

TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE *MERDEKA* CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore English teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in junior high schools and to identify the challenges they faced in practice. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected from five English teachers across two junior high schools through classroom observations, questionnaires, and interviews. The findings reveal that teachers generally have positive perspectives of the curriculum implementation, appreciating its flexibility, support for innovative teaching, and the opportunity to adopt a more facilitative role in the classroom. Teachers were found to implement student-centered methods, utilize digital tools, and create interactive learning environments. Despite these positive perspectives, challenges remain, including limited resources, time constraints, difficulties in implementing differentiated learning, varying student proficiency levels, and the need for ongoing professional development. The study concludes that while teachers support the curriculum's objectives, sustainable and effective implementation requires stronger institutional support, sufficient resources, and continuous professional training.

Keywords: curriculum implementation, teacher perspectives, English language learning, junior high school, *Merdeka* Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform plays a vital role in improving educational quality and guiding teachers toward national learning goals. In Indonesia, the *Merdeka* Curriculum marks a major shift from a rigid, teacher-centered system to one emphasizing flexibility, differentiation, and student autonomy (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). It aims to promote meaningful learning aligned with the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, fostering independent, critical, and collaborative learners.

Despite these strengths, teachers still face challenges such as limited resources, time constraints, and difficulties in applying project-based or differentiated instruction (Lestari et al., 2023; Prasetyo, 2023). Understanding teachers' perspectives is therefore essential, as their interpretations determine how curriculum ideals are realized in classrooms.

Previous studies have explored the *Merdeka* Curriculum from various contexts. Haan and Margana (2024) examined senior high school teachers' lesson planning; Astuti et al. (2023) focused on differentiated instruction; Rina et al. (2024) studied teaching reading skills; Sulistyowati and Wulandari (2024) analyzed kindergarten education; and Wahyuni et al. (2023) investigated higher education. However, limited research has specifically examined English teachers' perspectives at the junior high school level.

To address this gap, the present study explores English teachers' perspectives and challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in junior high school English classes. The findings are expected to provide insights for improving professional development, strengthening institutional support, and aligning curriculum goals with classroom practice.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Based on the research background, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do teachers perceive the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation in English language learning?
2. What challenges do teachers face in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in their English language classes?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Curriculum

Curriculum serves as a systematic plan guiding the teaching and learning process. Richards (2013) defines curriculum as an organized framework for selecting materials, teaching strategies, and assessments to achieve educational goals. In the Indonesian context, the National Education Law No. 20 of 2003 describes curriculum as a set of plans and arrangements regarding objectives, content, and instructional methods to achieve national education standards (as cited in Oktavia et al., 2023).

A curriculum performs three main functions: directive, normative, and implementative (Kemdiktisaintek, 2023). The directive function provides vision and direction for the learning process, while the normative function sets competency standards and learning outcomes. The implementative function, on the other hand, serves as a practical guide for teachers in planning lessons and organizing classroom activities. Together, these functions ensure that teaching practices are aligned with educational goals and that learning experiences remain meaningful and relevant.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum

The *Merdeka* Curriculum was officially introduced in 2022 as part of Indonesia's effort to reform education following the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. "*Merdeka*," meaning "freedom," represents the autonomy granted to schools and teachers to design learning according to students' readiness and local context (Kemendikbudristek, 2024). The curriculum replaces the rigid *Kompetensi Inti* (Core Competencies) and *Kompetensi Dasar* (Basic Competencies) of the 2013 Curriculum with *Capaian Pembelajaran* (Learning Outcomes), *Tujuan Pembelajaran* (Learning Objectives), and *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* (Learning Pathways).

Its objectives include promoting student-centered learning, integrating character education through *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, developing 21st-century skills, and empowering teachers to exercise flexibility. The main features of the curriculum are:

- a. Project-based learning to develop collaboration and creativity;
- b. Differentiated learning tailored to students' needs and abilities;
- c. Focus on essential content for literacy and numeracy mastery;

These features collectively aim to make learning experiences more inclusive, contextual, and outcome-based.

Teachers' Perspectives

Teachers' perspectives refer to their beliefs, attitudes, and understandings that shape classroom practices (Richardson, 1996). Borg (2015) notes that teachers' perspectives evolve over time as they adapt to changing pedagogical demands. These perspectives are influenced by personal experiences, professional training, and contextual factors such as institutional support (Rahayu et al., 2021).

