Transforming Education with the "*Merdeka Belajar Curriculum*: Digging into Challenges and Crafting Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

Widya Rizky Pratiwi
Universitas Terbuka, Tangerang Selatan, Indonesia

Corresponding Email: widya_pratiwi@ecampus.ut.ac.id

Abstract. The Merdeka Belajar curriculum has been widely recognized for its flexibility, student-centered approach, and potential to enhance digital literacy. However, limited studies have explored its specific impact on English language teaching (ELT), particularly in rural secondary schools. This study investigates the practice of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum in ELT at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara, focusing on the barriers encountered by teachers and students and the strategies employed to address them. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected using semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The study involved three English teachers and ten seventh-grade students. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's framework, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion verification. The findings reveal that while the Merdeka Belajar curriculum encourages innovative teaching methods and student engagement, its implementation in rural settings is hindered by inadequate resources, limited technological infrastructure, and teachers' readiness. To overcome these challenges, teachers employed adaptive strategies such as contextualized lesson planning, multimodal teaching techniques, and collaborative learning approaches. These strategies helped optimize the curriculum's objectives despite existing limitations. The study provides valuable insights for educators and policymakers on how to enhance curriculum implementation in resource-constrained environments. It underscores the need for targeted professional development programs, improved educational infrastructure, and community involvement to maximize the curriculum's impact on English language learning in rural Indonesia.

Keywords: Curriculum implementation; English language teaching; Merdeka Belajar curriculum; rural education; teacher adaptation

Introduction

In recent years, the global educational landscape has experienced profound transformations, spurred by technological advancements and shifting societal needs. These changes have been particularly significant in Indonesia, where the introduction of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, in English recognized as the Independent Curriculum, marks a major shift in how education is structured. The curriculum was launched as part of a broader national reform strategy by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) to align the Indonesian education system with the demands of Industry 4.0 and Civilization 5.0. Industry 4.0, characterized by the integration of artificial intelligence, automation, data exchange, and digital technologies, calls for a deep restructuring of educational systems worldwide (Dariyono & Rusman, 2023; Widyastuti, 2022). Likewise, the rise of Civilization 5.0, a society where technology is leveraged to foster human-centered development, necessitates curricula that prepare students for an ever-evolving, interconnected world (De Villiers, 2024).

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

The *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* is designed to foster flexibility, autonomy, and student-centered learning, aiming to create a more inclusive and dynamic educational environment (Hunaepi & Suharta, 2024). Unlike previous models, such as the 2013 Curriculum, which struggled to address the diverse needs of students, especially in remote regions, the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* emphasizes adaptability, allowing schools to customize their teaching approaches based on local contexts (Mulyasa, 2023). One of its core tenets is to encourage project-based learning that integrates both academic knowledge and character development, facilitating not only literacy and numeracy but also critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration (Pratikno et al., 2022; Sari, 2023). Moreover, the curriculum promotes the Pancasila Student Profile, which instills values such as independence, global awareness, and noble character, essential in preparing students for future global citizenship (Sari, 2023; Harmi et al., 2022; Apriani, 206).

Over the past five years, the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* has garnered considerable attention from researchers in Indonesia and abroad, particularly with regard to its flexibility, engagement, and potential to improve digital literacy among students. One of the key findings is that the curriculum's flexibility enables teachers to design learning activities that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of students, making learning more personalized (Sianturi, 2025). This approach contrasts with traditional, one-size-fits-all methods, which often fail to engage students, particularly in diverse and remote contexts. According to Pratikno et al. (2022), the adaptability of the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* empowers teachers to use innovative teaching strategies that address individual learning styles and contextual challenges, thus promoting a more inclusive learning environment. The integration of project-based learning is particularly emphasized as a mechanism for fostering student engagement, critical thinking, and collaboration, all of which are vital competencies in the modern educational landscape (Novita et al., 2022; Shrishthy, 2023).

In addition to the shift towards more dynamic, student-centered learning approaches, the incorporation of technology into the curriculum has been recognized as a significant advantage. Digital tools and learning platforms are highlighted as powerful resources that enhance student engagement, providing opportunities for interactive, technology-driven education. Research by Novita et al. (2022) and Shrishthy (2023) indicates that technology-enhanced learning environments have the potential to improve student outcomes, especially when aligned with project-based activities that require the application of knowledge in real-world contexts. Such environments not only increase access to information but also help develop digital literacy, an essential skill in today's technology-driven world (Wang et al., 2023). Technology-driven education reform in Indonesia: a look into the current status of the *Merdeka Belajar* Program. However, the full integration of digital tools remains contingent upon the availability of resources, such as internet access, digital devices, and teacher readiness to adopt technology in the classroom.

Despite these promising aspects, several studies have pointed out significant challenges to the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, particularly regarding teacher preparedness and resource disparities. A major hurdle identified in recent research is the gap in teachers' readiness to embrace the new pedagogical approaches introduced by the curriculum. According to Prakoso et al. (2021) and Al-Shehri and Alaudan (2024), many educators struggle with the shift from traditional, teacher-centered instruction to more flexible, student-centered methodologies. The challenges are compounded by limited professional development opportunities, which hinder teachers from acquiring the necessary skills to integrate the new curriculum effectively into their classrooms. Emawati et al. (2024), Jasrial et al. (2023), and Khusniyah (2023) also underline the importance of providing continuous training and support to educators to help them navigate the complexities of the curriculum, particularly in rural areas where resources and professional networks are often scarce.

