

## EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTION ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF KURIKULUM MERDEKA: A CASE STUDY AT SMAN 2 PARE IN KEDIRI

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**Abstract:** The aim of this study is to explore English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher perceptions on implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at SMAN 2 Pare in Kediri, East Java. When Kurikulum Merdeka was introduced, a lot of schools and educators are learning to adjust to the new curriculum, hence, the researchers are intrigued to learn how English teachers perceive this new policy. To investigate and describe teacher opinions in depth, a qualitative research method was used. This study collected data through questionnaires, interviews, observations, and document analysis. Several research findings to highlight include an overall positive perception of Kurikulum Merdeka implementation, the factors that influence EFL teachers' perceptions of Kurikulum Merdeka, several strengths of Kurikulum Merdeka, which is considered a flexible curriculum, and teachers' expectation that Kurikulum Merdeka can improve the quality of education. On the other hand, these teachers highlighted the weaknesses of the curriculum. According to these EFL teachers, the first weakness is that learning hours have been reduced; second, the Kurikulum Merdeka has not been implemented fully; third, there is no learning guidebook for students; and fourth, many teachers are still lacking either competence or access to use effective learning media in support of their teaching, which may impact students' learning focus. Finally, many EFL teachers expect that the government will oversee the curriculum implementation process and conduct seminars or workshops to support teachers

**Keywords:** EFL, Kurikulum Merdeka, Teachers' Perception

### INTRODUCTION

Kurikulum Merdeka (also known as Emancipated Curriculum) is a new educational policy proposed by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud). Kurikulum Merdeka is a recovery program for learning activities in education systems following the COVID-19 epidemic that seeks to overcome learning backwardness in diverse Indonesian regions. Kurikulum Merdeka's foundation is based on the principles of student-centered learning, in which each student is believed to have distinct talents and interests. According to Kasmawati (2021), students can develop their talents and interests through Merdeka Belajar. In accordance with this, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia states that students have the freedom to study independently and creatively through freedom of learning or freedom of thought (Hendri, 2020).

Kurikulum Merdeka features various intracurricular learning content designed to provide students sufficient opportunity to investigate the subjects and build competencies. Autonomy is offered to educational components that allow space for students to explore their full potential. In this scenario, what has to be developed is the teacher as the primary key to autonomous learning success. As the curriculum developer, the teacher guides the delivery of learning instructions. When implementing Kurikulum Merdeka policies, how instructors interpret and store information linked to Kurikulum Merdeka policies effects the execution of

school education policy. According to Walgito (2010), perception takes place through a person's view via the five senses of an item that causes stimulation from the absorbed stimulus, which leads to an assessment. As a result, teachers need to thoroughly evaluate Kurikulum Merdeka and determine how it might be implemented in their particular educational settings. English is one of the subjects that must be taught in primary and secondary schools. According to Kasihani and Astini (2001), English was the first foreign language necessary for accessing information, absorbing and developing science, technology, arts, and culture, and interacts with other countries. From this, it can be said that learning English will help meet the competency needs of students in the 21st century and develop active, innovative, creative, and practical learning through the concept of the Kurikulum Merdeka. However, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka still has obstacles. Some teachers at SMAN 2 Pare said they still did not fully understand the concepts of Kurikulum Merdeka, incorporating several dimensions into the learning process and readiness in making learning tools or media. This is in line with findings from previous studies which concern teacher readiness in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka (Jamilah et al., 2023; Nurzen, 2022).

Anggila's research (2022) finds that the perceptions of junior high school teachers in the Tanjung Kemuning district regarding the Kurikulum Merdeka were positive and received very good appreciation from teachers. This can be seen from the results of questionnaires, interviews and observations that have been made. The results of the study also explain the importance of massive outreach to all parties at the education unit level, so that the curriculum implementation can be carried out properly as expected. Kurikulum Merdeka is created as adaptive as possible to development time, so as to give freedom fully to students in developing ability according to talent respectively (Abidah et al., 2020). Freedom of study independently requires the teacher to guide and be responsible to his/her students. The teacher plays a significant role in the development of this independent curriculum, meanwhile the school principal is fully responsible for improving the quality of teachers in teaching.

