



The Freedom Approach-Based in Managing Arabic Language Classroom Interaction in the Era of Merdeka Belajar in Pekanbaru City

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2025-12-17 Revised: 2026-09-07 Accepted: 2026-09-14 Keywords: <i>Freedom-based approach; Classroom interaction management; Arabic language learning; merdeka Belajar era</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.8914 Corresponding Author: Rizqullah Arsy Ramadhan rizqullaharsyramadhan@gmail.com Arabic Language Education, Sultan Syarif Kasim State Islamic University, Riau	<i>This study investigates the implementation of a freedom-based approach in managing classroom interaction for Arabic language learning within the Merdeka Belajar framework, with a focus on Pekanbaru city. The research is motivated by the dominance of teacher-centered practices, that reduce students' active participation, which is increasingly incompatible with 21st-century demands for communication, collaboration, creativity, and learner autonomy. The study employs a qualitative phenomenological design involving experienced Arabic teachers selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, while validity was ensured through triangulation and member checking. The findings demonstrate four significant outcomes. First, classroom interaction patterns show a gradual shift toward dialogical communication, although participation remains dominated by high-achieving students. Second, learning freedom is reflected in the flexibility of tasks and methods, allowing students to choose activities that suit their preferences and learning styles. Third, teachers' roles are transforming from knowledge transmitters to facilitators who guide and support the learning process. Fourth, the application of the freedom-based approach positively affects students' motivation, confidence, and independence in using Arabic, thereby fostering intrinsic discipline and active participation. Overall, the study confirms the relevance of a freedom-based approach in enhancing the effectiveness of Arabic language learning. It provides both theoretical contributions to the discourse on classroom management and practical guidance for teachers in creating humanistic, participatory, and responsive classrooms aligned with the goals of Merdeka Belajar and the competencies required in the 21st century.</i>

1. Introduction

Paulo Freire (1970) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* emphasizes the importance of freedom of thought in education, which is in line with the concept of freedom-based classroom interaction management (Freire, 1970; Siswadi, 2022). The concepts of freedom of thought and freedom-based classroom interaction management are reflected in freedom thinking-based learning strategies that balance the roles of teachers and students and encourage active communication (Signoret, 2013; Taufik et al., 2024). The social phenomenon in Arabic language learning in Indonesia shows that the pattern of interaction in the classroom is still largely dominated by teachers, while students tend to be passive (Muradi et al., 2021; Syafni et al., 2025). This condition is not in line with the needs of the 21st century, which demands communication skills (Mahatma, 2024; Tsany et al., 2024), collaboration (Mahatma, 2024; Tsany et al., 2024), creativity (Fitria et al., 2024; Rilianty et al., 2023), and independence (Fitriani & Maarif, 2023; Lestari, 2023).

This reality raises serious questions about the effectiveness of classroom management that is overly oriented towards teacher authority, especially when students are expected to develop Arabic language competencies in a global context that emphasizes active participation and learning autonomy (Haq, 2023). In addition to Paulo Freire's theory of freedom, this study is also relevant to Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, which emphasizes students' freedom in managing their learning process (Rogers, 1969), and Kolb's experiential learning theory, which emphasizes direct experience as the core of learning (Kolb et al., 2014). This perspective is reinforced by Mezirow's transformative learning theory, which views education as a process of changing ways of thinking through critical reflection (Mezirow, 1991). Furthermore, sociocultural language learning theory underscores the importance of social interaction in language learning, where students acquire a learning identity through active participation in the classroom community (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

All of these theories are in line with the Merdeka Belajar (Freedom of Learning) policy, which demands independence, autonomy, and active student participation in learning, so that the management of Arabic language classroom interactions in Pekanbaru City must be directed towards a democratic, participatory, and liberating pattern (Azhar et al., 2022; Muhammad, 2024).

The paradigm shift in education in the digital age has led to various innovations in learning strategies, including in the context of Arabic language teaching. In *The Use of Arabic Neologisms in Social Media Applications*, The International Journal of Arabic-English Studies, 2021 highlights the importance of creativity and linguistic freedom in the use of modern Arabic (Hamdan & Al-Salman, 2021; Izzati et al., 2025). The important role of education in developing human potential, integrating intelligence to encourage individual growth (Mulliyani, M., & Amril, 2023).

