



Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English Language Teaching at Rumah Belajar Aksi-Inspirasi: A Case Study of Strategies and Challenges

Videlindah Ani Sophiandry Haan^{1*}, Margana Margana², Maria Kanisia Apriliani³

¹Aryasatya Deo Muri University, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia; ²Yogyakarta State University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia; ³Boston University, Massachusetts, United States

*Corresponding author: videlindah@gmail.com

Abstract

The primary aim of this study was to explore the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching at Rumah Belajar-Aksi Inspirasi, focusing specifically on the development of lesson plans, the instructional process, and the assessment strategies employed by three English teachers in Sleman, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This qualitative case study utilized descriptive analysis, employing structured interviews, classroom observations, and an analysis of instructional documents for data collection. The findings reveal that teachers implement the Merdeka Curriculum through three primary strategies: CERIA, Game-Based Learning (GBL), and Jigsaw. They adapt textbooks provided by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture to fit their classroom context and incorporate a range of educational tools, including laptops, cell phones, and interactive websites such as Wordwall, Gemory, and Quiz. Both formative and summative assessments are conducted at the end of each session, resulting in 85% of students demonstrating increased engagement and comprehension. The study highlights the significance of these strategies in enhancing the teaching and learning process and offers insights into the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language education.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, English Language Teaching, Game-Based Learning, Formative Assessment

Introduction

Indonesia's education system has undergone significant reforms in recent years to meet the demands of 21st-century learning, with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum (Freedom Curriculum) by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022 being among the most transformative changes. Unlike its predecessor, the Kurikulum 2013 (K-13), which adhered to a more rigid, standardized approach, the Merdeka Curriculum prioritizes flexibility and student-centered learning. This shift allows teachers to adapt their lesson plans and instructional strategies to better accommodate students' diverse needs. This change aligns with global trends in education that emphasize critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and active learning, all of which are crucial skills in today's interconnected and information-rich world (Kemendikbud, 2022; Tomlinson, 2017).

At the heart of the Merdeka Curriculum lies the Pancasila Student Profile, which identifies six core competencies: faith, creativity, critical thinking, independence, cooperation, and global



citizenship (Kemendikbud, 2022). These values are intended to produce students who excel academically and exhibit strong character and social responsibility. The Merdeka Curriculum's holistic approach combines academic, personal, and social development, aiming to equip students with the necessary skills to navigate modern society's complexities (Emilia, 2021).

Literature on curriculum reform in developing countries underscores the importance of flexible teaching approaches and teacher autonomy to address diverse student needs, principles that are central to the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers are encouraged to adopt active learning techniques, such as Project-Based Learning (PBL) and the Genre-Based Approach (GBA), to foster critical thinking and practical skills essential for language learning (Shin, 2018; Emilia, 2021). For example, PBL enables students to apply language skills in real-world contexts, which enhances engagement and relevance, while GBA helps students master the structure and conventions of various text genres, which is vital for effective communication in English (Derewianka, 2015).

However, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum has introduced new challenges, especially for educators accustomed to the prescriptive frameworks of past curricula. With the increased autonomy and responsibility demanded by the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers must not only understand its core objectives but also adapt these to diverse educational settings. For teachers in nonformal Education, such as Rumah Belajar Aksi-Inspirasi, these challenges are amplified by infrastructural constraints, limited access to professional development, and scarce technological resources (Darmawan & Surya, 2023). Consequently, teachers in these regions often struggle with acquiring appropriate learning materials, technology, and training necessary for adopting innovative instructional practices (Firman, 2023).

English language teaching, in particular, faces unique challenges under the Merdeka Curriculum due to its emphasis on active learning, genre-based approaches, and technology integration. As English is a required subject within Indonesia's national curriculum, teachers in nonformal education, where students typically have minimal exposure to English outside the classroom, face difficulties in fostering both engagement and proficiency (Lamb & Coleman, 2008). Additionally, the curriculum's emphasis on technology-driven instruction is challenging to implement in areas with limited digital infrastructure (Dudeney & Hockly, 2016).

Although some studies have explored the broader implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, limited research has been conducted on its specific impact on English language instruction, particularly at the elementary School and junior high school level in less urbanized regions such as nonformal Education (Sari, 2023; Kusuma & Ferdous, 2022). Most existing research tends to compare the Merdeka Curriculum with previous frameworks like K-13 or assess its general advantages and challenges, often overlooking subject-specific and region-specific nuances. Consequently, these studies frequently do not address the distinctive requirements of English language teaching, especially in areas where consistent exposure to English is limited.