Despite the growing body of research on the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, significant gaps remain in understanding its practical application, particularly in remote schools. While

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

studies have explored the curriculum's general framework and national implementation, limited attention has been given to its specific impact on English language teaching (ELT), especially in secondary schools located in rural areas (Jasrial et al., 2023; Kamil, 2023). Moreover, few studies have examined how teacher practices evolve under the curriculum, especially in the face of challenges such as limited resources and teacher preparedness (Shrishthy, 2023). Furthermore, while some research has acknowledged the potential of the *Merdeka belajar* Curriculum to transform education in rural areas, there is a lack of in-depth research focusing on schools that have been designated as Independent Change (Mandiri Berubah) institutions, such as SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara in East Kalimantan (Pratikno et al., 2022).

Another gap in the literature is the context-specific strategies used by teachers in rural areas to implement the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum*. Given the unique challenges posed by geographical isolation, low-tech environments, and regional educational disparities, more research is needed to identify contextualized teaching strategies that are effective in such settings (Novita et al., 2022; Pratikno et al., 2022). Additionally, there is limited research into the student outcomes of this curriculum in remote schools, particularly regarding English language acquisition and critical thinking development (Kamil, 2023). This research gap creates an opportunity to explore how schools like SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara adapt and implement this curriculum and how their strategies influence student engagement and academic performance.

This study addresses these gaps by focusing specifically on the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in English language teaching at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara, a secondary school located in the remote region of East Kalimantan. By examining how this school, a designated Independent Change institution, has gradually transitioned from the 2013 Curriculum to the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum*, the study provides valuable insights into how a rural school navigates the challenges and opportunities of curriculum reform. The study will specifically explore how the flexibility and autonomy embedded in the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* are manifested in the English classroom, with a focus on teacher practices, strategies, and student outcomes in this remote context (Sari, 2023).

The novelty of this research lies in its contextualized focus on a rural school in East Kalimantan, an area that has been largely underrepresented in the literature. While the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* has been widely studied in urban and semi-urban settings, there is a lack of research on its implementation in isolated schools where access to technology, professional development, and resources may be limited. This research will provide critical insights into the local adaptations of the curriculum, highlighting how project-based learning and digital tools are utilized and how teachers and students are engaging with the curriculum under such constraints.

The primary aim of this study is to investigate how the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* is implemented in the teaching of English at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara. Specifically, the study will explore the challenges faced by both teachers and students in adapting to the curriculum, focusing on issues such as technology access, teacher training, and student engagement (Pratikno et al., 2022; Shrishthy, 2023). Finally, the study will identify the strategies employed by teachers to overcome these challenges and promote effective learning in English.

This research will contribute to the theoretical understanding of curriculum implementation in rural contexts, adding to the growing body of literature on the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum and language teaching in Indonesia. The findings will provide practical insights for educators and policymakers, particularly those working in remote areas, on how to adapt and implement the curriculum effectively despite challenges such as limited resources and geographical isolation. Moreover, the study will offer recommendations for future curriculum reform in rural schools, highlighting the need for more contextually relevant teaching strategies and professional development programs tailored to the unique needs of teachers and students in these regions.

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework discusses more about the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, teaching and learning English in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, and the pancasila student profile.

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

The curriculum plays a vital role in the education system, serving as a structured framework that outlines learning objectives and instructional sequences (Abdurashidova, 2022). It acts as a pedagogical blueprint that guides knowledge acquisition and cognitive development while maintaining a strong interconnection with the learning process (Gunawan, 2017). A well-designed curriculum must be flexible and adaptable to keep pace with scientific and technological advancements, ensuring that students receive relevant and high-quality education (Darman, 2021). As education is a key driver of national development, a country's progress depends on its ability to cultivate highly skilled individuals who contribute to economic and societal growth.

The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum embodies this adaptability by offering a simplified yet comprehensive framework that prioritizes essential knowledge and skills at different developmental stages (Priantini et al., 2022). This approach fosters deeper cognitive engagement in a more enjoyable and student-friendly manner. A key advantage of this curriculum is the autonomy it grants to both learners and educators. Students have the flexibility to select subjects aligned with their abilities and aspirations, while teachers are empowered to tailor instructional strategies based on individual progress. Schools, in turn, gain the authority to design and oversee their curriculum, ensuring alignment with institutional goals and student needs.

Despite these benefits, the dynamic nature of *Merdeka Belajar* necessitates continuous monitoring and refinement to maintain its relevance in evolving educational landscapes. Regular curriculum evaluation is essential to optimize its effectiveness and responsiveness to technological advancements, changing learner needs, and broader societal demands (Darman, 2021). By consistently analyzing and refining the curriculum, educators and policymakers can enhance its implementation, ensuring that it remains a powerful tool for fostering academic achievement and national development (Abdurashidova, 2022; Gunawan, 2017; Priantini et al., 2022).

Teaching and Learning English in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum emphasizes a student-centered, differentiated, and technology-based approach to English learning. In this framework, students actively construct knowledge while teachers serve as facilitators. The curriculum aims to develop communicative competence through various multimodal texts and intercultural understanding, fostering critical thinking and creativity (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). To achieve these goals, English instruction must be engaging, ensuring students acquire practical and applicable language skills without experiencing unnecessary stress (Octaviana, 2017). Effective teaching methods, such as inquiry-based learning and collaborative tasks, encourage students to develop higher-order thinking skills (Pratiwi et al., 2024).

Differentiated learning is another key aspect of the curriculum, ensuring that instruction aligns with students' readiness, interests, and learning profiles. Educators can modify content, processes, and products to meet diverse student needs (Atikah et al., 2023). For instance, less proficient students receive foundational material, while advanced learners engage in deeper problem-solving activities (Shihab et al., 2021). This approach not only enhances engagement but also fosters learner autonomy, a crucial aspect of language acquisition. Furthermore, project-based learning, such as the *Pancasila Student Profile Project*, provides meaningful contexts for students to practice English while developing essential life skills (Kemdikbudristek, 2022).

