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Breaking Barriers in English Writing: Pedagogical Shifts under the Merdeka Curriculum in Vocational Education

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to explore the implementation of English writing teaching within the curriculum framework of Merdeka Curriculum at Indonesian vocational high schools, focusing on understanding, classroom practice, and challenges faced by teachers in implementing project-based, student-centered principles. Adopting a concurrent, transformative mixed-methods design, data were obtained from thirteen English teachers in Malang, East Java, through qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys to reveal their perceptions and practices. The results indicate that a gap between the intended flexible curriculum, centered on differentiated instruction, student choice, and active engagement, and what is actually happening in classrooms has continued to persist. Instructors have a partial understanding of such pedagogical facts. However, the practice is suppressed by students' varying writing proficiency levels, scarce learning materials, inadequate professional training, and limited support from the school. Merdeka Curriculum: a source of hope. Nevertheless, as much as Merdeka Curriculum offers an inspiring vision of pedagogical transformation. Structurally, there are impediments to its effective realization in the world of vocational education. Continued systemic support and increased pedagogical alignment are necessary to achieve a more meaningful curricular change. Empowering teacher initiative, developing teacher collaboration, and providing continuous professional development are essential to improve writing instruction in trade or technical schools. The study provides policymakers, administrators, and curriculum developers with the knowledge to simplify support systems, enabling English teachers to implement Merdeka Curriculum in the writing classroom fully.

KEYWORDS:
English writing; English teaching; Merdeka Curriculum; Vocational high school; Indonesian students

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Introduction

The Indonesian educational landscape has undergone a dramatic transformation with the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum, a revolutionary concept for reimagining learning

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experiences and outcomes at all levels of education. Vocational high schools, in particular, are leading this wave of education reform (Newhouse & Suryadarma, 2009; Wolf, 2011), where students are better prepared to perform in a more complicated and dynamic workplace. In this context, English composition education serves as a point of convergence for educational scholarship, where the development of professional readiness and language proficiency intersect. Most importantly, the current landscape of education poses enormous challenges in educating English writing in vocational senior high schools (Elfiyanto & Fukazawa, 2022; Singh, 2024). Despite the excellence of the Merdeka Curriculum's reformative goals, considerable gaps remain between the curriculum's vision and classroom practice (Hadi et al., 2023; Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). Students often lack proper professional and technical writing competencies, with a significant disparity between classroom pedagogy and the communicative needs of the outside world (Taye & Mengesha, 2024). The disparity is particularly notable in developing, teaching, and assessing writing competence in vocational training.

Behind this challenge is a multifaceted interconnection of educational, organizational, and situational circumstances. Conventional pedagogy of writing prevails, skewed towards ignoring the sophisticated communication needs of contemporary professional environments (Mokhtar, 2016). Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum offers a more adaptive and competency-oriented paradigm; however, the translation of such premises into effective writing pedagogy is hindered by fragmentation and inconsistency (Retnaningrum et al., 2023). This disparity is indeed felt in vocational high schools, where writing capabilities become not merely a school assignment but an essential job skill (Priawasana & Subiyantoro, 2024). Furthermore, the research aims to critically analyze the state of English writing education within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, examining the inherent causes that hinder the development of strong writing capacities. Through an examination of the various dimensions of writing pedagogy, the research aims to identify systemic impediments and propose innovative solutions to bridge the gaps in current competency. The broad focus will lie on understanding to what degree the current pedagogical methods relate to the curriculum goals, and the actual writing needs of professional contexts.

Some key problems include a lack of professional growth activities for educators, which negatively affects their ability to utilize the curriculum to its potential. Most educators require increased training on differentiated instruction, project-based teaching, and proficiency with computers, which are essential for implementing an interactive, student-centered learning process. Moreover, incorporating technology as a fundamental aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum remains challenging due to the constraints of limited resources and the diverse literacy levels of the teaching force. Lacking backup systems such as comprehensive training modules and adequate teaching materials, the implementation of the curriculum can hinder its performance to the disadvantage of student learning.

