

Challenges and Adaptations Pre-Service Efl Teachers' Perceptions on Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum In Teaching English

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges and adaptations encountered by pre-service English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. A qualitative case study approach was used to collect data from 89 final-year english education students at the state islamic university of north Sumatra who had completed teaching internships. The aim of the study was to explore the difficulties faced by these pre-service teachers in applying the new curriculum and the adaptation strategies they used to overcome them. The findings indicate that, although the pre-service teachers demonstrated a strong understanding of the curriculum's principles especially in integrating the Pancasila Student Profile into their teaching they faced significant challenges. These challenges included difficulties in designing lesson plans, implementing student-centered teaching methods, and conducting authentic assessments. Support from schools, including adequate facilities, guidance from senior teachers, and professional development, was crucial in helping them address these challenges. Additionally, adaptation strategies such as attending workshops, collaborating with peers, and independently seeking additional resources proved effective in enhancing their capacity to implement the curriculum. This study emphasizes the importance of ongoing collaboration among educational institutions, schools, and pre-service teachers. Continuous training, mentoring, and resource support are essential to ensure the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and better prepare future educators for curriculum innovations.

Keyword: Merdeka Curriculum; Pre-Service Teachers; EFL Teaching; Curriculum Implementation; Teacher Adaptation

Introduction

Curriculum development is an innovative effort made by the government to address various challenges in the national education system. Existing curricula are often considered less relevant to the demands of the times, making it necessary to evaluate and update them in order to be more effective in meeting the evolving educational needs (Tricahyati and Zaim, 2023). Mathura (2019) emphasized that the quality of human resources plays a pivotal role in a country's progress. Therefore, curriculum development in Indonesia aims to improve the quality of education by fostering knowledge and innovation (Darwisah, 2020). Gradually, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) continues to update the education system by implementing various curricula, such as KBK in 2004, KTSP in 2006, K13 in 2013, and the Merdeka Curriculum in 2023 (Achadiyah and Azmi, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum was introduced as a response to the changing needs of education, offering more flexibility for teachers to design lessons tailored to the characteristics and needs of their students (Aulia, 2021). The primary goal of this curriculum is to cultivate a generation prepared to face future challenges by emphasizing 21st-century competencies such as creativity, critical thinking, and social

skills (Rozandy et al., 2021). Unlike its predecessors, such as the 2013 Curriculum (K13), which focused heavily on High Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) in assessments, the Merdeka Curriculum offers greater freedom to teachers to create simpler and more contextualized learning plans. Previously, K13 emphasized critical thinking through complex assessments, but its implementation faced numerous challenges, including a lack of infrastructure and human resources (Indrawati, 2018).

The Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities for English language teaching (ELT) to be more innovative. Teachers are encouraged to design interactive and student-centered lessons that align with the aspirations of the learners, while still adhering to the core values outlined in the Pancasila Student Profile, which serves as the foundation for character education (Aulia, 2021). This approach marks a significant shift from previous curricula, which were more focused on fulfilling standardized and rigid curricular requirements. Teachers are empowered to be more flexible and responsive to the local context, making the curriculum more adaptable to the needs of both students and educational institutions.

However, despite the opportunities it offers, the Merdeka Curriculum also presents several challenges, particularly regarding the depth of understanding and application, especially among novice and pre-service teachers. Research by Saputra and Yogi (2020) indicates that beginning teachers in Indonesia face multiple challenges in implementing a new curriculum, including pedagogical, professional, social, and personal hurdles. Similarly, Farrell and Thomas (2021) highlight the significant struggles faced by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers, particularly during the sudden shift to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges demand substantial adjustments in teaching methodologies, which are often complicated by a lack of experience and resources.

