporting media such as projectors is still very limited, thereby restricting the use of visual media and digital technology in the learning process. This condition impacts the limited variety of learning resources that can be maximally utilized in the classroom.

These field findings are consistent with previous studies showing that the low utilization of digital media in language learning is often not caused by a lack of teacher competence, but rather by limitations in supporting facilities within educational institutions. In this context, the teacher continues

to adjust learning strategies to existing conditions, even though digital media cannot yet be optimally integrated.

Thus, the Learning Resource Developer indicator is an aspect that requires further attention and strengthening, particularly in the provision of learning facilities and institutional support. Increased access to digital media, such as projectors and other supporting devices, is expected to strengthen the teacher's role in developing more varied and engaging learning resources, thereby positively impacting students' interest and engagement in Arabic language learning.

Theme 5 Personality and Professionalism

Based on questionnaire results, all eighth-grade students of MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi (16 out of 16) stated that the Arabic language teacher demonstrates discipline, responsibility, fairness, patience, and respect toward students during the learning process. The high level of student agreement on this indicator reflects a very positive perception of the teacher's personality and professionalism in carrying out classroom roles.

These questionnaire findings are reinforced by classroom observations showing that the teacher consistently applies time discipline, starts and ends lessons according to schedule, and acts fairly in providing opportunities to speak and responding to students. In addition, the teacher appears patient in addressing differences in students' learning abilities and shows respect for students' opinions expressed during discussions.

The interactions established between the teacher and students during the learning process demonstrate a positive, respectful, and exemplary relationship. The teacher not only acts as a transmitter of knowledge but also as a figure who demonstrates attitudes and ethical values that students can emulate, both in the learning context and in daily life within the madrasah environment.

Empirically, these findings are in line with previous field research emphasizing that teachers' personality and professionalism have a significant influence on students' character development. These findings point to the ethical and affective dimensions of teacher influence that extend beyond content delivery, the teacher's personal conduct and professional demeanor serve as a silent curriculum that shapes students' attitudes toward Arabic learning and madrasah life more broadly.

Theme 6 Assessor and Feedback Provider

Based on questionnaire results, all eighth-grade students of MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi (16 out of 16) stated that the Arabic language teacher conducts learning outcome assessments objectively and fairly. No students expressed doubts regarding the clarity or fairness of the grading process. This finding indicates a high level of student trust in the assessment system implemented by the teacher.

These questionnaire findings are reinforced by interviews with the eighth-grade Arabic language teacher, who revealed that the assessment process is conducted based on predetermined criteria and aligned with learning objectives. The teacher emphasized that grading is not based on subjective factors, but on students' learning achievements, both through assignments, exercises, and evaluations carried out during the learning process.

Furthermore, classroom observations show that the teacher openly communicates assessment aspects to students, including success criteria and expected achievement indicators. The teacher is also observed to systematically record students' learning progress during lessons, which serves as the basis for providing objective and transparent final assessments.

In addition to conducting assessments, the teacher also provides constructive feedback on students' learning

outcomes. This feedback is delivered both orally and in written form, with the aim of helping students understand their mistakes, address shortcomings, and improve learning outcomes in subsequent meetings. This indicates that the assessment function is oriented not only toward outcomes but also toward the learning process.

Empirically, these findings are consistent with previous field research emphasizing that objective assessment accompanied by clear feedback plays an important role in continuously improving learning quality. Thus, the results of this study strengthen the evidence that the eighth-grade Arabic language teacher has effectively fulfilled the role of assessor and feedback provider, supporting students' academic development optimally.

The six teacher role themes identified above are not isolated practices; they collectively contribute to the sequential development of students' learning interest as described by Hidi and Renninger's four-phase Interest Development Theory. Specifically, the roles of Facilitator of Learning and Motivator of Students' Engagement (Themes 1 and 2) are most directly associated with triggering and sustaining students' situational interest, as they create the initial conditions, participatory atmosphere, positive reinforcement, and engaging instructional delivery, that attract students' attention and maintain their involvement. The role of Curriculum Designer and Learning Planner (Theme 3) bridges situational and individual interest by providing structured, meaningful learning experiences that help students internalize the value of Arabic. The roles of Role Model and Assessor and Feedback Provider (Themes 5 and 6) are particularly relevant to the development of individual interest, as they instill values, strengthen self-confidence, and provide formative guidance that deepens students' personal commitment to learning. The role of Learning Resource Developer (Theme 4), while

currently suboptimal, represents a structural factor whose enhancement could further support all phases of interest development, particularly in sustaining situational interest through varied and engaging media. The following section presents the empirical evidence for these relationships through the lens of the Interest Development Theory framework.