This study is framed within the complexity of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational high schools using multiple theoretical perspectives, with its focal point being the Pedagogical Transformation Theory, which critiques and seeks to transform conventional education models by shifting the focus from teacher to student learning environments, which promote critical, creative, and adaptive thinking. Zembylas and Papanastasiou (2005) stated that the Teacher Empowerment and Professional Development Model focuses on the various dimensions of professional agency and professional growth, particularly through digital collaboration, where teachers become agents of change in education. This is complemented by the Morcke et al. (2013) Competency-Based Education Framework, which posits that

academic learning should integrate industry experience in the form of contextualized, outcome-based, real-world competencies, rather than being time-dominated in the classroom. Adhikari (2023) contributes to this discourse with the Socio-Educational Transformation Perspective, discussing inequity in relation to national competitiveness and agility, while describing the education paradigm shift and promoting decentralized and responsive systems explicitly designed to address diverse educational demands. Together, these theories collaboratively address the blend of pedagogical change, teaching professionalism, student engagement, industry partnership, and transformation in vocational education within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Although research has expanded in the specific area of Merdeka Curriculum adoption for English language teaching, it remains primarily limited to secondary-level high schools. The majority of current studies focus on general instructional practices and technologies, teacher perceptions, and systemic readiness. Conversely, those inquiries have focused on the shift from teacher-centered to more learner-centered instruction, the integration of character education and 4C skills, and better alignment of English teaching with vocational skills (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023; Hikmawati et al., 2024). Nevertheless, these all consistently point out that major headaches still exist in the form of minimal pedagogical support, scant resources, both human and otherwise, a lack of proactive planning, not to mention when it occurs, and virtually no training targeted at teachers who teach these courses (Safitri & Kusumaningtyas, 2023; Syahida & Siminto, 2023). While local studies of teacher attitudes toward the curriculum tend to be supportive (Purwanti & Wardani, 2024), these discussions remain primarily descriptive and general in nature.

What is lacking in the literature is an in-depth investigation into how the Merdeka Curriculum operates, specifically in terms of teaching language skills, such as writing English, within a vocational setting. Writing instruction is a complex and challenging field, requiring teachers to be well-versed in genre awareness, employ scaffolding strategies, develop effective feedback practices, and align instruction with vocational needs. However, this aspect has not been adequately studied in earlier research. English pedagogy as a whole is what gets the attention of most existing papers and books, but there is little analysis on how writing is developed, taught, and examined at places of autonomy in Merdeka Curriculum students. Therefore, this article fills the void by examining English writing pedagogy at vocational high schools within the Merdeka Curriculum. It contributes to the way of examining what teachers' writing instructional activities look like, how they foster students' development as writers, and how they negotiate curriculum flexibility, which is often necessary due to the demands made by vocational courses in an era when there are real institutional constraints.

By foregrounding writing pedagogy rather than general ELT practices, this study offers a more nuanced understanding of the curriculum's practical implications. It offers pedagogical insights directly relevant to vocational English teachers and other curriculum stakeholders. According to the current research, the researchers posed two research questions with the aim of understanding how English teachers perceive the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in teaching academic writing at vocational high schools. What teaching strategies and classroom practices do English teachers employ to adapt academic writing instruction to the principles of Merdeka Curriculum? What challenges and opportunities do teachers identify in applying Merdeka Curriculum to the instruction of academic writing in vocational high school?

Method

A concurrent mixed-methods research design was employed in this study, where qualitative and quantitative data were collected, analyzed, and integrated to gain comprehensive insight into English writing pedagogy in vocational high schools where the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented. This design carried the advantage that numerical trends based on questionnaire data could be given meaning and put into context by being linked to in-depth qualitative insights from teachers' narratives and in-classroom activities (Creswell et al., 2004). Such an integrated approach has enabled the study to achieve methodological triangulation, thereby increasing the overall validity, reliability, and depth of the research findings. The quantitative thread consisted of a structured online questionnaire, which was sent to thirteen English teachers teaching at vocational high schools (VHS) in Malang, East Java. This is a secondary school in Indonesia focused on practical, job-specific skills to prepare students for immediate entry into the workforce or further vocational training.

The survey included Likert-scale and multiple-choice items that aimed to capture teachers' levels of familiarity with Merdeka Curriculum, their feelings about the implementation, the effectiveness of teaching writing, problems encountered, and the requirements for support. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, were used to identify any general phenomena or trends present among specific types of curriculum implementation. Additionally, the present study involved thirteen English teachers from vocational high schools in Malang City, East Java, Indonesia. The level of participants ranged widely, from experienced teachers to novice teachers from different educational backgrounds and teaching methodologies, which is an advantage in providing a more holistic picture of how the curriculum is realized in authentic classroom contexts. Five teachers were chosen to participate in interviews using purposive sampling from the thirteen participants.

