

## CHALLENGES FACED BY EFL TEACHERS IN IMPLEMENTING *KURIKULUM MERDEKA*: A REFLECTION ON DIGITAL ERA TEACHING PRACTICES

Mutia Aulia Aulia

English Education Program  
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education  
[Mutia02aulia@gmail.com](mailto:Mutia02aulia@gmail.com)

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini mengkaji tantangan yang dihadapi oleh guru Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) dalam mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka, kurikulum baru di Indonesia yang menekankan pembelajaran berpusat pada peserta didik dan integrasi teknologi digital. Meskipun kurikulum ini mendorong fleksibilitas dan otonomi guru, banyak guru menghadapi kesulitan dalam menyesuaikan diri dengan perubahan tersebut di tengah era digital. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara dan angket terbuka kepada guru EFL tingkat SMP. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan beberapa permasalahan utama, seperti keterbatasan akses terhadap perangkat digital, kurangnya pelatihan profesional, serta kesulitan dalam menyesuaikan metode pembelajaran konvensional dengan lingkungan belajar berbasis teknologi. Tantangan-tantangan ini berdampak pada efektivitas pembelajaran dan keterlibatan siswa di kelas. Studi ini merekomendasikan perlunya dukungan terstruktur melalui pelatihan literasi digital dan pengembangan sumber belajar yang mudah diakses guna membantu guru EFL menghadapi tuntutan Kurikulum Merdeka secara lebih efektif.*

**Kata kunci:** Guru EFL, Implementasi Kurikulum, Kurikulum Merdeka, Pembelajaran digital, Tantangan Mengajar.

### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges encountered by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, a new Indonesian curriculum that emphasizes student-centered learning and digital integration. While the curriculum promotes autonomy and flexibility, many teachers face obstacles in adapting to these changes within the context of the digital era. Using a qualitative descriptive method, data were collected through interviews and open-ended questionnaires involving junior high school EFL teachers. The findings highlight several key issues, including limited access to digital tools, insufficient professional development, and difficulty adjusting traditional teaching methods to suit technology-based learning environments. These challenges impact classroom effectiveness and student engagement. The study suggests the need for structured support systems, including digital literacy training and the development of accessible teaching resources, to help EFL teachers navigate the demands of Kurikulum Merdeka more effectively.

**Keyword:** Curriculum implementation, digital learning, EFL teachers, Kurikulum Merdeka, teaching challenges.

### INTRODUCTION

The curriculum in education continuously evolves in response to the challenges of a dynamic and ever-changing era. Curriculum reform is often undertaken by governments or educational institutions as a means to adapt to societal demands, labor market needs, and developments in education quality (Shofiyah 2018). According to Law No. 20 of 2003 Article 1 Paragraph (19)

on the National Education System, the curriculum is defined as "a set of plans and arrangements regarding the objectives, content, and learning materials as well as the methods used as guidelines for organizing learning activities to achieve educational goals" (Rohma, Harapan, & Wardiah, 2020). It functions not only as a guide for teachers in conducting instruction but also as a framework for achieving educational objectives (Putri et al 2022). However, implementing

curriculum changes is often met with various obstacles. Teachers, students, and educational institutions may encounter challenges such as inadequate resources, insufficient training, and difficulty adjusting to new instructional approaches.

English, as a key component of Indonesia's national curriculum, has been incorporated into Curriculum 2013 with a competency-based framework that promotes a balanced development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. English language instruction under this curriculum emphasizes four core skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing alongside the cultivation of character and local cultural awareness (Susanti, Fadrianti, & Asroa, 2023). Despite its comprehensive goals, the curriculum's implementation has proven difficult in practice. A major limitation is the restricted time allocation typically only two hours per week which hampers students' ability to thoroughly grasp the material. Teachers frequently struggle with creating engaging and relevant content, particularly when teaching resources are scarce. Apsari (2018) identifies three common challenges experienced by teachers: issues during the teaching and learning process, difficulties in lesson planning, and problems related to instructional materials.

