

**ELEMENTARY ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF
MERDEKA CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN INDONESIAN
PRIVATE SCHOOLS: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum reform in Indonesia has led to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasizes learner autonomy, flexibility, and student-centered learning. Teachers play a central role in translating this reform into classroom practice; however, empirical studies capturing teacher voices in elementary English education remain limited. This study explores English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in elementary schools during the 2024/2025 academic year. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, data were collected from eight English teachers in five private elementary schools through a structured questionnaire and supported by semi-structured interviews. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed that teachers expressed predominantly positive perceptions of the curriculum. Specifically, 64% of responses indicated agreement regarding alignment with ministerial regulations, while 63% reflected positive perceptions of English teaching practices under the Merdeka Curriculum. Interview findings further showed that teachers valued the curriculum's flexibility and its support for active and contextualized English learning, although challenges related to curriculum terminology, instructional preparation, and student engagement were also identified. These findings highlight the importance of incorporating teacher perspectives in curriculum reform and underscore the need for continuous professional development to ensure effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary English learning.

Keyword: *Merdeka curriculum, teachers' perceptions, curriculum reform, English learning, elementary education*

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum reform has become a central strategy in improving educational quality and relevance in response to rapid social, technological, and global changes. In Indonesia, one of the most significant recent reforms is the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), officially initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and

Technology under the leadership of Nadiem Makarim. This curriculum emphasizes learner autonomy, flexibility in teaching, and the holistic development of students through the Pancasila Student Profile, which includes faith and morality, global diversity, collaboration, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity (Rahmansyah, 2021).

The Merdeka Curriculum grants teachers greater freedom to design learning experiences that align with students' needs, contexts, and developmental stages. Teachers are positioned not merely as transmitters of knowledge but as facilitators who guide students toward active, meaningful, and independent learning (Daga, 2022). While this approach offers substantial pedagogical opportunities, it also places increased demands on teachers' professional competence, adaptability, and understanding of curriculum principles.

English, as a foreign language in Indonesia, occupies a strategic role in elementary education. Early exposure to English is widely considered beneficial due to children's high capacity for language acquisition during the so-called "golden age" (Uysal & Yavuz, 2015). However, teaching English at the elementary level presents unique challenges, including students' limited linguistic resources, varying motivation levels, and the need for engaging, age-appropriate instructional methods. These challenges become more complex within the framework of a new curriculum that requires active learning, differentiated instruction, and contextualized materials.

Previous studies have examined teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum at various educational levels, such as early childhood education (Rakhmawati, 2022), junior high schools (Fatma & Ratmanida, 2023), and inclusive education settings (Daroini & Prasetyoningsih, 2022). However, empirical research focusing specifically on English teachers at private elementary schools remains scarce. Moreover, existing studies tend to emphasize general curriculum implementation rather than subject-specific practices, particularly in English language teaching.

This gap highlights the need for research that explores how English teachers at the elementary level perceive and implement the Merdeka Curriculum in real classroom contexts. Understanding teachers' perceptions is crucial, as perceptions influence instructional decisions, classroom practices, and ultimately the success of curriculum reform (Sunarni & Karyono, 2023). Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by investigating teachers' perceptions of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English learning at private elementary schools in Kota Solok.

This study aims to examine English teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary schools, with particular attention to both policy alignment and classroom practice. Specifically, the research seeks to analyze teachers' perceptions of the curriculum's implementation in relation to ministerial regulations governing the Merdeka Curriculum, as well as their perceptions of English teaching practices conducted under this curriculum framework. By exploring these two dimensions, the study intends to provide a comprehensive understanding of how English teachers interpret, experience, and enact curriculum reform in elementary English learning contexts.