This approach was adopted to ensure that the study sample included a variety of teaching experiences, curriculum understanding, and implementation experiences that could provide depth to the participants' views. The focus of the selected schools also differed in terms of their classifications as well as the levels of technological support available to them, thus presenting a valuable contextual contrast concerning the criteria of scope and institutional preparedness. Consequently, the entire school visited conducted the data collection process in two parts. The first part was conducted online and included completing surveys and conducting several semi-structured interviews. The second part was conducted in person at the schools and included direct observations of the lessons.

Then, the integrative data was collected through a structured online survey conducted using Google Forms (Pecáková, 2016). The survey included closed questions in the form of five Likert scales and multiple-choice questions, as well as open-ended questions aimed at measuring teachers' knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and actual usage of the Merdeka Curriculum. With this instrument, the researcher was able to evaluate trends within subgroups of the broader population-based teacher demographic framework. Moreover, the incorporation of open-ended answers enhanced contextual understanding, thus providing depth to the qualitative analysis.

Table 1. *Questionnaire's points*

Aspects	Questionnaire Points
Understanding and Implementation	• How familiar are you with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum? • Have you incorporated Merdeka Curriculum principles in your English writing lessons? • What aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum do you find most useful for teaching writing?
Perception and Challenges	• In your opinion, how effective is the Merdeka Curriculum in improving students' writing skills? • What challenges have you faced while implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English writing? • How do you perceive students' responses to the writing activities under the Merdeka Curriculum?
Suggestions and Support	• What additional support do you think teachers need to implement the Merdeka Curriculum effectively in teaching English writing? • Please share your suggestions or comments on how the Merdeka Curriculum can be improved for teaching English writing.

Integrated data were collected using several tools. Initially, a Google Form was sent to the English teachers via a survey link in the teachers' WhatsApp group, as it is efficient, straightforward, and accessible (Ruslin et al., 2022). This method enabled easy participation from respondents and facilitated prompt responses while preserving feasibility in data collection.

The closed-ended survey responses were quantitatively analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, which included counting, calculating percentages, and determining average values to identify overarching patterns in the participant responses (Baburajan et al., 2021). Subsequently, quantitative findings were made interpretable through the aid of representational tools, such as drawings, graphs, and data sets. These illustrations contributed to the identification of significant insights, in addition to the qualitative findings. Through the illustrations, the research made it easy to understand the numerical information and its relevance to the research study.

Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data collected through the questionnaire (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The process was multistage, starting with open coding, then moving on to code grouping, and lastly, the production of abstract themes. The aim was to represent the participants' voices in all their intricacy and detail. Furthermore, observational field notes and other pertinent documents were analyzed inductively for salient patterns and emerging concepts. Focus was given to the degree of correspondence between observed practices and the articulations of curriculum principles, as well as gaps that may suggest implementation, adaptation, or contextual challenges. That form of analysis broadens the inquiry into the social, institutional, and pedagogical context of the data collected.

To increase the study's credibility and trustworthiness, methodological triangulation was used. Data from various surveys, interviews, observations, and documents were systematically compared and verified. Using this method, the researcher was able to confirm the consistencies of the various data, thereby validating the findings. Where gaps emerged, further clarification interviews were conducted to provide a correct depiction of the data interpretation. This way, the study conclusions were accurate and based on a comprehensive and thorough analysis of the research context.

Results

In this study, the researcher categorized the findings into two general themes: perceiving and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the vocational high school level, and teachers' perceptions and experiences in teaching writing to VHS students under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Perceiving and Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at the VHS Level

The research findings of this subject reveal a series of varied results regarding the degree to which vocational high school teachers are familiar with and able to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings are shown in Figure 1 below:

