

# English teacher's experiences in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*: A case study at a private elementary school in Yogyakarta

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## ABSTRACT

English is the language used as an international language in which all humans on earth can communicate more easily even though the language they use every day is very different. So that is why education in Indonesia has also embedded English in its curriculum. Kurikulum Merdeka is the latest curriculum that has begun to be implemented in 2022. This research is a qualitative study that discusses the excellence, obstacles, as well as efforts of an English teacher at a private elementary school in Yogyakarta during the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. Teachers and students experience many advantages in applying the Kurikulum Merdeka in teaching learning activities. With the obstacles that occur, the teacher can make self-adjustment and improvement in order to be in line with the goals set in Kurikulum Merdeka. With Kurikulum Merdeka, a lot of things happen to the organizers, both school, students and teachers. However, the significant impact is felt by the teacher, because it is the teacher who has a direct role in applying it when learning teaching activities. However, teachers also gained a lot of experience and new pedagogical knowledge, so teachers experienced an improvement in self-competence from time to time.

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## 1. Introduction

English is the language used as an international language in which many people on earth can communicate easily even though the language they use every day is very different. To exist in the international arena, mastering the language is needed. In this way, various cross-cultural and international activities can be facilitated. Therefore, one of the subjects taught in formal school is English. With the supply as soon as possible, it is expected that students in Indonesia will get used to and master English more deeply.

In education in Indonesia, there is a need for a standard system in applying learning in formal schools so that the learning process in the classroom can be successful and in line with what is expected. According to Law No. 20 (2003), a learning plan package containing objectives, contents, teaching materials, as well as methods used as guidelines in achieving learning goals is called a curriculum. Lestari et al. (2023) also mentioned that the curriculum serves as a tool for evaluating government learning systems as well as improving scholars and teachers.

According to Kamiludin & Suryaman in Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo (2022) curriculum can also be understood as a set of teaching programmes that have been enhanced for a specific purpose and can be used as something that can be practiced for a particular educational goal. It can be concluded that the curriculum is not a result, but a leap stone to the next goal, or a tool to reach the goal. In this case, it achieves the goal of learning efficiently but yielding maximum results.

To continue to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, the Ministry of Education continues to improve and improve the system from time to time. Among them were 1947, 1964, 1968, 1973, 1975, 1984, and 1994. Not enough until then, in 1997 the Ministry of Education revised the 1994 Curriculum, in 2004 the Ministry of Education implemented the Competency-Based Curriculum, and the 2006 curriculum was KTSP. (*Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan*). Furthermore, in 2013 the Ministry of Education carried out an upgrade named *Kurtilas* (Curriculum 2013), and then revised again in 2018 (Ulinniam et al., 2021).

In 2022, the Indonesian Ministry of Education again made improvements by creating a new curriculum called the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. It is listed in the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Number 262 / M / 2022 concerning Amendments. Rahayu et al. (2022) stated that with the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, students can learn calmly, comfortably, and happily without having to feel stressed and depressed, which is also commonly referred to as the term independent learning and creative thinking.

The concept of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is that the Ministry of Education guarantees that schools, teachers, as well as students can carry out learning activities in schools independently, creatively, and free teachers to teach with innovation (Sherly et al., 2020). With the new curriculum concept, it is expected that teachers will be more freely conducting teaching and learning activities so that they can adjust their teaching style by keeping the students at the center of teaching and learning activities. Teacher experience in conducting teaching learning activities is quite essential. Because of teachers' experience, teachers can carry out evaluations and improvements in teaching methods in the future. Besides, according to Alamsyah et al. (2020), experience can also be called a factor to test knowledge and exchange knowledge with others to be able to perform work effectively.

*Kurikulum Merdeka* was introduced only two years ago, so teachers from different backgrounds have had a variety of challenges in implementing it. One of the challenges is learning that is identical to creativity and innovation compared to the previous curriculum (Hartawati, 2024). With different curriculum principals, teachers have to adapt again to the atmosphere of application of the new curriculum. In addition to different learning characteristics, the Pancasila profile project is also a challenge for teachers because it eliminates things that really do not exist in previous curriculum. In addition to not feeling familiar with the program, Hartawati (2024) also submitted a number of schools suffering barriers with limited facilities and facilities for remote schools, thus requiring students to spend their own funds for the success of the project.

The experience of teachers in the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* is essential to the continued improvement of the quality of education. Teachers and schools can further evaluate the effectiveness of the application of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in English language learning through a lot of tests and learning practices. All they can do is improve what is already good, as well as fix things that are still under-maximum. So from that, with the existence of this article, it is expected to help in terms of quality improvement through the experience of English language teachers.

This article highlights three focuses:

1. The benefits of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in teaching English at elementary schools.
2. The obstacles experienced by English teacher during the application of *Kurikulum Merdeka*.
3. The efforts made by the English teacher during the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* to deal with the existing obstacles.

## 2. Method

This research is a qualitative study. The data were collected from the interview via WhatsApp voice note with an English teacher who taught at a private elementary school in Yogyakarta. The data collection process could not be done face-to-face due to the constraints of respondents who have a rather tight agenda. So, the most efficient way is to do non-real-time questions-answer via WhatsApp.