Currently, the classroom is no longer seen as merely a place for teachers to deliver material, but as an interactive ecosystem that demands the active involvement of students (Almelhes & Alsaiari, 2024; Ekawati et al., 2024; Hamdan & Al-Salman, 2021; Sutisna & Atha, 2023; Widiyanti, 2024). According to the Handbook of classroom management, classroom management is not just about maintaining order, but also about building a positive climate that allows students to learn optimally (Emmer & Sabornie, 2015; Khotimah & Ilmiani, 2024; Siswanto, 2022).

In the context of Arabic, classroom management poses a unique challenge because learning requires intensive practice (Soleh et al., 2021), and patience in the language acquisition process (Masnun et al., 2025). The challenges of globalization, technological developments, and shifts in the learning culture of the younger generation have created a

need for a more flexible, dialogical, and freedom-oriented approach to classroom management (Ahmadi et al., 2024). This highlights the need for teachers to adapt to digital technology while ensuring that students receive comprehensive guidance and support (Noverma & Wahyudi, 2025).

In Arabic language teaching practice, there is often a tendency for traditional methods to still emphasize full teacher control and material dominance (Fasha et al., 2025; Pratama et al., 2024; Waliyuddin et al., 2024). This model does not provide enough space for students to express their ideas, ask critical questions, and build authentic communication (Akramova, 2023; Isnaini et al., 2025).. This is where the freedom approach in classroom interaction management becomes relevant, as it places students as subjects who have learning authority while encouraging the formation of a democratic classroom atmosphere (Izzati et al., 2025; Rahmadhani, Willy Hidayati, 2024; Taufik et al., 2024).

The freedom approach does not mean without restrictions, but rather a pedagogical strategy that provides space for active participation, freedom of expression, and opportunities for exploration within a guided framework (Almelhes & Alsaiani, 2024; Amrullah et al., 2022; Simon & Mutmainah, 2025). In the context of Arabic language teaching, this approach has the potential to strengthen communicative competence, namely the use of language in real contexts, the integration of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), and interactive activities such as dialogue, role-play, and group discussions (Azhar et al., 2022; Ekawati et al., 2024; Hendri, 2017; Janadbah & Sharef, 2024; Zubair, 2024; Zulhannan et al., 2025). The implementation of this approach not only encourages active engagement and motivation to learn, but also builds a more egalitarian relationship between teachers and students, so that classroom interaction management becomes more effective and in line with the demands of 21st-century learning (Egitim, 2021; Riyadi & Robandi, 2025).

The Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for schools and teachers in designing learning strategies according to the needs of students. This flexibility is important because each school has different conditions, student characteristics, and resources (Hadi et al., 2023; Irsyad et al., 2024). According to (Angga et al., 2022), the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to make it easier for educational units to adapt learning to the local context and the needs of students. Findings (Fitri Rahayu, 2025) indicate the need for modernization in continuous teaching to ensure that Islamic education remains competitive and relevant in a global context. (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022) emphasize that curriculum flexibility allows teachers to develop creative, participatory, and contextual learning strategies.

(Nurmasyitah et al., 2023) found that flexibility in the Merdeka Curriculum has a positive implication on student learning motivation, as teachers can adapt the material to the students' learning styles (Nurmasyitah et al., 2023). (Lestari, 2023) emphasizes that the freedom to adapt the curriculum helps teachers overcome differences in students' learning abilities within a single class. (Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2023) also shows that curriculum flexibility accelerates post-pandemic learning recovery by adjusting content as needed. The curriculum must adapt to contemporary developments and student needs to effectively address current issues through well-designed educational materials (Lestari, U. F., Wahyudi, H., Hidayat, H., & Hakim, 2024).

