

# Preparedness in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum: Insights from Indonesian EFL Teachers

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## Abstract

This research examines the preparedness of Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instructors to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. It focuses on six indicator areas: adapting to change, teacher's ability to adapt learning strategies to student needs, teacher skills in involving students in active and creative learning, supporting resources, institutional support, and professionalism enhancement. Through a phenomenological case study, four EFL teachers in Indonesia share their insights and experiences in integrating the new curriculum into their teaching. The results reveal that teachers value adaptability and recognize the benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum in addressing individual student needs. They employ diverse teaching methods to promote student engagement and participation. Schools offer sufficient technological and institutional support, including training and resources, to facilitate effective curriculum implementation. Nonetheless, instructors express the importance of ongoing professional growth to tackle challenges and enhance readiness. In summary, the study concludes that Indonesian EFL instructors are ready and receptive to implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, underscoring the significance of continual learning and innovation in education.

## Keywords

Preparedness  
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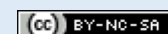
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# Preparedness in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum: Insights from Indonesian EFL Teachers

## Introduction

In a dynamic educational landscape, the adoption of innovative curriculum is essential to enhance students' learning experiences (Catacutan et al., 2023; Miller, 2023; Orr et al., 2020). An example of such a groundbreaking initiative is the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia, aimed at promoting a student-centered and comprehensive approach to education (Voak et al., 2023; Indriani & Holisah, 2022). This progressive curriculum focuses on nurturing critical thinking, creativity, and empowering students to take an active role in shaping their educational paths (Harris & de Bruin, 2017; Zoubaida Subhi Salman, 2023). Students are encouraged to be proactive participants in their learning journey, with an emphasis on exploring their own interests and talents. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has attracted considerable attention, particularly in the realm of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Asrifan et al., 2023; Situmorang, 2023), as it aligns with the imperative to improve English proficiency in the era of globalization and technological advancement. Within this curriculum, English instruction goes beyond mere grammar and vocabulary mastery to focus on enhancing students' verbal and written communication skills (Schmitt, 2019).

In the realm of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the Merdeka Curriculum prioritizes active and student-centered learning. Students are prompted to apply English in authentic scenarios, such as engaging in role-plays, group discussions, and collaborative projects that involves them in genuine and significant contexts. Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum advocates for teachers to transition into facilitators of learning rather than mere providers of information (Kurniawan, 2023; Abidin & Malisa, 2023). They encourage students to take an active role in constructing their own knowledge through exploration, discovery, and reflection. Specifically in the domain of English language education, this entails offering opportunities for students to actively practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English, while also encouraging them to utilize the language outside the classroom. This methodology aims to foster an inclusive learning environment and support students in developing attributes, competencies, and attitudes that resonate with global demands. Furthermore, by adopting a more comprehensive approach, students are anticipated to experience heightened motivation and confidence in learning English, thereby making positive contributions to cross-cultural communication in an increasingly interconnected world (Lou & Noels, 2019; Van de Vijver & Leung, 2021).

Teachers face various difficulties when implementing a new curriculum, such as inadequate training that impedes their grasp of its goals, content, and instructional approaches (Putri et al., 2020; Rasheed et al., 2020; Syarifuddin & Hz, 2023). Furthermore, time constraints pose significant obstacles due to the substantial investment required for planning, resource development, and adjusting teaching strategies. Limited access to updated materials aligned with the new curriculum also hampers effective implementation (Chigbu & Adamu, 2023; Ifarajimi, 2023; Sientop et al., 2019). Resistance to change among educators, the alignment of assessments, and addressing diverse student needs further complicate successful

implementation. Additionally, inadequate administrative support from school authorities can impede the curriculum's successful integration (Margot & Kettler, 2019). In line with that, in applying independent curriculum in the school, teachers face difficulties as they have to teach the Merdeka Curriculum curriculum in grade 7 while grades 8 and 9 still use the previous curriculum, aligning with the school policy. In such a situation, teachers may feel confused, overwhelmed, or reject the curriculum due to its demand for innovation beyond their experience, or students may be unprepared to adopt the new curriculum. Therefore, teachers should have a deep and comprehensive understanding of the concept of the independent curriculum, actively participate in innovation, and self-development to effectively tackle this curriculum, ensuring the desired educational goals are maximally achieved.