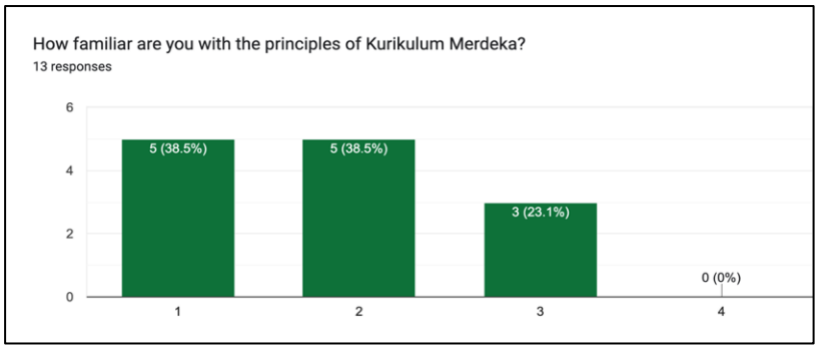


Figure 1. *Data findings in participants' familiarization with implementing the Merdeka Curriculum*

Figure 1 chart revealed that the most significant proportion of respondents, nearly 40%, showed a moderate level of familiarity with the concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum. This suggests that while they are knowledgeable or informed to some extent about the curriculum, they lack a comprehensive understanding of its details and applications. Astonishingly, an equal proportion of respondents, i.e., nearly 40%, showed a low level of familiarity with the Merdeka Curriculum. This suggests that most respondents to this survey lack a significant understanding of the main principles and objectives of the new curriculum. This finding puts into perspective the need for thorough training and promotion of the Merdeka Curriculum to enhance awareness of it among teachers and administrators.

Conversely, a relatively lower percentage (approximately 23%) of the respondents reported very high familiarity with the Merdeka Curriculum. This indicates that in-depth experience and familiarity with the new curriculum are not yet widespread in the respondent population. The general lack of top familiarity respondents is also an indication that there is still a necessity for large-scale professional development to equip teachers and schools with the proper mechanisms for an easy transition into and effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, the following discovery elucidates the manner in which English teachers apply the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum to teach English, specifically in academic writing.



Figure 2. *Chart of participants incorporated into the Merdeka Curriculum in English writing*

Survey results in Figure 2 provide encouraging news regarding the degree to which the tenets of the Merdeka Curriculum have been applied in English composition courses. Over 60% of the respondents reported that they always or often apply the principles of the new curriculum in practice. This reveals a high rate of adoption and enthusiasm towards the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by a large number of respondents within the sample group of English teachers. Specifically, 30.8% of the respondents stated that they always apply the concepts of the Merdeka Curriculum in their English composition classes. This represents a substantial percentage, reflecting the presence of instructors who have fully adopted the new curriculum and consistently applied its principles in the classroom. 30.8% of the subjects claimed to apply the Merdeka Curriculum continuously, which represents yet another effort on their part to adjust teaching procedures in line with the new curriculum's objectives.

However, the data also reveal that a reasonably small, but still considerable, percentage of teachers are not yet implementing the Merdeka Curriculum on a systematic basis. Approximately 23.1% of the teachers reported that they use the principles of the new curriculum from time to time, reflecting a more differential or non-systematic implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in their English classes. Additionally, 15.4% of teachers reported that they rarely use the Merdeka Curriculum. However, it is reassuring to understand that no respondent indicated they had never used the new curriculum when teaching.

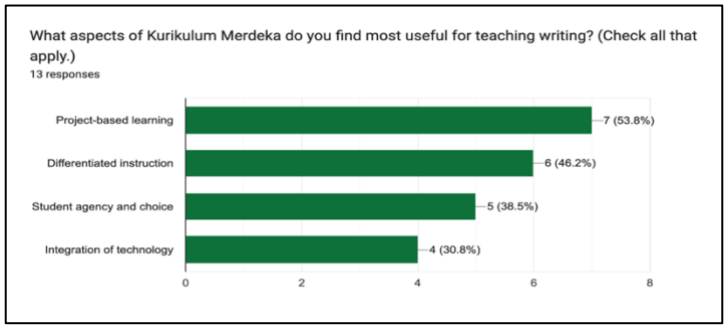


Figure 3. *Data on participants' perception of the Merdeka Curriculum aspect for English writing*

Then, discussing the aspects involved in the Merdeka Curriculum for the process of learning English writing, the participants provided varied responses, as shown in Figure 3. As shown in Figure 3, project-based learning was the most in demand, with 53.8% of the sample selecting it. This is to ensure that teachers recognize that having students work on inquiry-based, hands-on learning projects is an effective way to enhance their writing skills. The second significant finding is honoring differentiated instruction, for which 46.2% of the sample

chose. This suggests that teachers recognize the importance of pedagogical adaptation to cater to the diverse interests and needs of learners, particularly in writing instruction. Student agency and choice were also mentioned as a good reason, selected by 38.5% of the survey respondents. This recognition is that giving students more autonomy over their own learning process can have a positive impact on their writing development. Finally, the selection of technology, made by 30.8% of the respondents, suggests the potential role of technology and digital resources in supporting the development of writing instruction in the Merdeka Curriculum.

