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Strategies for Enhancing Teaching and Learning Quality in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

Objective: This study examines strategies for improving teaching and learning quality and identifies enabling and inhibiting factors in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta, Indonesia. **Theoretical framework:** The study draws on transformational leadership, organizational culture, instructional supervision, and teacher professionalism to explain how school leadership and collaborative practices support educational quality improvement. **Literature review:** Previous studies have emphasized the importance of curriculum implementation, teacher competence, and school leadership in improving learning outcomes. However, the integration of leadership transformation, coaching-based supervision, adaptive organizational culture, and teachers' roles as learning designers requires further investigation within Islamic integrated elementary schools. **Methods:** This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Participants included the principal, vice principal for curriculum affairs, teachers, and students. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Trustworthiness was established through source and methodological triangulation. Data analysis involved collection, reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. **Results:** Quality improvement strategies encompassed transformational instructional leadership, organizational culture strengthening, and resource optimization. The principal acted as an agent of change by promoting transformative role modeling, while teachers developed innovative and reflective learning practices. Implementation involved collaborative planning, coaching-based supervision, and continuous professional development. Enabling factors included transformational leadership, religiously grounded collaboration, and professional learning communities. Barriers comprised administrative demands during curriculum transition, diverse student learning needs, and limited digital resources. **Implications:** Effective curriculum implementation requires school leaders to foster collaboration, provide continuous professional support, adapt instruction to student diversity, and optimize available digital resources. Policymakers should strengthen administrative support and professional development opportunities. **Novelty:** This study proposes an integrative strategy model combining transformational leadership, coaching-based supervision, adaptive organizational culture, and teachers' roles as learning designers to improve teaching and learning quality within the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

Keywords: teaching and learning quality, merdeka curriculum, transformational leadership, instructional supervision, islamic elementary education

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a cornerstone of developing skilled, competitive individuals with strong character. Educational success depends largely on the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in responding to globalization, technological advances, and the demands of twenty-first-century skills. However, teaching and learning continue to face challenges, including ineffective instructional methods, limited teaching innovation, and teachers' difficulties in creating active, creative, and engaging learning environments. These challenges highlight the need for well-planned, sustainable strategies to improve the quality of teaching and learning in ways that address students' needs [1].

The Merdeka Curriculum was developed to address various educational challenges through flexible, competency-oriented learning that supports character development. It gives schools and teachers the autonomy to adapt teaching and learning to students' needs, potential, and individual characteristics. This flexibility creates opportunities for instructional innovation and differentiated instruction. Nevertheless, successful implementation requires a well-prepared educational ecosystem, including competent educators, adequate facilities, effective school leadership, and sound management of teaching and learning [2].

Curriculum changes in Indonesia have not always been accompanied by sufficient improvements in educational quality. Policy reforms often emphasize administrative and structural changes rather than substantive improvements in teaching and learning. Associated challenges include inadequate evaluation of previous curricula, limited teacher training, insufficient school readiness, and a lack of policy continuity. Teaching and learning also continue to face difficulties in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and digital literacy. Regional disparities in resources and infrastructure further affect the equitable implementation of the curriculum [3].

Improving educational quality requires a shared commitment from the government, communities, and families to create environments that support students' development. Education is also a long-term investment in human resource development and national development. Quality improvement must therefore be pursued continuously through purposeful educational management. Effective management helps schools use their resources, align programs with educational goals, and ensure that policy changes lead to tangible improvements in learning processes and outcomes [4].

Educational management involves school principals, teachers, support staff, students, school committees, and school foundations as mutually supportive stakeholders. Although scholars classify management functions differently, these functions generally include planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and monitoring. They are essential for setting priorities, assigning responsibilities, implementing programs, and evaluating achievements. Improving the quality of teaching and learning therefore requires coordination among school policies, educator development, the provision of facilities, and the monitoring of instructional practices [5].

