CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING KURIKULUM MERDEKA FOR EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract: Indonesia's new *Kurikulum Merdeka*, introduced for post-COVID-19 recovery and educational improvement, presents unique challenges, especially requiring teachers to create teaching materials from scratch. This article explores the challenges the English teachers face in executing *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This study employed a mixed-method approach to examine the challenges faced by English teachers when implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Quantitative data were collected through a Google Form questionnaire distributed to 170 English

teachers in secondary schools across Indonesia. Qualitative insights were obtained through two separate Focus Group Discussions (FGD) sessions, one involving junior high school (SMP) teachers and another with high school (SMA) teachers, in the cities of Malang and Mataram, Indonesia. The current study unveils a myriad of challenges faced by English teachers in connection with the curriculum. These challenges are ascribed to various factors encompassing insufficient teacher training, limited access to support facilities, reduced self-efficacy levels, inadequate information technology skills, students' diverse backgrounds, financial constraints, limited resources, comprehension and implementation obstacles associated with differentiated learning strategies, and issues related to time allocation and management.

INTRODUCTION

The global outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 has undeniably presented numerous challenges to individuals worldwide. The educational domain has seen significant effects, affecting both educators and students (Bhasin et al., 2021). In response to the global pandemic, numerous educational institutions were driven to implement a shift towards online learning as a means of adapting to the surrounding circumstances. However, Aswat et al. (2021) have highlighted that the transition to online learning has resulted in significant deviations from the traditional classroom environment, leading to the emergence of a phenomenon known as learning loss. This phenomenon refers to the adverse effects experienced by students as a consequence of the move to online learning. As posited by Pier et al. (2021), learning loss refers to the phenomenon in which learners' educational progress experiences setbacks in comparison to their prior

academic years. This condition occurs when students encounter impediments or delays in the acquisition of new knowledge or skills (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Engzell et al., 2021).

In the context of Indonesia, the ongoing epidemic has exacerbated the pre-existing challenges faced by the country, particularly in terms of learning loss. Based on research conducted by the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), it was revealed that 70% of children below the age of 15 encountered challenges in the domains of reading and mathematics, thus underscoring the existence of a profound learning crisis (PISA, 2018). This observation suggests that Indonesia is currently experiencing a significant educational challenge. In response to the aforementioned concerns, the Minister of Education and Culture, NadiemMakarim, introduced a curriculum known as *KurikulumDarurat*during episode 15 of *Merdeka Belajar*. This curriculum can be regarded as a streamlined iteration of the existing Kurikulum 2013. Based on the data presented by the Minister, it can be observed that the implementation of *Kurikulum Darurat* resulted in a reduction of learning loss by a duration of one month, whereas the implementation of *Kurikulum* 2013 led to a reduction of learning loss by a duration of six months. The aforementioned outcome catalyzed the Minister to initiate the development of a curriculum known as *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* is distinguished from the K-13 curriculum in that it not only prioritizes the enhancement of students' knowledge but also places significant emphasis on the cultivation of their abilities. According to Saleh (2020), the program known as *Kurikulum Merdeka* aims to explore the potential of both teachers and students in fostering a higher level of learning within the classroom setting. Additionally, Sapitri (2022) states the *Kurikulum Merdeka* program focuses on empowering schools to develop their curriculum according to the specific requirements of their pupils. This approach grants instructors complete autonomy in establishing their own instructional and learning methods.

Furthermore, information available on the official website Kemdikbud.go.id highlights several distinctive features that set *Kurikulum Merdeka* apart from *Kurikulum 2013*. Notably, the lesson plans have been streamlined, incorporating activities aligned with the *Pancasila* student profile. This curriculum also delineates clear learning objectives, with a deliberate focus on fostering students' non-academic development.

In the 15th material presentation, the Minister asserted that *Kurikulum Merdeka* possesses three distinct advantages that are poised to enhance and elevate the quality of Indonesia's education system. The curriculum placed significant emphasis on providing comprehensive and accessible learning materials. Another significant aspect is the utilization of the term *Merdeka* within the context of students, teachers, and the educational institution itself. This curriculum provides students with the opportunity to select a subject that aligns with their interests or talents. Teachers are afforded the autonomy to employ instructional approaches and resources that align with the student's level of attainment.

The educational program known as *Kurikulum Merdeka* grants educational institutions complete autonomy in designing and administering the curriculum in alignment with the unique attributes and needs of the students. According to Saleh (2020), the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* grants educational institutions the autonomy to tailor their curricula to cater to the specific requirements of their respective schools. One notable benefit of incorporating *Kurikulum Merdeka* is the utilization of project-based learning, enabling students to investigate real-world concerns. This approach aligns with one of the key components of this curriculum, namely the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* program (Project Strengthening the Profile of *Pancasila* Students, further referred to as P5). The P5 program provides children with an opportunity to enhance their knowledge, talents, and character development through experiential learning within their surrounding environment.