This study contributes theoretically by enriching the literature on curriculum reform and teacher perceptions in the context of English language teaching at the elementary level. Practically, the findings provide insights for policymakers, school administrators, and teacher educators regarding the support and professional development needed to optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in private elementary schools.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to obtain a comprehensive understanding of English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in private elementary schools. Specifically, an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was adopted, in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative interviews to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component used a descriptive survey approach to identify general trends in teachers' perceptions, while the qualitative component provided in-depth insights into teachers' experiences, challenges, and instructional strategies related to curriculum implementation.

This design was considered appropriate because teachers' perceptions of curriculum reform are multidimensional and cannot be fully captured through numerical data alone. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, the study enhances the depth and credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation.

Population and Sample

The population of the study consisted of English teachers from private elementary schools in Kota Solok that had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum during the 2024/2025 academic year. In educational research, a population refers to the entire group of individuals who share specific characteristics relevant to the purpose of the study and from whom conclusions may be drawn (Creswell, 2014). Due to the limited number of eligible participants, total sampling was employed, resulting in a sample of eight English teachers from five private elementary schools

While the use of total sampling allowed for comprehensive coverage of the available population, the relatively small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings beyond the studied context. Therefore, the results of this study should be interpreted as context-specific and exploratory, providing insights into teachers' perceptions rather than statistically generalizable conclusions. This limitation is addressed in both the methods and limitations sections (Taherdoost, 2016; Sugiyono, 2014).

Furthermore, the use of total sampling strengthens the internal validity of the study by ensuring that the perspectives of all eligible participants are represented (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This approach is commonly applied in descriptive studies that seek to provide an accurate and complete portrayal of a specific educational context rather than to generalize findings to a broader population. Therefore, the sampling strategy adopted in this study was deemed appropriate for examining English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in private elementary schools in Kota Solok.

Research Instruments

Data for this study were collected using two research instruments: a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The use of multiple instruments was intended to obtain comprehensive data on teachers' perceptions and to enhance the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The questionnaire consisted of 24 Likert-scale items designed to measure teachers' perceptions of (1) curriculum procedures in accordance with ministerial regulations and (2) English teaching practices under the Merdeka Curriculum, including instructional planning, student engagement, and classroom implementation. The items were developed based on relevant literature on curriculum implementation and teacher perception studies (Riduwan,

2010; Sugiyono, 2014; Likert, 1932; Boone & Boone, 2012). Prior to data collection, the validity of the research instrument—questionnaire was established through **content** validation by three experts in curriculum studies and English language education to ensure alignment with the research objectives, clarity of wording, and relevance to the elementary school context. Three expert validators with expertise in curriculum studies and English language education were invited to evaluate the questionnaire. The validators assessed each aspect of the instrument in terms of relevance, clarity, and alignment with the research objectives.

To quantify content validity, an assessment percentage (P_v) was calculated for each aspect based on the validators' ratings. The content validity was determined using the following formula:

$$P_v = \frac{\sum X_i}{\sum Y_i} \times 100\%$$

where:

P_v = Assessment percentage

X_i = Value of validity for the i -th aspect

Y_i = Maximum value of validity for the i -th aspect

$\sum X_i$ = The total value of validity for all aspects

$\sum Y_i$ = The total of maximum value of validity for all aspects

The assessment percentages were classified according to predetermined validity criteria adapted from Riduwan (2010), in which an assessment percentage of 80% or higher was considered valid. The results of the content validity analysis indicated that all assessed aspects achieved an assessment percentage of 80%, demonstrating that the instrument met acceptable content validity standards. A summary of the content validity results based on expert judgment is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Content Validity Results based on Expert Judgment

Assessed Aspects ($n = 3$)	Number of Validators	Content Validity Index (P_v)	Criteria
All aspects	3	80%	Valid

Because the validity of the instrument was established through expert judgment using a content validity index, internal consistency reliability coefficients (e.g., Cronbach's alpha) were not calculated. This is acknowledged as a limitation of the study, as reliability was

assessed qualitatively rather than statistically. Future studies are encouraged to examine the instrument's reliability using larger samples to allow for more robust psychometric analysis.