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

Pancasila Student Profile

A core component of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum is the *Pancasila Student Profile*, which aligns with Indonesia's Vision and Mission for education (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Character development is central to this framework, as education shapes individuals' values, behaviors, and mental qualities (Sajadi, 2019). Rooted in John Dewey's progressivism philosophy, *Merdeka Belajar* grants educators autonomy in designing learning experiences that foster student engagement and self-directed learning (Pratiwi et al., 2024). Through this approach, the *Pancasila Student Profile* cultivates Indonesian students who are lifelong learners with global competence while upholding Pancasila values.

The *Pancasila Student Profile* encompasses six interrelated dimensions: faith and piety in God Almighty and noble character, global diversity, cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creative thinking (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). These competencies extend beyond cognitive skills, emphasizing values that shape students into responsible national and global citizens. The Indonesian Ministry of Education envisions the *Pancasila Student Profile* as an integral part of daily life, fostering an inclusive and tolerant society while promoting continuous self-improvement (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Its successful implementation requires active participation from both students and educators, as teachers serve as primary role models in embedding these values in academic and professional settings. Ultimately, realizing the *Pancasila Student Profile* contributes to an autonomous, progressive, and character-driven Indonesia (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Material and Method

The research employed a descriptive qualitative design to analyze participants' perceptions and experiences of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in ELT at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara. This approach, grounded in post-positivism, focused on in-depth exploration of natural phenomena without experimental manipulation, as described by Sugiyono (2022). Creswell (2019) further emphasized that this approach constructs a comprehensive understanding of social or human problems through in-depth, naturalistic inquiry. The study used multiple data collection methods, enabling triangulation and inductive analysis to uncover the barriers encountered by teachers and students in implementing the curriculum. The goal was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum's practical application in a multicultural setting, especially the barriers experienced, and to develop a theoretical framework for its effective integration into English language teaching.

The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara, a school selected for its implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. The focus was on Grade 7 students, who were beginning their English studies, to examine how the curriculum impacted their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. This selection aimed to gather in-depth, varied perspectives on the implementation of the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum in English language teaching, allowing for a thorough understanding of its challenges and effectiveness in the school's educational setting. Informants were purposively chosen to provide insights into the curriculum's application, including an English teacher (symbolized as teacher 1), the vice principal of curriculum development (symbolized as teacher 2), the Pancasila Project Profile coordinator (symbolized as teacher 3), and ten students (symbolized as S1 – S10). The students were selected based on responses from questionnaires, with those providing the most negative perspectives on English learning being chosen for interviews. Snowball sampling was used to expand the data pool progressively, ensuring comprehensive insights by identifying additional informants as needed.

The primary data collection method in this study was a semi-structured Interview. It was conducted with key informants, including teachers and students, to gather in-depth insights into the implementation, challenges, and strategies of the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum*. The semi-structured format allowed for flexibility and detailed responses, with the researcher using a set of guiding questions. Interviews were held in Bahasa Indonesia to

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

avoid misinterpretation and were recorded for thorough analysis. Each interview session lasted between 10 to 25 minutes, depending on the informant, and focused on curriculum experiences, especially in evaluating challenges and strategies to address them. The following table 1 shows the interview guidelines.

Table 1
Interview Guidelines

No.	Research Question	Aspects	Informants	Interview Question Main Points
	What challenges are teachers and students encountering when applying the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum to teach and study English?	Challenges	Teachers	Challenging Curriculum Aspects, Technology Challenges, Adapting to Learning Styles, and Student-Centered Learning
			Students (Student 1-Student 10)	Student Challenges in Learning English, Curriculum/Teaching Method Understanding, and Impact on Learning and Performance
	What strategies are employed by the teachers in applying the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in teaching English?	Strategies	Teachers	Access and Benefit Strategies, Alleviating Challenges, Support and Resources, Current Initiatives, Effective Interventions, Recommendations for Improvement, Effective Strategies, Innovative Approaches

Direct observation was also conducted to observe the practice of the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* in ELT at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara. Observations focused on class dynamics, teacher-student interactions, and the integration of curriculum elements. A general observation was conducted initially to understand the school environment, followed by informal and formal sessions. The researcher applied triangulation, consistency checks, and member checking to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. The main observation took place in class VII C, with two-hour meetings conducted in May 2024. The following table 2 shows the aspects of observation.

Table 2
Observation Aspects

No	Aspects Observed (Learning Process)	Yes	No
	Opening the Class		
	a. Preparing students physically and mentally		
	b. Motivating students		
	c. Delivering apperception		
	d. Delivering objectives learning		
	Core Activities		
	a. Mastery of the material		
	b. Model/Approach/Strategy		
	Closing the lesson		

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

To support data gathered through interviews and observations, the researcher analyzed relevant documents such as lesson plans, the school's *Kurikulum Operasional Satuan Pendidikan* (KOSP), and the Project Profile Journal. These documents provided additional context and verification for the curriculum's implementation in English teaching. The researcher specifically reviewed lesson plans related to extracurricular activities to cross-check the information and enrich the findings with visual representations of the learning process.

Data analysis in this research followed the stages outlined by Miles and Huberman (2014), including data condensation, data display, and drawing and verifying conclusions. Data condensation involved selecting and simplifying raw data from interviews, observations, and documents to focus on relevant aspects, streamlining the information for clarity and focus. The next step, data display, presented the data in a narrative format to represent the findings accurately. Finally, the researcher concluded and verified them, ensuring that the interpretations were valid and aligned with the research goals. This analysis process was iterative, with each stage interacting with the others throughout and after data collection, allowing for continuous refinement and theory-building.

Results and Discussions
Results

Before discussing the challenges and strategies related to the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, it is important to provide a general overview of its application at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara, a secondary school located in the remote region of East Kalimantan.

