

**THE PERCEPTION TOWARDS MERDEKA CURRICULUM FOR EFL
TEACHER AT SMPN 1 SAKRA BARAT**

Mistya Rini¹, Ari Prasetyaningrum², Hamzani Wathoni³, Usuluddin⁴

^{1,2,3,4}Universitas Hamzanwadi

Email: rinimistya@gmail.com

Abstrak: Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menyelidiki persepsi dan tantangan guru dalam menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka di SMPN 1 Sakra Barat, Rensing Raya, Kabupaten Lombok Timur. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif, di mana peneliti menggunakan kuesioner dan observasi untuk pengumpulan data, dengan fokus pada guru Bahasa Inggris di sekolah tersebut. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa persepsi guru terhadap Kurikulum Merdeka adalah positif, dengan adaptabilitas siswa sebagai faktor kunci dalam keberhasilan implementasinya. Berdasarkan temuan ini, peneliti merekomendasikan agar guru terus meningkatkan pemahaman mereka tentang Kurikulum Merdeka dan agar institusi pendidikan memberikan dukungan yang lebih baik untuk implementasinya demi manfaat bagi guru dan siswa.

Kata Kunci: Persepsi, Kurikulum Merdeka, Guru EFL

***Abstract:** The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher perceptions and challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 1 Sakra Barat, Rensing Raya, East Lombok Regency. Using a qualitative method, the researcher employed questionnaires and observations for data collection, focusing on English teachers at the school. The results indicate that teacher perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum are positive, noting students' adaptability as a key factor in its successful implementation. Based on these findings, the researcher recommends that teachers continue to enhance their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and that educational institutions provide better support for its implementation to benefit both teachers and students.*

***Keywords:** Perception, Merdeka Curriculum, EFL Teachers*

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development is a central component of educational systems, shaping the teaching and learning processes that determine student outcomes. Curricula have historically placed a strong emphasis on rote learning and content delivery in order to

prepare students for standardized testing (Habiburrahim, 2017). Nonetheless, an educational approach that prioritizes creativity, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, in line with current trends, is one that focuses on problem-based learning, which integrates techniques such as scaffolding and flexible cognition. This approach aims to enhance students' critical thinking skills and creativity and develop students' independent learning and autonomy (Yuen, 2023).

Many models that attempt to address the shifting needs of society and the demands of the workforce of the twenty-first century have been developed as a result of the development of curriculum theories. Innovative curricula emphasize technology integration, interdisciplinary learning, and the development of lifelong learning skills. These Recent modifications in education emphasize the importance of equipping students with skills to solve real-world challenges alongside achieving academic success (Burke & Stewart, 2022)

The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced in Indonesia as part of a major reform intended to increase the adaptability and relevance of education. The Merdeka Curriculum places a strong emphasis on school and teacher autonomy, enabling them to customize learning opportunities to the unique needs and circumstances of their students. The goal of this strategy is to create a more flexible and inclusive learning environment that encourages student participation and accommodates a range of learning styles (Kemendikbud, 2020).

Additionally, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the development of critical thinking, teamwork, and communication skills as well as character education. This is in line with international trends in education that acknowledge the value of holistic development in enabling students to meet obstacles in the future (Lie, 2021).

In the field of education, curriculum design and implementation are crucial, particularly when teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). A well-designed curriculum gives EFL teachers the framework they need to effectively teach language to students, enabling them to meet academic standards and acquire language proficiency. However, the attitudes and perceptions of the teachers who use the curriculum have a major impact on its success.

The way that EFL teachers view the curriculum is important because it has a direct bearing on how they teach, how engaged their students are, and what they learn. While negative perceptions may lead to resistance and hinder the effectiveness of teaching methods, positive perceptions encourage enthusiastic adoption and foster innovative instructional approaches (Salinas-Aguirre et.al, 2022). Research has shown that factors such as professional development opportunities, available resources, and the degree of support from educational authorities influence teachers' acceptance of curriculum changes (Jenkins, 2020)

Curriculum changes in the context of teaching EFL frequently force teachers to embrace new approaches, incorporate technology, and prioritize communicative competence over conventional grammar-based instruction. To effectively deliver the curriculum, teachers require continuous access to appropriate teaching materials and ongoing professional development opportunities (Kisirkoi & Kamanga, 2018).