Therefore, the successful implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has the potential to yield positive outcomes for the education system in Indonesia. According to Ekawati (2016), it is imperative to take into account the role of curriculum development as a determinant of a nation's destiny. According to Johnson (2001), the development of a curriculum is a complex undertaking that necessitates the involvement of all stakeholders throughout the entire process of examining and changing the curriculum. Nevertheless, the pivotal factor in determining the effectiveness of a curriculum is the role played by the teachers. The significance of their role may be substantiated by the fact that teachers possess extensive expertise and a profound understanding of pedagogical methodologies. Furthermore, teachers hold the responsibility of introducing students to the curriculum that was established (Alsubaie, 2016).

The active engagement and effective implementation of this curriculum hold heightened significance, particularly for teachers specializing in English. As previously stated, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* places significant emphasis on fostering the students' skill development in accordance with the *Pancasila* student profile.It is imperative that English educators who have adopted the *Kurikulum Merdeka* also incorporate the moral principles of *Pancasila* into the student's educational endeavors. Upholding the country's high morals and values, preparing people to become global citizens, emulating social justice, and developing 21st-century skills are the main objectives of the *Pancasila* Students Profile (Nugrohadi & Anwar, 2022; Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2022). In addition, it is imperative for English teachers to consider the suitability of instructional materials in relation to the *Capaian Pembelajaran* (Learning Achievement, hereafter referred to as CP), *Tujuan Pembelajaran* (Learning Objectives, hereafter referred to as TP), and *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* (Learning Objectives Flow or syllabus, hereafter referred to as ATP) when delivering their instruction. According to the findings of Zulaiha et al. (2022), it was determined that schools that recently adopted the *Kurikulum Merdeka* noted a significant challenge among instructors in accurately

identifying the Core Principles (CP) provided by the central authority and subsequently translating them into Teaching Plans (TP) and Assessment Tools and Practices (ATP). The *Kurikulum Merdeka* program incorporates a diagnostic assessment to ascertain the students' overall abilities, including their competencies, strengths, and areas for improvement (Supriyadi et al., 2022). As a result, it is imperative for teachers to implement diversified instructional approaches within their classrooms, thereby facilitating the collective comprehension of the English language among students with diverse learning requirements. English teachers are expected to possess both creativity and insight, serving as role models for their students.

The significance of the teacher's role in the curriculum development process has recently been acknowledged, particularly in relation to the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which introduces new regulations that differ dramatically from the previous curriculum. The researchers have concerns about the extent to which teachers are receptive and adequately prepared to face these modifications. This also elicited questions regarding the teacher's viewpoint on the recently implemented curriculum. Tricahyati and Zaim (2023) believe that certain teachers may exhibit opposition towards novel reforms, stemming from either a lack of clarity regarding updated policies or a general inclination towards opposing change.

In recent years, studies related to challenges in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* have been conducted before, each with different types of challenges that the teachers encountered. For instance, difficulties in understanding the curriculum (Aulia, 2021; Pertiwi & Pusparini, 2021; Marlina, 2022, Salim, et al., 2022), low IT skills (Solikhah & Purnomo, 2022; Damayanti & Muhroji, 2022), difficulties in understanding CP, TP, and ATP (Damayanti & Muhroji, 2022; Marlina, 2022; Rindayati, et al., 2022; Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023, Zulaiha et al., 2022) difficulties in making the teaching module (Effendi, et al., 2023, Mustika, 2022), and lack of readiness for the teachers (Correos & Huelma, 2022; Nurzen, 2022; Solikhah & Purnomo, 2022; Yuhastina, et al., 2020; Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023).

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no study has been conducted to specifically identify the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The implementation of this curriculum can be characterized as relatively novel for the majority of teachers. In light of this emerging phenomenon and in light of the requirements imposed by the new curriculum, researchers' express apprehension regarding potential challenges that English teachers may face when attempting to implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

The present study focuses on elucidating the various challenges encountered by English teachers in the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Specifically, the research question that guides this investigation is as follows: "What are the challenges that English teachers face in the process of implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*?" The objective of this study is to improve the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* by identifying the challenges associated with its execution. Furthermore, it is anticipated that the findings of this research will make a valuable contribution towards enhancing the educational standards in Indonesia, thereby highlighting the significance of undertaking this study.

METHOD

To comprehensively investigate the challenges encountered by English teachers during the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, this research employed a mixed-method approach, which combines quantitative and qualitative methodologies in a unified framework (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). The study collected quantitative data through a questionnaire distributed via Google Forms. Qualitative data was gathered through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to facilitate in-depth discussions on the specific challenges faced by teachers in the execution of this curriculum within their respective school settings.

Following the recommended sequential explanatory method proposed by Creswell and Tashakkori (2007), the researchers employed the following steps. Initially, the researchers developed a questionnaire utilizing a four-point Likert scale format, drawing

inspiration from prior scholarly investigations. Subsequently, focus group discussions (FGDs) were undertaken to complement the data findings gathered from the questionnaires completed by the teachers. In light of this, the inquiries posed during the focus group discussion (FGD) were predominantly based on the information obtained from the questionnaires.