The Practice of *Merdeka belajar* Currculum

The practice of the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara began in the 2022/ 2023 academic year, following a mandate from the East Kutai Regency Education Office. The school chose the "Mandiri Berubah" path after conducting a study on school conditions, teacher capabilities, student characteristics, and the surrounding environment. Teacher 2 confirmed this decision during an interview, highlighting that the school was selected based on these factors and the instrument used by the Ministry of Education. This flexible curriculum allows schools to adapt its implementation according to their unique characteristics and needs, as it can be tailored differently from the government's general guidelines.

The *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* focuses on a student-centered approach, with various teaching methods and resources integrated into the learning process. Teacher 1, a seventh-grade English teacher, has taught under this curriculum for two years. She explained in an interview that teachers are encouraged to learn independently through the *Merdeka Belajar* Platform, which provides resources and support for implementing the curriculum. This method contrasts with the previous 2013 Curriculum, where teachers received more face-to-face training. Despite this, Teacher 1 found the new online training to be helpful, particularly in integrating technology and resources into the classroom, such as using Canva, Google Forms, and social media platforms for interactive lessons.

In terms of teaching and learning processes, Teacher 1's classroom activities are structured around the principles of the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum*. Through observation, it was found that the teacher engages students in pre-activities, such as discussing learning outcomes and character development linked to the Pancasila Student Profile. Core activities involve group work, discussions, and projects, while post-activities include student presentations and reflections on their learning experiences. Teacher 1 emphasizes the use of local resources, such as folklore and digital tools, ensuring that students are actively involved in their learning process, with a focus on communication skills and critical thinking.

The *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* also incorporates co-curricular activities like the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, which aims to develop students'

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

competencies and character. In this project, students engage in real-world issues and work on projects that promote values such as cooperation, creativity, and independence. Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 discussed how these projects help students understand the importance of these values while developing skills through hands-on activities. Students actively participated in projects, such as creating anti-bullying campaigns, local crafts, and environmental projects, which were designed to enhance their character development in alignment with the Pancasila Student Profile.

Extracurricular activities, like the English Club, also play a role in supporting students' development. Teacher 1 observed that students were highly engaged in these activities, especially when they could use their gadgets, making the learning process more interactive and fun. The English Club focused on enhancing students' language skills with activities such as writing stories and using time adverbs to structure compositions. Students also participated in peer reviews, which allowed them to practice their writing and improve their language proficiency in a supportive environment. Through these various curricular and extracurricular activities, the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* fosters a holistic approach to education, preparing students to develop both academically and personally. However, despite the above efforts, challenges remain in fully optimizing the curriculum in the context of limited resources and teacher readiness, which will be explored further in the following sections.

Challenges Encountered When Applying the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in ELT.

The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* presents various challenges for both teachers and students in the process of teaching and learning English at the junior high school level. Several factors related to these challenges can have a considerable impact on the overall success of the program.

Teacher's Challenges

Before delving into the specific types of challenges faced by teachers in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum*, it is important to recognize that the transition to a student-centered approach has brought about significant obstacles. Teachers must navigate a range of issues that affect both the effectiveness of their teaching and the overall learning experience for students. Based on the results of the observation and interview, these challenges include adapting to diverse student needs, managing technological limitations, and fostering active student engagement in the learning process.

Differentiated Learning

Teachers face difficulties in differentiating learning for students with varying abilities. For example, Teacher 1 noted that in her class, students had different levels of English proficiency. To address this, she had to assess each student's ability and learning style to create a plan that accommodated all students. As she explained:

"Differentiated learning practice refers to students' abilities and learning styles. Teachers must design a learning process that caters to these differences" (T1, Personal Communication, May 20, 2024).

However, the challenge became more complex due to the large class size, which exceeded thirty students. This required significant planning and preparation to ensure all students could engage effectively.

Limitations of Technology

Teacher 1 also faced infrastructure issues, such as the absence of a language laboratory and poor classroom facilities. She mentioned that the classroom lacked proper lighting and soundproofing, which made it difficult for students to focus on multimedia lessons, especially when listening to recordings.

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

"There is no language laboratory available to us. The classroom has poor lighting and no soundproofing, which disrupts students' focus during multimedia lessons" (T1, May 20, 2024).

Additionally, the lack of adequate technology, such as microphones and speakers, limited the ability to create an effective learning environment for language acquisition. This limitation in technology was further confirmed by Teacher 2, who noted that the school's infrastructure challenges hinder the implementation of some aspects of the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum*. Teacher 2 mentioned that while the school aims to incorporate more digital tools into the learning process, the lack of technological resources, such as adequate internet access and devices for students, restricts the effectiveness of online learning platforms and multimedia resources.

"As the vice principal in charge of curriculum development, I understand the importance of digital tools in supporting the curriculum. Unfortunately, our infrastructure limits the full potential of these tools, making it hard for teachers to deliver multimedia-rich lessons effectively." (T2, May 21, 2024).

Student-Centered Learning

Teacher 1 also struggled with encouraging students to take an active role in their learning. Many students were passive, relying on the teacher to provide all the information. As she pointed out:

"Arousing their initiative to explore learning sources outside the guidebook requires effort. Their motivation needs improvement to learn independently" (T1, Personal Communication, May 20, 2024)

This issue was partly due to the lingering influence of the previous curriculum, where students were more accustomed to passive, teacher-centered instruction. Teacher 3, the Pancasila Project Profile coordinator, also emphasized that this challenge is not unique to English language lessons. She observed that students often showed reluctance to engage in independent learning activities, particularly when it came to projects focused on character development, such as the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project.

"It's a significant shift for students who have been used to traditional teaching methods. While the projects are designed to foster independence, it's clear that many students still prefer passive learning. This requires continuous guidance and motivation." (T3, May 22, 2024).

