

## Teachers Perceptions Of The *Merdeka* Curriculum's Effects On English Proficiency Of Students

Uun Apriana Lago<sup>1</sup>, Darmawan<sup>1</sup>, Ma'fulah<sup>1</sup>, Wahyudin<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Tadulako Palu, Indonesia

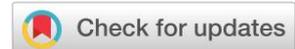
\*Correspondence: [uunaprianilago22@gmail.com](mailto:uunaprianilago22@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to explore English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum and to examine its perceived impact on students' English proficiency at SMPN 2 Palu. Specifically, the study seeks to understand how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum influences classroom practices, student engagement, and language learning outcomes, as well as to identify the challenges faced by teachers during its implementation. Employing a qualitative phenomenological approach, this research investigated the experiences of three English teachers who had implemented the curriculum for more than one year. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and triangulated with students' midterm English examination scores to enhance the validity of the findings. The results indicate that teachers perceive the Merdeka Curriculum as beneficial in promoting student-centered learning, increasing students' speaking confidence, and encouraging collaborative learning. Nevertheless, several challenges were reported, including limited technological resources and difficulties in shifting from traditional teaching approaches. To address these issues, teachers adopted strategies such as differentiated instruction and peer tutoring. This study provides valuable insights into the influence of curriculum reform on English language teaching and offers recommendations for improving teacher training, resource availability, and curriculum implementation strategies.*

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Merdeka Curriculum; teacher perceptions; English proficiency; curriculum implementation; secondary education.

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### 1. Introduction

Indonesia's education system is undergoing a significant transformation with the introduction of the *Merdeka Curriculum* (Kurikulum Merdeka) in 2022 by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This reform was introduced in response to long-standing challenges, including rote learning, low student engagement, and a disconnect between classroom practices and 21st-century skills (Cristiana et al., 2023; Ferdous & Novita, 2023). At its core, the Merdeka Curriculum decentralizes curricular authority, positioning teachers as instructional designers and emphasizing student-centered approaches such as project-based learning and differentiated instruction. These pedagogical shifts aim to foster critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and learner autonomy—skills essential for navigating today's rapidly evolving global context (Fullan, 2001; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2020; Weda et al., 2021).

Within this broader reform, English language education holds strategic importance. English proficiency is increasingly recognized as a key academic and professional asset, granting students access to higher education, global information, and international job markets (Mustafiyanti et al., 2023; Rahman & Weda, 2019; Kaharuddin et al., 2025). However, Indonesia continues to face challenges in this area, ranking 80th out of 112 countries in English proficiency (EF EPI, 2022). Common obstacles include limited opportunities for authentic language use, outdated teaching methods, and disparities in resources between urban and rural areas (Ndari et al., 2023; Adinda et al., 2025; yaumi et al., 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on contextualized and communicative learning presents a potential remedy to these issues. For instance, project-based learning and teacher-designed materials have been associated with improved language outcomes (Aji, 2023; Fauzi et al., 2023; Youngsun et al., 2024; Tammasse et al., 2025).

Despite this potential, there remains a research gap concerning the curriculum's impact at the junior secondary level—a critical period for language acquisition. Prior studies have focused largely on vocational schools, higher education,

or non-language subjects (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023; Cristiana et al., 2023; Yatim et al., 2021), leaving middle school English classrooms relatively underexplored. This lack of attention is concerning, especially in light of Vygotsky's (1978) theory, which highlights the importance of social interaction and scaffolding in early adolescence. Furthermore, while teacher agency is essential to successful curriculum reform (Fullan, 2001), existing literature often prioritizes policy design and technical implementation over teachers' lived experiences (Widodo, 2022).

To address this gap, the present study investigates how English teachers at SMPN 2 Palu perceive and implement the Merdeka Curriculum, and how these practices influence students' English proficiency. SMPN 2 Palu was selected for its early and active adoption of the curriculum since the 2022/2023 academic year, making it a relevant case study. The school also reflects the diverse realities of Indonesia's educational landscape, including socioeconomic variability, uneven access to technology, and differing levels of teacher readiness. This research seeks to answer the following questions: What are English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 2 Palu?, How does the curriculum affect students' English proficiency?, and What challenges and benefits do teachers encounter in implementing it?

