

**ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
MERDEKA CURRICULUM FOR HIGH SCHOOLS
IN BANGKINANG KOTA SUB-DISTRICT**

Dzikra Hariza¹, Eliwarti², Mahdum³

^{1,2,3}Universitas Riau

[¹dzikra.hariza1015@student.unri.ac.id](mailto:dzikra.hariza1015@student.unri.ac.id), [²eliwarti@lecturer.unri.ac.id](mailto:eliwarti@lecturer.unri.ac.id),

[³mahdum.adanan@lecturer.unri.ac.id](mailto:mahdum.adanan@lecturer.unri.ac.id)

ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the perceptions of English teachers towards the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for high schools in Bangkinang Kota Sub-District, Kampar. The study used a Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods design with two stages, namely quantitative data collection and analysis through questionnaires and qualitative data deepening through semi-structured interviews. The research sample consisted of 17 English teachers at SMAN 1, SMAN 2, and SMKN 1 Bangkinang Kota who were selected through purposive sampling. The results of the study show that in general, teachers have a positive perception of the Independent Curriculum, especially the flexibility of teaching modules, the student-centered learning approach, and the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). Teachers consider this curriculum to be able to increase students' creativity, independence, and character. However, a number of obstacles were found such as limited training in the preparation of teaching modules, inadequate infrastructure, and difficulties in integrating the P5 project into English learning. This study concludes that continuous support in the form of training, provision of facilities, and collaboration between teachers, schools, and education authorities is needed so that the Independent Curriculum can be implemented effectively and sustainably.

Keywords: *merdeka curriculum, high school, sequential explanatory mixed methods*

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis persepsi guru Bahasa Inggris terhadap implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka untuk sekolah menengah di Kecamatan Bangkinang Kota, Kampar. Penelitian menggunakan desain Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods dengan dua tahap, yaitu pengumpulan dan analisis data kuantitatif melalui kuesioner serta pendalaman data kualitatif melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur. Sampel penelitian terdiri dari 17 guru Bahasa Inggris di SMAN 1, SMAN 2, dan SMKN 1 Bangkinang Kota yang dipilih melalui purposive sampling. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa secara umum guru memiliki persepsi positif terhadap Kurikulum Merdeka, terutama terhadap fleksibilitas modul ajar,

pendekatan pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa, serta Proyek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5). Guru menilai kurikulum ini mampu meningkatkan kreativitas, kemandirian, dan karakter siswa. Namun demikian, ditemukan sejumlah kendala seperti keterbatasan pelatihan penyusunan modul ajar, sarana prasarana yang belum memadai, serta kesulitan dalam mengintegrasikan proyek P5 ke dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa dukungan berkelanjutan berupa pelatihan, penyediaan fasilitas, dan kolaborasi antara guru, sekolah, dan otoritas pendidikan sangat diperlukan agar Kurikulum Merdeka dapat diimplementasikan secara efektif dan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: kurikulum merdeka, sekolah menengah, sequential explanatory mixed methods

A. Introduction

Education is one of the most important aspects in national development because it plays a vital role in shaping human resources who are qualified, competent, and capable of facing global challenges. Along with the rapid development of the 21st century, Indonesia continues to reform its educational system to align learning with students' needs and global standards. One of the government's efforts to improve the quality of education is through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum as part of the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) policy. (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum is a recent educational reform in Indonesia designed to address learning loss during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. It emphasizes flexibility,

differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and character development through the Pancasila Student Profile (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). Unlike the previous curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater autonomy for teachers to design lessons, select instructional materials, and adapt the learning process to students' needs.

Teachers play a crucial role in the success of any curriculum implementation. Their perception influences their commitment, instructional decision-making, and classroom practices (Rahimah, 2022). In particular, English teachers must adapt their pedagogical approaches to accommodate the curriculum's focus on competencies, critical thinking, collaboration, and global awareness.

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student centered learning, providing teachers with the freedom to design and adapt learning activities based on students' characteristics, needs, and local contexts. Teachers are given the autonomy to determine learning objectives, select suitable methods, and develop teaching modules as independent learning tools (Fitra, 2023). Moreover, this curriculum focuses on character education through the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) or Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, which aims to develop collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and independence among students.

