

Problems encountered by English teachers in applying the Merdeka curriculum in primary education

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Abstract

This study explores the challenges faced by elementary school English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia and the strategies they use to overcome them. Using a qualitative descriptive case study, data were collected through questionnaires from teachers with experience in applying the curriculum. The findings show that teachers face difficulties in developing teaching modules, carrying out lessons, using media, managing classrooms, assessing students, and accessing training. Limited resources and unequal support between schools make these challenges more complex. However, teachers respond with creativity and resilience by collaborating with colleagues, using low-cost teaching aids, adjusting lesson strategies, and trying new forms of assessment. The study concludes that while the Merdeka Curriculum provides more flexible and student-centered learning, its success depends on continuous teacher training, fair resource distribution, and stronger institutional support. Suggestions are offered for teachers, schools, policymakers, and future researchers to help improve English teaching and ensure the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum are achieved.

Keywords: Challenges, Curriculum Implementation, English Teachers

INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia has undergone several curriculum reforms over the past decades, reflecting the government's continuing efforts to improve the quality of learning and to respond to changing social, cultural, and technological needs. From the 2006 KTSP (School-Based Curriculum) to the 2013 Curriculum (K-13), and most recently to the Merdeka Curriculum, each shift has carried different philosophies and practices. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, is considered one of the most ambitious and transformative reforms to date. Its primary goal is to move away from rigid, content-heavy instruction and towards a more flexible, student-centered, and competency-based approach. Instead of emphasizing memorization and standardized lessons, the curriculum seeks to nurture critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and character-building through differentiated instruction and project-based learning.

In principle, the Merdeka Curriculum aligns with global trends in education that emphasize 21st-century skills, learner autonomy, and holistic development. Its framework supports teachers in designing lessons that adapt to students' needs and contexts rather than enforcing a one-size-fits-all model. For subjects like English, which is widely seen as a global lingua franca and an important skill for future careers, the curriculum offers opportunities to integrate communicative and contextualized learning strategies. At the elementary school

level, English is often introduced to provide students with basic vocabulary, simple grammar, pronunciation practice, and listening and speaking activities that build confidence. However, within the new curriculum framework, English teachers are also expected to design differentiated learning and incorporate projects. This dual responsibility, building foundational language skills while also fulfilling broader educational objectives, makes English teaching in elementary schools especially demanding.

Despite the promising goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, its implementation has not been without difficulties. Teachers are the key actors in translating curriculum policies into classroom practice, but their readiness, resources, and support systems vary widely. Many teachers report that they struggle to understand and operationalize the flexible design of the curriculum in practical terms. The shift from rigid lesson structures to project-based, contextualized, and differentiated activities requires not only pedagogical innovation but also professional development, sufficient resources, and confidence in using technology. For English teachers at the elementary school level, these demands are particularly challenging because they must balance linguistic objectives with creative and student-centered approaches, often in resource-constrained environments.

The issue of teacher preparedness has been documented in several recent studies in Indonesia. Sephiawardani and Bektiningsih (2023), for example, examined teacher readiness in public elementary schools and found that while some teachers showed enthusiasm for the curriculum, many still faced limitations in facilities, evaluation tools, and pedagogical understanding. Their study suggested that readiness is uneven across schools, especially between urban and rural areas. Similarly, Maryani et al. (2024) conducted a large-scale survey of 205 primary teachers and reported that although many teachers displayed moderate to high professional competence, gaps remained in areas such as pedagogy, addressing student diversity, and curriculum application. These findings highlight that while the Merdeka Curriculum has been welcomed by many educators, the capacity to implement it effectively is still developing.

Focusing specifically on English teaching, other Indonesian studies provide valuable insights. Fitria & Tiarina (2023), in their research at SMAN 3 Solok Selatan, identified five major challenge areas: lesson planning, lesson implementation, instructional media, classroom management, and learning assessment. English teachers reported difficulties in adapting lesson plans to fit the flexible design of the curriculum and struggled with limited availability of instructional media. Classroom management was also highlighted as a challenge, particularly in classes with diverse student abilities and levels of motivation.

At the junior high school level, Awaliyah & Tiarina (2023) investigated teachers' difficulties and strategies in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 1 Panyabungan Selatan. They found that teachers struggled with material adaptation, student readiness, and time management. However, they also documented strategies such as simplifying content, modifying tasks, and collaborating with colleagues to share resources. These coping mechanisms show that teachers are actively finding ways to navigate the new demands, but also underline the importance of institutional support and more consistent professional development.

