

# Madrasah Principals as Academic Supervisors: Advancing Teacher Professionalism Through Merdeka Curriculum Implementation at State Madrasah Aliyah

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## ABSTRACT

The role of the madrasah principal as an academic supervisor is crucial in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and fostering teacher professionalism. This study explores the management strategies of the madrasah principal at MAN 1 Prabumulih City in developing teacher competence within this curriculum framework. A qualitative case study approach was employed, utilizing in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis to gather data. This method provided a comprehensive understanding of the principal's supervisory role and its impact on teacher development. Findings indicate that the principal plays a vital role as a motivator and facilitator, supporting teachers through both pre-service and in-service training programs. An inclusive and collaborative approach fosters a dynamic learning environment, with active teacher and student participation as key success indicators. However, challenges such as teacher readiness and scheduling constraints remain. Despite these challenges, effective supervision, continuous training, and strategic time management are essential in overcoming barriers to teacher professionalism. The study highlights the importance of leadership in ensuring successful curriculum implementation. Madrasah principals play a pivotal role in enhancing teacher professionalism through active supervision and training strategies. Continuous professional development efforts, including structured mentoring programs, are essential for improving teacher competence. This research contributes to the discourse on educational leadership and provides practical insights for madrasah principals on effective supervision in curriculum implementation.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of education in Indonesia, the management of the madrasah principal has a very crucial role, especially in academic supervision aimed at supporting the professional development of teachers. As expressed by Ramli (2023), management does not only include planning and organizing but also ensuring that the goals that have been set can be achieved effectively. In this case, academic

supervision carried out by the madrasah principal is not just a performance evaluation but a collaborative process that emphasizes improving the quality of teaching in the madrasah (Sunaedi & Rudji, 2023). The madrasah principal functions as a leader who facilitates teacher development, which in turn will influence the process of forming the character and morals of students (Sibaweh, 2024).

The madrasah principal, within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, has the responsibility to create a learning environment that supports the development of student potential. Education becomes a conscious and planned effort to optimize student abilities (Yulianto et al., 2024), in line with the goals of national education stipulated in Law Number 20 of 2003. In this case, the success of education is not only measured by how healthy knowledge can be transferred to students but also by how education can shape character and skills that are relevant to the challenges of the times (Kusumawati et al., 2023). Effective management and adequate support for the madrasah principal are essential to improving the quality of education in madrasahs.

In carrying out his duties, the head of the madrasah, as an academic supervisor, must be able to carry out his duties and functions effectively and efficiently (Karimulah & Ummah, 2022). Good management is needed to ensure that the implementation of academic supervision runs smoothly. To that end, the head of the madrasah needs to establish good coordination between himself and all members of the madrasah, including teachers and other education personnel. Educational development is not merely an administrative demand but an effort to realize the vision of society or the nation about its future, with the aim of forming a just and prosperous society.

Education itself is basically a process of empowerment. This process aims to explore and reveal the potential of individuals so that they can make meaningful contributions to society, both locally and globally. Education not only aims to explore potential but also to ensure that this potential can be controlled and utilized to improve the quality of life. In the context of empowerment, education is directed at improving the quality of human resources. Through the goals of national education, the government seeks to educate the life of the nation and develop the whole Indonesian human being (Pasaribu, 2017; Sujana, 2019). This includes creating individuals who are faithful and pious, have noble character, have knowledge and skills, and have a high sense of responsibility to society and the nation.

To achieve this noble goal, all components in the education system must be interrelated and supportive. One component that is no less important is the role of the madrasah principal in implementing leadership management in the madrasah environment. The madrasah principal must be able to coordinate various elements of education, ensuring that all parties work together towards the established educational goals (Habibullah & Basir, 2023; Maryati, 2016). In this case, the role of the madrasah principal is vital to realizing national education goals. With effective leadership and efficient management, the madrasah principal can ensure that the education process runs well, empowers the potential of individual students, and ultimately contributes to improving the quality of life of the community and the nation.

According to Ramli et al. (2023), citing the opinions of James A.F. Stoner and Charles Wankel, management is a process that involves planning, organizing, leading, and controlling members of the organization and the use of organizational resources to achieve predetermined goals. In the context of education, especially in madrasahs, the role of the madrasah principal as a manager is very crucial. The madrasah principal is responsible for the quality of madrasah management, which includes various managerial aspects. To achieve good management, the madrasah principal must have professional skills in planning, organizing, mobilizing, and supervising.