Based on the background above, the researchers were intrigued to investigate the perceptions of EFL teachers at SMAN 2 Pare in Kediri Regency in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, what factors influence these EFL teachers' perceptions, their opinions about the strengths and weaknesses, and their expectations for Kurikulum Merdeka through a qualitative approach. Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka will work well if schools, especially teachers, understand the concepts and learning objectives of the curriculum. From this research, it is hoped that there will be more insights regarding strategies and approach that have been or will be implemented by both teachers and the government in the management of curriculum implementation and improvement of the quality of learning in the Kurikulum Merdeka.

## **METHOD**

This research used a qualitative approach. Research instruments were in the form of (1) a questionnaire containing statements related to the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. The questionnaire was used to find out the teachers' initial perceptions in general so that researcher could explore them in more in-depth interviews. The questionnaire uses a dichotomous or Guttman scale to obtain Yes or No answers because it will help clarify participant statements or perceptions. According to Sugiyono (2014), the Guttman Scale is a scale used to get firm answers from respondents, namely, there are only two intervals such as "agree-disagree"; "Yes No"; "True False"; "positive-negative"; "ever-never" and so on. (2) observation, the researcher observed EFL teachers during the process of implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in classroom learning. (3) interview to find direct and in-depth information from participants related to the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. (4) documentation like

instructional materials and LKPD (Student Worksheets/ Lembar Kerja Peserta Didik). The EFL teachers were selected based on several criteria including their experience in teaching English and in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka. The researchers chose SMAN 2 Pare as the research context with 3 EFL teachers as participants. Data were analyzed using interactive data analysis techniques by Miles and Huberman (1992), namely data collection, reduction, presentation and conclusion. Research data that has been collected from questionnaires, interviews, observations and documentation was coded based on previously determined themes, and discussed based on the conceptual frameworks and the research questions. The analytical triangulation method is used to verify the accuracy of the data in this research which was done through member checking and theoretical triangulation to analyse the data from different theoretical perspectives. Finally, the conclusions in this research are in the form of findings from research results supported by valid evidence.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### EFL Teachers' Perception on the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka at SMAN 2 Pare

EFL teachers at SMAN 2 Pare have a positive perception of implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. All EFL teachers considered the Kurikulum Merdeka to be good. This statement is supported by previous research by Anggila (2022), which states social studies teachers have a positive perception and get a good appreciation of Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. The following are the findings obtained through the questionnaire, interview and observation:

#### a. EFL Teachers' Perceptions of Instructional Materials in the Kurikulum Merdeka

EFL teachers have positive perceptions regarding the teaching modules in the Kurikulum Merdeka. The detailed teaching module allows learning to be more accessible because it can be arranged according to learning needs and learning objectives in the classroom. Furthermore, regarding the provision of projects and LKPD (Student Worksheets/ Lembar Kerja Peserta Didik), it can hone students' English skills.

*"Making instructional materials helps teachers manage material and assessment, namely as a guide for deciding, assessing and teaching or making it easy for students to learn."* (teacher 1)

*"Instructional materials are more detailed, actually if followed properly it will help us (teachers) especially LKPD/worksheets to make it easier to observe children's learning development."* (teacher 3)

These participants' statements were in line with Widyastuti (2020) who stated that Kurikulum Merdeka was initiated by Ministry Nadiem Makarim has been very helpful and liberating for teachers, especially in lesson plans (instructional materials) because the material more focus, effective and efficient.

#### b. Perceptions of EFL teachers towards assessment in the Kurikulum Merdeka

There are several forms of assessment in the Kurikulum Merdeka, such as written tests, products, and observations. Furthermore, the assessments used were diagnostic (oral tests and question sheets), formative assessments (knowledge, skills, and attitudes on the Pancasila student profile), and summative assessments (written tests).

*"The implementation of the assessment in Kurikulum Merdeka is almost the same as the previous curriculum, only different terms such as formative and summative assessment, there are daily tests and final tests, there may be additional assessments of the attitudes of other Pancasila/P3 student profiles that are still the same, such as scoring."* (teacher 1)

This was also expressed by other EFL teachers at SMAN 2 Pare. In another research, Rahman et al. (2021) highlights the assessment in Kurikulum Merdeka in its simpler format and is a mandatory component in lesson plans.

c. Perceptions of EFL Teachers on the Teaching Process in the Kurikulum Merdeka

EFL teachers stated that the Kurikulum Merdeka made students active and creative in the learning process in class. Based on the results of observation, the researcher saw that students were active and creative in answering questions from the teacher. Students actively provide opinions and are creative in determining various solutions. The following is one of the statements from teacher 2.