Previous studies have investigated the impact of curriculum to EFL teachers, both in global scale (see: Wang & Cheng, 2005; Q. Wang, 2007; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018 ; R. Harris & Graham, 2019), and in Indonesian context (e.g: Riadi, 2019; Pajarwati et al., 2021; Ahmad, 2014; Nur & Madkur, 2014). Those studies investigated various perspectives (include teachers' point of view) related to previous curriculum, which jumped into various conclusions. However, there is still limited evidences on the perspective of EFL teachers in the change of curriculum into Merdeka Curriculum, as this curriculum is relatively new in Indonesian education practice. Understanding the perspectives of EFL teachers on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is essential to ensure its success. Teachers play a crucial role in carrying out the curriculum, and their firsthand experiences and perspectives offer valuable understanding about the obstacles and advantages linked to this innovative method.

The preparedness of English teachers in Indonesia to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is a critical focus, necessitating a thorough examination of the obstacles and perspectives encountered (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023; Yunitasari et al., 2023; Lestari, 2023) by educators to gain a deeper comprehension of the complexities involved in incorporating this new curriculum. In addition to readiness discussions, this study emphasizes the significance of teacher institutions in determining the effectiveness of Merdeka Curriculum implementation. It delves into how educators perceive their roles in this process and the extent to which they feel empowered to adjust their teaching techniques, presenting English teachers' viewpoints that contribute to the ongoing discourse on educational reform in Indonesia. By grasping educators' perspectives, this research aims to provide valuable insights for educational policymakers, curriculum developers, and teachers to improve the successful integration of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia's EFL classrooms.

## Method

This research aims to explore a comprehensive and in-depth perception of English as a Foreign Language teachers' preparedness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. It is qualitative study that utilizes a phenomenological approach to gain a deep understanding of teachers' preparedness in implementing this curriculum (Dare et al., 2018; Palmer, 2023). The research methodology involves exploring teachers' perspectives, experiences, attitudes, and insights through thorough interviews, observations, and content analysis. This research framework enables researchers to delve into various aspects such as personal challenges, teachers' views on the curriculum, and their professional development requirements.

Through this approach, researchers can uncover the complex details surrounding teachers' readiness to adapt to curriculum changes.

To gather data, the researcher utilized a variety of methods, such as conducting in-depth interviews and focused group discussions to directly capture teachers' perspectives on their readiness for the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, direct observations in classrooms will help in observing how teachers put their preparation into practice on a daily basis. Analyzing official documents and teaching materials will offer further insights into the curriculum and teaching strategies employed by the teachers. By combining these approaches, the study aims to obtain a thorough understanding of EFL teachers' preparedness for the Merdeka Curriculum and delve into different aspects related to its implementation in Indonesia.

In order to analyze the data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis related EFL teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum (Independent Curriculum), the researcher utilized a thematic analysis method. The initial stage of the analysis involved transcribing interviews, documenting observations, collecting relevant curriculum materials, and organizing them into different categories according to main themes, the researcher will then analyze the data to find patterns, similarities, and differences (Roller, 2019; Bouncken et al., 2021). This approach helps in gaining a thorough understanding of the obstacles and achievements in implementing the Merdeca Curriculum as perceived by EFL teachers. It also aids in pinpointing areas that need improvement and in creating specific interventions to improve teacher readiness and curriculum implementation efficiency.

**Results**

This research involved the involvement of four Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia. Demographic details of these teachers are outlined below.