The findings aim to provide both theoretical and practical insights. Theoretically, the study contributes to understanding how curriculum reform interacts with teacher agency and student outcomes. Practically, it informs educational stakeholders about the support systems, professional development, and resource allocation necessary to ensure effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum across diverse school contexts.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design using a phenomenological approach to explore English teachers' lived experiences in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 2 Palu, Central Sulawesi. The phenomenological method was chosen to capture the depth and nuance of teachers' perceptions regarding curriculum change and its impact on students' English proficiency (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Participants were selected through purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020), consisting of three English teachers who met the following criteria: (1) at least one year of experience with the Merdeka Curriculum, (2) a minimum of two years teaching experience, and (3) willingness to engage in reflective dialogue. This ensured that participants had sufficient knowledge and contextual familiarity with the curriculum implementation process (Suri, 2020).

Data were collected over two months (March–April 2025) through semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Each teacher participated in a 60–90 minute interview focused on their instructional strategies, curriculum perceptions, and observed effects on student learning. Interviews were recorded with consent, transcribed verbatim, and followed up for clarification when necessary. To triangulate the data, anonymized midterm English exam scores from each teacher's class were examined to identify patterns supporting or contrasting with the interview findings.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022). This involved familiarization with transcripts, coding, theme generation, and synthesis of findings across data sources. The exam scores were interpreted descriptively, not statistically, and served to enrich and contextualize the qualitative insights.

Ethical principles were carefully applied throughout the study to protect participants and ensure research integrity. Informed consent was obtained before data collection, allowing participants to clearly understand the purpose of the study and their voluntary involvement. To maintain confidentiality, participants' identities were anonymized using codes T1, T2, and T3. All research data, including interview recordings and transcripts, were stored securely and used only for academic purposes. In addition, the researcher practiced reflexivity by keeping a research journal, which helped reflect on the research process and minimize potential bias, as suggested by Lincoln et al. (2018).

This methodological approach allowed the researcher to explore teachers' perspectives in a comprehensive and meaningful way. The integration of ethical procedures and qualitative data strengthened the credibility of the findings. By linking teachers' experiences with real classroom situations, the study provided interpretations that were grounded in practice. This approach also helped capture the contextual challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in implementing the curriculum. As a result, the study offers reliable insights with sufficient depth to support discussions on curriculum reform in English language teaching.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 Findings

##### a. Teacher Perceptions of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

The thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews conducted with the three English teachers (T1, T2, and T3) at SMPN 2 Palu yielded rich qualitative data, providing a nuanced understanding of their experiences with the Merdeka Curriculum. These interviews explored their perceptions, adaptations, and reflections on the curriculum's implementation, revealing both commonalities and distinct approaches among the teachers.

Teacher T1's narrative was characterized by a sense of gradual transition and adaptation. T1 openly acknowledged a degree of reliance on pre-existing teaching methodologies, stating, "I sometimes still use teaching methods from the previous curriculum, but I am gradually adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum approach." This statement encapsulates the complexity of curriculum implementation as a process of change. It suggests that teachers do not always immediately or uniformly adopt new practices but rather engage in a process of reconciling new demands with established routines. T1's approach indicates a thoughtful and deliberate effort to integrate aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum while retaining elements of their prior teaching experience. This could stem from various factors, such as a desire to ensure continuity for students, a need to build confidence with new methods, or a perception that certain traditional techniques remain valuable. The extended time frame for T1's adaptation underscores the importance of providing ongoing support and professional development for teachers as they navigate curriculum change. It also highlights the need to acknowledge and respect the individual pace at which teachers engage with new pedagogical approaches.

Teacher T2 presented a contrasting perspective, demonstrating a more comprehensive and enthusiastic adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in the area of differentiated instruction. T2 articulated a systematic approach to assessing students' proficiency levels and using this assessment to inform instructional decision-making. T2 explained, "I always try to assess my students' different levels and adjust my teaching accordingly." This commitment to differentiation reflects a student-centered philosophy, where instruction is tailored to meet the diverse needs of learners within the classroom. T2's approach aligns closely with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on personalized learning and responsiveness to individual student differences. The focus on assessment as a tool for informing instruction suggests a deep understanding of the curriculum's principles and a proactive effort to implement them effectively. T2's success in implementing differentiated instruction may be attributed to factors such as prior experience with student-centered teaching, a strong belief in its efficacy, or a willingness to embrace new challenges and seek out relevant professional development opportunities.

