



A Journal of Culture, English Language, Teaching & Literature

ISSN 1414-3320 (Print), ISSN 2502-4914 (Online)

Vol. 25 No.2; December 2025

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Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum: Adapting CLT for Innovative ELT Practices in the Context of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract: This study explores how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches are adapted to support innovative English Language Teaching (ELT) practices within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. It also investigates the challenges English teachers face in implementing the curriculum, how they perceive and apply CLT-based methods in relation to its student-centered, competency-based orientation, and how students perceive English language learning under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with 20 English teachers across four provinces, and 15 students of secondary school. Data were analyzed using an interactive model by (Miles at al., 2014) and which include three main components: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, and inductive coding approach to identify recurring pedagogical patterns, contextual adaptations, and teacher/student perspectives. Findings reveal that teachers decontextualize CLT through four key strategies: localizing communicative tasks, integrating project- and inquiry-based learning, redefining teacher roles, and utilizing low-tech digital tools. However, systemic and classroom-level challenges persist, including limited curriculum understanding, insufficient professional development, and unequal access to resources, assessment misalignment, and classroom management difficulties. While teachers generally perceive CLT as compatible with Merdeka's aims, its implementation remains partial due to institutional and logistical constraints. Student perceptions indicate that many enjoy communicative, interactive, and project-based learning more than traditional methods. However, some experience anxiety due to limited English skills and lack of familiarity with student-centered activities. The study implies that successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum requires not only curricular reform but also continuous teacher support, student readiness programs, and the development of contextually appropriate assessment practices.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, Merdeka Curriculum, ELT innovation, student-centered learning.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana pendekatan Pengajaran Bahasa Komunikatif (CLT) diadaptasi untuk mendukung praktik Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris (ELT) yang inovatif dalam kerangka Kurikulum Merdeka di Indonesia. Studi ini juga menyelidiki tantangan yang dihadapi guru bahasa Inggris dalam mengimplementasikan kurikulum, bagaimana mereka memandang dan menerapkan metode berbasis CLT dalam kaitannya dengan orientasi berbasis kompetensi yang berpusat pada siswa, dan bagaimana siswa memandang pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di bawah Kurikulum Merdeka. Dengan menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 20 guru bahasa Inggris di empat provinsi, dan 15 siswa sekolah menengah. Data dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman (1994), yang mencakup tiga komponen utama: reduksi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan/verifikasi kesimpulan, dan pendekatan pengkodean induktif untuk mengidentifikasi pola pedagogis yang berulang, adaptasi kontekstual, dan perspektif guru/siswa. Temuan penelitian mengungkapkan bahwa guru mendekontekstualisasikan CLT melalui empat strategi utama: melokalisasi tugas-tugas komunikatif, mengintegrasikan pembelajaran berbasis proyek dan inkuiri, mendefinisikan ulang peran guru, dan memanfaatkan perangkat digital berteknologi rendah. Namun, tantangan sistemik dan tingkat kelas tetap ada, termasuk pemahaman kurikulum yang terbatas, pengembangan profesional yang tidak memadai, dan akses yang tidak merata ke sumber daya, ketidakselarasan penilaian, dan kesulitan manajemen kelas. Sementara guru umumnya menganggap CLT sesuai dengan tujuan Merdeka, implementasinya masih parsial karena kendala kelembagaan dan logistik. Persepsi siswa menunjukkan bahwa banyak yang lebih menikmati pembelajaran komunikatif, interaktif, dan berbasis proyek daripada metode tradisional. Namun, beberapa mengalami kecemasan karena kemampuan bahasa Inggris yang terbatas dan kurangnya keakraban dengan kegiatan yang berpusat pada siswa. Studi ini menyiratkan bahwa implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka yang sukses tidak hanya membutuhkan reformasi kurikulum tetapi juga dukungan guru yang berkelanjutan, program kesiapan siswa, dan pengembangan praktik penilaian yang sesuai dengan konteks..

Kata kunci: Pengajaran Bahasa Komunikatif, Kurikulum Merdeka, inovasi ELT, pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa.

INTRODUCTION

Today in Indonesia, the curriculum has become a hot issue in the national education system, it was formed by ministry of education and served as well-structure for course planning, learning goals and objectives, teaching method, learning guidelines, and learning outcomes. become hot issue in the national education system. Through this curriculum, schools aim to provide meaningful learning experiences and nurture students to become creative, innovative, and responsible individuals who contribute positively to society in the future by Bateman (2004). Bateman, (2004). In fact, in less than 10 years, Indonesia has made curriculum updates three times. These changes are applied periodically as part of continuous initiative to improve and strengthen Indonesia's' education system, especially in relation to learning objectives, learning outcomes, teaching or learning models, and instructional strategies that facilitate and promote meaningful learning implementation. . With these changes, Indonesia wishes to prepare students personally to have good potential in both academic and non-academic areas (Wardani 2023). . In fact, the change or replacement of curriculum is a common thing in Indonesia since 1947 to 2013. It because Indonesia has continuously revised or adjusted the curriculum framework to address to changes in national policy, social need, educational goal, and global or internation development as well as to enhance and improve the quality level and educational

relevance based on the evaluation result of previous curricula.. This situation arises with many benefits and challenges for teaching within the educational the educational system, which is why many people state the phrase, changing ministers would be changed the curriculum.