The distribution of the questionnaire was conducted among English teachers in secondary schools in Indonesia who have implemented *Kurikulum Merdeka*, with the assistance of the Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia (TEFLIN) network and the teacher support groups (MGMPs). The questionnaire was administered during the period of June to August 2023 and subsequently concluded. It aimed to gather data from a sample of 170 participants, specifically English teachers employed in secondary schools. The questionnaire was part of the bigger study on teachers' self-efficacy in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The teachers were asked to choose between the options yes, unaware, no, and uncertain based on the following questions whether they are having difficulties in understanding *Kurikulum Merdeka,* whether they have insufficient IT proficiency, whether they have difficulties in translating CP, TP, and ATP, whether they have difficulties in creating *Modul Ajar,* and whether they agree with the fact that the government's lack in terms of support resulted in unprepared teachers for the transition. The teachers were also given the chance to add their challenges in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* through an open-ended question. Subsequently, the participants were selected in random order to be extended an invitation to partake in the focus group discussion (FGD) segment of the study. The study involved a sample of 59 participants who were English teachers from both junior high schools (SMP) and high schools (SMA).

The FGD sessions were organized into two separate groups: one comprised of both SMP and SMA teachers in Malang, with 27 participants, and the other consisting of teachers from West Nusa Tenggara, with 32 participants. Both regions were chosen based on the

number of teachers who responded to the questionnaire which indicated the majority of them were from Malang and West Nusa Tenggara. Each group engaged in one hour-long discussion, sharing their comprehensive experiences with the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* within their respective schools. The FGDs also collected data from English teachers in Mataram. The questions posed during these sessions aimed to prompt teachers to openly discuss the challenges they encountered while implementing this new curriculum in their educational institutions.

The analysis of the results from both sets of data was conducted using different methodologies. Quantitative analysis was employed to examine the questionnaire data, whereas thematic analysis was utilized to explore the qualitative data gathered from the focus group discussion (FGD) sessions.

FINDINGS

This section presents an in-depth discussion of the prevalent difficulties faced by English teachers during the implementation of the curriculum. The resulting discussion is organized into six distinct categories, offering a more complex examination of the subject matter. The initial challenge pertains to a deficiency in comprehending *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The second challenge revolves around their limited proficiency in information technology (IT). The third challenge is associated with the intricacies of translating CP, TP, and ATP within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework. The third challenge is associated with the intricacies of translating CP, TP, and ATP within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* framework. The fourth challenge pertains to the creation of *Modul Ajar*. The fifth factor contributing to the challenges faced during the transition is the absence of adequate government support, which subsequently results in a lack of preparedness among teachers. In addition to the aforementioned challenges, English teachers face a number of other obstacles, which are outlined towards the conclusion of this section.

Difficulty in Understanding the *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Based on the result of the distributed questionnaire, it is clear that the teachers have mixed responses regarding how well they understand the whole concept of *Kurikulum Merdeka.*
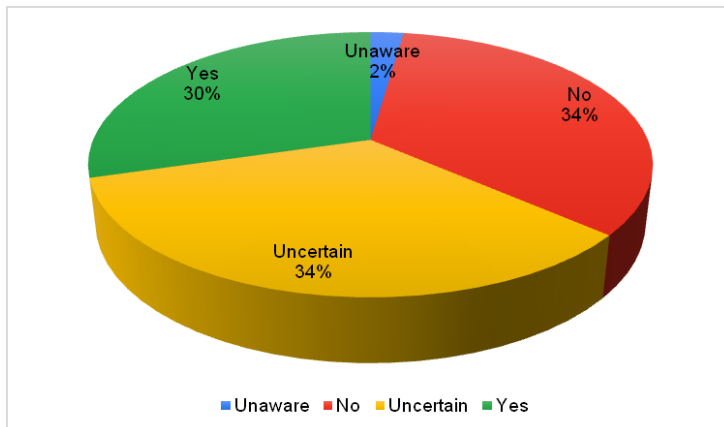

Figure 1. The difficulty in understanding Kurikulum Merdeka

Figure 1 gives a clear illustration of whether or not the teachers are having difficulty understanding*Kurikulum Merdeka.* Respondents showed a distinctive pattern, most of them are equally divided between disagreeing (34%) that they have experienced any difficulties in understanding *Kurikulum Merdeka* and feeling uncertain (34%) if they are undergoing a challenge about the curriculum. The rest of the respondents (30%) agree that they have gone through some difficulties in comprehending the curriculum. Meanwhile, the other (2%) of the respondents are unaware that they are experiencing this circumstance.

The data give a further explanation that most of the teachers do not experience any struggle in grasping the whole idea of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Most of them also are not sure whether they are facing a challenge in understanding the whole curriculum. It can be concluded that in reality, teachers do comprehend what the curriculum is like, what made it different from the previous curriculum, what are the different aspects of the curriculum, and so on. However, it is a possibility that what they might experience is the struggle of

implementing the curriculum or in other words applying it in their teaching practice. Some of the teachers, unfortunately, do not understand the curriculum on its own. This lack of understanding would then possibly hinder them from further executing this curriculum in practice.