A key research gap that remains underexplored is the experience of pre-service teachers in adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum during their teacher preparation programs. Further research is needed to delve into the specific challenges these teachers face, including their understanding of the curriculum, their adaptation to new teaching methods, and the support (or lack thereof) they receive from more experienced teachers, who may themselves still be adjusting to the new curriculum. Understanding the perspective of pre-service teachers is crucial in identifying gaps in their preparation and addressing the support mechanisms necessary for successful curriculum implementation. The aim of this study is to explore the challenges and forms of adaptation that pre-service teachers encounter in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, specifically within the context of English language teaching (ELT). The study will address the following research questions:

1. What is the capacity of pre-service teachers to implement the Merdeka Curriculum?
2. What are the teaching conditions in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum?
3. What are the primary challenges faced by pre-service EFL teachers in applying the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching?
4. How do pre-service teachers perceive the adaptations made to overcome these challenges in ELT?

By examining the experiences and challenges of pre-service teachers in this context, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and offer recommendations for improving teacher training and support systems. This research is expected to contribute to the development of educational policies and training programs that will better prepare teachers for the demands of the evolving curriculum.

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at analyzing the challenges and constraints faced by prospective English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The case study focuses on analyzing current events in a real-world context, which includes specific, complex, and functional characteristics. The primary data sources for this study are final-year English education students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra, selected because they have completed teaching internships at schools that implement the Merdeka Curriculum and have applied it in their teaching methods and module development. Participant selection was based on these criteria. The research instrument is a questionnaire distributed via Google Form, consisting of demographic items and 22 statements on a 5-point Likert scale to assess the capacity, teaching conditions, challenges faced, and efforts of prospective teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Data collection is conducted by distributing the questionnaire to participants, and data analysis involves examining responses to the statements within the predetermined categories.

Result and Discussion

Data was collected from questionnaires distributed to 89 final semester students at the State Islamic University of North Sumatra who have completed the teaching internship. The first part of the data collected was related to gender, type of school, and level of education, as shown in Table 1.

Tabel.1 Respondents' demographis information

Total	Gender		Type of school		Level of education		
	Female	Male	Private	Public	Primary	Junior	Senior
89	73	16	49	40	-	46	43

Tabel 2. Pre-Service Teachers' Perception On Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum In Teaching English

Variable	Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total	Mean	variable mean
		1	2	3	4	5			
The capacity of pre-service teachers' in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum	I understand the main objectives of the subjects I teach in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum	1	1	10	52	25	366	4,1	3,7
	I can relate the subject objectives to the Pancasila student profile	0	3	35	42	9	324	3,6	
	I am confident in implementing learning based on the Pancasila student profile	2	1	33	44	9	324	3,6	
Teaching conditions in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum	I have enough time to plan, implement, and evaluate learning.	2	10	30	32	15	315	3,5	3,5
	The facilities provided by the school support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum well.	1	19	25	27	17	307	3,4	

	I received adequate support from the principal and supervising teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum.	1	6	22	37	23	342	3,8
	The training and mentoring related to the Merdeka Curriculum provided by the campus was quite helpful for me in understanding and implementing it.	1	15	27	37	9	305	3,4
	I am able to create teaching materials that are relevant to students' needs and the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum.	1	18	14	49	7	310	3,4
	I feel confident in designing lesson plans that support project-based learning.	2	26	13	35	13	298	3,3
	I can develop learning plans that are responsive to the diverse needs of students (differentiated learning).	1	27	25	28	8	282	3,1
Challenges faced by pre-service teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum	I am able to use interactive teaching methods in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum	3	1	22	48	15	338	3,7
	I feel confident in using technology-based teaching methods according to student needs.	3	17	26	27	16	303	3,4
	I can create an active and enjoyable learning atmosphere according to the Merdeka Curriculum	1	12	20	41	15	324	3,6
	I can adapt teaching activities to students'	1	16	21	38	13	313	3,5

	characteristics and needs.								
	I am able to manage the class well while carrying out project-based or collaborative learning activities.	4	1	25	46	13	330	3,7	
	I understand how to conduct diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments in learning.	0	23	21	36	9	298	3,3	
	I can use the assessment results to improve the quality of student learning.	2	9	24	43	11	319	3,5	
	I am confident in assessing student competencies based on learning outcomes.	3	1	25	44	16	336	3,7	
	Taking part in training or workshops helps me understand the Merdeka Curriculum	0	4	27	44	14	335	3,7	
The efforts' of prospective teachers to implement the Merdeka Curriculum successfully	Discussing with colleagues to overcome my challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.	0	4	19	44	22	351	3,9	
	Searching for references independently helps me in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum	1	2	23	45	18	344	3,8	3,8
	I am confident in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum after making adaptations	2	0	24	49	14	340	3,8	