Table 1. Particiants Information

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Teaching Level</b>	<b>Teaching Experience</b>	<b>Occupation Status</b>
Teacher 1	37	Female	Junior High School	4-5 years	Private School Teacher
Teacher 2	38	Male	Junior High School	2 years	Private School Teacher & Lecture
Teacher 3	36	Female	Senior High School	11 years	Civil Servant
Teacher 4	30	Female	Junior High School	6 years	Private School Teacher

**Response to Change**

This question seeks to understand how teachers react to alterations in the execution of the Independent Curriculum, encompassing their perspectives, assessments, and emotions towards the modifications. The ability to respond to changes in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a crucial competency for educators to adapt to advancements in the field of education. This entails acknowledging and adapting to potential modifications in the curriculum and teaching methodologies. Teachers must be cognizant of the fluid nature of educational transformations and possess the capacity to effectively communicate and collaborate with their colleagues. Moreover, they should exhibit flexibility and a willingness to engage in continual learning to stay abreast of the latest educational innovations. Consequently, responding to change is not solely about technical proficiencies but also necessitates a resilient mindset and professionalism.

*"The Curriculum Merdeka is great because it creates quality learning specialized to students' needs and the conditions of each educational unit". - Teacher 2*

*The curriculum itself is good, but its implementation requires a lot of processes and learning. -Teacher 3*

*In this Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are given the freedom to determine their own learning objectives and students are more enthusiastic. -Teacher 4*

Teachers agree that being able to adapt to changes in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is an important skill for teachers to adapt to developments in the field of education. They recognize that the Merdeka Curriculum has the advantage of creating learning that suits students' needs and conditions. However, they also realize that implementation requires many processes and intensive learning. In addition, they welcomed the freedom given to teachers in determining the course of learning, which increased student enthusiasm.

### **Teacher's ability to adapt learning strategies to student needs**

This question aims to understand the extent to which teachers are able to adapt their teaching methods to the individual needs of students in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. This highlights the importance of flexibility and a deep understanding of each student to maximize learning effectiveness.

*"The advantages of the Merdeka Curriculum are that students become more active. In the classes I teach, they enjoy learning while playing. So, I usually create strategies for learning while playing". - Teacher 1*

*"In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the classroom, I employ several strategies to enhance its effectiveness. One of them is the Think, Pair, Share (TPS) model, aimed at developing student interaction. Additionally, I utilize the Jigsaw Learning Model, where students are divided into study groups consisting of several members to facilitate understanding of the material. The Project-Based Learning (PBL) method is also integrated to provide students with opportunities to deepen their knowledge through various project activities. By implementing these strategies, I hope to increase student engagement and understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum material".- Teacher 2*

*“They are divided according to their types of independence, such as kinesthetic, linguistic, interpersonal, etc. So the treatment is different when entering the kinesthetic class; there should be plenty of moving games, they should be moving around. While linguistic teaching uses activities such as writing stories, poems to train their writing skills, and so on”. - Teacher 3*

*“Differentiated learning, where children are grouped according to their learning styles. So we have to provide learning media according to the child's learning style. For example, if they are auditory learners, we must think of appropriate learning media. If they are kinesthetic learners, what learning media is suitable”. - Teacher 4*

Four teachers agreed that the use of the Merdeka Curriculum provides an advantage in increasing student engagement in learning. Teachers implement various strategies such as Think, Pair, Share (TPS), Jigsaw Learning Model, and Project Based Learning (PBL) to enhance the effectiveness of learning. In addition, they also pay attention to the students' types of independence in learning by conducting differentiated learning and providing different treatments according to the students' learning styles, such as using various learning media suitable for each student's learning style.

### **Teacher skills in involving students in active and creative learning**

The question aims to understand the teacher's ability to involve students in active and creative learning. This encompasses the teacher's proficiency in devising and delivering lesson content that encourages active participation from students, as well as their skill in nurturing students' creativity as they explore concepts and devise innovative solutions.

