

ENGLISH TEACHER AGENCY AND COMPETENCIES IN IMPLEMENTING *KURIKULUM MERDEKA* AT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN PALEMBANG, SOUTH-SUMATERA, INDONESIA

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Abstract study aims to examine teacher agency and its influence on teacher competence in the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. The study involved English teachers at the secondary school level as research subjects, who were divided based on their response to curriculum change: proactive, reactive and passive. The results show that teachers with proactive teacher agency adapt more quickly and are able to develop their pedagogical, social and professional competencies better. They take advantage of the freedom offered by Merdeka Curriculum to innovate in teaching and integrate technology and interactive learning methods. In contrast, teachers with reactive responses require more support in the form of training, time and resources to adjust to the changes, while teachers with passive responses tend to maintain traditional teaching methods and show resistance to change, which hinders the development of their competencies. The implications of these findings suggest the importance of providing ongoing training, adequate resources and collaboration among teachers to support the successful implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. Structural support and better communication between schools and teachers are needed to ensure that all teachers, regardless of their level of teacher agency, can contribute effectively to the implementation of the new curriculum

1. Introduction

The Kurikulum Merdeka (KM) was introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in February 2022. The Minister claims that this curriculum will help Indonesia get past its current learning problem brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning loss and a widening learning gap among students were the most likely signs of the learning crisis ([The Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022](#)).

The results of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) International Student Assessment Program (PISA) study was the other factor that led to the revision of the previous national curriculum, the 2013 Curriculum. It was reported that surveys conducted between 2000 and 2018 revealed no appreciable change in Indonesia's educational system. To make matters worse, the 2018 PISA study's findings were inferior to those of the 2015 survey ([Shocheb, 2023](#)).



The Minister of Education (2022) provided various benefits of KM implementation in schools to bolster the argument of revamping the current curriculum. First, the curriculum was more thoroughly and simply written, emphasizing the needful resources and the kids' age-appropriate competency development. Teachers and students are granted greater autonomy. However, students are free to select their courses in accordance with their goals, interests, and abilities. Through varied learning, educators will teach pupils to adapt to their own growth and accomplishments. Schools also have the power to create and oversee curricula and instruction that are appropriate for the characteristics of their pupils and their educational background.

Bhawana (2023) and Little (2003) consequently stated that the KM was developed and put into practice in order to raise the standard of education in Indonesia. Teachers may find that the curriculum offers more effective methods for enhancing pupils' reading, numeracy, and character development. It is anticipated that over time, raising pupils' levels of literacy, numeracy, and character traits will likely boost their future academic performance. Furthermore, the fundamental tenet of knowledge management—student-centered learning—may direct, navigate, and lead students toward their pleasure and safety while they pursue their education. As a result, KM implementation entails producing exceptional, intelligent pupils who fit the Pancasila criteria.

However, instructors have a major role in how curriculum changes are implemented in classrooms. In addition to establishing new guidelines, implementing a new curriculum necessitates altering the school's culture of instruction. Since they are the ones that introduce the curriculum in the classroom, better instructors facilitate the successful implementation of a new curriculum (Alsubaie, 2016). Furthermore, the curriculum modification will not be successfully implemented if teachers do not react positively to

it. According to Fullan (2007), effective curriculum change implementation requires ongoing communication among stakeholders and a shared understanding of what the change entails. Therefore, before implementing the curriculum modification, policymakers need to take into account the knowledge, experiences, and competencies of instructors. Overall, because instructors are so important to the success of curriculum development activities and their implementation, curriculum planning should consider basic issues regarding teachers' thinking and doing.

The teacher's role is crucial to the implementation of a new curriculum because they are an integral part of the framework designed to foster creativity. This construct is extremely likely to support or prevent the application of new ideas and practices in a new curriculum (Rogan & Grayson, 2003). In a similar vein, Fullan (2007) clarified that curricular reform implementation "depends on what teachers do and think" (p.115). In summary, instructors must align their knowledge, abilities, beliefs, and concepts with the new curriculum for curriculum implementation to be successful.

The direction of the teaching and learning activities in the classroom must be completely managed by the teachers (Lowe & Appleton, 2015). Teachers' poor comprehension of the curriculum was one of the main obstacles to the successful implementation of curricular change (Cheung & Wong, 2012). Therefore, in every attempt to modify the curriculum, attention should be paid to the roles played by teachers and their responses to the core ideas of the change.

The improvement of the six English language skills—listening, speaking, reading, writing, and watching—as well as their application to a variety of text genres—is the main goal of English language instruction in the KM. It is required of students that they possess the communication skills necessary to engage with the global world. The curriculum's objectives are developed to address the ELT focus. According to the goals of ELT in KM, students should be able to: 1)

Proficiency in oral, written, visual, and audio-visual English communication; 2) Intercultural competency to understand and value both foreign and Indonesian cultural products and perspectives; 3) Self-assurance to express oneself as a responsible and independent person; and 4) Critical thinking abilities and creativity.