Positive teacher perspectives often lead to more effective implementation of new curricula. However, if teachers perceive a curriculum as impractical or overly demanding, they may resist change (Fullan, 2007; Rahayu, 2024). Therefore, evaluating teachers' perspectives provides insight into how educational reforms like the *Merdeka* Curriculum are received and enacted at the classroom level.

Factors Influencing Teachers' Perspectives: Korthagen's Onion Model

Korthagen (2004) proposed the Onion Model, which consists of six interrelated aspects that influence teachers' perspectives and how they implement educational reforms such as the *Merdeka* Curriculum. These six aspects are interconnected and collectively shape teachers' decisions, attitudes, and practices in the classroom.

1. Environment

Refers to the external conditions surrounding teachers, including school policies, facilities, leadership, and student characteristics. For instance, teachers working in well-supported schools with adequate resources and administrative encouragement can implement project-based learning more effectively than those in schools with limited facilities.

2. Behavior

Involves teachers' observable actions, such as teaching methods and classroom management practices. For example, teachers who frequently use group discussions, peer collaboration, and student-centered tasks demonstrate behaviors aligned with the *Merdeka* Curriculum's approach.

3. Competency

Encompasses teachers' knowledge, skills, and confidence in performing their professional duties. For instance, teachers with strong digital literacy and lesson-planning skills are more capable of adapting to new curriculum demands and integrating technology into learning.

4. Beliefs

Represents teachers' assumptions and views about teaching and learning, which guide their classroom decisions. For example, teachers who believe that learning should be active, collaborative, and inquiry-based tend to design lessons that encourage student participation and exploration.

5. Identity

Refers to teachers' self-concept and professional role in the classroom. For instance, teachers who perceive themselves as facilitators of learning rather than information providers are generally more open to innovation and flexible teaching practices.

6. Mission

Reflects teachers' personal values, goals, and moral purpose in education. For example, teachers who view teaching as a meaningful responsibility to shape students' character remain motivated and resilient despite challenges or institutional constraints.

Understanding these aspects provides a deeper insight into how teachers internalize educational reforms, interpret their professional roles, and translate curriculum changes into classroom practices.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design aimed at exploring and describing English teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in English language learning at the junior high school level. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows an in-depth exploration of teachers' lived experiences, attitudes, and reflections within their natural school environments (Creswell, 2009).

The participants of this study were five English teachers from two junior high schools in Bandung Regency, namely SMP BPPI Baleendah and SMP Handayani 1 Banjaran, both of which have adopted the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The teachers were selected through purposive sampling based on several criteria: they were actively teaching English under the *Merdeka* Curriculum for at least one academic year; one of them was a *Guru Penggerak*; all held an educational background in English Education at the bachelor's degree level or higher; and each demonstrated willingness to participate voluntarily and provide reflective insights related to classroom practices and curriculum implementation. Their teaching experience ranged from two to ten years, offering a variety of perspectives that enriched the findings and provided a comprehensive understanding of how the *Merdeka* Curriculum is implemented at the junior high school level.

Data were collected using three instruments developed based on Korthagen's Onion Model, namely classroom observations, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. The classroom observation checklist contained thirteen indicators focusing on observable aspects of student-centered learning, instructional media use, and teacher–student interaction. These indicators were categorized according to the six aspects of Korthagen's Onion Model, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Classroom Observation Indicators

Aspect	Observation Indicators
Environment	Availability of learning materials and supportive classroom settings that promote student-centered learning.
Behavior	Application of student-centered methods such as group work, projects, and discussions, supported by constructive feedback and active student engagement.
Competency	Teacher confidence, professionalism, and clear lesson structure aligned with <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum principles.
Belief	Encouragement of student voice, inquiry, and autonomy through differentiated and participatory activities.
Identity	Teacher enthusiasm, motivation, and positive classroom relationships reflected through warm communication and humor.
Mission	Integration of academic and character values such as collaboration, independence, responsibility, and critical thinking in learning activities.

The questionnaire consisted of eighteen five-point Likert-scale items (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree) distributed across six aspects reflecting the Onion Model. Each aspect included three items designed to capture teachers' perspectives related to curriculum implementation, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Questionnaire Items

Aspect	Item No.	Statement
Environment	1	My school provides sufficient resources to support the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum.
	2	The school leadership encourages innovation in implementing the curriculum.

