

To cite this article: Sri Ambiyah, Sitti Roskina Mas and Arifin Sukung (2024). TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE ISLAMIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM AT ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, International Journal of Education and Social Science Research (IJESSR) 7 (4): 90-102 Article No. 956, Sub Id 1493

## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP OF THE ISLAMIC SCHOOL PRINCIPAL IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM AT ISLAMIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.37500/IJESSR.2024.7405>

### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the ability of Islamic school principals at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. A qualitative with a multisite study design was carried out at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City. Data analysis techniques use single-site analysis and cross-site analysis. The present study revealed that Islamic school principals have the following abilities: (1) influencing teachers in implementing the vision and mission through the ability to facilitate the preparation and implementation of Islamic school vision and missions, influencing teacher involvement, becoming role model, (2) motivating and inspiring teachers through the ability to move the school community towards more positive changes, showing trust in teachers, raising teacher enthusiasm with motivational sentences, (3) stimulating teachers to become problem solvers and learning innovators through the ability to encourage teachers to solve problems related to the Merdeka Curriculum, encourage teachers to come up with new ideas that are constructive, creative and innovative, supervise/supervise the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, (4) strengthening teacher's heart by paying attention to outstanding teachers both material and non-material through the ability to know teachers individually, facilitate and encourage teachers to take part in training, provide rewards and compensation.

**KEYWORDS:** transformational leadership, Islamic school principal, Merdeka Curriculum.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The principal serves as the school's administration and leader. Effective leadership has the capability to inspire all students to fulfill the mission and vision of the school. Schools must be adequately governed, run, and used to raise the standard of living for people. The determination, regulation, management, and empowerment of a school are directly tied to the leadership exhibited by its principal. The school principal's performance significantly impacts academic achievement. School principals are crucial in controlling learning, yet their agendas often get in the way [1]. As teachers'

leaders, school principals need to be able to help them become better learners. A Merdeka Curriculum is one place to start when making the necessary curriculum modifications.

Students may exhibit their innate abilities in a carefree, enjoyable, and stress-free environment with the help of the Merdeka Curriculum. The core of open learning is creativity and freedom. The Ministry of Education and Culture started offering free education in conjunction with a driving school program. This educational initiative aims to support all educational establishments in raising a new generation of students who will identify as Pancasila students for life. The Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, officially announced the Merdeka Curriculum. With an emphasis on core subjects and developing each student's individuality and skills, the Merdeka Curriculum is intended to be a more flexible framework [2-4].

In general, transformational leadership inspires employees to go above and beyond what they can accomplish and boosts their self-esteem, improving performance. (1) Idealized influence (charismatic influence), (2) inspirational motivation (motivation that inspires), (3) intellectual stimulation, and (4) individualized consideration (adapted attention) are the traits of transformational leadership [5-7]. The four characteristics of transformational leadership are explained in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Table 1.

**Table 1: Main characteristics of transformational leadership in the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum**

Characteristics	Description
<i>Idealized influence (charismatic influence)</i>	A transformational leader must have charisma to serve as a role model for his staff. In its implementation, a school principal who has charisma and authority that is reflected in himself can influence teachers and the entire school community to be actively involved in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.
<i>Inspirational motivation</i>	Transformational leaders have a clear vision and can articulate their vision to stakeholders. This spirit is raised through enthusiasm and optimism. In its implementation, school/Islamic school principals can motivate teachers to improve the standards set by the Merdeka Curriculum itself.
<i>Intellectual stimulation</i>	A transformational leader who can motivate his staff to solve problems carefully and rationally. Always encourage new, more creative and innovative ways of solving problems. Independence in resolving problems and obstacles as well as channeling creative and innovative ideas through the principal's consideration of whether the teacher has matured in understanding the Merdeka Curriculum as a whole. In other words, this independence is provided under the guidance of the school principal.
<i>Individualized consideration</i>	A transformational leader, in this case the school principal, always listens attentively and pays special attention to the achievement needs and needs of teachers and other school members. This factor represents school principals providing a supportive climate, where they listen carefully to teachers' needs. The principal acts as a coach and advisor, while trying to help teachers realize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The Merdeka Curriculum incorporates the notion of "Freedom to Learn," which is distinct from the 2013 curriculum. It refers to granting schools, teachers, and students the freedom to innovate, learn independently, and be creative, with the teacher serving as the primary figurehead in this regard [8]. Application of the Merdeka Curriculum According to Syafi'i (2021), Rahayu et al. (2022), and Angga et al. (2022), who describe the implementation in several driving schools, learning in elementary schools is still restricted to driving schools. At first, everything went effectively, but implementers—teachers in particular—need to learn more about administrators' role in developing elementary school curricula [9–11].

