

English Teachers' Perception on The Implementation of *Merdeka Kurikulum*: A Case Study at Madrasah Tsanawiyah 1 Mataram

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Abstract: In response to societal changes, the *Merdeka Kurikulum* has been introduced in Indonesia as a new curriculum that is characterized by flexibility, project-based learning, and the development of students' soft skills, character, literacy, and numeracy. This study aims to know the perceptions of English teachers at MTsN 1 Mataram regarding the implementation of the *Merdeka Kurikulum* examining its strengths, weaknesses, and the expectations. This research uses a qualitative method and data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. The questionnaire data were analyzed using a Likert scale and categorized by percentage, while the interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes. The results show that English teachers have positive perception towards the *Merdeka Kurikulum*, as reflected by the 86.25 % agreement level in the questionnaires and supportive responses during interviews. The implementation of the *Merdeka Kurikulum* at MTsN 1 Mataram is generally perceived positively by English teachers, with its flexibility and student-centered approach being appreciated.

Keywords: Implementation, *Merdeka Kurikulum*, Teacher Perception

INTRODUCTION

Education is derived from the Latin terms *educare* means to train or mold) and *educere* means to lead out (Craft, 1984 in Bass & Good, 2004). Education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals and society (Verma & Verma, 2023). As for learning, education is defined as a process to equip students with knowledge and critical thinking skills. Education has functions and targets that require accomplishment. To achieve the objectives there is component called curriculum (Sa'adullah, 2023). A curriculum serves the goals, content, teaching methods, and assessment strategies of an educational institution (Nawawi et al., 2019). It is a strategic tool to ensure learning objectives are met, as mandated by Regulation No. 19 of 2003 of Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture. A proper and suitable curriculum is essential in helping students organize their learning experiences, and it should be tailored to their needs and to societal changes.

In Indonesia, curriculum reform has been a recurrent effort since 1947. The changes are implemented to maintain students' competitiveness (Andriani, 2015). The latest change is the introduction of the *Merdeka*

Kurikulum, prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the perceived limitations of the previous 2013 Curriculum (K13), which was considered too rigid and less responsive to societal transformation (Gumilar et al., 2023; Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2022). The *Merdeka Kurikulum* makes teacher more flexible to differentiates learning according to student abilities. The *Merdeka Kurikulum* emphasizes essential content while fostering students' soft skills and character through project-based learning centered on the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*. This approach strengthens literacy and numeracy, and allows teachers to tailor instruction to students' needs and contextual conditions (Sumaludin, 2022; Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2022).

The implementation of the *Merdeka Kurikulum* presents various challenges, particularly in organizing learning materials and adjusting to the new policies. According to Ayuningtyas (2023), many educators experience confusion due to the curriculum's broader vision and objectives, which differ significantly from previous frameworks. Furthermore, the dynamic nature of educational policies demands that teachers continuously adapt to shifting contexts and expectations (Amin et al., 2022). This

includes revising instructional strategies, assessment practices, and professional interactions to align with ongoing curricular innovations. Different from KTSP and K13, the *Merdeka Kurikulum* introduces innovative approaches to graduate profiles, learning models, and assessment methods, emphasizing creativity, the use of media, and project-based learning.

MTsN 1 Mataram has used the *Merdeka Kurikulum* since it was issued. However, teachers have experienced difficulties in preparing lesson plans, particularly for English instruction, due to limited socialization and the pressure to adapt to new standards. Many felt unprepared to fully utilize the flexibility provided in designing learning activities. Teachers are expected to understand and apply the curriculum's goals, content, teaching methods, and assessment techniques in the classroom (Fristiviona et al., 2024). Without this understanding, it becomes difficult to implement the curriculum effectively. Based on this context this study aimed to explore English teachers' perception at MTsN 1 Mataram regarding the strengths, weaknesses, and expectations of the *Merdeka Kurikulum*.

METHODS

This study was conducted at MTsN 1 Mataram at the end of first semester. The participants consisted of three English teachers from grades VII to IX. This study employed a qualitative case study design. Qualitative methods aim to understand phenomena or problems through non-numerical data, describing situations or events in depth (Sugiyono, 2015). A case study is a research method used to investigate phenomena in real-life contexts (Yin, 2014). The data collected through questioner and interview. The questionnaire contained 20 questions and interview contained 7 questions. Questionnaire data were analyzed using a 4-point

Likert scale consisting of: **(1)** Strongly Disagree, **(2)** Disagree, **(3)** Agree, and **(4)** Strongly Agree. Each response was scored, converted into percentages, and then categorized into four levels: **Very Good** (80%–100%), **Good** (60%–79%), **Bad** (31%–59%), and **Very Bad** (0%–30%). The use of Likert scale helps understand people's perception or opinions (Nemoto, 2014). Interview results were analyzed through thematic analysis, a method that focused on identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within the collected information. This approach is commonly employed for analyzing qualitative texts, such as interviews or transcripts (Clarke et al., 2013).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This research employs two distinct data collection methods: questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 20 questions, which were grouped into three main indicators: teachers' perception of the *Merdeka Kurikulum*, the strengths and weaknesses of the *Merdeka Kurikulum*, and teachers' expectations regarding the curriculum.