To address this gap, this study examines the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language instruction in Rumah belajar Aksi Inspirasi through three research questions: (1) How do English teachers prepare lesson plans and implement these lesson plans in the classroom within the Merdeka Curriculum framework? (2) What are the outcomes of student achievement in English under the Merdeka Curriculum?"

This research investigates how English teachers in Rumah belajar aksi-inspirasi design curriculum-aligned lesson plans, analyzes the instructional strategies used to implement these plans, and evaluates the academic outcomes of students learning English under the Merdeka Curriculum framework. By focusing on the strategies employed by English teachers, this study aims to deepen understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum influences English language teaching in this region. Findings from this research will offer practical insights for developing targeted professional training, refining curriculum content, and informing policy decisions that support educators in realizing the curriculum's goals of enhancing both academic achievement and character development among students (Ambarita, 2023).

Methods

This study employed a multiple-case study approach as the primary method of investigation. A multiple case study was chosen to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in

English language teaching at Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi. This approach provided comprehensive and in-depth information on the topic, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. The qualitative nature of the research enabled the collection of reasoned information, detailed descriptions, and explanations of various human processes involved in teaching and learning (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

The rationale for choosing a qualitative case study over a quantitative method lies in the complexity of educational processes and the need to capture the contextual factors influencing implementation. Qualitative methods are particularly suited for exploring the rich, subjective experiences of teachers and students, providing insights that quantitative data may overlook.

The participants in this study were English teachers at Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi. The selection criteria for these teachers included their direct involvement in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, their experience in teaching English, and their willingness to share their insights on the curriculum's application. Detailing these criteria enhances the transparency of the research process.

Furthermore, a brief discussion of the demographics of Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi will help readers understand the institutional context. This center serves a diverse population of students, primarily from the surrounding community, and is dedicated to providing quality education aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The research focused on describing the phenomena occurring in the teaching and learning process of English, specifically how teachers prepared lesson plans, implemented these plans in the classroom, and evaluated student progress. By conducting multiple case studies, it was assumed that these phenomena could be better explained and understood as they occurred within their situational contexts (Thomas, 2016).

To produce a detailed description of the teaching processes, data triangulation was employed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the English language teaching context. Data sources included interviews with English teachers, direct classroom observations, and the analysis of relevant documentation. Once data were collected, the interview transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings were transcribed, organized, and analyzed to provide a holistic view of the methods used to teach English at Rumah Belajar.

Research Design

This study aimed to investigate and analyze the processes involved in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching, producing a detailed description of how English instruction is conducted in the context of nonformal education at Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi. According to Thomas (2016), a case study should focus on one or several instances of a particular phenomenon to provide a detailed account of the events, relationships, experiences, or processes arising in a given context. In this study, the English language teaching process constituted the specific phenomenon being investigated.

The multiple case study design was selected to describe the particulars of real-world situations concerning the English language teaching process. This approach utilized data triangulation to examine the case in depth within a real-life scenario, relying on multiple sources of evidence to enhance the robustness of the findings (Thomas, 2016). The qualitative data sources included interviews with English teachers, direct classroom observations, and relevant documentation, all of which aimed to provide comprehensive knowledge of the case.

The information gathered allowed for a rich exploration of the teaching practices and the nuances of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Once all data were collected, the interview transcripts, field notes, and audio recordings were transcribed, organized, and analyzed to construct a holistic view of the methods employed to teach English at Rumah Belajar.

Subject

This research was conducted at Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi, located in Sleman, Yogyakarta. This institution was selected as it represents a nonformal education center implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. It began integrating the Merdeka Curriculum promptly following the government's introduction of this new educational policy, aiming to align student learning experiences across various educational settings. The research took place from March 8, 2024, to April 15, 2024. Information was gathered from three English teachers and students in grades IV

and V, focusing on how the Merdeka Curriculum is being implemented in their English instruction.

The initial phase involved conducting a survey to gather baseline information, after which tailored tools were developed for data collection in the research area. The data collection process included observations of teaching practices, interviews with teachers, and document analysis. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants, ensuring that they met specific criteria relevant to the study. According to Phillippi & Lauderdale (2018), theoretical saturation was used to determine the purposive sample size, ensuring that the collected data provided comprehensive insights into the subject of study.

Instruments

This research was conducted at Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi, selected to represent nonformal education in Sleman and among those required to implement the Merdeka Curriculum starting in 2022, when the new curriculum policy was first introduced. The study took place from March 15 to April 25, 2024, focusing on three English teachers and their students in grades I-VI. This initial stage aimed to gather a comprehensive understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum is applied in English instruction.

