

Curriculum reform and language pedagogy: Rethinking policy and practice in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate how Indonesia's *Merdeka Curriculum* reform influences English language pedagogy, focusing on the alignment between policy expectations and classroom practices. Grounded in the framework of curriculum and instructional development, the research employs a qualitative descriptive design involving document analysis, teacher interviews, and classroom observations in selected junior and senior high schools. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns in pedagogical adaptation and implementation challenges. Validation of the instruments and data interpretation were ensured through expert judgment, triangulation, and member checking to maintain credibility and dependability. The findings reveal that while the *Merdeka Curriculum* encourages a significant pedagogical shift toward learner-centered, contextual, and genre-based English teaching, teachers still struggle with interpreting curriculum guidelines, designing authentic learning activities, and assessing students' communicative competence. The analysis indicates that limited professional training and institutional support have constrained the effectiveness of the reform at the classroom level. This study concludes that successful curriculum transformation requires stronger teacher capacity-building programs, clearer instructional frameworks, and sustained policy communication between stakeholders. The research contributes to the broader discourse on curriculum reform and educational development by highlighting the interaction between national education policy and pedagogical practice in the context of a developing country.

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform has long been recognized as a crucial driver of educational improvement and national development, particularly in rapidly changing socio-economic contexts. In Indonesia, the education system has undergone a series of curriculum reforms aimed at promoting competency-based and student-centered learning that aligns educational objectives with global competencies, digital literacy, and 21st-century skills (Bentri et al., 2022; Raya et al., 2025). The most recent reform, the *Merdeka Curriculum*, introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022, represents a paradigmatic shift from content-heavy, test-oriented learning toward a competency-based and student-centered framework (BSKAP Kemendikbud et al., 2022). This reform emphasizes autonomy (*Merdeka Belajar*), contextualized learning, and differentiated instruction that enables students to learn according to their interests, pace, and socio-cultural contexts. Within this transformation, English language education has become a key domain for examining how policy is enacted and interpreted at the classroom level, as it directly relates to global

communication, access to knowledge, and human capital development (Agustin et al., 2026; Widodo et al., 2022).

The urgency of this study lies in the gap between curriculum policy formulation and its classroom enactment. Although the Merdeka Curriculum promotes contextual learning and authentic assessment, many English teachers continue to experience challenges in shifting from traditional teacher-centered instruction to more student-centered and contextual classroom practices (Musringatin et al., 2025; Naufalin et al., 2023). Research on the implementation of curriculum reform in Indonesia consistently shows that teachers face challenges in interpreting curriculum principles, developing instructional materials aligned with learning outcomes, and designing authentic learning and assessment activities that reflect the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum (Musringatin et al., 2025; Naufalin et al., 2023; Nursyahrifa & Jufrizal, 2025). These implementation challenges are not unique to Indonesia; internationally, curriculum reforms often encounter resistance or inconsistent implementation when teachers lack sustained professional learning, instructional coaching, collaborative support, and coherent institutional leadership (Keung et al., 2021; McLure & Aldridge, 2023). Thus, understanding how teachers perceive, adapt, and enact curriculum innovations in English teaching becomes essential for assessing the effectiveness and sustainability of national reform initiatives.

In practice, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires English teachers to integrate communicative, project-based, and contextually meaningful tasks that promote learner autonomy and critical thinking. However, empirical studies indicate that although teachers generally support the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, they continue to face challenges in instructional design, authentic assessment, and the adaptation of instructional materials and learning resources (Musringatin et al., 2025; Naufalin et al., 2023; Nursyahrifa & Jufrizal, 2025). The discrepancy between curriculum ideals and classroom realities raises important questions about how policy translation occurs at the micro level of instruction. Moreover, the shift to competency-based education demands new forms of teacher expertise—especially in designing learning experiences that are relevant to students' linguistic, cultural, and community contexts. Without sustained professional development and systemic support, teachers are more likely to maintain familiar instructional practices, limiting the successful enactment of curriculum reform and its intended transformative outcomes (McLure & Aldridge, 2023; Mustamin et al., 2025).

