

EFL TEACHERS' BEST PRACTICES OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN BATAM SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: December 2024 Revised: February 2025 Published: April 2025	<i>The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced to address the need for a more flexible and responsive education system, which is crucial in a diverse country like Indonesia. Educational challenges vary significantly between urban and rural areas and public and private schools. This study investigates the factors that hinder the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and examines how English teachers apply it in senior high schools located in inland and hinterland areas of the Riau Islands region.. The methodology used a mixed-method approach. The research involved 30 English teachers—23 from island schools and 7 from hinterland schools. Data were gathered through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, with 5 teachers providing in-depth insights during interviews. The results reveal significant gaps in implementation, particularly among hinterland teachers, where 42.9% reported limited adaptability. The finding shows that each teacher faces unique challenges, which include: 1) administrative costs, 2) adjustments to new curricular components, and 3) a lack of government support, all of which hinder successful integration of the curriculum. To successfully implement the Merdeka curriculum, the following are essential: 1) involvement and support from all parties, 2) comprehensive teacher training, and 3) teachers' readiness. This study emphasizes that the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum depends on the active participation of every school, ensuring that there is readiness, support, and adaptation to the new educational framework.</i>
Keywords Best practice; Merdeka curriculum; Curriculum implementation; Curriculum design; Teaching practices;	
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INTRODUCTION

Merdeka Curriculum, implemented by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, embodies a revolutionary educational methodology that give teachers the freedom to create quality learning that is in line with the needs and environment of the learners (Marthawati & Adi, 2024). The Merdeka Curriculum aims to be more flexible and responsive to individual student needs, emphasizing student-centered learning and technology. It marks a substantial shift in the Indonesian education system towards a more progressive approach. (Hadi et al., 2023; Hazyimara, 2023). The aim is to educate students about the challenges of the twenty-first century by equipping them with the skills, information, and values required to prosper in a fast-changing world (Muhammad Rafi Zidan & Zaitun Qamariah, 2023).

Before implementing the Merdeka curriculum, Indonesia's traditional curricula were often criticized for being overly rigid and not accommodating the diverse needs of the nation's students. The shift from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum was prompted by various issues, including insufficient teacher preparation, evolving societal needs, and the 2013 Curriculum's assessment outcomes. (Mitra & Purnawarman, 2019; Saputri et al., 2024).

Furthermore, the presence of these systemic problems has emphasized the necessity for a curriculum design and implementation philosophy that is more adaptable and inclusive.

Zamista & Deswita, (2023) mentioned the Merdeka Curriculum is carried out in the following ways: (1) emphasizing learning according to students' interests and talents, (2) learning that focuses on essential material, and (3) providing flexibility to educational units to design operational curricula according to school capabilities. In addition, Prakoso et al., (2021) highlights that the teacher is material center, supervisor center, activity facilitator, and development function. It can be included that teacher has a vital role which will greatly affect to carry out these practices. As has been mentioned, the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented in direct response to the demand for a more flexible and responsive education system. This adaptability is especially vital in a heterogeneous nation such as Indonesia, where educational obstacles differ significantly between urban and rural regions, as well as between state and private instructional institutions.

There is considerable variation in the practical application of the Merdeka Curriculum across inland and hinterland regions. Inland schools, commonly situated in metropolitan or suburban areas, typically have superior access to resources, educational programs, and infrastructure, thereby enabling more seamless implementation. By contrast, schools situated in hinterland regions, which are more isolated and rural, encounter distinct obstacles such as restricted availability of skilled teachers, insufficient infrastructure, and limitations in resources. The observed discrepancies emphasize the necessity of providing customized assistance and implementing localized approaches to guarantee the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in all settings, irrespective of geographical location. Akib et al., (2020) emphasizes that it is necessary to conduct a more in-depth study regarding the development of a broader curriculum, considering the geographical conditions of Indonesia.