Teacher T3's contribution to the study centered on the implementation of peer tutoring as a key pedagogical strategy within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. T3 expressed a strong conviction in the value of peer interaction, stating, "I strongly believe in peer tutoring. It helps students learn from each other and build their confidence." This emphasis on collaboration reflects a recognition of the social nature of learning and the potential for students to serve as valuable resources for one another. T3's implementation of peer tutoring involved structuring classroom activities to facilitate peer interaction, such as assigning students to work in pairs or small groups to explain concepts, practice skills, or provide feedback. The perceived benefits of peer tutoring, as articulated by T3, included increased student engagement, improved communication skills, and the development of a more supportive learning environment. T3's experience highlights the importance of considering the social dynamics of the classroom and leveraging peer interaction to enhance student learning. It also underscores the need for teachers to develop skills in facilitating group work and providing guidance to ensure that peer tutoring is productive and equitable.

Collectively, the teachers' narratives reveal a dynamic interplay between individual teaching styles, pedagogical beliefs, and the demands of the new curriculum. While each teacher demonstrated a unique approach to implementation, they shared a common commitment to enhancing student learning and adapting their practices to align with the Merdeka Curriculum's purposes.

##### b. Effects of the Merdeka Curriculum on Students' English Proficiency

In addition to exploring teachers' perceptions, the study sought to investigate the perceived effects of the Merdeka Curriculum on students' English proficiency. The teachers' observations provided valuable qualitative data on this aspect, offering insights into the ways in which the curriculum was believed to influence student learning outcomes.

Teacher T1 reported a notable increase in students' confidence in expressing their ideas in English. T1 explained, "Students are much more confident now. They are not afraid to speak up in class." This observation suggests that the Merdeka Curriculum, with its emphasis on active learning and communication, may contribute to a more positive and supportive classroom environment where students feel empowered to participate. The increased confidence reported by T1 could also be a result of specific pedagogical strategies employed by the teacher, such as creating opportunities for students to present their work, engage in discussions, or participate in role-playing activities. The development of student confidence is a crucial outcome of English language learning, as it enables students to use the language more effectively and engage in meaningful communication.

Teacher T2 observed improvements in students' speaking and communication abilities. T2 noted that students demonstrated greater fluency, accuracy, and ability to engage in extended conversations. T2 stated, "Their speaking skills have improved a lot. They can communicate much more effectively now." This observation aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum's focus on communicative competence, which emphasizes the ability to use language for real-world purposes. T2's report of improved communication skills suggests that the curriculum and the teacher's instructional practices are effectively promoting students' ability to interact with others in English. This could involve activities such as group discussions, debates, presentations, or collaborative projects that require students to use their speaking skills to convey information, express opinions, or negotiate meaning.

Teacher T3 highlighted the positive impact of peer tutoring on students' writing skills. T3 observed that peer tutoring helped students to improve the organization, clarity, and coherence of their written work. T3 explained, "Peer tutoring has really helped their writing. They are much better at organizing their ideas now." This finding suggests that collaborative learning strategies, such as peer tutoring, can be effective in developing students' writing skills. Peer tutoring provides students with opportunities to receive feedback from their peers, identify areas for improvement in their writing, and learn from each other's strengths. The process of explaining writing concepts to others and providing constructive criticism can also deepen students' own understanding of effective writing strategies.

To complement these qualitative observations and provide an additional layer of evidence, student midterm scores from the 2022–2023 academic year were contextualized as supplementary material. These scores were not analyzed statistically but were instead interpreted thematically to identify patterns that aligned with or diverged from teachers' qualitative perceptions. This approach allowed the scores to serve as supporting narratives rather than standalone metrics of learning outcomes.

**Table 1. Overview of Midterm Score**

No	Class	Score Range	Average Scores
1	7C	76–89	82.3
2	8C	75–88	80.1
3	9C	77–83	79.8

Source: Processed Secondary Data, 2025

The ranges and averages in Table 1 were examined holistically to contextualize teacher-reported observations about student performance in English. For instance, the narrow score range in Class 9C (77–83) corroborated interview accounts of consistent but plateauing progress, while Class 7C's higher average resonated with teachers' emphasis on foundational skill development. By framing these scores as descriptive complements, their role remained strictly exploratory, reinforcing the primacy of qualitative insights.