*"Kurikulum Merdeka makes students active, creative and interactive, but this also depends on how the teacher manages to learn in class." (teacher 2)*

According to the three EFL teachers, the proper way to implement the Kurikulum Merdeka is by looking at learning objectives, designing learning activities according to learning objectives, choosing learning media appropriate to the material to be taught, and conducting appropriate assessments or following the materials and media used. Furthermore, regarding the learning process, the EFL teacher stated that Kurikulum Merdeka gives students a learning experience not only in the classroom. Students can enjoy and have fun participating in learning outside the classroom to learn a relaxed manner.

*"Kurikulum Merdeka has flexibility, where students not only learn in class but also create projects in the school environment that teach students to socialize well for their future lives." (teacher 1)*

Previous research by Kasmawati (2021) support the finding explain the perception of the application of Merdeka Belajar at SMA Negeri 5 Takalar is very good because of where the process is learning can not only be done in the study room but it can also be done outside of school.

From the discussion above, the three EFL teachers also stated that Kurikulum Merdeka is good for students' lives in the future because it provides space for students to develop their talents and interests. Besides that, the Kurikulum Merdeka also contains the profile of Pancasila students.

**Factors influencing EFL teachers' perceptions of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka**

Based on the interview conducted there are several factors that influence the perceptions of EFL teachers.

a. Teacher Teaching Experience

According to EFL teachers, their teaching experience also influences their perspective on the Kurikulum Merdeka. Based on the time or length of teaching English in the context of formal or non-formal education has influenced the way teachers understand and develop the Kurikulum Merdeka. Through teaching experience, the teacher can carry out learning more effectively, provide essential material, and which material is prioritized to meet learning objectives. The longer the teacher has teaching experience, the more comprehensive the context or dimension in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka.

b. Teacher Educational Background (Education Degree)

The teacher education background at SMAN 2 Pare ranges from a bachelor's to a Master's degree in English Education. Based on the statements of EFL teachers, background influences how teachers perceive the Kurikulum Merdeka from various perspectives. Educational degrees relevant to the subjects taught impact how teachers carry out learning activities and support them in achieving learning goals.

*"The background of the teacher will have implications for how the teacher views Kurikulum Merdeka." (teacher 1)*

*“The higher educational degree, the easier it is for teachers to understand teaching in learning, especially in understanding the curriculum.” (teacher 2)*

c. Training Followed by the Teacher

According to EFL teachers, technical guidance through training significantly impacts the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. The three EFL teachers stated that the activity made them aware of Kurikulum Merdeka, what the content was like, what needed to be achieved, and how to teach it.

*“The training has significantly impacted, but most is conducted online. So that teachers still have difficulty fully understanding how to implement the requested Kurikulum Merdeka. If there is real implementation after online training, which can be seen directly, it will help teachers implement the Kurikulum Merdeka.” (teacher 3)*

d. Teachers' Personal Experience

The three EFL teachers have different personal teaching experiences, from formal to informal. According to EFL teachers, teachers' personal experience does not influence perceptions, and there are no problems in implementing a Kurikulum Merdeka.

*“The teacher's personal experience when teaching has no impact or no problems in carrying out a Kurikulum Merdeka.” (teacher 2)*

EFL teachers implement the Kurikulum Merdeka by the established policy learning methods. Teachers use the student-centered approach in implementing a Kurikulum Merdeka with project-based learning methods and a scientific approach by prioritizing the learning process result.

In connection with the results of Saputra's research (2022), factors such as the teacher's teaching experience, the teacher's educational background, the training followed and the personal experiences of the four influence how the teacher perceives the Kurikulum Merdeka. This is different from the results of the researcher's research because there are only three factors that influence it. In contrast, the fourth factor is the teacher's personal experience which has no effect.