The introduction of new curricula, like the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia, attempts to give education a more adaptable and student-centered approach. This curriculum places a strong emphasis on autonomy for EFL teachers when creating lessons that meet the varied needs of their students and foster critical thinking and communication abilities. It is crucial to comprehend how EFL teachers view the Merdeka Curriculum in order to pinpoint the difficulties and resources required for a successful rollout (Kemendikbud, 2020).

Furthermore, the context of their teaching environments, their experiences, and their beliefs all have an impact on teachers' attitudes toward curriculum changes. Teachers' opinions and their readiness to adopt new curricula are greatly influenced by a number of factors, including class size, student proficiency levels, and institutional support (Lie, 2021).

Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore how EFL teachers understand curriculum modifications, with a focus on the challenges they face and the support they need to implement these changes effectively. By learning more about teachers' perspectives, policymakers and educational leaders can better address teachers' concerns and enhance the overall quality of EFL education

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research method, analyzing phenomena through participants' perspectives. Participants are interviewed, observed, and asked to share their opinions, data, thoughts, and perspectives. Researchers use various interactive strategies, such as direct observation, in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documents, to examine the participants' point of view. The study aims to understand teachers' perceptions and teachers challenges when implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English Language Education subjects, its benefits and drawbacks, and the innovative approaches employed by teachers in implementing it. The data and facts gathered are presented in the form of words or images rather than numbers.

This study was conducted at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat* in the school year 2024-2025. Focusing on all of English teachers at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat*. This setting provides a representative sample of EFL teachers in a typical Indonesian secondary school environment, making the findings relevant to similar educational context.

In order to gather information about the state of SMPN 1 Sakra Barat, a driving school that has been using the Merdeka curriculum since 2021, this study used direct observation and interviews. An effective research strategy is observation, which gives researchers insight into behavior and its significance. In order to comprehend the circumstances of SMPN 1 Sakra Barat, which has been implementing the Merdeka curriculum since 2021, the researchers made direct observations.

Through direct, in-person interactions, interviews are a valid and trustworthy way to collect verbal replies from a chosen group of people. Using direct inquiry between the interviewer and the informant with or without the use of an interview guide in-depth interviews are a method of obtaining data for study objectives. We conducted interviews with English teachers at SMPN 1 Sakra Barat to gather comprehensive data regarding the execution of the Merdeka Curriculum. EFL teachers were surveyed using a questionnaire to learn more about the difficulties they were having adopting the Merdeka Curriculum. To get the EFL teachers' perspectives, the researcher prepared ten questions.

Qualitative techniques, including observation, interview, and questionnaire, were utilized to examine data in this study. Data analysis is a continuous process that begins

with problem-setting and explanation prior to fieldwork and continues throughout the investigation. After summarizing the findings from the observation, the researcher presented the findings from the interview. Additionally, they examined how EFL teachers felt about the Merdeka curriculum's implementation.

According to Miles and Huberman, who were employed in the study, the process of analyzing qualitative data is interactive and ongoing until it is finished. Data reduction, data display, and conclusion are among the activities. Data reduction entails condensing, selecting the most important information, searching for trends and themes, and eliminating irrelevant information. There are many different ways to show data, including flowcharts, charts, flow descriptions, and narrative text.

In qualitative research, conclusion and verification constitute the third stage. The preliminary findings are provisional and could be modified if compelling data is discovered to justify moving further with the data gathering. Nonetheless, the results are legitimate if they are backed up by reliable and consistent data whenever the researcher goes back to the field. The researcher examined how EFL teachers perceived and encountered challenges when putting the Merdeka curriculum into practice in this study. The questionnaire comprised 10 items with five-point response scales, and the largest percentage was chosen as the primary factors of implementation Merdeka curriculum difficulties.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Research Result

1. Observation result

The purpose of this research observation activity was to observe and record the learning process at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat*, collect data on EFL teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum, and identify the difficulties faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This observation activity was carried out at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat*, Soekarno Hatta district, Rensing Raya, Kec. West Sakra, Kab. East Lombok, Prov. West Nusa Tenggara on Tuesday, August 20, 2024. The researcher conducted several observation activities to obtain comprehensive data. the researcher collected preliminary

data on the school profile, the number of EFL teachers, and the number of students in the school. In addition, the researcher also observed the learning process in Class VII using the Merdeka Curriculum. During the observation, the research collected data on the learning methods used and identified the difficulties faced by EFL teachers in implementing the independent curriculum.