Thus, the flexibility offered by the Merdeka Curriculum provides space for Arabic language teachers to manage classroom interactions more (Khotami et al., 2024; Nisa & Al Ghifari, 2023; Selim, 2018). This finding is reinforced by (Nurzen, 2022), who highlights the importance of teacher readiness in utilizing the flexibility of the curriculum so that it does not only become a policy on paper but also has a real impact on daily learning practices (A. Wahyuni et al., 2024).

This flexibility is not merely a technical aspect but a pedagogical strategy that supports the creation of a democratic, humanistic classroom environment aligned with the characteristics of today's students (Anggini et al., 2024; Tunas & Pangkey, 2024).

In line with this, Fitriyyah also emphasized that teachers in the new curriculum era need to adapt to a more dialogic learning paradigm, so that students are not only passive recipients but also producers of knowledge (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). Rumania reinforces this argument by showing that freedom-based classroom management has been proven to improve Arabic language communication skills while fostering student independence in learning (Rumania et al., 2023). Therefore, research on the freedom approach in the context of Pekanbaru City is relevant and urgent.

The freedom approach in classroom interaction management theory is not only important theoretically, but also has practical implications for learning transformation (Rumania et al., 2023), especially in Arabic. The importance of planning, organizing, implementing, and supervising educational activities (Fitri et al., 2023). Active participation of students not only improves the quality of learning but also supports the overall development of students' potential, including social skills, critical thinking, and leadership skills (Azhar et al., 2023; Mulyana et al., 2024). As a result, the learning that takes place is merely a transfer of knowledge without fully considering the objectives that have been set (Mahmud & Hamzah, 2020). Thus, this study seeks to analyze the Freedom approach that can be used as a reference for Arabic language teachers in creating a more humanistic, participatory, and responsive classroom that is in tune with the dynamics of the times (Rababah, 2020).

Thus, this study focuses on three main areas: first, how Arabic language teachers manage freedom-based classroom interactions within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the city of Pekanbaru; second, what strategies teachers choose to balance student freedom with the achievement of learning objectives; and third, how the implementation of the freedom approach impacts student motivation and learning independence (Maulisa et al., 2025; Nur'aini & Farisi, 2023; Ruswatie et al., 2024). With this framework of questions, it is hoped that this study can provide an in-depth picture of the actual practice of the freedom approach in the local context.

The urgency of this research also lies in its contribution to the development of Arabic language education science and practice. Conceptually, this study adds a new perspective on the relevance of the freedom approach in classroom management in the era of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom of Learning). Practically, this research is useful for teachers, as it can be used as a reference in creating a more democratic and participatory classroom atmosphere. (R. Wahyuni & Berliani, 2019) highlight the weaknesses of the old curriculum, which placed too much emphasis on cognitive aspects without allowing space for affective aspects and student participation. In the context of Merdeka Belajar, these weaknesses are to be overcome by providing greater space for students' freedom of expression and active participation.

Literature Review

Recent studies show that providing freedom in classroom interactions can increase student motivation and communication skills (Suryana & Hamengkubuwono, 2024). Recent research discussing Arabic classroom interaction management over the past three years, which is relevant to several approaches (Tsany et al., 2024), shows that the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) interaction model allows for increased student participation in Arabic classes, even though this pattern is still teacher-centered. Research (Unsi & Wutsqo, 2023) reveals that encouraging students to use Arabic contextually in real situations is a form of guided freedom approach. Meanwhile, (Masnun et al., 2025) mentions the Content and

Language Integrated Learning Model, which actively involves students and gives them freedom in learning. The concept of freedom in classroom management can also be linked to efforts to create a flexible and adaptive learning atmosphere that meets the needs of the classroom dynamics. (Hidayat & Wahyudi, 2024) emphasize that a free approach triggers intrinsic discipline. This is in line with Deci & Ryan (2000) in their Self-Determination theory, which explains that students' intrinsic motivation grows when they are given learning autonomy (Dunn & Zimmer, 2020).

Interaction management in Arabic language classroom management is a highly complex and contextual pedagogical issue (Roviin, 2018). However, research on Arabic language learning interaction management over the past three years has generally focused on four main approaches (Mohamed, 2024).