To complement the quantitative data, a semi-structured interview guide comprising nine open-ended questions was employed. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore participants' perspectives in greater depth while maintaining a consistent framework across interviews (Kallio et al., 2016). The interview questions were designed to elicit teachers' experiences, perceived challenges, instructional strategies, and reflections on implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English learning. This qualitative approach enabled participants to clarify and elaborate on their questionnaire responses, thereby providing richer contextual insights.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this study was conducted over a one-week period, from July 24 to July 31, 2024, following approval from the participating schools and informed consent from all participants. Prior to data collection, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. This procedure was implemented to ensure ethical compliance and to encourage honest and accurate responses (Creswell, 2014).

The questionnaire was administered directly to the participating English teachers during scheduled school hours. Participants were provided with clear instructions on how to respond to the questionnaire items and were given approximately 30 minutes to complete the instrument. Allowing sufficient time for completion helped minimize response bias and ensured that participants could reflect carefully on each item (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Completed questionnaires were collected immediately to prevent data loss and to maintain data integrity.

Following the questionnaire administration, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. The interviews aimed to clarify questionnaire responses and to gain deeper insights into teachers' experiences, perceptions, and instructional practices related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Conducting interviews after the survey allowed the researcher to probe specific issues emerging from the quantitative data, thereby enhancing the depth of analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

All interviews were conducted in Indonesian to ensure participants' comfort and to facilitate clear and accurate expression of ideas. Using the participants' first language is widely recommended in qualitative research, as it reduces communication barriers and increases the credibility of the data collected (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Each interview was conducted in a quiet setting within the school environment and lasted approximately 15–25 minutes. With participants' permission, key points from the interviews were recorded in written notes to support subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques with the assistance of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16.0. Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize and describe teachers' perceptions by calculating frequencies, percentages, and mean scores for each questionnaire item. The use of descriptive statistics is appropriate for perception studies, as it allows researchers to systematically identify response trends and overall tendencies within a given population (Creswell, 2014; Gay et al., 2012).

The results of the questionnaire analysis were presented in percentage form to facilitate clear interpretation and comparison across perception categories. These percentages were then classified according to predetermined criteria adapted from Riduwan (2010), which categorize responses into levels ranging from very poor to excellent. This classification framework enabled the researcher to interpret the numerical results meaningfully and to draw conclusions regarding the overall quality of teachers' perceptions toward the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English learning.

Qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves systematically identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview responses were first reviewed repeatedly to achieve data familiarization. Subsequently, meaningful units related to teachers' understanding of the curriculum, perceived challenges, and instructional practices were coded and grouped into broader themes. The themes derived from the interviews were then compared with the quantitative findings to provide contextual explanations and to strengthen the interpretation of the results through triangulation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the findings of the study based on data obtained from the questionnaire and supported by interview results. The quantitative findings describe English teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary English learning, focusing on curriculum procedures, English teaching practices, and overall implementation.

Teachers' Perceptions of Merdeka Curriculum Procedures

The first aspect examined teachers' perceptions of curriculum procedures as regulated by the Ministry of Education. Analysis of the questionnaire responses showed that teachers generally expressed positive perceptions toward the procedural aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum. As presented in Table 1, 64% of responses fell into the "agree" category, which was classified as a *very good* level of perception. This indicates that most teachers perceived the curriculum procedures as clear, applicable, and aligned with official regulations. Neutral and negative responses were relatively limited, suggesting minimal resistance or uncertainty regarding curriculum procedures. Detailed findings can be seen in the following table.

Table 2: Teachers' Perceptions of Merdeka Curriculum Procedures

Response Category	Percentage (%)	Perception Level
Strongly Agree	19%	Very Good
Agree	64%	Very Good
Neutral	29%	Moderate
Disagree	7%	Poor
Strongly Disagree	1%	Very Poor

Note: The highest percentage (64%) falls in the "agree" category, indicating a very good perception of curriculum procedures.