School principals play a vital role in overseeing education, developing school personnel, managing administrative affairs, and ensuring the effective use of facilities and infrastructure. To improve the quality of teaching and learning, principals need to understand institutional developments, mobilize the school community, and encourage instructional innovation. Leadership strategies help translate the school's vision and mission into carefully planned programs implemented in stages. Principals must also demonstrate a commitment to strengthening teachers' capacities by providing support, training, and opportunities for professional development [6].

Teachers are primarily responsible for delivering instruction and shaping the quality of students' learning experiences. Their performance influences the achievement of school goals and the quality of graduates. Teachers' responsibilities extend beyond presenting subject matter to include classroom management, understanding student development,

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selecting instructional strategies, using learning media, and evaluating learning. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum therefore requires teachers who can adapt their instructional approaches to students' needs. Collaboration between teachers and school principals is essential for creating engaging, effective learning experiences that support students' development [7].

In integrated Islamic schools, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum also requires integrating Islamic values with competency and character development. SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta was selected as the research setting because of its commitment to students' academic and spiritual education and character development. Preliminary accounts indicate that the school attracts considerable interest from the Greater Solo community and has experienced both qualitative and quantitative growth. Quality improvement efforts are pursued through the management of educational programs aligned with the school's vision and mission. These characteristics provide a context for examining instructional strategies that connect national curriculum policy with institutional identity [8].

Preliminary observations and interviews with the principal, vice principals, teachers, and administrative staff revealed quality improvement efforts across eight areas of educational standards. Regarding content standards, the school develops Quranic education through the LittaQwa method, character development, extracurricular activities, support from two to three teachers per classroom, and educational field trips. Regarding process standards, the school employs varied instructional methods and learning media, including Google Classroom, Bamboozle, and Quizizz. Graduate competencies are developed through activities that strengthen knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Educator development is supported through training, further education, and performance appraisal.

Previous studies have examined the evaluation of the Merdeka Curriculum using the Context, Input, Process, and Product (CIPP) model and emphasized teacher capacity development and collaboration through SWOT analysis. They have also highlighted the importance of staff readiness, parental support, and principals' roles as facilitators of teacher development. These findings reinforce the need for integrated, adaptive, and sustainable management of teaching and learning [9].

Other quality improvement efforts include facility maintenance, library development, the implementation of operational procedures, collaboration with the school committee, periodic evaluation, and transparent and accountable financial management. Learning assessment is strengthened through training, varied assessment techniques, objective practices, and the use of assessment results to guide improvement. Previous research has emphasized curriculum evaluation, leadership, teacher readiness, collaboration, character education, and project-based learning. However, further research is needed to connect these dimensions within a systematic management strategy tailored to the context of private integrated Islamic elementary schools. This study therefore examines strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta, focusing on planning, implementation, and evaluation. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of Islamic educational management and serve as a reference for similar schools [10].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Quality in Teaching and Learning

Quality in teaching and learning encompasses effective learning processes, student engagement, competency attainment, and character development. It plays an important role in addressing the demands of twenty-first-century skills. However, limitations in instructional methods, innovation, and learning environments can hinder quality improvement. These perspectives suggest that the quality of teaching and learning should be

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examined in terms of both processes and outcomes [11]. In this study, quality is understood through the alignment of instructional planning with students' needs, the variety of teaching methods and learning media, students' participation, and the use of evaluation findings to guide improvement. In integrated Islamic schools, these dimensions also involve strengthening spiritual values and character through students' learning experiences.

Strategic Management and School Leadership

Strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning require purposeful management of school resources and programs. Management functions include planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and monitoring. Although classifications of these functions vary, they consistently emphasize systematic educational management. School principals are responsible for developing school personnel and ensuring the effective use of facilities [5]. Their support is also essential for strengthening teachers' capacities. This synthesis provides a basis for analyzing the relationships among leadership, collaborative planning, professional development, and the evaluation of teaching and learning. Coaching-based supervision is examined as an aspect of teacher support practices at the school under study [12].