Notably, the higher average score in Teacher T3's class (7C) aligns with T3's observation that peer tutoring had a positive impact on students' writing skills a component typically emphasized in midterm assessments. However, these scores must be interpreted cautiously, as variables such as differences in prior knowledge or classroom dynamics could also influence outcomes. The relatively close averages across classes suggest comparable overall proficiency levels, providing a broader context for teachers' perceptions of skill-specific improvements.

It is essential to acknowledge the limitations of relying solely on midterm scores to assess the Merdeka Curriculum's impact. These exams prioritize measurable skills (e.g., grammar, writing) over speaking fluency or communicative competence areas where teachers T1 and T2 reported unquantified growth. Thus, the scores are best interpreted as one piece of evidence among many, complementing rather than overriding qualitative insights.

### **c. Challenges and Benefits in Teaching English under the Merdeka Curriculum**

The teacher interviews also provided critical insights into the challenges and benefits they experienced while teaching English under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Teacher T3 highlighted a significant challenge related to the school's limited technology infrastructure. T3 expressed, "We don't have enough technology. It makes it difficult to use multimedia and online resources." This lack of access to adequate technology posed a barrier to T3's ability to fully utilize the curriculum's potential, particularly in incorporating digital tools and resources to enhance student learning. The Merdeka Curriculum often encourages the use of technology to create engaging and interactive learning experiences, and the absence of sufficient resources can hinder effective implementation.

Teacher T1, while adapting to the new curriculum, faced the challenge of transitioning away from traditional teaching methods. T1 noted, "It's hard to change my old ways. I'm used to teaching in a certain way." This reflects the inherent difficulty in changing established pedagogical practices, even when new approaches are recognized as potentially beneficial. Teachers may have developed a sense of comfort and familiarity with traditional methods, and shifting to student-centered, project-based learning requires a significant change in mindset and classroom management skills.

Despite these challenges, the teachers also reported several benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers T1 and T2 both emphasized increased student engagement and participation. T1 observed, "Students are much more engaged now. They participate more in class," and T2 stated, "They are definitely more active in the lessons." This suggests that the curriculum's focus on active learning strategies and student-centered activities can lead to a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment, fostering greater student involvement in the learning process.

Teacher T2 also appreciated the flexibility of the curriculum in selecting learning resources. T2 explained, "I love that I can choose my own resources. It makes teaching more enjoyable." This autonomy allows teachers to tailor their instruction to the specific needs and interests of their students, selecting materials that are relevant, engaging, and aligned with the curriculum's objectives.

Teacher T3 emphasized the benefits of collaborative strategies, particularly peer tutoring. T3 stated, "Peer tutoring helps students learn from each other and become more independent learners." Peer tutoring not only supports academic learning but also fosters social interaction, communication skills, and a sense of shared responsibility among students.

These challenges and benefits provide a balanced perspective on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, highlighting both the obstacles that need to be addressed and the positive outcomes that can be achieved.

### **3.2 Discussions**

This study's synthesis of findings, derived from in-depth interviews with English teachers, the triangulation of their perceptions with data from student midterm English exam scores, and a comprehensive examination of the challenges and benefits encountered during implementation, offers a richly textured and multifaceted understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum's impact on English language teaching and learning at SMPN 2 Palu. This detailed analysis directly addresses the central research questions that guided this investigation, skillfully weaving together relevant theoretical frameworks from the field of education with the empirical realities uncovered through fieldwork. Our overarching aim extends beyond the mere presentation of findings; we endeavor to provide a holistic and nuanced interpretation of the study's broader implications for understanding the intricate dynamics of curriculum reform, the lived experiences of teachers navigating these changes, and the tangible influence of the Merdeka Curriculum on student outcomes, with a particular emphasis on the development of English proficiency.