Moreover, there is a noticeable gap in students' English proficiency between urban and rural regions. Motivation to learn English also tends to be low, largely due to the perception that the subject is difficult and irrelevant to students' everyday lives. Many educators lack sufficient training and support to implement innovative teaching strategies. Kurniadi and Rozelin (2023) further note that some teachers lack curriculum guidebooks, students often appear passive during lessons, and many have trouble understanding the material, leading to uneven achievement of learning outcomes across different regions.

To overcome the shortcomings of Curriculum 2013, the Indonesian government introduced the Merdeka Curriculum, initially designed as an emergency response during the COVID-19 pandemic and later developed into a more permanent framework (Anggraena, Felicia, & Pratiwi, 2021). This curriculum offers greater flexibility and autonomy for both teachers and learners. As part of a broader educational transformation, it focuses on essential

competencies while fostering character development (Kemendikbud, 2022). According to Sanra et al. (2022), the Merdeka Curriculum encourages creativity and independent learning. It introduces new concepts such as the Pancasila Student Profile, Learning Objectives Flow (ATP), Teaching Modules (MA), Learning Outcomes (CP), and Achievement Criteria (KKTP) (Hardanie, 2022), all intended to enhance the quality of instruction and learning.

While the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to nurture students to become adaptive, innovative, and globally competitive individuals, its implementation still faces serious challenges. Teachers are expected to independently design and contextualize teaching modules, even when training and support are not always available (Jaelani & Umam, 2021). Furthermore, disparities in school readiness and educational infrastructure contribute to uneven application across the country. Given these issues, this study aims to investigate the problems encountered by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum and to explore how they respond to these challenges. In particular, this research seeks to answer the following questions: What are the problems faced by EFL teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum? and the strategies that teachers use.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to investigate the challenges faced by English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach was chosen for its ability to explore teachers' experiences in depth within their real teaching contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Interviews were conducted with English teachers at junior high schools in the Bogor area who have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. The interviews followed a guideline to ensure consistency while allowing flexibility for participants to share their experiences openly. Observations were conducted during classroom activities using structured observation sheets to record teaching behaviors, instructional strategies, and teacher-student interactions.

The research instruments consisted of interview guidelines, observation sheets, audio recording devices, and field notes. Data analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) model, which involves three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, interview transcripts and observation notes were filtered and summarized to highlight the core issues. The reduced data were then presented narratively to identify emerging patterns and themes. Conclusions were drawn continuously throughout the research process, supported by cross-verification to ensure data validity. This method was designed to provide an objective and comprehensive understanding of the problems faced by EFL teachers and to offer relevant solutions based on the research findings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted at a junior high school in the Bogor area, focusing on English teachers' experiences in implementing Merdeka Curriculum. Through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, five main findings were found to be significant challenges for EFL teachers: limited technological facilities, difficulties in managing large classes, low student motivation, limited learning time, and lack of appropriate training and mentoring.

### Challenges teachers face

#### a. Limited Facilities and Technology

Most teachers said that limited technology tools hinder the digital learning process. Many classrooms are not equipped with projectors, speakers or stable internet connections. In many cases, teachers have to use personal devices such as laptops and cellphones to deliver materials. One teacher stated, *"Technology facilities exist, but are limited. Projectors are only available in some classes, speakers and internet connections are also limited..."*. Based on observations, learning takes place traditionally, with lecture methods and written exercises, without the support of interactive media.

#### b. Complexity of Classroom Management

The number of students in a class of 36 to 45 makes it difficult for teachers to implement

learning that suits individual needs. The diversity of students' ability levels makes it difficult to implement differentiated learning. One teacher said, *"This greatly affects the effectiveness of learning, especially in activities such as speaking that require more time and attention."* Teachers cannot give equal attention to all students, and the learning process becomes focused on active students, while others tend to be left behind.

#### c. Low Student Motivation

Students' motivation to learn English is still relatively low. Based on the results of the interview, the teacher assessed that most students did not show enthusiasm in participating in learning. This is due to the lack of environmental support and minimal exposure to English in daily life. The teacher stated, *"Students' interest in English is still relatively low... The lack of role of parents and the lack of literacy culture in the surrounding environment is one of the causes."* As a result, students tend to be passive, and only a small percentage are actively involved in learning activities.