First, research on interaction management with a power approach emphasizes the authority of teachers in regulating classroom order, particularly in the context of secondary schools and modern Islamic boarding schools (Rahmatillah, 2023). For example, (Rahmawati, 2022) found that strong teacher control was able to maintain focus on learning, while (Thaib, 2024) demonstrated the effectiveness of the authoritative role of teachers in reducing communication disruptions in digital Arabic language classes.

Second, research using a freedom approach highlights the importance of giving students autonomy. A study (Mulyaningsih, 2014) shows that student independence in choosing interaction strategies increases learning motivation, which is in line with what is mentioned by (Sari & Wahyudi, 2024) to involve students emotionally and show a shared focus on emotional relationships in education. Meanwhile, (Sidik et al., 2021) emphasizes that the role of teachers as facilitators actually strengthens the negotiation of meaning in the context of online learning.

Third, research with a teaching approach focuses on technology-based instructional strategies (Fanani & Maisyaroh, 2024). (Kosim et al., 2024) reviews the effectiveness of task-based instruction in Arabic language classes, while (Khairanis & Aldi, 2025) asserts that teachers' digital media-based instructional skills contribute to more productive interactions in inclusive classrooms.

Fourth, research with a behavioral change approach emphasizes the use of modern educational psychology principles (Samsudain & Omar, 2024). (Almulla et al., 2025) shows that positive reinforcement in Arabic language classes in the UAE can improve discipline without reducing participation, while a local Indonesian study (Saifulloh & Hamsar, 2024) underlines the effectiveness of rewards and punishments in shaping students' language habits. Similarly, emphasizes that the Behavior Change Approach in Classroom Management in Arabic Language Learning can trigger intrinsic discipline.

With reference to the theoretical framework and previous research results, it can be emphasized that this research is important not only from an academic perspective, but also as a real contribution to educational practice. Arabic teachers in Pekanbaru City can obtain conceptual and practical guidance for implementing the freedom approach in their classrooms. Ultimately, this study is expected to bridge the gap between the macro policy of Merdeka Belajar (Freedom of Learning) and the micro reality in the classroom, so that Arabic language learning can be more humanistic, participatory, and in line with the demands of the 21st century.

2. Method

This study was designed using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, as its main focus was to explore in depth the experiences and views of Arabic language teachers regarding the application of a freedom approach in classroom interaction management (Hasan & Melyyani, 2023). The research setting was in two Senior high schools

in Pekanbaru city, namely Al-Azhar Senior High School and Az-Zuhra Senior High School, with the research subjects being Arabic language teachers who had at least one year of teaching experience (Nurdin & Hafidzi, 2023). The inclusion of experienced Arabic teachers from Al-Azhar Senior High School and Az-Zuhra Senior High School Pekanbaru, selected through purposive sampling and interviewed using in-depth techniques, aligns well with contemporary qualitative research practices in Arabic language education studies.

The main objective of this research is to comprehensively explore the perspectives of Arabic language teachers on the application of the freedom approach in managing classroom interactions (Hasan & Melyyani, 2023). Informants were selected using purposive sampling, which involved selecting teachers who were considered relevant and capable of providing in-depth data (Mukhlis & Wahyudi, 2024). Until the number of informants reached data saturation, in line with phenomenological and qualitative research practices in studies of Arabic language learning based on freedom of thought (Nurdin & Hafidzi, 2023; Taufik et al., 2024).

Data Collection Techniques In-depth interviews: conducted face-to-face or online using semi-structured interview guides. Questions focused on: (1) Arabic language classroom interaction management practices. (2) Teachers' perceptions of the freedom approach in the classroom. (3) Challenges and opportunities in implementing this approach (Muradi et al., 2021; Nurdin & Hafidzi, 2023; Taufik et al., 2024).

Data analysis techniques were carried out using the model (Dull & Reinhardt, 2014; Miles, 1994): (1) Data reduction – filtering interview results relevant to the research focus. (2) Data presentation – compiling data in the form of tables, narratives, or theme matrices. (3) Drawing conclusions – compiling conceptual findings regarding the application of the freedom approach in Arabic language classroom interactions (Asy'arie et al., 2024; Salsabila & Setiyawan, 2024).