To ensure the reliability of the instruments used, pilot testing was conducted prior to the main data collection. Feedback from initial interviews and observations helped refine the questions and protocols, thus enhancing their clarity and effectiveness in capturing relevant data.

The first interview was conducted on March 20, 2024, with an English teacher from Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi who had been working there for five years. This session lasted approximately one hour (60 minutes) and was documented as the First Interview. The second interview took place on April 4, 2024, with another English teacher who had been employed there for three years, also lasting one hour and recorded as the Second Interview. The third and final interview, conducted with an English teacher who had been with the institution for two years on April 13, 2024, similarly lasted 60 minutes and was documented as the Third Interview.

Classroom observations were also carried out at Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi to gain insight into curriculum implementation in real classroom settings. The first observation was on March 20, 2024, during the first period (14:50 - 16:00 PM) with 15 students from grades 3-4 and their English teacher. This observation was documented as the First Observation. The second observation occurred at Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi on April 4, 2024, involving 17 students from grades 5-6 and their English teacher from 14:50 to 16:00 PM, and was documented as the Second Observation.

The data analysis process followed the model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, which is appropriate for qualitative research. During the coding phase, challenges were encountered, including distinguishing between overlapping themes and ensuring consistency across different data sources. These challenges were addressed through regular team meetings to discuss coding strategies and verify the integrity of the data. Together, the interviews and observations provided a detailed snapshot of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English teaching, highlighting practices, strategies, and challenges faced at Rumah Belajar Aksi Inspirasi.

Data Analysis

This study utilized both verbal and nonverbal data collected through interviews and document analysis. Following the framework established by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), an interactive model for data analysis was employed.

The data analysis process began with Data Reduction, which involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the collected data as presented in the transcriptions. After completing the data collection, the research team systematically coded the verbal data from field notes and interview transcriptions. This involved creating categories based on key themes related to the implementation of the English Curriculum Merdeka. Each piece of data was reviewed and refined to ensure only relevant information was included, effectively narrowing down the dataset for analysis.

Next, the Data Display phase involved organizing the condensed data into a structured format that facilitated interpretation and inference. As defined by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), a data display is an ordered, condensed representation of information that aids in drawing

conclusions and guiding subsequent actions. In this study, the data were presented using matrices and descriptive summaries, allowing for a comprehensive view of the findings regarding the English Curriculum Merdeka and its various components.

The final phase, Conclusion Drawing, involved synthesizing the analyzed data to form insights and conclusions. This process occurred after all data had been collected and displayed. The conclusions drawn focused on several aspects, including the implementation of the English Curriculum Merdeka, the roles of the principal, English teachers, and the committee, the teaching and learning processes in English, the development of English teaching materials, challenges encountered during the research, and proposed solutions to address these challenges. By clearly outlining the steps taken for data coding and interpretation, this analysis provides transparency and allows readers to understand how the research conclusions were derived.

Findings

This study employed direct observation and interviews with three English teachers to explore the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language instruction. The findings indicate that these educators primarily utilized three teaching methods: CERIA (Cerdas, Energik, Responsif, Inovatif, dan Aktif), Game-Based Learning (GBL), and Jigsaw. These methodologies align with contemporary pedagogical practices that promote student engagement and collaborative learning, as highlighted in existing literature on innovative curriculum implementation.

The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture provides textbooks that serve as handbooks for students in English language instruction. In addition to these resources, teachers effectively integrate various educational tools, including laptops and mobile phones, to facilitate learning. They also leverage web-based platforms such as Wordwall, Gemary, and Quiz to enhance the educational experience through interactive and social media engagement.

Assessment practices employed by the teachers include both formative and summative evaluations, which are conducted following instructional periods to gauge student progress. This dual approach to assessment aligns with findings from previous studies that advocate for ongoing evaluation to inform teaching practices and enhance student outcomes.

By comparing these findings to existing studies, it becomes evident that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, characterized by its emphasis on active learning and technology integration, presents a unique approach to English language teaching in this context. This not only underscores the innovative aspects of the curriculum but also highlights the adaptability of educators in utilizing available resources to foster an engaging learning environment.

Lesson Planning and Delivery

The teachers implement the CERIA technique (Choose, Explore, Resume, Inform, Apply) as part of the Merdeka curriculum in their English lessons. This process begins with the teacher conducting a basic needs analysis to identify the specific learning requirements of the students and the types of materials that would be most effective. The analysis involves pinpointing areas where students exhibit difficulties during the learning process.

Based on these insights, the teacher develops targeted materials designed to address the identified gaps in student understanding. This approach aims to provide students with opportunities to express themselves and enhance their abilities while engaging with the content. For instance, when learning vocabulary, students are encouraged to explore the words used in context, recognize their meanings within sentences, and interpret their significance. This method not only supports vocabulary acquisition but also fosters a deeper understanding of language use.