A result from the FGD session explains even further the reasons why the teachers are experiencing difficulties in understanding the curriculum. They said that,

> "Well, coincidentally, yesterday I happened to be a mentor for the PPG program. I was like, "Oh, how will I do this?" So, I ended up learning on my own how to handle it." (Excerpt 1a, SMP, MLG)

> "There are things that we don't understand, especially for those in P5, the*ProjekPenguatanProfilPelajar Pancasila.* Coincidentally, I ended up being the coordinator for it, and it's been quite challenging for me, making me a bit confused." (Excerpt 1b, Mataram)

> "But now, you see, we're the ones who come up with the concepts ourselves, create them ourselves. So, we sort of become, you know, like, what does it mean? I mean, because of this freedom" (Excerpt 1c, SMA, MLG)

> "We're asked to design our curriculum, even though we're not really experts in it."(Excerpt 1d, SMA, MLG)

Based on the compiled responses, it can be concluded that teachers have not grasped the whole concept of *Kurikulum Merdeka* and some of them feel that it is too complicated for them to understand. The teacher's confusion over the curriculum had made them compelled to learn by themselves (Excerpt 1a). Another teacher also expressed complaints regarding their confusion about P5, one of the standout aspects of the curriculum (Excerpt 1b). Furthermore, other complaints also mentioned that teachers are struggling to understand how to design their teaching concepts (Excerpt 1c). The teacher referred to in

Excerpt 1d mentioned that they are not capable enough to design their curriculum.

Insufficient IT Proficiency

Data received from the questionnaire show that teachers have different stands regarding their proficiency in IT skills.
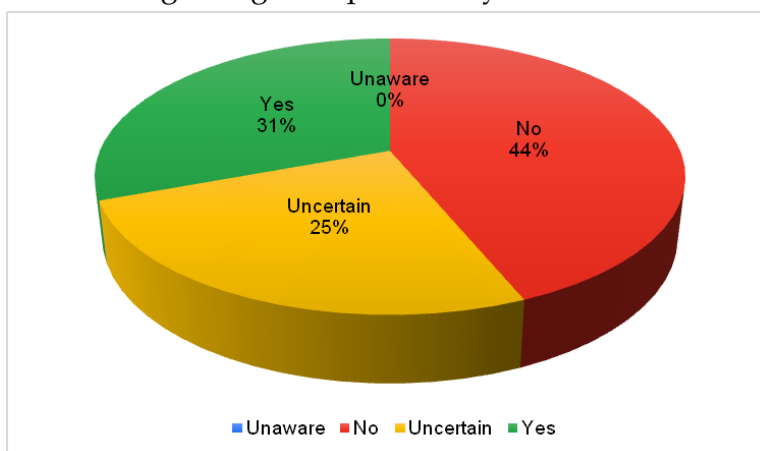

Figure 2. Insufficient IT proficiency

Based on Figure 2, the majority of the respondents (44%) disagree that they have insufficient IT skills. Some of the respondents (31%) though, agree that their IT proficiency is not adequate to fit into the requirements of *Kurikulum Merdeka.* Meanwhile, the rest of the respondents (25%) are uncertain if their IT proficiency qualifies as insufficient to be applied in *Kurikulum Merdeka.* The data shows that most of the teachers who have implemented this curriculum have the right amount of IT skills that are needed. However, those who responded that they do have insufficient IT proficiency need to be paid attention as the number is still considered high.

To give further explanation into the struggles or the teachers' incapability of utilizing IT, the result of the FGD session highlighted several conditions like technical challenges and a lack of familiarity with modern technological tools that hindered their effective integration of IT into the classroom. They noted that,

> "In essence, the signal is feeble, and the majority of its users are from Madura." (Excerpt 2a, SMP, MLG)

> "Well, the most significant challenge we face at our school is the internet network." (Excerpt 2b, SMA, MLG)

> "I observe the development, whether it's about smartphones for these kids, or laptops, or the internet – oh my, I feel like I'm left behind if I don't catch up with all of this." (Excerpt 2c, SMP, MLG)

> "However, for schools, it's just that there will be new challenges when the facilities are already in place, the kids are tech-savvy, but new challenges will arise. In other words, they progress faster than we do." (Excerpt 2d, SMP, MLG)

The findings from the focus group discussion (FGD) indicate that two primary factors posed challenges for teachers in meeting the information technology (IT) requirements of this curriculum. The initial concern pertains to an unreliable network, which was encountered by the majority of educational institutions, resulting in interruptions to the educational experience (Excerpts 2a & 2b). The second challenge pertains to the teachers' inability to keep pace with technologically proficient pupils, resulting in a complex learning environment that hampers their capacity to seamlessly incorporate technology into instructional practices (Excerpts 2c & 2d).

Difficulty in Translating CP, TP, and ATP in *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Based on the result of the questionnaire, the teachers have distinctive responses regardless of whether they have difficulties in translating the CP, TP, and ATP in *Kurikulum Merdeka.*
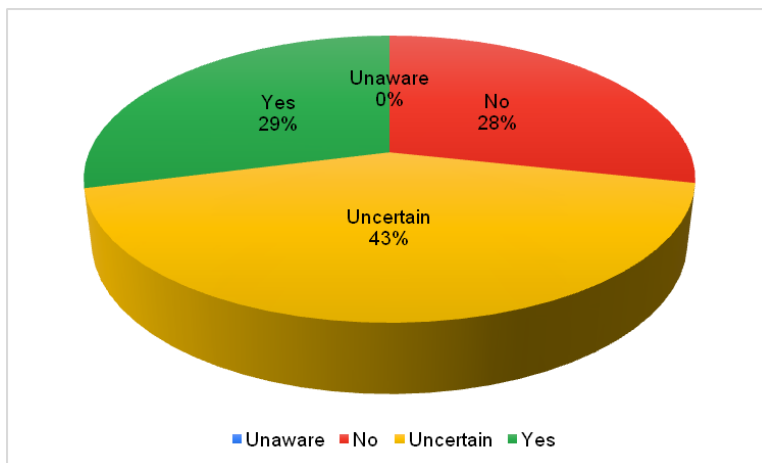
Figure 3. Difficulty in translating CP, TP, and ATP in *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Based on Figure 3, most of the respondents (43%) are uncertain whether they have gone through a challenge in translating CP, TP, and ATP. Meanwhile, the remaining respondents are somewhat split between agreeing (29%) that they face challenges in translating these components and disagreeing (28%) with encountering the same issue.