Data validity is maintained by: (1) Source triangulation (comparing information from several teachers). (2) Technique triangulation (interviews, documentation, observation). (3) Member check (reconfirming interview results with informants to ensure they match their intentions) (Akmaliyah et al., 2021; Nurdin & Hafidzi, 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the freedom approach in managing Arabic language classroom interactions in Pekanbaru City is not only evident in classroom observations, but also confirmed through in-depth interviews with two Arabic teachers. Both informants described how giving students the space to express their opinions, choose their learning methods, and participate actively has significantly changed the dynamics of classroom communication. This is in line with Azhar's findings, which state that this approach contributes significantly to the transformation of communication patterns, the role of teachers, and student motivation to learn (Azhar et al., 2022).

Both teachers stated that “students became more courageous in speaking, more confident, and showed increased enthusiasm in free conversation-based activities. Even students who were previously quiet began to speak actively after being given a safe and non-judgmental space, the application of freedom in choosing methods and tasks, and the change in the teacher's role from dominator to facilitator” (Teacher [MA], 2025).

This is in line with the findings of Fitriyah and Wardani in their findings on the increase in student motivation and independence in Arabic language learning (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). These two main findings are in line with Paulo Freire's theoretical framework on freedom of learning, Carl Rogers' humanistic theory, and the student-centered learning paradigm emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum (Freire, 1970; Scocuglia, 2018).

In addition, both informants emphasized that the freedom-based approach they applied remained within the boundaries of classroom rules, such as a speaking rotation system, class agreements, and clear assessment rubrics. This is in line with the idea that freedom is not synonymous with boundlessness, but requires control and direction so that learning objectives can still be achieved (Galad et al., 2024).

Thus, the results of this study contribute theoretically to the literature on freedom-based classroom management while offering practical implications for Arabic language teachers to build a democratic and participatory learning climate (Lestari, 2023).

Interviews with two teachers revealed that classroom interaction patterns are increasingly shifting toward dialogic communication. Both interviewees implemented a "talking rotation system," whereby each student gets a turn to speak so that interaction is not monopolized by students who are smart or confident. This strategy helps reduce the participation gap previously found in the observation of Teacher and Student Interaction Patterns in Arabic Language Learning in Pekanbaru City. This is in line with findings that show a trend towards more dialogic communication, although teacher dominance has not completely disappeared (Tsany et al., 2024). Observations show that about half of the students actively participate in discussions, while the rest remain passive and tend to be listeners (Muradi et al., 2021).

This phenomenon is consistent with previous studies that found that the IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback) interaction pattern still dominates Arabic language classes, despite efforts to encourage two-way communication (Azhar et al., 2022).

"Oh, of course, because we as educators, we definitely see ourselves as human beings, especially since the characters of these children are different. Some are mentally brave enough to speak up, while others want to speak but don't have the mental courage. Usually, I give them time to speak, an opportunity, or I myself call on them to ask questions. like, 'Hey, Anu, is there anything you want to ask?' Or I open it up to the class, asking if anyone has any questions. If no one does, I point to one or several students and ask them what they have learned from my lesson. When students are given the opportunity to lead a conversation or discussion, they appear more confident and feel valued." (Teacher [MA], 2025)

This condition is in line with sociocultural theory, which states that social interaction is an important medium in the formation of language learning identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011).

Teacher [MA] said, *"I give students the opportunity to ask questions, answer, and respond, so that a space for dialogue begins to open up. However, active participation still comes more from students with high academic achievement, while other students tend to be passive, indicating a participation gap in the classroom"* (Teacher [MA], 2025). Therefore, Resource Teacher [RC] argues that *"teaching beginners still requires intense attention. This condition shows that learning freedom requires differentiation strategies in order to reach all levels of students, not just those with high achievements"* (Teacher [RC], 2025). This is in line with the findings (Ekawati et al., 2024; Lestari, 2023; Syafni et al., 2025).