Previous studies on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in both inland and hinterland areas reveal mixed results. Studies have shown that the curriculum in inland schools has been relatively successful, with teachers' readiness reporting increased student engagement and more opportunities for creative teaching (Fahrurrozi et al., 2025; Ferdaus & Novita, 2023; Kamila & RM, 2023; Telaumbanua, 2024). However, in hinterland areas, the results are less promising, with many schools struggling due to a lack of support and resources (Jaguna, 2023; Samili et al., 2023; Sene et al., 2024; Zerlinda & Alam, 2025). Research indicates that while the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to improve educational outcomes, its success is highly dependent on the context in which it is implemented. This underscores the importance of providing adequate support and adapting the curriculum to fit the specific needs of each school. While there has been some research on the Merdeka Curriculum, there still needs to be a significant gap in understanding the best practices for its implementation in senior high schools, particularly in Batam.

However, since most studies focused on public schools or specific geographic regions, limited attention was given to the unique challenges and opportunities. This present study is intended to fill that gap. The research questions for this study are how the teachers implement Curriculum Merdeka in English subjects for senior high school hinterland and inland Riau Islands province and what the best practices from the teacher's point of view are related to the challenges and opportunities.

Review of Related Literature Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is the most recent curriculum implemented by numerous schools. It features varied extracurricular learning and optimizes content to provide students with ample opportunity to explore concepts and enhance competencies, which in line with Retnaningrum et al., (2023) The Merdeka Curriculum offers students learning opportunities that are accessible and conducive to a serene, relaxing, and joyful educational experience,

devoid of stress and pressure while considering their innate skills and refraining from coercing them to study or excel in a particular field of knowledge. The Merdeka Curriculum has three characteristics: focusing on developing soft skills and character through project-based and Pancasila student profiles, essential material, and flexible learning. To strengthen the Pancasila profile, or what is commonly called 5P, this project is a co-curricular activity that provides opportunities for students to explore, study in-depth, and take real action on their lessons. Learners are expected to become intelligent, have global competitiveness and character, and uphold the values of Pancasila (Hamzah et al., 2022). Implementing the Merdeka curriculum offers three distinct options for different educational units. The first option is independent learning, wherein schools or education units maintain the use of the 2013 curriculum. The second option is the simplified K13/Emergency Curriculum, which incorporates the components and principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. 2) The proposed initiative involves the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum by education units in the 2022/2023 academic year, utilizing the prepared teaching tools as a reference. 3) The proposed approach entails the independent implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, granting education units the autonomy to develop diverse teaching tools within their operations (Ayundasari, 2022; Fauzan et al., 2023).

Curriculum Design

The curriculum examines all educational phenomena. Methodology may be consulted for methodological assistance from any external discipline; however, it is not permitted to dictate the inquiry (Egan, 1978). In designing the curriculum, it can be segmented into 3 forms: Subject-centered design.

According to Kenneth D. Moore, (2009) the subject-centered curriculum emphasizes oral discourse and thorough explanations. It demands teachers to plan instruction ahead of time and organize it around the material, and it implies that some topics should be taught to all students. The subject-centered curriculum typically includes a study of specific facts and ideas. Direct procedures such as lectures, debates, and questions are commonly used in teaching. This curriculum stresses life experiences while failing to address students' needs and interests effectively. The teacher dominates the lesson, allowing little student input (Ornstein, 1982).

Learner-centered design.

Cullen et al., (2012) I believe that curriculum design should incorporate learning experiences for students to assist their development as creative, independent learners. Learner-centered techniques seek to build independent learners who can think critically and solve challenges. As previously said, learner-centered environments establish roles and responsibilities for students, which improves the quality, depth, and permanence of their learning. (Doyle, 2023).

Problem-centered design.

Problem-centered curriculum design is a form of student-centered design similar to learner-centered curriculum design. Problem-centered curricula emphasize the development of student's ability to analyze a problem and devise a solution. Consequently, students are exposed to real-world issues, which aids in the development of transferable skills that are applicable to the real world (Schweitzer, 2020). The implementation of problem-centered curriculum design enhances the program's pertinence and fosters students' creativity and innovation during the learning process (Guo et al., 2020). An inherent limitation of this curriculum design approach is its failure to account for diverse learning styles consistently.