#### d. Limited Learning Time

The duration of learning, which only lasts 4 lesson hours per week, is considered insufficient to implement the Merdeka Curriculum approach, especially project-based and exploratory activities. The teacher revealed, *"Only 2 meetings of 2 lessons each ... not enough, especially when implementing project-based learning."* In addition to limited time, there are often other school activities such as exams and celebrations that reduce effective learning time.

#### e. Lack of Professional Training and Mentoring.

Although teachers have participated in Merdeka Curriculum training, they feel that the training has not addressed their practical needs in the classroom, especially for English language learning. The training schedule also often conflicts with teaching hours. One teacher explained, *"There was one time when the training took place at the same time as the class, so I had to leave the class."* Teachers finally took the initiative to look for references independently or discuss in forums such as MGMP, although they still felt the need for further assistance.

### **Teachers' Strategies in Overcoming Challenges**

Despite facing various obstacles in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, EFL teachers have adopted adaptive and creative strategies tailored to their classroom realities. These efforts reflect their initiative to maintain the quality of learning despite limitations.

#### **a. Maximizing Simple Learning Resources**

To address the lack of technological support, teachers used whatever tools were available and often relied on personal devices. One teacher stated, *"I sometimes use PowerPoint and YouTube videos, but not too often because of limited facilities."* Instead of relying on digital tools, they combined traditional methods like lecturing with written exercises to keep the learning process going.

#### **b. Using Group Work and Peer Tutoring**

To manage large and diverse classrooms, teachers organized students into smaller groups and assigned peer tutors. As one teacher mentioned, *"I actively form small learning groups and assign some students to act as peer tutors so learning can be more equitable."* This approach encouraged more students to participate and helped balance attention across different learning levels.

#### **c. Incorporating Relevant and Familiar Topics**

To boost student motivation, teachers adapted the lesson content to align with students' interests and everyday experiences. A teacher explained, *"I relate the material to topics students like, such as hobbies or English songs. I also give praise and rewards to motivate them."* Although not all students responded equally, this approach contributed to better classroom engagement.

#### **d. Extending Learning Beyond Classroom Time**

Due to limited in-class hours, some teachers continued the learning process outside of school by assigning independent tasks. One teacher shared, *"I assign tasks via Google Classroom or WhatsApp so students can continue learning on their own."* This method helped compensate for the time constraint and allowed students to practice English more consistently.

#### **e. Engaging in Self-Learning and Teacher Communities**

In response to the lack of practical training, teachers showed initiative by independently studying the curriculum and joining teacher learning communities. One of them stated, *"I review training materials after class and join teacher groups to share insights and support each other."* Participation in MGMP forums also helped teachers exchange strategies and address difficulties in implementing the curriculum.

### **Discussion**

The implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* presents various challenges for EFL teachers, particularly in schools with limited infrastructure. One of the most pressing issues is the lack of adequate facilities and technological resources. According to Smaldino et al. (2009), effective learning media are essential in creating engaging and meaningful classroom experiences. However, many schools in Indonesia still rely on conventional tools such as blackboards and printed textbooks, making it difficult for teachers to adopt the technology-integrated learning approaches recommended in the curriculum. This technological gap limits opportunities for multimedia-based instruction and reduces the potential to enhance students' digital literacy.

Classroom management also becomes more complex in large-sized classes, which typically consist of 35 to 45 students. In such environments, teachers struggle to maintain student attention, deliver individualized instruction, and create interactive learning settings. As noted by Emery (2012), large class sizes are a common challenge in EFL teaching, leading to reduced student participation and difficulty in classroom control. Similarly, Nurkamto (2003) asserts that the effectiveness of English instruction is significantly affected by the number of students in a classroom, particularly in activities requiring speaking practice and direct engagement.

Low student motivation further compounds the difficulties teachers face. In the context of foreign language learning, motivation is a key factor in student success. Inagaki and Nakaya (2022) highlight that many Indonesian students feel anxious and demotivated when learning English, often due to their perception of English as a difficult subject with limited relevance to their

daily lives. This aligns with findings in the literature that emphasize how learners' attitudes toward English significantly influence their classroom performance and willingness to participate (Sakkir, 2020).