From a sociocultural perspective, active participation in classroom interactions is the main means for students to build their language learning identity (Norton & Toohey, 2011). Therefore, unequal interaction patterns have the potential to hinder the formation of an egalitarian learning community (Simon & Mutmainah, 2025).. The results of this study are in line with the findings (Janadbah & Sharef, 2024) that mastery of Arabic language communication skills can only be achieved if classroom interactions allow students to participate actively through dialogue, discussion, and collaboration.

Furthermore, these findings reinforce the idea that freedom-based interaction management can be a solution to reduce teacher dominance in Arabic language learning (Amrullah et al., 2022). Teachers who provide ample space for student participation can create a democratic, conducive classroom atmosphere that respects different learning styles (Egitim, 2021). Thus, the dialogic interaction pattern formed in Pekanbaru City can be considered a first step toward a participatory Arabic language classroom, although there are still challenges in equalizing the participation of all students (Rumania et al., 2023).

In interviews with both sources, the implementation of freedom in learning in Arabic language classes in Pekanbaru was demonstrated by the following interview results: *"The form of freedom that I often practice is, for example, giving assignments, whether in the form of a portfolio or media, or later I will provide conversation videos or learning materials in the form of media or PPT presentations, like that. Or role-playing"* (Teacher [MA], 2025). This is in line with the findings that by giving students flexibility in choosing the form of assignments, learning methods, and ways of participating (Galad et al., 2024). Teachers no longer impose a single form of evaluation but provide options such as oral presentations, group discussions, or reflective writing (Veletsianos & Houlden, 2019). This practice reflects the understanding that students' learning styles are diverse and that flexibility is key to creating inclusive and adaptive learning (Lestari, 2023).

From a constructivist perspective, this flexibility allows students to construct knowledge through direct experience, in line with the experiential learning framework proposed by (Kolb et al., 2014). In addition, freedom in choosing learning strategies is consistent with self-determination theory, which emphasizes the importance of autonomy in fostering students' intrinsic motivation (Dunn & Zimmer, 2020). Thus, when teachers are able to connect with their students, they can more easily guide, encourage, and motivate them to engage enthusiastically in learning (Ahmid, 2020; Noverma & Wahyudi, 2025).

Furthermore, the application of learning freedom in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes that students are positioned as active subjects in determining the course of the learning process (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). This not only supports the achievement of academic goals but also builds 21st-century skills such as critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity (Mahatma, 2024). Thus, flexibility in learning freedom has been proven to have a broader impact, not only on the achievement of Arabic language learning outcomes, but also on the development of students' holistic competencies (Hermawan et al., 2025).

Research findings indicate a significant shift in the role of Arabic teachers from dominators to facilitators (Azhar et al., 2022). Teachers no longer function solely as conveyors of material, but rather as companions who guide discussions, provide feedback, and support student exploration (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). This transformation is in line with the student-centered learning paradigm, which emphasizes that knowledge is constructed through active student interaction, rather than simply one-way transfer of information (Khair, 2025).

The interviews revealed a significant shift in the role of teachers from dominators to facilitators. Teachers now spend more time directing discussions, asking provocative questions, giving students space to speak, and monitoring classroom dynamics rather than dominating the learning process.

One teacher said that students are more disciplined when they are given trust. *"Their response was very positive. They became more enthusiastic, more confident in speaking Arabic, and even students who used to be quiet are now brave enough to speak"* (Teacher [MA], 2025). Being given space actually makes them responsible for the classroom atmosphere. This shows that freedom can lead to intrinsic discipline, not just formal obedience.

Both teachers also utilized digital platforms such as Google Classroom and Quizizz for independent practice, reinforcing their role as facilitators rather than the center of learning. *"Yes, I use Google Classroom for assignment submissions and Quizizz for vocabulary practice. This allows them to study independently."* (Teacher [RC], 2025) This practice is consistent with Carl Rogers' humanistic perspective, in which teachers function as facilitators who create a conducive learning environment, provide emotional support, and respect students' freedom in managing their learning process (Rogers, 1969). The results of this study indicate that teachers who apply a facilitative approach are able to foster students' confidence in using Arabic, while also creating a democratic and open classroom atmosphere (Amrullah et al., 2022).