When implementing KM in ELT, it is important to take into account the teachers' reactions to the curriculum's implementation. This study aims to investigate how ELT instructors' agency in responding to the enactment of the KM effects teachers' competences, as improving students' English communication competency is one of the goals of ELT in the KM.

A large number of teachers have made some attempts to adapt to the curriculum shift. They participated in a variety of government-or other institution-provided training programs to increase their knowledge and proficiency in KM implementation. Teachers of English as a second language look to the new curriculum for hope and answers. Naturally, though, not every teacher has the same background. Many bring an optimistic outlook and are eager to optimize their agency as teachers with the new curriculum but many others perform the other way around, they are pessimistic and cannot catch up with the new curriculum (Widodo, 2016; Wang, 2022; Shochab, 2023; Rogan & Grayson, 2003).

Based on my initial investigation while visiting multiple senior high schools in Palembang, it appears that the same thing is true there. In order to pinpoint issues and provide answers pertaining to English language teacher agencies and the introduction of a new curriculum in classrooms, more research on this topic is required. In order to better understand teacher agency and skills, this study will focus on senior high schools in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia as they adopt Kurikulum Merdeka (KM).

2. Literature review

2.1. Teacher Agency

Teacher agency, according to Giddens (1984), quoted in Guoyuan (2020), is the process of forming unique behaviors and acts throughout time. The definition of the term "agency" has been defined differently by different academic authorities. According to Guoyuan (2020), agency is the dynamic ability of individuals to act autonomously and make their own decisions. This is stated from a sociological perspective. According to philosophy, agency did not originate from individual behavior but rather from a collective, dynamic combination of structural and cultural factors.

According to Zimmerman (2000) the ecological perspective, agency situates it inside the contingent environments in which agents behave based on the values, beliefs, and characteristics they mobilize in relation to a specific circumstance. According to this perspective, people acquire agency through their active participation in the surroundings, not because they possess it. Informed by the past (prior experience, e.g., adopted routines), oriented toward the future (motivation, fears, desires), and engaged with the present (e.g., judgments about the limitations and opportunities provided by the contexts), such ecological agency also takes into account the interplay of time dimensions.

The ability of educators to take intentional, positive action to guide their own professional development and raise the standard of education is known as teacher agency. It is applied when people make decisions and choose positions that have an impact on their careers. From the standpoint of agency, educators (as agents) must be viewed as whole individuals with their own life experiences, feelings, responsibilities, and worries for their own welfare in addition to their missions, identities, and duties as educators (Avalos, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004; Guskey, 2002; Leat et al., 2014; Reeves, 2010).

Furthermore, sociocultural factors including material circumstances, physical artifacts, power dynamics, and school cultures that either limit or facilitate teachers' agency mutually comprise teacher agency. Put differently, teacher agency is not

something that is possessed by individuals but rather something that arises or is attained through teachers' engagement with the environment. It is the outcome of the interaction between agentic spaces (contextual variables, such as societal change, role expectations, and social work) and agentic capacity (individual elements, such as commitment, value, role, belief, and power) (Biesta et al. 2015).

Teachers are expected to be "agents of change" in the areas of curriculum development (e.g., utilizing multiple resources), classroom teaching and learning (e.g., facilitating collaborative discussions to inspire students), and school improvement (e.g., forming and reforming fruitful collaborations with colleagues, parents, and the community and engaging in inquiries seeking to address exclusion and educational disadvantage). The degree of teacher agency varies according to social structure, attitudes, and specific environmental situations that present opportunities and limits.

2.2. Teacher Agency in Response to Curriculum Reform

The Triadic Reciprocity Framework Core Agency Concepts (TRFCAC) concept was put forth by Jenkins (2020). The model served two purposes. It made it possible to explore the contextual circumstances that affected the teachers as they acted and to identify and map the numerous characteristics of the act of teacher agency as stated by the instructors.

When educators try to control or influence some aspects of curricular changes in their schools, they are exercising agency at work. Teachers are makers of experiences and shapers of events when Albert Bandura's agentic theory is applied in these situations. Teachers try to control the events that occur in their lives. In order to avert undesirable outcomes and accomplish their desired ones, people use their influence over things they think they can control. They will be altered as a result. There is a triadic connected and interactive connection between the personal determinants of a person, their behavioral determinants, and the environmental determinants in which they live and work. The interaction between contextual elements (determinants) constantly evolves and

fluctuates in pressure and influence. Teachers have the ability to be change agents as well as subjects. Teachers who adapt to curriculum changes when they are presented with them serve as an example of this.

The Triadic Reciprocity Framework Core Agency Concepts (TRFCAC) model is used to analyze teacher agency in response to curriculum reform. According to Jenkins (2020), instructors exhibited three distinct forms of teacher agency: proactive, reactive, and passive responses.