This study also emerges from a developmental concern regarding the broader implications of English education in Indonesia. As English proficiency continues to be a marker of socio-economic mobility and global participation, ineffective curriculum implementation may widen inequalities between schools with differing resources and teacher capacities (Kirkpatrick & Kirkpatrick, 2006). The Merdeka Curriculum aspires to democratize learning opportunities, yet the extent to which it achieves equitable pedagogical change in English classrooms remains underexplored. While previous research has examined teachers' beliefs or readiness toward the reform, few studies have provided a grounded account of how English teachers perform the curriculum in everyday classroom practices and the types of support they require for effective implementation. This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by focusing on teachers' practical experiences, pedagogical adjustments, and perceived challenges in translating curriculum principles into teaching practices.

Another dimension of urgency lies in the developmental orientation of Indonesia's education policy. The government envisions education as the foundation for human capital development and national competitiveness (The World Bank, 2021). Yet, education policy reforms can only succeed when teachers as the key agents of change possess both conceptual understanding and practical capacity to implement the intended innovation. The Merdeka Curriculum explicitly positions teachers as facilitators of student growth rather than transmitters of information. However, this pedagogical shift requires teachers to redefine their instructional roles, redesign curriculum planning, and strengthen their assessment literacy to effectively implement the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum (Agustin et al., 2026; Musringatin et al., 2025; Naufalin et al., 2023). Hence, investigating teachers' experiences of this reform offers valuable insight into the interplay between educational policy, pedagogical development, and classroom realities.

Given these contextual and theoretical considerations, this study focuses specifically on English teachers' understanding and enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum. The research is guided by two main objectives: (1) to analyze English teachers' understanding and enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum in classroom practice, and (2) to identify the pedagogical and institutional challenges teachers face in implementing contextual and project-oriented English learning. By focusing on these two aims, the study avoids overextension into model design and instead concentrates on empirical realities that reflect the policy–practice nexus. This scope enables the research to generate practical and policy-relevant insights that are both contextually grounded and theoretically informed.

This study underscores that curriculum reform is not merely a technical adjustment of content or structure, but a transformative process that redefines how teachers and learners engage in knowledge construction. Understanding the dynamics of this process in the Indonesian context can inform more effective teacher professional development, institutional policy, and curriculum evaluation frameworks. By documenting how English teachers interpret and enact the Merdeka Curriculum, this research provides evidence-based insights for policymakers, curriculum designers, and educational practitioners striving to ensure that reform efforts lead to meaningful pedagogical change and sustainable educational improvement.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore English teachers' understanding and enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian secondary schools. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the depth and complexity of teachers' experiences, perceptions, and classroom practices in the context of curriculum reform. The study was conducted from January to June 2024 in three secondary schools (two public and one private) in the Yogyakarta Special Region, Indonesia which was selected for its diverse educational contexts and active participation in the Merdeka Curriculum pilot implementation. The research focused on six English teachers, selected purposively based on their experience (minimum of five years) and direct involvement in implementing the new curriculum. Data collection was carried out through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to obtain comprehensive and triangulated insights. The instruments used included an observation sheet to record classroom activities and instructional interactions, an interview guide to elicit teachers' conceptual understanding and pedagogical adaptations, and a document checklist to review lesson plans, assessment tools, and student work. All instruments were validated through expert judgment by two senior lecturers in English education and curriculum studies, ensuring their relevance and content validity before field application.

The research procedure consisted of three stages: preparation, data collection, and analysis. During the preparation stage, the researcher reviewed national policy documents, including *Panduan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka* (BSKAP Kemendikbud et al., 2022), and secured research permissions and ethical clearance. In the data collection stage, each participant was observed in three different teaching sessions, interviewed individually for approximately 45–60 minutes, and requested to share relevant teaching documents. Data were recorded, transcribed, and coded for analysis. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021) through iterative processes of familiarization, coding, theme generation, and interpretation to identify recurring patterns related to curriculum understanding and classroom enactment. To ensure credibility and dependability, data triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, and audit trails were employed. NVivo 12 software was used to assist in managing and organizing qualitative data. Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the research process: participants' consent was obtained, pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity, and findings were reported responsibly. The combination of these methodological steps ensured that the study produced valid, reliable, and contextually grounded insights into how English teachers interpret and implement curriculum reform in their pedagogical practice.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study generated a rich set of data from three sources: (1) classroom observations of six English teachers' instructional practices; (2) semi-structured interviews that explored their perceptions, understanding, and reflections regarding the Merdeka Curriculum; and (3) document analysis of lesson plans, syllabi, and assessment records used in their classes. The integration of these three data types provided a triangulated understanding of how English teachers interpret and enact the new curriculum in daily practice. The findings are presented in three major parts: (1) respondents' background, (2) teachers' understanding and enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum, and (3) pedagogical and institutional challenges affecting curriculum implementation.