*“Merdeka Curriculum mostly involves group activities. For example, in group activities, they break it down, discuss it, and then present the material. So the students are enthusiastic and more active because they are required to be more active than the teacher”. -Teacher 1*

*“According to the guidelines of the Merdeka Curriculum, I allow students to have the freedom and responsibility to organize their own learning, increase involvement in decision-making, solve problems, and develop projects according to their interests and talents. This enhances students' independence, creativity, and potential in their areas of interest”. -Teacher 2*

*“When I teach recount text, report text, or analytical exposition, at the end of each UKBM lesson I create a project. For the recount project, they have to create a text based on what they have learned before. Now, for analytical exposition, I ask them to observe, conduct research, and then write a paper. That becomes the project. Because there is always a project, students are more active, creative, and their critical thinking skills are also enhanced”. - Teacher 3*

Based on the opinions of the three teachers, it is concluded that student involvement in active and creative learning is highly emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum. These teachers implement approaches that allow students to engage in group activities, organize their own learning, and create projects based on their



interests and talents. Consequently, students become more enthusiastic, active, creative, and critical in their learning.

### **Supporting Resources**

The question aims to understand how schools utilize various supportive resources, such as textbooks, teaching aids, technology, and facilities, to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This includes the process of selecting, organizing, and integrating these resources in line with the principles and objectives of the curriculum in question.

*“For the implementation of the independent curriculum technology, it's highly needed. In this school, we use projectors, speakers for listening to songs, learning while singing, and currently TV also provided”. -Teacher 1*

*“To support the implementation of the independent curriculum, especially in terms of facilities and technology, it's crucial. In the school where I teach, it's already well-supported; there's Wi-Fi, language lab, teaching aids such as anatomical models with English instructions, and sometimes teaching through films using projectors. It's quite adequate, but it's sufficient”. -Teacher 2*

*“Due to the demands of the independent curriculum to actively use technology, all classes use projectors, and teachers also use laptops. Essentially, it's about enabling these children to be creative. We provide them with one material, and they learn independently. Teachers also give students access to explore learning materials from the Internet, YouTube, or other educational apps”. -Teacher 3*

From the statements of the 3 teachers, it can be concluded that the supporting resources for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the school are already quite adequate. Technological support such as projectors, speakers, TVs, Wifi, language labs, teaching tools, and laptops are available to support more interactive and independent learning for students. Teachers also provide students with access to explore learning materials through various online sources.

### **Institutional Support**

This question relates to the support provided by educational institutions, such as headmaster or school foundations, in implementing the merdeka curriculum. It includes resources, training, guidance, and policies created to support teachers in effectively implementing the curriculum.

*“To support the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, the school principal has been fully supportive”. -Teacher 2*

*“So far, the school has provided facilities to support the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, and training sessions for the Merdeka curriculum were held a few months ago”. -Teacher 3*

*“The school has provided full facilities and support for the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, including organizing webinars, and even the*

*principal often asks what is lacking, what needs to be added, or what needs to be purchased". -Teacher 4*

The teachers agree that institutional support in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the school is very strong. The principal has provided full support, facilities have been fulfilled, and training and webinars have been conducted to support the implementation of the curriculum. Additionally, the principal actively asks staff about deficiencies that need to be addressed or additions needed to support the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. So that it can strengthen teachers' understanding of the curriculum, and support the development of resources needed to implement.

### **Professionalism Enhancement**

The question related to the improvement of professionalism may aim to understand how teachers are updating their knowledge and skills in accordance with the demands of the independent curriculum, as well as enhancing their evaluation skills to measure student achievement.