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Integrated Islamic Schools

The Merdeka Curriculum provides schools with the flexibility to develop teaching and learning practices that respond to students' needs and individual characteristics. It creates opportunities for instructional innovation and differentiated instruction, while emphasizing the importance of teachers' ability to design instructional strategies, use learning media, and evaluate learning. These perspectives indicate that curriculum flexibility requires adequate pedagogical competence. In integrated Islamic elementary schools, implementation must integrate competency development with Islamic education. Accordingly, this study examines how teachers adapt instruction to diverse student needs, incorporate character development, and use digital facilities. Teacher readiness and school support are essential to successful implementation [13].

The literature review identifies three interconnected dimensions underlying the improvement of teaching and learning quality: instructional quality, strategic school management, and curriculum implementation. These dimensions provide a conceptual foundation for understanding how educational institutions develop effective learning environments. Instructional quality focuses on learning processes and outcomes, while strategic management emphasizes leadership, resource allocation, and teacher development. Curriculum implementation highlights pedagogical flexibility, student-centered instruction, and Islamic character formation. The following table summarizes the principal concepts and analytical dimensions used to guide this study.

Table 1. Summary of the Literature Review

No.	Main Concept	Key Dimensions
1	Teaching and Learning Quality	Planning, methods, media, participation, evaluation, and character
2	Strategic Management and Leadership	Planning, coordination, supervision, teacher development, and resources
3	Merdeka Curriculum Implementation	Flexibility, differentiation, digital learning, and Islamic values

The three dimensions presented in Table 1 establish an integrated analytical framework for examining teaching and learning quality at SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta. Their interrelationships demonstrate that educational improvement depends not only on curriculum design but also on effective leadership and teachers' instructional competencies. School

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management provides institutional direction and professional support, while curriculum flexibility enables teachers to address diverse learning needs. Furthermore, integrating Islamic values ensures that academic achievement is accompanied by spiritual and moral development. This framework guides the analysis of school strategies, implementation processes, supporting factors, and challenges in improving the overall quality of teaching and learning.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted from December 15, 2025, to April 6, 2026. It focused on the planning, implementation, and evaluation of strategies, as well as their enabling factors and barriers, with particular attention to school leadership, teacher competency development, collaborative culture, and the integration of Islamic values. The informants included the school principal, the vice principal for curriculum affairs, teachers, and students. Data were collected through observations of teaching and learning activities and school management practices, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted in stages and repeated to obtain deeper insights until data saturation was reached.

Documentary materials included activity records, teacher and student lists, and photographs of curriculum implementation. Data trustworthiness was established through source and methodological triangulation by comparing information across informants and findings from observations, interviews, and document analysis. Data were analyzed interactively through data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The data were organized according to the study's focus and presented in narrative form to explain the relationships among the strategies. Conclusions were verified by reexamining field notes and supporting evidence to ensure that they reflected the school's practices for improving the quality of teaching and learning within its specific context [14].

The research methodology was designed to systematically examine the strategies for improving teaching and learning quality at SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta. The research process involved identifying the study period, determining the research focus, selecting relevant informants, collecting qualitative data, and conducting systematic analysis. Observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis were employed to obtain comprehensive information. Data credibility was strengthened through source and methodological triangulation. The overall research procedures are illustrated in Figure 1.