Profile of Research Respondents

The six teacher participants were selected from junior and senior high schools representing both public and private institutions in Yogyakarta and Sleman districts. Their demographic and professional profiles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Profile of Research Respondents

Teacher Code	Gender	School Type	Teaching Level	Years of Experience
T1	Female	Public	Junior High	10
T2	Male	Public	Junior High	7
T3	Female	Private	Junior High	12
T4	Male	Public	Senior High	8
T5	Female	Public	Senior High	15
T6	Female	Private	Senior High	9

The respondents were mid-career teachers with an average teaching experience of 10.2 years. Four of them (T1, T2, T4, T5) had participated in official Merdeka Curriculum training organized by Balai Guru Penggerak, while two (T3, T6) had not received formal training and relied on informal peer learning. This variation provided a meaningful comparative basis for analyzing differences in curriculum understanding and enactment.

Teachers' Understanding and Enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum

Findings from semi-structured interviews and document analysis indicate that most teachers demonstrated a generally positive perception of the Merdeka Curriculum as a step toward a more flexible and learner-centered system. Teachers with prior training (T1, T2, T4, T5) could clearly describe the curriculum's foundational concepts—such as Profil Pelajar Pancasila, Capaian Pembelajaran (CP), Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP), and project-based learning (P5). For example, T1 expressed her understanding as follows:

“Under this curriculum, we don't just teach content. We teach values and competencies, especially communication and collaboration. The assessment must reflect these competencies, not only grammar.”

Document analysis of T1's lesson plan confirmed this awareness: it contained explicit mapping of Capaian Pembelajaran with indicators of communicative competence and creativity. Similarly, T4's documents included project rubrics assessing collaboration and language use in social contexts.

In contrast, teachers without formal training (T3 and T6) exhibited fragmented understanding. T3 believed that Merdeka Curriculum only meant “simpler documents and fewer competencies,” while T6 considered it “another version of Kurikulum 2013 with more autonomy but less guidance.” Their lesson plans still followed old structures with “Basic Competence” and “Indicators” headings—terminology no longer used in Merdeka Curriculum.

Classroom observations revealed varied degrees of enactment aligned with teachers' conceptual understanding. Teachers with better understanding tended to experiment more with

interactive and project-oriented learning, whereas others maintained conventional instruction. T4's classroom demonstrated strong enactment of Merdeka principles. Students worked collaboratively on a mini project entitled "Save Our Environment", producing bilingual posters and short written campaigns. Observation notes recorded high student engagement, peer feedback, and teacher facilitation. T1's class incorporated contextual discussion tasks, where students practiced giving opinions about social media. Though less structured than T4's projects, her approach fostered student expression. T3 and T6's classes, however, displayed limited innovation. Lessons followed textbook patterns, emphasizing grammar translation and reading comprehension. Students were passive, and teacher talk dominated over 80% of classroom time.

The observation notes further revealed recurring instructional patterns that reflected teachers' adaptation to the Merdeka Curriculum: (a) Blended Pedagogical Models: Teachers combined elements of the old curriculum with new approaches. For instance, T2 began with teacher explanation (traditional), followed by a short group writing task (new approach), (b) Student-Centered Shifts: Trained teachers provided opportunities for student collaboration. In T5's class, students engaged in "mini debates" about teenage lifestyles, reflecting the curriculum's communicative emphasis, (c) Surface-Level Integration of Projects: Several teachers labeled extended written assignments as "projects," though they lacked authentic inquiry. T3's so-called project was a five-paragraph essay written individually with no real-world connection, (d) Emerging Assessment Innovation: T1 and T4 developed rubrics assessing creativity and collaboration. However, other teachers still used standard written tests as the sole evaluation method. These patterns show that implementation is partial and adaptive, with innovation limited by time, confidence, and institutional support.