Ningsih et al. (2024) focused on speaking skills in junior high schools and noted that teachers faced challenges related to students' lack of confidence, limited class time, and inadequate media for communicative activities. To address these challenges, teachers experimented with group discussions, role plays, and other interactive methods. While this study was at the junior high school level, it has implications for elementary teachers as well, since confidence-building and student engagement are foundational concerns in both contexts.

Together, these studies confirm that teachers across Indonesia, at both elementary and secondary levels, are experiencing similar sets of challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The issues revolve around curriculum interpretation, availability of resources, use of technology, classroom management, assessment practices, and student motivation. However, much of the existing research has focused on secondary education. There is still relatively less emphasis on the experiences of elementary school English teachers, even though this stage is crucial for establishing language foundations and fostering positive attitudes toward English learning.

Although several Indonesian studies have investigated challenges in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, there is still a need to focus specifically on elementary school English teachers. Most previous research has either examined general teacher readiness (Sephiawardani & Bektiningsih, 2023; Maryani et al., 2024) or explored challenges in secondary contexts (Fitria & Tiarina, 2023; Awaliyah & Tiarina, 2023; Ningsih et al., 2024). Yet, elementary school teachers face unique conditions: they are introducing English at the most basic level, often to students who have no prior exposure, while simultaneously being expected to integrate differentiated instruction and project-based learning. Furthermore, the Merdeka Curriculum adds another layer of responsibility, as teachers must design activities that not only teach English but also build character, independence, and collaboration.

To address this gap, the present study focuses on two central research questions:

1. What are the problems faced by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level?
2. How do these teachers attempt to overcome such challenges?

Based on these questions, the objectives of the study are twofold. First, it seeks to investigate and describe the specific difficulties encountered by English teachers during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Second, it aims to discover and explain the strategies teachers employ to address these difficulties. These objectives emphasize both the diagnostic and practical dimensions of the research, providing insights not only into what problems exist but also into how teachers respond to them in their professional practice.

The study is significant because it brings attention to the lived experiences of elementary school English teachers in navigating the complexities of the Merdeka Curriculum. By examining both their problems and their solutions, it aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of curriculum reform and to offer practical insights for improving its implementation.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design with the support of quantitative elements through descriptive statistics. The qualitative approach was chosen because the primary aim of the research was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and the strategies they adopted to overcome those challenges. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for exploring teachers' perspectives, experiences, and practices in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriem & Tisdell, 2016). The descriptive element allowed the researcher to systematically present patterns, themes, and recurring issues drawn from the data (Lambert & Lambert, 2012), while the quantitative element provided frequency counts to show the most common problems and solutions mentioned by participants. The integration of descriptive qualitative insights with basic statistical summaries is consistent with recommendations for educational research that seeks both depth and clarity (Miles et al., 2014). This mixed descriptive

approach ensured that the findings captured both the breadth and depth of teachers' experiences, thereby strengthening the validity of the study.

Respondents

The participants in this study were English teachers from elementary schools that had adopted the Merdeka Curriculum. Since the primary goal of the research was to capture authentic experiences, purposive sampling was employed. Purposive sampling is a widely used technique in qualitative research in which participants are deliberately selected based on specific criteria that directly align with the research objectives. This approach was deemed appropriate because not all teachers had direct experience with the Merdeka Curriculum, and it was essential to include only those who could provide meaningful insights into its implementation.

The inclusion criteria were carefully formulated to ensure the reliability and relevance of the data. First, participants were required to be actively teaching English at the elementary school level, as this stage represents the foundational phase of English language education where the Merdeka Curriculum begins to take effect. Second, teachers were required to have a minimum of one year of experience in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, as this duration was considered sufficient for teachers to encounter, reflect on, and adapt to the challenges of the new curriculum. Finally, participants had to demonstrate a willingness to share their experiences and insights, since openness and reflection are crucial for obtaining rich qualitative data.

By applying these inclusion criteria, the study ensured that the voices represented were both credible and contextually appropriate. The sample size was not predetermined; instead, it was guided by the principle of data saturation. This flexible approach to determining sample size allowed the study to remain responsive to the richness of participants' contributions rather than adhering to a fixed number. In total, the participants represented a diverse range of teaching backgrounds and school environments, which enriched the findings by highlighting both shared and unique experiences in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Such diversity in participant profiles not only strengthened the validity of the study but also reflected the varied realities of English teaching at the elementary level in Indonesia.