These findings are also consistent with global practices in second language learning, where the role of teachers as facilitators has been proven to be more effective in improving students' communicative skills (Janadbah & Sharef, 2024). Conversely, teachers who continue to play a dominant role tend to create a passive, monotonous classroom atmosphere that limits students' creative potential (Pratama et al., 2024). Therefore, the transformation of the teacher's role in Pekanbaru City can be considered a positive adaptation to the demands of the 21st century and the Merdeka Curriculum policy (Muhammad, 2024).

The interviews showed that students responded very positively to the implementation of freedom. Students became more enthusiastic, more confident, more courageous in speaking, and showed improvement in their Arabic speaking and listening skills.

"Students practice more often through free conversation, so their communication skills develop more quickly. Even quiet students begin to speak up after being given the opportunity and a supportive atmosphere that makes students more intrinsically motivated." (Teacher [RC], 2025)

This is in line with the theory of autonomous motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which states that trust can strengthen internal motivation. One of the most significant findings of this study is the increase in students' motivation and competence in using Arabic after the implementation of the freedom approach (Rumania et al., 2023). Observations show that students became more courageous in expressing their opinions in Arabic, albeit still in simple sentences (Calafato, 2020). Teachers also reported an increase in intrinsic motivation, where students felt more confident and motivated to practice without always relying on teacher instructions (Ahmid, 2020).

Within the framework of self-determination theory, this condition shows that the autonomy given by teachers encourages the emergence of sustained intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). In other words, students are encouraged to learn not solely because of external factors such as grades or punishment, but because of a sense of ownership over their own learning process (Dunn & Zimmer, 2020).

In addition to motivation, the application of freedom also contributes to improving students' communicative competence. They use Arabic more often in daily interactions in the classroom, whether through group discussions, presentations, or informal conversations (Ekawati et al., 2024). This reinforces the argument that learning freedom creates a safe space for students to practice without fear of making mistakes, thereby accelerating the language acquisition process (Isnaini et al., 2025).

Furthermore, this increase in motivation and competence not only has an impact on linguistic aspects, but also on the development of students' social, leadership, and collaboration skills (Mulyana et al., 2024). Thus, the application of freedom in Arabic language learning has broader implications, namely supporting the holistic development of

students' potential in line with the demands of the 21st century (Sobandi, 2024). Although the results of this study show the positive impact of implementing the freedom approach, there are still a number of challenges faced by Arabic teachers (Muradi et al., 2021), Teacher [MA] said: "*The biggest challenge is managing time and controlling classroom dynamics, because some students become too noisy when given freedom.*" (Teacher [MA], 2025) especially in the city of Pekanbaru.

One of the main challenges is the gap in participation among students, where most discussions are still dominated by high-achieving students, while students with low abilities tend to be passive (Tsany et al., 2024). This shows that the freedom approach requires differentiation and scaffolding strategies to accommodate the needs of all students (Lestari, 2023). This is in line with the lack of enthusiasm associated with factors such as the absence of engaging learning media (Syarifah Rizcy Fuzielestari, Hakmi Wahyudi, Agustiar, 2024).

Another challenge lies in the limited facilities and learning media that support interactive learning practices (Soleh et al., 2021). Many teachers continue to rely on conventional methods due to limited access to technology and digital learning resources. Consequently, the implementation of learning freedom (*kebebasan belajar*) often remains confined to variations in assignments without adequate media support (Ahmadi et al., 2024). These findings are reinforced by (Muhartini, M., & Amril, 2023), who emphasize that the integration of technology in education must be balanced to ensure it does not diminish the teacher's essential role in nurturing students' ethical values.

This situation contrasts with global research findings, which demonstrate that the use of digital media can actually strengthen learning freedom through collaborative and project-based learning (Khairanis & Aldi, 2025). Furthermore, there are cultural challenges in which some students are still accustomed to authoritative learning models that position the teacher as the central figure (Rahmatillah, 2023). The shift toward a dialogic and participatory learning model requires an adaptation period for both teachers and students, as changes in learning paradigms cannot occur instantaneously (Pratama et al., 2024).