Teachers' Perception and Experience in Teaching Writing to VHS Students under the Merdeka Curriculum

The perception and experiences of teachers in teaching writing to VHS students within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum have garnered significant attention in the field of education. This study aims to explore how teachers perceive their roles in facilitating writing instruction and the challenges they encounter while implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in the classroom, according to Figure 4 below:

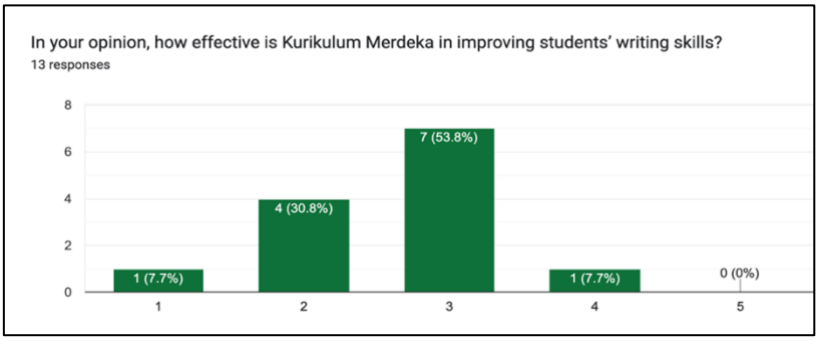


Figure 4. *The data on the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in improving writing skills*

Figure 4 analyzes the success of the Merdeka Curriculum in enhancing students' writing capabilities. From the results, 53.8% of the respondents rate the curriculum as effective, 30.8% rate it as moderately effective, and 7.7% rate it as ineffective. The results from the above indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum has succeeded in improving students' writing capabilities, as more than half of the respondents identify that it has enhanced their writing skills. However, the moderate effectiveness reported by a majority of respondents indicates that there are still a number of students who may find it challenging to adapt to the curriculum approach. These demands continued to enhance curriculum implementation and teaching methods. The comparatively small percentage of students who reported that the curriculum was ineffective necessitates more research into the probable obstacles to its success, including student learning needs, instructional methods, and provision of resources. Data concerning these aspects will be essential in achieving the optimal formulation of the curriculum and its effectiveness in enhancing writing ability.

Second, Figure 5 addresses the concerns of English writing teachers regarding the recognition of the Merdeka Curriculum. The primary issues identified are inconsistency of the students' writing skills (92.3%), insufficient time (23.1%), inadequate training (30.8%), and insufficient teaching materials (7.7%). The findings indicate that the most critical problem is the inconsistency of students' writing skills, which breaks the homogeneity of learning outcomes and complicates teaching. The teachers also mentioned that time constraints also

prevent them from teaching effectively, and inadequate training hinders their capacity to draw out the best from the curriculum. Moreover, limited access to teaching resources was also cited as a contributing factor to these issues, particularly in the availability of interactive and nurturing learning materials for diverse students. These challenges underscore the need for particular professional learning and resourcing to facilitate the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

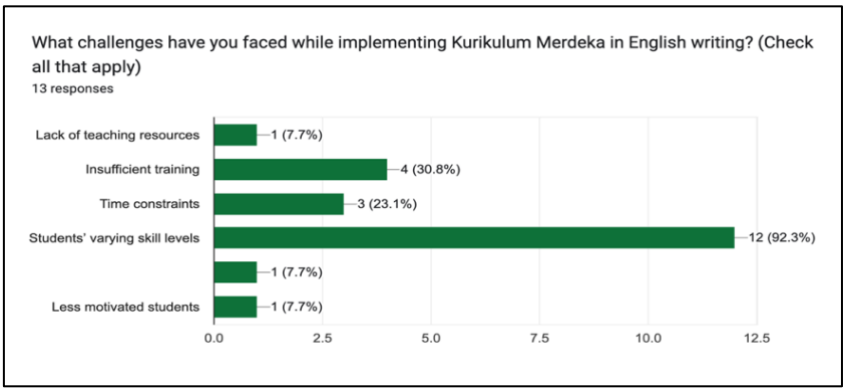


Figure 5. *Participants' challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in teaching English writing*