On Wednesday, August 21, 2024, the research continued the research process and conducted interviews with several EFL teachers at the school. The purpose of this interview is to obtain information about EFL teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum. After the interview was completed, the researcher observed the condition of school facilities such as libraries, laboratories, and others. During the observation, the research collected data on the availability of resources that support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

On the 3rd day, which was Thursday, August 22, 2024, the researcher carried out the final step in the research process by administering a questionnaire prepared by the researcher to the EFL teachers at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat*. The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify specific challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the school.

By doing so, the researcher can gather comprehensive data on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat* and provide useful recommendations for EFL teachers and the school to improve the quality of learning.

2. Interview Result

In the interview activity, the researcher asked several questions regarding EFL teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The results of the interview indicated that some EFL teachers explained that the Merdeka Curriculum is an educational policy that provides flexibility to educational units, educators, and students to adjust the curriculum according to their respective needs and potentials.

The perception of EFL teachers regarding the Merdeka Curriculum at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat* is that the majority of EFL teachers show a positive perception of the Merdeka Curriculum. They believe that this curriculum can enhance student engagement

through project-based learning and develop students' creativity. However, some EFL teachers also expressed negative perceptions. They mentioned several weaknesses, such as reduced study hours, a curriculum that has not been fully implemented, a lack of study guidebooks for students, and a lack of competence or access to effective learning media for some teachers.

This research shows that EFL teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum are varied, but generally, they have a positive perception of this curriculum. However, there are still some weaknesses that need to be addressed to enhance the effectiveness of its implementation. Thus, this study can contribute to the development of educational curricula in Indonesia and improve the overall quality of education.

3. Questionnaire Result

To collected the data from the field, the present researcher shared questionnaire research on August 23,2024. Here, to clarify the result of the questionnaire.

Here are the data shown from the questionnaire:

Table 1

The result of the questionnaire

No	Questionnaire	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	I have difficulty finding suitable teaching materials that align with the Merdeka Curriculum for EFL classes.		6			
2	The Merdeka Curriculum requires additional time for lesson preparation.		4	2		
3	I feel that the training provided for the Merdeka Curriculum was inadequate.		3	3		
4	My students struggle to keep up with the changes implemented by the Merdeka Curriculum.	1	3	1	1	

5	The Merdeka Curriculum makes it more difficult to assess students' proficiency in EFL.	4	2
6	There are too many changes that need to be made to adapt to the Merdeka Curriculum.	4	1 1
7	I struggle to integrate technology into EFL teaching in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum.	6	
8	I find it difficult to adapt my traditional teaching methods to the requirements of the Merdeka Curriculum.	4	2
9	I find difficult to understanding the basic concepts of the merdeka curriculum.	3	3
10	The Merdeka Curriculum makes teaching EFL more challenging than before.	6	

Based on the table of questionnaire results above, it was found that all EFL teachers (100%) have difficulty finding teaching materials that align with the Merdeka Curriculum for EFL classes. Additionally, 66.67% of teachers agree and 33.33% are neutral regarding the statement that the Merdeka Curriculum requires extra time for lesson preparation. Regarding the training provided, 50% of teachers agree that the training for the Merdeka Curriculum is inadequate, while the other 50% are neutral. In terms of students' difficulties in adapting to the changes implemented by the Merdeka Curriculum, 16.67% of teachers strongly agree, 50% agree, 16.67% are neutral, and 16.67% disagree. Furthermore, 66.67% of teachers agree and 33.33% are neutral that the Merdeka Curriculum makes assessing students' abilities in EFL more challenging.

Furthermore, 66.67% of teachers strongly agree, 16.67% agree, and 16.67% are neutral that there are too many changes needed to adapt to the Merdeka Curriculum. All teachers (100%) also acknowledge the difficulties in integrating technology into EFL teaching according to the Merdeka Curriculum. A total of 66.67% of teachers agree and 33.33% are neutral that they face challenges in adjusting their traditional teaching methods to the requirements of the Merdeka Curriculum. Regarding the understanding of the basic concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum, 50% of teachers agree and 50% are neutral that it is difficult to comprehend. Finally, all teachers (100%) agree that the Merdeka Curriculum makes EFL teaching more challenging than before.