Teachers exhibited proactive agency when they took the initiative to modify the curriculum in response to a recognized need, without external guidance. When instructors are tasked with implementing curricular changes in their classrooms, departments, or schools, they are acting with reactive agency. In these cases of reactive agency, instructors responded to a change that was imposed and sought to mitigate its impacts rather than being the ones who started the change. Teachers who concentrated on sticking to the curriculum they had previously taught or changing it to fit their own agendas instead of engaging with the compulsory curriculum change were practicing passive agency.

Teachers demonstrated proactive agency when they took the initiative to alter the curriculum. To get the results they wanted, these teachers were driven to seek the change. Teachers exhibited reactive agency when they responded to decisions made by leadership at the top-down level. In the classroom and beyond, instructors exhibited passive agency when they abstained from contributing to, influencing, or carrying out departmental and school-wide curriculum modifications.

Teachers who used a curriculum-change strategy that allowed them to avoid changing anything about their teaching methods that they disagreed with or did not want to alter were exercising the passive form of agency. In many instances, educators reported that, despite the fact that not much had changed in the classroom, it appeared to other students that they had adopted the required curricular modification. Outside of the classroom, they talked about how different contextual

circumstances had left them feeling low-motivated or ineffective when it came to changing the curriculum in their departments and schools.

2.2.1. Types of Teacher Competences

The Ministry of Education and Culture's Regulation No. 16 from 2007 shall be followed by the four different types of teacher competencies used in the classroom. Each ability is explained in detail as follows:

1) Pedagogic Competence

- a) Master the characteristics of students from the aspects of physical, moral, social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual.
- b) Master the learning theory and the principles of learning.
- c) Develop the curriculum of the learning subject being taught.
- d) Conduct effective teaching.
- e) Utilize information and communication technology for the benefit of learning.
- f) Facilitate the growth of students' potential to actualize their potential abilities.
- g) Communicate with students effectively, empathetically, and politely.
- h) Conduct assessment and evaluation of the process and the result of learning.
- i) Make use of the result of the assessment and the evaluation for the improvement of learning.
- j) Do a reflection for the sake of the learning quality improvement.

2) Personality Competence

- a) Act accordingly in line with the norms of religion, law, society, and national culture.
- b) Show up as a person with integrity, a noble attitude, and a role model for students and the community.
- c) Show up as a person with a steady and stable personality, wise and respectful.
- d) Show work ethic, high responsibility, teacher pride,

and self-confidence.

- e) Uphold the teacher's ethics.

3) Social Competency

- a) Act inclusively, and objectively, not discriminating against gender, religion, physical condition, family background, or socioeconomic status.
- b) Communicate effectively, empathetically, and politely with the colleagues, parents, and the society.
- c) Adapt to the workplace in all areas of the Republic of Indonesia which consists of social and cultural diversity.
- d) Communicate with the community of teacher professionals through several means of communicating media.

4) Professional Competency

- a) Master the material, structure, concept, and thinking pattern of the science related to the subject being taught.
- b) Master standard and basic competency of the subject being taught.
- c) Develop the material of the subject being taught creatively.
- d) Develop professionalism continuously through reflective action.
- e) Utilize information, communication, and technology to communicate and develop personal ability..

2.3. Teacher Agency and Pedagogical Practice

The ability of teachers to carry out their professional duties as instructors in the classroom is influenced by teacher agency. The impacts could have an impact on how educators carry out their lesson plans in the classroom. According to the research conducted by Yakavets et al. (2020), educators typically hold a high feeling of professional responsibility towards their students. As a result, in order to make wise decisions about their own educational views, everyday classroom practices, and the current experiences of their pupils, teachers heavily rely on their professional agency. In

order to maximize their students' potential, teachers make decisions based on the requirements of the new curriculum as well as the experiences of their previous pupils.

Imants and Van der Wal (2019) expounded on a particular model that elucidated the correlation among teacher agency, curricular reform, and individual practice. They observed that the highly contextualized school curriculum and professional development have a dynamic interaction with teachers as actors. The teacher's practice may or may not improve as a result of the dynamic interaction. The dynamic relationship's outcome can have a variety of effects on an individual's practice, the authors continued.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employs a comparative case analysis methodology and will be analyzed through the critical discourse analysis lens. The study, which examines how teachers' agency changes their pedagogical practice as they implement Kurikulum Merdeka, is a good fit for the case study methodology. "How' questions are likely to favor using a case study," according to Creswell and Cresswell (2018) (p. 11). "An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident," according to Yin (2009) on page 18 and in 2018 on page 15, is what the qualitative case study approach is. Moreover, Yin said that in real-world circumstances, context and phenomenon are not always immediately apparent. As a result, a case study addresses a specific circumstance with a number of intriguing aspects. This method uses triangulation to draw evidence from several sources.

To receive a comprehensive and in-depth explanation of the research questions' responses. Fairclough's three-dimensional data analysis will be used to interpret the data. The gathered information will be subjected to three distinct levels of analysis: macro, meso, and micro (Behnam & Mahmoudy, 2013).