**Strengths and Weaknesses of the Kurikulum Merdeka from the View of EFL Teachers**

The Kurikulum Merdeka is a new curriculum implemented in several schools in Indonesia. Therefore, many things are adapting and need improvement and repair. According to EFL teachers, this latest curriculum has strengths and weaknesses.

a. Curriculum Structure

EFL teachers have various opinions regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the Kurikulum Merdeka, the following are statements from the EFL teachers:

*“The advantage of the Kurikulum Merdeka is that it provides something that is not only learning in class, there are projects that can be refreshing for students so, they don't get bored learning English or studying in class. They can also learn about social life through projects to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students or P5 and the profile of Pancasila students or P3. Meanwhile, the lack of the Kurikulum Merdeka has reduced study hours.” (teacher 1)*

*“The advantages of the Kurikulum Merdeka are that it makes learning enjoyable and there is a strengthening of the profile of Pancasila or P3 students, which allows students to socialize, while the disadvantage of Kurikulum Merdeka is that children can be too relaxed because they are given different spaces such as art so they will focus on that art.” (teacher 2)*

Furthermore, related to the flexibility of the Kurikulum Merdeka structure, all EFL teachers said that the Kurikulum Merdeka had a flexible curriculum structure, one of which was that each school was free to choose and arrange material according to needs and prioritize. Regarding the flexibility policy in regulating learning hours, the project (Projects to strengthen the profile of Pancasila students or P5) reduced learning hours in class so that the teacher is less flexible in arranging learning hours.

*“Regarding the hours of learning English, it was slightly reduced because additional projects were carried out per week, automatically English lessons were slightly reduced. Maybe this can be overcome by setting better study hours.”* (teacher 1)

From the EFL teachers’ statements, there was a gap. On the one hand, the EFL teacher said that the project in the Kurikulum Merdeka was good, on the other hand, it also impacted reducing learning hours. According to EFL teachers, some of the policies in the Kurikulum Merdeka are too fast.

#### b. Technical Implementation of the Curriculum

According to the EFL teacher the advantages of Kurikulum Merdeka are the creation of instructional materials, such as an objective learning flow that are arranged to achieve learning outcomes in each phase, teaching modules that contain Pancasila student profiles, selection of essential and prioritized materials and use of learning media as needed. Furthermore, the weakness of the Kurikulum Merdeka is that there is no concrete evidence of how the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka is carried out, so teachers do not know the correct implementation of this new curriculum. In addition, some projects must be carried out affecting class hours so that learning activities are slightly reduced.

#### c. Material Content

According to the EFL teacher, the material delivery in Kurikulum Merdeka is not much different from the previous curriculum. In Kurikulum Merdeka, teachers provide essential learning in conveying material to students. Simple examples that are easy to understand so that students can capture learning material more efficiently and quickly remember because the examples given are by the events they experience.

*“For example, in the material "Suggestions" I will test them about situations they often encounter every day when they ask for advice on buying a new cell phone. So I always give material related to their daily lives.”* (Teacher 1)

Furthermore, the weakness of the content material, according to the EFL teachers, is that students do not have handbooks to read more material because their material can be obtained from the material sheets provided by the teacher. This makes EFL teachers do not have a reference book for teaching classes by the Kurikulum Merdeka. Students will have difficulty following the learning material when the material sheet is lost or left behind.

#### d. Use of Instructional Materials

The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka is inseparable from the manufacture of instructional materials. Instructional materials are various teaching materials that teachers can use to support their teaching and learning activities. Instructional materials have learning paths and outcomes arranged according to specific domains and phases. Instructional materials can be teaching materials, modules, project modules, or textbooks. According to the EFL teacher, the making of instructional materials in the Kurikulum Merdeka is not much different from the previous curriculum, it is just that the instructional materials in the Kurikulum Merdeka are added with the Pancasila student profile /P3, such as independence, mutual cooperation, creative and others. The instructional materials in the Kurikulum Merdeka still contain points of learning objectives, learning steps, and student worksheets/ *Lembar Kerja Peserta Didik/LKPD*).

The advantages of the Kurikulum Merdeka for instructional materials are arranged in more detail, materials can be made according to learning needs, assignments can be in the form of products or projects, and assessments can also be adjusted according to the rubric's assessment and considered the media and material being taught. At the same time, the weaknesses of the instructional materials in the Kurikulum Merdeka are in the process of making them because compiling teaching modules and dimensions of Pancasila student profiles still confuses teachers about combining the attitudes of Pancasila student profiles with learning materials.