	3	The school environment promotes collaboration and flexibility in teaching.
Behavior	4	I regularly use student-centered activities such as group work or projects.
	5	I design classroom activities that encourage active student participation.
	6	I give students opportunities to express their opinions during lessons.
Competency	7	I feel confident in implementing the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum effectively.
	8	I am well-prepared to design contextual learning materials.
	9	I can assess students' learning outcomes according to the curriculum principles.
Belief	10	The <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum enhances students' learning experiences.
	11	Allowing students to make choices improves their motivation to learn English.
	12	My teaching beliefs are aligned with the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum's values.
Identity	13	The <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum helps me grow as a reflective and student-focused teacher.
	14	I feel motivated and proud to teach using the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum.
	15	I see myself as a facilitator of student learning rather than a traditional instructor.
Mission	16	My personal teaching goals align with the objectives of the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum.
	17	I believe my role is to help students develop both competence and character.
	18	I am committed to continuous improvement in implementing the curriculum.

The semi-structured interview guide consisted of seven open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' reflections, beliefs, and perceived challenges in implementing the curriculum. Each question represented one of the aspects of Korthagen's Onion Model, as shown in the table below.

Table 3. Interview Questions

Aspect	Interview Question
Environment	Can you describe how your school's support, resources, and leadership influence your ability to implement the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum in English learning?
Behavior	How do you carry out English teaching using the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum in your classroom?
Competency	Do you feel you have the skills and preparation needed to implement the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum effectively?
Belief	What do you believe about the effectiveness of the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum in enhancing students' English learning?
Identity	How has the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum influenced how you see yourself as an English teacher?
Mission	What is your personal goal as an English teacher, and how does that align with the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum?
Challenges	What challenges have you faced in implementing the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum in English learning?

All instruments were carefully reviewed to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives before being administered.

The data collection process was conducted in three sequential stages. First, classroom observations were conducted to capture authentic teaching practices, teacher–student interactions, and learning activities during English lessons. Each teacher was observed twice to ensure consistency of instructional patterns and behaviors. Second, questionnaires were distributed to gather quantitative data regarding teachers’ perceptions, attitudes, and readiness in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The responses were analyzed descriptively using the following percentage formula:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100$$

In which:

P = the percentage

F = the frequency of responses for each category

N = the total number of respondents

100 = the fixed number (constant)

This descriptive analysis summarized the overall tendencies of teachers’ perspectives numerically. Finally, semi-structured interviews were conducted after the questionnaires to gain deeper insights into teachers’ experiences, reflections, and challenges. Each interview lasted 15–25 minutes and was recorded and transcribed for thematic analysis.

The qualitative data obtained from classroom observations and interviews were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña’s (2014) interactive model, which consists of three major stages:

- a. Data condensation – selecting, organizing, and simplifying the raw data to identify emerging patterns and key themes.
- b. Data display – arranging the data in narrative and tabular forms to facilitate clear interpretation and analysis.
- c. Conclusion drawing and verification – interpreting the data, developing conclusions, and cross-checking findings for consistency and validity.

Triangulation across the three instruments was applied to enhance the validity and reliability of the study.

Finally, the emerging patterns and themes were categorized and interpreted according to the six aspects of Korthagen’s Onion Model: environment, behavior, competencies, beliefs, identity, and mission. This analytical framework provided a comprehensive understanding of how both external factors (such as school environment and teaching competencies) and internal factors (such as teachers’ beliefs, identity, and sense of mission) collectively shaped their perspectives on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

A. Classroom Observation

The classroom observations were conducted twice for each of the five English teachers to ensure consistency and depth in capturing their classroom practices. The results revealed that all teachers implemented the *Merdeka* Curriculum effectively, demonstrating consistent application of student-centered learning principles, contextualized teaching, and integration of character education. Although each teacher showed different instructional styles, their practices collectively reflected the *Merdeka* Curriculum’s emphasis on fostering autonomy, collaboration, and meaningful learning. These findings are discussed according to the six aspects of Korthagen’s Onion Model: environment, behavior, competency, belief, identity, and mission.