Documentation, video records, archival records, surveys, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and tangible artifacts are a few examples of possible evidence sources (Yin, 2009). Because the multiple-case research style presents contrasting scenarios that could reinforce the findings for a theoretical replication compared to merely a single-case study, it is selected for this study over the single-case study design (Yin, 2018). "To develop a thorough understanding of the particular at each scale and to analyze how these understandings produce similar and different interpretations of the policy, problem, or phenomenon under study" is the stated objective of comparative case study research, according to Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) (p. 41). The researcher will be able to comprehend the phenomenon under study from several perspectives thanks to this methodology.

3.2. Subject of Research

Four English language instructors from four senior high schools in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia, will be the study's subjects. The purposive sampling method will be used to select the research subject. In the participant recruitment selection procedure, three requirements must be met. First, the school's location will determine the choice of school. Two educational institutions will be chosen from Palembang's downtown. The other two schools will be selected from Palembang's suburbs. It is anticipated that the location criterion will accurately reflect the demographic makeup of Palembang's public schools.

Second, before implementing the curriculum, the instructors should have taken multiple preparation trainings and have expertise administering the Kurikulum Merdeka. This criterion was selected to confirm that the participants knew enough about Kurikulum Merdeka. The number of research subjects chosen is determined by how feasible it is to collect the necessary data. The academic schedule of the institution will impose restrictions on the researcher as they gather different kinds of data. In order to adequately represent the phenomenon being examined in relation to teacher agency

and teacher pedagogical practice, four participants should be sufficient.

3.3. Instruments and Technique for collection

Data from interviews and a questionnaire will be gathered in order to address the first research question. A questionnaire with open-ended questions will be used to collect data on teacher agency. A semi-structured interview will then be used to corroborate the information from the questionnaire once more.

A semi-structured interview will be used to provide answers to the second through the fourth questions. Questions regarding the participants' opinions of Kurikulum Merdeka will be posed. The final query will be addressed by gathering information from classroom observations, including lesson plans from teachers, student work that has been deidentified, and video recordings for data backup. The teaching background questionnaire and school profiles will provide further information about the teaching backgrounds of the teacher participants as well as their school.

3.4. Technique for Analyzing Data

The Fairclough model of data analysis will be used to examine the qualitative data obtained from a questionnaire, audio recordings of interviews, video recordings of teaching sessions, observation field notes, lesson plans from teachers, and deidentified classroom assignments from students. As to Henderson (2005), Talib, and Fitzgerald (2016), who cited the Fairclough model, the data analysis would be carried out in three stages:

Table 1.

Fairclough's CDA Data Analysis

Macro level of analysis	The analysis of the rationale for the enactment of <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>
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Meso level of analysis	The analysis of how participants perceive the implementation of <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>
Micro level of analysis	The analysis of Participants' Pedagogical Practices in four selected schools as they implement <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>

I will explore each data collected to answer the research questions formulated at the beginning of the study. The analysis will also be guided by the theory or model proposed by Jenkins (2020), Yakavets, et al., (2020) and Imants & Van der Wal, 2019).

3.5. Triangulation

The validity and reliability tests will be used to assess the research's quality (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Trustworthiness is the phrase used in qualitative research to discuss validity and reliability. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are four ideas that can be used to make research trustworthy (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Credibility can be characterized as the actual worth of the research results. The accuracy with which the study findings represent and interpret the legitimate facts and opinions of the participants is determined by the credibility of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). We will use member-checking and triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of this research. Using a variety of data sources, including questionnaires, interviews, classroom observations, videotaped teaching sessions, lesson plans from instructor participants, and deidentified student assignments, the triangulation technique will be carried out. I am able to develop a cogent defense of themes by looking at data from multiple sources. Additionally, teacher participants will receive the verbatim transcripts of the interviews for verification as part of a member-checking technique to ascertain the accuracy of the findings.

According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014), transferability refers to the ability of study findings to be applied in different situations or contexts. To make this

research transferable, I will give a thorough and in-depth explanation of the results. This enables readers to assess the extent to which the research findings can be applied to their own contexts. The consistency and objectivity of the research findings are what make them reliable and confirmable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The researcher uses a peer-review approach to guarantee dependability and confirmability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I'll consult with a few colleagues as well as authorities on critical discourse analysis and teacher agency to get their opinions and suggestions.

3.6. Research Timeline

The research will be conducted in four public senior high schools in Palembang, South Sumatera, Indonesia. The timeline of the research is presented in the following table.

Table 2.

Timeline

Time	Activity
August – November 2023	Writing of research proposal
January- April 2024	Revising research proposal
May – December 2024	Preparing to collect data
January – June 2025	Processing/analyzing data
January-June 2025	Writing up chapters
August 2024	Approval for exam

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The Result of English teachers perceive their current agency to respond to curriculum change

The results of this study indicate that English teachers' perceptions of educational institutions vary in responding to changes in the Merdeka Curriculum. The survey results show that most teachers believe that they are quite capable of adapting to the changes; however, some teachers feel less confident. One teacher stated, *"I feel that this curriculum*

change is important, but it is difficult for me to follow all these changes because of the limited time and resources available" (Teacher 1, Questionnaire, 2024). This shows that teachers' perceptions of their ability to implement curriculum changes are influenced by limited time and resources.