The Decree of the Minister of Religion, Number 347 of 2022, concerning Guidelines for Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Islamic schools, regulates how the curriculum is implemented at Islamic primary schools, and this is similar to elementary schools. Islamic schools implement the Merdeka Curriculum following the policies set forth by the Ministry of Education and Culture. However, under certain circumstances, Islamic schools modify the curriculum to meet their specific learning objectives and emphasize Arabic and Islamic religious education, unique to Islamic schools [12]. So the guide for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Islamic schools was developed from the Merdeka Curriculum Implementation Guide in the Education Unit, Curriculum Standards and Educational Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was conducted at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City using a qualitative technique and a multisite study design. The first case involved research on a single site, and the second instance involved research on the second site. In this study, documentation, observation, and interviews are the methods used to collect data. Two phases of data analysis were conducted: (a) individual case data analysis with source triangulation and (b) cross-site data analysis, which aimed to compare the conclusions drawn from each case and combine cases. Meanwhile, confirmability and credibility were utilized to evaluate and validate the data.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results are based on data collection techniques: in-depth interviews, observation, and document study of the two sites. After that, a single data analysis was carried out on each site using comparative and cross-site analyses to find intersections between the two sites. These results are depicted in the context diagram in Figure 1.



**Figure 1: Research results**

### **3.1 The ability of islamic school principal to influence teachers in implementing the vision and mission and islamic elementary school operational curriculum at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City**

The final findings of the research appear to show the ability of the Islamic school principal to influence teachers in implementing the vision and mission and Islamic school operational curriculum (KOM) of MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City, reflected in the ability of the Islamic school principal to facilitate the preparation of the vision and mission starting from forming a team to prepare the Islamic school vision and mission, distributing draft vision and mission to teachers/employees, formulate with SWOT analysis a draft vision and mission, submit a draft vision and mission to the foundation, work meetings to determine the vision and mission, and socialize the vision and mission to all Islamic school residents, implementation of the Islamic school vision and mission through Islamic school programs where all residents Islamic schools and stakeholders play an active role in achieving the vision and mission effectively and efficiently. In formulating the mission, according to the previous study, one must consider the main tasks of the Islamic school and interest groups related to the Islamic school so that what the Islamic School does can be understood by the parties involved in implementing it [13,14]. The Islamic school does not encounter obstacles or prejudice from society.

This process has been carried out at both sites, and there have been no significant obstacles to its implementation.

The second hypothesis about the processes in strategic planning is the one advanced by John A. Pearce II, who proposed that there are six steps in preparing strategic planning, the first of which is identifying the mission and objectives, which is a crucial duty for senior management. Creating a firm profile, which will highlight the organization's past achievements and capacity to assist with strategy implementation to achieve future objectives, is the second step in the process. The third phase is external environmental analysis, which involves figuring out how political, social, cultural, and technological changes might indirectly impact the organization. Comparing the company profile with the external environment is how the company's internal analysis is conducted in the fourth step. Creating a business strategy is the fifth phase. When chosen and defined, the company must convert long-term objectives and strategies into operational plans and short-term (annual) targets. Review and evaluation are the last steps [14, 15]. Bass in Masaong (2022) states that a transformative leader needs to serve as an example for his employees. They set a good example in addition to leading. This is exhibited by actions that respect employees, have a firm attitude, are devoted to and consistent with every choice made, and comprehend the organization's vision and mission [7].