This information is substantiated by data collected during interviews with the English teachers, who emphasized the importance of tailoring instruction to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Teacher 1 (March 20, 2024)

Untuk setiap kegiatan belajar saya itu pakenya yang umum dipakek guru di sekolah, kalau ngga salah namanya CERIA. Jadi sebelum kegiatan belajar saya lihat dulu materi apa nih yang cocok. Pokoknya saya observasi dulu dalam kelas, pake tes kecil-kecilan. Setelah itu baru saya nyicil kasih pemahaman tentang materi, contohnya seperti pelajaran Vocab tadi itu,

soalnya mereka lebih mengenal kata-kata yang dipake dilingkungan sekitar mereka, seperti kerjaan bapak, mama atau kakak. (In every English Lesson, I use the CERIA technique (Choose, Explore, Resume, Inform, and Apply). As a preparation before learning, I always conduct a survey to choose and see what learning materials are suitable for the first meeting. This is done by making observations in the classroom and some pretest of the needs of students. Then I will give students the opportunity to exploit the material. The material that students have chosen before is to recognize the vocabulary of the professions of the people around them, for example, the professions of father and mother or siblings and other families.)

The subsequent step involves preparing a summary of the learning material to enhance students' vocabulary acquisition. When students can identify basic vocabulary from their surroundings, teachers provide supporting question sentences to help them understand vocabulary related to specific professions. To further facilitate comprehension and retention, teachers utilize visual aids, such as pictures illustrating vocabulary examples.

Once students grasp the lesson's concepts, the final step is to apply the learning material in practical contexts. Teachers engage students in learning activities that incorporate games, such as game-based learning, to make the lessons more enjoyable and interactive. The teacher employs prepared game cards or interactive games to illustrate the themes, capturing students' interest and aiding in their memorization of the vocabulary taught. This approach is corroborated by the findings from the interviews, where teachers emphasized the importance of using engaging methods to reinforce vocabulary learning. The results of the interview confirm this information.

Teacher 1 (March 20, 2024)

Kalau saya sudah kasih pemahaman tentang materi, saya coba kasih anak-anak untuk belajar dulu nih..., tapi pake Game itu loh, tema gamenya sudah saya samaain sama kesukaan anak-anak, seperti flashcard, kalau online ya persis Gemary itu, pokoknya seperti game tebak-tebakan kata lah, anak-anak itu suka game kek begitu, apalagi lebih gampang dan disukai, soalnya kan mainnya bareng-bareng. Nah.. kalau udah habis main, saya kasih Tes lagi, cuman buat pastiin kalau anak-anak ngerti materi barusan. (Once I have given some insight into the concepts that the students will learn, I give the students the opportunity to explore the games that I have provided like Game Card or Gemary. I create learning themes according to the students' interests, and the games are also played with other students, so they can also play together. Students like a game of guessing like this, and at the end of learning, I'll give them a quiz to make sure they understand and remember the given material.)

Aside from Teacher 1, there are other teachers—let's call them Teacher 2—who use the Wordwall application to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. Wordwall is a gaming application that can assist students in learning vocabulary. Before implementing games on Wordwall, teachers will identify the needs and interests of students in learning English. Students can easily access this game on their smartphones and laptops. However, in the Rumah Belajar-Aksi Inspirasi, teachers will facilitate students with laptops. The interview results below support this statement.

Teacher 2 (April 4, 2024)

Pokoknya sebelum pake game Worwall, saya cek dulu anak kelas 1-6 ini, kesukaan mereka apa, minatnya apa, mau belajar yang kek apa, suka main game atau gimana, pokoknya gitu.. terus kalau mereka suka, saya bakal jelasin gimana cara mainnya, baru saya kasih ke mereka. Supaya mereka semangat belajarnya. (Before implementing the Wordwall application in teaching, I conducted an analysis first to assess the needs and interests of students for vocabulary learning. This application, like online games, appeals to elementary school students in grades 1-6 who enjoy playing games. Therefore, to enhance students' motivation in learning English, I utilize this game and explain how they can play this application.)

In addition to Teacher 1, other educators—referred to as Teacher 2—utilize the Wordwall application as a tool for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Wordwall is a gaming platform designed to assist students in enhancing their vocabulary skills. Prior to introducing games on Wordwall, teachers assess the needs and interests of their students in learning English, ensuring that the activities are relevant and engaging.