The interview results showed significant differences between teachers with high teacher agency and teachers with low teacher agency. Teachers with high agency see curriculum changes as an opportunity to innovate and improve the learning process. As expressed by one teacher, *"I see the Independent Curriculum as an opportunity to increase student engagement. I have greater freedom to choose the learning method that best suits students' needs"*. (Teacher 2, Interview, 2024) These teachers showed an optimistic attitude towards change. This is in line with the theory of teacher agency put forward by Priestly et al. (2015), which states that teacher agency allows teachers to act independently and constructively in responding to changes that occur in their environment. Priestly et al. (2015) stated that teacher agency is the capacity of teachers to act based on their beliefs, knowledge, and social conditions, which allows them to act based on their beliefs. Priestly et al. (2015) stated that teacher agency is the capacity of teachers to act based on their beliefs, knowledge, and social conditions, which allows them to be more adaptive in facing the challenges of a new curriculum.

However, teachers with low teacher agency felt pressured by curriculum changes and lacked confidence in implementing them. Based on an interview, one teacher stated, *"I feel like this change is too fast, and I don't fully understand how best to implement it in my class,"* (Teacher 3, Interview 2024). This teacher indicated that the speed of change along with the lack of instruction and support hindered the adaptation process. These results are in line with Wang's (2022) research, which found that teachers with low authority often find it difficult to adapt the curriculum due to limited external support, such as adequate training and resources. Wang also emphasized that teachers need sufficient supportive contexts to develop their organizations and adapt to change.

In an interview, another teacher also emphasized the importance of support in the process of adapting to the Independent Curriculum:

"I feel like I need to get more relevant training to be able to implement this curriculum well. Without enough guidance, I tend to follow the old methods". (Teacher 4, Interview, 2024).

This teacher described a reliance on external training and guidance, indicating the importance of structural support in building strong teacher agency. In closing, another teacher with moderate teacher agency stated: *"I understand the purpose of the Independent Curriculum, but I need more time to adjust my teaching methods to this new curriculum."* (Teacher 5, Interview, 2024). This teacher highlighted the need for a longer adaptation period to implement the new curriculum effectively, especially in terms of changing teaching approaches that have been used.

These findings suggest that teacher agency influences teachers' perceptions of curriculum change and their ability to adapt to new teaching methods. Teachers with high teacher agency demonstrate a willingness to innovate and respond proactively to curriculum change, as described by Priestly et al. (2015), who stated that agency is a quality derived from teachers' active involvement in their social and professional contexts. On the other hand, teachers with low teacher agency feel constrained by a lack of training, support, and time, which impacts their adaptation to curriculum change.

According to Fullan (2007), success in curriculum change is highly dependent on the active participation of teachers, which requires strong teacher agency. If teachers feel less supported, as expressed in interviews, they tend to be reactive or passive towards change, which can ultimately hinder the effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Wang (2022) also emphasized the importance of structural support to enhance teacher agency, especially in the context of significant changes in education policy. Support such as relevant training, sufficient adaptation time, and adequate resources are needed to help teachers respond to change more effectively.

4.2. The Result of English teachers with proactive responses perceive the English Language Teaching (ELT) in Kurikulum Merdeka.

Based on the results of the questionnaire and interviews, teachers who had a proactive response to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum emphasized that this curriculum gave them greater freedom in designing and adjusting teaching materials according to students' needs. One teacher wrote in the questionnaire: *"I feel freer to adapt teaching materials to students' needs, and this increases student engagement in learning."* (Teacher 4, Questionnaire, 2024). This freedom allows teachers to apply teaching methods that are more relevant to the classroom context, increase students' active participation and make learning more dynamic.

In interviews, teachers with proactive teacher agency expressed very positive views of the Independent Curriculum. They saw this curriculum as an opportunity to innovate and expand creativity in teaching. One teacher said: *"This curriculum allows me to be more flexible in using various teaching methods such as project-based learning and task-based learning, which I feel are more effective in improving students' language skills."* (Teacher 5, Interview, 2024). Approaches such as project-based learning and task-based learning have long been recognized in the educational literature as strategies that encourage students to think critically, collaborate, and communicate more effectively (Krajcik & Blumenfeld, 2006).

Teachers also emphasized the role of technology in improving the effectiveness of English learning. One teacher stated: *"With the Merdeka Curriculum, I use digital tools such as videos and interactive learning applications more often, which really help students improve their listening and speaking skills."* (Teacher 6, Interview, 2024). This is in line with previous research that emphasizes the importance of technology integration in language learning to improve students' communication skills (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Ahearn, 2001; Borg, 2003). The use of digital tools not

only makes it easier to deliver material, but also enriches students' learning experiences with access to wider resources.