Time limitation is another structural issue hindering the effectiveness of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. As Hamdan (2011) and Apsari (2018) both point out, insufficient instructional time reduces the opportunity for students to fully master language skills, especially speaking and listening, which require frequent and extended practice. In the case of EFL in junior high schools, English is often allocated only two periods per week, forcing teachers to prioritize grammar and reading-based exercises over communicative and project-based learning, which are core to the new curriculum.

Finally, limited professional development support hampers teachers' readiness to apply the curriculum effectively. As described by Inayah et al. (2022), many teachers report confusion and difficulty understanding new concepts introduced in *Kurikulum Merdeka*, such as ATP (Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran), CP (Capaian Pembelajaran), and MA (Modul Ajar). This is in line with Umam and Indah (2020), who stress that continuous professional development (CPD) is crucial in helping teachers stay current with pedagogical innovations and curriculum reforms.

### Strategies Employed by EFL Teachers to Overcome Challenges

Despite the challenges, EFL teachers have demonstrated various strategies to adapt and ensure the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in their classrooms. One of the key approaches is the use of group-based learning. Collaborative tasks allow students to support each other and reduce the anxiety often associated with speaking English. According to Brosh (1996), effective EFL teachers encourage student independence and promote cooperation among learners, which is particularly important in contexts where student confidence is low. Group learning also addresses the issue of large class sizes by distributing participation across smaller units.

Teachers also adopt contextual learning strategies, wherein lesson content is connected to students' real-life experiences. This method enhances comprehension and relevance, leading to

higher engagement. Al-Mahrooqi (2015) emphasizes that good EFL instruction must be responsive to students' cultural and contextual realities. By designing lessons that align with students' daily lives, teachers make learning more meaningful and reduce resistance to learning English.

In terms of resource limitations, teachers creatively utilize locally available materials and create simplified teaching modules adapted to their students' needs. Rahmadayanti and Hartoyo (2022) support this by noting that teachers are encouraged to modify government-provided modules or develop their own based on class conditions. This aligns with the principle of differentiated instruction promoted in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which allows educators to tailor learning to students' readiness and learning profiles (Kemendikbud 2022).

Another instructional strategy observed is the application of task-based learning, where tasks are modified according to student proficiency and classroom dynamics. This approach reflects the flexibility encouraged by *Kurikulum Merdeka* and supports learner-centered instruction. Farhatunnisa and Umam (2020) argue that task-based learning is effective in providing authentic contexts for language use and in accommodating diverse learner needs.

Additionally, due to the lack of formal training or mentoring systems, teachers rely on informal peer collaboration. As noted by Ambarita et al. (2023), peer-based professional forums such as MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran) offer an avenue for sharing best practices and enhancing teaching effectiveness. Even outside of formal MGMP structures, collegial dialogue and teamwork contribute to teacher resilience and pedagogical growth.

These strategies demonstrate the teachers' commitment and adaptability in the face of multiple constraints. While *Kurikulum Merdeka* emphasizes flexibility and learner autonomy, its practical implementation depends heavily on teachers' creativity, initiative, and access to ongoing support systems.

### CONCLUSION

This study explores the challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in junior high schools. The findings reveal that



teachers encounter several obstacles, including limited access to technology, large class sizes, low student motivation, insufficient instructional time, and a lack of relevant training and mentoring. Despite these difficulties, teachers adopt various adaptive strategies, such as utilizing simple teaching resources, implementing group-based and contextual learning, extending activities beyond class hours, and engaging in peer collaboration. These efforts reflect the teachers' dedication to maintaining instructional quality and achieving curriculum goals, even in constrained teaching environments. The study emphasizes the need for stronger institutional support to enable more effective and sustainable implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka.