Instruments

The primary research instrument used in this study was a questionnaire, specifically designed for English teachers at the elementary school level who have experience implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The purpose of this instrument was to identify the specific challenges teachers encounter during curriculum implementation and to explore the strategies they employ to address these challenges. By capturing authentic experiences directly from teachers, the questionnaire provided valuable insights into the practical aspects of curriculum implementation as well as teacher adaptability in diverse school contexts.

The questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions, adopted from Madani (2024) to encourage respondents to provide detailed, comprehensive, and honest responses based on their own teaching experiences. This format allowed the collection of rich qualitative data that reflected the varying conditions in which teachers work. The questionnaire was structured around six key focus areas, with each area containing two questions: one addressing the problem and the other exploring the solution. These focus areas included (1) Development of Teaching Modules, which examined difficulties in designing instructional materials aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum and the ways teachers overcame them (e.g., collaboration, training, resource-seeking); (2) Lesson Implementation, which investigated challenges during the actual teaching and learning process and the strategies used to maintain lesson effectiveness; (3) Instructional Media, which explored issues related to the selection,

availability, or use of teaching resources and how teachers compensated for limitations; (4) Classroom Management, which identified challenges in handling diverse student needs and behaviors while ensuring a conducive learning environment; (5) Learning Assessment, which looked at problems in evaluating student learning outcomes and the methods teachers used to ensure fairness and meaningful assessment. Altogether, the instrument contained 12 core questions in addition to several demographic items, such as years of teaching experience, school type, and training received.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the instrument, the questionnaire underwent a validation process through expert judgment. Two senior English education lecturers reviewed the questions to assess their clarity, relevance, and comprehensiveness. Furthermore, a small-scale pilot test was conducted with three English teachers, which helped confirm that the questions were understandable and produced the intended type of responses. Based on expert and participant feedback, minor revisions were made to improve the wording of questions and avoid ambiguity. Following the guidance of Miles et al. (2014), the development of this structured questionnaire supported the reliability of data collection while maintaining sufficient flexibility for participants to freely express their perspectives.

Data analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by elementary school English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges. The analysis was guided by the key aspects outlined in the questionnaire, namely teaching module development, lesson implementation, instructional media, classroom management, learning assessment, and teacher training.

The analysis process followed the qualitative data analysis framework suggested by Miles et al. (2014), which involved three key stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the first stage, data condensation, the responses were categorized according to the six indicators of the questionnaire. Each question was designed to capture a particular aspect of curriculum implementation, and responses were organized into these thematic areas. Within each category, the responses were carefully reviewed to identify recurring challenges, unique insights, and variations in teachers' experiences. For example, in the area of teaching module development, common issues such as limited resources, time constraints, or lack of professional training were noted and compared across responses.

Next, the solutions or strategies provided by the teachers were analyzed using a thematic approach inspired by Braun & Clarke's (2023) method of thematic analysis. This involved systematically coding the data, identifying key patterns, and developing themes that reflected how teachers addressed the challenges they encountered. Strategies were grouped into categories, such as collaboration with colleagues, self-directed resource development, or participation in professional training, to highlight both the diversity and commonality of adaptive practices.

To strengthen the findings, a frequency analysis was also conducted, identifying how often specific problems and solutions were mentioned across the dataset. This step made it possible to determine which challenges were most prevalent among teachers and which strategies were most widely employed. Furthermore, it allowed for comparisons between different focus areas, such as whether classroom management issues were reported more frequently than instructional media problems, or whether challenges in lesson implementation were closely tied to difficulties in conducting learning assessments.

The study also explored potential relationships across categories by comparing and connecting emerging themes. For instance, difficulties in lesson implementation often

intersected with issues in instructional media, suggesting that limited access to appropriate resources directly affected the quality of classroom delivery. Identifying such interconnections provided a more nuanced understanding of the structural and contextual factors that shaped teachers' experiences of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

Finally, the analysis took into account participants' demographic information, such as years of teaching experience, school type, and training background. This demographic lens allowed the study to examine whether teachers with different professional profiles faced distinct challenges or relied on different strategies. For example, novice teachers often reported more difficulties in classroom management, while more experienced teachers highlighted challenges related to adapting traditional assessment methods to the requirements of the new curriculum. By incorporating demographic factors, the study generated a richer and more contextualized picture of curriculum implementation. Through this structured, multi-layered, and methodologically grounded approach, the analysis provided a thorough and meaningful account of the difficulties faced by elementary school English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Profile

In terms of teaching experience, the respondents represented a diverse range of backgrounds. Some teachers were relatively new, with less than five years of teaching experience, while others had served for more than ten years. This variation allowed the study to capture perspectives from both novice and experienced teachers, making the findings more comprehensive. Teachers with longer service years could share how they compared the Merdeka Curriculum to previous curricula, while newer teachers provided insights into their fresh experiences adapting to current practices.