The success of the madrasah principal depends not only on their managerial skills but also on effective leadership. Ministerial Regulation Number 13 of 2007 states that the madrasah principal must be ready to manage the madrasah, which includes the ability to plan, organize, direct, and supervise. With good management, the madrasah principal is expected to be able to motivate and enforce discipline for teachers so that they can work with high productivity and professionalism. However, the success of the madrasah principal is also influenced by external factors, such as community participation and support from various parties.

The involvement of teachers and the community in efforts to improve the quality of education is significant. Unfortunately, the low quality of teachers and the lack of community participation are challenges in achieving these goals. In addition, government support that is more focused on teachers than on the madrasah principal is also an additional burden for the madrasah principal (Thamrin, 2015; Umar, 2013). Although the madrasah principal is the key to its success, more significant support from the government, both in the form of coaching and material support, is needed. Strong leadership from the madrasah principal is essential for developing teacher performance and achieving the vision, mission, and goals of the madrasah.

This study examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih City, focusing on teachers' readiness, challenges, and the role of the madrasah principal in academic supervision. It assesses improvements in teacher professionalism across pedagogical, professional, social, and personality competencies while analyzing internal and external factors influencing their development. The study also identifies obstacles faced by the Principal, including administrative, technical, and bureaucratic challenges. By addressing curriculum adaptation and teacher training issues, this research aims to enhance education quality and provide practical recommendations for madrasah management. Ultimately, the success of education depends on the synergy between the Principal, teachers, and the community in realizing quality education.

Several studies have been conducted, including research by Fauzi (2024), Maulana (2024), Najah (2024), Subaidi (2022), and Islam (2024). Most of the existing studies focus on the initial implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Still, few evaluate the long-term impact of the madrasah principal's academic supervision on improving teacher professionalism, so a longitudinal study is needed to understand its effectiveness sustainably. This study examines the implementation of the management of the madrasah principal as an academic supervisor in the Merdeka Curriculum to develop the professionalism of madrasah teachers at MAN 1 Prabumulih City with a focus on developing teacher professionalism. The urgency of this study lies in the role of the madrasah principal in ensuring teacher readiness to face the challenges of the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, this study fills the gap related to the long-term evaluation of academic supervision on teacher professionalism so that the results can be a reference for madrasahs and stakeholders in designing more effective teacher development programs.

## 2. METHODS

The research approach used in this study is qualitative with a descriptive type, focusing on an in-depth understanding of social phenomena in the madrasah environment. Field research is a method to find out precisely and realistically about people's lives. In this context, the researcher conducted direct observations at MAN 1 Prabumulih City, which allowed data collection through interaction with informants and analysis of real situations in the field. This study aims to explore more deeply the role of the madrasah principal as an academic supervisor in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The data collection process was carried out through observation, individual and group interviews, and documentation, involving the collection, organization, and holistic analysis of data.

To ensure the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the qualitative data, several validation techniques were employed. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from different sources, including observations, interviews, and document analysis. Member checking was also utilized to allow participants to review and confirm the accuracy of interview transcripts and interpretations. Additionally, prolonged engagement in the field helped enhance the trustworthiness of the data by allowing the researcher to build rapport with participants and gain a deeper understanding of the research context.

The selection of participants was carried out through purposive sampling, ensuring that key informants such as madrasah principals, teachers, and educational staff who were directly involved in

implementing the Merdeka Curriculum were included. The criteria for participant selection were based on their role, experience, and involvement in academic supervision and curriculum implementation. By selecting participants with relevant expertise, the study aimed to capture diverse perspectives and provide a representative understanding of the research phenomenon. The case selection of MAN 1 Prabumulih City was justified based on its adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum and its efforts in professional teacher development, making it a relevant and insightful setting for the study.

The data obtained were analyzed systematically using coding and thematic analysis techniques. Initially, all data from observations, interviews, and documents were transcribed. Open coding was applied to identify key concepts and recurring patterns in the data. Axial coding was then used to establish relationships between different themes, enabling the identification of overarching categories related to the role of madrasah principals in academic supervision and professional teacher development. Finally, selective coding was employed to refine the core themes and present a coherent narrative that addresses the research questions. This process ensured a structured and rigorous approach to qualitative data analysis.

