



## ASSESSING CURRENT EFL TEACHING PRACTICES ON IMPLEMENTATION OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM AT SECONDARY SCHOOL

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| Keywords   | Abstract   |
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| English Language Teaching, Kurikulum Merdeka, Junior High School, Learning Strategies, Implementation.   | This research aims to assess English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching practices in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and identify challenges faced by teachers in applying it at the secondary school level. The research employed a case study approach with interviews as the data collection instrument, involving one curriculum teacher and one English teacher at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan. The findings show that teachers have developed a basic understanding of the curriculum that allows them to apply it, although not comprehensively. Teachers adopt student-centered approaches and integrate technology in the classroom, aligning with the core principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. The main challenges identified include the lack of specific training related to curriculum implementation, difficulties integrating existing pedagogical approaches with the demands of the new curriculum, and student adaptation to new learning methods. Despite facing challenges, teachers have demonstrated resilience and adaptability in implementing the curriculum relatively effectively. |
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## INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental pillar in national development, particularly through its role in producing quality human resources. Indonesia's continuous efforts to enhance educational quality have led to various policy reforms, with the most recent being the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka (IKM), which evolved from the 2013 Curriculum (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). Since its introduction in the 2022/2023 academic year, the Merdeka Curriculum has significantly transformed learning processes in Indonesian schools, emphasizing holistic assessment approaches—Assessment for Learning, Assessment as Learning, and Assessment of Learning—as core components. The effective implementation of this curriculum requires teachers to master specific competencies, including a thorough understanding of the curriculum's philosophy and principles, formative assessment skills, learning technology proficiency, and active learning strategies. For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching in particular, these competencies translate into communicative approaches, technology integration, and creating supportive language learning environments.

Junior high schools play a crucial role in establishing the foundation of students' knowledge and skills. SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, provides an ideal setting to evaluate existing teaching practices and their effectiveness in the curriculum implementation process. The shift from result-focused assessment to a more holistic and continuous evaluation system poses significant challenges for EFL teachers who must now demonstrate competence in comprehensive curriculum understanding, learning planning skills, innovative teaching strategies, holistic assessment approaches, and adaptability to diverse student needs. As Sudirtha (2023, cited in Indrayani & Abdul, 2024) notes, effective assessment not only motivates students but also guides them toward maximizing their learning potential. However, research by Widodo et al. (2023) has identified persistent gaps between ideal curriculum goals and actual implementation practices, particularly in assessment aspects. Additionally, Asrifan et al. (2023) found that insufficient teacher knowledge often impedes proper curriculum implementation, while Safriana et al. (2024) highlighted concerns about inadequate socialization of new curricula. While previous studies by Nabilah et al. (2023) and Kurnia and Suci et al. (2023) have examined teacher readiness regarding pedagogical knowledge, lesson planning, and technology integration, they primarily focused on preparation rather than actual implementation. This research addresses this gap by exploring how teachers translate their



readiness into daily teaching practices, including teaching strategies, student interactions, and learning adaptations based on student needs.

This study investigates two key research questions: (1) How does current EFL teaching practices align with the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan? and (2) What challenges do teachers face during this implementation process? By answering these questions, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of EFL teaching practices under the Merdeka Curriculum and identify the obstacles teachers encounter during implementation.

The findings are expected to contribute significantly to both theoretical and practical domains of education. Theoretically, they will enrich existing knowledge about the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in junior high school settings. Practically, they will offer valuable insights for schools in improving supervision of teaching processes, for teachers in enhancing their instructional approaches, and for future researchers as reference material for related studies. Through this investigation, we hope to facilitate more effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, ultimately benefiting students' language learning experiences and outcomes.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative case study methodology to investigate EFL teaching practices in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan. Following Creswell's (2014) approach, this methodology enabled an in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences and challenges that could not be adequately measured quantitatively. As Denzin and Lincoln (2018) emphasize, this approach allowed for studying phenomena in their natural settings with the researcher serving as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. The research participants were purposefully selected, consisting of an experienced English language teacher implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and a curriculum representative overseeing schoolwide implementation, providing complementary perspectives on curriculum adaptation in EFL contexts.

Data collection employed direct communication through semi-structured interviews lasting 10-15 minutes with each participant, conducted on April 10-11, 2025. Following Roberts' (2020) recommendation, interview guidelines were carefully developed with open-ended questions exploring participants' experiences and perceptions regarding curriculum implementation. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure accuracy in data capture,



while relevant documentation including curriculum guidelines and teacher planning materials was collected to complement interview data. This multi-method approach facilitated triangulation and enhanced the credibility of findings.