Pedagogical and Institutional Challenges

The second major theme emerged strongly across the three data sources. Teachers consistently cited interrelated challenges affecting their ability to implement Merdeka Curriculum principles effectively.

All six teachers highlighted insufficient and fragmented professional development. Interview data indicated that while some attended short workshops, few received sustained mentoring. As T5 reflected:

"The training was too general. We listened to lectures about philosophy but didn't learn how to make lesson plans or assess projects."

Document analysis showed that only two teachers (T1, T4) kept updated handbooks and digital modules from Balai Guru Penggerak. Others relied on peer-shared materials. Observation records also confirmed uncertainty: several teachers often referred to printed guidelines during lessons, showing reliance on incomplete references.

The absence of follow-up mentoring created inconsistencies in implementation, leading to fragmented classroom practices. Both interviews and document analysis revealed that most teachers struggled with limited or outdated teaching resources. Teachers reported that English textbooks aligned with Merdeka Curriculum were unavailable in many schools. As a result, they adapted Kurikulum 2013 materials, sometimes merely rebranding exercises as "projects." T2 mentioned:

"There are no English books that match the Capaian Pembelajaran. We just keep using the old books and try to add context."

Observation data supported this: in three of six classes, students used K-13 textbooks, supplemented with teacher-made worksheets. Teachers' lesson plans rarely contained authentic or locally relevant materials, reducing opportunities for contextual learning—one of the key Merdeka principles.

Institutional culture and workload significantly affected teachers' pedagogical space. Interviews revealed that administrative reporting and limited school support reduced time for reflective planning. T1 commented:

"We are asked to fill many forms and reports. It takes our preparation time. Sometimes I just reuse last year's plan and change the format."

Classroom observations also documented large class sizes (ranging from 32–38 students) and limited access to ICT resources, which hindered interactive learning. In schools with only one projector, teachers had to rotate usage, limiting multimedia instruction. School documents confirmed the pressure to meet standardized testing demands, which often contradicted the flexibility promoted by Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers in public schools (T1, T2, T4, T5) were required to align final assessments with district standards, leaving little room for innovation. Despite constraints, teacher agency emerged as an important micro-level response to policy demands. Teachers developed practical adaptations to bridge gaps between policy ideals and classroom realities. T1 created simplified rubrics for project evaluation, adapted from Kemdikbud online resources. T4 collaborated with colleagues to develop local English materials on environmental themes. T5 encouraged peer learning by forming student project groups, reducing workload while maintaining engagement.

Observation field notes revealed that in these adaptive classrooms, student participation rates were higher, and teacher feedback was more dialogic. Teachers reported feeling more motivated when students showed enthusiasm for contextual topics. This demonstrates that while structural challenges persist, professional autonomy and reflective collaboration can nurture gradual curriculum internalization.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal a transitional stage in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum within English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesian secondary schools. Teachers generally endorse the curriculum's learner-centered and contextual principles but demonstrate uneven enactment in practice. This pattern—where conceptual endorsement coexists with limited pedagogical transformation—has been consistently identified in Indonesian curriculum reform research (Kulsum et al., 2020; Rahmawati, 2024). Teachers' understanding of Merdeka principles tends to surpass their ability to apply them effectively in classroom routines, largely due to insufficient scaffolding, lack of sustained professional mentoring, and minimal exemplars for translation into practice. The present study corroborates these conditions: while teachers articulated the vision of merdeka belajar (independent learning) with enthusiasm, classroom observations revealed persistent reliance on traditional teaching approaches such as teacher-dominated explanations and written drills.

These findings reaffirm the notion that educational policy innovations—especially those requiring pedagogical autonomy—cannot succeed without concurrent development of teacher capacity (Borg, 2026). The data indicate that professional development (PD) activities under the Merdeka Curriculum are typically brief, theoretical, and disconnected from classroom realities. Such a format limits teachers' opportunities to internalize reform-oriented pedagogies and experiment with contextualized strategies. Similar implementation challenges have been reported in other educational contexts, particularly in Vietnam, where large-scale curriculum reforms promoting competency-based and learner-centered teaching have been constrained by insufficient teacher preparation and sustained professional learning (Nguyen et al., 2026; Truong et al., 2026). In Indonesia, teacher professional development related to curriculum reform has often relied on short-term training, while opportunities for sustained mentoring and continuous professional support remain limited (Musringatin et al., 2025; Mustamin et al., 2025). Consequently, while teachers conceptually embrace the new curriculum's aims, they lack the pedagogical and institutional tools to actualize them in sustainable ways.

