



## IDENTIFYING GAPS AND NEEDS IN ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KURIKULUM MERDEKA AT SMAS TUNAS BHAKTI PONTIANAK

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*Merdeka curriculum, teaching practices, teacher gaps and needs*

### **Abstract**

*This study aims to identify gaps and needs in English language teaching practices to support a more effective implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak, a small private school with limited resources. Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes differentiated learning, character strengthening through the Pancasila Student Profile, and project-based learning approaches. However, in its implementation, various obstacles emerged, such as teachers' limited understanding of new learning approaches, low student engagement, and the dominance of conventional learning methods. In addition, the lack of infrastructure such as digital devices, collaborative spaces, and varied learning media is also an additional obstacle. This study also found that teachers need continuous and specific professional training related to teaching module development, differentiated learning design, and PjBL implementation. The results of this study contribute to improving teacher capacity and school readiness in implementing Merdeka Curriculum, and provide input for stakeholders to design mentoring programs that are appropriate to the conditions in the field.*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum is the latest reform in Indonesia's education system, emphasizing flexibility in learning, instructional differentiation, and character development through the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). It aims to grant greater autonomy for schools and teachers in designing learning experiences that align with student needs, using project-based and competency-based approaches (Putri & Rahman, 2023). And the proper use of Information Technology so that harmony can be created between the use of digital media and increasing digital literacy (Rifai, 2023). However, despite its transformative vision, the implementation of this curriculum particularly in English language teaching at the senior high school level faces numerous challenges. These include limited teacher readiness, scarce resources, and a lack of training in applying student-centered and project-based learning strategies (Suryadi & Nugroho, 2024).

The urgency of this study lies in addressing those challenges, especially in under-resourced schools. In the current era of globalization, English proficiency is a vital skill for students to be competitive. If the difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum are not addressed promptly, it could exacerbate the gap in English language learning quality, particularly in low-accredited and resource-constrained schools. Previous research has underlined this issue: Putri and Rahman (2023) emphasize that successful implementation depends on the teacher's capacity to apply student-focused learning, while Suryadi and Nugroho (2024) highlight the significance of infrastructure and teacher training. Rahmawati (2022) found that financially well-supported schools are more prepared for curriculum reform, and Yusuf and Pratama (2023) concluded that schools with digital integration adapt more easily to the changes.

However, there remains a notable research gap. Few studies have focused specifically on how the Merdeka Curriculum is being implemented in English teaching within underprivileged schools. Most existing literature tends to examine schools with better access to facilities, training, and infrastructure, leaving the realities of marginalized schools underexplored. This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the experiences and obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English instruction at schools with limited resources.

SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak, a private senior high school located in West Pontianak, serves as the focal point of this case study. Established in 1984 under the Tunas Bhakti Foundation, this school currently holds a low accreditation status and struggles with limitations in infrastructure, teaching materials, and access to educational technology. Despite these challenges, the school remains committed to enhancing the quality of its education by strengthening teacher capacity and integrating more innovative teaching strategies. Student enthusiasm for learning is a positive factor that may support the curriculum implementation provided it is accompanied by an adaptive and effective instructional system.

In the specific context of English teaching, the school faces several core challenges. These include a lack of contextual learning materials aligned with

Merdeka Curriculum principles and minimal teacher training on project-based and student-centered methods. Teachers often have to tailor their approach to fit the constrained facilities, making the implementation process more complex. Setiawan and Lestari (2023) observed that schools with limited resources face difficulties in adopting innovative and technology-based pedagogies observation that aligns with the situation at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak.

Therefore, this study not only aims to identify the gaps and needs in English teaching practice under the Merdeka Curriculum but also seeks to offer practical recommendations for schools, educators, and policymakers to support a more inclusive, contextualized, and equitable curriculum implementation across Indonesia.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, aimed at exploring gaps and needs in English teaching practices during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak. This approach was chosen because it can provide an in-depth understanding of the context and experiences of teachers as well as school policies (Yin, 2018; Creswell, 2020).

The research subjects consist of English teachers and the curriculum deputy principal, selected purposively due to their direct knowledge of the curriculum implementation at the school. Data collection techniques include semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation (Creswell, 2018). The research instruments were validated through expert judgment to ensure content validity (Weideman, 2019).

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke (2006), with six stages: data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, reviewing, naming, and report preparation. The validity of the data was strengthened through triangulation of techniques and data sources.

## RESULT

The results show that English teachers at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak have a limited understanding of the concept of Merdeka Curriculum, especially in terms of differentiated learning and Project-Based Learning (PjBL). Although teachers' enthusiasm to implement the new curriculum is high, they have not received adequate training, so they still rely on conventional teacher-centered methods. This results in low student engagement in the learning process and minimal application of innovative strategies that support active learning.

In addition, infrastructure limitations such as the unavailability of digital devices, unstable internet connections, and the lack of contextual learning media are also significant obstacles. The results of class observations show that learning is still passive and has not implemented a project-based approach. Therefore, the main needs identified include continuous teacher training, provision of teaching materials that are in accordance with the principles of Merdeka Curriculum, and support for technological facilities to support effective and contextualized learning.

## DISCUSSION

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## CONCLUSION

This study identified various gaps and critical needs in the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching practices at SMAS Tunas Bhakti Pontianak. The findings show that although teachers are aware of the curriculum's objectives, they face various challenges, such as limited understanding, lack of training and limited access to technological resources. In addition, the application of differentiated learning and Project-Based Learning (PjBL) is still limited due to large class sizes, minimal support, and limited teaching materials.

Effective implementation of Merdeka Curriculum requires continuous professional development for teachers, provision of adequate resources, and practical guidance in implementing innovative teaching strategies. By addressing these challenges, teaching quality can be improved and student engagement and learning outcomes optimized. This research makes an important contribution to policy makers, educators and stakeholders who want to improve English language education in resource-constrained schools.

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