*"The rapidly evolving world demands that teachers keep pace and be responsive to changes occurring in both students' and the education sector in general. Schools and teachers must remain dynamic and progressive while preserving the values of civility and school wisdom within the realm of education. The commitment of schools and teachers is now the challenge in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Without the dedication and courage of teachers to continue learning and innovating, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum will not be effective". - Teacher 2*

*"To maximize the achievement of the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers must continuously undergo processes, and their development must be maintained because if success is mentioned, it's still halfway there. The Merdeka Curriculum is only in its first semester, so it can't be considered successful yet; it's still in progress, but the desire is for success". - Teacher 3*

*"In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, if asked if I'm ready, I would answer that I am ready, but I still doubt my readiness because this is only the second year. The first year was still about training, and the second year is still ongoing. So, in my opinion, there is still a need for training, webinars, or seminars to support readiness, and ideally, it should be specific, focusing on all English teachers so that the implementation can be exemplified". - Teacher 4*

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers need to continuously innovate, learn, and enhance their professionalism to address the challenges of educational development. This includes the courage to undergo processes, readiness to implement the curriculum, and willingness to participate in training, webinars, and seminars that support the improvement of teaching quality, especially for English teachers.



## Discussion

The readiness of Indonesian EFL Teachers in implementing the Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia, based on interview results, can be categorized as ready but still needing some development. They respond to changes and are able to adapt well to the curriculum. They also recognize that the Merdeka Curriculum has advantages in creating learning that suits students' individual needs, implementing various strategies, and they also understand the importance of differentiating learning based on student learning styles to increase learning effectiveness. Thus, it can be concluded that Indonesian EFL teachers are ready and responsive in implementing Merdeka Curriculum. The teachers' responses are based on their experience in implementing the Merdeka curriculum.

There are six significant indicators that are the focus of research in assessing teacher readiness. First, Response to change, which measures how prepared teachers are to face and respond to changes that may arise during the implementation process of curriculum. Second, Teacher's ability to adapt learning strategies to student needs. Third, Teacher skills in involving students in active and creative learning, which reflects teachers' ability to engage students actively and creatively in learning. Fourth, Supporting Resources, which refers to the availability and utilization of resources such as textbooks, technology, and teaching materials in the context of the curriculum. Furthermore, Institutional support, which evaluates the support provided by educational institutions for the implementation. And lastly, Professionalism Enhancement, which encompasses teachers' efforts to continually improve their competence in line with the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum. From the indicators, the findings suggest that English teachers are well-prepared to implement the Merdeka curriculum across these aspects. Previous research by (Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023) supports this, showing that English teachers in Padang Junior High Schools are ready to implement the curriculum, displaying competence in lesson planning, high motivation, self-confidence, and commitment. While there is room for improvement, with an average score of 3.20 (Level 3), overall readiness to implement the curriculum is evident.

The teachers agree that responding to changes in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Independent curriculum) is an important skill for teachers to adapt to developments in education. They acknowledge that the Curriculum merdeka has advantages in creating learning that suits the needs and conditions of students (Irawati et al., 2022; Fuadi & Irdalisa, 2021). They also welcome the freedom given to teachers in determining the course of learning, which increases student enthusiasm. However, they also acknowledge that its implementation requires many processes and intensive learning such as the need for ongoing professional development and support to effectively incorporate new approaches into their teaching. By acknowledging both the positives and challenges, educators can strive to maximize the benefits of the Merdeka while addressing any obstacles that may hinder its successful implementation. Previous studies mentioned in Merdeka belajar Curriculum innovation and its application in education units (Irawati et al., 2022). argue that the key factor determining the effectiveness of the curriculum is not the materials or resources provided, but rather the mindset of the teachers. These include having leadership that is receptive to innovation, a work environment built on trust, collaboration, and a culture that empowers teachers to embrace continuous learning and risk-taking. Additionally, fostering a cooperative partnership between educators and parents or students' families is essential.