Student's Challenges
Limited Vocabulary and Independent Learning

Many students struggled with their vocabulary, which made it difficult to participate in the student-centered learning approach. For example, Student 6 shared that she had never learned English in elementary school and started studying it only in junior high.

"I never had English before. I started learning English in seventh grade" (S6, May 3, 2024).

This lack of a strong vocabulary base made it challenging for students to express themselves, participate in group activities, and complete independent learning tasks.

Impact on Motivation and Academic Performance

The student-centered approach also posed difficulties for students who were not confident or engaged. For instance, Student 4 expressed reluctance to participate in class discussions due to a lack of vocabulary and fear of making mistakes.

"I'm not confident to speak in front of others because I lack vocabulary, and I'm afraid of making mistakes" (S4, May 3, 2024).

Students like Student 3, who found English hard to understand, were less motivated to engage in the subject.

"When I learn English, it doesn't seem easy to understand. Sometimes, I don't like English. I prefer Physical Education" (S3, May 3, 2024).

This lack of motivation and passive learning style hindered students' academic performance and their ability to develop essential language skills, such as reading and writing.

Challenges with Technology Integration in Learning

Despite the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum's* emphasis on digital literacy, students faced significant challenges with technology, which hindered their ability to fully engage with the learning process. Many students, such as Student 10, recognized the importance of technology in enhancing their learning experience but pointed out that the classroom lacked the necessary resources, like a language laboratory and a reliable internet connection, making it difficult to use digital tools effectively.

"Technology is important for learning. There are tools like translators that help with understanding English, but we don't have proper resources" (S10, May 3, 2024).

Furthermore, some students, like Student 1, struggled with affordability, unable to purchase the data plans necessary to access online learning materials, which further exacerbated the technological divide.

"Sometimes, I can't join the class because I don't have money to buy the internet quota" (S1, May 3, 2024).

Additionally, while some students expressed a desire for more interactive learning resources, like apps or online games, these were not available to them. Student 7 mentioned:

"We mostly use textbooks and worksheets, which can get boring. I would prefer using apps or online games to study English" (S7, May 3, 2024).

This lack of access to technology and interactive tools limited students' ability to engage in more dynamic and effective language learning activities, ultimately affecting their motivation and academic performance.

Strategies for Applying the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Teaching English

Before discussing the strategies implemented to solve these challenges, it is essential to highlight that the students at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara face a range of difficulties that affect their learning process. As a result, students often encounter barriers that hinder their ability to fully engage in the student-centered approach promoted by the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum*. The following sections explore the strategies employed by

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

teachers to address these issues, aiming to enhance the learning experience and support students in overcoming these obstacles.

Overcoming Barriers to Effective Merdeka Belajar Implementation

Teacher 1 emphasized that the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* requires specialized training, particularly in English. The curriculum shifts towards adaptable and learner-centered approaches, and Teacher 1 believes that without proper training, teachers may struggle to effectively engage students and create a learning environment that aligns with the curriculum's goals. Such training is essential as it helps teachers understand the new methods and equips them with the tools to better implement these strategies in the classroom. The training process enables teachers to foster a more interactive, student-driven learning atmosphere.

> *"Teachers must comprehend and adjust to the novel methods and strategies implemented by the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, which prioritize a more adaptable and learner-focused methodology"* (T1, May 20th, 2024)

To address the challenges teachers encounter in applying the curriculum, Teacher 1 suggested a policy in which both students and teachers speak English on designated days. This immersive practice creates an environment that encourages students to use the language in real-world contexts, making their learning more meaningful. She explained that when students are "forced" to use English, they tend to remember the vocabulary and expressions they use. This practice not only strengthens their speaking skills but also builds confidence in using English outside of the classroom: "What we use or the vocabulary we use will always be remembered in our heads if we use it when we are forced to" (T1, May 20th, 2024) This strategy helps students feel more comfortable and familiar with the language, effectively breaking down their inhibitions.

Furthermore, Teacher 1 highlighted the importance of continuous professional development for teachers. She recommended additional training, especially in English teaching methods, either through independent PMM (Program Merdeka Mengajar) training or by participating in school-based learning communities. This ongoing learning is vital for teachers to stay updated and maintain their effectiveness. Alongside training, Teacher 1 also stressed the significance of enhancing communication with parents. Regular discussions about students' progress, particularly in English language acquisition, can help identify areas of improvement. For instance, some students might forget to bring essential tools like dictionaries, which can hinder their learning. Strengthening communication between teachers and parents can help resolve such issues and ensure that students have the necessary resources to succeed.

Ensuring Accessibility and Understanding in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

Teacher 1 emphasized that the key to ensuring all students can access and benefit from the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* lies in the teachers themselves. Teachers must continually upgrade their knowledge and deepen their understanding of the curriculum. This proactive approach helps ensure that they can effectively teach in line with the new guidelines. Communication with both students and parents is also pivotal. By informing them about the shift from the old curriculum to the new one, teachers help open their minds and provide a clearer picture of how the changes will benefit the learning process. Teacher 1 highlighted:

> *"Establishing communication with children and parents will open their insights about the curriculum being applied to them"* (T1, May 20th, 2024).

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

This clear communication ensures that the entire learning community is on the same page, which makes the implementation of the curriculum more effective and smoother for both students and teachers.

In addition, Teacher 2, the Vice Principal of Curriculum Development, suggested the integration of diverse learning resources to ensure accessibility for all students. This includes digital tools, community-based learning projects, and peer mentoring. These varied resources allow students with different learning styles and backgrounds to engage with the curriculum in ways that suit them best. Teacher 2 explained:

"By offering a range of resources, both digital and offline, students can choose methods that suit their learning preferences, making the curriculum more accessible and engaging" (T2, May 21st, 2024).

This approach ensures that all students, regardless of their individual learning preferences, have equal opportunities to access and benefit from the curriculum.

