



TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF *KURIKULUM MERDEKA* IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN PEKANBARU

Ega Febiani Suhendar¹, Eliwarti², Dahnilisyah³

^{1, 2, 3} **Universitas Riau, Pekanbaru, Indonesia**

E-mail: ¹ ega.febiani0700@student.unri.ac.id, ² eliwarti@lecturer.unri.ac.id, ³ dahnilisyah@lecturer.unri.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This research explores the perceptions of English teachers regarding the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in junior high schools in Pekanbaru. The study highlights the importance of education in shaping individuals and emphasizes the need for equal access to learning opportunities. The Kurikulum Merdeka, introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, aims to provide flexibility in teaching methods and reduce academic pressure. The findings indicate that teachers generally have a positive perception of the curriculum, with a strong commitment to enhancing their teaching practices. Key areas of focus include teaching practices, learning methods, assessment methods, teacher attitudes, and commitment. The study concludes that teachers play a vital role in the successful implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka and recommends further research to explore its practical application in classrooms.

Keywords: Education, Kurikulum Merdeka, Teachers' Perceptions

PERSEPSI GURU TERHADAP IMPLEMENTASI KURIKULUM MERDEKA DALAM PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA INGGRIS DI SMP NEGERI PEKANBARU

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji persepsi guru bahasa Inggris mengenai implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di sekolah menengah pertama di Pekanbaru. Studi ini menyoroti pentingnya pendidikan dalam membentuk individu dan menekankan perlunya akses yang setara terhadap kesempatan belajar. Kurikulum Merdeka, yang diperkenalkan oleh Kementerian Pendidikan Indonesia, bertujuan untuk memberikan fleksibilitas dalam metode pengajaran dan mengurangi tekanan akademis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa guru umumnya memiliki persepsi positif terhadap kurikulum, dengan komitmen yang kuat untuk meningkatkan praktik pengajaran mereka. Area fokus utama meliputi praktik pengajaran, metode pembelajaran, metode penilaian, sikap guru, dan komitmen. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa guru memainkan peran penting dalam keberhasilan implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dan merekomendasikan penelitian lebih lanjut untuk mengeksplorasi penerapan praktisnya di kelas.

Kata Kunci: Kurikulum Merdeka, Pendidikan, Persepsi Guru, Praktik Pengajaran

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an important part of life and provides various kinds of changes to human life. Education cannot be separated from the learning process carried out between teachers and students. This learning process is part of the education system that determines the success of learning and the pressure on the process and results. In 2019, Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture introduced a major reform through the Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning) policy. This initiative aimed to grant students and teachers the freedom to choose learning methods and reduce academic pressure (Herdiansyah & Kurniati, 2020).



The major component of this policy is the *Kurikulum Merdeka* introduced in response to the learning loss caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. This curriculum emphasizes project-based learning to promote student engagement through hands-on experiences and character development (Kemendikbud, 2022). The goal is to create a joyful learning environment for students, teachers, and even parents, reducing the pressure from academic achievement expectations (Marisa, 2021).

Kurikulum Merdeka allows each educational institution to adapt the curriculum based on its unique local context—whether economic, social, cultural, or infrastructural (Anggreini & Priyojadmiko, 2022). Teachers, therefore, become central agents of change. They are expected to serve as learning leaders, community mobilizers, and mentors to fellow educators (Ningrum & Suryani, 2022). Under this curriculum, teachers are not merely deliverers of content but also facilitators who adapt learning activities to meet the goals of the Pancasila Student Profile (Sibagariang et al., 2021).

The curriculum aims to offer a flexible, student-centered approach that focuses on essential content and provides ample time for students to build both competence and character (Asrifan et al., 2023). In today's globalized world, the curriculum also prepares students to face the digital era by developing their critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity (Kusumo et al., 2022).

In order to implement this curriculum effectively, teachers need to adapt in various aspects; from planning lessons to delivering them and conducting assessments. Collaboration among teachers, students, and parents is essential (Megandarisari, 2021). As Yanti and Fernandes (2021) argue, the success of any curriculum lies in the hands of teachers. If they fail to understand and apply the curriculum properly, its objectives are unlikely to be achieved.

However, many teachers are still in the adjustment phase and face challenges, particularly in mastering digital technology. As digital skills are essential under *Kurikulum Merdeka*, ongoing training and workshops are needed to help teachers integrate technology into teaching effectively (Wijaya Saputra & Hadi, 2022). Teachers must be innovative, flexible, and capable of creating meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences aligned with the new curriculum's goals.