Students can easily access the games on their smartphones and laptops, which facilitates a flexible learning environment. However, within the Rumah Belajar-Aksi Inspirasi, teachers

primarily provide access through laptops to ensure that all students can participate effectively. The following interview results further support this approach, highlighting the positive impact of utilizing interactive applications like Wordwall in the classroom.

Teacher 2 (April 4, 2024)

Untuk main game Wordwall ini, saya bagi mereka dalam tiga kelompok sesuai sama kelas mereka di sekolah, jadi temanya sesuai. Game wordwall ini ada gambarnya sama pertanyaan juga, yang udah saya siapin. Jadi mereka bebas main dalam kelompok kalau udah selesai main, baru deh. kita diskusikan sama-sama jawaban yang benar dan salahnya. Tapi kalau untuk main game ini, biasa saya minta bantuan guru lain juga, buat temanin mereka dalam kelompok. (Before inviting students to learn and play with the Wordwall application, I divided them into 3 groups with 3 different levels based on their classes, so that students can play and learn with suitable themes. In the Wordwall game, there are pictures and supporting questions for students to answer, which I have prepared. Then, students will be given the opportunity to discuss the correct answers, in line with the images and supporting sentences in the game, with the teacher accompanying them.)

After completing their discussions, the teacher asks students to present the outcomes of their group work, including the number of questions they answered correctly and those they found challenging. This encourages students to reflect on their understanding and difficulties encountered during the lesson. At the end of the session, the teacher assigns homework to each group, which they are expected to discuss at home. This homework will be reviewed collaboratively in the next class session. The following data supports this practice.

Teacher 2 (April 4, 2024)

Habis diskusi sama guru dalam kelompok, saya ajak mereka buat presentasi depan teman-teman lain untuk jawaban benar sama salahnya, kalau ada kata-kata sulit yang mereka ngga ngerti, saya ajak teman-teman mereka untuk bantu jawab dan diskusi, yang benar apa..kalau ga ada yang bisa jawab, kita jadiin PR. PRnya kita diskusi lagi minggu depan, ini sih.. biar mereka belajar lagi dirumah. (After discussing their learning with the Wordwall game, I will ask them to present their scores and achievements in the game, what vocabulary they successfully answered, and what vocabulary they found difficult to answer. The challenging vocabulary will be assigned as homework to be discussed again next week, so that students can continue learning at home.)

Another teacher, referred to as Teacher 3, implements game-based learning and the jigsaw method in the application of the Merdeka Curriculum. Teacher 3 utilizes game-based learning for large group instruction and the jigsaw technique for small group activities, typically involving students from grades 3 and 4.

At the outset of the jigsaw technique, the teacher conducts a brief warm-up to engage students and spark their enthusiasm for the upcoming lesson. Following this, the teacher introduces the core material. Students are then paired up and asked to discuss their favorite word for five minutes, after which they will present their chosen word to the class. This approach not only encourages peer interaction but also enhances students' confidence in sharing their ideas. The following interview supports this assertion:

Teacher 3 (April 12, 2024)

Untuk pelajaran Bahasa Inggris tu ada belajar dalam kelompok besar dan kecil. Kalau kelompok besar itu artinya kita belajarnya bareng semua murid, otomatis pake GBL soalnya murid tuh suka main kan? Jadi kita sambil main game ya sambil belajar. Nah kalau udah pastiian main game apa murid tuh bakalan dibagi lagi jadi beberapa kelompok, biasanya sih tiga, sesuain sama guru-guru yang ada aja. Kalau udah ada dikelompok aku ajak main pake teknik Jigsaw. Pokoknya sebelum mulai, wajib pemanasan kek nyanyi sambil gerakan-gerakan dalam bahasa inggris, biar anak-anak semangat dan nyaman. Soalnya kalau murid nyaman proses belajar jadi enteng juga, hahaha.. kalau udah agak enakan, aku bagi mereka jadi berpasang-pasangan. Aku bilang "ayokk, cari pasangan dulu, kita mau main game seru ini!" (For English language learning, we as a team of teachers like to create learning groups both small and large. For large groups, we often use Game Based Learning (GBL) because many children enjoy learning and playing. However, when divided into three small groups, I like to use the Jigsaw technique. Before starting the class, we do warm-ups first to make the children happy.

We believe that if the children are already happy, then the process of accepting learning will be easier. After that, I will pair the children up because we are going to play an exciting game, that's what I say.)