Essential Support and Resources for Effective Curriculum Implementation

Teacher 1 suggested that extracurricular activities are a vital resource to help students improve their speaking abilities. These activities provide additional practice outside of class hours, giving students more opportunities to use English in informal settings. Teacher 1 highlighted the importance of such engagement, saying,

"We also encouraged them to participate in extracurricular activities outside of English learning hours" (T1, May 20th, 2024).

Additionally, Teacher 1 recommended that students engage with social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, which offer interactive and engaging ways to learn English. By using these platforms, students can immerse themselves in language learning in an environment they already find appealing, potentially increasing their motivation to learn.

To support the teachers, Teacher 1 stated that the school had already provided general training on the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum*, which helped teachers grasp the broader changes and expectations. However, this training was not subject-specific, meaning that English teachers may require more targeted training. While the government provided online training through the PMM platform, it was not designed specifically for English subjects. Teacher 1 suggested that more subject-specific training, especially in English, would help teachers implement the curriculum more effectively in their classrooms, allowing them to meet the unique needs of their students and maximize the impact of the curriculum.

Adapting and Innovating for Effective Curriculum Delivery

Teacher 1 expressed her hope that the school would eventually improve its physical facilities to support better teaching. However, while waiting for these improvements, she focused on utilizing engaging media to capture students' attention. One of her ideas was to use the school's magazine board to display English-related activities, creating a fun and public way to engage the students. This approach showcases English learning in a creative and visible way, potentially inspiring students to engage more with the language. She noted that while this was a rare practice at the school, she hoped to make it a regular feature in the future.

Looking ahead, Teacher 1 planned to explore the use of educational games to enhance vocabulary acquisition. Recognizing that students often get bored with repetitive activities, she believes that games can add excitement and novelty to the learning process. By introducing games that are both enjoyable and educational, Teacher 1 hopes to maintain students' interest and motivation. Games would provide students with a fun and interactive way to learn and reinforce their English skills, creating a more dynamic and engaging learning environment. By focusing on both the pedagogical aspects of teaching and the

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

emotional engagement of students, Teacher 1 aims to create a balanced approach that keeps students actively involved in the learning process.

These strategies provide a comprehensive view of how Teacher 1 is adapting to the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* in her English classes. Through continuous professional development, communication with students and parents, and innovative teaching methods, she strives to create an engaging and accessible learning environment for her students.

Discussion

The practice of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara has brought about several challenges for both teachers and students, particularly in the areas of differentiated instruction, technology limitations, and the shift toward a student-centered approach. Teachers, especially Teacher 1, faced difficulties in customizing instruction to meet the diverse needs and learning preferences of students, such as language laboratory. This atatemen is suported by Ogodo et al., (2021) who state that the lack of a language laboratory further exacerbated this challenge, limiting the ability to use technology effectively in the classroomAs a result, Teacher 1 had to identify students' English proficiency levels using diagnostic tests to design personalized teaching plans that would cater to the variability in student abilities. However, the large class sizes, often exceeding thirty students, posed additional difficulties, requiring significant effort in preparation and resource management (Ramadon, 2022).

The absence of a language laboratory and the insufficient classroom infrastructure presented further barriers to the successful implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. Teacher 1 noted that poor lighting, defective equipment such as LCDs, microphones, and speakers, and external noise disruptions significantly hindered the use of multimedia learning resources. These challenges mirrored the findings of Fitria (2023), who highlighted the critical role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in supporting education and the difficulties faced when these resources are inadequate. Without the proper technological infrastructure, teachers and students are unable to fully benefit from the technology-driven aspects of the curriculum (Rahayu et al., 2022).

Another major obstacle was the passive learning behavior of students, who were more accustomed to traditional, teacher-centered instruction. Teacher 1 struggled with motivating students to seek educational resources beyond those provided in the classroom. This dependency on the teacher made it difficult for students to adapt to the student-centered approach that the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* advocates. Students, many of whom had limited motivation, required continuous encouragement and guidance to engage in learning activities, a challenge identified by Ramadon (2022). Teacher 1 observed that students were generally passive and reluctant to participate in activities that required independent thinking and initiative.

The shift to a student-centered approach also posed challenges in terms of vocabulary and language proficiency. Many students had inadequate vocabulary skills, which prevented them from fully participating in activities such as public speaking and collaborative learning tasks. Student 6, for instance, started learning English only in the seventh grade, which affected her ability to express ideas clearly. This lack of vocabulary also hindered students' ability to engage in student-centered activities, as they found it difficult to navigate complex educational materials. According to Kemdikbudristek (2022) and Salnick (2023), student-centered learning promotes active engagement, but without a solid vocabulary foundation, students are unable to reap the full benefits of this approach.

Moreover, the lack of motivation and confidence in using English among students further hindered the adoption of a student-centered learning model. Student 4 reported feeling insecure about public speaking due to a limited vocabulary and a fear of making mistakes. This lack of confidence is common among students with restricted language skills as they struggle to articulate their thoughts in English. These issues were compounded by

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

the need for students to rely on traditional learning methods rather than actively participate in more dynamic, student-led learning activities (Ramadon, 2022).

Teacher 1 also emphasized the importance of improving the school's support system, particularly for developing speaking and listening skills. She suggested that the school could implement policies where students and teachers are required to communicate in English on designated days. This policy would promote constant use of the language, helping students build their vocabulary and fluency through repetition and practice. According to Teacher 3, consistent use of English would help integrate the language into students' cognitive processes, enhancing their overall language proficiency (Pamzan et al., 2023; Shawaqfeh et al., 2024; Yunitasari et al., 2023).