The study prioritizes a holistic and contextual approach, allowing for the exploration of the meaning behind individual and group behaviors. This aligns with the research objective of understanding how the leadership of madrasah principals contributes to teacher professionalism in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The researcher documented each step meticulously to ensure data accuracy and validity while providing a clear depiction of field conditions and processes. Overall, this study is expected to provide a clear and in-depth picture of the dynamics of leadership in the madrasah environment. By implementing qualitative descriptive methods and case studies with a structured approach to data validation, participant selection, and systematic analysis, the information obtained can serve as a reference for improving the effectiveness of educational management at MAN 1 Prabumulih City.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. *Duties of the Head of Madrasah as Academic Supervisor at MAN 1 Prabumulih City*

The Principal of State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) 1 of Prabumulih City plays a vital role as an academic supervisor in ensuring the quality of learning at the madrasah. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2017), this task includes monitoring and evaluating curriculum implementation and developing learning strategies. Al-Musawi (2020) emphasizes that the head of the madrasah is not only a leader but also a supervisor who ensures that all academic activities run according to standards. In addition, the head of the madrasah is responsible for developing teacher professionalism through monitoring competencies and providing training that improves the quality of teaching. As a mentor, the head of the madrasah guides teachers in optimizing teaching methods to create high-quality education for students.

Apart from technical aspects, the head of the madrasah also ensures that educational policies comply with national and international standards. At MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih, the Principal of the madrasah strives to develop relevant academic programs so that students can compete at a higher level. The role of the Principal as a mediator between the madrasah community, parents, and external parties is also crucial in building a conducive learning environment (Al-Musawi, 2020). To carry out this task, the head of the madrasah needs to have visionary leadership and a deep understanding of Islamic education in order to lead innovation and continuous quality improvement.

The condition of teachers at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih has a significant influence on the effectiveness of academic supervision. Teachers at this madrasah have an essential role in advancing Islamic education despite facing challenges such as a lack of infrastructure support and professional development (Ahmad, 2019). Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia (2018) emphasized that improving teacher welfare must be a priority to improve the quality of education. Budiarto (2020)

emphasizes that teacher welfare is directly related to teaching motivation, so incentive support and ongoing training are needed. Ahmad (2019) added that professional development programs must be strengthened so that Islamic education in madrasas is increasingly qualified. In addition, understanding the local social and cultural context is essential for designing effective learning strategies (Budiarto, 2020).

The role of the madrasah principal in academic supervision is a significant factor in improving teacher professionalism and learning effectiveness. Proper management can improve the overall performance of teachers and students (Masnun, 2017; Sahmudin & Prayoga, 2019). According to Wahab (2014), implementation in education involves adjusting various resources to achieve academic goals. The Principal must ensure the implementation of academic plans properly and build collaboration between teachers, students, and related parties to create a conducive academic climate. However, supervision programs are often disrupted by other agendas, such as monthly meetings, which causes less than optimal evaluation (LWGR1, 2019). Therefore, the head of the madrasah must encourage innovation in the preparation of teaching materials and implement effective management to improve teacher professionalism and the quality of Islamic education at MAN 1 Prabumulih City.

**Table 1.** Competence of the Head of Madrasah in Managing MAN 1 Prabumulih City

No	Competence	Competency Aspects	Research Findings
1	Personality	Have an exemplary attitude, independent, optimistic, disciplined	Providing examples of disciplined attitudes and work ethic
2	Technical	Able to carry out the administration of curriculum, student affairs, facilities and infrastructure, finance, public relations, and documentation and able to use technology and exceptional services	a. KTSP curriculum development b. Student Activities c. Optimization of facilities and infrastructure d. Financial mechanisms e. Public relations activities f. Activity reports g. Computer and Internet operation
3	Social	Able to socialize well	a. Creating a conducive work climate b. Teamwork
4	Managerial	Able to lead and make decisions	Carrying out asset management and management effectively and efficiently

Based on the findings from Table 1, the competency of the Principal of State Islamic Senior High School (MAN) 1 Prabumulih City reflects a variety of skills that are very important for the effectiveness of the management of this educational institution. In terms of personality, the Principal demonstrates an exemplary attitude, independence, optimism, and discipline. These attitudes are not just concepts but are manifested in their daily actions. For example, they often provide examples in terms of discipline and work ethic. This directly contributes to the formation of a positive madrasah culture.

