

**TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF THE *MERDEKA* CURRICULUM  
IMPLEMENTATION IN ENGLISH VOCABULARY TEACHING AT RURAL  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

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### **Abstract**

The Merdeka Curriculum is a new policy in the Indonesian education sector that aims to give teachers and schools the freedom to design learning that suits students' needs and abilities. This research aims to determine teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English vocabulary lessons in rural elementary schools. The research method used is descriptive qualitative research. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with 3 class teachers in each elementary school in a rural area that had implemented the independent curriculum. The results of the research show that teachers have a positive perception of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English vocabulary lessons in rural elementary schools. Teachers feel that the Merdeka Curriculum gives them the freedom to design learning that is more creative and innovative, and better suited to students' needs and abilities. The findings of this research show that the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to improve the quality of English language learning in elementary schools. However, further support is needed from the government and schools to assist teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum effectively.

**Keywords:** Merdeka curriculum, Teachers' perception, English vocabulary teaching

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education stands as a fundamental pillar in nation-building, with quality education serving as the cornerstone for cultivating exceptional human resources capable of

propelling the nation toward a brighter future. Among the factors that determine the quality of education is the curriculum. The curriculum encompasses a set of plans and arrangements that outline the objectives, materials, methods, and learning activities employed to achieve educational goals. The Indonesian government has consistently undertaken curriculum reforms to enhance the quality of education. One of the latest curriculum updates is the Merdeka Curriculum, launched in 2021. Mudhakomala (2022) highlights the purpose of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum as humanization, aiming to foster freedom of expression and deep thinking within the learning process. This emphasis on humanization underscores the curriculum's emphasis on empowering students and fostering a holistic learning experience. A key aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum is its emphasis on flexibility, allowing teachers and schools to tailor learning to the specific needs and contexts of their communities. Teachers play a pivotal role in implementing the curriculum effectively in the classroom. Their perceptions of the curriculum are crucial in determining the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

According to Wati (2023), perception is an individual's understanding or interpretation of something. Perception occurs through the five senses, leading to stimulation of the perceived stimulus and ultimately resulting in judgment. Perceptions can be broadly classified into two categories: positive perceptions and negative perceptions. Sulasmia et al. (2021) define positive perceptions as favorable evaluations of a particular aspect or entity, while negative perceptions represent unfavorable or unpredictable assessments of a specific object. Negative perceptions tend to focus on personal desires, seeking to establish and validate self-worth. Positive perceptions among teachers will encourage them to implement the curriculum with enthusiasm and commitment. The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in every subject, especially English vocabulary. According to Tirtanawati (2021), vocabulary learning is not enough just to convey material and students listen to the material conveyed but learning English vocabulary must involve students in learning. English vocabulary can be learned from various sources including songs, movies, books, videos, and games (Prastiwi & , Meiga, 2021). So that learning English vocabulary must be made varied so that students are interested in learning English vocabulary. This is in line with the concept of an independent curriculum in rural elementary schools.

The Merdeka Curriculum strongly emphasizes English language learning in elementary education. Its implementation extends across all educational levels, encompassing both rural and urban settings. While modern and advanced facilities and resources may facilitate the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in urban schools, rural schools face unique challenges. Rural areas are often characterized by a lack of access to essential services, including healthcare, education, economy, transportation, and internet connectivity. This infrastructure gap can hinder the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in rural schools. Furthermore, regarding English language education, rural areas have limited funding to conduct such instruction within their institutions. According to Febriana et al. (2018), as mentioned above, rural areas pose difficulties in implementing independent curricula due to internet constraints and inadequate learning materials.

In light of these challenges, this research aims to investigate teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly concerning English vocabulary instruction, in rural elementary schools. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to enhancing the quality of English language learning in rural elementary schools through the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

## **Definition of Perception Merdeka Curriculum, Perception , and English Vocabulary Teaching.**

### **Definition of Perception**

According to Robbins in Sugiarto (2017), Perception is a process that each individual undergoes to organize and interpret the sense impressions you have to give meaning to the environment. Many factors can affect perception, ranging from perpetrator perception to perceived objects and situations faced. According to Schiffman and Kanuk in Sumarwan (2018), Perception is defined as the process by which an individual selects organizes, and interprets stimuli into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world. It can be described as "how we see the world around us". According to Sihatul (2020), this perception

refers to a process related to the delivery of messages/information to the human brain.

Based on the above, we can conclude that perception is an action carried out by an individual through brain observation, which is then translated into opinions or sentiments derived from personal experience. Perception can also be defined in general terms as the way an individual perceives, interprets, perceives, focuses on, and reacts to an object acquired through the process of sensing, organizing, and interpreting. Perception is divided into two, namely positive perception and negative perception. According to (Sulasmiati et al., 2021) positive perception is a valuable gift that prepares confidence and strength to capture the world, endure crises, and focus beyond oneself or others. while negative perceptions tend to focus on their desires, trying to obtain and prove their self-worth.