A closer examination of the data revealed three major systemic constraints: (1) the limited duration and practicality of PD programs, (2) the scarcity of curriculum-aligned materials and authentic assessment tools, and (3) the structural pressures of large class sizes and high-stakes examinations. These factors collectively create a “policy–practice gap” that restricts teachers' agency in enacting reform. These factors collectively create a policy–practice gap that constrains teachers' agency in enacting curriculum reform. This finding is consistent with international evidence showing that systemic and institutional constraints often hinder the translation of educational policies into effective classroom practice (McLure & Aldridge, 2023; Pambudi & Fajrin, 2024; Truong et al., 2026). The tension between policy expectations and institutional realities is particularly acute in developing contexts, where infrastructure, resources, and teacher training systems remain uneven.

The persistence of this gap underscores that reform must move beyond rhetorical autonomy toward material and institutional support. From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the broader discussion of teacher agency in curriculum reform. The Merdeka Curriculum rhetorically positions teachers as autonomous designers of learning, yet autonomy alone does not guarantee agency. Consistent with (Zhang & Peng, 2024) argument, this study demonstrates that teacher agency is relational. It emerges through social, institutional, and material mediation rather than individual will. Teachers who had access to peer collaboration, school-based communities of practice, or shared teaching materials (e.g., T1, T4, and T5) demonstrated stronger adaptive enactment of the curriculum than those working in isolation. This pattern supports the claim that teacher agency flourishes in supportive professional ecologies that provide dialogic spaces for reflection and co-construction of knowledge (Zhang & Peng, 2024). Conversely, when teachers lack access to collegial dialogue, feedback, and exemplary, reform efforts remain superficial.

In pedagogical terms, the study found that integrating genre-based pedagogy (GBP) and project-based learning (PjBL) offers a promising route for operationalizing Merdeka's learner-centered ideals. Teachers who combined community-linked projects with explicit teaching of text genres, such as T4's integration of local tourism brochures in writing instruction which demonstrated more authentic communication and higher student engagement. This supports Kartika-Ningsih and Gunawan (2019) argument that contextualizing genre pedagogy through projects fosters student agency and aligns with sociocultural views of learning as participation in meaningful social practices. The present findings are consistent with recent studies showing that genre-based instruction, when implemented through authentic communicative contexts, supports the development of learners' linguistic competence and academic literacy (Fenwick & Herrington, 2022; Triastuti et al., 2022).

However, the rarity of such integration across classrooms reflects teachers' uncertainty and lack of concrete guidance. Most participants expressed the need for exemplary lesson plans, project templates, and assessment rubrics aligned with learning outcomes. Without these mediational tools, even innovative teachers struggle to sustain reform-oriented practices. Another critical insight concerns assessment reform. Although the Merdeka Curriculum promotes competency-based and formative assessment, most lesson plans reviewed in this study continued to rely on summative written tests. This mismatch between curriculum ideals and classroom assessment mirrors a long-standing challenge in Indonesian education. Consistent with previous studies, Naufalin et al. (2023), Pambudi and Kaliaskarova (2023), and Triastuti et al. (2022) stated that the continued reliance on test-oriented assessment constrains pedagogical innovation and encourages teachers to prioritize linguistic accuracy over communicative competence, thereby limiting the effective implementation of learner-centered language teaching. Internationally, similar tensions exist teachers often equate accountability with standardized testing, despite policy shifts toward formative assessment (Borg, 2026). Therefore, meaningful reform requires structural support for assessment literacy, including exemplary rubrics, moderated scoring procedures, and institutional recognition of alternative assessment modes.