Previous Study

Many studies have investigated the positive impact of using the Merdeka curriculum at different levels of education (Hadi et al., 2023; Maulana et al., 2023; Zandrato & Agatha,

2023). The result shows that the Merdeka curriculum allows students to learn freely and teachers to design meaningful, engaging, and innovative learning experiences. It offers teachers a lighter workload, more straightforward lesson planning, and other benefits. On the other hand, numerous implementations have been made by teachers who expressed challenges in implementing differentiated instruction due to students' diverse interests and learning styles. In addition, teachers encounter challenges when it comes to developing instructional modules that are both innovative and creative (Akhmadi, 2023; Kamal, 2024; Novtian & Yavani, 2023; Sari & Muamaroh, 2024; Tohamba & Ansyar, 2025). Another study also revealed that the limitations of the teacher's handbook and teacher training as a source of information and educational resources hinder the effective implementation of the Merdeka curriculum (Ajisoko et al., 2025; Emawati et al., 2024; Hanum & Dalimunte, 2025; Imron, 2023; Mamujaja et al., 2023; Wulandari & Mustofa, 2023). Other studies also found that preparing the learning outcomes, objectives, teaching modules, and assessments is difficult because of the need for more knowledge (Awaliyah & Tiarina, 2023; Nasir & Muhamad, 2025; Sutinah et al., 2024; Tricahyati & M, 2023). The results of previous studies show similarities, such as the themes raised and the methods used, but they have different purposes of use and different location with this research. This research investigates how the teachers implement Curriculum Merdeka in English subjects for senior high school hinterland and inland Riau Islands province and what the best practices from the teacher's point of view are related to the challenges and opportunities.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research methodology includes a description of the methodology, participants, research instruments, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Stevenson & Witschge, (2020) stated that technique pertains to the views applied to one's research. The researcher employs a mixed-method approach. Mixed methods utilize a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies tailored to the study's objectives and the research question's nature, aiming to enhance comprehension of the subject (Taherdoost, 2022). According to Creswell & Creswell, (2018) mixed method is chosen because of its strength of drawing on both qualitative and quantitative research and minimizing the limitations of both approaches. This approach is optimal for the researcher to access quantitative and qualitative data, as it facilitates a more comprehensive knowledge or research problems and inquiries.

Research Participants

The study took place in several inland and hinterland senior high schools. The researcher employed purposive sampling, which selects individuals and sites intentionally to learn or understand the essential phenomenon. There are 88 senior high schools in Batam and 84 schools in the hinterland, from Natuna, Anambas, Bintan, Karimun, and Lingga regencies. In deciding on the participants, the researcher selected experienced English teachers who have been in the school for over two years. 27 English teachers in the inland and 7 in the hinterland areas were willing to participate in this research. The reason why the researcher chosen the sample size as the representative of the population is based on the standar of availability and experience. The sample size is appropriate because purposive sampling targeted experienced 'Curriculum Merdeka' teachers from diverse school settings (inland and hinterland). Given the constraints of time, resources, and accessibility in remote hinterland areas, this sample size strikes a balance between feasibility and comprehensive data collection, enabling meaningful interpretations that can be extended to similar educational settings.

Instruments

According to Patten (2016) a questionnaire efficiently collects data, including sensitive matters. The instruments used in this research are a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire and interview questions are adopted from previous researchers (Abduh et al., 2022; Mutmainah & Widhiatama, 2024; Purwanti & Wardani, 2024). The questionnaire utilized the Likert Scale with four options: SD (Strongly Disagree), D (Disagree), A (Agree), and SA (Strongly Agree). Moreover, the questionnaire comprised 40 questions organized into four distinct sections. Furthermore, the interviews that will be conducted are Semi-structured interviews, whereby the researcher asks all participants in their sample the same questions, each time following the same pre-set order. Structured interviews include many yes/no and multiple-choice questions, providing little space for open-ended questions (Karatsareas, 2022). Semi-structured interviews enable a more in-depth examination of unexpected themes that may emerge from statistical findings. They facilitate triangulation and enhance the credibility of research by validating or elaborating on quantitative results. This method ensures that researchers measure perceptions numerically and capture the subtle aspects of participants' experiences and insights by integrating structured queries with open-ended discussions.

Data Collection

The researcher utilized two primary tools to gather data: semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire. Thirty participants completed the questionnaire, which was designed and distributed using Google Forms. This questionnaire aimed to collect both demographic and perceptual data. It included questions about the teachers' educational backgrounds, the subjects they teach, their years of teaching experience, and the type of school they work in (either SMK or SMA). Additionally, the questionnaire asked for participants' experiences and opinions concerning the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in their schools. To facilitate quantitative analysis, the questionnaire featured a combination of closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, allowing the researcher to easily identify trends and patterns in the teachers' responses.