Thus, although the implementation of freedom-based approaches has yielded positive results, continuous support is still required in the form of teacher training, the provision of adequate facilities, and the strengthening of a democratic learning culture (Nurzen, 2022).

The application of the freedom-based approach in Arabic language learning has proven to align with the spirit of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, which emphasizes flexibility, autonomy, and learner-centered pedagogy (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022). This finding is further supported by (Rahmadhani et al., 2023), who argue that curriculum stability significantly influences educational outcomes. The policy provides teachers with the autonomy to adjust teaching methods according to local needs, including the context of Arabic language learning, which requires intensive practice, patience, and concentration (Hadi et al., 2023).

This study indicates that the freedom-based approach is not merely a pedagogical strategy but also a concrete implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* principles at the classroom level (Nisa & Al Ghifari, 2023). Arabic language teachers in Pekanbaru City, for instance, have attempted to implement curriculum flexibility by offering students choices in assignments, transforming their role into facilitators, and fostering collaborative classroom engagement (Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings show that classroom freedom not only enhances academic achievement but also accelerates post-pandemic learning recovery by cultivating intrinsic learning motivation (Angga et al., 2022). This aligns with global studies asserting that curriculum flexibility and learning autonomy can build students' resilience in facing 21st-century educational challenges (Angga et al., 2022).

Therefore, this research strengthens the relevance of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy while providing empirical evidence that the freedom-based approach can serve as an effective localized instructional model (A. Wahyuni et al., 2024).

Interview results corroborate observational findings regarding several challenges, including: Participation Gap. Despite the implementation of turn-taking mechanisms, some students remain passive. Teachers must apply *scaffolding* strategies—beginning with small roles and gradual mentoring—to help students become accustomed to participation. Uncontrolled Classroom Dynamics. One teacher revealed that excessive freedom sometimes makes the classroom atmosphere too noisy, requiring teachers to manage time and activity rhythm more carefully. Adaptation for Beginners. Teachers need to provide more intensive guidance to novice learners so they do not feel disoriented within a highly flexible system. Limited Learning Media. Teachers expressed the need for more equitable access to digital facilities and regular training on facilitative strategies under the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

5. Conclusion

This research provides several important implications for the development of Arabic language pedagogy in Indonesia.

First, the freedom-based approach can be utilized as a strategy to enhance students' communicative competence through dialogic interactions, group discussions, and collaborative learning (Ekawati et al., 2024). This model differs from traditional approaches that emphasize grammatical memorization, making it more aligned with 21st-century competency demands (Isnaini et al., 2025).

Second, the transformation of teachers' roles into facilitators indicates that Arabic language learning can be more effective when teachers act as process mentors rather than mere transmitters of knowledge (Hidayat & Wahyudi, 2024).. This implication highlights the need for teacher training programs that focus on facilitation skills, communication, and project-based learning (Fanani & Maisyaroh, 2024).

Third, the increase in students' motivation and competence in Arabic demonstrates that learning freedom can strengthen the affective and social dimensions of learning, not merely the cognitive aspect (Rumania et al., 2023). This is particularly relevant to address the limitations of previous curricula that overemphasized academic achievement while neglecting students' intrinsic motivation (R.Wahyuni & Berliani, 2019).

Fourth, this study underscores the importance of educational policies that support learning flexibility, as learning freedom cannot function optimally without systemic support (Muhammad, 2024). Hence, the implications extend beyond classroom practices to encompass macro-level policy considerations that advocate a paradigm shift toward the democratization of education (Tunas & Pangkey, 2024).

Finally, this study reveals that adopting a freedom-based approach in managing Arabic language classroom interactions holds significant potential for enhancing learning effectiveness while fostering students' independence, creativity, and participation (Azhar et al., 2022). Therefore, these findings can serve as a valuable reference for teachers, policymakers, and researchers in formulating Arabic language teaching strategies that are more humanistic, inclusive, and responsive to contemporary educational demands (Salsabila & Setiyawan, 2024).

6. References

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