However, this flexibility also brings challenges. Teachers are required to have a strong understanding of pedagogical concepts, curriculum principles, and technical skills to create effective modules. Without sufficient training and examples, teachers may find it difficult to align their learning designs with the core competencies and philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum (Maulida, 2022). In addition, the shift from teacher centered learning to student centered learning demands teachers

to be more innovative in managing classroom activities (Falah et al., 2023). In the context of English teaching, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum provides both opportunities and challenges. English teachers are expected to integrate language skills with character education through project-based learning and differentiated instruction. This requires teachers to be creative and able to contextualize English lessons according to real-life situations. Fristiviona et al. (2024) emphasized that English teachers must adopt creative and adaptive approaches to achieve the goals of the new curriculum effectively.

Although many teachers have responded positively to the Merdeka Curriculum, practical problems still exist. Some of the main challenges include limited training, insufficient facilities, and difficulties in developing contextual teaching modules (Rahimah, 2022). These issues are also found in Kampar, Riau Province. Preliminary observations revealed that some teachers enthusiastically implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, while others still faced confusion and uncertainty in understanding its concepts and technical procedures.

This phenomenon shows a gap between the curriculum policy and its actual implementation in the classroom. Teachers, as the primary agents of curriculum delivery, play a decisive role in the success of the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, it is important to investigate how English teachers perceive the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for high schools in Bangkinang Kota Sub-District.

Bangkinang Kota Sub-district is among the regions where high schools have begun adopting the Merdeka Curriculum. Despite its potential benefits, teachers may experience challenges related to teaching module development, assessment practices, and P5 project integration. Therefore, understanding teacher perceptions is essential to improving implementation.

This study focuses on three main aspects that reflect the core implementation components of the Merdeka Curriculum, namely: (1) Teaching Module, (2) Teaching Process, and (3) P5 project. The results of this research are expected to provide a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions, challenges, and readiness, and to serve as valuable input for improving teacher

professional development and ensuring more effective curriculum implementation in the future.

B. Research Method

This study adopted a Sequential Explanatory Mixed-Methods design, consisting of an initial quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase to further interpret the numerical findings (Creswell, 2018). In the first phase, quantitative data were collected through a 30-item Likert-scale questionnaire distributed to 17 English teachers from SMAN 1 and 2 Bangkinang Kota, and SMKN 1 Bangkinang Kota, selected purposively based on their implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The instruments measured three core dimensions: Teaching Module, Pancasila Student Profile Project (P5), and English Teaching Process. In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with several teachers selected from the survey results to clarify and deepen the quantitative findings, particularly regarding challenges in module development, P5 integration, and student-centered learning practices.

The questionnaire underwent a try-out with 10 respondents; validity testing using Pearson Product Moment indicated all items were valid ($r = 0.639-0.970$; r -table = 0.632), while reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha showed excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.971$).

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics via Microsoft Excel, whereas qualitative data were analyzed through thematic procedures involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The mixed-methods approach provided a comprehensive understanding by enabling qualitative insights to reinforce and explain the quantitative results.

C. Results And Discussion

The findings of this study are presented in two parts: the results of the questionnaire and the findings from interviews. The questionnaire focused on three key aspects teaching module, teaching process, and P5 while the interviews provided qualitative insights into teachers' experiences and challenges in applying each aspect.

No	Dimension	Percentage	Criteria	
1	Teaching Module	78%	Positive	
2	P5	88%	Very Positive	
3	Teaching Process	81%	Positive	

1. Teaching Module

The results indicated that the Teaching Module aspect received a positive perception (78%). Teachers expressed favorable views about the teaching module, describing it as more flexible and easier to adapt compared to the previous curriculum. Several teachers highlighted that the simplified module structure enabled them to modify materials based on students' needs.

