



## Beyond the Curriculum: English Teachers' Perceptions of Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation

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### Abstract

An autonomous curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum, signifies a substantial shift in Indonesia's educational paradigm. By doing so, a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment will be created, allowing teachers to create and implement curricula based on the needs and circumstances of their pupils. Finding out how English teachers think about creating learning objectives based on learning outcomes from Merdeka curricula is the aim of this study. Additionally, educators use differentiated instruction, learning cycles, and evaluations that are based on several curricula. The Merdeka curriculum is said to have an impact on English language learning, particularly on student learning outcomes, when the Merdeka curriculum is implemented in English language learning at SMP IT Annida' Lubuklinggau. This establishes the main point: the Merdeka curriculum (specifically the Merdeka curriculum) is believed to affect how students learn English and their results. Methods of qualitative description were used in the investigation. Two English teachers at SMP IT Annida's Lubuklinggau who implemented the Merdeka curriculum were interviewed in order to gather data. The study's findings demonstrated the influence of the Merdeka Curriculum on the process of learning English. Researcher can draw the conclusion that the use of an autonomous curriculum affects English language development based on the findings and the discussion above. Based on the learning outcomes of the autonomous curriculum, all English teachers develop their learning objectives.

**Keywords:** *Kurikulum Merdeka; Teachers' Perception; English Teaching Learning*

### Introduction

An autonomous curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum, signifies a substantial shift in Indonesia's educational paradigm. By doing so, a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment will be created, allowing teachers to plan and execute the curriculum in accordance with the requirements and circumstances of their students. As stated by Saputra

and Hadi 2022 the curriculum for autonomous learning is an improvement over the 2013 curriculum, and instructors, students, and parents have naturally responded differently to it. Everybody has different opinions about the curriculum revisions, which seem to be implemented too quickly to replace the 2013 curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is flexible, competency-based, and development-oriented, and it is created in accordance with an Merdeka curriculum policy. values and soft skills, as well as adjust to changing global demands (Permendikbud No. 22 of 2020, cited in Fatma 2023).

Three things define a Merdeka curriculum: 1) project-based learning to enhance students' Pancasila profiles; 2) emphasis on key content to help students build foundational knowledge; and 3) flexibility, which allows teachers to modify, add, and customize the curriculum based on the personalities of their students. The idea of "independence of learning" is one of these. Aside from that, it is imperative to take into account teachers' readiness to adapt to changes in the curriculum. Though this method promises to raise teaching standards, it still needs improvement when applied to some areas, such as teaching English as a second language. One of the most crucial components of education is the curriculum, which is the general framework for teaching and learning that enables the achievement of specific learning objectives. Richards is cited in Sari (2023). The curriculum is the overall plan or design of a subject. The Indonesian educational system is now using the Merdeka Belajar (Merdeka Belajar) curriculum.

The use of Merdeka curriculum in the teaching and learning process is examined from the perspective of English teachers in this article. According to John Dewey education is the process of updating the meaning of experience. This is done to foster social resilience and can occur through intentional or unintentional contact with the younger generation. The development and supervision of young children, as well as the communities in which they reside, are involved in this process. (Williams, 2017) Education can be obtained outside of the classroom as well. For instance, family education can be done at home, as can social education through our surroundings or unofficial community education..

The goal of education, then, is to fulfill the requirements of children's growth and development, according to Ki Hajar Dewantara. This is seen as an attempt to educate pupils in accordance with their innate skills so that everyone in society can live as secure and happy a life as possible. English language skills are very important in a globalized world, so effective English language teaching is a top priority in Indonesian education. The transition to an Merdeka curriculum offers an opportunity to reassess and update English language teaching practices. Understanding teachers' views regarding these initiatives is critical to evaluating their effectiveness, identifying challenges, and exploring potential improvements. (Mawarni 2023) Ki Hajar Dewantara believes that teaching must provide useful physical and mental knowledge and can liberate children. Independence should be applied to the child's way of thinking, namely so that the thoughts of others do not always order the child, but the child must be accustomed to seeking and discovering the various values of knowledge, attitudes, and skills by using his own mind and abilities.