The technical aspect is also an equally important part of the competency of the Principal. They are able to carry out various administrations comprehensively, including curriculum administration, student affairs, facilities and infrastructure, finance, public relations, and documentation. The Principal of the madrasah at MAN 1 Prabumulih City demonstrates good skills in utilizing technology, including the development of a KTSP-based curriculum and transparent financial management. This ability dramatically supports operational efficiency and better service to all stakeholders in the madrasah. Furthermore, social and managerial competencies are also very significant in the role of the Principal. They demonstrate the ability to socialize and build a conducive work climate. In terms of managerial aspects, the head of the madrasah at MAN 1, Kota Prabumulih, is skilled in leading, making decisions, and carrying out coaching and managing madrasah assets effectively and efficiently. The combination

of these various competencies makes the head of the madrasah a leader who is able to encourage positive change and improve the quality of education.

The competency of the madrasah principal, which includes personality, technical, social, and managerial aspects, can be analyzed using educational leadership theory. According to Bass (1990) in Wahjono (2011), Transformational leadership emphasizes exemplary behavior, motivation, and influence on subordinates, which is in line with the attitude of discipline and optimism shown by the Principal of the madrasah at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih. An exemplary attitude in discipline and work ethic creates a strong organizational culture, as stated by Schein (2010) in Nugroho (2024), which states that a positive organizational culture is formed through the actions and values applied by the leader. In addition, the technical competence of the madrasah principal in administrative management shows the application of educational management principles according to Robbins and Coulter (2016) in Nur Azmi (2021), which emphasizes the importance of planning, organizing, leadership, and control in running an educational institution effectively.

From the managerial side, the head of the madrasah at MAN 1, Kota Prabumulih, shows leadership that is oriented toward decision-making and operational efficiency. This is in line with Mintzberg's strategic management theory (1994) in Suwardy (2024), which emphasizes the importance of leadership in managing resources and creating adaptive strategies for change. The social competence demonstrated by the Principal of the madrasah in building communication and good relationships with stakeholders also supports the situational leadership theory of Hersey and Blanchard (1982) in Tabroni (2022), which states that leaders must adjust their leadership style to the situation and needs of subordinates. With the combination of these various competencies, the head of the madrasah not only carries out administrative functions but also becomes an agent of change who is able to improve the quality of education at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih in accordance with the principles of effective educational leadership.

### ***3.2. Exploration of Dialogue Related to Supervision of Madrasah Principals***

In the context of supervision, the Principal of the madrasah at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih understands that their role is not only limited to administrative aspects. They act as strategic leaders who focus on developing teacher professionalism. To achieve this goal, the Principal utilizes various management strategies, including curriculum management and continuous academic supervision. One of the things emphasized in the implementation of management at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih is the importance of listening. The Principal tries to hear all the aspirations of teachers and staff. One of the administrative staff said that the leadership of the Principal is firm, honest, and responsible, even though initially facing challenges from some teachers who were skeptical of change. Through good and open communication, the Principal was able to build trust and improve relationships with parties who were previously against (Suryani, 2022).

By actively listening, the principals were able to identify areas that needed improvement. This enabled them to implement appropriate measures to improve the quality of teaching and learning. This success was evident from the increasing participation of teachers in professional development programs and their support for new initiatives that were implemented. In addition, the principals were also skilled in clarifying and presenting the policies they took. When faced with differences of opinion, they tried to explain comprehensively to their subordinates. One teacher stated that the Principal was able to explain the reasons behind the policy so that teachers could finally understand and accept the direction. This process is essential to ensure that each policy is not only passively accepted but is actively understood by all members of the madrasah community.

The Principal of the madrasah at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih encourages both directly and indirectly to all teachers. Direct encouragement, such as motivation and praise, when the teacher's understanding is in accordance with the institution's vision and mission, is invaluable. Indirect encouragement is reflected in the attitude and behavior of the madrasah principal, who reflects highly exemplary behavior (Hidayati, 2022). In the context of developing the Merdeka Curriculum, the Principal provides

clear direction to the teachers. Through his experience in participating in various curriculum development activities, the Principal said that the main objective of the Merdeka Curriculum is to create a Pancasila student profile. Therefore, academic supervision carried out by the Principal is essential to ensure that teachers can implement this curriculum well.