The environmental aspect reflected supportive learning spaces and adequate school resources that enabled effective curriculum implementation. Each classroom utilized various teaching aids such

as PowerPoint slides, projectors, printed worksheets, and English dictionaries to enhance comprehension. The teachers arranged their classrooms flexibly, beginning lessons with students seated in rows and later forming pairs or small groups to facilitate collaboration. These arrangements encouraged interaction, teamwork, and the exchange of ideas among students. However, despite the overall conduciveness of the learning setting, some challenges persisted. Time limitations occasionally prevented all groups from completing presentations, and disparities in students' proficiency sometimes caused less proficient learners to lag behind. Nevertheless, the physical and instructional environments were generally conducive to active, student-centered learning.

In the behavioral aspect, teachers consistently displayed student-centered approaches throughout their lessons. They employed interactive and communicative methods, including group discussions, paired activities, collaborative projects, and presentations. Each teacher demonstrated creative variations of these strategies—such as dialogue practice, report-text writing, vocabulary-based spelling tasks, and grammar transformations. Praise such as “*Great!*” or “*Excellent!*” was used frequently to sustain student motivation, while some teachers provided guiding feedback after activities. Students were mostly active and cooperative, though a few remained passive during group tasks. This suggests that differentiated scaffolding and targeted encouragement are still needed to fully engage all learners across varying proficiency levels.

The competency aspect was evident in the teachers' professionalism, confidence, and effective classroom management. All five teachers structured their lessons coherently, beginning with stimulus questions, followed by guided tasks, and concluding with reflection or presentation. Learning objectives were clearly communicated, ensuring that students understood the purpose of each stage of instruction. Teachers also demonstrated strong mastery of both content and pedagogy, responding to students' questions with clear and relevant explanations. For instance, they clarified spelling patterns and grammatical rules using accessible examples that matched students' comprehension levels. Minor challenges were noted in time management, as teachers sometimes struggled to balance explanation, activity duration, and student performance time. Despite these issues, the teachers maintained focus and control, ensuring that learning goals were achieved efficiently.

The belief aspect reflected teachers' strong conviction in the principles of student-centered learning. They trusted their students to take ownership of learning, encouraging participation, creativity, and autonomy. Students were given opportunities to choose topics, express opinions, and demonstrate their understanding through different forms of output such as group projects and presentations. The teachers viewed learning as an interactive process in which students construct knowledge through collaboration and exploration. This belief guided the design of their lessons and the way they interacted with students, positioning them as facilitators rather than information transmitters. Even so, in a few cases, teachers needed to provide more structured guidance to help less confident students engage equally in learning activities.

The identity aspect emerged through the teachers' enthusiasm, warmth, and professional presence in the classroom. They consistently showed dedication and confidence, using humor, encouragement, and positive reinforcement to create comfortable and engaging learning atmospheres. Such personal and professional qualities helped reduce student anxiety and fostered active participation. Teachers also demonstrated adaptability and responsiveness to classroom conditions, reflecting their commitment to students' success. Nonetheless, some struggled with maintaining balanced engagement among students of different ability levels, suggesting that ongoing reflection and adaptive strategies could further strengthen their professional identity as inclusive educators.

Finally, the mission aspect was evident in the teachers' sincere commitment to holistic education that integrates language mastery with character formation. Learning activities were designed not only to improve linguistic competence but also to instill values such as collaboration, responsibility, independence, and bravery. Through tasks like group discussions, paired dialogues, and

classroom presentations, students learned to cooperate, express ideas, and take initiative—embodying the values of Pancasila and the goals of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Teachers showed genuine care for their students’ personal and academic growth, emphasizing both skill development and moral formation despite challenges such as limited time and varying proficiency levels.

Based on the discussion above, the classroom observations conducted twice for each teacher revealed that the five English teachers effectively implemented the *Merdeka* Curriculum. They demonstrated strong alignment between instructional practice and curriculum values through supportive learning environments, interactive student-centered methods, and professional competence. While several challenges were observed—such as time constraints, uneven student participation, and the need for more differentiated support—the overall implementation was successful. The teachers consistently fostered active learning, collaboration, and character development in their classrooms. Their practices reflected not only compliance with curriculum principles but also a genuine internalization of the *Merdeka* Curriculum’s spirit: empowering students to learn independently, think critically, and grow holistically.