There are three previous studies. The first was carried out by Meriyani et al. (2023), using qualitative descriptive techniques followed by interview, observation, and documentation techniques. According to the research findings, during the Merdeka curriculum

informatics learning planning stage, the instructor first creates a lesson plan known as a teaching module. Secondly, the integration of information technology education into a stand-alone curriculum is thought to be more significant and engaging. With project-based learning, students have more chances to actively investigate related subjects. Thirdly, the assessment of informatics education in relation to the offered curriculum is fairly good; teachers are able to explain material that is considered challenging in secondary education in a more approachable manner, enabling students to comprehend the subject and meet their learning objectives.

This study combined a case study methodology with a qualitative approach, as reported by Ndari et al. in 2023. Five (1) Implementation of Merdeka curriculum in curriculum reform is the research's outcome. (2) Teachers continue to employ a lecture-based teaching approach, and learning is not student-centered. (2) A lot of educators aren't prepared to use the Merdeka curriculum. (3) Due to peer pressure, pupils continue to adopt their friends' hobbies and skill sets regardless of their own. (4) Teachers lack enthusiasm and are unprepared to deal with curriculum changes, particularly in the area of teaching aids. (5) Educational institutions devise distinct approaches for executing self-directed curricula.

Previous research on the third study was carried out by Nikmah et al. (2023). The method used in this study is qualitative. The results of the research indicate that teachers and students at SMP Negeri 4 Hulu Sungai Tengah are still adjusting to the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation in scientific instruction. With the Merdeka curriculum, students approach learning science with positivity. Teachers who are proficient in technology, teacher self-motivation, the independence of the education and learning community, the application of PMM, and more contextual learning concepts all assist in the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum. In the meantime, factors that hinder the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum include teachers' conceptual errors, busy study schedules, and lack of understanding, particularly with regard to P5.

A few more studies have been conducted on the curriculum, both the autonomous curriculum and the prior curriculum. Nonetheless, every study on this subject has unique features. For instance, difficulties, roadblocks, shortcomings, and strengths in putting the 2013 curriculum into practice; media-based research; and assessment in putting the autonomous curriculum into practice. However, there hasn't been much research done on how English teachers feel about adopting an autonomous curriculum in connection to the English course itself. As previously explained, the purpose of this study is to determine ". "Beyond The Curriculum: English Teachers' Perceptions of Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation" Kurikulum Merdeka aims to create a more holistic and relevant educational framework that aligns with Indonesia's national education goals. By evaluating teachers' perceptions, stakeholders can assess whether the curriculum effectively nurtures students' academic and moral development, as well as their critical thinking and creativity skill.

## **Method**

The research used in this study is descriptive-qualitative. (Creswell, 2014) Qualitative research refers to the study of understanding processes in different methodological research traditions that investigate social or humanitarian issues. In this case, the method used is library research through content analysis. Therefore, researchers used interviews as a data

collection tool. The subject of this research is an English teacher at SMP IT Annida, which implements the Merdeka curriculum. SMP IT Annida has two English teachers as an example. The data for this research are English teachers. The researchers designed a questionnaire, which was adopted by Lestar (2024). It is hoped that through the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, teachers can find out their understanding of English language learning. The questions themselves include:

1. what do you know about Kurikulum Merdeka?
2. What do you know about the purpose of Kurikulum Merdeka?
3. Do you have readiness for the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka?
4. Any differences in the English teaching process between the previous curriculum and Kurikulum Merdeka?
5. What kinds of teaching approaches are used for English teaching and learning in Kurikulum Merdeka?
6. Any difficulties during the preparation of the lesson plan for Kurikulum Merdeka?
7. At the beginning of the lesson, did you give a diagnostic test?
8. In the main activities, do you apply learning based on student learning styles?
9. Do you evaluate the learning process that has been carried out?
10. Is there any change in student learning outcomes in English subjects with the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka?

In this study, the researchers used data analysis based on (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). The data analysis consists of three activities carried out:

#### 1) Data Reduction

The act of selecting, focusing, streamlining, abstracting and changing data from observation sheets or written transcriptions is known as data reduction. In this situation, the researcher condenses the information collected from interview transcripts. Based on the research question, the researcher selected and analyzed data from observation sheets and interview transcripts.

#### 2. Data Display

A view is a well-organized collection of data that enables action and drawing conclusions. In this step, the researcher simply chooses words, sentences and narratives as the basis for the data collection, thus enabling researchers to control the data as a basis for drawing appropriate conclusions. Information about the application of the Merdeka Curriculum for learning

The English language used by teachers in this study is displayed as data. To draw conclusions as research findings, researchers collect data carefully before presenting it.