The question was about the English teacher's experience in the classroom during the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in that school.

To be more specific, the questions were focused on the ease and difficulty of teaching English at the school. In addition, questions on their efforts of the English teacher in overcoming the difficulties the English teacher encountered were also raised. After obtaining the data, the results of this study interview were analyzed using qualitative descriptive methods by Huberman, et al. (2014) with several steps. Starting with an introduction to qualitative data analysis, then undertaking approaches in quantitative analysis, also organizing and grouping qualitative data. After that, perform coding analysis techniques, apply qualitative data analysis in the context of multidisciplinary research.

It is expected that through this recent research, the school can make it a means of evaluation and input to increase support for teaching and learning activities and improve the quality of the school. Besides, this can illuminate the teacher's experiences so that it can be more efficient in carrying out teaching-learning activities. Likewise, for other researchers, it is hoped that this research can be an inspiration in research with interrelated spheres of discussion.

### 3. Findings and Discussion

Based on the research data obtained, it is proved that the English teacher has the following experiences.

1. *Kurikulum Merdeka* requires teacher to use more teaching media following the teachers' conditions to more easily convey and represent the delivery of the teaching materials. This is because the English language teacher at the elementary school is already accustomed to the use of teaching media. Moreover, the teacher is also supported with the condition that the facilities in the elementary school are very complete, so that no obstacles are experienced during the teaching activities.
2. The material requirements to be presented by the teacher at each meeting are not too many so that the teacher can focus more on less material and can ensure a well-connected understanding of the material presented in each meeting. Thus, the material absorbed by the student is not only wide but can be more profound and rooted, so the basis of the knowledge of the student can be stronger.
3. The recent curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) requires non-monotonous learning and innovation that can be done flexibly, this makes the students more enthusiastic about studying the material, such as having a project done, then outing class, and various other activities that feel new to students.
4. Students can be more creative and free when learning teaching activities, as well as more focused because of the principle of differentiated learning. Thus, the acceptance of knowledge acquired much more evenly after applying *Kurikulum Merdeka* in the learning activities.

In addition to the advantages mentioned, the English teacher suffered from several obstacles. However, the English teacher made efforts to make the learning happened.

1. The English teacher felt the need for more in-depth efforts to make the young learners in the school more active overall when learning activities took place considering their differential learning styles. Differential learning is a learning approach designed to meet the different learning needs of each individual in the classroom. One effective way to apply differential learning is through play activities with educational game tools (Mahmudah, 2019). With a lot of interaction with students, the teacher hoped to be more able to adapt with the principle of differential when teaching with various characteristics of students in learning.
2. The increase of administrative task make teacher has to spend time outside of work hours. One of the administrative tasks that teachers have to do is to understand the material and work on the PMM website. PMM is an abbreviation of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*. PMM is a website facility provided by the government for the head of schools and teachers in facilitating the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Aulia et al., 2023). PMM is an educational platform

that becomes a driving partner for educators in creating *Pancasila* students with Learning, Teaching, and Carrying features. The training and assignment of teachers that are sometimes carried out outside of working hours makes teachers feel burdened. What the teacher has been trying to do is adapt to the existing system, as well as time management is implemented better than before so that all parties can run the *Kurikulum Merdeka* effectively and efficiently without diminishing the main essence of learning activities.

3. For some teachers who are accustomed to monotonous teaching activities, the application of *Kurikulum Merdeka* becomes quite challenging. This makes teachers have to work harder to improve their teaching competence. Not only that, teachers will eventually not want to have to think more innovatively when preparing themselves before teaching scholars to conform to the criteria that have been set according to *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

The presence of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in education in Indonesia makes a rather significant difference, especially the teachers who are directly dealing with the technique of teaching execution. Of course there will always be obstacles when implementing a new curriculum. Having an obstacle doesn't mean changing into something to avoid, but it's seen as something to overcome. As Rani (2023) pointed out, to minimize challenges, there is a massive need for socialization, training, and development monitoring. With good management from all sides, both teachers, educational institutions, and educational services, change will be easier so that education will make significant progress.

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, the English teacher experienced that the English teacher can feel the advantages and joy of the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This is supported by the capacity of the teacher as well as facilities provided by the school. In addition, the teacher can teach the students in greater depth because the material is taught when learning has adapted to the ability and style of learning of the student, so that the student does not feel the absence of differences when understanding the material. The characteristics of *Kurikulum Merdeka* demanding the teachers to be more creative and innovative help the students to be enthusiastic when teaching activities take place.

Further, the English teacher faced with various challenges, such as varied curriculum aspects, the many requirements that teachers have to fulfil outside the teaching hours, as well as new challenges in teaching in the classroom creatively and innovatively. With the various challenges that exist, the English teacher at the elementary school makes efforts to overcome the obstacles, like improving themselves from meeting to meeting inside the class, adapting to the various requirements existing, and trying to think more creatively and innovative in preparing materials and teaching materials.

With *Kurikulum Merdeka*, a lot of things happen to school management, students and teachers. However, the significant impact is felt by the teacher, because it is the teacher who has a direct role in applying it when learning teaching activities. However, the teacher also gained a lot of experience and new pedagogical knowledge. Therefore, the teacher implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* also improves self-competence.

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