1. The Capacity of Pre-Service Teachers' In Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum

Based on the research results, the understanding capacity of prospective teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in statements 1 to 3 showed an average score of 3.7 which is in the agreed category. This shows that the individual or group assessed has a good understanding of the concepts, principles, and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This understanding is reflected in the ability to apply project-based learning, understand the implementation of the curriculum, carry out differentiated learning

according to student needs, and integrate the Pancasila student profile into the learning process. According to Sugiyono (2019), an average score above 3.5 reflects good ability and readiness to apply concepts in real situations. With this achievement, it can be concluded that the parties involved are ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum effectively, although continuous reinforcement and evaluation are still needed to maintain the quality of implementation.

2. Teaching Conditions In Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum

The level of satisfaction of prospective teachers with teaching conditions in statements 4 until 7 showed an average score of 3.5, which is in the agree category. According to Robbins and Judge (2017), job satisfaction is influenced by various factors, including the work environment, social support, and professional development opportunities. This reflects that prospective teachers feel quite satisfied with various aspects of teaching, including working hours that are considered quite appropriate, adequate school facilities, and support from the tutors and school in carrying it out. This is in line with the opinion of Wahyuni (2020), who stated that prospective teachers' satisfaction with the teaching environment greatly influences their motivation and performance in the field.

Therefore, it is necessary to improve school facilities and the desire for training from the campus to ensure that prospective teachers can develop optimally. When compared to other countries, the implementation of a new curriculum in Indonesia faces similar challenges to those identified in international studies. Several countries, including Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, and China, have encountered comparable obstacles in curriculum reform. In Trinidad and Tobago, Mathura (2019) found that the primary challenges in curriculum change are teacher readiness and the gap between theoretical training and practical application in the classroom. Educators often struggle to translate the concepts learned during training into effective teaching practices.

This challenge is also evident in Indonesia, where teachers require intensive support and mentoring to effectively implement the principles of the new curriculum. In Turkey, as noted by Oktavia (2022), differences in perception between policymakers and education practitioners often pose barriers to curriculum reform. Government-designed curricula sometimes fail to align with the needs and experiences of teachers in the field, leading to difficulties in policy adoption and execution. A similar phenomenon occurs in Indonesia, where curriculum policies frequently face implementation challenges due to a lack of active involvement from educators in the decision-making process.

Meanwhile, in China, challenges in implementing a new curriculum are largely related to a learning culture that remains heavily test-oriented. Mahmud (2020) found that despite efforts to introduce more communicative teaching methods, the Chinese education system continues to focus on exam-based assessments, making it difficult for teachers and students to adapt to new approaches. Indonesia faces a similar issue, as its curriculum reforms emphasize competency-based learning but struggle against an entrenched evaluation system that still heavily relies on written exams.

This comparison suggests that challenges in implementing a new curriculum are not unique to Indonesia but are common across different educational systems worldwide. Key obstacles such as teacher preparedness, the gap between policy and practice, and deeply rooted educational cultures must be addressed to ensure the effective adoption of curriculum reforms. Therefore, a more comprehensive strategy is needed to support curriculum implementation, including more practical teacher training, better communication between policymakers and practitioners, and a shift in assessment culture to better align with educational goals.

3. Challenges and Adaptations Pre-Service EFL Teachers' Perceptions on Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English Language Teaching

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in English Language Teaching (ELT) by pre-service teachers faces various challenges that need to be overcome so that learning can run effectively. Based on research findings, the main challenges faced by pre-service teachers include difficulties in adapting to a student-centered learning approach, limited instructional resources and digital tools, and difficulties in curriculum flexibility and assessment techniques. One of the biggest challenges is the change from teacher-centered to student-centered learning methods. Many pre-service teachers are still accustomed to traditional teaching models and have difficulty implementing project-based methods and collaborative learning.