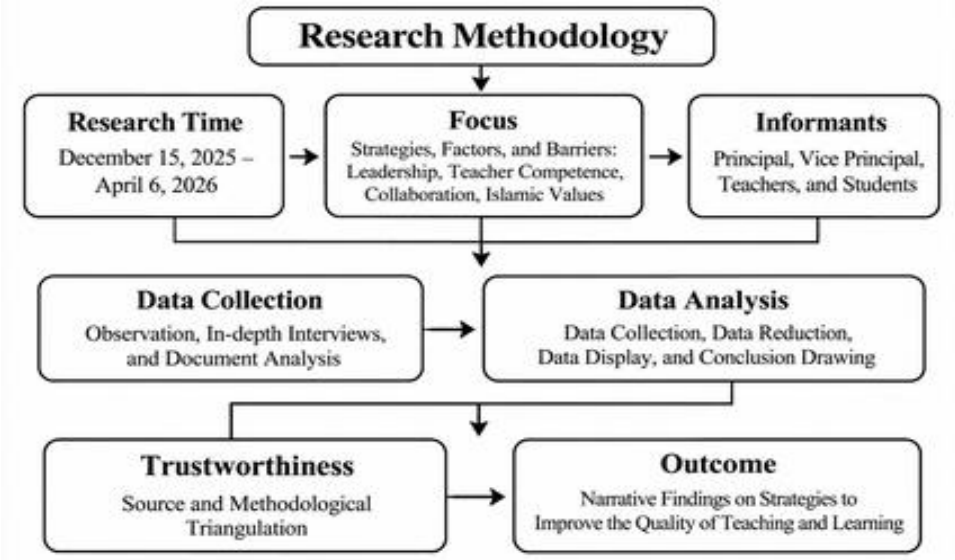


Figure 1. Research Methodology Framework

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Figure 1 illustrates the systematic procedures employed in this study, beginning with the research period and identification of the main research focus. The principal, vice principal for curriculum affairs, teachers, and students served as key informants. Data were collected through observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The collected information was subsequently analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure research credibility, source and methodological triangulation were applied by comparing information from different informants and collection techniques. These interconnected procedures provided a systematic basis for interpreting the findings and explaining strategies for improving teaching and learning quality.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Strategic Focus on Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning

The study at SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta indicates that improvements in the quality of teaching and learning within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum were pursued through strategies connecting school leadership, teacher competency development, organizational culture, and resource optimization. Findings were obtained through observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, then examined in relation to planning, implementation, evaluation, and the factors influencing strategy implementation [15]. Source and methodological triangulation revealed connections among school policies, teachers' experiences, students' responses, and documentary evidence of activities. The discussion therefore focuses on instructional practices within the school context rather than solely on the completeness of curriculum documentation.

The school's vision of educating a generation characterized by piety, independence, and creativity provides the foundation for aligning the Merdeka Curriculum with its identity as an integrated Islamic school. Academic competency development is pursued alongside moral development, independence, and creativity. Within this context, curriculum flexibility is used to adapt activities to students' needs while maintaining Islamic values [16]. The quality of teaching and learning is understood through the adequacy of instructional planning, methodological variety, classroom interactions, student engagement, and follow-up actions arising from evaluation. This focus reflects the study's background, which emphasizes substantive instructional change and the readiness of the school ecosystem to respond to changes in educational policy [17].

School Leadership and the Strengthening of a Culture of Discipline

The principal employed motivational strategies by providing trust, encouragement, recognition, and facilities for teachers seeking to improve instruction. Interviews indicated that innovation was considered essential to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers were encouraged to explore different methods and adapt learning media to students' characteristics. Leadership support gave teachers the confidence to experiment and communicate their instructional needs. School development plans and meeting records reinforced the finding that instructional creativity was a management priority. Observations of teacher discussions also showed that learning media were developed through open professional interactions [18].

These strategies can be interpreted as a combination of transformational and instructional leadership. The transformational dimension was evident in efforts to build trust, motivation, and shared commitment, while the instructional dimension was reflected in attention to teaching methods, instructional materials, and students' learning experiences. The principal acted as an agent of change, helping teachers translate curriculum flexibility into pedagogical practice. These findings are consistent with the importance of principals' support for teacher capacity development. Such support is essential because instructional autonomy requires

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guidance to ensure that innovation remains aligned with students' needs and learning objectives [19].

Discipline was strengthened through the principal's role modeling, particularly in attendance and time management. Observations showed that the principal arrived before school activities began and demonstrated consistent routines to the school community. Attendance summaries, classroom logs, and school rules supported the monitoring of discipline. Teachers interpreted this example as encouragement to fulfill their professional responsibilities. Entering classrooms on time helped maintain smooth transitions between lessons and reduced the loss of instructional time. Discipline was therefore directly related to the quality of educational provision and respect for every student's opportunity to learn [20].