#### 3) Drawing conclusion and verification

The verification process to arrive at a conclusion is to put the information gathered into a statement that is good and has clear information. The use of the Merdeka Curriculum by teachers in teaching English at SMP IT Annida Lubuklinggau can be seen in the conclusion section. Verification is the process of uncovering intermediate findings indicating that data continues to be analyzed and confirmed after collection.

## **Results and Discussion**

Perception is a process of how a person selects, organizes, and interprets the information inputs to create a meaningful overall conception. As a teacher, understanding the new curriculum is important because, by understanding the curriculum, English teachers know the strategies they can use to teach the students effectively. The change from the previous curriculum to Kurikulum Merdeka is something that needs to be learned more about. In this new curriculum, there is a change in that only lesson hours for each subject are allocated for two learning activities, namely intra-curricular learning and P5 (co-curricular). By implementing this new curriculum, the researchers aimed to know the English teaching perception of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in the English teaching learning process. There are six indicators of English teachers perception; knowledge, readiness, differences, difficulties, behavior.

### **Teacher knowledge**

#### **a. Teachers' knowledge of Kurikulum Merdeka**

All teachers in this study understand the Merdeka curriculum. Their knowledge of the Merdeka curriculum extends to the basic principles of implementing the Merdeka curriculum. They say the Merdeka curriculum can help students become more active because the approach is student-centered. Students can also think critically.

"As an English teacher, I understand that the Merdeka curriculum, or Merdeka curriculum, is a new educational framework introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education. It aims to increase learning flexibility by emphasizing a student-centered approach , critical thinking and creativity. The curriculum provides schools and teachers with greater autonomy to design and implement learning experiences tailored to students' unique needs and interests". (Teacher 1)

"Yes, in the Merdeka curriculum we are given the freedom to develop students' potential and improve the quality of teaching. Teachers can plan learning creatively according to their needs. The minimum passing score is also determined by the teaching conditions. Students and schools also learn achievement (learning outcomes), learning goals (learning goals) and twenty percent project-based learning". (Teacher 2)

#### **b. Teachers' knowledge of the purpose of Kurikulum Merdeka**

All English teachers understand the purpose of Kurikulum Merdeka. One of them said that this purpose was to make the teachers have freedom in implementing the curriculum while still being ready. The complete description of the teachers' knowledge can be seen :

"The aim of the Merdeka Curriculum is to create an educational environment that is more adaptable and meets the various needs of students. It aims to promote a well-rounded education with a focus not only on academic achievement but also on the development of character and practical skills. This curriculum encourages innovative teaching practices and seeks to prepare students for real-world challenges by emphasizing critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration". (Teacher 1)

"That we can be free and not shackled, but we can also adapt to each other's abilities. They are given freedom in implementing the curriculum, for example there is an emergency curriculum" (Teacher 2)

### **Teacher Readiness**

All English teachers stated that they were willing to implement an Merdekacurriculum. As is known, the Merdekacurriculum has been implemented for approximately one year. Then they said whether they were ready or not, they had to be ready because that was government policy.

“The readiness of English teachers to implement an Merdeka curriculum varies. Personally, I feel prepared because of the professional development opportunities and support from school leadership. However, some teachers may require additional training and resources to fully adapt to the new curriculum”. (Teacher 1)

“Like it or not, you have to be prepared” (Teacher 2)

### **The differences between the previous curriculum and Kurikulum Merdeka**

Each teacher has a different opinion regarding the application of the previous curriculum to the Merdeka curriculum. One of them believes that the implementation of this curriculum weakens students' knowledge because it focuses too much on the P5 project which is part of the Merdeka curriculum.

“Yes, there are several differences in the English language teaching process between the previous curriculum and the Merdeka curriculum. This new curriculum prioritizes learning that is more interactive and student-centered compared to the previous teacher-centered approach. Greater emphasis is placed on project-based learning, integrating real contexts, and developing critical thinking and communication skills in English”. (Teacher 1)

“Yes, but now to be honest I feel like the Merdekacurriculum keeps the kids focused, maybe because it's their first year. Children focus less on what the teacher is teaching and may even receive information from different sources”. (Teacher 2)

### **Teachers' behavior**

#### **a. Teaching approach**

All English language teachers agree that there is nothing really difficult about preparing lesson plans for Kurikulum Merdeka. Because this curriculum is new, it is necessary for teachers to always learn in the process of implementing it.