Regarding educational background, the majority of respondents held undergraduate degrees in English Education or related fields, while a smaller proportion had pursued postgraduate studies. This diversity in educational qualifications added richness to the data, as teachers' academic training influenced the way they approached curriculum implementation and problem-solving.

The profile also showed that all respondents were actively teaching English at the elementary school level. This ensured that the data collected were directly relevant to the focus of the study, as the participants had first-hand experience in introducing foundational English language skills to young learners. Additionally, all of them had at least one year of experience implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, which aligned with the study's inclusion criteria. Their familiarity with the curriculum provided a strong basis for evaluating the challenges and strategies in its implementation.

Finally, the demographic spread confirmed that the respondents came from schools that had formally adopted the Merdeka Curriculum. This reinforced the validity of their responses, as the teachers were not reflecting on hypothetical situations but rather on their real, lived classroom experiences. The demographic profile illustrates that the participants were well-suited to provide meaningful insights. Their varied teaching experience, diverse educational backgrounds, and direct involvement in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum strengthened the credibility and relevance of the study's findings.

The purpose of this study was to identify the problems faced by elementary school English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and to explore the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. The findings are presented according to the two research questions.

Findings

Problems faced by elementary school English teachers

The study found that teachers faced multiple challenges in almost every aspect of the teaching and learning process. These problems can be grouped into six categories: developing teaching modules, lesson implementation, instructional media, classroom management, assessment, and teacher training.

1. Problems in Developing Teaching Modules

Teachers reported that creating teaching modules for the Merdeka Curriculum was one of their biggest challenges. The curriculum requires teachers to design flexible, student-centered activities, but many felt unprepared to do so. They lacked sufficient training and clear guidance on how to create modules that align learning objectives with classroom activities. Limited teaching resources, such as books and reference materials, made this task even harder. Teachers also struggled with time management, as they were already burdened with administrative tasks and other teaching responsibilities.

2. Problems in Lesson Implementation

Teachers also experienced difficulties when applying the curriculum in real classroom situations. The limited number of English class hours each week made it hard to cover all the material. In addition, students' English abilities varied greatly. Some students had prior exposure to English, while others were complete beginners. This gap created challenges in maintaining lesson flow and ensuring all students learned effectively. Teachers also noted that many students lacked motivation, often seeing English as too difficult or not relevant to their daily lives.

3. Problems with Instructional Media

The Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to use creative and interactive media, including digital tools. However, not all schools had the facilities to support this. Many schools lacked projectors, computers, or internet access, which limited the use of multimedia resources. Teachers in rural areas often relied only on blackboards, textbooks, or simple worksheets. Even when teachers used personal devices, unstable internet connections or financial constraints restricted them.

4. Problems in Classroom Management

Classroom management was another obstacle. Young learners are naturally active, and many teachers struggled to keep students focused during English lessons. Large class sizes in some schools made it difficult to give individual attention to students, particularly when correcting errors in speaking or writing. Issues such as noise, distractions, and lack of discipline also reduced the effectiveness of lessons.

5. Problems in Assessment

Assessing students under the Merdeka Curriculum was confusing for many teachers. The curriculum emphasizes authentic and competency-based assessment, focusing on communication, creativity, and problem-solving rather than memorization. However, teachers admitted they were unsure how to design or apply such assessments. Without enough training or clear examples, many found it difficult to evaluate students fairly and consistently.

6. Problems with Teacher Training

Finally, the lack of effective training was a major concern. Although teachers had attended some workshops or socialization sessions, these were often too short, too general, or not practical enough. Teachers felt unprepared and unsupported. Rural schools especially had fewer opportunities for training compared to urban schools. This uneven access to professional development left many teachers struggling on their own.

Elementary School English teachers overcome problems in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Although teachers faced many obstacles, the findings also showed their creativity, resilience, and willingness to adapt. They applied various strategies to address the problems they encountered.