The culture of discipline was also connected to religious routines and character development. Regular activities provided opportunities to experience responsibility, orderliness, and consistency between the values taught and the actions of school community members. These practices can be understood as education through role modeling. Consistent routines created an environment that supported students' sense of security and readiness to learn. The findings align with the importance of responsibility, role modeling, and empowerment in school leadership. In integrated Islamic education, discipline forms part of the integration of spiritual values into everyday academic life [21].

Collaborative Planning and Differentiated Instruction

Instructional planning was undertaken through workshops on instructional materials at the beginning of each semester, teacher group discussions, and guidance from the principal and the vice principal for curriculum affairs. Teachers discussed curriculum learning outcomes, instructional objectives, classroom management, media selection, and evaluation techniques. Academic calendars and meeting minutes indicated that these activities were incorporated into the school's agenda. An examination of teaching modules revealed leadership feedback, assessments of students' needs, and reflective notes. Planning extended beyond document approval to establish a shared understanding of the instruction to be delivered. Collaboration helped teachers prepare activities more purposefully [22].

Flexibility in planning was evident in the adaptation of assignments and activities to students' readiness and interests. Teachers reported that modules could be revised in response to students' reactions. Student interviews described choices in assignment formats, including posters, videos, and written work, which made learning experiences more varied. These practices reflected efforts to accommodate student diversity while maintaining learning objectives. The findings are consistent with the principles of flexibility and differentiation. Collaborative planning served as a link between curriculum principles and teachers' decisions about classroom activities [23].

The relationship between management strategies and students' experiences was evident in the use of games, group work, and choices in assignment outputs. Students reported that these activities reduced boredom and allowed them to engage in learning in appealing ways. Their accounts complemented the perspectives of school leaders and teachers on instructional innovation. Students' voices are important because educational quality is closely related to their experiences as active participants. Nevertheless, positive responses were interpreted as indications of engagement within the study context rather than as conclusive evidence of the success of school programs [24].

Teacher Deployment and Professional Development

Teachers were assigned responsibilities based on their educational backgrounds and areas of expertise. Teacher profiles and teaching assignment records reflected consideration of competencies and workload. According to the informants, appropriate assignments supported

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teachers' subject knowledge and confidence. This strategy indicates that instructional quality is supported from the allocation of responsibilities, rather than only during classroom activities. Within educational management, aligning duties with capabilities is part of human resource organization. Continued support remains necessary, however, because relevant academic qualifications alone do not address all pedagogical demands [25].

Competency development was pursued through internal training, external activities, peer mentoring, and support for further study. The school provided teachers with opportunities to attend training in rotation, along with time and financial support as needed. Certificates, assignment letters, and activity records corroborated the informants' accounts. Teachers who attended training shared their knowledge with colleagues through the school's internal teacher working group. This mechanism helped turn training outcomes into shared learning resources. Discussions about applying the material enabled teachers to adapt new knowledge to classroom conditions, making professional development a process of sharing and applying practices rather than merely attending activities [26].

Support for further study reflected a commitment to continuous academic capacity development. The school granted study permission and flexibility in work arrangements to teachers pursuing additional qualifications. Educator profiles and permission letters supported this finding. The outcomes of further study could inform discussions and instructional development within the school. From a management perspective, training and further education represent investments in educators' capacities that need to be connected to classroom practice. Their benefits are understood through teachers' contributions to knowledge, reflection, and innovation, rather than as an automatic guarantee of improved quality. This connection strengthens the school's role as a learning organization [19].

Teachers' roles as learning designers were evident in their ability to select materials, organize activities, use learning media, and refine approaches through reflection. Teachers did not simply implement existing materials; they adapted them to classroom situations. This process required organizational support to prevent the demand for creativity from becoming an individual burden. The findings showed that leadership guidance and collaborative work provided opportunities to consider alternative actions. Teachers' professional autonomy thus operated alongside responsibility for learning objectives, students' needs, and the educational values promoted by the school [27].