The results of this study indicate that EFL teachers at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat* face various challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly regarding teaching materials, technology integration, and adaptation of teaching methods. This difficulty indicates the need for further support, both in the form of more comprehensive training and the provision of adequate resources, to ensure the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum in that school

Discussion

The study's conclusions demonstrate that EFL teachers at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat* have a generally positive opinion of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially when it comes to how adaptable and effective it is at encouraging student engagement through project-based learning. This is consistent with earlier research demonstrating that when educational reforms support student-centered approaches and promote creative thinking, teachers generally view them favorably (Jenkins, 2020). Nevertheless, the study also revealed certain unfavorable opinions, such as worries about the decrease in study time, a lack of reference materials, and unfamiliarity with the new teaching techniques mandated by the curriculum. These problems are consistent with earlier research that highlights the difficulties instructors encounter when implementing new curricula in the absence of sufficient resources and assistance (Kisirkoi & Kamanga, 2018). Thus, while the overall perception is positive, certain practical challenges hinder its full implementation.

This research indicates that there are a number of significant obstacles that EFL teachers must overcome in order to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, including finding relevant teaching materials, integrating technology, and changing conventional teaching methods. Finding appropriate resources has proven to be difficult, according to all teachers, and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum takes more time. Other studies have reported similar results, highlighting the fact that continual professional development and the availability of resources are critical for the success of curriculum reform (Saleem, 2021). Furthermore, the difficulties in integrating technology and modifying conventional teaching techniques align with other research suggesting that inadequate training and assistance may exacerbate the shift to alternative educational models (Liang et al., 2020). These difficulties imply that in order for teachers to successfully implement the Merdeka Curriculum at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat*, more extensive support is needed

CONCLUSION

The study's conclusion emphasizes that although EFL teachers at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat* generally have positive opinions about the Merdeka Curriculum especially about its adaptability and focus on student-centered learning a number of noteworthy obstacles still need to be overcome. Teachers recognize that project-based learning has the potential to improve student engagement and stimulate creativity in the classroom. But obstacles like inadequate funding, inadequate training, and challenges adjusting to novel teaching approaches prevent the curriculum's full potential from being realized. The incorporation of technology and the extra time needed for lesson preparation which many educators find taxing exacerbate these difficulties.

Increased support is obviously required to make sure the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented successfully. This entails filling in the gaps in technology integration, giving teachers relevant teaching materials, and providing more extensive professional development opportunities. The Merdeka Curriculum's efficacy will probably be constrained in the absence of these vital supports, and instructors will still have difficulty providing high-quality EFL instruction. As a result, this study recommends focused

interventions to deal with these issues and raise the standard of instruction at *SMPN 1 Sakra Barat*

REFERENCES

- Burke, A., & Stewart, S. (2022). Learning problem solving to manage school-life challenges: The impact on student success in college. *Active Learning in Higher Education*.
- Habiburrahim, H. (2017). Developing an English education department curriculum. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 5(1), 1-14.
- Jenkins, G. (2020). Teacher agency: the effects of active and passive responses to curriculum change. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 47, 167-181.
- Kisirkoi, F., & Kamanga, A. (2018). Continuous Teacher Professional Support for Effective Implementation of Basic Education Curriculum Framework. *Education Quarterly Reviewes*.
- Kemendikbud. (2020). The goal of creating a flexible and inclusive learning environment in the Merdeka curriculum. Jakarta: *Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia*.
- Liang, X., Collins, L., Lenhart, L., & Ressa, V. (2020). Instructional change following formative instructional practices professional development. *Teacher Development*, 24, 108 - 125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2019.1705886>.
- Lie, R., Aranda, M. L., Guzey, S. S., & Moore, T. J. (2021). Students' views of design in an engineering design-based science curricular unit. *Research in Science Education*, 51(3), 663-683.
- Salinas-Aguirre, M., Hernández-Cueto, J., & Meza, A. (2022). Teacher evaluation is myth or reality for teaching innovation. *Revista de Pedagogia Critica*.
- Saleem, A. (2021). Effectiveness Of Continuous Professional Development Program As Perceived By Primary Level Teachers. *İlköğretim Online*. <https://doi.org/10.17051/ilkonline.2021.03.06>.
- Salim, dan Haidar. (2019). *Penelitian Pendidikan: Metode, Pendekatan, dan Jenis*. Kencana.

- Sugiyono. (as cited in Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M.). (2022). Interactive qualitative data analysis and saturation. *Educational Research Methods*.
- Widyasari, H., & Dardjito, H. (2022). Teaching Indonesian for other language speakers. *Technium Social Sciences Journal*.
- Yuen, H. (2023). Fostering Holistic Development: Exploring the Integration of Positive Psychology, Constructivist Teaching, and STEAM Education in Hong Kong Secondary Schools. *Lecture Notes in Education Psychology and Public Media*