Sugiyono (2023) states that this transition requires gradual training and experience to enable teachers to implement more active and interactive learning models. In addition, limited resources, especially in schools in rural areas, further complicate the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. As found by Nugroho and Handayani (2023), inadequate education infrastructure can hinder innovation in teaching methods. The following table summarizes the main challenges faced by pre-service teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum:

Tabel 3. Challenges Faced by Pre-Service Teachers in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Challenges	Description	Supporting Literature
Student-Centered Learning Approach	Difficulty implementing project-based and collaborative learning methods. Many pre-service teachers are still accustomed to teacher-centered methods.	Sugiyono (2023) stated that transitioning from teacher-centered to student-centered learning requires training and gradual experience.
Limited Resources	Schools, especially in rural areas, lack technology and teaching materials that support interactive learning.	Nugroho and Handayani (2023) found that inadequate educational infrastructure remains a major obstacle in curriculum implementation.
Curriculum Flexibility and Assessment	Challenges in designing authentic assessments and applying flexible learning approaches. Many novice teachers still rely on written exams.	Widiarti (2021) stated that project-based and formative assessments require more advanced planning skills.

The challenges faced by prospective teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in statements 8 until 18 have an average score of 3.4, which is in the category of agree to overcome challenges. This indicates that prospective teachers can face obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, such as adjustments to project-based learning, differentiation of learning, prospective teachers' skills in using educational technology, and formative assessments. According to Fullan (2020), the success of curriculum implementation is highly dependent on the teacher's ability to adapt to change and adequate support from the school environment.

Meanwhile, Mulyasa (2021) emphasized the importance of continuous development of teacher competencies so that they are more confident in overcoming various challenges in the field. Therefore, synergy is needed between campuses, schools,

and prospective teachers in providing relevant training and mentoring to ensure the success of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Fullan's (2020) theory of curriculum adaptation emphasizes that successful curriculum implementation is highly dependent on teacher readiness, institutional support, and flexibility in adjusting learning methods to student needs.

In the context of ELT, curriculum adaptation is also influenced by the pedagogical approaches used, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which demand interaction-based learning and authentic tasks. The results show that prospective EFL teachers in Indonesia have a fairly good understanding of Merdeka Curriculum, but still face various challenges in implementation. The main difficulties found in this study include designing project-based learning, implementing interactive methods, as well as authentic assessment in accordance with the principles of the new curriculum.

Research by Karakus (2021) highlights that teachers' perceptions of curriculum change can affect implementation effectiveness. In Indonesia, a study by Tricahyati and Zaim (2023) found that teachers who have a better understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum concept are more adaptable to a more flexible and competency-based approach. In contrast, teachers who have not received intensive training often experience difficulties in aligning learning with student needs. In this study, many prospective teachers stated that support from schools, mentors and seniors was crucial in helping them overcome the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. More intensive training on CLT and TBLT approaches is urgently needed to improve their readiness to teach.

4. The Capacity of Prospective Teachers In Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum

The first finding shows that the individual or group assessed has a good understanding of the capacity of prospective teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum including a deep understanding of the main objectives of the subjects taught, the ability to connect these objectives with the Pancasila Student Profile, and self-confidence in implementing learning based on the values of the Pancasila Student Profile. Our findings are consistent with Mulyasa (2022) who also found that understanding the main objectives of the subject is an important foundation for teachers to be able to design learning that is relevant to the needs of students. The Independent Curriculum requires teachers to be able to design flexible and competency-based learning, so the ability to map learning objectives clearly and concretely is needed.

This finding is also supported by Widiarti (2021) who emphasized that integrating subject objectives with the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, such as cooperation, independence, and global diversity, is the key to building student character. This requires teacher creativity to develop character-strengthening projects through a contextual learning approach. Teachers' confidence in implementing learning based on the Pancasila Student Profile is also an important aspect. Sugiyono (2023) said that prospective teachers need to have a good understanding of curriculum philosophy and pedagogical skills in order to facilitate students to become creative, critical, and integral individuals.