### **Definition of Merdeka Curriculum**

According to (Madhakomala, 2022), the Merdeka curriculum is a learning curriculum that refers to the talent and interest approach. The curriculum launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture for Research and Technology Nadiem Makarim is a form of evaluation of efforts to improve the curriculum in 2013. According to Nurhayati et al (2022), the Merdeka learning policy is an educational approach that emphasizes freedom for teachers and students. The essence of independent learning is to explore the best potential of teachers and students to innovate and improve the quality of learning independently.

Based on the expert's explanation above, it can be concluded that the independent learning curriculum is an effort to build a learning environment that is free from various obstacles, especially psychological pressure, and is free to express themselves and innovate. In terms of its use, instructors with this freedom are more concerned with optimizing learning to meet national educational goals (goal-oriented), while adhering to curricular guidelines.

## **Definition of English Vocabulary Teaching**

According to (Istiqomah, 2023) Understanding and learning vocabulary is crucial for facilitating English learning activities. Without a grasp of vocabulary, mastering a language becomes challenging. According to (Nordlund & Norberg, 2020) Vocabulary is a key factor in successful language acquisition, and the textbook is central in the teaching of English. Mastering vocabulary is a critical element in the process of learning English. This underscores the significance of aligning vocabulary with language skills.

From the various opinions above, it can be concluded that teaching vocabulary is an initial foundation or basis for someone learning English. Learning vocabulary is also crucial, both in school and outside of school. Thus, currently, English has become an icon in the teaching of the Merdeka Curriculum.

## **METHODS**

This research belongs to library research where the technique of collecting data uses documentation of previous research related to writing assessment. The data will be analyzed based on the results of previous research qualitatively. Supporting the explanation of this paper, the writer will show some research articles related to the title. In this case, the writer takes three research articles and the topic is about research in writing skills and also will be described the assessment of writing within.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The curriculum plays a pivotal role in determining the success of the educational process in schools. For teachers, undergoing training on the implementation of newly revised curricula is of paramount importance. Changes and updates to curriculum documents, such as the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum, necessitate a thorough understanding among teachers to ensure the delivery of high-quality instruction. The

Merdeka Curriculum, introduced in the 2022/2023 academic year, serves as an optional curriculum for educational institutions. It builds upon the direction of previous curriculum developments. Observations conducted in schools that have adopted the Merdeka Curriculum reveal its implementation in elementary English education. In practice, teachers design creative and innovative lessons while adhering to textbooks. The Ministry of Education and Culture has provided textbooks specifically for the Merdeka Curriculum, facilitating teachers in adapting English language instruction for their students. These textbooks encompass the material that will be covered in the end-of-school examinations. Therefore, regardless of their creativity in designing lessons, teachers must not overlook or exclude the content provided in the textbooks.

In elementary English education, instruction heavily focuses on vocabulary acquisition. Teachers introduce a variety of everyday vocabulary words during lessons, gradually incorporating English into their interactions with students. When introducing new vocabulary, teachers demonstrate the correct pronunciation and ask students to imitate them. The aim is for students to grasp the meaning of these English words and expand their knowledge of the language.

**Table 1**

No t	Teacher	Pancasila student profile	Learning differentiati on	Technolo gy-based learning	Project p5
1	A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pray before studying</li> <li>• Tolerance</li> <li>• Cooperation</li> </ul>	Differentiati on process	Never mind	Making products (crafts, food, beverages, and objects)