B. Questionnaire

The results of the questionnaire indicate that teachers’ responses to the 18 close-ended items show a consistent pattern reflecting positive perspectives on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in English language learning. Overall, the data reveal that the five teachers strongly support the curriculum’s emphasis on flexibility, student-centeredness, and character development. Their responses across the six aspects of Korthagen’s Onion Model highlight a well-rounded understanding and internalization of the curriculum principles.

In the environment aspect (items 1–3), for item 1, 40% of teachers agreed and 40% strongly agreed, indicating that most teachers perceived their schools as providing sufficient support and resources to implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum. For item 2, 60% agreed and 40% strongly agreed, showing that all teachers believed school leadership and facilities positively influence their ability to apply the curriculum. Meanwhile, for item 3, 60% agreed, 20% were neutral, and 20% disagreed, suggesting that although most teachers viewed their school environment as promoting innovation and flexibility, some saw room for improvement.

In the behavior aspect (items 4–6), for item 4, 60% agreed and 40% strongly agreed, indicating that all teachers regularly used student-centered methods such as group work and projects. For items 5 and 6, 100% agreed, showing that all teachers designed learning activities that encouraged active participation and gave students greater voice and choice in English learning.

In the competency aspect (items 7–9), for item 7, 60% agreed and 40% strongly agreed, while for item 8, 100% agreed; and for item 9, 80% agreed and 20% strongly agreed. These results show that all teachers felt confident, well-prepared, and capable of assessing students’ outcomes in alignment with the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

For the belief aspect (items 10–12), for item 10, 100% of teachers agreed, meaning that all teachers believed the *Merdeka* Curriculum enhances students’ English learning experiences. For items 11 and 12, 80% strongly agreed and 20% agreed, suggesting that all teachers viewed student autonomy as essential to motivation and that their teaching beliefs aligned with the curriculum’s principles.

In the identity aspect (items 13–15), for items 13 and 15, 80% strongly agreed and 20% were neutral, indicating that most teachers viewed themselves as reflective, student-focused facilitators, though a few were still adjusting to this role. For item 14, 100% agreed, meaning that all teachers felt motivated and proud to teach using the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Lastly, in the mission aspect (items 16–18), for item 16, 80% strongly agreed and 20% were neutral, showing that nearly all teachers felt their personal mission aligns with the goals of the curriculum. For item 17, 100% agreed, and for item 18, 60% strongly agreed and 40% agreed,

indicating that all teachers were committed to continuous improvement and to developing students' competence and character in accordance with the curriculum's values.

Based on the discussion above, the questionnaire findings indicate that teachers hold highly positive perspectives toward the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in English language learning. The strongest responses appeared in the aspect of belief, behavior, and competency, reflecting teachers' deep understanding and practical application of the curriculum's core principles. Although a few neutral responses were found in the environment, identity, and mission aspects—suggesting minor challenges related to resource availability, professional adjustment, and sustaining long-term commitment—the overall results show that teachers are confident, reflective, and committed practitioners. Their perspectives demonstrate that the *Merdeka* Curriculum has been positively received and effectively integrated into classroom practice, supporting its broader goal of fostering student-centered and character-based education.

C. Semi-Structured Interview

The interview findings provide deeper insights into teachers' lived experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in English language learning. The teachers' responses reflect the six interconnected aspects of Korthagen's Onion Model along with an additional reflection on the challenges they encountered during classroom practice.

In terms of environment, teachers highlighted that school support, resources, and leadership play a crucial role in shaping the quality of curriculum implementation. They expressed appreciation for the availability of basic teaching facilities such as projectors, teachers' handbooks, and access to digital platforms that facilitate lesson delivery. Leadership encouragement and opportunities for professional development, such as workshops and in-house training, were also viewed positively as they helped teachers strengthen their understanding of the curriculum. However, several teachers pointed out the lack of student textbooks and limited access to diverse learning materials, which restricted the implementation of differentiated learning. These constraints occasionally hindered creativity and innovation in lesson planning, especially when teachers had to adapt materials independently without sufficient institutional support.