Intensive training and direct experience in implementing innovative learning methods can help increase the confidence of prospective teachers. From these various opinions, it can be concluded that the capacity of prospective teachers in understanding, integrating, and implementing learning based on the Pancasila Student Profile is an essential element for the success of the Merdeka Curriculum. This capacity building can be achieved through ongoing training, mentoring, and adaptive learning practices. The

second finding shows that pre-service teachers' feel quite satisfied with various aspects of the conditions of prospective teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum are greatly influenced by various aspects, including satisfaction with working hours, school facilities, support from the principal, supervising teachers, and training obtained from the campus. These factors play an important role in shaping the readiness and motivation of prospective teachers in implementing the curriculum. Satisfaction with working hours is one of the important factors for the condition of prospective teachers. In line with research conducted by Hidayati (2022), it was found that flexible and less burdensome working hours provide space for teachers to plan learning better, follow professional developments, and innovate in teaching methods. Our research results also show that school facilities also affect comfort and effectiveness in teaching. This is supported by Supriyanto (2021), schools that provide adequate facilities, such as comfortable classrooms, internet access, and adequate learning devices, support the achievement of learning objectives in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Good facilities also increase the motivation of prospective teachers to teach more effectively. Support from the principal is one of the determining factors for the success of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Principals who actively support and provide policies that facilitate teacher professional development will increase the confidence and commitment of prospective teachers. Udi (2023), principals who are open to new ideas and provide time and space for discussion will make it easier for prospective teachers to adopt the new curriculum. Our results also show that supervisors also play a role in providing guidance and practical assistance to prospective teachers.

Nugroho and Handayani (2023) highlighted how supervisors play a role in helping teachers understand the principles of flexibility in learning. Teachers who receive support from supervisors are more confident in adapting learning strategies to the needs of students. In addition, training from the campus is one of the important elements that equip prospective teachers with the knowledge and skills needed to implement the curriculum. Based on Sari's research (2023), comprehensive and direct practice-based training in schools helps prospective teachers better understand the context and application of the Independent Curriculum. Thus, the condition of prospective teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is highly dependent on their satisfaction with these various factors. Improving the quality of training, facilities, and support from related parties is essential to create conditions that support the successful implementation of the curriculum.

5. Challenges Faced By Prospective Teachers In Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum

The third finding shows that prospective teachers can face obstacles and challenges faced by prospective teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum, including designing lesson plans, choosing learning methods, and assessing student learning outcomes. These three aspects require in-depth skills and understanding so that curriculum implementation can run effectively. The first aspect is designing lesson plans. Designing lesson plans in the Independent Curriculum requires teachers to be more flexible and creative, which is a challenge for prospective teachers. This is supported by Hidayati (2022), who states that prospective teachers often find it difficult to design lesson plans covering various aspects of student competency and aligning learning objectives with local characteristics and Pancasila values.

This requires the ability to adapt materials to the needs and interests of students, a skill that prospective teachers have not yet fully mastered. The second aspect requiring in depth skill is teaching methods in the Merdeka Curriculum emphasize learning that is more based on active student involvement, collaborative, and project-based. However,

Sugiyono (2023), many prospective teachers are still accustomed to conventional approaches that are more teacher-centered, so changing mindsets and habits in teaching is a big challenge. The use of active methods such as problem-based learning or inquiry-based learning requires high skills and confidence to be applied effectively in the classroom. The third aspect is assessment of student learning in the Merdeka Curriculum also presents its own challenges.

This curriculum emphasizes authentic assessment that focuses on observing the learning process, not just the end result. Widiarti (2021), prospective teachers often face difficulties in designing holistic assessments, which not only measure students' cognitive abilities, but also affective and psychomotor aspects. Assessments based on projects and portfolios also require skills in compiling clear and objective assessment rubrics. In addition, Rahayu (2022) stated that the lack of in-depth training related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is also a major challenge for prospective teachers. Many prospective teachers feel unprepared to design lesson plans that are in accordance with this curriculum approach, choose the right teaching methods, and compile assessments that are in accordance with the objectives of a more flexible and competency-based curriculum.