The collected data was analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, selected for its flexibility and effectiveness in identifying patterns across qualitative datasets. The analysis proceeded through five systematic phases: familiarization with data through verbatim transcription and repeated reading; generating initial codes using both deductive and inductive approaches; searching for themes by sorting coded data into meaningful groups; defining and naming themes with clear specifications; and generating reports with compelling evidence linked to research questions and existing literature. The research followed five sequential stages—preliminary research to obtain permissions, planning interviews and preparing instruments, data collection through scheduled interviews, data analysis using the thematic framework, and summarizing findings into coherent conclusions—with rigorous attention to research ethics and data security throughout the process

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (IKM) at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan reflects a developing understanding among English teachers, AS and RS, who demonstrate a sufficient grasp of the curriculum's principles despite acknowledging that their comprehension is not exhaustive. Both teachers recognize the importance of aligning the curriculum with the needs and abilities of their students, suggesting that while the Merdeka Curriculum is relevant to their educational context, there remains room for further adjustments to better cater to specific student characteristics. Their commitment to integrating active learning methods and technology into their teaching practices illustrates a proactive approach to curriculum implementation, even in the absence of formal training.

However, the findings also reveal significant challenges faced by the teachers, primarily stemming from a lack of specialized professional development opportunities related to the Merdeka Curriculum. Both AS and RS highlighted that the absence of targeted training is a major obstacle to effectively implementing the new curriculum, which requires different pedagogical approaches compared to previous frameworks. This gap in professional development



underscores the need for administrative support and structured training programs to enhance teachers' competencies and ensure successful curriculum integration.

Despite these challenges, the teachers reported that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been relatively effective, as evidenced by positive evaluations from students and successful integration of active learning strategies. Their resilience and adaptability in overcoming difficulties, such as students' struggles with new learning methods, reflect their dedication to fostering a conducive learning environment. The findings suggest that with adequate support and training, the potential for successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan can be significantly enhanced, ultimately benefiting both teachers and students in their educational journey.

## Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (IKM) at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan, particularly in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching practices. The teachers' understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, while not exhaustive, is sufficient for them to engage with its principles and apply them in their classrooms. This aligns with the notion that effective curriculum implementation is a gradual process, requiring time for educators to fully integrate new approaches into their teaching practices. As noted by Fullan (2007), the success of educational reforms largely depends on the actions and beliefs of teachers. The teachers' recognition of the curriculum's relevance to their students' needs reflects a realistic professional awareness, as described by Serdyukov (2017), emphasizing the importance of continuous improvement in educators' competencies.

A significant challenge identified in the findings is the lack of specialized professional development opportunities for teachers regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. This gap is critical, as Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasize that effective professional development is essential for the successful implementation of new curricula. The absence of targeted training can hinder teachers' ability to fully realize the potential of the Merdeka Curriculum, which requires different pedagogical strategies compared to previous frameworks. The teachers' acknowledgment of this issue highlights the need for systematic support from educational institutions to facilitate their professional growth. As Guskey (2002) suggests, professional development should be directly connected to classroom practice, and the current situation at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan underscores the necessity for enhanced administrative support and training initiatives.



Despite the challenges, the teachers demonstrated resilience and adaptability in their teaching practices, effectively utilizing active learning methods and integrating technology into their lessons. This approach aligns with the student-centered focus of the Merdeka Curriculum and reflects a shift towards more interactive and engaging learning environments, as advocated by Nunan (2004) and Brown (2014). The positive perceptions of the quality and relevance of the learning materials provided by the Merdeka Curriculum further support the potential for successful implementation. However, the difficulties faced by both teachers and students in adapting to new methodologies indicate a need for explicit communication and support during this transition. As Hedge (2000) points out, learners require a clear understanding of the rationale behind methodological changes to fully benefit from new approaches. Overall, the findings suggest that with adequate professional development and institutional support, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan can be significantly improved, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for both teachers and students.

## CONCLUSION

This study has explored the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (IKM) at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan, focusing on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching practices and the challenges faced by teachers. The findings indicate that while the teachers possess a sufficient understanding of the curriculum's principles, there is still room for improvement in aligning these principles with the specific needs and characteristics of their students. Their commitment to integrating active learning methods and technology into their teaching practices demonstrates a proactive approach to curriculum implementation, despite the absence of formal training.

However, the study also highlights significant challenges, particularly the lack of specialized professional development opportunities for teachers. This gap in training is a critical barrier to effectively implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which necessitates different pedagogical strategies compared to previous frameworks. The teachers' acknowledgment of this issue underscores the need for systematic support from educational institutions to facilitate their professional growth and enhance their competencies.

In conclusion, the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPS PGRI 1 Sungai Raya Kepulauan hinges on providing adequate professional development and institutional support. By addressing the identified challenges and fostering a supportive



environment for teachers, the potential for improved educational outcomes for both teachers and students can be significantly enhanced. This study contributes to the existing literature on curriculum implementation in junior high school settings and offers practical insights for schools, educators, and future researchers aiming to facilitate effective language learning experiences.

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