Following the questionnaire, five teachers from different schools in Batam and the hinterland were interviewed semi-structured via Zoom meetings. While the interview guide facilitated open-ended discussions to explore teachers' opinions, it also included pre-determined questions to maintain consistency throughout the interviews.. Since each interview was conducted individually, The researcher obtained detailed insights into teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum's effectiveness, challenges, and experiences. The study provides a comprehensive understanding of curriculum implementation across diverse educational contexts by integrating quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative insights from interviews.

Data Analysis

The researcher will carry out several stages of analyzing the data. The following are the steps in analyzing data: Conduct data collection using the chosen instrument: questionnaire; share the instrument to the participants; and calculate the sum of Likert scale data from the questionnaire using SPSS. Each sub-indicator reflects a distinct aspect of the measurement. The initial sub-indicator is Basic Principles, comprising five questions. The second sub-indicator is the Teaching Module, with five questions; the third is the Learning Process, consisting of ten questions; and the final is Perception, containing twenty questions. The questionnaire design uses Likert scale ranging from 1- 4 in scale: 1 (strongly disagree), 2 (disagree), 3 (agree) and 4 (strongly disagree). The data analysis used percentage calculation. The researchers utilized the percentage method to transform questionnaire data into percentages.

The result was interpreted using the interval estimate. The interval estimate method was employed to determine the population parameter based on the score of rates interval sample data, which has 24 intervals estimating each level. The rating score in this instance ranged from 40 to 160, with the questionnaire comprising five levels or categories. Consequently, the researchers highly calculated the score from strongly disagree (40) to agree (160). Consequently, the researchers utilized 24 interval estimations and a sufficiently high score to minimize the error rate or insignificant scores in measurement. The range of the participants in the questionnaire is presented in Table 4.

Table 4
The Rating Score

Score	Category
137 - 160	Very high adaptability
113 - 136	High adaptability
89 - 112	Limited adaptability
65 - 88	Low adaptability
40 - 64	Very low adaptability

To maintain consistency and reliability in theme identification, the researcher will implement a thorough coding process by reviewing transcripts multiple times, identifying recurring themes, and refining categories based on the data. The categories are: Understanding of merdeka curriculum; Challenges in implementation; and Support and training. By combining quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative thematic interpretation, the study offers a thorough understanding of teachers' views on the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

Questionnaire results in inland and hinterland

The questionnaire conducted through the Google Form was filled with out by 30 English teachers, 23 teachers from inland and 7 teachers from hinterland. The results of the questionnaire can be found below.