## REFERENCES

- Al-Mahrooqi, Rahma. 2015. "Characteristics of a Good EFL Teacher." *Sagepub* 1–15. doi:DOI: 10.1177/2158244015584782.
- Ambarita, Ratoga. 2023. "The Role of Subject Teacher Deliberation (MGMP) in Improving The Competence of Social Science Education Teachers in Junior High Schools (SMP)." *Jurnal Pendidikan Mandala* 8 (1): 2656-6745. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.58258/jupe.v8i1.4899.
- Anggraena, Y, N Felicia, and U Pratiwi. 2021. "Kajian Akademik Kurikulum Untuk Pemulihan Pembelajaran." *Pusat Kurikulum dan Pembelajaran Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi* 50-52.
- Apsari, Yanuarti. 2018. "Teachers' Problems and Solutions in Implementing Curriculum 2013." *ournal of English Language Pedagogy, Literature and Culture* 3 (1): 11-23.
- Brosh, H. 1996. "Perceived characteristics of the effective language teacher." *Foreign Language Annals* (29): 125-138.
- Emery, H. 2012. "A Global Study of Primary English Teachers' Qualifications, Training and Career Development." *British Council ELT Research* 12-08.
- Farhatunnisa, A, and A Umam. 2020. "Tbtl in Practice: Bringing Tasks to English Classroom in the Curriculum 2013." *English Journal* 16. doi:https://doi.org/10.32832/english.v14i1.3785.
- Hamdan, K. 2011. "The Teaching Constraints of English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia : The Context of School-Based Curriculum." *SOSIOHUMANIKA* 4 (2): 287-300.
- Hardanie, B D. 2022. "Evaluasi Kurikulum Pelatihan Guru Merdeka Belajar: Studi Deskriptif Evaluasi di Program Pelatihan Kolaborasi Literasi Bermakna." *Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia*.
- Inagaki, Rika, and Motoyuki Nakaya. 2022. "Relationship Between Japanese Language Anxiety, Beliefs About Learning, and Language Use in Japanese Language Classes." *European Journal of Educational Research* 11 (3): 1327-1336.
- Jaelani, A., & Umam, A. (2021). Preparing EFL pre-service teachers for curriculum 2013 through authentic materials and assessment integration. *JEES (Journal of English Educators Society)*, 6(1). https://doi.org/10.21070/jees.v6i1.829
- Kemendikbud. 2022. "Panduan Pembelajaran dan Asesmen. Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia."
- Kurniadi, Hendri, and Diana Rozelin. 2023. "Problems the Implementation of The 2013 English Curriculum: Perception by English Teachers." *EJEW* 2 (1): 83-97. <https://ejew.fah.uinjambi.ac.id/index.php/EJEW>.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative Data Analysis. United Stated: Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*, 3.
- Nurkamto, J. 2003. "Problematika Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di Indonesia." *Jurnal Ilmiah Masyarakat Linguistik Indonesia* 2 (21): 288-307.
- Putri, Cindi Arjihan, Evilia Rindayati, and Rian Damariswara. 2022. "Difficulties of Prospective Educators in Developing Learning Tools in the Independent Curriculum." *PTK jurnal Tindakan Kelas* 3 (1).

- Rahmadayanti, D, and A Hartoyo . 2022. "Potret Kurikulum Merdeka, Wujud Merdeka Belajar di Sekolah Dasar." *Jurnal Basicedu* 6 (4): 7174–7187. doi:<https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i4.3431>.
- Rohma, S, E Harapan, and D Wardiah. 2020. "The Influence of School-Based Management and Teacher's Professionalism toward Teacher's Performance." *Journal of Social Work and Science Education* 1 (1): 13-23. <https://doi.org/10.52690/jswse.v1i1.6>.
- Sakkir, Geminastiti. 2020. "Students' Perceptions toward Using YouTube in EFL Classrooms." *Journal of Applied Science, Engineering, Technology, and Education* 2 (1): 1-10. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.35877/454RI.asci.2125>.
- Sanra, R, and A Adisel. 2022. "IPS Learning Strategies in the Context of the Revised 2013 Curriculum with the Concept of Independent Learning." *JOEAI* 5 (1): 165-171.
- Shofiyah, S. 2018. "Prinsip-prinsip pengembangan kurikulum dalam upaya meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran." *EDURELIGIA* 2 (2): 122-130.
- Susanti, H, Fadrianti, and Iman Asroa. 2023. "Problematika Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka di SMP Negeri 5 Padang Panjang." *ALSYS Jurnal Keislaman dan Ilmu Pendidikan* 3 (1): 54-65. <https://doi.org/10.58578/alsys.v3i1.766>