The high number of responding teachers who express uncertainty about whether they experience any difficulties leads to the conclusion that it is a possibility that they occasionally face a struggle in deciphering CP, TP, and ATP in *Kurikulum Merdeka.* The data provide a more comprehensive answer regarding this specific challenge. They said that,

> "Perhaps it's only their superficial understanding, you know. They grasp the terms like CP and ATP, but when it comes to actually mapping it out, they face some difficulties." (Excerpt 3a, SMP, MLG)

> "In the current *Kurikulum Merdeka*, what's particularly complicated in this vocational high school is that the CP being developed is meant for regular high schools. It's overwhelming for us, ma'am." (Excerpt 3b, Mataram)

> "But the difficulty is the same, translating ATP and CP, which we find extremely challenging because it's different from the previous curriculum." (Excerpt 3c, SMP, MLG)

> "So, that's what sometimes still confuses me, you know. Because CP has many aspects, right? I mean, there are themes for the reading part, and there's a lot for the speaking part too. So, when we divide it for each semester, it becomes confusing. Then, we have to choose which ones are ultimately suitable for this reading text, so that the speaking skill aligns well with it." (Excerpt 3d, SMA, MLG)

Based on the findings of the focus group discussion (FGD), it can be concludedthat teachers continue to encounter difficulties in comprehending and distinguishing the concepts of CP (Competency Points), TP (Teaching Points), and ATP (Assessment Tools and Practices) within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Independent Curriculum) framework. One of the educators expressed their comprehension of the terminology, although they are encountering difficulties in integrating it into their educational process (Excerpt 3a). Another educator expressed their concern about the complexity of implementing the curriculum plan (CP) at their vocational high school, noting that the CP was originally designed for conventional high schools (Excerpt 3b). Furthermore, it was noted by several educators that the translation of ATP and CP posed a significant issue, mostly because of their departure from the prior curriculum (Excerpt 3c). Finally, a further educator highlights the perplexity that arises from the various facets of CP, encompassing a range of reading and speaking elements, as well as the difficulty of effectively aligning these components when organizing them into several semesters (Excerpt 3d).

Difficulty in Creating the *Modul Ajar*

Based on the result of the questionnaire, the data has gathered a variety of responses from teachers on their ability to create the *Modul Ajar* from *Kurikulum Merdeka.*
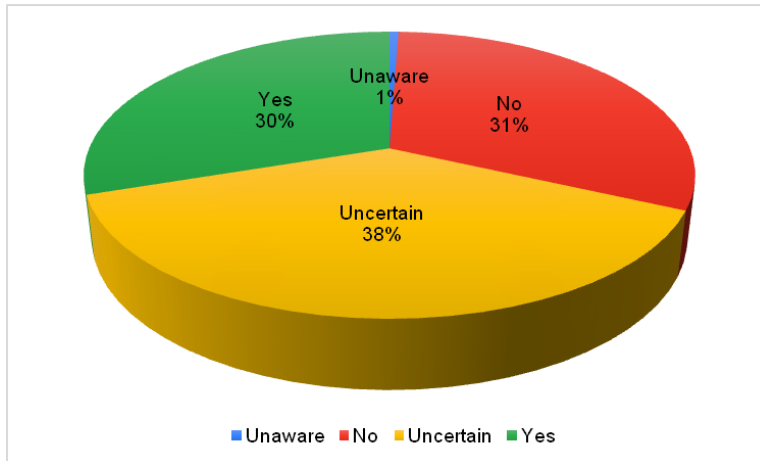
Figure 4. Difficulty in creating the *Modul Ajar*

The illustration from Figure 4 shows that most teachers (38%) feel uncertain if they undergo some difficulties in making the *Modul Ajar.* The rest of the responders are divided almost evenly into agreeing (30%) that they are having difficulties in creating the *Modul Ajar*, while (31%) do not encounter any challenges in producing the *Modul Ajar.* Meanwhile, a small number of teachers (1%) are unaware if they undergo the identical problem. Similar to the previously mentioned challenge, it is a possibility that the majority of teachers who responded with "uncertain" sometimes encounter a problem in creating *Modul Ajar*, but not constantly.