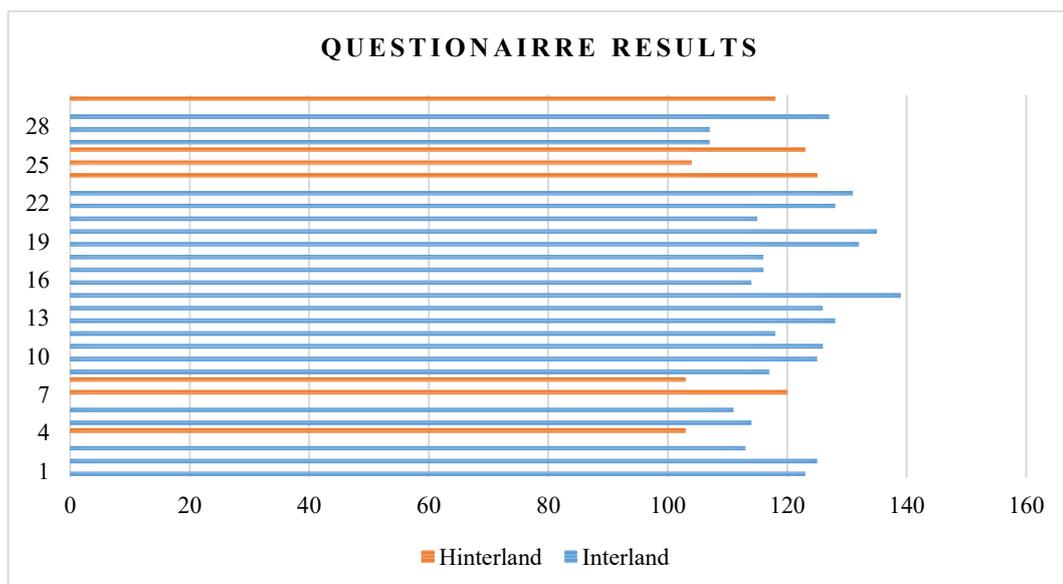


Figure 1. The Questionnaire Results

The figure above shows that only 1 English teacher from inland reached a very high category with 139 out of 160 total Likert scores and reached 87% in implementing the Merdeka curriculum. On the other hand, 2 English teachers from hinterland had the lowest scores, totalling 103 and 64%.

Table 2
Best Practice in Inland and Hinterland Using SPSS

		Best Practice		Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
		Frequency	Percent		
Valid	Limited adaptability	6	20,0	20,0	20,0
	High adaptability	23	76,7	76,7	96,7
	Very high adaptability	1	3,3	3,3	100,0
	Total	30	100,0	100,0	

The table above shows that most teachers (76.7%) exhibit High Adaptability, indicating strong alignment with the desired practices. However, 20% of teachers fall into the Limited Adaptability category, highlighting a need for targeted interventions to improve their performance. Only 3.3% of teachers achieve very high adaptability, representing exceptional performance and suggesting room to encourage more teachers to reach this top level.

The table below shows Merdeka's curriculum implementation in different lands. It shows that inland, three categories were reached: limited adaptability (13.04%), high adaptability (82.6%), and very high adaptability (4.35%). Furthermore, in the hinterland, two categories were reached: limited adaptability (42.9%) and high adaptability (57.1%).

Interview results

Furthermore, the interview participants are chosen from different lands, consisting of 5 English teachers. The participants are chosen for interviews, starting from the participants with the highest to the lowest sum on the Likert scale. It can benefit various opinions and perspectives being represented in the discussion. It also allows for a diverse range of perspectives and experiences to be shared, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the topic at hand. The responses are from participants' answers that are similar to one another, linked together to explain each question part.

Teacher strategies to understand the merdeka curriculum

Each teacher has a strategy to understand the Merdeka curriculum. All of the five teacher agree that any information about merdeka curriculum can be found in many plattform. They all agree that before implement the curriculum, teacher has to understand the curriculum. The following is the overall drawn response: *"To truly understand the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers can benefit from a variety of learning opportunities. Attending training programs, participating in school seminars, and exploring the Merdeka Belajar platforms can significantly deepen knowledge."*

Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

Teachers agreed and recognized that the Merdeka Curriculum offers them the autonomy to make choices in their teaching approaches. The following is the overall response: *"Teachers have the freedom to choose the learning environment they want to create. It allows teachers to create lesson plans and instructional strategies to meet the various needs of the students better, enabling a more personalized and engaging learning environment."* (Teacher A and E)

"We can do it by ourselves, we can create our learning since it's up to the teacher" (Teacher B)

"I still use the strategies in learning like i used to in curriculum 2013. Before I teach my students, I always assess my student so I know what kind of teaching method and learning styles that are suitable for my students" (Teacher C)

"I apply kurma in my teaching by combining various strategies and approach as well as teaching methods so that it can be implemented as good as possible." (Teacher D)

Challenges in implementing Merdeka curriculum

Since the teachers teach in different locations, each school has its implementation challenges. It can be seen below:

"Merdeka curriculum is challenging since it requires a lot of administrative work. I have trouble because I don't have enough time, and I have to balance it with my busy teaching schedule." (Teacher A and E)

"Our main curriculum is not focused a lot on the national curriculum, so we need to adapt. Because the Merdeka curriculum has P5 and for administration stuff, we have to make P5 happen. We require a national report. Two curricula at the same time are challenging. We also need to finish it." (teacher B)

"It's challenging. We, as teachers, have to spend more time learning since I used to learn the curriculum 2013. We only use the curriculum for ten grades here because It's still new." (teacher C)

"Lack of supports from government about kurma workshop and the high level materials in senior high school with limited teaching time also challenge me." (Teacher D)

Discussion

Teachers play a crucial role in education, facilitating students' knowledge acquisition, competencies, and other pertinent abilities. Technology advancements have generated several opportunities in the field of education, particularly in the alignment of curriculum with 21st-century standards. Indonesia has modified its curriculum, and now the Merdeka, or independent curriculum, is widely used. It is in line with Sabeliana et al., (2024) stated that the curriculum can change and be developed so that its implementation can adapt to the needs and developments of the times. It causes teachers to develop as well.