6. Adaptation Strategies Used by Pre-Service Teachers to Overcome Challenges

Despite these challenges, pre-service teachers have developed various strategies to address difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. One of the most commonly used approaches is attending training and workshops on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). According to Mulyasa (2022), intensive training significantly improves teachers' readiness to implement new curricula. Additionally, collaborating with senior teachers and supervisors plays a crucial role in helping pre-service teachers understand curriculum implementation more practically.

Teachers who receive guidance from experienced educators adapt more quickly to new teaching methods (Nugroho and Handayani, 2023). Many pre-service teachers also seek independent references through journals, articles, and online sources to enrich their teaching materials and align their methods with Merdeka Curriculum principles (Fitriani, 2022). The following table summarizes the strategies employed by pre-service teachers to overcome these challenges:

Table 4. Adaptation Strategies of Pre-Service Teachers in Overcoming Challenges

Strategy	Implementation in Teaching	Supporting Literature
Training and Workshops	Attending CLT and TBLT training to enhance teaching skills.	Mulyasa (2022) emphasized that training supports mastering innovative teaching methods.
Collaboration with Senior Teachers	Receiving guidance and sharing experiences with experienced teachers.	Nugroho and Handayani (2023) stated that mentoring accelerates novice teachers' adaptation.
Independent Reference Search	Accessing journals, articles, and online materials to improve teaching strategies.	Fitriani (2022) highlighted that technology usage can help enhance interactivity in learning.

Prospective teachers have a very strategic role in the success of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. In statements 19 until 22, the results of the study also showed that the adaptation of prospective teachers in the success of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum had an average score of 3.8, which is in the agree category. This indicates that prospective teachers can adapt well to implementing new approaches that are by the Merdeka Curriculum, such as technology integration in learning and collaboration between students. According to Wahyuni (2020), teachers' ability to adapt in dealing with curriculum changes greatly determines the success of the implementation of innovative and effective learning.

Therefore, prospective teachers need to continue to be allowed to develop their adaptive skills through intensive training and direct experience in the field. The fourth finding shows that the efforts' of prospective teachers to implement the Independent Curriculum successfully is greatly influenced by their efforts to adapt and adjust through various strategies that support the success of the implementation. The main steps taken by prospective teachers is to attend workshops or training organized by educational institutions or the government. According to Mulyasa (2022), workshops provide opportunities for prospective teachers to learn more about the philosophy, principles, and learning strategies in the Independent Curriculum, which allows them to gain practical skills that can be directly applied in the classroom.

This training also helps prospective teachers feel more prepared to face the challenges associated with curriculum change. In addition to attending training, discussing with colleagues is also an effective method in increasing prospective teachers' understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Hidayati (2022) stated that collaboration between teachers is very important in this adaptation process, because discussions can enrich perspectives and provide solutions to problems faced in the field. By sharing experiences and ideas, prospective teachers can find new ways to optimize the implementation of the curriculum based on student needs and local characteristics.

The results of this study also show that prospective teachers are expected to seek references independently to deepen their knowledge of the Independent Curriculum. In line with Sugiyono's research (2023) which explains that searching for references through books, articles, or online sources can help prospective teachers understand various learning and assessment approaches that are in accordance with this curriculum. This independently obtained knowledge will enrich prospective teachers' insights and increase their confidence in designing innovative learning. By combining these three steps attending workshops, discussing with colleagues, and seeking references independently prospective teachers will be better prepared and able to adapt well in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

The adjustments made will increase the likelihood of success in creating more flexible, competency-based learning that prioritizes strengthening student character. In the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT), the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach emphasizes the use of language in real-life contexts to enhance students' communication skills. Meanwhile, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) focuses on task-based learning, allowing students to acquire language understanding through authentic and meaningful activities. However, in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, various challenges arise that need to be addressed to optimize the effectiveness of English language learning.