1. Strategies for Developing Teaching Modules

To overcome difficulties in module design, many teachers worked together with colleagues. Peer collaboration allowed them to share lesson plans and adapt materials to their needs. Teachers also used online communities and educational websites to find examples of teaching modules. Self-learning played an important role too—teachers studied textbooks, online resources, and even YouTube tutorials to improve their skills. These efforts gradually increased their confidence in creating modules that fit the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. Strategies in Lesson Implementation

When teaching in the classroom, teachers became more flexible. They used visuals such as pictures, flashcards, and real objects to help students understand. To make lessons more engaging, they introduced songs, games, and role-play activities. Pairing stronger students with weaker ones was also effective, as peer learning helped bridge the gap in ability levels. Teachers adjusted lesson pace and focused on small, achievable goals to maintain student motivation and participation.

3. Strategies in Using Instructional Media

Teachers showed great creativity in dealing with limited media. Many designed low-cost teaching aids, such as vocabulary cards, posters, or handmade board games. Teachers with access to personal devices used them to play songs, show short videos, or display slides, even when the school lacked facilities. In areas with poor internet access, teachers downloaded materials in advance for offline use. These strategies allowed them to make learning more interactive despite limited resources.

4. Strategies in Classroom Management

To improve discipline and engagement, teachers set clear rules and routines at the beginning of the school year. Positive reinforcement, such as praise, stickers, or small rewards, encouraged good behavior. Building close relationships with students also proved effective, as students were more motivated when they felt respected and supported. Some teachers used differentiated instruction by giving tasks of varying difficulty levels, ensuring all students could participate according to their ability.

5. Strategies in Assessment

Teachers began experimenting with alternative assessment methods. Instead of relying only on written tests, they included performance-based tasks such as group projects, role plays, or short presentations. They also used formative assessments, such as observing students during class activities or giving quick oral quizzes, to monitor progress. Teachers often discussed with peers or used online teacher forums to learn new assessment techniques. These steps helped them align evaluation more closely with the spirit of the Merdeka Curriculum.

6. Strategies for Teacher Training

Since formal training opportunities were limited, teachers took the initiative to learn independently. Many joined webinars, WhatsApp teacher groups, or local communities of practice to exchange ideas and strategies. Experienced teachers often mentored younger colleagues, sharing practical tips from their own classrooms. While teachers recognized the need for more structured training, their self-directed efforts significantly helped them adapt to curriculum changes.

Discussion

This study set out to explore the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level and to examine the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. The findings show that while the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to give more freedom and flexibility to teachers and students, in practice it also creates a number of difficulties that teachers must manage. These difficulties are related to developing teaching modules, integrating technology, managing classrooms, conducting assessments, motivating students, and adapting to curriculum training. Each of these challenges will be discussed in more detail below.

One of the most prominent challenges found in this study is developing a new syllabus and teaching modules. Teachers explained that the teaching modules they received from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology often did not match the actual abilities and needs of their students. For example, some activities in the official modules were too advanced for young learners or did not connect well with their real-life context. This forced teachers to adjust, modify, or even completely redesign the materials before they could use them in class. Baker & Westrup (2000) point out that designing a new syllabus is often a major problem whenever a new curriculum is introduced. Similarly, Nurzen (2022) emphasizes that teachers often need to adapt government-provided materials to make them meaningful for their students. The experiences of the teachers in this study confirm that curriculum policies at the national level do not always fit local classroom realities, which adds extra workload and stress to teachers.

Another area of difficulty is technology integration in teaching. The Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to use ICT tools such as laptops, projectors, audio speakers, and online platforms. While this can enrich lessons and increase student motivation, as supported by Cahyani & Cahyono (2012) and Sojanah et al. (2021), many teachers in this study admitted that they lacked the necessary technological skills. Older teachers in particular found it hard to adapt to the use of digital platforms. At the same time, some schools did not even have enough facilities, which made it impossible for teachers to fully implement technology-based learning. As Baker & Westrup (2000) and Fitra & Tiarina (2023), finding and creating appropriate resources is already a challenge for English teachers, and this challenge becomes more complex when it requires ICT skills. Research by Sher Ryn & Sandaran (2020) also shows that teachers' lack of ICT confidence is one of the barriers to effective technology integration. These findings suggest that while technology has great potential, its successful use depends on both teacher readiness and the availability of school facilities.