Teacher 1 stated, "*Modul ajar dalam kurikulum merdeka ini lebih simpel, jadi lebih efektif dan lebih mudah diterapkan.....*"

Teacher 2 added, "*Guru bisa bebas mengubah modul agar sesuai dengan karakter siswa.....*"

However, despite positive perceptions, teachers faced significant challenges. They expressed difficulties with differentiated learning, adjusting modules to varying

proficiency levels, and the lack of thorough training. Some teachers relied heavily on online templates due to limited guidance. Teacher 6 explained, *"Kami belum dapat pelatihan mendalam soal bikin modul yang efektif, Kadang cuma pakai template yang ada di internet atau nira contoh dari grup guru online....."* Another challenge involved competency questions which were considered too difficult or misaligned with students' levels, as mentioned by Teacher 8: *"Pertanyaan kompetensi agak terlalu sulit bagi sebagian siswa, dan menimbulkan frustrasi....."*

2. P5 Project

Among the three components, P5 Implementation gained the highest perception (88%), indicating very positive views. Teachers agreed that P5 encourages creativity, collaboration, independence, and character development. They acknowledged that P5 helps students become more confident. P5 received the highest perception score, and responsible.

However, teachers also reported systemic and administrative issues. Funding constraints were frequently mentioned and significantly affected implementation. Teacher 1

noted, *"Semester pertama tahun lalu nggak bisa dilaksanakan karena dana belum cair....."* Another recurring issue was weak coordination among teachers. Teacher 3 explained, *"Tidak semua guru aktif terlibat, sehingga koordinasi sering menjadi masalah....."*

Additionally, English teachers expressed that P5 activities were rarely connected to English learning. According to Teacher 5, *"P5 tidak ada hubungan langsung dengan pelajaran Bahasa Inggris."* This lack of alignment often caused English teachers to view P5 as an additional task rather than an integrated component of their teaching.

3. Teaching Process

The Teaching Process aspect was perceived positively, with 82%. Teachers perceived the teaching process dimension positively, appreciating the curriculum's focus on student-centered and project-based learning. They acknowledged the flexibility to adapt methods, form heterogeneous groups, and make learning more engaging.

However, notable challenges emerged in practice. Low student motivation was a common concern. T2 shared, *"Siswa kurang termotivasi*

karena belum merasakan manfaat langsung dari bahasa Inggris."

Teachers also reported difficulty maintaining students' focus, especially during afternoon classes. Teacher 1 mentioned, "*Jadwal setelah Zuhur membuat siswa sulit fokus karena sudah lelah.*" Limited vocabulary and lack of independent learning habits further hindered learning progress. Teacher 5 noted, "*Siswa sering tidak membawa kamus, sehingga membuat proses belajar menjadi lambat....*" Despite these obstacles, teachers continuously adapted their methods to maintain engagement. As Teacher 4 expressed, "*Kalau belajarnya seru dan menantang, siswa mau mencoba.....*" The findings show an alignment between teachers' positive perceptions and the curriculum's intended goals, yet practical challenges hinder optimal implementation. The teaching module received a high score, suggesting teachers appreciate its flexibility. However, limited training and uneven student proficiency remain major barriers. This aligns with previous studies showing that differentiated learning is one of the most challenging aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The P5 dimension recorded the highest score, indicating strong acceptance of its character-building approach. Yet English teachers face challenges integrating P5 with language instruction. Funding issues and coordination problems also limit its effectiveness. These reflect broader systemic issues widely identified in Indonesian schools. The teaching process dimension shows positive perceptions of student centered learning. However, low motivation, limited vocabulary, classroom fatigue, and inconsistent engagement highlight contextual challenges in rural areas. Teachers' attempts to adjust methods indicate commitment but also emphasize the need for better support and training.

Overall, the findings reveal that while teachers accept and support the curriculum's philosophy, its successful implementation requires stronger structural support, continuous professional development, and contextual adaptation.

D. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, it can be concluded that English teachers in Kampar Regency have positive perceptions

toward the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Overall, teachers appreciated the philosophy and objectives of the curriculum, which emphasize student-centered learning, character development, and flexibility in teaching. They viewed it as a new approach that encourages teachers to be more creative and reflective in designing learning experiences. However, despite these positive perceptions, the research also revealed several obstacles that affect the effectiveness of the curriculum's implementation in real classroom practices.