To illustrate the progression of students' learning interest across the identified phases, the development of students' interest in Arabic learning is presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Development of Students' Interest in Arabic Learning



Students' learning interest in Arabic language learning at MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi was analyzed using the Interest Development Theory proposed by Hidi and Renninger. This theory views interest as a construct that develops gradually through four phases, namely triggered situational interest, maintained situational interest, emerging individual interest, and well-developed individual interest. The data were obtained through a questionnaire administered on 23 January 2026 with 16 student respondents and were strengthened by qualitative data from interviews.

Based on the questionnaire results visualized in the diagram, it was found that students' learning interest in Arabic falls into a very high category and shows positive development

across all phases of interest. In the triggered situational interest phase, all students (100%) stated that they were interested in participating in Arabic language learning. This unanimous response, while notable, is consistent with the qualitative data gathered through interviews, in which all participating students expressed positive orientations toward Arabic learning without prompting. The absence of dissenting responses may partly reflect the small and homogeneous sample, 16 students from a single classroom, as well as the social dynamics of a face-to-face classroom setting where social desirability effects cannot be entirely ruled out. Nevertheless, the convergence of questionnaire responses with observational and interview data across multiple collection methods strengthens confidence in these findings within the bounded context of this study.

This finding indicates that Arabic language learning from the outset was able to attract students' attention and stimulate their curiosity. This condition reflects the teacher's success in creating an engaging learning environment that effectively triggers students' initial interest. These results are reinforced by interviews with two eighth-grade MTs students in Kota Jambi, who stated that they were interested in Arabic language learning because the lessons were perceived as interesting and easy to understand.

In the maintained situational interest phase, 13 out of 16 students (81.25%) stated that they were enthusiastic about the learning methods and media used by the teacher. Although there was a slight decrease compared to the previous phase, this result still indicates that the majority of students were able to maintain their learning interest throughout the learning process. This finding suggests that the learning strategies applied played a role in sustaining student engagement, although further variation in methods and instructional

innovation is needed to optimally maintain students' learning interest.

Furthermore, in the emerging individual interest phase, all students (100%) demonstrated active participation in learning and perceived Arabic as a subject that holds important value for their personal development. This result indicates that students' learning interest has progressed from situational interest to individual interest that has begun to be internalized. At this stage, students are no longer merely interested due to external factors, but have started to develop personal awareness of the benefits of learning Arabic.

In the final phase, namely well-developed individual interest, all students (100%) stated that they have a strong desire to continue learning Arabic and to engage in independent learning in the future. This finding indicates that students' learning interest has developed in a mature and stable manner and is driven by intrinsic motivation. Interest at this phase no longer depends on situational stimuli, but has become part of students' personal commitment to Arabic language learning.

Overall, the questionnaire results, reinforced by interview data, show that students' learning interest in Arabic language learning at MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi develops gradually, consistently, and sustainably in accordance with the Interest Development Theory framework.¹² The combination of quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the finding that Arabic language learning not only succeeds in stimulating students' initial interest, but also encourages the formation of mature, long-term oriented individual interest.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the strategic role of teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

¹² Hidi and Renninger.

makes a significant contribution to the development of students' learning interest in Arabic language learning at MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi. These findings strengthen the view that students' learning interest does not develop automatically, but is formed through continuous interactions between teachers' roles, instructional design, and the learning experiences encountered by students in the classroom. These findings affirm that teachers' strategies play an important role in increasing students' interest in learning Arabic.¹³

The driving factors identified in this study include the quality of teacher-student relationships, the teacher's consistent motivational and facilitative behaviors, and students' intrinsic awareness of the importance of Arabic for their personal development. The primary inhibiting factor, as reflected across multiple data sources, is the limited availability of digital learning infrastructure, a structural constraint that affects the teacher's capacity to fully perform the Learning Resource Developer role and may place a ceiling on the variety of instructional experiences that can be offered to students,¹⁴ which highlights the importance of the teacher-student relationship.