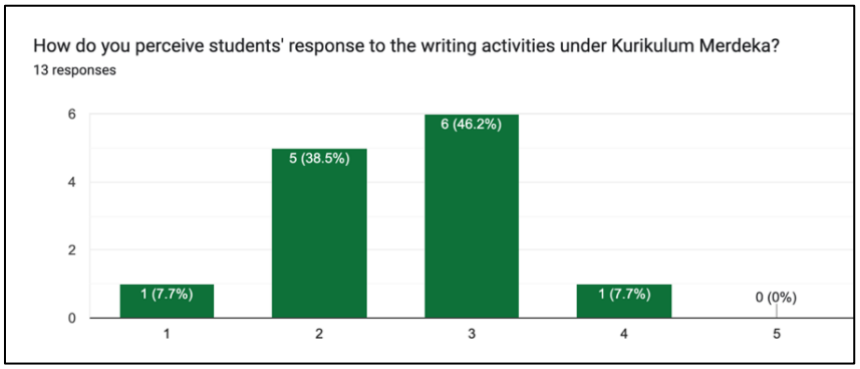


Figure 6. *The data about how participants perceive the students' response to the writing activity*

Figure 6 presents teachers' perceptions of students' responses to the writing activities under the Merdeka Curriculum. The results indicate that the majority of teachers (46.2%) find the students' reactions to be positive, with 38.5% viewing them as moderately positive. Only a limited number of teachers (7.7%) reported neutral or adverse reactions from the students. This indicates that the Merdeka Curriculum has been widely accepted by the students as a whole, especially for writing activities. This implies that students enjoy participating in the activities and are more likely to learn. The moderate answers, however, indicate room for improvement in adapting to the complexity level or giving more detailed feedback. The low rate of neutral or negative responses could be a reflection of individual challenges faced by some students, which can be attributed to variations in learning styles, prior knowledge, or the need for adaptation in instructional methods. Therefore, more personalized instruction and continuous feedback can enhance student engagement and performance.

Discussion

According to the above results, a complex situation exists regarding curriculum implementation among vocational high school teachers, particularly with respect to the implementation of English language teaching. The familiarity of the curriculum data reveals a significant image: nearly 40% of the teachers demonstrate moderate knowledge, and another 40% possess minimal knowledge of the essential principles of the curriculum. Only 23% of respondents report a complete understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum (Ben Gurion & Nasir, 2024; Ferdaus & Novita, 2023; Wijaya et al., 2024). This spread highlights one significant hindrance in effective deployment, emphasizing the paramount necessity of systemic professional development, special training sessions, and robust support systems.

Implementation frequencies in English composition pedagogy illustrate positive, though mild, trends. Approximately 61.6% of teachers apply Merdeka Curriculum principles consistently, 30.8% always, and another 30.8% often. Another 23.1% use the curriculum occasionally, and 15.4% hardly ever apply its principles. Notably, the absence of teachers reporting zero implementation is a sign of high acceptance of the new teaching strategy. Teachers also determined the most essential pedagogical strategies that support the Merdeka Curriculum values. Project-based learning was the top choice, with 53.8% of the respondents indicating its effectiveness in engaging students in experiential, inquiry-based learning. Second, it was differentiated instruction, with 46.2% acknowledging the need to adjust pedagogical strategies to suit different learning needs. Student autonomy and choice (38.5%) and technology integration (30.8%) were also expressions of the curriculum's diversity.

The research findings have implications that extend beyond statistical interpretation. Professional development is a significant area of focus, with recommended interventions through targeted training programs, mentoring, and extensive resource development. Pedagogical support should emphasize project-based learning, technology integration, and student-centered methods, leading to autonomy and adaptive learning (Syahida & Siminto, 2023; Tang, 2023). Despite the reassuring results, the research does acknowledge limitations. The article suggests the need for longer studies, larger samples, inter-school type comparisons, and a more comprehensive exploration of implementation effects over a period of years. The Merdeka Curriculum represents a significant shift in pedagogy, where incessant guidance, collaboration, and an educator’s perspective on school reform are at play (Ramdhani et al., 2024).