The final findings of the research and theory discussed above, the process of preparing and implementing the Islamic school vision and mission, and the Islamic School Operational Curriculum have been prepared and implemented following the theory expressed by experts. Preparing an Islamic school's vision and mission is part of strategic planning, which is the initial foundation of an organization, in this case, an Islamic school. Each educational unit is based on its vision, mission, and goals. The principal's managerial role includes planning. One of the actions carried out in this role is formulating the school's vision, mission, and goals and setting expectations for the school's vision, mission, and goals. The results of an analysis of the school's condition are disseminated to the school community and then determined as a joint decision [16]. If all school members understand the vision and mission of the Islamic school well, implementing the vision and mission will be far from negative prejudice, and each stakeholder can play an essential role in achieving the vision and mission of the Islamic school.

The ability of the Islamic school principal to influence teachers in implementing the vision and mission and Islamic School Operational Curriculum of MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City is reflected in influencing the involvement of teachers in implementing the Islamic school vision and mission, both emphasizing a Merdeka Curriculum knowledge approach and an emotional personal approach. Both sites have Islamic school principals with different characters based on gender, age, and character, which indirectly influence leadership style. According to Wahjosumidjo (2010), school principals are successful if they understand the school's existence as a complex and unique organization and can carry out the principal's role as someone responsible for leading the school [17]. In line with what has been shown by several authors [18-20]. According to the UPI Lecturer Team's

Educational Administration (2008), educational leadership is the capacity to direct the implementation of education to successfully and efficiently accomplish the established educational goals. Principals of Islamic schools can persuade instructors to use the Merdeka Curriculum even when their methods are different [21]. Because of the disparities in gender, age, and character between the two Islamic school principals, there is a variation in approach.

A transformational leader holds a vision. When the organization's goals and objectives have been accomplished, transformational leaders have a clear vision of what the organization will look like. This proves that a transformational leader grounds his actions on goals for the future, even if his vision is not revolutionary in the sense that it is universally acknowledged as a grand and essential vision. Organizational values are admirable principles that all employees should help create and define so that employees feel committed to practicing them. This is how a transformational leader sees them. The activities themselves are not as significant as the symbolic significance of a transformational leader's actions. The essential fundamental values that leaders uphold are everything and can be used as a reference for the organization's fundamental values that all staff uphold [22–23].

The final findings of the research regarding influencing teacher involvement in implementing the Islamic school vision and mission emphasize both the Merdeka Curriculum knowledge approach and the emotional personal approach with the theory that has been expressed that realizing the vision and mission cannot be done only by the head of the Islamic school but implementing programs to achieve the Islamic school vision and mission must be carried out by all Islamic school residents and stakeholders. The ability of the Islamic school principal to influence all Islamic school residents and stakeholders is crucial so that there is no coercion, but rather cooperation and participation are instilled to realize the Islamic school's vision and mission as the initial foundation of the Islamic school's Operational Curriculum.

The final findings of the subsequent research show that the ability of the Islamic school principal to influence teachers in implementing the vision, mission, and operational curriculum of the MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City Islamic school (KOM) is reflected in the ability to become a role model in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum by being a role model in the academic field, having character ideal leader by maintaining position and authority, as well as being a communicative and collaborative figure with teachers. Theoretically, transformational leaders can accomplish goals that go above and beyond the predetermined objectives by altering each subordinate's beliefs, attitudes, and personal objectives [24]. According to studies, transformational leadership emphasizes the bond that develops between the leader and his followers [25], as explained by Mahdinezhad (2013). Strong role models project competence, clearly state objectives, convey high standards, exude confidence, and act in a way that inspires motivation [26]. In addition to using effective communication and crafting a compelling vision, leaders should also project confidence, possess knowledge, be aware of the situational context, employ imagery, and be knowledgeable. They establish a solid emotional bond in this way with their followers [28].