One of the primary challenges lies in lesson plan design. Many teachers, especially those new to the profession, struggle with designing project-based learning and authentic assessments. Indrawati (2018) highlighted that limited understanding and experience in implementing flexible and project-based learning models often result in difficulties in

achieving the expected learning objectives. Additionally, limited resources and infrastructure pose significant obstacles to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in ELT. A study by Nugroho and Handayani (2023) found that many schools still face challenges in providing adequate facilities, such as language labs, internet access, and technological tools that support project-based learning. The lack of institutional support further complicates teachers' efforts to optimally adapt CLT and TBLT methods.

The use of technology in ELT is also an issue that requires attention. Fitriani (2022) found that many EFL teachers still need more training and guidance to effectively integrate technology into Merdeka Curriculum-based learning. Limited technological proficiency can hinder interactive and innovative learning processes, highlighting the need for continuous training strategies to help teachers maximize technology in supporting CLT and TBLT approaches. Overall, while CLT and TBLT offer relevant approaches to English language teaching, their success within the Merdeka Curriculum largely depends on teacher preparedness, resource availability, and adequate technological support. Therefore, efforts to enhance teacher capacity, provide better facilities, and offer continuous technology training are essential steps in overcoming these challenges.

7. Recommendations for Supporting the Successful Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in ELT

Based on the findings, several recommendations can be made to support the successful implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in English Language Teaching (ELT). Given the challenges encountered, strategic measures are necessary to ensure that this curriculum is effectively implemented and positively impacts English language education in Indonesia. One of the most crucial aspects of curriculum implementation is continuous teacher training. Professional development programs, particularly in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), should be expanded to equip teachers with the necessary skills to apply more communicative and task-based approaches in the classroom. Structured and ongoing training will help educators develop effective teaching strategies and enhance their readiness to adapt to curriculum changes.

In addition, infrastructure support plays a vital role in the successful implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. Schools must provide adequate facilities to support project-based learning. Access to technology, sufficient teaching resources, and flexible classroom spaces will create a more conducive learning environment that encourages active and independent student engagement. Without proper infrastructure, the adoption of innovative teaching methods will face significant obstacles. Furthermore, collaboration with senior teachers and supervisors should be strengthened to ensure that novice teachers receive proper guidance in understanding and implementing the curriculum effectively.

More experienced teachers can act as mentors, helping new educators adapt to more flexible, 21st-century skill-oriented teaching approaches. Through this collaboration, early-career teachers can gain confidence and practical insights to successfully apply Kurikulum Merdeka in their classrooms. Additionally, the success of curriculum implementation depends on regular evaluation and feedback mechanisms. A structured monitoring system should be in place to allow teachers to report challenges they encounter in the teaching process, enabling continuous improvements.

Periodic evaluations not only help identify obstacles but also allow policymakers and school administrators to refine implementation strategies for better effectiveness. By adopting these recommendations, Kurikulum Merdeka can be more effectively integrated

into ELT, leading to improved English language education in Indonesia. The success of its implementation will largely depend on teacher preparedness, infrastructure support, collaboration among educators, and continuous evaluation to ensure that the curriculum truly benefits students and the education system as a whole.

Conclusion

This study shows that EFL pre-service teachers face challenges in implementing the Independent Curriculum, especially in designing learning, selecting project-based methods, and authentic assessments, which are influenced by limited experience, training, and facilities. However, they have a good understanding of the curriculum principles, including the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile, and feel sufficiently supported by the school and mentors. Adaptation through training, discussion, and independent reference searches are the main strategies in overcoming these obstacles. Therefore, ongoing support from various parties is needed to strengthen the competence of pre-service teachers and ensure that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum runs effectively and is oriented towards innovative and character-based learning.

Based on the findings of several recommendations the first is that educational institutions need to improve intensive training for EFL teacher candidates in implementing the independent curriculum, especially in project-based learning, authentic assessments, and technology. The second recommendation is that the school must also support through assistance by senior teachers and adequate facilities. Collaboration between prospective teachers, lecturers, and educational practitioners needs to be strengthened to share experiences and adaptation strategies. The third recommendation is that further research is recommended to become longitudinal to observe the development of the adaptation of prospective teachers comprehensively, compare the effectiveness of strategies in all institutions, and use mixed methods to explore challenges, solutions, and impact of curriculum implementation.

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