The Principal of MAN 1, Kota Prabumulih, demonstrated effective leadership in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by conducting direct academic supervision and interacting with various stakeholders. Through this approach, he ensured that teachers implemented the curriculum seriously even though there was still room for improvement. The negotiation process with teachers, parents, and external institutions was carried out to build consensus and gain support in implementing the curriculum. In addition, the Principal also focused on developing teacher professionalism through relevant training and workshops, creating a collaborative work environment, and providing awards for teacher efforts in implementing the curriculum. With open communication and the right motivation, the Principal was able to encourage the active involvement of the entire madrasa community in curriculum change (MF, 2024).

Innovation in the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih City includes the use of the madrasah environment as a place of learning, which encourages creativity, cooperation, and student independence. The Principal of the madrasah emphasizes the importance of learning experiences outside the classroom to enhance innovation and critical thinking (MF, 2024). In addition, he provides attentive direction to teachers, staff, and students, creating positive relationships in the madrasah environment (Rahman, 2022). Overall, the leadership of the madrasah principal reflects a balance between personal, technical, social, and managerial abilities. With a clear and inspiring vision, he has succeeded in bringing about positive changes that have a significant impact on the quality of education, creating a conducive and responsive learning environment for the entire Madrasah community.

**Table 2.** Implementation of Madrasah Principal Management as Academic Supervisor

Themes and Sub Themes	Summary
Theme: Exploration of Dialogue Related to Supervision of Madrasah Principals	Implementation of participatory, democratic and charismatic supervisory management: The Principal actively participates in various activities or delegates if unable to. In addition, he gives teachers and staff the freedom to develop their creativity and skills. With high dedication, the Principal dedicates himself to serving the institution, ensuring an inspiring and productive educational environment for all.
Sub Theme	
1. Listening	Listening to subordinates' aspirations
2. Clarifying and Presenting	Clarification and presentation of problems that occur
3. Encouraging and Directing	Direction and reinforcement for every important information
4. Negotiation	Negotiation to face obstacles and challenges
5. Motivation	Motivation is an approach and direct direction

The implementation of the Principal's supervision management at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih is carried out in a participatory, democratic, and charismatic manner. The Principal plays an active role in various academic supervision activities, both directly and through delegation if unable to attend. With an open approach, he listens to the aspirations of teachers and staff clarifies and presents the problems that occur to find the best solution. By strengthening communication, the Principal provides clear direction for every critical piece of information so that all educators can understand the goals and strategies that must be applied in learning. In addition, negotiations with various parties, including teachers, parents of students, and external institutions, are carried out to overcome challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

In an effort to increase the motivation of educators, the Principal applies a supportive and inspiring approach. He gives teachers the freedom to innovate in learning methods so that they are more confident and creative in teaching. In addition, the Principal directly gives awards for the

dedication and achievements of teachers in implementing the curriculum, which further strengthens their commitment to improving the quality of education. With visionary and dedicated leadership, the head of the madrasah creates a conducive, collaborative and inspiring work environment, encouraging the entire madrasah community to play an active role in achieving better educational goals.

The academic supervision approach applied by the head of the madrasah at MAN 1 Prabumulih City is in line with the educational supervision theory put forward by Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2014) in Raharjo (2023), which emphasizes the importance of participatory supervision and supports the development of teacher professionalism. The Principal of the madrasah not only acts as a supervisor but also as a facilitator who listens to teacher aspirations clarifies problems, and provides constructive direction. This is in line with the transformational leadership theory of Bass (1994) and Wahjono (2011), which emphasizes that effective leaders must be able to provide inspiration, motivation, and encouragement for their subordinates to develop. In this context, the Principal plays a role in creating a conducive work environment and building strong professional relationships with teachers and staff.

Furthermore, the negotiations and motivation carried out by the madrasah principal in facing the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum can be linked to the organizational communication theory of Robbins and Judge (2017) in Natalia (2019). This theory emphasizes that effective communication in educational organizations must include a process of listening, clarification, and open negotiation to reach a common understanding. The Principal applies democratic communication with teachers and other stakeholders to ensure that curriculum policies can be accepted and implemented optimally. In addition, the motivational approach applied is in accordance with Herzberg's theory (2003) in Ismail (2017) about motivational and maintenance factors in the work environment, where appreciation and support for teachers can improve their performance and satisfaction. By implementing this strategy, the head of the madrasah succeeded in creating a productive, innovative, and quality-oriented educational environment.