The maturity of students' interest at MTs Nurul Iman appears to be sustained by the consistent emotional support embedded in the teacher's conduct, evidenced by students' unanimous perception of the teacher as patient, fair, and respectful (Theme 5), combined with the intellectual challenge provided through clear learning objectives and constructive feedback (Themes 3 and 6). This combination of affective

¹³ Baharuddin et al., "Strategi Mengajar Guru dalam Meningkatkan Minat Belajar Bahasa Arab Peserta Didik pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19."

¹⁴ Yunaldi Yunaldi and Aprilianti Nasution, "Juhūd al-Mu'allim fi Tarqiyat Mahārat al-Kalām lil-Ṭullāb fi Ta'lim al-Lughah al-'Arabīyah fi Ma'had Dār al-Ikhlās," *Thariqah Ilmiah: Jurnal ilmu-ilmu kependidikan dan Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 2 (2020): 100-119, <https://doi.org/10.24952/thariqahilmiah.v8i2.3141>.

support and cognitive structure creates a classroom climate conducive to the internalization of learning values, a condition that Hidi and Renninger identify as essential for the transition from situational to individual interest.¹⁵ This finding resonates with Ridha et al., who demonstrate that the combination of emotional support and structured cognitive engagement constitutes a necessary affective foundation for overcoming psychological barriers and sustaining active learning in Arabic language instruction.¹⁶ Other studies further emphasize that the strategic role of teachers is reflected in their ability to manage students' enthusiasm during the classroom action process.¹⁷

The Role of Teachers and the Development of Situational Interest

Interest is one of the internal factors of students that significantly influences learning success.¹⁸ The unanimous expression of triggered situational interest among all students points to a key analytical insight: in a resource-constrained madrasah setting where digital media are limited, the teacher's interpersonal and facilitative behaviors, rather than technological tools, serve as the primary catalyst for initial student engagement. This finding suggests that triggered situational interest in this context is fundamentally teacher-

¹⁵ Hidi and Renninger, "The Four-Phase Model of Interest Development."

¹⁶ Muhammad Rasyid Ridha et al., "Optimizing Arabic Listening Skills: A Systematic Review and the Proposal of an Integrated Suggestopedic Brain-Based Learning (ISBBL) Model," *Alsina : Journal of Arabic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2025): 161–200, <https://doi.org/10.21580/alsina.7.2.27815>.

¹⁷ Syaipuddin Ritonga, "Strategi dalam Mengatasi Tantangan Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab bagi Guru di Era Teknologi Modern," *Hikmah: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 12, no. 2 (2023): 378–95, <https://ojs.staituankutambusai.ac.id/index.php/hikmah/article/view/571>.

¹⁸ Laesti Nurishlah et al., "Minat Belajar Siswa Sekolah Dasar Berdasarkan Orientasi Kognitif," *TA'DIB: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 1, no. 2 (2023): 186–95, <https://doi.org/10.69768/jt.v1i2.30>.

mediated rather than media-mediated, a distinction with significant pedagogical implications.

Theoretically, this aligns with Hidi and Renninger's assertion that situational interest is sparked by features of the environment, but it extends their framework by demonstrating that in low-resource contexts, the teacher's personal attributes and facilitative conduct can substitute for the environmental stimuli more commonly associated with technology-rich classrooms.¹⁹ This is consistent with Baharuddin et al., who found that teacher instructional strategies, not media availability, were the dominant predictor of student interest in Arabic learning during pandemic conditions.²⁰ Other studies emphasize that the optimal role of teachers is highly necessary to foster students' learning motivation, because the social environment and the development of modern life often influence such motivation.²¹

Theoretically, this condition is in line with the view of Hidi and Renninger, who emphasize that situational interest is triggered by external stimuli, such as teaching methods, modes of content delivery, and a supportive classroom climate.²² In this context, the teacher functions as the primary trigger for the emergence of students' initial interest through student-centered learning strategies, as emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum. As highlighted in other studies, teachers, as mediators, must possess classroom management skills and the ability to select appropriate methods to address the diverse

¹⁹ Hidi and Renninger, "The Four-Phase Model of Interest Development."