However, as previously stated, the Curriculum Merdeka requires adaptation, particularly in the inland and hinterland regions of Riau. The data obtained indicates that the hinterland has achieved a limited adaptability rate of 45.9% in the implementation of Curriculum Merdeka, while English teachers in the inland regions reported a limited adaptability rate of 13%. These figures underscore a substantial disparity in the implementation of curriculum between inland and hinterland. The results are consistent with prior research that underscores the difficulties related to curriculum adaptation in remote regions, which are attributed to infrastructure constraints, teacher preparedness, and resource availability.

The implementation of Curriculum Merdeka poses three significant challenges for teachers. There are administrative burdens, adaptation to new curriculum components, and insufficient government support. The significant increase in administrative responsibilities relative to previous curricula is a pressing issue. Curriculum Merdeka seeks to enhance flexibility. However, teachers indicate that the demands of extensive documentation, reporting, and compliance significantly consume their time. According to Juniarni et al., (2023) time management is one of the factors that can affect teacher performance. The increased workload diminishes the time allocated for lesson planning and student engagement, hindering teachers' ability to concentrate on effective instructional practices. In

hinterland areas, where resources and workforce are limited, this challenge is more pronounced, further obstructing effective curriculum implementation.

Another significant challenge is the need to adapt to new curriculum components while still managing existing frameworks. Numerous schools are required to integrate Curriculum Merdeka with their existing curriculum, resulting in increased complexity. The implementation of *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)* necessitates that teachers design and implement project-based learning activities while adhering to national reporting standards. Moreover, given that Curriculum Merdeka is a recent initiative, numerous teachers are required to invest additional time in understanding its framework and goals. The dual-curriculum approach complicates the maintenance of consistency in lesson delivery and student assessment, especially in schools that are in the initial phases of transitioning to the new system. Ramadan & Widagsa, (2022) concluded that this problem occurred because of the need for more information and a good understanding of the Merdeka curriculum and its implementation.

A lack of government support in training and resources further complicates the implementation process. Teachers need organized workshops, continuous professional development, and explicit guidelines to implement Curriculum Merdeka effectively. Limited access to training programs, especially in inland and hinterland regions, results in many educators facing challenges in understanding and applying the methodologies of the new curriculum. The advanced materials required in senior high school frequently surpass the allotted teaching time, complicating the comprehensive coverage of all essential topics. The transition to Curriculum Merdeka is uneven without sufficient support, highlighting the necessity for targeted interventions such as improved teacher training, streamlined administrative processes, and policy adjustments to assist schools in adapting to the new framework.

Anisah & Qamariah, (2023) stated that the implementation of a new curriculum necessitates numerous modifications in all Indonesian schools. It includes not only the schools themselves but also the teachers who must adjust and adapt to the new curriculum. Merdeka Curriculum is a new and evolving curriculum. Teachers will need to be creative and adaptable to effectively implement the new curriculum, which emphasizes the development of character, the acquisition of essential knowledge, and the enhancement of student competencies to enhance children's talents and interests (Jamilah et al., 2023).

To successfully implement Curriculum Merdeka, all stakeholders, including school principals, teachers, administrators, students, parents, communities, and government agencies, must engage actively (Nurzen S, 2022). A well-organized and methodically managed educational framework guarantees that the curriculum is developed, executed, and monitored efficiently. When schools build a structured management system, they may resolve difficulties more efficiently, leading to a more seamless curriculum transition.

Teacher preparedness is another critical factor in the success of Curriculum Merdeka (Endot, 2021). Teachers must develop a strong understanding of the curriculum's principles, methodologies, and student-centered learning approaches. Various professional development opportunities, including school seminars, government-led programs, teacher training sessions, and digital resources like the Merdeka Belajar Platform (PMM), are essential to support this transition. These initiatives provide teachers with the knowledge and tools to adapt and effectively apply the curriculum in their classrooms. Furthermore, fostering teacher self-efficacy is crucial, as confident and motivated educators are more likely to embrace innovative teaching strategies. Studies suggest that teachers with high self-efficacy exhibit more remarkable professionalism and adaptability, while those resistant to change may struggle with curriculum reforms (Fauziah & Badaruddin, 2023; Hussain & Khan, 2022; Rohmah et al., 2024).