The data from the FGD session explain the elaborated responses from the English teachers about this mentioned issue. They noted that,

> "*Modul Ajar*, then how about the work project, and why does it seem like it's taking away our teaching time?" (Excerpt 4a, Mataram)

> "Then, but there's this one, actually, from what you asked earlier. In giving lessons, writing *Modul Ajar* mostly uses problem-based learning. However, that language can't be done like our syntax. It requires research and so on, so we revert." (Excerpt 4b, SMP, MLG)

"For example, being asked to create *Modul Ajar*, that's still, well, somewhat uncertain." (Excerpt 4c, SMP, MLG)

Based on the findings from the focus group discussion (FGD) discussed earlier, it is evident that the requirement for teachers to develop their own teaching modules, known as *Modul Ajar*, is a complex matter. Certain educators have asserted that this particular request could potentially be perceived as an excessive demand on teachers, particularly given that the majority of them lack any prior familiarity or expertise in this subject matter (Excerpts 4a & 4b). According to some teachers, the utilization of problem-based learning in *Modul Ajar* posed challenges for them, particularly in meeting research requirements and coping with language complexities (Excerpt 4c).

The Lack of Government Support Resulted in Unprepared Teachers for the Transition

Based on the questionnaire results, the teachers' responses emphasize variations that emerge due to the governor's lack of support, leading to their unpreparedness for the upcoming transition.
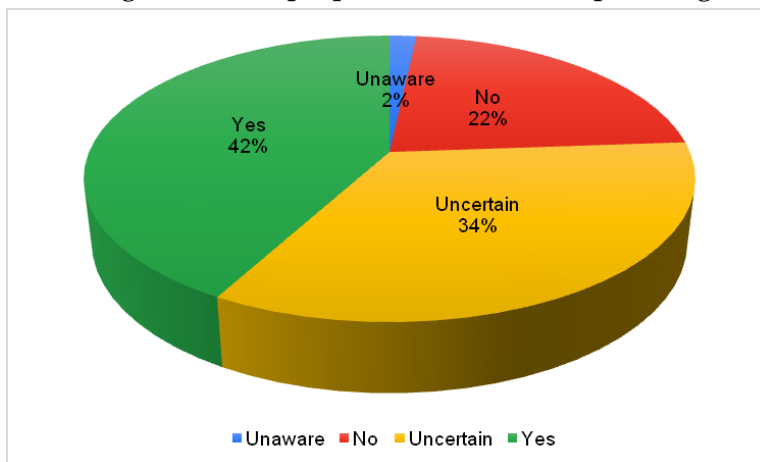

Figure 5. The lack of government support resulted in unprepared teachers for the transition

Figure 5 illustrates that most of the respondents (42%) agree that insufficient support from the government led to teachers feeling unprepared to implement the new curriculum. The other respondents (34%) feel uncertain that the government's lack of support is the cause of teachers' unreadiness. The rest of the respondents (22%) disagree about the same issue, while a small number of respondents (2%) are unaware of that statement.

The conclusion can be drawn from the data result that most of the teachers agree that the government did not give enough supply of knowledge to the teachers to prepare them for implementing this new curriculum. Meanwhile, the rest of the teachers are not sure if it is the government's factor that made some teachers not adequate to carry out *Kurikulum Merdeka.* Teachers also have mixed responses about this issue based on the result of the FGD session. They told that,

> "We are not quite capable, not yet able to reflect too deeply, because, to be honest, this is a bit of a confession, Our school supervisor was truly negligent, very negligent throughout the past year. That's right, what's lacking, it's unknown. We just carry on like that." (Excerpt 5a, SMP, MLG)

> "Actually, sometimes we take the material from teachers who are experts in different fields, which might not be feasible. Perhaps we still can't facilitate it for each subject like that. Sometimes it's like, "Oh, how should we do this? When using this syntax, why does it seem a bit forced?" So, that's often the main question asked by the teachers." (Excerpt 5b, SMP, MLG)

> "The socialization exists, but sometimes the explanations haven't fully penetrated yet, it's just the beginning like this, oh yes, like that, but it's not comprehensive, for example, regarding teaching and how the teaching modules are, the socialization is still limited like that." (Excerpt 5c, Mataram)

> "In fact, we are the ones who end up feeling the pressure. We are supposed to keep up with the times, but our level of freedom is limited to some extent. It's sort of like that." (Excerpt 5d, SMA, MLG)

Data from the FGDs show that teachers gave a few factors about what made most teachers feel unprepared for the transition that is coming from the government specifically. One of the teachers complained that their school supervisor seemed inattentive giving the teachers guidance regarding *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Excerpt 5a). Others also expressed that there was a lack of adequate resources coming from the feasibility of adapting materials and uncertainty of the teaching methods as well (Excerpt 5b). A different case happened to one of the teachers who mentioned that the socialization about *Kurikulum Merdeka* that they received was not sufficient to cover the entire curriculum (Excerpt 5c). Lastly, a teacher claimed that the extent of "freedom" which is the whole concept of this curriculum overwhelms the teachers (Excerpt 5d).

The Other Challenges of Implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*

In addition to the aforementioned five challenges, the questionnaire provided an opportunity for teachers to express additional difficulties they encountered when implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* through an open-ended question. The responses unveiled a supplementary set of challenges confronting teachers within this curriculum. These challenges can be further categorized into four distinct domains, such as difficulties arising from students' diverse backgrounds and financial limitations, obstacles due to insufficient facilities or resources, challenges related to understanding and implementing differentiated learning strategies, and issues concerning time allocation and management.