Teachers' Perceptions of English Teaching Practices under the Merdeka Curriculum

The second aspect focused on teachers' perceptions of English teaching practices implemented under the Merdeka Curriculum. The results revealed that teachers largely viewed the curriculum as supportive of effective English instruction. As shown in Table 2, 63% of responses were categorized as "agree," indicating a *very good* perception of classroom teaching practices. This finding suggests that teachers perceived the curriculum as facilitating student-centered learning, active participation, and contextualized English instruction. The

following table show the detailed percentage on Teachers' Perceptions of English Teaching Practices under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 3: Teachers' Perceptions of English Teaching Practices under the Merdeka Curriculum

Response Category	Percentage (%)	Perception Level
Strongly Agree	9%	Very Poor
Agree	63%	Very Good
Neutral	28%	Poor
Disagree	0%	Very Poor
Strongly Disagree	0%	Very Poor

Note: Agreement responses dominated (63%), indicating very good perceptions of English teaching practices.

Teachers' Overall Perceptions of Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

Overall, the findings demonstrate a consistent pattern of positive teacher perceptions across all measured aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation. The dominance of agreement responses across curriculum procedures and teaching practices indicates that English teachers in private elementary schools generally viewed the curriculum as feasible and beneficial for English learning. These results suggest that teachers were able to adapt their instructional practices in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. It is summarized in the following table.

Table 4: Summary of Teachers' Perceptions across Curriculum Aspects

Aspect Evaluated	Agree (%)	Interpretation
Curriculum Procedures	64%	Very Good
English Teaching Practices	63%	Very Good

Table 4 summarizes teachers' perceptions across the main aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation, highlighting consistently high levels of agreement for both curriculum procedures and English teaching practices. To provide a clearer visual comparison of these summarized findings, Figure 1 presents a bar chart illustrating teachers' agreement levels across the two curriculum aspects. The figure complements the tabular data by visually emphasizing the similarity in agreement percentages between curriculum procedures (64%) and English teaching practices (63%), thereby reinforcing the overall pattern of positive teacher perceptions identified in the quantitative analysis.

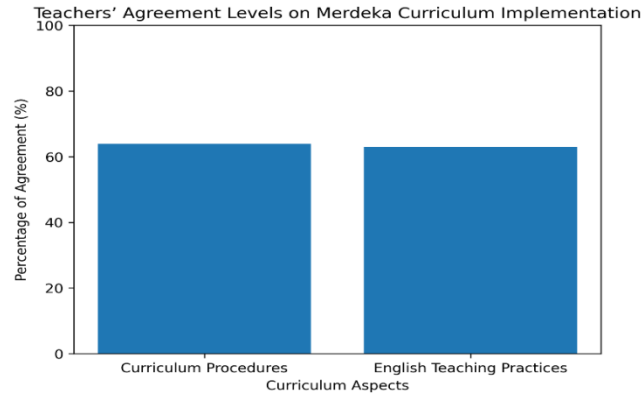


Figure 1: Teachers' Agreement Levels on Merdeka Curriculum Implementation

Figure 1 presents a visual comparison of teachers' agreement levels regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. As shown in the figure, the majority of teachers expressed agreement with curriculum procedures (64%) as well as with English teaching practices under the Merdeka Curriculum (63%). This visual summary complements the tabular data by highlighting the consistently positive perceptions across both curriculum aspects.

The findings indicate that elementary English teachers generally held positive perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In terms of compliance with ministerial regulations, 64% of respondents expressed agreement, which was categorized as a very good perception. This result suggests that most teachers demonstrated a clear understanding of curriculum objectives, learning outcomes, and procedural guidelines mandated by the Merdeka Curriculum.