Given to this context, the understanding teachers' perceptions of *Kurikulum Merdeka* is crucial. The teachers' views reflect the readiness and potential challenges in implementing the curriculum effectively. Therefore, this research focuses on exploring how English teachers in junior high schools in Pekanbaru perceive and implement *Kurikulum Merdeka* in their teaching and learning practices. The findings are expected to contribute to efforts aimed at improving the quality of education in Indonesia through informed and supportive curriculum implementation. Therefore, the aim of this research is to determine teachers' perceptions on the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in teaching and learning English at Junior High schools in Pekanbaru

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to (Depdiknas, 2002: 259), perception is defined as a response or understanding of an object that arises from the reception of information through the five senses. This indicates that perception reflects a person's impression or response after they have engaged with and sought to understand various objects through their senses. (Bimo Walgito, 2017:54) elaborates on this concept by stating that perception involves the impression of an object that is acquired through the processes of sensing, organizing, and interpreting the information received by the individual. This process is meaningful and integrated within the individual.

According to (Isthofiyani, et al, 2013), Teacher's perception is a process where somebody selecting, organizing, interpreting input information to create something meaningful picture from this world. This perception will depend not only on stimulation physique but also relationships between



stimulation with surrounding terrain and conditions. According to Bimo Walgito (2017), the indicators of the perception are:

1. Stimulation

Stimulation is beyond what individuals accept from the outside, so that form is decisive in determining acceptance perception. The five senses accept stimulation and give images or impressions in the brain.

2. Understanding

Understanding is the level of defining object perception in the brain. The description will be interpreted through understanding and patterns to form a perception of an incident. From an individual to something object related to understanding what happened from the observation. Understanding that compared to become a reality on the ground so that form the assessment formed subjectively, in other words, perception of character individualistic because of characteristic assessment individual and their differences.

3. Evaluation

Having formed an understanding, there is an evaluation of an individual. The individual will compare their understanding with the criteria or norms they own subjectively. The assessment of each person is different, although the object is the same.

The perception itself happens because of some factors. According to Walgito (2017), there are some conditions, as follows:

- a. Object: An object generates a stimulus that is detected by sensory tools, or receptors. The stimulus can originate from outside sources and is processed by the individual nerves acting as receptors.
- b. Receptors: Receptors function as the means of receiving a stimulus. There are sensory nerves that transmit the information received by the receptors to the brain, which serves as the center of awareness.
- c. Attention: Attention allows us to be aware of or focus on a perception. It is the first step in the process of perception, involving a concentration of mental activity directed toward a specific individual or group of objects.

According to Toha (in Arifin, Fuady & Kuswarno, 2017), these factors can be categorized into two main groups:

- a. Internal Factors. These include our feelings, attitudes, desires or hopes, attention (focus), learning processes, physical condition, mental health, values, needs, interests, and motivation.
- b. External Factors. These encompass aspects such as family background, the information we acquire, our knowledge, the intensity and size of stimuli, resistance, repetition, movement, as well as the novelty or familiarity of objects, and feelings of alienation.

Kurikulum Merdeka is the curriculum launched by the Minister of Education and Culture, Mr. Nadeem Anwar Makarim in February 2022. Merdeka curriculum is a development of Kurikulum Darurat which caused by Covid-19 Pandemic. In 2020, the prototype of *Kurikulum Merdeka* have already implemented to several schools in Makassar, South Sulawesi Province. However, at that time, the government permits schools to select their own curricula, including the 2013 curriculum or emergency curriculum which is now *Kurikulum Merdeka*. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). *Kurikulum Merdeka* was originally referred to as the “Darurat Curriculum”, later changing its name to the Curriculum Prototype, and now become known as *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This curriculum was introduced as an optional addition for educational institutions to support learning recovery from COVID-19 outbreak in 2022.

Kurikulum Merdeka in today's digital world lets students learn not just in school, but also



through all sorts of online resources. This means that Gen Z students are really comfortable with tech, especially smartphones, which can be great for learning. Because of this, teachers need to keep up with the times and guide students to use their phones wisely and responsibly (Munirah, 2015). In order to succeed in the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the teacher acts as Educators, Managers, Administrators, Supervisors, Leaders, Innovators, and Motivators.