Regarding behavior, teachers described how they applied student-centered learning through a variety of strategies, including grouping students based on ability levels, using project-based learning (PjBL), and implementing differentiated instruction across content, process, and product dimensions. These practices reflected teachers' efforts to accommodate students' diverse needs and promote active learning. Nevertheless, maintaining consistent participation from all students remained a challenge, particularly for those with lower proficiency or limited confidence. Despite this, teachers consistently emphasized their commitment to creating engaging and participatory learning experiences aligned with the principles of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

In the area of competency, teachers expressed confidence in their professional skills and preparedness to deliver lessons under the *Merdeka* Curriculum framework. They felt capable of adapting teaching materials, applying interactive strategies, and integrating technology effectively into classroom instruction. Many teachers described how they used multimedia presentations, collaborative platforms, and online resources to make learning more dynamic. However, some teachers acknowledged the need for continued professional development to deepen their understanding of differentiated assessment and to sustain innovative teaching methods. This indicates that while teachers demonstrate strong pedagogical competence, they also recognize the importance of lifelong learning to meet evolving curriculum demands.

With regard to belief, teachers conveyed optimistic views about the *Merdeka* Curriculum's potential to enhance students' English learning outcomes. They described how the curriculum encourages creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication—the 4Cs—while promoting student autonomy and comfort in expressing ideas. Teachers agreed that by giving students

freedom to explore topics and engage in interactive tasks, the learning process becomes more meaningful and relevant to real-life contexts. However, they also emphasized that these benefits can only be fully achieved when adequate resources and consistent institutional support are available.

In terms of identity, teachers reflected that the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum has transformed their role from being the central authority in the classroom to becoming facilitators and guides. They viewed themselves as mentors who provide assistance and direction rather than simply transmitting knowledge. This shift encouraged teachers to reflect on their own professional growth and to prioritize student-centered practices. Many teachers described feeling more connected to their students, developing stronger empathy and awareness of individual learning needs. This evolving teacher identity highlights the transformative influence of the *Merdeka* Curriculum on how educators perceive their role in fostering student learning and growth.

The mission dimension revealed that teachers' personal teaching goals align closely with the broader vision of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, particularly its emphasis on holistic education and character formation. Teachers expressed their commitment to promoting freedom in learning while fostering the values embedded in the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5). They shared that classroom activities such as presentations, group projects, and role-plays not only improve students' language proficiency but also nurture collaboration, responsibility, and independence. This alignment between personal mission and curriculum objectives demonstrates that teachers internalize the curriculum's values beyond mere compliance, integrating them into their daily classroom practices.

Despite these positive insights, several challenges emerged. Time management was one of the most frequently mentioned obstacles, as teachers often struggled to balance lesson delivery, group activities, and assessment within limited instructional time. Implementing differentiated learning was also perceived as demanding, particularly in large or mixed-ability classes where providing individualized support was difficult. Additionally, the limited availability of student learning materials and technological infrastructure posed constraints on maximizing the curriculum's flexibility and innovation. These challenges point to the continuing need for institutional backing, resource provision, and targeted training programs to help teachers sustain effective curriculum implementation.

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the interview findings reveal teachers' generally positive perspectives on the *Merdeka* Curriculum. They appreciate its emphasis on student-centered learning, creativity, and character development, and they view themselves as increasingly competent, reflective, and aligned with its goals. However, the findings also underscore that successful implementation requires continuous professional development, adequate learning resources, and strong institutional support. Overall, teachers' reflections illustrate both their professional growth and their ongoing commitment to realizing the *Merdeka* Curriculum's vision of empowering students to learn independently, think critically, and develop holistically.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore teachers' perspectives and challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in English language learning at the junior high school level.

Observation findings show that teachers consistently apply student-centered approaches such as group discussions, projects, and presentations that encourage collaboration and independence. They demonstrate confidence, creativity, and alignment with the curriculum's goals of fostering active and meaningful learning. Questionnaire results reveal that teachers hold positive perspectives toward the curriculum, feeling professionally competent and motivated to design engaging lessons that promote autonomy, character development, and critical thinking. Interview findings also confirm these results, showing that teachers value the curriculum's flexibility and integration of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* values, though they acknowledge the need for more consistent support and professional development.

Despite these positive perspectives, teachers face several challenges. Limited learning resources, time constraints, and varying student readiness often hinder the full implementation of differentiated instruction. The interviews further emphasize the importance of continuous training and institutional support to help teachers manage classroom diversity and sustain effective practices.

In conclusion, teachers demonstrate strong commitment and optimism toward the *Merdeka Curriculum*, viewing it as an opportunity to enhance both student learning and character growth. However, strengthening resource provision, providing ongoing professional development, and ensuring supportive school environments are essential for realizing the curriculum's vision of holistic, student-centered English education.

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