### ***3.3. Madrasah Principals in the Development of Madrasah Teacher Professionalism in the Context of the Merdeka Curriculum***

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih has received serious attention from the leadership with the aim of creating a profile of Pancasila students who are faithful, pious, independent, creative, and critical thinking. M. Fajar emphasized that the success of this curriculum is highly dependent on the competence of teachers in developing and implementing it effectively. Academic supervision carried out by the head of the madrasah is key to ensuring that teachers implement the curriculum well through routine monitoring and direct observation in class. "MAN 1 Prabumulih has a Decree as an IKM Implementing Madrasah from the Directorate General of Pendis," explained M. Fajar, showing the leadership's commitment to supporting teachers to achieve curriculum goals. Innovations in learning, such as the use of madrasah environmental facilities as study spaces, give students the freedom to learn outside the classroom to increase creativity, cooperation, and piety. "The teaching and learning process now uses facilities such as places of worship and madrasah gardens," said M. Fajar, highlighting the benefits of the environment in supporting the development of students' imagination. The main focus in the implementation of IKM is to prioritize field practice over administrative burdens so that it is more effective in motivating students to be independent. Teachers are also encouraged to continue to improve their professionalism while reducing administrative tasks, reflecting a pragmatic approach to managing learning in madrasahs.

Although the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has shown positive progress, the results have not been fully optimal because there are still challenges in its implementation. The Principal of the madrasah plays an essential role in providing clear direction, ongoing supervision, and encouraging innovation in learning methods that are adaptive to student needs. Curriculum management is carried out through the planning to reflection stages, with a focus on local wisdom to deepen students' understanding of their environment. However, there are obstacles to the

Principal's interaction with students that require a more patient approach. With periodic academic supervision and continuous evaluation, teacher professionalism and the quality of education at MAN 1 Prabumulih will likely increase.

This study found that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih received serious attention from the leadership, with academic supervision as the main factor in ensuring the effectiveness of curriculum implementation. The Principal actively monitors and guides teachers through periodic supervision and direct observation in the classroom, while learning innovations such as the use of the madrasah environment also support student creativity and independence. The main focus of this curriculum is more on-field practice than administrative burden, thus encouraging teachers to be more professional and adaptive to students' needs. Although the implementation of this curriculum has shown positive progress, there are still challenges, especially in managing the interaction between the madrasah principal and students and optimizing learning methods. With continuous supervision and evaluation, the Merdeka Curriculum can be implemented more effectively to improve the quality of education in madrasahs.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih reflects the principles of adequate academic supervision, as stated by Glickman, Gordon, and Ross-Gordon (2018) in Raharjo (2023), which emphasizes that supervision must be oriented towards teacher professional development and improving the quality of learning. The head of the madrasah acts as an instructional leader who not only supervises but also guides teachers in implementing innovative and adaptive methods according to student needs. The use of the madrasah environment as a place of learning is also in line with Vygotsky's constructivism theory (1978) in Arafah (2023), which emphasizes that learning is more effective when it occurs in a social and environmental context that supports active interaction and exploration. Thus, this strategy gives students the freedom to learn independently while strengthening their own Pancasila values.

Although supervision and learning innovation have been implemented, challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum remain, especially in terms of interaction between the madrasah principal and students and optimization of learning methods. According to Sergiovanni (2001) in Ansarika (2024), Effective leadership in education requires not only managerial skills, but also skills in building harmonious relationships with students and teachers. Therefore, the academic supervision applied must be more reflective and collaborative in order to provide more effective solutions to the obstacles faced. In addition, the principle of change management by Fullan (2016) juga relevan dalam konteks ini, di mana keberhasilan implementasi kurikulum bergantung pada kesiapan seluruh pemangku kepentingan dalam menerima perubahan serta melakukan penyesuaian secara berkelanjutan. Dengan pendekatan supervisi yang adaptif dan evaluasi berkelanjutan, diharapkan Kurikulum Merdeka di MAN 1 Prabumulih dapat diterapkan secara lebih optimal untuk meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan.