²⁰ Baharuddin et al., "Strategi Mengajar Guru dalam Meningkatkan Minat Belajar Bahasa Arab Peserta Didik pada Masa Pandemi Covid-19."

²¹ Rianawati et al., "Role of Teachers as Motivators in Learning Islamic Religious Education in Elementary School of Negeri 05 Pontianak Timur."

²² Hidi and Renninger, "The Four-Phase Model of Interest Development."

characteristics of students, so that learning barriers can be effectively overcome.²³

In the maintained situational interest phase, the majority of students demonstrated sustained engagement in maintaining learning enthusiasm throughout the learning process. This finding indicates that the teacher's role as a motivator and learning designer has been implemented quite effectively. The clarity of learning objectives, the relevance of materials to students' needs, and the provision of positive reinforcement are important factors in sustaining students' learning interest. This is supported by other studies that employ the Direct Interaction method, a strategy that emphasizes face-to-face interaction, namely direct interaction among students to improve instructional outcomes and students' interest without highlighting individual dominance.²⁴

Nevertheless, the findings also indicate a decrease in the percentage related to the indicator of the utilization of instructional media and learning technology. This suggests that the maintenance of students' learning interest still faces structural challenges, particularly those related to limitations in facilities and infrastructure. Other studies also demonstrate the importance of media, which function as communication tools to convey messages from educators to learners in order to stimulate thinking, feelings, attention, and learning interest.²⁵ This condition supports previous research findings

²³ Siti Noor Ismail et al., "Teacher Collaboration as a Mediator for Strategic Leadership and Teaching Quality," *International Journal of Instruction* 11, no. 4 (2018): 485–98, <https://doi.org/10.12973/iji.2018.11430a>.

²⁴ Ariyanti and Syarifah, "Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab dalam Meningkatkan Minat Belajar Bahasa Arab Siswa Kelas VII MTs Nurul Muttaqin Simpang Tiga."

²⁵ Abdul Wahid, "Pentingnya Media Pembelajaran dalam Meningkatkan Prestasi Belajar," *Istiqra: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pemikiran*

stating that the successful implementation of innovative learning does not depend solely on teachers' competence, but also on institutional support and the availability of supporting facilities, as the creation of a comfortable classroom atmosphere provides learners with space to learn without pressure. In the context of language learning, interactive media serve as strategic tools to increase student engagement and facilitate the development of complex language skills.²⁶ Moreover, other supporting studies indicate that students' interest tends to increase in environments that promote cooperation rather than individual competition.²⁷

The Development of Individual Interest and the Internalization of Learning Values

Interestingly, in the emerging individual interest phase, all students demonstrated active participation and began to perceive Arabic as a subject that is important for their personal development. Individually, students no longer positioned themselves as passive objects, but rather as active subjects who construct knowledge (constructivism).²⁸ This indicates that students' learning interest has developed from situational interest toward individual interest that has begun to be internalized. At this stage, the teacher's role is no longer limited to that of a technical facilitator, but also extends to serving as a

Islam 5, no. 2 (2018),
<https://jurnal.umpar.ac.id/istiqlra/article/view/461>.

²⁶ Atikah Nur Halisah et al., "Enhancing Arabic Listening Skills through the Development of Interactive Multimedia for High School Students," *Jurnal Al Bayan: Jurnal Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 17, no. 2 (2025): 565–86, <https://doi.org/10.24042/nhrkx202>.

²⁷ Istiqomah and Naswa Alifia Azzahra, "Strategi Pembelajaran Aktif untuk Meningkatkan Keterlibatan Siswa dalam Pembelajaran di Kelas," *Bestari: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 1, no. 1 (2024): 19–26, <https://ejournal.almusthofa.org/index.php/bestari/article/view/5>.

²⁸ Niken Ristianah, "Internalisasi Nilai-Nilai Keislaman Perspektif Sosial Kemasyarakatan," *Darajat: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Islam* 3, no. 1 (2020): 1–13, <https://ejournal.iaitabah.ac.id/index.php/Darajat/article/view/437>.

role model and learning mentor who instills values, positive attitudes, and learning awareness in students.