According to (Sibagariang et al. 2021), several key expectations are outlined for the role of teachers. First, these teachers are anticipated to be independent in developing their own competencies and capable of motivating their colleagues to innovate, thereby enhancing educational outcomes. Second, they should inspire students to pursue personal development aligned with their individual talents, thereby achieving educational goals consistent with the school's vision. Third, mobilizing teachers are expected to innovate and contribute to school development, which can be accomplished through collaboration with parents and the community to foster an independent mindset and cultivate leadership skills. Fourth, it is essential for mobilizing teachers to possess a strong character, demonstrating emotional maturity and adhering to the ethical standards upheld in society. Lastly, they should effectively manage student-centered learning, which involves establishing positive communication with parents.

Additionally, (Retnaningrum et al., 2023) states that teachers serve as the link to connect the curriculum with the characteristics and needs of their students. In order to implement *Kurikulum Merdeka* effectively, English teachers should prepare various strategies, including speaking techniques, project-based learning, emphasising language skill elements, and a student-focused approach (Ayuningtyas & Ratih, 2023).

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the researcher uses a quantitative design. Data were collected from closed-ended questionnaires with 44 questions. The aim is to provide the most valid and truthful answer to the research questions. The sample of this research was taken from English teachers in several Junior High Schools in Pekanbaru. It was conducted from 30 English teachers from several Junior High Schools in Pekanbaru.

The research instrument was a questionnaire to collect teachers' perceptions. Teachers' response refers to the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* question from the questionnaire that was constructed" (Alfath et al., 2022). The questionnaire was adopted by Laura (2023), Teachers were asked to choose Never (N), Sometimes (S), Often (O), and Always (A). Based on Nemoto (2014), the Likert scale provides a range of responses to the questions or statements given.

Table 1. Blueprint of Questionnaire on Teachers Perceptions of *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Item Number	Aspect	N	S	O	A
1- 18	Teaching Practices				
19-25	Learning Methods				
26-35	Assessment Methods				
36-41	Teacher's Attitude				
42-44	Teacher Commitment.				

As for the data analysis method, this research used The Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS). Questionnaire answers are divided into three point frameworks by Miles & Huberman (1994), consisting of: (a) data collection with closed questionnaires written in Google form; (b) data views, to see the progress of students who have filled out the questionnaire at the data display stage; (c) data condensation, the researcher transcribed the data from the answers obtained



from 30 respondents; (d) data summary, the final step of the research is collecting results or summaries from respondents. The questionnaire was adopted from the Nugriyantoro (1998) with the questionnaire value levels and value categories as follows:

Table 2. Scoring Range of Likert Scale (Nugriyantoro, 1998)

Scale	Intervals (%)	Category
4	85-100	Very good
3	75-84	Good
2	60-74	Enough
1	40-59	Less

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1) Teaching Practices

The first indicator in this data analysis is the teaching practices. This indicator represents how teachers' perceptions of the function of teaching practices in the classroom. The classification can be seen in the following table.

Table 3. Perceptions towards in Teaching Practices

No	Question	N	S	O	A
1	Upgrade knowledge related to Merdeka Curriculum implementation	0 (0%)	7 (23%)	13 (43%)	10 (33%)
2	Ask students to imitate all expressions they hear	1 (3%)	4 (13%)	15 (50%)	10 (33%)
3	Make students speak English at school	0 (0%)	12 (40%)	6 (20%)	12 (40%)
4	Encourage students to ask questions during lessons	2 (7%)	3 (10%)	7 (23%)	18 (60%)
5	Use various teaching methods to engage students	3 (10%)	9 (30%)	6 (20%)	12 (40%)
6	Provide feedback on students' performance	0 (0%)	10 (33%)	12 (40%)	8 (27%)
7	Integrate technology in the classroom	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	4 (13%)	25 (83%)
8	Foster a positive classroom environment	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	11 (37%)	18 (60%)
9	Collaborate with colleagues for professional development	0 (0%)	6 (20%)	8 (27%)	16 (53%)
10	Behave as teacher does	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (17%)	25 (83%)
11	Behave politely to students	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	5 (17%)	24 (80%)
12	Enter class on time when teaching	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (27%)	22 (73%)