The teacher provides a concise explanation of the lesson and the game mechanics to ensure that students grasp the activity's objectives. To facilitate effective preparation, each student is given two minutes to think about the vocabulary and supporting sentences they will use in their presentation. Following this preparation time, students are allotted eight minutes to present their work to their peers. During each presentation session, other students are encouraged to actively participate in the learning process and engage in discussions, fostering a collaborative learning environment. The results of the interviews confirm this approach:

Teacher 3 (April 12, 2024)

Kalau murid udah berpasangan aku kasih mereka buat milihin satu kata yang bakal bereka mainin. Jadi mereka akan satu persatu maju kedepan dan bikin kalimat clue buat teman-teman lain, dan teman-teman lain harus bisa tebak katanya tuh apa.. buat satu pasangan tuh aku kasih 5 menit, buat diskusi dan maju tebak-tebakan didepan. Menurutku mereka nyaman banget main game ini, mainnya sambil semangat dan kadang ketawa. (Once they are paired up, I will instruct them to choose one vocabulary they like, and later we will play a guessing game with the other children, taking turns. I give each pair 5 minutes for discussion and presentation. During the children's presentations, they will give clues to their friends using sentences, and then the children will guess which vocabulary is correct, based on the clues given. In my opinion, they enjoy playing and learning like this.)

The research findings indicate that teachers utilize instructional materials aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum for English language instruction. They customize their teaching resources based on student textbooks, which include both physical textbooks and e-book modules provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Additionally, the study reveals that teachers leverage various learning media, such as laptops and smartphones, to access social media platforms like Wordwall, Gemary, and WhatsApp, enhancing the learning experience.

After discussing the processes and stages involved in planning and designing teaching modules and delivering lessons, this study summarizes the overall findings concerning how English teachers prepare lesson plans and implement them within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum. This is addressed in response to the first research question: "How do English teachers prepare lesson plans and implement these lesson plans in the classroom within the Merdeka Curriculum framework?"

The table below consolidates the planning and designing processes for creating learning modules conducted by teachers prior to learning activities, whether for an annual program, a single meeting, or multiple sessions. This comprehensive summary highlights key points regarding the implementation of lesson plans within the teaching and learning process.

Table 1. Lesson Planning and Lesson delivery under the Merdeka Curriculum

First Research Question	
How do English teachers prepare lesson plans teachers and implement these lesson plans in the classroom within the Merdeka Curriculum framework?	1. English teachers, consider several aspects before making a lesson plan.
	2. English teachers, confer and discuss good and effective lesson plans to be applied to learning activities.
	3. English teachers, considering the needs of students and the conditions of the school in accordance with the material to be presented
	4. English teachers, design the stages, points and main focus of learning that will be used or applied in the classroom, in the learning module or lesson plan.

	5. English teachers, design and adapt lesson plans from a variety of sources.
	6. Teachers implement the stages of the Lesson Plan into the teaching process, which consist of pre-learning, learning evaluation, and lesson closure, by utilizing GBA, PJBL (Project-Based Learning) and PBL (Problem-Based Learning) methods.
	7. Teachers manage the classroom using the following strategies: providing feedback, speaking with clear voice and pronunciation, starting and ending lessons on time, fostering character development, preparing and using learning media, and giving students space to actively engage in learning.
	8. The teacher utilizes and integrates technology to support learning.
	9. The teacher improvises during teaching and learning activities to maintain a positive learning environment.

Students' Achievement Assessment

Teachers employ both formative and summative assessments to report on student learning outcomes during evaluations. Formative assessments are conducted throughout the learning process, allowing teachers to monitor student progress and make timely adjustments to instruction. In contrast, summative assessments occur after students complete activities or assignments, providing a reference point for final evaluations. These assessments primarily focus on assigning grades to students. The following interview results further substantiate these findings.

Teacher 1 (March 20, 2024)

Untuk penilaian, kami pakek penilaian yang anak-anak terima disekolah, biar ana-anak juga ngga kebingungan. Jadinya kita pake formatif dan sumatif. Kalau disekolah penilaian kurikulumnya seperti apa, kita ikut beradaptasi. (For assessment, we follow the evaluations students receive at school, namely formative and summative assessments. This is to ensure students don't get confused, so from the beginning, we always adjust and implement the current curriculum.)

Teacher 2 (April 4, 2024)

Untuk evaluasi saya pake formatif dan sumatif. Contohnya dalam kegiatan belajar saya suka kasih pertanyaan random buat anak-anak, nah,, itu kan masuk formatif kan? Lalu untuk sumatifnya saya sukanya kasih tes gitu diakhir pembelajaran. (For evaluation, I use both formative and summative assessments. During the learning activities, I always ask questions, which is for formative assessment. And for summative assessment, I do it at the end of the learning session.)