Instructional Dialogue and Coaching-Based Supervision

Instructional dialogue took place through regular meetings and additional meetings when urgent issues arose. These forums addressed student development, difficulties in presenting subject matter, and barriers to curriculum implementation [28]. Meeting observations showed that teachers had opportunities to express their views and receive feedback from leaders and colleagues [29]. Minutes recorded proposed follow-up actions for the issues discussed. Teachers found this support helpful because classroom problems were not addressed in isolation. Two-way communication connected classroom experiences with school decisions, allowing programs to be adjusted to actual needs. These practices also supported the exchange of experiences and the maintenance of professional trust [30].

Classroom supervision was conducted periodically by the principal and the vice principal for curriculum affairs. Observations covered lesson introductions, subject knowledge, teacher–student interactions, media use, and the implementation of learning activities. Supervision instruments were used to record matters requiring discussion. Following observations, dialogue focused on successes, challenges, and possible improvements. Teachers reported that this guidance helped them address classroom management difficulties without feeling judged. Reflective notes and follow-up plans reinforced the finding that supervision was oriented toward professional support. Monitoring was therefore conducted as part of professional development connected to instructional needs [31].

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Coaching-based supervision positioned school leaders as teachers' reflective partners. Guiding questions helped teachers identify effective practices and areas requiring adjustment. Common issues could be discussed collectively without singling out particular teachers for criticism. This pattern can be interpreted as supporting teachers' psychological safety in examining their own practices and trying new solutions. Linking supervision with the professional learning community strengthened continuity among observation, reflection, and follow-up. This strategy is relevant to the Merdeka Curriculum because teachers must make adaptive decisions while remaining accountable for their alignment with learning objectives [32].

Resource Optimization and the Evaluation of Teaching and Learning

Resource optimization included digital devices, internet access, teaching aids, the library, reading corners, and learning spaces suitable for group activities. Observations and budget documents indicated attention to the acquisition, use, and maintenance of facilities. Teachers used learning resources to present materials in varied ways and encourage student exploration. Students' responses indicated more engaging learning experiences through videos, applications, and activities outside the classroom. However, the reported barriers also revealed limitations in digital equipment in some rooms. Facility support was therefore understood as an ongoing development process that still required more equitable provision [8].

The findings on facilities highlight the importance of aligning procurement decisions with pedagogical needs. Equipment availability creates opportunities for innovation, but the quality of its use depends on teachers' capabilities and activity planning. A supportive learning environment also includes classroom organization, comfort, and access to basic learning resources. This discussion is consistent with the importance of conducive physical and psychological environments. Within the school context, resource optimization needs to be connected to opportunities for both independent and collaborative learning. Facilities therefore support instructional strategies, while teaching decisions continue to require educators' professional judgment [33].

Evaluation addressed instructional programs, processes, and outcomes. The principal and teachers reviewed students' achievements and problems arising during classroom activities. Assessment results informed decisions about reteaching material, adjusting methods, providing remedial instruction, and offering enrichment. Assessment analyses and progress records showed planned follow-up actions. Teachers explained that remedial instruction involved more than repeating tests; it included improving explanations when students had not understood the material. These practices demonstrate that evaluation provided information for pedagogical decisions. Attention was directed toward individual learning needs and the effectiveness of the approaches used [34].

From a management perspective, evaluation connected implementation with subsequent planning. Findings about students' difficulties informed adjustments to activities, the provision of learning media, and additional support. This pattern is consistent with improving instruction through evaluation analysis and reflection. Triangulation involved comparing informants' accounts, observed activities, and follow-up documents. These comparisons helped establish the relationship between planned programs and their implementation. Indicators of quality were primarily evident in methodological variety, teacher readiness, student responses, and improvement practices. These qualitative findings were not used to quantify gains in academic achievement [35].