13	Finish class on time	1 (3%)	2 (7%)	8 (27%)	19 (63%)
14	Make students learn in line with <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>	0 (0%)	5 (17%)	14 (47%)	11 (37%)
15	Communicate with students well	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (23%)	23 (77%)
16	Create good communication with students' parents	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	10 (33%)	19 (53%)
17	Create good communication with all teachers	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (27%)	22 (73%)
18	Create good communication with all education staff	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	12 (40%)	17 (57%)
Average		1 (1%)	4 (11%)	9 (30%)	17 (58%)

The results of the questionnaire indicate that most respondents consistently apply effective teaching practices in line with the *Merdeka Curriculum*, with 58% choosing "Always" and 30% "Often" on the average. Teachers show strong performance in areas such as technology integration, classroom management, timely attendance, respectful behavior, and communication with students and colleagues. These results suggest a high level of professionalism and commitment among educators. However, some areas, such as upgrading knowledge about the curriculum and using varied teaching methods, require further improvement through ongoing training and collaboration.

2) Learning Methods

The second indicator in this data analysis is the learning methods. This indicator will represent teachers' perceptions regarding the motive behind learning methods. The classification can be seen in the following table.

Table 4. Perceptions of teachers towards learning methods

No	Question	N	S	O	A
1	Relate the English material concept with Dimensions 'Pelajar Pancasila'	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	14 (47%)	13 (43%)
2	Learning English in class does not focus on one skill only	0 (3%)	10 (33%)	14 (47%)	6 (20%)
3	Apply Project Based Learning in the classroom	1 (3%)	9 (30%)	11 (37%)	9 (30%)
4	Making different instructions to different students' abilities in the learning process	1 (4%)	9 (30%)	10 (33%)	10 (33%)
5	Making interesting media (pictures, video, game, quizzes, etc) towards the material	0 (0%)	6 (20%)	12 (40%)	12 (40%)
6	Make students practice their English ability anywhere	1 (3%)	7 (25%)	14 (47%)	7 (25%)
7	Make the progress of learning for each student in the journal	1 (3%)	7 (23%)	12 (34%)	7 (27%)
Average		1	7	12	10



(2%) (24%) (41%) (33%)

Based on Table 4 above, perception of English language teaching methods, with 41% of respondents satisfied with the integration of material with 'Pelajar Pancasila' dimensions. A similar percentage appreciated the focus on multiple skills in learning. Project-Based Learning and tailored instructions for different abilities received mixed feedback, while engaging media and opportunities for practice outside the classroom were well-received. Overall, there is a strong preference for diverse and adaptable teaching approaches that cater to various student needs.

3) Assesment Methods

The third indicator in this data was represent the impact of the assessment methods on teachers' perceptions. The third indicator in this data was represent the impact of the assessment methods on teachers' perceptions. The classification can be seen in the following table.

Table 5. Perceptions of teachers towards assessment methods

No	Question	N	S	O	A
1	Assess students orally	0 (0%)	6 (20%)	15 (50%)	9 (30%)
2	Assess students in writing	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	17 (57%)	11 (40%)
3	Students' attitude is scored	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	7 (23%)	20 (67%)
4	Students' knowledge of English is scored	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	8 (27%)	19 (63%)
5	Students' skill in English is scored	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	10 (33%)	18 (50%)
6	The assessment of student's knowledge is done by giving a test	1 (3%)	2 (7%)	12 (40%)	17 (50%)
7	The assessment of student's skills is done by practicing	0 (0%)	7 (23%)	15 (50%)	8 (27%)
8	The assessment of student's skills is done by giving projects	0 (0%)	11 (37%)	15 (50%)	4 (13%)
9	Making different Formative Assessments for different students' ability	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	15 (50%)	12 (40%)
10	Making different Summative Assessments for different students' ability	1 (3%)	2 (7%)	20 (67%)	7 (23%)
Average		1 (2%)	4 (12%)	13 (45%)	12 (41%)

Based on Table 5 above, a diverse range of opinions regarding various evaluation methods for students. For oral assessments, a significant portion of respondents (50%) rated it as acceptable, while 30% found it satisfactory. In writing assessments received a little higher acceptable rate of 57%, with 40% considering it satisfactory. The scoring of students' attitudes and knowledge of



English showed a strong preference for satisfactory ratings, with 67% and 63% respectively. However, the assessment of students' skills in English revealed a more balanced distribution, with 50% rating it as satisfactory and 33% as acceptable. The use of tests for assessing knowledge was viewed positively by 50% of respondents, while practical assessments for skills were less favored, with only 27% rating them as satisfactory. The feedback on formative and summative assessments highlighted a tendency towards satisfactory ratings, particularly for summative assessments, where 67% found them satisfactory. Overall, the data suggests a preference for written assessments and a need for varied approaches to cater to different student abilities.