Teacher 3 (April 12, 2024)

Aku mengikuti kurikulum merdeka, emang kita semua selalu janji untuk adaptasi sama kurikulum yang murid terima disekolah kok.. jadi umum aja sih sumatif sama formatif. Kalau untuk formatif pas lagi diskusi itu aku kasih pertanyaan langsung ke murid, kadang barengan, kadang satu-satu, buat mereka jawabin, terus buat sumatif ntar beda lagi tuh pertanyaannya di akhir pembelajaran. (To assess students, I use the standards from the Merdeka Curriculum,

namely both summative and formative assessments. For example, during discussions with students, I engage in direct question and answer sessions with students, which is for formative assessment. Then for summative assessment, I also provide students with questions, but at the end of the learning activity.)

Based on observations of learning activities at Rumah Belajar-Aksi Inspirasi and insights gained from interviews, the three teachers employed assessment methods that align with the standards of the Merdeka Curriculum, utilizing both summative and formative assessments. This adaptation was made to ensure consistency with school-based learning activities and adherence to the evolving curriculum. As a result, students' learning outcomes continued to progress, benefiting from both the school environment and the Rumah Belajar setting.

To summarize the findings presented in this section, this study consolidates the results and key points into a table. The table below addresses the second research question regarding how teachers assess student achievement in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 2. Assessment Practices in the Merdeka Curriculum

Second Research Question	
How do the English teachers assess the students' achievement according to the Merdeka Curriculum?	1. Teachers assess students' attitudes, knowledge, and skills.
	2. Teachers utilize authentic assessments in learning activities.
	3. Teachers apply various types of assessments including Formative Assessment, Alternative Assessment, Diagnostic Tests, and Summative Tests.
	4. Teachers use technology to support the assessment process.

The findings clearly illustrate that the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation remains in a developmental stage. Since its establishment by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology on June 22, 2022, the curriculum is still considered relatively new, with only two years in operation. This short period of implementation has prevented schools from reaching full readiness, as high levels of preparedness require collaboration not only with school resources but also with the broader community, including families and parents. The limited timeframe has presented unique challenges for teachers and administrators, who are navigating the adjustment phase while striving to achieve the curriculum's objectives.

Despite these obstacles, educators and schools, including nonformal educational settings like Rumah Belajar-Aksi Inspirasi, are proactively working to incorporate the Merdeka Curriculum. They are embracing a hands-on approach by adopting, adapting, and innovating instructional materials. This includes designing customized teaching modules, creating learning aids, and employing varied assessment methods that reflect the curriculum's emphasis on flexibility and student-centered learning. Furthermore, educators are aligning their teaching strategies with differentiated learning practices, tailoring lesson plans to address the distinct needs and characteristics of their students.

The Merdeka Curriculum also calls for the integration of Pancasila character education, which educators are striving to implement. Teachers are embedding values-based education into lessons to strengthen students' character, helping to instill principles such as responsibility, collaboration, and respect. By focusing on character education within the framework of the curriculum, teachers are not only teaching academic content but are also fostering holistic development in students, aligning with the broader goals of Indonesia's educational vision.

Discussion

The first research question is: "How do English teachers prepare lesson plans and implement these lesson plans in the classroom within the Merdeka Curriculum framework?" Prancisca et al.

(2023) found that this assessment approach aligns with the implementation of an adapted assessment system in each classroom setting under the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum grants teachers the authority to tailor the learning process to the unique needs of each student.

This research shows that teachers at Rumah Belajar utilize different techniques in planning lessons, reflecting the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum. For instance, teachers implement assessments in varied ways; the first and third teachers used questions at the beginning and end of learning activities, while the second teacher opted to give assignments as a form of summative assessment. Gray (2020) states that each teacher assesses students' learning abilities in their own unique way. As long as the assessment results reflect the students' abilities, they indicate the real outcomes of student learning activities.

Teachers often face challenges in providing appropriate assessments, considering the standards in English language learning, students' proficiency in English, and the presence of students who do not actively participate in class or respond to teacher questions. The varying interests and abilities among students further emphasize this point. However, with teachers consistently providing inspiration to increase students' motivation and interest in learning, they can help students improve their English proficiency (Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023).

The second research question is: "What are the outcomes of student achievement in English under the Merdeka Curriculum?" This question is directly addressed through the assessment practices employed by teachers. Previous research by Mulyani (2023), Zainudin & Zamrudiana (2022), and Supeno & Suseno (2020) supports this notion, indicating that when teachers use the Merdeka Curriculum, they employ various tools such as Jigsaw, CERIA, and GBL to enhance student learning. Mardiant et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of student-centered learning (SCL) in the Merdeka Curriculum, which focuses on student-centered approaches in all activities. This framework adjusts to accommodate each student's individual needs, addressing diverse learning demands (Tomlinson, 2011). Saadah et al. (2023) echoed this idea, emphasizing the use of differentiated learning as a method in the English learning process to meet various student demands.