To address these challenges, Teacher 1 suggested a variety of strategies. She recommended the implementation of extracurricular activities that would allow students to practice their speaking skills outside of the classroom. Additionally, she encouraged the use of social media platforms like TikTok and Instagram, which could provide a more engaging and informal environment for students to learn English. These strategies were designed to increase students' enthusiasm for the language and improve their engagement in the learning process (Desnaranti et al., 2022).

Despite these challenges, Teacher 1 remained optimistic about the potential of the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* to improve student learning outcomes. She emphasized the need for specialized teacher training in English to ensure effective implementation of the curriculum. Teacher 1 also advocated for better communication with parents to ensure they are informed and involved in their children's education. This collaboration between teachers and parents is essential to creating a supportive learning environment for students (Lakkala et al., 2021; Sari & Muamaroh, 2024).

Teacher 1 also emphasized the importance of using engaging media and educational games to increase student interest in learning English. She noted that without interactive and enjoyable activities, students often became bored and disengaged. By incorporating games and other interactive learning methods, Teacher 1 hoped to make English lessons more fun and motivating, ultimately improving students' academic performance (Sari & Muamaroh, 2024).

Finally, Teacher 1's perspective on overcoming the challenges of implementing the *Merdeka Belajar curriculum* aligns with the broader findings of research on educational innovation. As identified by Hijriani et al. (2024), creative and adaptive teaching approaches can significantly improve student outcomes, particularly in reading comprehension and language skills. Teacher 1's strategies, including increasing teacher expertise, enhancing communication with parents, and employing engaging learning methods, are crucial to overcoming the barriers to successful curriculum implementation and improving the overall learning experience for students.

Conclusion

The practice of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara has had both positive and challenging impacts on English teaching. The curriculum promotes flexibility, student participation, and personalized learning through its intracurricular, co-curricular, and extracurricular activities. These activities have improved students' cognitive, social, and emotional development, with tools like the Genre-Based Approach (GBA) enhancing student engagement. However, challenges remain, particularly in differentiated learning, the lack of a language laboratory, insufficient infrastructure, and students' passive learning behaviors. These barriers hinder the effective adoption of technology and learner-centered approaches, as students face difficulties in engaging with the curriculum due to limited vocabulary and infrastructure. To enhance the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in English language teaching at SMP Negeri 5 Sangatta Utara, several key recommendations are proposed. Schools should improve infrastructure by providing multimedia equipment, stable Internet access, and a language laboratory to support ICT-

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

integrated learning. Teachers need targeted training in differentiated instruction, student-centered strategies, and digital tool utilization. Engaging students through social media, extracurricular activities, and gamified learning approaches can increase motivation and participation. Additionally, fostering students' confidence through positive reinforcement, peer collaboration, and self-directed learning initiatives is crucial. By adopting these strategies, schools and educators can effectively address challenges and ensure students receive quality English language education in a supportive, student-centered environment.

References

Abdurashidova, N. A. (2022). Why blended learning: the meaning of BL for teachers. *Theoretical & Applied Science*, 2, 136–139.

Al-Shehri, E. K., & Alaudan, R. (2024). Teacher-Centered or Student-Centered Learning Approach to Promote Learning. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *20*(1). 47-51

Amalia, R., Shamsuddin, S., & Kaur, K. (2023). Differentiated learning and blended learning environments: A study on its impact in educational settings. *Journal of Educational Innovation, 5*(2), 134-142.

Apriani, E. (2016). A New Literacy: The role of technology to develop student's character. *Ta'dib: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 21(1), 59-72. https://doi.org/10.19109/td.v21i1.742

Atikah, I., Fauzi, M. A. R., & Firmansyah, R. (2023). Penerapan Strategi Diferensiasi Konten dan Proses Pada Gaya Belajar Berbasis Model Problem Based Learning. *Pubmedia Jurnal Penelitian Tindakan Kelas Indonesia*, 1(2), 11. https://doi.org/10.47134/ptk.v1i2.57

Dariyono, & Rusman. (2023). Impact of Industry 4.0 on Education in Indonesia: Implications for Curriculum Development. *International Journal of Educational Development, 79*, 31-41.

Darman, R. A. (2021). *Telaah Kurikulum*. Guepedia.

Darmayanti, M. (2023). The adaptability and learner-centered approach in the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum: A pathway to improving student learning outcomes. *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction, 11*(3), 88-95.

De Villiers, C. (2024). The Impact of Society 5.0 on Curriculum Development in Higher Education. *Journal of Ethics in Higher Education*, (4), 1-25.

Desnaranti, M., Shamsuddin, S., & Kaur, K. (2022). The role of digital learning tools in enhancing English language skills. *International Journal of Educational Technology, 14*(1), 45-56.

Emawati, E., Taufiqulloh, T., & Fadhly, F. Z. (2024). Challenges And Opportunities In Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum In Language Education: A Meta-Synthetic Analysis. *English Review: Journal of English Education*, *12*(2), 869-882.

Fitria, T. N. (2023). Using Information And Communication Technology (ICT) In The Education Sector: Opportunities And Challenges In English Language Teaching (ELT). *Teaching English as Foreign Language, Literature and Linguistics*, *3*(1), 9-30.

Gunawan, I. (2017). Indonesian Curriculum 2013: Instructional Management, Obstacles faced by teachers in implementation and the way forward. *Presented to the 3rd International Conference on Education and Training (ICET 2017)*, 56–63.

Harmi, H., Karolina, A., Fathurrochman, I., Fadila, F., Daulay, S. H., Apriani, E., & Supardan, D. (2022). Analysis of multicultural understanding and moderation of religion of PAUD teachers in Bengkulu province. *Pegem Journal of education and instruction*, 12(4), 128-136. https://doi.org/10.47750/pegegog.12.04.13

Hunaepi, H., & Suharta, I. (2024). Transforming education in Indonesia: The impact and challenges of the *Merdeka belajar* curriculum. *Path of Science*, *10*(6), 5026-5039.