Students' Background and Financial Constraints

Teachers have additional challenges when utilizing this curriculum, particularly in relation to the student's perspective, which poses obstacles to its effective implementation. They said that,

> "Some of the students that lack support come from their family and their financial problems."

> "Economic limitations within families and the student's background knowledge in rural areas."
> "Students haven't fully understood their personal responsibilities and obligations regarding independence in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*."
> "Sometimes it's difficult to prepare students' readiness because of their different background problems."

Based on the analysis of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, it is evident that students' various backgrounds, lack of family support, and financial challenges within their families may have an impact on the effective implementation of the curriculum. Students may originate from an educational context characterized by restricted resources and limited exposure, resulting in challenges while attempting to comprehend complex matters. Conversely, the financial circumstances of their family may impose some constraints on the educational achievements that students can attain. In rural areas, there exist disadvantages in terms of educational access when compared to students residing in urban areas.

Insufficient Facility or Resources

Similar to the previously discussed challenge, this issue is not a reflection of the teacher's competence. Instead, it is the inadequacy of support facilities and resources that obstruct teachers in the execution of the curriculum. They noted that,

> "The limited availability of printed teaching materials at school, especially for English, makes this Independent Learning Model a bit difficult."
> "Yes, the lack of learning resources/books to support learning."
> "Lack of LCD facilities in classrooms and WiFi for students."
> "Another challenge is that teachers have to find many sources of learning."

According to the responses provided by teachers in relation to the open-ended question, it was revealed that a considerable number

of schools continue to face challenges in terms of inadequate support, encompassing both technical resources and educational materials, which hinders their ability to meet the demands imposed by the curriculum. Moreover, the curriculum necessitates teachers to exhibit autonomy in their instructional methods, which presents an additional problem of identifying appropriate sources that align with the content and cater to the students' requirements. The effectiveness of implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* depends upon the careful consideration and balance of several factors. These variables play a significant part in defining the efficacy of the curriculum.

Difficulty in Understanding and Applying Differentiated Learning

Differentiated learning is one of the instructional methodologies that is included in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Concurrently with this strategy, teachers had challenges in comprehending the appropriate methodology for its effective implementation within their classrooms. They stated that,

> "The actual implementation of differentiated learning, especially in English language instruction."
> "My challenge lies within the context of differentiation. So, in delivering my teaching materials for the English subject, I need to ensure personal communication to better understand the interests of the students in the class I'm teaching."
> "Dealing with students having diverse assignments while also recognizing their different learning styles in practice."
> "The challenge of implementing differentiated instruction in the classroom according to the content of the Independent Curriculum, which caters to students' learning needs. In high school with a large number of classes, it presents challenges and difficulties to execute differentiated teaching due to the numerous classes and students, demanding teachers to work hard and manage their time to facilitate students effectively."

The results indicate that implementing the differentiated learning technique poses challenges for teachers, as they must carefully

examine these issues. Firstly, the students exhibit diverse interests in their preferred areas of study. Furthermore, it is important to note that the pupils exhibit varying preferences in terms of their learning styles. Moreover, the presence of a significant number of students in a large classroom setting poses challenges in effectively addressing their individual requirements continuously. Given the role of the teacher as a facilitator in implementing differentiated instruction, many teachers perceive the task of adapting instructional materials, assignments, and teaching strategies to accommodate diverse student learning preferences as challenging.

Time Allocation and Management

In conclusion, the prevailing response to the inquiry about the challenges teachers encounter in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* concerns time management and allocation. They noted that,

> "The division of teaching hours that only receives 2 teaching hours per week makes it challenging for teachers to maximize learning, considering the various activity elements that need to be covered such as reading, listening, speaking, writing, and others."
> "Teaching hours are excessive if at least 30 hours per week are required. Students find it difficult to commute back home late in the afternoon, especially in the highland area with unpredictable weather."
> "The abundance of administrative tasks consumes teachers' time, impacting their focus on classroom teaching."
> "Insufficient allocation of learning hours."

In summary, time poses a formidable challenge for teachers in implementing the curriculum, regardless of whether it pertains to its management or allocation. Some educators find it challenging due to a lack of instructional hours to cover all essential English components for their students, while others contend with excessively long teaching hours, impacting students' commuting schedules. Regarding time management, many teachers struggle to balance their instructional

responsibilities with administrative tasks, such as developing learning modules and creating customized materials to cater to diverse student needs. These new administrative demands imposed by *Kurikulum Merdeka* consume a significant portion of teachers' time.

DISCUSSION

The present study reveals that English teachers face a diverse array of challenges during the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This finding provides additional evidence that the curriculum under investigation exhibits a greater number of shortcomings than initially anticipated, despite the notable strengths it presents. These shortcomings from *Kurikulum Merdeka* may have arisen from the lack of full cooperation among stakeholders: teachers, the government, and students. To have a meaningful impact, *Kurikulum Merdeka*—an alternative option in the education recovery following the COVID-19 pandemic—requires collaboration from all parties (Ningsih & Adnan, 2023). The aforementioned scenario, wherein educators face difficulties due to the existing curriculum, has been previously observed. In a recent study conducted by Putwain and Embse (2020), it was discovered that a noteworthy correlation exists between the demands imposed by the curriculum and the self-efficacy of teachers. The study revealed that teachers experienced a sense of pressure when they were compelled to adapt to changes in the curriculum. In the context of the present investigation, it is evident that a significant number of English teachers lack the necessary preparedness to effectively adapt to the sudden shift into the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Hence, several challenges emerge.