### **3.4. Implementation of Madrasah Principal Management at MAN 1 Prabumulih City**

The implementation of the management of the madrasah principal as an academic supervisor at MAN 1 Prabumulih City shows a participatory, democratic, and charismatic approach. The madrasah principal is active in academic supervision and provides freedom for teachers to innovate, creating a productive educational environment (Editorial Team, 2023). The commitment of the madrasah principal is seen in his ability to listen to teachers' aspirations and guide them in facing challenges. This approach allows for effective negotiation in overcoming educational barriers, increasing teacher involvement, and strengthening work enthusiasm (Rahman, 2022). The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum also provides freedom for teachers to design flexible and contextual learning using more varied learning media. However, challenges remain, especially in the readiness of teachers to manage this freedom (MF, 2024).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum workshop on May 23-25, 2023, at MAN 1 Prabumulih City demonstrated the school's commitment to improving the quality of education. This

activity was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Religion, with the Head of the TU Sub-Division Miftahudin emphasizing the importance of teachers continuing to update their knowledge so as not to be left behind in curriculum changes (Editorial Team, 2023). In addition, the madrasah implemented the "Suara Merdeka" project on September 21, 2023, which aims to develop students' critical and collaborative thinking skills. The project leader, Omi Warni, hopes that this activity can improve students' understanding of the material while applying Pancasila values in their lives.

Teacher competencies at MAN 1 Prabumulih City include mastery of teaching materials, classroom management, and the use of innovative learning media. The evaluation carried out not only assesses cognitive aspects but also affective and psychomotor, ensuring holistic learning. Teacher professionalism is also seen in their understanding of Islamic education and the use of appropriate educational administration such as RPP and syllabus. Collaboration between madrasahs and the community in developing teacher professionalism reflects efforts to improve the quality of education through strategic partnerships. The head of the madrasah is also active in developing human resources and natural resources by improving the competence of teachers and education personnel holistically, demonstrating a commitment to creating a quality and sustainable educational environment.

Meanwhile, supervision of staff work results by the head of the madrasah at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih is carried out after the implementation of activities to carry out follow-up activities in order to be a reference for decision-making. Furthermore, to provide a more detailed explanation of the efforts of the head of the madrasah in developing the professionalism of Madrasah Teachers, it can be explained as follows:

1. Consistency of the madrasah principal in developing the professionalism of madrasah teachers in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. In an interview with M Fajar B1, it was seen that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih received serious attention from the leadership. The main objective of the Merdeka Curriculum is to create a profile of Pancasila students who are faithful, pious, independent, creative, collaborative, critical thinkers, and globally diverse. To achieve this goal, professional teachers are needed who are able to develop this curriculum effectively.
2. The madrasah principal carries out consistency in academic supervision Academic supervision. MF plays an essential role in ensuring that teachers can implement the Merdeka Curriculum properly. This supervision is carried out both regularly and through direct observation in the classroom and field. The results of the supervision show the seriousness of the teachers in implementing IKM, although there is still room for improvement. "Moreover, MAN 1 Prabumulih has a Decree on the appointment as an IKM Implementing Madrasah from the Directorate General of Pendis, and I, as the Head of the Madrasah, supervise the teachers, including observing the developments made by the MAN teachers in approaching students according to the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum" (MF, 2024).
3. Innovation in learning methods. The use of madrasah environmental facilities as a place of learning is one of the innovations in the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih. This gives students the freedom to learn outside the classroom, which can increase students' creativity, cooperation, and piety. "The teaching and learning process now uses other facilities such as the madrasah environment, such as places of worship (mosques) and madrasah gardens. In my opinion, all of that is part of the teacher's motivation to invite and develop students' abilities to innovate, think, and develop their imagination in the open air" (MF, 2023).
4. Focus on developing teacher professionalism. In addition to learning innovations, the focus on field practice and direct observation is prioritized over administrative burdens, which are considered more effective in motivating students to be independent. "So I see the work of professional teachers carrying out their duties in their entirety, and I think this is an important part of my position as Kamad, ordering teachers to create an increase in the professionalism of MAN 1 Prabumulih teachers. In addition, I do not burden the teachers too much with various administrations even though they must be there, but field practice is even more important to me"

(Fajar, 2023).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih has shown positive progress, although the results are not yet fully optimal. The implementation of this curriculum has brought significant changes in the learning process, leading to a more flexible and relevant approach to student needs. However, some challenges still need to be overcome so that the results achieved can be more optimal and in accordance with expectations.

The role of school leaders is crucial in the success of the implementation of this Merdeka Curriculum. Effective leaders provide clear direction and consistent supervision and encourage innovation in learning methods, contributing significantly to the positive results that have been achieved. These innovations include the development of teaching methods that are adaptive and responsive to student needs, which are key to improving the quality of education and achieving curriculum goals.