The process of adaptation experienced by Teacher T1, characterized by a deliberate negotiation between deeply ingrained pedagogical practices rooted in previous curricula and the emergent principles and demands of the Merdeka Curriculum, underscores the inherently complex and often gradual nature of curriculum implementation as a significant process of professional change. This observation resonates profoundly with Fullan's (2001) seminal work on curriculum change theory, which astutely posits that the adoption of new educational paradigms is rarely a swift or uniform endeavor. Instead, educators like T1 engage in a dynamic and often iterative process of reconciling the novel demands and philosophical underpinnings of the new curriculum with their established routines, deeply held beliefs about effective teaching and learning, and practical classroom management strategies honed over years of experience. This intricate process is significantly shaped by a confluence of interacting factors, including the individual teacher's depth of understanding regarding the curriculum's core objectives and guiding principles, the quality and consistency of support

received from various educational stakeholders (including school administration, fellow teachers, and external professional development providers), and the individual teacher's inherent readiness and disposition towards embracing pedagogical innovation (Rahayu, 2023).

The findings of this study, specifically the challenges faced by T1 in integrating new methodologies while still relying on familiar approaches, find parallels in Ndari et al. (2023)'s research, which also highlighted the difficulties teachers encounter when transitioning from traditional teaching methods to more student-centered approaches. This suggests that curriculum change necessitates a fundamental shift in pedagogical mindset and practice, which cannot be achieved overnight. The experience of T1, and corroborated by Ndari et al. (2023), highlights the critical need for sustained and differentiated support for teachers as they navigate this transitional phase. It underscores that change is not a monolithic event with a clear beginning and end but rather a personalized journey of professional growth, requiring ongoing reflection, experimentation, and adaptation. Crucially, this journey directly influences the teacher's capacity to effectively foster and enhance students' English proficiency across all skill areas.

Furthermore, the consistent reports from the participating teachers regarding notable improvements in their students' confidence levels and communicative competence in English lend strong empirical support to the tenets of Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory. This robust theoretical framework compellingly argues for the indispensable role of social interaction and collaborative engagement in the intricate process of learning and knowledge construction. Vygotsky's emphasis on the social nature of learning is particularly relevant to the development of English proficiency, which relies heavily on communicative practice and interaction. The specific instance of peer tutoring, enthusiastically highlighted by Teacher T3 as a particularly effective pedagogical strategy, provides compelling empirical evidence for this theoretical perspective in action within the context of English language learning. T3's perception that peer interaction fosters a supportive and collaborative learning environment where students can learn from one another, articulate their understanding, receive constructive feedback, and build confidence in using English aligns directly with Vygotsky's (1978) emphasis on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and the crucial role of more knowledgeable peers in scaffolding learning.

Building on Vygotsky's work, Johnson (2019) further emphasizes that intentionally designed collaborative learning environments serve to amplify students' active participation, cultivate deeper levels of understanding through peer explanation and negotiation of meaning, and ultimately enhance their overall language proficiency by providing authentic opportunities for communication and practice. The teachers' positive observations in this study regarding the impact of collaborative activities on students' speaking skills, in particular, corroborate the findings of Ferdaus and Novita (2023), who also noted the Merdeka Curriculum's facilitation of a more engaging and interactive learning environment conducive to language skill improvement. This underscores the importance of creating classroom contexts where students are actively engaged in using English for meaningful communication, which is a key principle of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The integration of technology into classroom practices, while acknowledged by the teachers as holding significant potential for enriching English language learning experiences and ultimately enhancing students' English proficiency, is simultaneously framed as an area presenting considerable challenges, primarily due to existing limitations in school-level technological infrastructure. This duality underscores a critical tension inherent in the implementation process. The Merdeka Curriculum's strong emphasis on innovative pedagogical approaches such as project-based learning (PjBL) and authentic assessment methodologies (Cristiana et al., 2023) inherently necessitates that teachers are adequately equipped to develop contextually relevant and engaging learning materials and activities that leverage the affordances of technology. In this endeavor, technology can serve as a powerful catalyst, enabling the creation of interactive tasks, access to diverse and authentic resources, opportunities for authentic communication with native speakers, and the development of digital literacy skills, all of which are crucial for enhancing students' English proficiency in the 21st century.

Fauzi et al. (2023) further highlight the crucial role of technology in facilitating deeper learning, fostering the development of 21st-century skills, and preparing students for success in a technologically driven world. These skills, such as critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and communication, are also integral to effective English language use. However, the challenges faced by teachers in this study due to limited technology infrastructure echo the broader systemic issues identified by Ndari et al. (2023), who found that inadequate resources can significantly hinder the effective implementation of the curriculum's goals and limit the potential for technology to positively impact students' English proficiency. Addressing these technological limitations is therefore paramount to fully realizing the pedagogical potential of the Merdeka Curriculum to transform English language education and equip students with the necessary English skills for future success.