Similarly, 63% of the respondents reported positive perceptions of English teaching practices under the Merdeka Curriculum framework. This finding indicates that teachers were largely able to align their instructional practices with the curriculum's emphasis on flexibility, student-centered learning, and contextualized instruction. The relatively consistent percentages across curriculum procedures and teaching practices suggest that teachers' conceptual understanding of the curriculum was accompanied by practical classroom implementation.

However, the findings also imply that a portion of teachers did not fully express strong agreement, indicating ongoing challenges in translating curriculum principles into practice. Interview data revealed that these challenges were primarily related to limited teaching resources, time constraints, and the need for clearer instructional guidelines. Despite these

challenges, teachers demonstrated adaptability by modifying learning activities and assessment strategies to suit students' needs, reflecting the core philosophy of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Overall, the results suggest that while teachers' perceptions are predominantly positive, effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English learning requires sustained professional support and contextual adaptation at the school level.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that elementary English teachers in private schools generally perceived the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum positively. Rather than merely reflecting approval of policy directives, these perceptions suggest that teachers were able to meaningfully interpret the curriculum's flexible framework and translate it into classroom practices. This finding supports Fullan's (2007) assertion that successful curriculum reform depends largely on teachers' sense-making processes and professional agency, rather than on policy mandates alone.

The high level of agreement regarding curriculum procedures indicates that teachers perceived the Merdeka Curriculum as conceptually clear and practically feasible. This result aligns with previous studies reporting that teacher autonomy and curricular flexibility contribute to positive responses toward the Merdeka Curriculum (Daroini & Prasetyoningsih, 2022; Sunarni & Karyono, 2023). However, unlike earlier studies that primarily focused on secondary or public school contexts, this study highlights how private elementary school settings may offer structural conditions—such as smaller class sizes and greater institutional flexibility—that facilitate teachers' engagement with curriculum reform.

Teachers' positive perceptions of English teaching practices further suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum supports student-centered and active learning approaches in elementary English classrooms. This finding is consistent with active learning and communicative language teaching frameworks, which emphasize learner engagement, contextualized instruction, and meaningful language use (Ho et al., 2023; Richards, 2017). Importantly, the alignment between curriculum procedures and teaching practices indicates that teachers' conceptual understanding of the curriculum was accompanied by practical implementation, rather than remaining at a theoretical level.

Nevertheless, the presence of neutral responses indicates that curriculum implementation was not entirely unproblematic. Interview data revealed that teachers encountered challenges related to limited instructional resources, varying levels of professional experience, and the need for more structured guidance in lesson planning and assessment. These contextual factors are particularly salient in private elementary schools, where access to professional development and teaching materials may vary across institutions (Suryadarma & Jones, 2013). This finding suggests that positive perceptions alone do not guarantee optimal implementation without adequate institutional support.

From a policy and practice perspective, the findings underscore the importance of sustained professional development to support English teachers in adapting to curriculum reform. While the Merdeka Curriculum provides pedagogical freedom, teachers require ongoing training and practical guidance to effectively design learning activities and assessments aligned with curriculum principles. Policymakers and school administrators should therefore consider targeted professional development programs and resource support, particularly for elementary English teachers in private school contexts. Such efforts are essential to ensure that curriculum flexibility translates into consistent and effective classroom practices.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study contributes to curriculum reform research by providing empirical evidence on elementary English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian private schools and highlights the important role of teacher agency in translating curriculum policy into classroom practice. The findings suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum offers a workable framework for elementary English instruction when teachers are given adequate autonomy, guidance, and support. However, effective implementation requires continuous professional development, especially in curriculum understanding, instructional planning, assessment, and student centered teaching approaches. Policymakers, curriculum developers, and school leaders are encouraged to provide clear guidelines, targeted training, and opportunities for collaboration and resource sharing, while teacher education institutions should integrate Merdeka Curriculum principles into both pre service and in service programs. Future research should involve larger and more diverse samples and apply mixed method approaches to gain

deeper insight into curriculum implementation and its impact on English teaching and learning.

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