These findings are consistent with the concept of Pedagogical Content Knowledge,²⁹ which emphasizes that teachers' ability to meaningfully transform subject matter plays an important role in helping students understand the relevance and benefits of learning. This is reinforced by studies stating that teachers must possess critical abilities to analyze discourse in textbooks so that it can be conveyed contextually to students.³⁰ When students begin to recognize the intrinsic value of learning Arabic, learning interest no longer depends entirely on external stimuli, but instead grows from students' internal motivation.³¹

This discussion emphasizes that the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on students' interest in learning Arabic cannot be separated from educators' strategic roles. This finding reinforces the centrality of the teacher as a reflective and adaptive agent in Arabic language learning. Within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, the effectiveness of learning does not depend solely on the availability of tools or resources, but on the teacher's capacity to leverage existing conditions, however limited, to create meaningful interactions that foster students' intrinsic motivation and individual interest in Arabic. This finding consistent with Wardhana et al., who demonstrate that structured pedagogical planning and curriculum

²⁹ Shulman, "Those Who Understand: Knowledge Growth in Teaching."

³⁰ Lailatul Qomariyah, "Strategi Internalisasi Nilai Moderasi dalam Pengembangan Kurikulum Bahasa Arab di Pondok Pesantren Darus Salam Jombang," *Al-Irfan : Journal of Arabic Literature and Islamic Studies* 5, no. 2 (2022): 147–76, <https://doi.org/10.36835/alirfan.v5i2.5252>.

³¹ Robert E. Carlson, "Assessing Teachers' Pedagogical Content Knowledge: Item Development Issues," *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education* 4, no. 2 (1990): 157–63, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00126124>.

integration, rather than resource availability alone, are the primary determinants of Arabic language learning quality.³²

Mature and Sustainable Learning Interest

In the well-developed individual interest phase, all students stated that they have a strong desire to continue learning Arabic and to develop their abilities independently. This finding indicates that students' learning interest has reached a mature and relatively stable stage. At this phase, the interest that has been stimulated is maintained through sustained participation in tasks perceived as meaningful.³³ Within the context of Interest Development Theory, this condition serves as an indicator of successful learning, as interest has developed into a long-term commitment to learning. This finding contrasts with other studies which state that mature and sustainable interest is achieved through synergy between teachers' strategic roles and the use of interactive media that provide instant feedback, thereby strengthening students' psychological engagement at each phase of interest development.³⁴

In contrast, at MTs Nurul Iman, the use of interactive media is still relatively low. This study also emphasizes that the quality of textbook content has a significant influence on increasing students' interest in learning Arabic.³⁵ Furthermore,

³² Wardhana et al., "Enhancing Arabic Proficiency through Structured Language Planning and Curriculum Integration."

³³ Hidi, S., & Renninger, K. A. (2006). The four-phase model of interest development. *Educational psychologist*, 41(2), 111-127.

³⁴ Amna Ali et al., "Efektivitas Media Pembelajaran Interaktif dalam Meningkatkan Minat dan Motivasi Belajar Siswa Sekolah Dasar," *Journal of Information System and Education Development* 3, no. 1 (2025): 1-6, <https://doi.org/10.62386/jised.v3i1.115>.

³⁵ Muhammad Habib Azroi and Zulfahmi Lubis, "Analisis Isi Buku Ajar Bahasa Arab Terhadap Peningkatan Minat Belajar Bahasa Arab Siswa Kelas X MAS PPM Al-Yusriyah," *EDUKASIA: Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran* 4, no. 2 (2023): 1705-10, <https://doi.org/10.62775/edukasia.v4i2.486>.

to achieve sustainable interest, teachers at MTs Nurul Iman need to balance their roles as structured instructional managers (managerial aspect) and providers of a supportive language ecosystem (environmental aspect).³⁶

This success cannot be separated from the consistency of the teacher's role as an assessor and provider of objective and constructive feedback. A transparent assessment system and the provision of constructive feedback help students understand their learning progress and strengthen their self-confidence. This supports the view that formative assessment plays an important role in reinforcing students' motivation and learning interest in a sustainable manner.