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

Imron, A., Fitria, N., & Yunitasari, A. (2023). The role of technology in enhancing student engagement in *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. *Journal of Education and Technology, 7*(1), 29-38.

Jasrial, et al. (2023). Teachers' Perceptions of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum Implementation in Remote Schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice, 7*(4), 245-256.

Kamil, F. (2023). CEFR Levels in the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum: Aligning Content with Educational Intentions. *Indonesian Journal of English Teaching, 12*(2), 178-191.

Kemdikbudristek. (2022). *Merdeka belajar* Curriculum: Empowering student-centered learning. *Ministry of Education and Culture*, 45-67.

Khusniyah, N. L., (2023). *Indonesia Curricula and Their Implementation in Language Teaching Practice*. UIN Mataram Press.

Lakkala, S., Galkienė, A., Navaitienė, J., Cierpiałowska, T., Tomecek, S., & Uusiautti, S. (2021). Teachers supporting students in collaborative ways—An analysis of collaborative work creating supportive learning environments for every student in a school: Cases from Austria, Finland, Lithuania, and Poland. *Sustainability*, 13(5), 2804.

Mulyasa, E. (2023). Curriculum Development in Indonesia: Trends, Challenges, and Future Directions. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching, 11*(1), 55-67.

Novita, D., et al. (2022). Digitalization in Education: The Role of Technology in Implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. *Journal of Educational Technology and Innovation, 8*(1), 134-146.

Ogodo, J. A., Simon, M., Morris, D., & Akubo, M. (2021). Examining K-12 Teachers' Digital Competency and Technology Self-Efficacy During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Higher Education Theory & Practice*, *21*(11).

Pamzan, M., Javaid, Z. K., & Ali, A. A. (2023). Perception of students about collaborative strategies employed by teachers for enhancing English vocabulary and learning motivation. *Pakistan JL Analysis & Wisdom*, *2*, 146.

Prakoso, Y., et al. (2021). Teachers' Perceptions of Curriculum Change: The Case of *Merdeka Belajar* in Indonesia. *Indonesian Journal of Education, 15*(2), 22-34.

Pratikno, A., et al. (2022). Digital Education and the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum: A Case Study in Indonesian Schools. *Journal of Digital Learning and Education, 5*(3), 58-70.

Pratiwi, W. R., Juhana, J., Acfira, L. G., & Sumbulatin, S. (2024). Examining Curriculum Needs, Teaching Methods, and Technology Integration for a Comprehensive Approach to English Language Education. *KLASIKAL: Journal of Education, Language Teaching and Science*, *6*(3), 794-805.

Pratiwi, W. R., Kuswoyo, H., Puspitasari, M., Juhana, J., & Bachtiar, B. (2024). Driving to communicative approach: the innovative teaching speaking methods in Indonesian English immersion program. *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education*, *13*(1), 626-634.

Priantini, D. A. M. M. O., Suarni, N. K., & Adnyana, I. K. S. (2022). Analisis Kurikulum Merdeka dan Platform Merdeka Belajar untuk Mewujudkan Pendidikan yang Berkualitas. *Jurnal Penjaminan Mutu*, 8(02), 238–244.

Rahayu, L., Sari, D., & Muamaroh, F. (2022). The impact of school infrastructure on the successful implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. *Journal of School Administration, 18*(1), 56-67.

Ramadon, A. (2022). Overcoming the challenges of implementing student-centered learning in Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. *Journal of Educational Development, 8*(3), 102-110.

Sajadi, D. (2019). Pendidikan Karakter dalam Perspektif Islam. *Tahdzib Al-Akhlaq: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, *2*(2), 16-34.

Salnick, K. (2023). *Creating Student-Centered Schools: Discovering Best Practices in Experiential, Progressive Public School Design and Exploring the Effectiveness of*

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

Media and Community Events in Creating Grassroots Change. Northeastern University.

Sari, L., & Muamaroh, F. (2024). Addressing challenges in *Merdeka belajar* Curriculum implementation in senior high schools. *Journal of Secondary Education, 15*(2), 130-142.

Sari, R. (2023). Pancasila Student Profile: Integrating Character Development into the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. *Journal of Character Education, 6*(1), 45-57.

Shawaqfeh, A. T., Jameel, A. S., Al-adwan, L. A. Y., & Khasawneh, M. A. S. (2024). Interaction as a mechanism to enhance English language proficiency in the classroom. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *15*(1), 229-234.

Shihab, Najelaa dan Jaringan Semua Murid Semua Guru. (2020). *Semua Murid Semua Guru 4: Edukasi di Masa Pandemi*. Lentera Hati: Jakarta.

Shrishthy, S. (2023). Global Perspectives on English Language Teaching in Indonesia's *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. *International Journal of Language Teaching, 10*(4), 231-245.

Sianturi, B. (2025). Teachers' Perceptions and Challenges in Implementing Differentiated Learning in Kurikulum Merdeka. *J-SHMIC: Journal of English for Academic*, *12*(1), 1-15.

Wang, C., Zhang, M., Sesunan, A., & Yolanda, L. (2023). Technology-driven education reform in Indonesia: a look into the current status of the *Merdeka Belajar* Program.

Widyastuti, P. (2022). Technological Innovations in Education: The Rise of Industry 4.0 and Civilization 5.0. *International Journal of Educational Technology, 6*(1), 77-88.

Yunitasari, A., Aryati, R., & Shamsuddin, S. (2023). Teacher professional development and curriculum implementation in the *Merdeka belajar* era. *Journal of Professional Development in Education, 22*(1), 78-89.

Widya Rizky Pratiwi, 2025

Transforming Education with Merdeka Belajar
Curriculum: Digging into Challenges and Crafting
Effective Strategies in Rural Indonesia

EMPTY PAGE