Enabling Factors and Barriers to Strategy Implementation

The main enabling factors included leadership that provided positive role models, alignment between the school foundation's and teachers' visions, a collaborative culture

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grounded in religious values, an internal professional learning community, and student enthusiasm. Leaders' trust helped teachers embrace change, while peer interactions facilitated knowledge sharing. Islamic values provided a foundation for commitment, responsibility, and solidarity in program implementation. The learning community offered a forum for discussing modules, assessments, and classroom issues. These forms of support indicate that readiness for curriculum implementation depends not only on facilities but also on professional relationships and the school community's willingness to learn together. Student enthusiasm further strengthened teachers' motivation to develop activities [36].

The barriers identified included the need to change teachers' mindsets, administrative demands, limited time for professional development, diverse student needs, and uneven access to digital resources. Preparing diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments, along with project documentation, required adaptation and additional time. Differences in students' readiness required teachers to prepare varied activities, while teaching schedules limited training opportunities. Teachers responded through group discussions, peer mentoring, and collaborative preparation of instructional materials. Collaboration helped ease these difficulties, but it did not indicate that all barriers had been resolved. The school still required capacity development, time management, and improved facilities to ensure more consistent strategy implementation [37].

Synthesis of the Integrative Strategy and Research Implications

This discussion clarifies the research gap identified in the study's background. Leadership, training, and evaluation were not treated as separate programs but as mutually supportive elements. The distinctive context of an integrated Islamic school was reflected in the connection between religious culture and professional collaboration. The integrative pattern identified is therefore a formulation grounded in field practices that can be developed through further research. Studies in other schools are needed to understand how this pattern operates under different resource conditions, organizational cultures, and student characteristics.

Overall, the findings point to an integrative strategy connecting leadership, organizational culture, coaching-based supervision, professional learning communities, and resource optimization. Collaborative planning provided direction, teacher development supported implementation, and supervision and evaluation generated feedback. The integration of Islamic values maintained the school's identity while implementing national policy [38]. The study's contribution lies in explaining the relationships among strategies within the context of SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta. This pattern may inform similar schools, provided that their respective characteristics are considered. Instructional quality develops through an organization's ability to adjust programs, support educators, and respond continuously to students' needs [39].

The integration of strategies can be understood through the relationship among policy direction, implementers' capacities, and improvement mechanisms. The principal established quality priorities and provided support, teachers translated them into learning activities, and the school community created opportunities for reflection. When difficulties arose, classroom information was brought to instructional forums to determine follow-up actions. This relationship demonstrates that improving the quality of teaching and learning requires ongoing communication. Training programs, facility procurement, and supervision become meaningful when their outcomes address the issues experienced by students and teachers during learning activities [40].

Consistency is an important consideration in implementation. Effective planning requires implementation that can be monitored, while reflection requires follow-up action. Teaching modules, supervision records, and assessment results helped the school maintain these connections. However, documents must be considered alongside the experiences of the school community so that evaluation does not focus solely on administrative completeness. This approach maintains a human-centered orientation by taking students' needs and support

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for teachers into account in decision-making. Quality improvement is therefore understood as a shared developmental process achieved through adjustments to practice [41].

The synthesis table summarizes the relationships among strategies, implementation practices, supporting evidence, and their relevance to instructional quality. This presentation helps illustrate the connections between management and pedagogy while retaining the school context. The table provides an analytical summary of the findings and is not intended to rank the effectiveness of individual strategies.

Table 2. Synthesis of Strategies for Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning at SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta

Strategic Dimension	Implementation Practices	Supporting Evidence	Relevance to the Quality of Teaching and Learning
Leadership and school culture	Motivation, role modeling of discipline, recognition, and reinforcement of Islamic values	Interviews, attendance records, school rules, and meeting records	Supports teacher commitment and an orderly learning environment
Collaborative planning	Workshops on teaching modules and identification of students' readiness and interests	Teaching modules, reflective notes, and observations of discussions	Guides the adaptation of activities to students' needs
Professional development	Training, knowledge sharing, peer mentoring, and further study	Certificates, assignment letters, study permission letters, and activity records	Strengthens pedagogical capacity and the exchange of instructional practices
Coaching-based supervision	Classroom observations, reflective dialogue, and follow-up planning	Supervision instruments and mentoring records	Helps teachers identify problems and plan improvements
Resource optimization	Use of digital devices, teaching aids, the library, and flexible learning spaces	Facility observations, inventory records, and budget documents	Provides varied learning media and learning experiences
Continuous evaluation	Assessment analysis, instructional adjustments, remedial instruction, and enrichment	Analyses of assessment results and student progress records	Connects learning outcomes with decisions about instructional improvement