Regarding the teaching module, teachers perceived it as more flexible, practical, and easier to adapt to students' characteristics and needs compared to the previous curriculum. This flexibility allows them to plan lessons that are contextual and relevant to students' daily lives. Teachers also found that the simplified structure of the module helps them focus more on learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment.

Nevertheless, several teachers still faced challenges in developing their own teaching modules. Limited training, insufficient guidance, and time constraints were the main

barriers that prevented teachers from fully mastering the preparation of effective teaching modules. Some teachers were still dependent on online templates rather than developing materials independently, indicating that the implementation of differentiated instruction remains incomplete.

In terms of the P5 project (*Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila*), teachers viewed it as a valuable program that contributes to students' creativity, collaboration, independence, and character building. The project was seen as an effective way to connect classroom learning with real-life experiences, allowing students to apply language skills meaningfully. However, the research also showed that the implementation of the P5 project still faces several constraints, including limited school facilities, lack of coordination among teachers, and minimal integration with English learning activities. Some schools struggled to align P5 themes with the English subject, resulting in the project being conducted only as an additional activity rather than part of the core learning process. Concerning the English teaching process, teachers agreed that the *Merdeka*

Curriculum promotes interactive, communicative, and student-centered learning. Teachers were motivated to use a variety of teaching strategies such as group discussions, project-based learning, and creative media to engage students in learning English. They appreciated the freedom to adapt teaching materials according to students' levels and learning contexts. However, the findings also indicated that teachers still encountered difficulties in maintaining student engagement and participation. Problems such as students' low motivation, lack of classroom facilities, large class sizes, and differences in language proficiency made it challenging to implement the curriculum optimally. Teachers also reported that the transition from the previous curriculum to the *Merdeka Curriculum* required more time and adaptation.

In conclusion, English teachers' perceptions of the *Merdeka Curriculum* were generally positive, reflecting their support for its principles and goals. Nevertheless, the findings highlight that effective implementation requires stronger support systems, including continuous training, adequate school facilities, and

collaboration among teachers, principals, and education authorities. Only through such comprehensive support can the *Merdeka Curriculum* truly achieve its purpose of fostering independent, creative, and competent learners in English education.

References

Fristiviona, C., Ramasari, M., & Seli, S. (2024). An Analysis of English Teachers' Perception of Merdeka Curriculum at Elementary Schools in Lubuklinggau. *Jurnal Arjuna : Publikasi Ilmu Pendidikan, Bahasa Dan Matematika*, 2(5), 292–299. <https://doi.org/10.61132/arjuna.v2i5.1220>

Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Falah, I. F., Kusumah Rita, Apsari, Y., & Pramudika Sari, A. K. (2023). The portrait of teaching English in primary school under Kurikulum Merdeka: Teachers' voices. *CONCEPT: Community Concern for English Pedagogy and Teaching*, 9, 70–79.

Fitra, D. (2023). Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Pendidikan Modern. *Jurnal Inovasi Edukasi*, 06(02), 2023.

Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia. (2022). Keputusan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia Nomor 262/M/2022 tentang Perubahan atas Keputusan Menteri Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Nomor 56/M/2022 tentang Pedoman Penerapan

Kurikulum dalam Rangka Pemulihan Pembelajaran., Pub. L. No. NOMOR 56/M/2022, Kemdikbudristek (2022). <https://kurikulum.kemdikbud.go.id/service/download.php?kategori=rujukan&id=32>

Maulida, U. (2022). Pengembangan modul ajar berbasis kurikulum merdeka. *Tarbawi*, 5(2), 130–138. <https://stai-binamadani.e-journal.id/Tarbawi>

Rahimah. (2022). *Peningkatan kemampuan guru SMP Negeri 10 Kota Tebingtinggi dalam menyusun modul ajar kurikulum merdeka melalui kegiatan pendampingan tahun ajaran 2021/2022*.