From teacher statements, it is evident that they employ teaching methods similar to those of their peers. This consistency reflects their application of the Merdeka Curriculum by incorporating techniques such as GBA or GBL into learning activities. These methods consider the varying interests, readiness, and learning preferences of students, though teachers face challenges in designing original and engaging lesson plans that meet students' needs while utilizing the modules offered by the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, educators play a crucial role in creating learning experiences tailored to students' needs, rather than merely adhering to the curriculum's flexibility, which may not always align with students' actual needs (Rindayati, 2022).

According to Laila et al. (2022), teachers can enhance student-centered learning by integrating imaginative teaching materials that still align with the principles of the applied modules and meet students' needs. Additionally, teachers can support students by introducing relevant ideas that resonate with their experiences, increasing their familiarity with the material.

The research also found that teachers improvise in their teaching, with observations showing that they develop various methods to make learning activities more effective and engaging. Nurzila's (2022) research supports these findings, suggesting that teachers have the freedom to develop and use materials in the classroom as long as they meet the achievement standards set by the Merdeka Curriculum. Furthermore, teachers have access to self-learning platforms, such as digital textbooks and other teaching materials related to the Merdeka Curriculum, available on the official government website, <https://www.kemdikbud.go.id/>. Previous research also indicates that teachers can utilize official textbooks and e-book modules from the website <https://static.buku.kemdikbud.go.id/> as sources or guides in their teaching practice (Hermawan, 2020). This website provides teachers with the freedom to adapt and revise modules based on students' learning needs (Nurzen, 2022).

In implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers can utilize digital platforms like Duolingo, WhatsApp, or other applications to enhance learning activities tailored to students' needs (Racmah, 2018; Elvira, 2023). However, observations in English learning activities revealed that teachers at Rumah Belajar-Aksi Inspirasi face challenges in implementing the

Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in differentiating instruction based on students' English proficiency. This difficulty aligns with the findings of Tricahyati & Zaim (2023), who noted the challenges teachers face in grouping students according to their skill level, often requiring them to group students solely based on class.

Moreover, teachers must adopt creative teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of students, each having unique learning styles and competencies. To address these challenges, teachers begin learning activities by analyzing students' needs to provide tailored support, which is in line with Herwina's (2020) suggestion that conducting surveys on students' abilities and interests can help alleviate difficulties in meeting students' needs. Gray (2020) emphasized the importance of differentiated learning in fostering student independence, which requires teachers to adapt to applications that support student learning activities. This adaptation aims to capture students' attention and increase engagement in learning. The findings of this study align with Robbins & Judge (2012), who highlighted that motivating students and stimulating their interest in learning can encourage each student to pursue goals aligned with their abilities, ultimately facilitating the achievement of desired objectives.

Conclusion

This study highlights the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English teaching at Rumah Belajar-Aksi Inspirasi, demonstrating a strong alignment with the curriculum's categories and concepts. The integration of learning objectives into classroom activities reflects the standards set forth by the Merdeka Curriculum, with the implementation process following a structured approach that includes opening, core activities, and closing phases. Observational findings reveal that teacher-student interactions commence with greetings and introductory questions, which effectively engage students and provide clear guidance on the concepts to be covered. The majority of learning activities employ game-based learning and methods that encourage active discussion, with teachers facilitating each session by providing detailed tasks, organizing group work, and incorporating interactive elements.

The research identifies three key techniques employed by teachers at Rumah Belajar-Aksi Inspirasi: CERIA, Game-Based Learning (GBL), and Jigsaw. Additionally, educators adapt materials and modules sourced from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture to fit their specific teaching context. The English language learning process integrates various media tools, including laptops, smartphones, Wordwall, Gemary, and WhatsApp. Assessment practices are consistent with those in traditional school settings, utilizing both formative and summative evaluations.

While the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has shown promise, challenges such as student differentiation and the customization of modules to meet diverse student needs and interests remain. Teachers respond to these challenges by employing teaching modules and techniques designed to capture student attention and enhance motivation for learning.

The findings of this study not only contribute to understanding the effective application of the Merdeka Curriculum in a specific educational setting but also offer valuable insights for educators in broader contexts. By sharing these strategies and approaches, teachers in other settings can adapt similar techniques to foster engaging and inclusive learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of their students. Furthermore, the insights gained from this study could inform policy development and curriculum design initiatives aimed at improving educational practices across various levels of instruction.

Ethics approval

All have been reviewed for research ethics.

Competing interests

All the authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

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Underlying data

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