The final findings of the research are the ability to become a role model in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum by being a role model in the academic field, having the character of an ideal leader by maintaining position and authority and being a communicative and collaborative figure with teachers under the theory that has been explained as a role model is part of transformational leadership in which a leader can articulate goals, has good emotional relationships and communication with teachers, has an exemplary personality and is a competent person in his field.

### **3.2 The ability of islamic school principal to motivate and inspire teachers to realize standards based on the Merdeka Curriculum implementation stages at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City**

The final findings of the field research show that the ability of the Islamic school principal to motivate and inspire teachers to realize standards based on the stages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City is reflected in the ability of the Islamic school principal to move the school community towards more positive changes with specific standards, especially in the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum through academic and spiritual coaching and habituation programs. Therefore, in order for teachers to be suitable as role models, there needs to be appropriate training that will help teachers form individuals who are stable, honest, have good morals, are responsible, and so on. These points are then referred to as teacher personality competencies [29]. These strategies are adjusted to the goals to be achieved, both academically related to the Merdeka Curriculum and spiritually. In this instance, leadership is defined as the capacity that some individuals possess to move, influence, inspire, invite, direct, counsel, guide, instruct, order, forbid, and even punish, as well as to develop and inspire others to take action and strive toward the achievement of the intended goals [30]. In her role as the school's top official and as a learning leader, the principal works hard to support, encourage, and help teachers implement innovative teaching practices and high-quality instruction by providing well-structured academic guidance that piques the community's interest. Academicians who were scheduled and prepared [31].

The ability of the Islamic school principal to move the school community towards more positive changes with specific standards, especially in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum through academic and spiritual coaching and habituation programs. Islamic school programs include workshops/training to increase knowledge of the Merdeka Curriculum, and spiritually, there are teacher Islamic schools and faith tours. In both Islamic school programs, teachers try to improve in the spiritual field. All of this is done to move the school community towards more positive changes.

Giving teachers/employees full authority for classroom management, particularly in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, demonstrates the Islamic school principal's ability to inspire and motivate them to realize standards based on the stages of implementing the curriculum at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City. As per Bass, a transformative leader can set high expectations and inspire team members to meet those standards with enthusiasm and passion [7]. As per the findings of Hafidulloh et al. (2021), inspirational leaders can instill enthusiasm in their subordinates (i.e.,

teachers/staff) toward organizational tasks. They can speak in a way that boosts their confidence in accomplishing tasks and reaching organizational objectives [32]. Kuswaeri (2016) defines inspiring others as a leader's capacity to bestow trust, exert influence, or motivate subordinates to put in great effort to meet predetermined organizational objectives. Inspiring others includes motivating others, fostering accomplishment, and instilling confidence [33].

The final findings of the research show that the ability to show a sense of trust in teachers/employees by giving full authority for classroom management, especially in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, is following the theory discussed, namely transformational leadership, where a leader or head of the Islamic school gives trust to teachers to complete their tasks and constantly encouraged to excel.

The final findings of the field research show that the ability of the Islamic school principal to motivate and inspire teachers to realize standards based on the stages of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is reflected in raising the enthusiasm of teachers/employees in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum with motivational sentences with the advice of an academic and spiritual nature and opening forums/a forum for discussion and sharing about the Merdeka Curriculum. According to Musdalifah et al. (2020), school principals motivate by providing opportunities for teachers to develop ideas/opinions or creativity, raising teachers' awareness of the importance of carrying out their duties, providing lots of verbal motivation, school principals providing examples when behaving and behaving as top managers, provide training as motivation for flexible self-development [34].

The ability of the Islamic school principal to raise the enthusiasm of teachers/employees in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum with motivational sentences with the advice of an academic and spiritual nature and opening forums/vessels for discussion and sharing about the Merdeka Curriculum under the theoretical discussion that this ability is part of the characteristics of inspirational motivation with words of motivation, developing ideas and opinions, and providing challenges according to more excellent standards.