The findings of this study indicate that the management of the madrasah principal as an academic supervisor at MAN 1 Prabumulih City applies a participatory, democratic, and charismatic approach in supporting the development of teacher professionalism and the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The madrasah principal actively supervises academics through direct observation and guidance to teachers and provides them with the freedom to innovate in learning. This commitment is reflected in various initiatives such as the Merdeka Curriculum workshop, student collaboration-based projects, and the use of madrasah environmental facilities as learning media. Teachers demonstrate good competence in mastering materials and learning methods and adapting to the new curriculum, although they still face challenges in readiness and managing learning flexibility. Overall, the role of a visionary and innovative madrasah principal is a key factor in creating a conducive educational environment, supporting the improvement of teacher professionalism, and ensuring the effectiveness of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in accordance with national education goals.

The findings of this study are in line with the educational management theory put forward by Sergiovanni (2009) in Bagyoastuti (2016), which emphasizes that the Principal or madrasah must act as an instructional leader who is able to inspire and guide teachers in improving the quality of learning. The participatory, democratic, and charismatic approach applied by the Principal of the madrasah at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih shows transformational leadership, where the Principal not only acts as a supervisor but also as a facilitator in developing teacher professionalism (Wahjono, 2011). This is reflected in ongoing academic supervision activities and encouragement for teachers to innovate in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. According to Sudjana (2010), Effective academic supervision should include direct observation, constructive feedback, and training for teachers so that they can continue to improve their competence. Thus, the Principal's strategy in guiding and supporting teachers at MAN 1 Kota Prabumulih reflects the principles of adequate academic supervision and is oriented towards improving the quality of education.

In addition, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which gives teachers the freedom to design flexible learning, is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) constructivism theory in Arafah (2023), which emphasizes that learning must be student-centered and accommodate experiences and social interactions in the learning process. According to Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (2000) in Gultom (2024), The use of project-based learning methods and the use of the madrasah environment as a learning resource support this approach by allowing students to construct their understanding more independently and contextually. However, challenges in teacher readiness to manage this freedom indicate the need for more intensive training, as suggested by Fullan (2016), which emphasizes that the success of curriculum reform depends on the readiness and adaptation of teachers to the changes that occur. Therefore, although the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih City has brought positive changes, further efforts are still needed in the form of training and ongoing support for teachers so that its implementation can run more optimally.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of the madrasah principal's management as an academic supervisor in the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih has shown positive results despite facing several challenges. By applying an inclusive and collaborative approach, the madrasah principal has created a dynamic and flexible learning environment that encourages active participation from both teachers and students in curriculum development. The continuous monitoring and evaluation conducted by the madrasah principal play a crucial role in ensuring that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum runs effectively. Furthermore, efforts to enhance teacher professionalism are carried out through various strategies, including managerial and administrative optimizations, as well as pre-service and in-service training, such as coaching and certification programs. These initiatives help teachers improve their qualifications and competencies, enabling them to adapt more effectively to curriculum changes.

However, several challenges remain, including the lack of readiness among some teachers in adapting to the new curriculum and issues related to scheduling constraints. To address these challenges, effective time management and structured communication strategies are essential. Additionally, more intensive supervision efforts from the madrasah principal are needed to ensure that all teachers can maximize their potential. By providing strong support through training programs, workshops, and mentoring, the madrasah principal encourages teachers to enhance their professional competence continuously. The successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Prabumulih is expected to serve as a model for other madrasahs, demonstrating the importance of effective leadership in managing change and fostering teacher professionalism.

To enhance the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, policymakers and educational practitioners should prioritize structured and accessible professional development programs for teachers, addressing challenges such as readiness and scheduling constraints. Collaborative efforts between the government and educational institutions are essential in providing continuous workshops, mentoring, and certification programs that equip teachers with the necessary skills to adapt to curriculum changes. Additionally, granting madrasah principals greater autonomy in school-based management can help tailor strategies to their institutions' specific needs, fostering a culture of collaboration and innovation. Future research should explore comparative studies across multiple madrasahs to analyze variations in implementation strategies and their impact alongside quantitative assessments of teacher performance metrics such as student engagement and instructional effectiveness. Investigating the role of digital tools in improving teacher competency and student learning outcomes can also provide valuable insights for refining educational policies, ensuring a more effective and sustainable curriculum implementation in madrasahs nationwide.

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