Questionnaire result

This section presents a percentage of questioner. The 20 questions were grouped into three main categories: teacher perceptions, curriculum strengths and weaknesses, and expectations. A chart was used to visualize and calculate the distribution of responses, such as how many respondents chose "Strongly Agree," "Agree," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree." Based on the data summarized in the chart, percentages were obtained. The Distribution of Questionnaire' Result of English Teachers perception of The Implementation of *Merdeka Kurikulum* at MTSN 1 MATARAM

Table 1. The result of questionnaires

Indicators	Teachers Perception on the Implementation of <i>Merdeka Kurikulum</i>	The Strength and The Weakness of the Implementation of <i>Merdeka Kurikulum</i>	The Expectation of the Implementation of <i>Merdeka Kurikulum</i>
Total	86%	83%	90%
Average	86.25% (Very good)		

The response of the questionnaire revealed that English teachers at MTsN 1 Mataram generally have a positive perception of the *Merdeka Kurikulum*. A total of 86% of

respondents selected "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" when asked about their perception, indicating strong support for the curriculum's principles. In terms of the strengths and

weaknesses, 83% of respondents highlighted the freedom in teaching as a strength while also pointing out challenges such as limited facilities and media. For teachers' expectations, 90% respondents expect the curriculum would support character building and skills development and be accompanied by proper training and resources. The average perception score reached 86.25%, placing it in the "very good" category.

Interview result

Each participants provided varied feedback regarding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Participants stated that the implementation was successful, however, several challenges were identified during the process. The interview results are presented in the Table 2 below.

Table 2. Interview result

Perceptions	All three English teachers have a positive perception of the <i>Merdeka Kurikulum</i> . They appreciate its flexibility in lesson design and student-centered focus	Teacher A: <i>"The Merdeka Kurikulum has a positive impact because it gives teachers the opportunity to explore various teaching approaches to better understand students' needs."</i>
Strengths	Simplified learning materials- increased student engagement through creative projects- Use of multimedia tools	Teacher B: <i>"This curriculum encourages students to be more creative and innovative through projects such as video or poster creation."</i>
Weaknesses	Time-consuming lesson planning- Limited access to facilities (e.g., LCDs)- Lack of early training or socialization	Teacher A: <i>"It requires a lot of time in planning, and there is a lack of resources, especially devices like LCDs."</i> Teacher B: <i>"We faced difficulties and were unprepared due to the lack of socialization."</i>
Expectation	Teachers expect improvements in infrastructure, more practical training, and clearer guidance in material selection.	Teacher C: <i>"There are too many choices, which make us feel confused. Therefore, we hope for training on how to select the appropriate materials for use."</i>

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the perception of English teachers at MTsN 1 Mataram is generally positive towards the *Merdeka Kurikulum*, as indicated by the average questionnaire score of 86.25%. This perception is seen to be supported by the curriculum's emphasis on flexibility, student-centered learning, and the development of student creativity and activeness. This model significantly contributes to the development of competencies for both students and teachers. A student-centered approach encourages learners to develop critical, creative, and innovative thinking skills, as well as the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023). In this study, several strengths of the *Merdeka Kurikulum* were found. These strengths include simpler learning materials and more diverse learning media. Simpler here means that the *Merdeka Kurikulum* frees teachers to choose learning that suits students' needs. Therefore, students do not need to learn things that are beyond their needs. Simplified materials and the wider use of varied media such as videos and posters were also appreciated, aligning with the

curriculum's focus on essential content and innovative teaching practices (Ihda et al., 2023).

Several weaknesses of the *Merdeka Kurikulum* were identified. It was reported that the planning phase of this curriculum demands a significant investment of time. The development of the Learning Objective Flow (*Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* or ATP) is considered time-consuming and more complex compared to previous curriculum models (Sujana et al., 2022). Moreover, many educators have expressed challenges and a lack of preparedness has been shown by many educators due to limited understanding of the new curriculum. One of the main weaknesses in the successful implementation of the *Merdeka Kurikulum* is the lack of socialization and teacher training, which causes teachers to feel unprepared for the changes. Adequate training needs to be provided to improve teachers' understanding and ability to implement the *Merdeka Kurikulum* effectively (Nurfadila A, Mahyuni, et al. 2023)

Insufficient technological infrastructure such as malfunctioning LCDs can hinder the smooth flow of learning. Technology supports interactivity, flexibility, and the development of

digital skills that students need in the digital age. When technological devices, such as LCDs, function properly, educators can deliver materials more clearly and engagingly, which in turn enhances student attention and understanding. Technology in education is crucial because it enhances the quality of learning by making content more engaging and easier to understand (Salsabila & Agustian 2021). Stronger governmental support was expected by interview participants, particularly in the form of appropriate teacher training, improved infrastructure, and practical resources. These measures are viewed as essential for ensuring the successful implementation of the *Merdeka Kurikulum* and for enhancing the quality of education in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

In this study, positive perception of the *Merdeka Kurikulum* was found among English teachers at MTsN 1 Mataram. The curriculum was appreciated for its flexibility and its support for innovative, student-centered teaching approaches. Although initial confusion was experienced due limited socialization and guidance, the new curriculum was gradually adapted to by the teachers. Student freedom and exploration were encouraged through its implementation. Several strengths of the curriculum were identified, including the use of shorter and more innovative learning materials, as well as the integration of technology that made learning more engaging. However, certain weaknesses were also found. Lesson planning was described as time-consuming, infrastructure such as LCDs was reported as inadequate, and training for teachers was considered insufficient. As a result, difficulties in adaptation were experienced, particularly in incorporating technology and creativity into non-arts subjects. Nonetheless, it was believed that these weaknesses could be addressed through the adjustment of teaching strategies. Expectations were expressed for better socialization of the curriculum, more practical training, and clearer guidance in selecting appropriate learning materials. Additionally, improvements in school facilities were hoped for. Greater support from the government was viewed as essential in enhancing teacher professionalism and strengthening the infrastructure needed for

successful implementation of the *Merdeka Kurikulum*.

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