Table 2 synthesizes six strategic dimensions for improving teaching and learning quality at SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. These dimensions encompass leadership and school culture, collaborative planning, professional development, coaching-based supervision, resource optimization, and continuous evaluation. Each dimension is operationalized through specific practices supported by empirical evidence, including interviews, observations, institutional documents, and student assessment records. The strategies collectively strengthen teacher commitment, pedagogical competence, instructional adaptability, and evidence-based decision-making. Their effectiveness depends on the integration of transformational leadership, collaboration, and reflective professional practices. Furthermore, optimizing available resources and addressing students' diverse learning needs are essential to creating an inclusive, responsive, and sustainable learning environment that supports continuous educational quality improvement.

The synthesis demonstrates that improving teaching and learning quality requires a coordinated system rather than isolated interventions. Leadership establishes shared priorities

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and creates conditions for professional collaboration, while differentiated planning translates curriculum flexibility into responsive classroom practices. Teacher development and coaching-based supervision strengthen the capacity to implement, examine, and refine these practices. Meanwhile, learning resources and continuous assessment provide support and feedback for instructional decisions. The integration of Islamic values gives these efforts a coherent institutional direction by connecting academic development with character formation. Nevertheless, implementation remains constrained by time, administrative demands, varied student readiness, and unequal digital access. Sustainable improvement therefore depends on consistent coordination, targeted support, and ongoing evaluation.

CONCLUSION

Strategies for improving the quality of teaching and learning in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SDIT Ar-Risalah Surakarta were implemented through an integrative approach combining transformational leadership, the strengthening of organizational culture, and resource optimization. The principal acted as an agent of change through role modeling, motivation, and guidance that encouraged teachers to develop creative and reflective instructional practices. These strategies were put into practice through collaborative planning, professional development, coaching-based supervision, and continuous evaluation. Their integration supported adaptive, innovative, and student-centered learning while maintaining Islamic values as the foundation of the school's educational practices. Strategy implementation revealed changes in the culture of discipline and teachers' roles. Discipline developed through role modeling and responsibility, while teachers were given opportunities to become learning designers who adapted activities to students' readiness and interests. Collaboration between school leaders and teachers strengthened the connections among planning, implementation, and instructional improvement, enabling the principles of Merdeka Belajar to be applied. Enabling factors included constructive leadership support, a religious and collaborative culture, and an internal professional learning community supported by peer mentoring. These factors facilitated knowledge sharing, reflection, and the resolution of instructional problems. Barriers included administrative demands associated with assessment preparation and documentation of projects to strengthen the Pancasila Student Profile, diverse student learning needs, and uneven access to digital resources. These conditions required effective time management, competency development, and improvements to facilities. Improving the quality of teaching and learning therefore depends on the synergy among leadership, teacher engagement, and organizational adaptability. This study emphasizes the importance of strategies that connect management support with pedagogical practice to develop students' potential. The findings may inform integrated Islamic schools in designing instructional improvements suited to their respective characteristics and resources.

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Author Contribution

Muhammad Iksan contributed to conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and manuscript preparation. Imam Makruf contributed to theoretical development, methodology, and critical revision. Heldy Ramadhan Putra Pembangunan contributed to interpretation, validation, supervision, and final manuscript review.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest related to this research, its authorship, or publication. All research activities were conducted independently, without external influence compromising the integrity or objectivity of the findings.

Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Artificial intelligence tools were used to assist with language refinement and grammatical editing. The authors independently reviewed and verified the manuscript's content, interpretations, and conclusions, retaining full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the published work.

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