Other teachers also shared positive views, highlighting the flexibility offered by the Independent Curriculum: *"I find it more flexible to adapt teaching materials and methods to suit the students' abilities. This helps me to focus on developing the practical skills they need."* (Teacher 7, Interview, 2024). This supports the self-determination theory proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000), where intrinsic motivation arises when someone is given the freedom to choose and act according to their personal goals, which in this case are teaching goals.

However, some teachers also indicated that adapting to the new curriculum required additional time and effort. One teacher said:

"Although I feel helped by the freedom provided by the Independent Curriculum, I still feel that it takes time to really adapt all these new materials and methods to the conditions in the classroom." (Teacher 8, Interview, 2024). This shows that although proactive teacher agency can encourage innovation, the adjustment process still requires sufficient support and time.

The results of this study indicate that teachers with proactive teacher agency feel more motivated and involved in implementing the Independent Curriculum. The freedom provided by this curriculum encourages teachers to develop creativity in teaching, as illustrated by the use of project-based and task-based learning methods. This is in line with the self-determination theory which states that intrinsic motivation arises when individuals are given the autonomy to make decisions that are in line with their personal values and goals (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ahmad & Shah, 2022). Proactive teachers are more likely to take the initiative to adapt teaching methods to students' needs, which in turn increases student engagement and learning outcomes.

4.3. The Result of English teachers with reactive responses perceive the ELT in Kurikulum Merdeka.

Based on the results of the interviews and questionnaires, teachers who had reactive responses in the questionnaire indicated that they were more likely to wait for direction from

the school or government before fully implementing the Independent Curriculum. One respondent stated: *"I feel the need to follow the direction given by the school before I can fully implement this curriculum."* (Teacher 7, Questionnaire, 2024). This statement indicates that teachers with reactive responses feel the need for formal guidance and training before they can feel confident in adopting the new strategies offered by the curriculum.

The interview results also showed that teachers with reactive responses tended to accept the changes, but they felt they needed more time, training, and additional support to be able to implement the Independent Curriculum effectively. One teacher said: *"I am trying to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, but I still feel the need to take further training to really understand the best way to do it."* (Teacher 8, Interview, 2024). This view highlights that even though they were open to change, they still felt underprepared without additional training.

In addition, several teachers also highlighted limitations in terms of time and facilities as major obstacles in implementing the Independent Curriculum. One teacher stated: *"We have been given training, but the time in class is not enough to implement all the strategies expected by the Independent Curriculum."* (Teacher 9, Interview, 2024). These teachers felt that busy schedules and lack of access to adequate facilities limited their ability to fully implement the new learning approaches suggested by the curriculum.

Another teacher added that the adaptation process took longer due to the differences in conditions between theory and practice in the field: *"The training provided was useful, but when I tried to apply it in class, many things did not match what was taught in the training. So, I had to adjust myself according to the students' conditions."* (Teacher 10, Interview, 2024). This shows a gap between the theory taught in training and the reality in the field, which slows down the process of implementing the Independent Curriculum in schools.

Teachers with a reactive response to curriculum change tend to wait for further direction and need more support to

adapt to the Independent Curriculum. This is in line with [Cheung and Wong's \(2012\)](#) research, which found that the main obstacle to curriculum change was the lack of teacher understanding and readiness. The lack of adequate training and clear instructions made teachers feel the need to rely on direction from the school or government before they could fully adopt the new curriculum.

Teachers with reactive responses tend to follow rather than take the initiative, indicating that their teacher agency still needs to be developed. As revealed by [Tricahyati and Zaim's \(2023\)](#) research, teachers who are not ready to face change often wait for direction or guidance before acting, indicating that ongoing training and guidance are essential to ensure the successful implementation of the new curriculum.

In the context of self-efficacy theory proposed by [Bandura \(1997\)](#), teachers with reactive responses may have lower levels of self-efficacy, which makes them more hesitant to act independently in facing changes. They need successful experiences in implementing new curricula and get stronger external support to increase their confidence in making changes. Therefore, increasing ongoing training and providing adequate facilities will be important steps to encourage teachers with reactive responses to be more prepared for curriculum changes.

[Jenkins' \(2020\)](#) research also confirms that teachers with strong teacher agency are more likely to innovate and adapt teaching methods to the demands of the new curriculum. These teachers not only comply with changes but also actively create learning strategies that are more relevant to student conditions and local contexts. Thus, proactive teacher agency plays an important role in the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum, which allows teachers to be more flexible and innovative in responding to the challenges of the new curriculum.

4.4. The Result of English teachers with passive responses perceive the ELT in Kurikulum Merdeka.

Based on the results of the interviews and questionnaires, teachers with passive responses in the questionnaire showed

that they did not feel the urgency to change their teaching methods despite the curriculum changes. One respondent wrote: *"I still use the same teaching method as before because I feel this method is still relevant and effective."* ([Teacher 10, Questionnaire, 2024](#)). This view shows that teachers with passive responses tend to feel comfortable with the teaching practices they have mastered and are not motivated to adapt to the Merdeka Curriculum.