4) Teachers' Attitude

The fourth indicator in this data analysis is teacher attitude. This indicator will represent teacher attitude related to teachers' perceptions. The classification can be seen in the following table.

Table 6. Perceptions of the teachers towards teachers' attitudes

No	Question	N	S	O	A
1	How often did you have the freedom to try innovative methods for better learning?	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	14 (47%)	15 (50%)
2	How important having a specialized training and seminar for better teaching styles	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	9 (30%)	19 (63%)
3	How often have you received an appraisal for your work at school?	2 (10%)	0 (0%)	16 (50%)	12 (40%)
4	What are the points considered during your appraisal?	0 (0%)	4 (13%)	12 (40%)	14 (47%)
5	Were you satisfied with the appraisal you were given?	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	13 (43%)	15 (50%)
6	How important do you think the following, according to your opinion?	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	7 (27%)	16 (53%)
Average		0 (0%)	3 (8%)	13 (44%)	14 (48%)

Based on Table 6 above, A significant 48% of respondents felt they had the freedom to try innovative methods for better learning, while 63% emphasized the importance of specialized training and seminars for enhancing teaching styles. Regarding appraisals, 50% reported receiving satisfactory evaluations, although 40% felt neutral about their appraisals. The criteria considered during appraisals were acknowledged by 47% of respondents, indicating a clear understanding of the evaluation process. Overall, the data suggests a strong appreciation for innovation and professional growth, alongside a desire for constructive feedback in the teaching profession.

5) Teachers' Commitment

The fourth indicator in this data analysis is teacher commitment. This indicator will represent teacher commitment related to teachers' perceptions. The classification can be seen in the following table.



Table 7. Perception of the teachers towards teachers' commitment

No	Question	N	S	O	A
1	I am enthusiastic to teach English with <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>	0 (0%)	3 (10%)	21 (70%)	6 (20%)
2	I often read literature relating to <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> to enhance my competency	3 (10%)	1 (3%)	19 (63%)	7 (23%)
3	I do Platform Merdeka Mengajar to enhance my competency	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	14 (47%)	16 (53%)
Average		2 (7%)	0 (1%)	19 (62%)	9 (30%)

Based on Table 7 above, respondents for teaching English using the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, with 70% expressing satisfaction in this regard. Additionally, 63% reported frequently reading literature related to *Kurikulum Merdeka* to improve their competencies, while 53% actively engage with the Platform Merdeka Mengajar for professional development. Overall, the data suggests a positive attitude towards the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and a commitment to enhancing teaching skills through various resources.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore teachers' perceptions of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* used by 30 English teachers at several Junior High School in Pekanbaru. Basically, there are five issues that have been researched; Teaching Practices, Learning Method, Learning Assessment, Teacher's Commitment, and Teacher's Attitude. According to the result, the researcher found that the teachers' perceptions on the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in teaching and learning English at Junior High schools in Pekanbaru shows the positive reaction to *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Two out of five issues that have been researched, the teachers chose "Always" as the response of Teaching practices (78%) and Teachers' attitude (67%), which indicate that teachers have positive reaction to *Kurikulum Merdeka* at always level of satisfaction of the issues that have been asked. On the other hand, for Learning methods (57%), Assessment methods (60%), and Teacher commitment (62%) the result of the research are in "Often" category. It is indicated that the teachers have positive reaction at medium level of satisfaction and there are still hope for the improvement for the future.

Recommendation

According to the study's findings, the researcher suggests the following areas for future study. An experimental study can be done to find out how *Kurikulum Merdeka* is used in the classroom. Even though it is simple to learn about *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s implementation from books or the internet, putting that knowledge to use is challenging. The adage "it is easy to say but difficult to do" is frequently used.

Additional study can use the same research strategy with various Riau participants, such as students, principals, elementary or senior high school English teachers, or even elementary kids. Other researchers may use the same research strategy to study various populations, such as math teachers or other subjects.



Additional studies can use the same research methodology in other provinces. Finally, it is advised that English teachers increase their commitment to using *Kurikulum Merdeka* and enhance their teaching style to specify the fundamentals of *Kurikulum Merdeka* Education.

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