Another key opportunity lies in tailoring instruction to meet students' needs. Teachers can design more personalized teaching modules and implement differentiated instruction techniques by assessing students' learning styles. Project-based learning, interactive methodologies, and the integration of digital tools can significantly enhance the teaching and learning experience. Research highlights that technology-driven instruction supports student comprehension and motivation, particularly in English classes (Gabriella & Febria, 2022; Imaliyah & Febria, 2023; Teresa et al., 2024). Additionally, a personalized learning approach promotes autonomy, critical thinking, and real-world application of knowledge (Makhambetova et al., 2021; Mustafa et al., 2025; Yunitasari et al., 2023). Hayati et al., (2021) highlight the significance of teachers utilizing effective ways to improve the learning process and consistently updating their abilities to accommodate diverse resources and objectives. In conclusion, overcoming the challenges of Curriculum Merdeka requires a combination of structured educational management, ongoing teacher training, and a student-centered learning environment that embraces technology and personalization.

The findings directly address the research questions by revealing how the curriculum can be adapted in inland and hinterland schools and identifying specific obstacles to its implementation. The differences in adaptability percentages suggest that geographical factors affect the effectiveness of Curriculum Merdeka. They also highlight the need for context-specific policy modifications.

CONCLUSION

In addition to identifying the barriers to Curriculum Merdeka implementation, this study looked at how English teachers in inland and hinterland areas deal with these issues. Based on location-specific characteristics, administrative costs, adjusting to new curricular components, and a lack of government support, the results show a considerable gap between these places. These difficulties show that focused interventions are required to guarantee a fairer and more efficient curriculum implementation. Despite these challenges, teachers are keen to improve their educational approaches and are hopeful about Curriculum Merdeka's potential benefits. Their dedication to creativity, flexibility, and professional growth is crucial to the curriculum's effective execution. However, the transformation will remain uneven among regions if school administrators, legislators, and local education authorities do not provide sufficient support.

Stakeholders can take various specific initiatives to improve implementation. Policymakers should simplify administrative procedures to lessen teachers' workload and let the teachers focus on teaching. Expanding professional development programs would improve curricular preparedness, especially for rural teachers. Remote schools could benefit from financial and technological support for blended learning and student-centered teaching. Constant monitoring and assessment should be maintained to ensure curriculum implementation in varied school environments. School administrators are vital to helping teachers adjust. To promote collaboration, encourage teachers to exchange excellent practices and help each other adapt to the curriculum. Structured mentorship programs can help teachers move to Curriculum Merdeka with confidence. Administrators should also give teachers enough time for lesson planning, professional development, and curriculum adaptation without overwhelming them. A helpful workplace would help the curriculum adapt.

Teachers, the primary implementers of Curriculum Merdeka, should actively study through professional learning communities, government-led training programs, and online resources like Platform Merdeka Mengajar. Teachers can boost student engagement and learning by tailoring their techniques to student needs and using student-centered methods like project-based learning and individualized instruction. Strongly conveying difficulties to

school leaders and legislators and pushing for extra training and resources can help close implementation gaps and improve curriculum acceptance.

While this study provides valuable insights, it has certain limitations. The research focuses specifically on inland and hinterland senior high schools, and the findings may not fully represent the experiences of schools in urban or well-funded areas. Future research should explore comparative studies across various school settings to provide a broader perspective on Curriculum Merdeka implementation. Additionally, examining the long-term impact of the curriculum on student outcomes and teacher effectiveness would offer deeper insights into its overall success. Implementing Curriculum Merdeka requires a collective effort from policymakers, school administrators, and teachers. Ensuring teachers receive adequate training, support, and resources is crucial for overcoming challenges and fostering an effective learning environment. By prioritizing student-centered approaches, simplifying administrative tasks, and investing in professional development, Indonesia's education system can move toward a more inclusive and adaptive curriculum, ultimately improving the quality of education for all students.

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