### **Expectations of EFL teachers on the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka**

The following are the expectations of EFL teachers for the Kurikulum Merdeka in the future:

#### **a. Improving the Quality of Education in Indonesia**

According to the EFL teacher at SMAN 2 Pare Kurikulum Merdeka, it can help achieve national education goals. Kurikulum Merdeka is made by considering students' interests and talents and strengthening Pancasila's values. From this goal, there is hope that the EFL teacher wants for the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. First, the Kurikulum Merdeka can be successful between the knowledge and character of the child by the profile of Pancasila students. Secondly, there are workshops for direct implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, third there are examples or concrete evidence of the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, and there are evaluations from related parties who monitor how the Kurikulum Merdeka is implemented in schools.

*"I hope there should be an actual workshop or training related to implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka so that there is evidence." (teacher 3)*

#### **b. Kurikulum Merdeka Goals**

The Kurikulum Merdeka aims to give educators the freedom to create high-quality instruction tailored to student needs and student learning environments ([kurikulum.kemdikbud.go.id/kurikulum\\_merdeka](http://kurikulum.kemdikbud.go.id/kurikulum_merdeka)). Therefore according to EFL teachers, implementing a good curriculum will help teachers achieve national education goals. Develop abilities according to talents and interests that radiate from the choices they give or fields of study or interests that are by the wishes child. So, the school accommodates the various abilities and talents of students.

*"Kurikulum Merdeka allows students to learn according to the field students want to work in or what talents they will hone for their future while studying or having a career." (teacher 1)*

#### **c. Control of Government Policy**

EFL teachers at SMAN 2 Pare have ways of overcoming various problems and self-control over policies in the Kurikulum Merdeka. According to EFL teachers, they always hold discussions or share with fellow teachers, try to attend workshops or seminars and seek solutions from various trusted internet media sources. EFL teachers also continue to improve to implement Kurikulum Merdeka better and evaluate and reflect continuously to find deficiencies and what needs to be fixed.

*"To solve problems in the Kurikulum Merdeka, the teacher and I always share and discuss what is a good solution to these problems." (teacher 1)*

These weaknesses were also found in Kasmawati's research (2021) the application of Kurikulum Merdeka which makes students creative by relying on their ability to build achievements they like, can raise concerns from teachers. Students become too focused only on the fields they like so that they become too relaxed and can get out of the rules that are applied. In implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka EFL teachers have several expectations,

which can help teachers achieve national education goals, monitoring to evaluate the implementation that is already taking place in schools to improve the implementation of a better Kurikulum Merdeka, examples of actual Kurikulum Merdeka implementation and direct training or workshops. In line with Anggila's research (2022), whose research results also explain the importance of massive socialization to all parties at the educational unit level, so that the curriculum implementation can be done correctly as expected.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on research data and analysis related to the perceptions of EFL teachers towards the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka at SMAN 2 Pare is a positive perception. All EFL teachers support the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka because it accommodates the needs of interests and talents and strengthens Pancasila values. In this research, three factors influence teacher perceptions regarding the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka (1) teachers' teaching experience, (2) educational background/ degree dan (3) training followed by the teacher. Meanwhile, the teacher's personal experience does not affect how the teacher implements the Kurikulum Merdeka. Besides that, in the process of implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, the teacher found several strengths and weaknesses of Kurikulum Merdeka. So that these EFL teachers also have expectations regarding the implementations of Kurikulum Merdeka.

The limitation in this research is the location which is only carried out at SMAN 2 Pare which has implemented the Kurikulum Merdeka. The reason for choosing this school is because based on pre – research with EFL teachers at SMAN 2 Pare, many teachers are still adjusting to implementing Kurikulum Merdeka and they have diverse perceptions of this new curriculum. For further researchers it is suggested to research in a broader context or area to obtain more detailed and abundant data. From this research, the researcher hopes that the government can provide massive assistance related to Kurikulum Merdeka implementation and schools, especially teachers, can improve the quality of learning based on the Kurikulum Merdeka which is better in the future.

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