Lastly, the study supports the vital truth that the proper implementation of a curriculum is not an outright substitution but a deliberate adaptation. The Merdeka Curriculum defies traditional education standards by promoting student autonomy, pluralist learning strategies, and responsive pedagogy (Lestari et al., 2023; Syahrir et al., 2024). For vocational high schools, this is an educational environment not just of cognition, but one that conditions and empowers students as independent, self-motivated learners capable of participating in fuller and more complex educational and workplace environments. The future demands a concerted action of all the various education stakeholders - policymakers, educators, and administrative officials – to accept this revolutionary movement.

The data provide a close and fine-grained analysis of vocational high school teachers’ enactment of the Merdeka Curriculum, and a rich description of curriculum understanding and enactment. The teacher familiarization findings are telling roughly 40% of teachers have bounded knowledge, and a further 40% have moderate comprehension of the master

principles of the curriculum. This lopsided spread of knowledge highlights an irreplaceable need to intensify professional education and foundational courses (Halawa, 2024). English writing instruction implementation rates are encouraging. Around 61.6% of teachers consistently fully implement the Merdeka Curriculum guidelines, and another significant proportion also actively participates in innovative aspects of the curriculum. Standard uses illustrate a greater acceptability of new teaching methods, accompanied by some resistance to detailed understanding (Fauziah et al., 2023; Purwanti & Wardani, 2024). Crucially, none have refused the outright application, suggesting the optimistic horizon for scholastic innovation. The research identified key pedagogical strategies that align with the Merdeka Curriculum's innovative framework (Raudah et al., 2024; Safitri & Kusumaningtyas, 2023). Project-based learning emerged as the most promising approach, with 53.8% of respondents highlighting its effectiveness in creating engaging, inquiry-driven learning experiences. Differentiated instruction (46.2%) and student agency (38.5%) further illustrated the curriculum's commitment to personalized and student-centered learning environments.

These findings result in directions for more adaptive and dynamic models of education. The findings have significant implications for professional training and support in teaching. Implications are drawn from the need for immediate training protocols, mentoring, and comprehensive support systems to close knowledge gaps (Wilson & Nurkhamidah, 2023). Schools must invest in creating materials that not only cover the curriculum but also outline how to implement it. The research acknowledges the complexities of changing the curriculum, taking into account the fact that everyday use often outweighs theoretical knowledge (Fabela et al., 2024). It is a system-wide process that involves continuous professional growth, mutual learning, and a willingness to adapt pedagogy. The Merdeka Curriculum is not only an organizational transformation but also a paradigm shift in pedagogical engagement and student empowerment (Fatma et al., 2023). There are complexities in realizing the maximum potential of the curriculum. The various degrees of teacher familiarization and deployment are such that a one-size-fits-all answer is not possible. Policymakers and future researchers need to develop more flexible and empowering models that can accommodate the multifaceted needs of teachers and students in every learning environment. The research henceforth proposes the Merdeka Curriculum as a viable solution that can facilitate more progressive, student-oriented education (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023). With project-based education, technology integration, and autonomy, the curriculum breaks down all traditional learning paradigms.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore English teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in vocational high schools, with a particular focus on how the curriculum is applied in the teaching of English writing. The findings reveal that while the curriculum encourages student-centered and responsive pedagogies designed to enhance learners' critical thinking and creativity, its practical implementation remains uneven. Teachers demonstrated varying levels of understanding and adaptation, influenced by challenges such as limited digital infrastructure, insufficient professional development, and a persistent gap between educational expectations and industry demands. Collaborative practices among teachers emerged as a key driver of meaningful curriculum enactment, reinforcing the role of teacher agency and digital readiness in shaping effective learning experiences. However, this study has limitations, particularly in terms of its scope and sample size, which may not fully represent the diverse contexts of vocational schools across Indonesia. The reliance on self-

reported perspectives may also introduce subjective biases that limit the depth of understanding of classroom realities.

Future studies should consider broader and more diverse participant groups to provide a more comprehensive overview of curriculum implementation nationwide. Longitudinal investigations are also necessary to assess the long-term effects of Merdeka Curriculum practices on students' writing development and workplace readiness. Additionally, research that incorporates classroom observations and industry stakeholder viewpoints would offer deeper insights and help bridge existing gaps between learning outcomes and labor market needs.

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