Four teachers also agreed that the use of the Merdeka Curriculum provides an advantage in increasing student engagement in learning (Zidan & Qamariah, 2023; Fauzan et al., 2023). Teachers implement various strategies such as Think, Pair, Share (TPS), Jigsaw Learning Model, and Project Based Learning (PBL) as applied by teacher 2 to enhance the effectiveness of learning (Linsenmeyer, 2021; Kurjum et al., 2020). In addition, they also pay attention to the students' types of independence in learning by conducting differentiated learning and providing different treatments according to the students' learning styles, such as using various learning media suitable for each student's learning style. In general, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum alongside creative teaching approaches has demonstrated positive outcomes in improving student participation and academic achievements, as supported by empirical evidence and the experiences of teachers.

Based on the opinions of the teachers, it is concluded that student involvement in active and creative learning is highly emphasized in the Merdeka Curriculum (Rohmah et al., 2023; Restu et al., 2022; Maryani, 2023) . These teachers implement approaches that allow students to engage in group activities, organize their own learning, and create projects based on their interests and talents. Consequently, students become more enthusiastic, active, creative, and critical in their learning. in line with (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023b) opinion in his research said, vocational high schools in Sidoarjo have adopted the Merdeka Curriculum for English education, focusing on fostering independence among teachers and students in a student-centered learning environment. This approach involves various practical teaching methods that promote active engagement and collaboration among teachers and students. The curriculum emphasizes fostering creativity and innovative thinking skills that are essential for the future.

From the statements of the 3 teachers (Teacher 1, 2, and 3), it can be concluded that the supporting resources for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the school are already quite adequate. Technological support such as projectors, speakers, TVs, Wifi, language labs, teaching tools, and laptops are available to support more interactive and independent learning for students. Teachers also provide students with access to explore learning materials through various online sources. By utilizing supporting resources, implementing Merdeka Curriculum will be more effective and improve the quality of education at the institution in line with (Firmansyah et al., 2023) research said, utilizing available resources and following the guidelines of the independent learning program can boost the effectiveness of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Miftahul Midad Tarbiyah College of Science, specifically at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah 01 Candipuro in Lumajang Regency. By integrating initiatives such as active literacy and numeracy programs, library trips, technology integration assistance, and other planned activities within the Merdeka Curriculum structure, the institution can enhance the educational standards effectively.

In addition, In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers need to continuously innovate, learn, and enhance their professionalism to address the challenges of educational development (Hadi et al., 2023; Restu et al., 2022; Marlina et al., 2023). To overcome doubts about implementation readiness, as mentioned by teacher 4, it requires the courage to undergo processes and the willingness to participate in training, webinars, and seminars that support the

improvement of teaching quality, especially for English teachers. Teachers also need to be open to feedback and reflection on their teaching practices to continuously improve and adapt to the changing educational landscape. They should actively seek professional development opportunities, collaborate with colleagues, and engage in lifelong learning to stay updated with the latest trends and best practices in language teaching. By embracing a growth mindset and a commitment to excellence, Indonesian EFL teachers can truly be ready to implement the Merdeka curriculum well and effectively (Pratikno et al., 2022; Sudimantara, 2023).

## Conclusion

In summary, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia are ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. The preparedness of English teachers in Indonesia to implement the Merdeka curriculum can be seen from the research results. They are responsive to change, can adapt learning strategies according to student needs, and are good at engaging students in active and creative learning. In addition, they also receive support from resources and institutions that strengthen their readiness. However, continuous efforts are needed to improve professionalism through learning, training and collaboration in order to overcome doubts and ensure effective implementation. By accepting these principles, English teachers in Indonesia can successfully face the challenges of educational development and provide high-quality education in line with the goals of the Merdeka curriculum.

However, this study has limitations in terms of a limited sample size and a focus on the experiences of four EFL teachers in Indonesia. Therefore, the generalization of findings may be limited to a broader population. For future research, it is recommended to involve more participants from various educational institutions and geographical regions in Indonesia. Additionally, future research could expand its scope to explore the long-term impacts of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum on the learning outcomes of EFL students.

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