In interviews, teachers with passive responses emphasized that they felt that the Independent Curriculum did not bring significant changes to the way they taught. One teacher stated: *"I don't see any significant difference between the Independent Curriculum and the previous curriculum. I still use the materials that I have prepared for years."* ([Teacher 11, Interview, 2024](#)). This attitude reflects resistance to change and an emphasis on the continuity of teaching methods that are considered to be proven effective by these teachers.

Another teacher expressed skepticism about the effectiveness of the curriculum changes, saying: *"I think the changes are more administrative than substantive. I don't feel the need to change much in my teaching."* ([Teacher 12, Interview, 2024](#)). This view suggests that these teachers felt that the changes were more of a formality or administrative nature, with no significant impact on the substance of their classroom teaching.

Another teacher added: *"I am not sure that these changes really help students learn better. I have more confidence in the methods that I have been using all this time."* ([Teacher 13, Interview, 2024](#)). This reflects teachers' distrust of the effectiveness of the new approaches introduced by the Independent Curriculum, indicating that they prefer to stick with the methods that they have mastered and proven successful in their experience.

Teachers with a passive response to the Independent Curriculum tend to reject change and choose to continue using old teaching methods that they consider more effective. This supports the theory put forward by [Fullan \(2007\)](#), which states that curriculum change often fails if there is no full

involvement from teachers. Teachers with a passive response may feel that they do not need to be involved in the change because they are comfortable with the methods they have mastered. According to Fullan (2007), the success of implementing change is highly dependent on the active involvement of teachers in the process. If teachers do not feel motivated to change, or feel that the change is not relevant to their needs, then curriculum change is unlikely to be implemented effectively.

This passive attitude can also be related to a study by Ferdaus and Novita (2023), which found that teachers who do not receive full support or adequate training tend to stick to traditional teaching methods. They feel that the old methods they use have proven effective, so they do not see the need to innovate. This attitude reflects a tendency to maintain the status quo in teaching, which can also be triggered by a lack of understanding of the benefits of proposed curriculum changes.

In addition, the theory of resistance to change (Kotter, 1996) explains that teachers with passive responses often resist change because they feel they are not involved in the change process or do not see the value of the change. These teachers may feel a lack of support and relevant training, resulting in low motivation to adopt new approaches to teaching. In the context of the Independent Curriculum, if teachers are not actively involved in the curriculum adaptation process and are not given appropriate training, this resistance is likely to continue.

4.5. The Result of English teacher agency shape teachers' competencies in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka?

The results of the study showed that teacher agency greatly influenced the development of teacher competencies in implementing the Independent Curriculum. Teachers with proactive teacher agency showed better abilities in developing their pedagogical and professional competencies. Teachers who were actively involved in the curriculum adaptation process, such as integrating technology into learning and creating an

interactive learning environment, tended to be more flexible in adapting teaching materials to students' needs. One teacher stated: *"I feel like I adapt to the Independent Curriculum more quickly because I use a lot of technology to increase student engagement."* (Teacher 14, Interview, 2024). This view reflects teachers' ability to take advantage of the opportunities provided by the new curriculum to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

Proactive teachers also showed improvements in their social competence, especially in terms of collaborating with fellow teachers to develop appropriate learning strategies. One teacher added: *"I often discuss with my colleagues about the best way to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, and this really helps me understand the new curriculum better."* (Teacher 15, Interview, 2024). This kind of collaboration strengthens teacher agency by allowing teachers to learn from their colleagues' experiences and improve their teaching practices.

In contrast, teachers who have a reactive or passive response to the Independent Curriculum show limitations in developing their competencies. They tend to maintain old teaching methods and do not take advantage of the opportunities provided by the new curriculum. A teacher with a reactive response said: *"I feel like I still need more training before I can fully implement the Independent Curriculum. Right now, I still use the old way of teaching."* (Teacher 16, Interview, 2024). This shows that the lack of active involvement in the change process hinders the development of the teacher's pedagogical competency.

Passive teachers are even more reluctant to change, and this affects their professional competence. One teacher stated: *"I haven't seen much benefit from the Independent Curriculum, so I stick with the way I usually do it."* (Teacher 17, Interview, 2024). This shows that the lack of teacher agency hinders teachers' adaptation to change and hinders the development of better competence.

Previous research supports this finding. According to Fullan (2007), teacher agency is a key factor in the successful implementation of curriculum change. Teachers with high

agency are more likely to develop new skills and adapt to change, while teachers who do not have agency tend to stick to their old ways and not develop. In addition, [Jenkins \(2020\)](#) found that proactive teacher agency encourages the improvement of teachers' professional and pedagogical competence because they are more likely to engage in continuous learning and collaboration with their colleagues.