Equity emerged as another prominent issue. The study found significant differences between public and private schools in terms of access to training, technology, and teaching resources. Teachers in better-funded schools benefited from more frequent PD and access to digital materials, whereas those in rural or resource-limited contexts faced chronic shortages. This disparity is consistent with previous research indicating that curriculum reform may reinforce existing educational inequalities when schools differ substantially in their implementation capacity and access to professional support (McLure & Aldridge, 2023). It also aligns with evidence that teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is strongly influenced by institutional support, school leadership, and the availability of professional learning opportunities (Musringatin et al., 2025; Naufalin et al., 2023). In this regard, policy design must consider context-sensitive strategies that ensure all teachers, especially those in under-resourced regions, receive equitable opportunities for professional growth. Across these discussions, a unifying theme emerges reform effectiveness depends on alignment among curriculum design, professional development, and institutional conditions. Isolated interventions, such as policy dissemination or one-off training sessions, cannot yield deep pedagogical transformation. This conclusion reinforces the model of sustained, practice-based PD advocated by Parnell and Bae (2023), who found that iterative learning cycles and peer

coaching significantly enhance teachers' adaptive expertise. Similarly, [Kulsum et al. \(2020\)](#) reported that iterative PD improves curriculum literacy and fosters reflective teaching habits among Indonesian EFL educators. The implications are clear PD programs must be reconceptualized as ongoing, collaborative, and classroom-embedded processes rather than short-term administrative requirements.

Theoretically, these findings also illuminate the interaction between policy discourse and local pedagogical realities. The Merdeka Curriculum represents Indonesia's broader aspiration to align education with 21st-century competencies, e.g. critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, while preserving local values of independence and social harmony. Yet, as this study demonstrates, translating global reform narratives into local classrooms requires deliberate mediation. Teachers must not only reinterpret new pedagogical paradigms through local sociocultural lenses but also negotiate institutional expectations and community norms. This finding is consistent with comparative research showing that curriculum innovation in many developing educational systems involves a process of hybridization, whereby global reform agendas are adapted to local institutional conditions, cultural values, and pedagogical practices ([Xu & Lu, 2022](#); [Yang & Li, 2022](#)).

Thus, the challenge lies not in importing external models but in cultivating professional ecosystems that allow teachers to internalize and adapt reform principles meaningfully. Ultimately, the study underscores that successful curriculum reform is not a matter of policy compliance but of pedagogical capacity building and professional trust. Teachers' enthusiasm for the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates the reform's conceptual appeal, but the persistence of traditional teaching patterns reflects systemic inertia. To advance reform goals, national and local policymakers must strengthen teacher mentoring systems, institutionalize collaborative PD structures (such as lesson study and peer coaching), and ensure that assessment reform proceeds in tandem with instructional innovation. Without such integrative efforts, Merdeka Belajar risks remaining a policy slogan rather than a transformative educational movement.

CONCLUSION

This study examined English teachers' understanding and classroom enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum and the pedagogical challenges they face in implementing its principles. The findings reveal that teachers possess a generally strong conceptual understanding of the curriculum's philosophy, particularly its emphasis on learner-centeredness, contextual learning, and competence-based outcomes, but this understanding does not always translate into consistent pedagogical practice. The gap between policy awareness and classroom realization is primarily shaped by systemic factors such as limited practical training, insufficient curriculum-aligned teaching materials, and institutional pressures related to assessment and administrative workload. From a broader perspective, the results suggest that teachers' enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum is mediated by the degree of professional and institutional support they receive. Teachers with access to collaborative professional learning and exemplary teaching resources demonstrated higher adaptability and stronger curriculum enactment than those without such support. This indicates that curriculum reform success depends not only on teachers' individual readiness or willingness to innovate but also on the enabling conditions provided by the education system. Furthermore, integrating genre-based pedagogy with project-based learning was shown to be a viable strategy for contextual and communicative English teaching, if teachers are supported with practical models and assessment frameworks.

The study generalizes that the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language education requires three interdependent conditions: (1) continuous and practice-oriented professional development programs that emphasize classroom application and reflective collaboration; (2) accessible exemplar materials, project designs, and formative assessment rubrics aligned with *Capaian Pembelajaran*; and (3) equitable institutional support that ensures all teachers, regardless of school type, have access to adequate training and resources. Addressing these factors will enable English teachers to translate the philosophical ideals of Merdeka Belajar into meaningful classroom practices that foster student autonomy, engagement, and communicative competence.

Although this research involved a limited number of participants in one regional context, its triangulated qualitative design offers valuable insights for both policy and practice. Future studies are recommended to expand the participant base across different provinces and examine how sustained mentoring and professional learning communities can enhance teacher agency and student learning outcomes under the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

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