### **3.3 The ability of Islamic school principal to stimulate teachers to become problem solvers and learning innovators in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City**

The final findings from the field show that the ability of Islamic school principals to stimulate teachers to become problem solvers and learning innovators in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City is reflected in the ability of Islamic school principals to encourage teachers to solve problems related to the Merdeka Curriculum with teachers independently, as well as sharing groups in developing solutions to problems faced in the classroom, increasing parent participation in Islamic school programs can be a support aid for teachers. According to Bass in Masaong (2022), one of the characteristics of a transformational leader is being able to motivate his staff to solve problems carefully and rationally. Also, staff should be encouraged to find new,



innovative, and creative ways to solve problems [7]. Thus, the ability of the Islamic school principal to encourage teachers to solve problems related to the Merdeka Curriculum with teachers independently or in sharing groups developing solutions to problems faced in the classroom, increasing parent participation in Islamic school programs can be a support aid for The teacher is following the theory discussed that the Islamic school principal's abilities include intellectual stimulation, which is a form of encouragement from superiors to see problems from a new perspective. With intellectual stimulation, leaders stimulate subordinates' creativity and encourage them to find new approaches to old problems.

The ability of the Islamic school principal to encourage teachers to come up with new constructive, creative, and innovative ideas related to the Merdeka Curriculum by opening a forum for channeling ideas formally through meetings or informally through casual conversations, being a decision maker when there are exciting and conflicting ideas, and facilitating the program -Islamic school programs related to the Merdeka Curriculum with total funding from the Islamic school. Apart from that, the ability of the Islamic school principal to supervise/supervise the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum consists of administrative supervision and supervision of teaching and learning activities. The supervision stage also consists of four stages, namely the initial meeting stage, class observation stage, feedback stage, and follow-up stage (post-supervision), as a form of intellectual stimulation so teachers develop.

Intellectual stimulation is leader behavior that provides opportunities for subordinates to develop their creativity, which has been hidden due to bureaucratic processes. Developing new ideas to achieve organizational goals, praising subordinates for work completed, and empowering them [35]. Leaders who can provide intellectual contributions always encourage staff to be able to devote efforts to planning and solving problems, one of which is by conducting evaluations in the form of supervision and control and then providing problem-solving on weaknesses when teaching. The intellectually stimulating dimension has indicators: instilling a critical attitude, encouraging creativity, and encouraging innovation. Intellectual stimulation is a transformational leadership attitude that can create awareness among subordinates of self/group problems and influence the view of these problems from new opinions to achieve organizational targets, increase knowledge and thinking, and solve problems together. The intellectual stimulation possessed by the school principal is to produce the development of an active work culture, work ethic, independence, and openness in creating harmonious relationships, thereby increasing individual awareness in solving problems thoroughly as well as awareness of the importance of achieving the school's goals, vision and mission [34,36].

The final findings of the research show that the Islamic school principal's ability to encourage teachers to come up with new constructive, creative, and innovative ideas related to the Merdeka Curriculum by opening a forum for channeling ideas formally through meetings or informally through casual conversations, becoming a decision maker when there are exciting or contrary ideas, and facilitate Islamic school programs related to the Merdeka Curriculum with total funding from the Islamic school.

Aside from that, the administrative and instructional supervision of the Merdeka Curriculum is within the responsibility of the Islamic school principal's capacity to supervise its implementation. The four stages of supervision are as follows: the first meeting, the stage of class observation, the stage of feedback, and the follow-up (post-supervision) stage. One of the traits of transformational leadership is the inculcation of a critical mindset, as well as an encouragement of creativity and invention.

### **3.4 The ability of islamic school principal to strengthen teachers' hearts by paying attention to teachers with both material and non-material achievements to support the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City**

The final field findings from MIT Al-Islah and MIM Unggulan Gorontalo City show that the ability of school principals to strengthen teachers' hearts by paying attention to high-achieving teachers both materially and non-materially to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is reflected in the ability of Islamic school principals to know teachers individually in order to know their skills, interest and understanding the problems faced by analyzing the teacher's background and behavior and collecting written data. According to Bass in Masaong (2022), what is called the character of individualized consideration is a leader who encourages his staff (a) to explore ways - new ways of carrying out tasks, (b) leaders who can understand the individual differences of their staff, (c) willing and able to listen to aspirations, educate and train staff, (d) able to see the potential for achievement and the need for staff development and facilitate it [7].