Thus, strong teacher agency not only facilitates adaptation to change but also encourages continuous improvement of competence. Proactive teachers show development in their pedagogical, social, and professional competence, while reactive or passive teachers show limited development due to lack of involvement in the change process.

Discussion

This study revealed that teacher agency greatly influences how teachers respond to curriculum changes, especially in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. First, in terms of teachers' perceptions of teacher agency, it was found that teachers with high agency felt more capable and ready to innovate in facing curriculum changes. They viewed the Independent Curriculum as an opportunity to improve their teaching skills and student engagement. In contrast, teachers with low teacher agency, both reactive and passive, showed dependence on school direction or additional support to adjust to the new curriculum. This suggests that there is variation in how teachers interpret their roles in the change process, which impacts their readiness and adaptation.

Teachers with proactive responses to ELT in the Independent Curriculum showed a positive attitude towards the freedom provided by this curriculum. They utilized technology and various innovative teaching methods such as project-based learning and task-based learning to improve students' English skills. These teachers were able to adjust their teaching strategies to the specific needs of their students, which is in line with the theory of intrinsic motivation in self-determination theory ([Deci & Ryan, 2000](#); [Ahmada & Azizah, 2023](#)), where teachers who feel empowered tend to be more creative and

innovative. On the other hand, teachers with reactive responses showed an open attitude towards change, but they needed more training and guidance to be able to implement the curriculum effectively. Limited time and resources were also identified as major obstacles for teachers with reactive responses in implementing the Independent Curriculum.

Teachers with passive responses, who still use traditional teaching methods, feel that this curriculum change does not bring much significant difference. They show resistance to change and tend to maintain the old teaching methods that they have mastered, even though the Independent Curriculum offers an opportunity to update their pedagogical practices. This attitude indicates that without adequate support, curriculum change will be difficult to implement effectively, as explained by [Fullan \(2007\)](#), who emphasized that active teacher involvement is the key to the success of curriculum change.

The influence of teacher agency on teacher competence is also clearly seen in the results of this study. Teachers who are proactive in responding to change show an increase in their pedagogical, social, and professional competence. They adapt more quickly to the demands of the Independent Curriculum and are able to integrate technology and more interactive teaching methods. In contrast, teachers with low agency, both reactive and passive, are slower in developing their competence. They tend to maintain old teaching methods, which hinders the improvement of their pedagogical competence.

Overall, this study shows that teacher agency is a key factor in the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Teachers with high agency are more able to respond to changes actively and creatively, while reactive and passive teachers need more support and training to adapt. These results highlight the importance of providing ongoing support for teachers in the form of sufficient training, resources, and time, to ensure that all teachers, regardless of their level of agency, can contribute effectively to the implementation of the new curriculum.

5. Conclusion

1.1. Contributions of the Study

This research is very helpful for education, especially in terms of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. The results show that educational institutions are very important in determining how teachers respond to curriculum changes and develop pedagogical, social, and professional skills. Teachers who have high agency (both reactive and passive) have the ability to take advantage of the freedom provided by the Merdeka Curriculum to innovate in learning, increase student engagement, and incorporate new technologies and learning approaches. In contrast, teachers who have low agency (both reactive and passive) have difficulty adjusting to change and maintaining older learning approaches.

1.2. Key findings and implications

This research is very helpful for education, especially in terms of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. The results show that educational institutions are very important in determining how teachers respond to curriculum changes and develop pedagogical, social, and professional skills. Teachers who have high agency (both reactive and passive) have the ability to take advantage of the freedom provided by the Merdeka Curriculum to innovate in learning, increase student engagement, and incorporate new technologies and learning approaches. In contrast, teachers who have low agency (both reactive and passive) have difficulty adjusting to change and maintaining older learning approaches.

It is clear that improving teacher organization should be a top priority. With ongoing support in the form of relevant training, availability of adequate resources and sufficient time for teachers to adjust to curriculum changes, the findings suggest that this should be done. To create a supportive environment for curriculum adaptation, inter-teacher collaboration and improved communication between schools and teachers are also important, and the government and education stakeholders should focus more on creating training programs that can help teachers maximize the potential of

Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers can more easily cope with change and improve the quality of their teaching by building a culture where people support each other and learn from others' experiences.

1.3. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample used was limited to English teachers in a particular region, so the findings may not fully reflect the experiences of teachers across Indonesia. Second, this study only focuses on teachers' perceptions in the context of Merdeka Curriculum, without exploring more deeply the implementation of the curriculum in other subjects. Third, this study did not examine in depth external factors such as support from school leaders or government policies that might influence teacher agency.

Future research could address these limitations by expanding the scope of the research area to include more subjects and different school contexts. In addition, further research could also explore how government policies and support from school leaders affect teacher agency on a broader scale. Longitudinal studies are also needed to assess the long-term impact of Merdeka Curriculum on teacher competency development and student learning outcomes. In-depth research examining the interaction between teacher agency and structural support could provide more comprehensive insights into how to facilitate effective curriculum change.

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