“Yes, giving a diagnostic test at the beginning of the lesson is a common practice. It helps in understanding students' prior knowledge, skills, and learning gaps. This information is crucial for tailoring instruction to meet students' individual needs and for planning subsequent lessons effectively” (Teacher 1)

“Yes, usually we use discovery learning where the teacher shows a video and then the children can develop their knowledge”. (Teacher 2)

### **Learning outcome change**

Not every educator believes that the Kurikulum Merdeka will result in better learning results for the students. According to one of the three teachers, using this curriculum causes kids to become more skill-focused and less knowledge-focused. Two other English teachers, however, claimed that using this curriculum improved student learning since it gave teachers complete flexibility to accommodate students' varying skill levels. In addition, using this curriculum encourages pupils to express themselves more during the learning process.

"There has been a noticeable change in student learning outcomes with the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. Students tend to be more engaged and show improvement in critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills. The emphasis on holistic education has also positively impacted their motivation and overall interest in learning English. However, the extent of these changes can vary depending on the teacher's proficiency in applying the new curriculum and the support provided by the school." (Teacher 1)

"Children are more expressive. It all depends on class conditions, not the curriculum. But now in grade 7 the children are more expressive, because the learning model is more versatile." (Teacher 2)

The findings of how educators view the Kurikulum Merdeka reveal a wide range of viewpoints regarding how it affects student learning outcomes. The instructors' conflicting answers are indicative of larger discussions in educational reform, especially with regard to striking a balance between information retention and skill development.

A crucial conflict in contemporary educational practices is highlighted by one teacher's worry that the curriculum fosters a more skill-focused approach at the expense of information retention. According to this perspective, there is a chance that fundamental knowledge will be forgotten even if abilities like critical thinking and problem-solving are crucial in today's society. This supports worries expressed in earlier research, which contends that placing too much focus on abilities may cause pupils to lack comprehension of key subject areas.

On the other hand, the two other educators' findings that the Kurikulum Merdeka has enhanced student learning results suggest that the curriculum has the capacity to promote flexibility and engagement. The curriculum's emphasis on holistic education may boost motivation and interest in learning English, as seen by Teacher A's claim that pupils are more involved and exhibit gains in critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication abilities. This viewpoint is consistent with studies showing that student-centered strategies can improve learning outcomes and boost motivation. Lestari et al. (2023), who emphasized the genre-based approach of the Merdeka Curriculum, concur with Teacher A's move to student-centered learning and project-based methodologies. However, research like Prahastina et al. (2024), which found consistently good skill development outcomes<sup>4</sup>, contrasts with Teacher B's worry about diminished information retention. This discrepancy may stem from your focus on English teachers, whereas prior work often examined broader subject groups.

## **Conclusion**

The study's conclusions provide insight into how English teachers view the integration of Kurikulum Merdeka within the teaching-learning process. Although the program has the potential to advance student-centered approaches and improve English language competence, in order to fully realize its potential, a number of obstacles and limitations must be overcome. Policymakers and educators can collaborate to support Kurikulum Merdeka's successful implementation and raise the standard of English language instruction in Indonesia by learning about the needs and experiences of instructors.

The researcher comes up with findings that address the research questions after characterizing and evaluating the evidence. Researchers can draw the conclusion that the use of an autonomous curriculum affects English language development based on the findings

and the discussion above. Based on the learning outcomes of the autonomous curriculum, all English teachers develop their learning objectives. Additionally, educators use differentiated instruction, learning cycles, and evaluations that are based on several curricula.

Not every English teacher has a solid plan for putting their own curriculum into place. One of them claimed that while the curriculum strengthens students' abilities, it also impairs their knowledge. Lessons in practice are given more attention by students than content. English teachers claim that an Merdeka curriculum has an impact on the English learning process, particularly on student learning results, despite the fact that they all have differing opinions regarding numerous classes. Student learning results are improved when an autonomous curriculum is used. It's critical that educators modify their instruction to fit the needs and circumstances of each student. There were few research subjects available for data gathering. Even better for upcoming researchers is this.

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