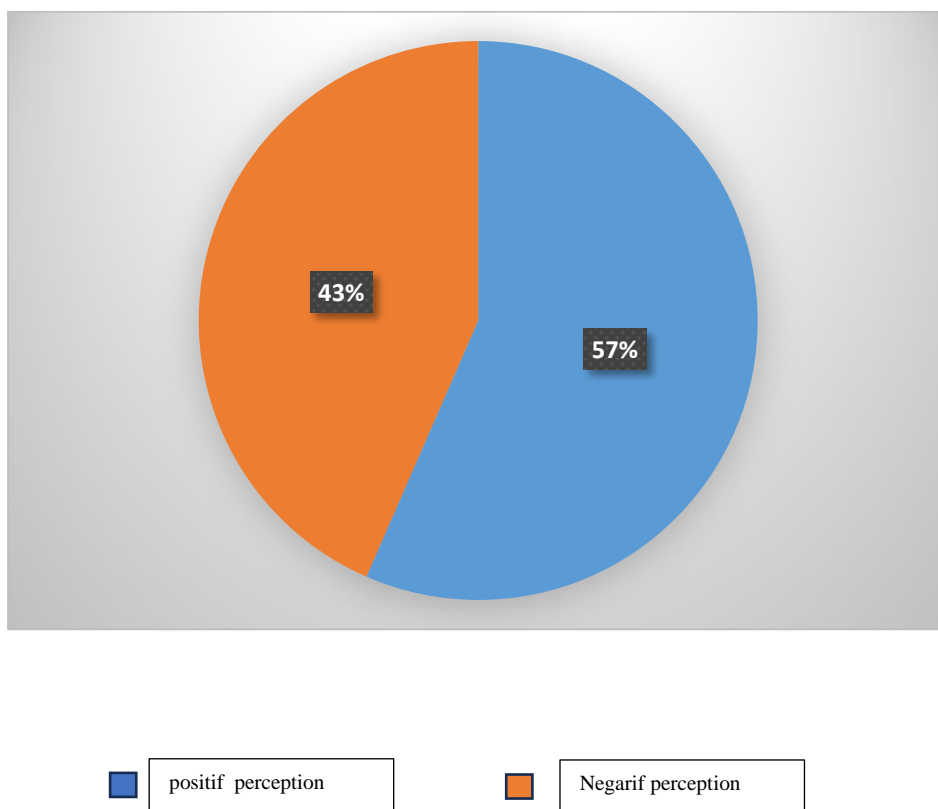
2	B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pray before studying</li> <li>• Helping each other</li> <li>• Cooperation</li> <li>• Creative</li> </ul>	Differentiation process	Learning through videos	Making products (crafts, food, beverages, and objects)
3	C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pray before studying</li> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Creative</li> </ul>	Differentiation process	Learning Games	Making products (crafts, food, beverages, and objects)

Additionally, the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile is integrated into English language instruction. Teachers connect the learning material to the values of Pancasila. Moreover, P5 projects are incorporated, with a majority of teachers adopting an entrepreneurship theme that is implemented weekly. During these projects, students are taught the fundamentals of entrepreneurship, from the production process to the final stage of sales or exhibitions. The materials used often involve repurposed items. Besides tangible products, students also produce food items. Differentiated instruction is evident in these P5 projects, as teachers encourage collaboration and group work, ensuring that slower learners are supported by their peers. This spirit of mutual assistance enables students with lower abilities to gradually catch up with their classmates.

Based on interviews and questionnaires conducted with teachers from various schools, a prevailing positive perception emerged regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers expressed their appreciation for the curriculum's emphasis on English language instruction, which was previously considered an optional subject in

rural elementary schools. This shift from an optional to a mandatory subject was viewed as a positive step, as it addressed the challenges faced by students in learning English at later stages of their education due to a lack of foundational knowledge. Despite the overall positive sentiment, teachers acknowledged certain challenges associated with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. These challenges primarily stemmed from a lack of IT skills and pedagogical expertise in English language instruction, given that many teachers' backgrounds lie in primary education rather than English language specialization.

**Figure 1**



Teachers' perceptions of the curriculum transition were influenced by their prior experiences and knowledge. Having undergone training and seminars on the Merdeka Curriculum, they recognized it as a positive change in the educational landscape. From their experience, they perceived the Merdeka Curriculum as an improvement over previous curricula, particularly in the context of elementary education. The curriculum's emphasis



on elements such as the Pancasila Student Profile and differentiated instruction, while not entirely new concepts, were now more explicitly highlighted and emphasized. The Merdeka Curriculum presents a complex yet promising set of tools for enhancing English language instruction in elementary schools. While teachers face challenges in adapting to the new curriculum, their overall positive perceptions and recognition of its potential benefits indicate a willingness to embrace this change and contribute to its successful implementation. Ongoing support and training for teachers will be crucial in ensuring that the Merdeka Curriculum's positive impact on English language learning is fully realized.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research aims to determine teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in English language learning in rural elementary schools. This research was conducted using qualitative methods, using interviews, observation, and questionnaire techniques. The research results show that in general, teachers have a positive perception of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language learning in rural elementary schools. Teachers assess that the Independent Curriculum provides them with the freedom to design learning that suits local needs and context. Teachers also assess that the Merdeka Curriculum helps them improve the quality of English learning in the classroom. However, this research also found several obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum. These obstacles include a lack of adequate learning resources, a Lack of IT skills, and a lack of teacher knowledge regarding English language learning, especially vocabulary.

Based on the results of this research, it can be concluded that the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to improve the quality of English language learning in rural elementary schools. However, to achieve this potential, several efforts need to be made to overcome the obstacles faced by teachers. Apart from that, this research also recommends that further research be carried out to find out more about the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in improving the quality of English language learning in rural elementary schools.

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