The results also revealed certain similarities with challenges observed in previous curriculum reforms in Indonesia. In a comparative study of *Kurikulum Merdeka* and *Kurikulum 2013*, Nuraeni et al. (2020) identified that the most significant challenge faced by teachers during the implementation of *Kurikulum 2013* was the difficulty in translating the curriculum into practical application. Interestingly, this is echoed in the challenges encountered by English

teachers in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*, as they found the policy associated with *Kurikulum Merdeka* to be excessively complex to comprehend and subsequently apply in practice. Maodzwa-Tarwiza and Cross (2019) noted that some educators advocate for sticking to tried-and-true teaching strategies rather than simply paying lip service to new regulations. A study by Ningsih and Adnan (2023) aligned with the findings, specifically regarding the teaching module in *Kurikulum Merdeka*, indicating that English pre-service teachers had difficulty understanding new terms, significantly affecting their preparation time.

Early implementation of *Kurikulum 2013* also had indications of unreadiness coming from the teachers and the facility needed to practice (Amin, 2013). As mentioned previously, some schools in rural areas are having difficulties implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* due to the lack of supporting facilities. Other problems mentioned earlier include the lack of resources. Many inputs and resources, including qualified teachers, communicative teaching materials, and financial, infrastructural, and management facilities, are required for English learning to be effective from primary through university levels (Salahuddin, et al., 2013). In *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the teachers are expected to develop the materials by themselves. Most of the English teachers agree that they would need to look through different resources to support their teaching process in class. The curriculum's rigorous requirements overlook the varied backgrounds of teachers nationwide, resulting in adverse consequences for them. The findings correspond with Ningsih and Adnan (2023), who discovered that English pre-service teachers lack resources to be adapted into materials for teaching.

Before *Kurikulum 2013*, the *Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan 2006* (also known as the School-Based Curriculum or KTSP) was implemented and is believed to share certain similarities with the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The initial implementation of KTSP in Indonesia was intended to enhance the country's education system (Bulhayat,

2019). The initiation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*was undertaken as a means to address the educational challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and to enhance the overall educational framework. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* is the Indonesian government's response to the COVID-19 epidemic, which was a catastrophe in education that posed a major risk (Meke, et al., 2021). When considering the problems at hand, it appears that the KTSP curriculum faced a comparable dilemma compared to the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. According to Uran's (2018) research, the Knowledge and Skills Standard Curriculum (KTSP) encountered a challenge concerning implementing an assessment system. Teachers were required to consistently utilize this system, yet they faced difficulties in accurately discerning the individual characteristics of each student. Consequently, fulfilling this demand proved to be challenging for the teachers. Another challenge lies in the expectation for teachers to employ diverse interactive learning approaches, hindered by their inadequate IT skills and time constraints.

Comparing these curriculums in Indonesia together has brought to the conclusion that, teachers' unreadiness to curriculum reform has always been the core problem of why each curriculum has the challenges in the first place. As stated by Lin and Chen (2023), teachers' lack of innovation knowledge has long been a barrier to curriculum implementation in Indonesia. Their unprepared state combined with the high demands from the curriculum, whether it be administrative or having to integrate technology into their teaching, made it difficult for them to be compelled to implement the curriculum successfully. In response to this, the teachers' self-efficacy plays an important role in determining how ready they are for the changes. Teacher self-efficacy is a characteristic that is anticipated or required in educators (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The level of self-efficacy in teachers shapes how ready they are to face changes and unexpected challenges that come before them. Psychological conditions, including teachers' satisfaction, positive attitudes, and passion for their

profession, are crucial factors that contribute to self-efficacy beliefs, impacting teachers' cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes, which in turn influence their task performance (Kasalak & Dağyar, 2020).

CONCLUSION

In summary, the findings of this survey indicate that a significant number of English teachers in many parts of Indonesia express a lack of confidence in their capacity to effectively implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The presence of these uncertainties presents significant challenges for teachers as they navigate the requirements of this new curriculum. The necessity to completely address present challenges is underscored by the experiences gained from previous curriculum implementations in Indonesia. The successful implementation of the curriculum necessitates the active involvement of all parties involved. . The success or failure of a curriculum implementation depends upon the actions of various stakeholders, including teachers, the government, and students. The study highlights the need for further support from many stakeholders to enhance the understanding and competence of English teachers, who serve as the primary subjects of this research, in effectively implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Additional adjustments and policy reforms are necessary in order to address the diverse issues encountered by these teachers. In addition, it is imperative that teachers enhance their self-efficacy levels, as this factor also influences their performance in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Given the previously mentioned requirements, it is plausible that *Kurikulum Merdeka* possesses the potential to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia. Furthermore, this curriculum places a strong emphasis on recognizing and valuing the unique characteristics and individuality of each student, a noteworthy benefit that should not be disregarded.

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