Synthesis of Teachers' Roles and Learning Interest in the Merdeka Curriculum

Overall, this discussion shows that the strategic roles of teachers as proposed by Harden and Crosby are concretely implemented in Arabic language learning at MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi.³⁷ Other studies emphasize that teachers hold the position of a central figure in the learning process.³⁸ The roles of teachers as facilitators, motivators, learning designers, developers of the learning environment, role models, and assessors function in an integrated and sustained manner, contributing simultaneously to the development of students' learning interest across all phases of Interest Development Theory. In this capacity, teachers extend beyond the transmission of knowledge to act as pedagogical architects

³⁶ Fuad Munajat and M Imam Zaenal Abidin, "Best Practices for Teaching Speaking Skills Based on Management Aspects and ACTFL Proficiency Levels at STIBA Ar Raayah," *Alsina : Journal of Arabic Studies* 7, no. 2 (2025): 257-84, <https://doi.org/10.21580/alsina.7.2.28197>.

³⁷ Harden and Crosby, "AMEE Guide No 20: The Good Teacher Is More than a Lecturer - the Twelve Roles of the Teacher."

³⁸ Zulqaidah et al., "Peran Kebijakan Kurikulum Merdeka Terhadap Kesiapan Guru dan Hasil Belajar Peserta Didik," *Socius: Jurnal Penelitian Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial* 2, no. 5 (2024): 122-29, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14538792>.

who shape meaningful learning experiences, determine the success of value internalization, and foster the growth of students' learning interest..³⁹

Thus, the results of this study affirm that the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum does not only focus on curriculum aspects and instructional methods, but also on optimizing the strategic roles of teachers as managers of the psychological learning environment. A supportive, participatory, and meaningful learning environment is proven to be able to encourage the gradual and sustainable development of students' learning interest in Arabic language learning. This is also consistent with other studies stating that learning interest is influenced by internal factors (health, psychological conditions) and external factors (family, school, and community).⁴⁰

Conclusion

This study provides evidence that teachers' strategic roles in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum contribute significantly to the development of students' learning interest in Arabic language learning at MTs Nurul Iman Kota Jambi. Drawing on Teacher Role Theory, the findings suggest that teachers who perform integrated roles, as facilitators, motivators, curriculum designers, role models, and assessors, create the cumulative conditions necessary for students' interest to develop across all four phases of Interest Development Theory, from triggered situational interest through to well-developed individual interest.

³⁹ Syukron Al-Itmam et al., "Peran Guru dalam Memotivasi Belajar Bahasa Arab Siswa Madrasah Tsanawiyah," *Pendas : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Dasar* 10, no. 3 (2025): 344–62, <https://doi.org/10.23969/jp.v10i03.33619>.

⁴⁰ Marsela Yulianti et al., "Peran Guru dalam Mengembangkan Kurikulum Merdeka," *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan dan Sosial* 1, no. 3 (2022): 290–98, <https://doi.org/10.58540/jipsi.v1i3.53>.

Notably, this progression was achieved despite the limited availability of digital learning media, with only 37.5% of students reporting regular use of technology-based resources. This finding suggests that in resource-constrained madrasah settings, the quality of teacher-student relationships and the consistency of teachers' facilitative and relational behaviors may serve as functional substitutes for technological infrastructure in sustaining students' long-term interest in Arabic. These insights have practical implications for school administrators and curriculum developers at the madrasah level: investments in teacher professional development, particularly in facilitative communication, formative assessment, and motivational strategies, may yield greater gains in student engagement than infrastructure investment alone.

For policymakers and Arabic language education stakeholders at the regional and national level, these findings underscore the importance of supporting teachers not only through curriculum reform but also through ongoing pedagogical coaching that strengthens their capacity to perform the full range of strategic roles demanded by the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted within their contextual boundaries. The study was conducted with 16 eighth-grade students and one teacher at a single madrasah over one day of data collection, which limits the generalizability of the findings. The small, homogeneous sample and single-site design mean that the results reflect the specific institutional culture and conditions of MTs Nurul Iman and may not be representative of Arabic language learning environments in other madrasahs or regions. Future research is recommended to employ larger, multi-site samples and longitudinal designs to more robustly examine the relationships between teachers' strategic roles and the gradual

development of students' learning interest in Arabic, and to test whether the compensatory role of teacher behavior over media infrastructure holds across diverse institutional contexts.

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