The identification of both challenges and benefits by the participating English teachers offers a balanced and nuanced perspective on the ongoing implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 2 Palu. These insights directly reflect the teachers' lived experiences and their evolving perceptions of the curriculum's impact on their professional practice and, most importantly, on their students' English language learning journeys. The challenges articulated, such as the constraints imposed by limited technology infrastructure and the inherent difficulties associated with transitioning from more traditional, teacher-centered instructional models (Nurhayati, 2023), highlight critical areas that warrant focused attention and strategic support from educational administrators and policymakers to ensure the long-term effectiveness of the curriculum in fostering comprehensive English proficiency across all four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

These challenges resonate with broader concerns raised by influential scholars in the field of educational change, such as Fullan (2001) and Hargreaves & Shirley (2020), who consistently emphasize the indispensable role of adequate resources, ongoing professional development tailored to the specific needs of teachers implementing the curriculum, and robust systemic support (including collaborative planning time, access to materials, and administrative encouragement) in facilitating successful and sustainable curriculum implementation. These factors significantly shape teachers' experiences, their sense of self-efficacy, and ultimately their capacity to effectively teach all facets of English language proficiency, including productive skills like speaking and writing, which often require innovative and resource-intensive pedagogical approaches.

Conversely, the reported benefits, including a noticeable surge in student engagement and motivation in English language learning, an empowering increase in teacher autonomy in designing and delivering instruction that is more responsive to the specific needs of their students, and the perceived effectiveness of collaborative learning strategies in enhancing student understanding and communication skills, collectively underscore the transformative potential of the Merdeka Curriculum in the realm of English language education. These positive perceptions align with Aji (2023)'s findings, which demonstrated that project-based learning, a key component of the Merdeka Curriculum, correlates with improved student achievement in English. These positive perceptions suggest a promising trajectory for the curriculum's ability to positively influence both teaching methodologies and student outcomes in key areas of English proficiency such as oral presentations, written projects, and overall communicative competence. The increased teacher autonomy, a cornerstone of the Merdeka Curriculum's philosophy, appears to be fostering a sense of ownership and creativity among educators, enabling them to tailor their instruction more effectively to the diverse needs and learning styles of their students, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of English proficiency and the creation of a more dynamic and engaging learning environment.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study addressed three critical research questions regarding English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum, its effects on student proficiency, and the challenges and benefits encountered. The findings reveal that teachers at SMPN 2 Palu perceive the curriculum as a transformative framework with the potential to reshape English language education. First, teachers acknowledged the curriculum's alignment with student-centered principles, particularly its emphasis on fostering engagement, collaborative learning, and autonomy in tailoring instruction. Second, they observed measurable improvements in students' speaking confidence, communicative competence, and writing skills outcomes linked to the curriculum's focus on project-based learning and peer interaction. Third, while the curriculum's flexibility and innovative strategies were praised, systemic challenges such as limited technological infrastructure and resistance to pedagogical shifts emerged as critical barriers to full implementation.

These insights extend beyond mere repetition of findings by synthesizing their broader implications. The study underscores that the Merdeka Curriculum's success hinges on two interrelated factors: teacher agency and systemic support. Teachers' ability to adapt the curriculum through strategies like differentiated instruction and peer tutoring demonstrates their role as active agents of change. However, their efforts are constrained by structural gaps, such as inadequate technology and insufficient training, which hinder the curriculum's potential to holistically address all domains of English proficiency (e.g., speaking fluency vs. exam-focused writing).

Crucially, this research fills a gap in the literature by focusing on junior secondary education, a formative stage for language acquisition often overlooked in prior studies. By centering teacher voices, the findings highlight the need for context-sensitive policies, including: Targeted investments in digital infrastructure to enable technology-integrated

pedagogy, ongoing professional development to ease the transition from traditional methods to student-centered approaches, and collaborative platforms for teachers to share best practices and resources.

In conclusion, while the Merdeka Curriculum represents a promising shift toward equitable and dynamic English language education, its transformative potential can only be realized through a balanced approach that empowers teachers while addressing systemic inequities. This study advocates for a nuanced implementation framework that prioritizes both pedagogical innovation and the practical realities of Indonesia's diverse educational landscape

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