A further challenge identified is related to student assessment. The Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to conduct assessments that are simpler, more practical, and better aligned with learning outcomes compared to the previous curriculum. However, teachers in this study reported that they often struggled with designing fair and meaningful assessments. Many students had diverse learning needs, which made it hard to create a single assessment tool that could fairly measure everyone's progress. This problem is made more complex because assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum must also strengthen the Pancasila student profile, adding additional elements to be considered in evaluation. A study by Zhao et al. (2023), on the alignment of teaching, learning, and assessment in project-based learning demonstrates that ensuring coherence among learning objectives, instructional activities, and classroom assessments can significantly enhance student learning and facilitate the achievement of curriculum goals. Similarly, Yusop et al. (2022) emphasize that assessment practices in TVET must be carefully aligned with clearly defined learning outcomes to ensure

validity and meaningful evaluation. The findings of this study reveal that while teachers understood the importance of assessment, they still lacked sufficient guidance and examples to create practical and meaningful tools in line with the new curriculum framework.

In addition to curriculum design and assessment, classroom management and student motivation were also identified as challenges. Several teachers explained that students in elementary schools often viewed English as a difficult subject, and some even considered it less important than other core subjects such as mathematics or science. As a result, students' motivation to learn English was often low. Baker & Westrup (2000) also argue that lack of student motivation is one of the main obstacles faced by teachers in language classrooms. Zega et al. (2024) emphasize that teachers play a key role in motivating students, but this requires effective classroom strategies. In this study, teachers mentioned that they tried using one-on-one encouragement, peer learning, and group work to help students feel more engaged. These strategies are consistent with Singh (2020), who found that group learning can boost student motivation because it allows weaker students to learn from stronger ones. However, the fact that many students remained unmotivated suggests that teachers need further support in developing effective strategies to build positive attitudes toward English learning.

The findings also point to problems with teacher training and support. Teachers reported that the training programs offered by the government to prepare them for the Merdeka Curriculum were often too short and mostly theoretical. Wahira et al. (2023) explain that the purpose of such training is to ensure that teachers understand and can apply the Merdeka Curriculum in their classrooms. However, the teachers in this study felt that the training did not provide enough practical examples, nor did it offer sufficient follow-up support. They expressed that one training session per year was not enough, and they needed continuous guidance to truly master the new approach. This highlights a significant gap between the policy intentions and the practical needs of teachers. Without strong professional development, teachers may continue to struggle with implementation, no matter how well the curriculum is designed.

Finally, the findings show that teacher competence and confidence are still developing in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers admitted that since the curriculum was new, they were still learning how to apply it effectively. As Fachmi et al. (2021) suggest, teacher motivation and competence are crucial for the success of teaching and learning. In this study, teachers' willingness to adapt was clear, but their lack of confidence in areas such as ICT, assessment design, and classroom management shows that they need more structured support. Without this, teachers may feel burdened and overwhelmed, which could reduce their motivation and effectiveness in the long term.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum has both strengths and challenges. On the one hand, it aims to give teachers more flexibility and encourages creative, student-centered learning. On the other hand, it demands high levels of teacher competence, strong technological skills, and a supportive school environment, which are not always available in practice. Therefore, the success of the curriculum depends not only on the teachers' efforts but also on the provision of adequate resources, continuous training, and effective monitoring from policymakers.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that elementary school English teachers face many challenges when applying the Merdeka Curriculum. Even though the curriculum is designed to make learning more flexible, creative, and student-centered, it is not easy to put into practice. Teachers struggle with making teaching modules, carrying out lessons, using media, managing the

classroom, assessing students, and getting enough training. These problems are made worse by limited resources, lack of technology, and unequal support between schools in urban and rural areas. However, the findings also show that teachers are not giving up. They try many ways to solve these problems, such as working together with other teachers, using their own creativity to make low-cost teaching aids, learning independently through the internet, adjusting lessons to student levels, and trying new methods of assessment. These efforts show that teachers are willing to adapt and support the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, even when facing many obstacles.

In short, the success of the Merdeka Curriculum depends not only on the teachers' hard work but also on support from schools and the government. More training, better resources, and fair support for all schools are needed to make sure the curriculum can run well. Strengthening teacher skills and confidence is very important because English at the elementary level builds the foundation for students' future learning.

This study suggests that teachers should keep improving their skills by joining trainings, online groups, or teacher communities, and by working together with other teachers to make teaching modules and simple learning media. They can also use fun activities like games, songs, and group work to make English more interesting for students. Schools are encouraged to give enough facilities, internet access, and time for English lessons, as well as support teachers through discussions, sharing sessions, and mentoring programs. The government should provide more practical training, distribute resources fairly between urban and rural schools, and listen to teachers' feedback when making policies. For future researchers, it is suggested to study the long-term effects of the Merdeka Curriculum, compare challenges at different school levels, and look at how technology and parent support can help improve English learning.

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