Individual consideration is the conduct of a leader who gives each follower attention, views them as unique individuals with unique needs, skills, and goals, and mentors and counsels them. From transformative leadership, observing and expanding opportunities, and treating each subordinate as an individual and companion [32]. On the other hand, individual consideration is leader behavior that considers the worker's capacity for handling tasks, according to Insan (2019). Engage in direct communication with subordinates, assign duties to them, and take on the trainer role for them [35].

Thus, the final findings are the ability of the Islamic school principal to know the teachers individually to know their skills and interests and understand the problems faced by analyzing the background and behavior of teachers, as well as collecting written data. To the theory discussed, namely individualized consideration, which is part of the characteristics of transformational leadership, the first step in finding out the approach used with individuals starts from analyzing the teacher's background and behavior and data collection because each teacher is a different person. Leaders must understand that each person is unique and requires a diverse approach. Therefore, there is a sense of mutual respect between superiors and subordinates.

The final findings of the research show that the ability of the Islamic school principal to facilitate and support online and offline training within/outside the Islamic school is facilitated by the Islamic school and receives total funding from the foundation, and bringing in expert resource persons for internal Islamic school training, especially for the Merdeka Curriculum, is a form of encouragement for

teachers' self-development. In line with the results of research from Musdalifa et al. (2020) show that the transformational leadership of school principals is fast and caring about the needs of teachers and staff, physiological needs, welfare, and security [34]. This shows that the principal is transformational because he can understand and be sensitive to the needs of each subordinate. Apart from that, the school principal develops the professionalism of teachers and staff through direct and indirect supervision, continuing master's education, Subject Teachers' Conference, educational workshops, and other training; supervision is carried out internally and externally at the school, which consists of supervision administration and supervision of learning in the classroom. This is done as a form of attention and responsibility from a school leader to meet the needs of educators and education staff. The final findings of the research are that the ability to give verbal praise and recognition to teachers, giving certificates/charters of appreciation in front of the entire Islamic school community, provides additional incentives for outstanding teachers as well as timely compensation (salary) following the theory discussed, namely a person's motivation in a job is very necessary. In this case, educators should be highly motivated to work. Work motivation creates encouragement or enthusiasm for work, or in other words, a driver of work enthusiasm. Apart from that, clarity of status and economic security greatly influence a teacher's performance, considering that compensation is also crucial for every worker because the worker will use compensation/remuneration to meet his and his family's living needs.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The ability of the Islamic school principal to facilitate the preparation and implementation of the Islamic school vision and mission, influence teacher involvement in implementing the vision and mission, and serve as a role model in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is indicative of their ability to influence teachers in implementing the vision and mission and the Islamic school operational curriculum.

The ability to move the school community toward more positive changes, demonstrate trust in teachers, and pique teachers' enthusiasm with inspirational statements are all indications of the Islamic school principal's ability to inspire and motivate teachers. This motivation is crucial for realizing the standards set by the Merdeka Curriculum, which are based on the stages of its implementation and are designed to ensure a high-quality education that aligns with Islamic values.

The ability of the Islamic school principal to inspire teachers to become innovators in learning and problem solvers in applying the Merdeka Curriculum into practice is demonstrated by the ability of the Islamic school principal to encourage teachers to carry out supervision/supervision towards the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and additionally to solve problems related to the curriculum.

The ability of Islamic school principals to get to know teachers on a personal level, facilitate and encourage teachers to participate in Merdeka Curriculum training, and offer rewards and compensation

all demonstrate their capacity to strengthen teachers' hearts by focusing on teachers with good material and non-material achievements to support the implementation of the curriculum.

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