In Indonesia, curriculum implementation has undergone various changes and developments. Since the country declared its independence, the curriculum has been fundamentally revised at least five times as a means to support teaching and learning methods. In the third recent period, several curriculum models were introduced, including the KBK (Competency-Based Curriculum) in 2004, the KTSP (School-Based Curriculum), the 2013 Curriculum (K13), and most recently, the Merdeka Curriculum. The continual revision of the curriculum aims to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. However, these frequent changes have also led to confusion among educators and stakeholders involved in education (Richard, 2013) This is partly because previous curricula were not yet fully implemented across all schools, and the intended outcomes particularly in preparing students with language competence for the workplace have often not been achieved (Sari & Fatmawati, 2024)

Regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the challenges in the field, one of its core ideals is to reduce the excessive learning burden that was common in previous curricula. In recent years, many have criticized earlier curricula for placing too much pressure on students. The Merdeka Curriculum seeks to address this issue by allowing teachers and students more flexibility to explore learning materials deeply and to focus on developing skills relevant to future work demands (Shanan et al., 2023). However, in practice, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum also faces significant challenges within the current educational context in Indonesia. As with any major reform, obstacles are inevitable. One major challenge is the varied understanding of the curriculum's core concepts, which can lead to confusion and a lack of focus in classroom instruction (Candra & Wazudik, 2024). Additionally, any challenges arise from weak administrative support, limited professional development opportunities for teachers, and shifts in assessment systems that many educators still struggle to interpret. In addition, school's particularly those in remote areas often lack essential resources. These problems include a shortage of skilled teachers, limited creativity in applying student-centered learning, and minimal use of contextual teaching strategies. However, many schools are still needing attention to deal with sufficient computer facilities, language and science laboratory, and strong internet access,

In response to the challenges of Merdeka curriculum implementation within the development of ELT in Indonesia, innovation of language teaching becomes crucial things. As instruction from ministry of education and culture in 2019, the Merdeka curriculum was created to follow the modern era and to respond to the demands of modern era, to globalize learning model, to give more flexibility teaching and learning process, to modernize the national education system in order that the goals of teaching and learning can be reached such as promote students-centered learning, control and encouraging students to develop their full potential (Fuadi, 2021). Hence, English education context was supported by integrated of 21st century competencies such as involved critical thinking, higher order thinking, shows student's creativity by supporting original ideas, facilitate autonomous independent learning, and encourage collaboration with learning peers during learning activities. (Ferdaus et al., 2023) Therefore, innovative ELT practices are crucial to aligning classroom instruction with the vision of the Merdeka Curriculum, ensuring that learners gain the abilities and mindset necessary for real communication and lifelong learning

Adapting Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) becomes an important approach for English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia within the implementation construction framework of the Merdeka Curriculum, which should be prioritizes student-centered learning, competence development, and real-world application. Hence, the Merdeka Curriculum's objectives serves to develop critical thinking, teamwork, creativity, and learner autonomy are closely aligned with CLT's promotion of active student participation, meaningful communication, and the use of language in authentic contexts (Arkananta et al., 2024). Unlike traditional approaches that tend to practicing grammar rules and memorizing word, CLT focus on improving students' ability to communicative effectively. This focus is relevant for engaging students in using English in both their life context and academic course such as the Merdeka curriculum gathering student to do project-based learning, inquiry-based activities, learning by problem-solving, and more flexible learning paths where it helps teacher and students be more attractive, interactive, and absolutely it will be tailored learning process to each individual student's work (Priasih, A. 2024) Furthermore, students have heterogeneous needs and language proficiency levels, so applying CLT is very needed to support the differentiated learning (Ramadhani et al., 2024). Thus, the practices of Merdeka Curriculum will not be only pedagogically sound but also an essential part of activating a more modern transformation of English Language education in Indonesia (Salam & Luksfinanto, (2024); Nurteteng, Sunta & Dollah, 2024).

Dealing with implementation of the Curriculum Merdeka, many researches had undertaken research which various aspects of objectives or application across teaching English educational setting. For example, Nurhidayat et al. (2020) examined the assessment of teaching and learning through CEFR method which focused on how the CEFR-informed reflection expresses students' communicative abilities in gathering both interpretation and ideas expressions. Similarly with Sulchaniya & Waluyo (2024) who tested the Merdeka Curriculum in driving schools by emphasizing the pivotal role of institutional infrastructure and educational facilities in practical implementation of the curriculum. Another researcher, Susilowati (2022) explored Other researcher Susilowati, (2022) who explored the Merdeka curriculum in different context by shaping students' character within Islamic religious education through pressuring values-based learning. Another study by Saipul, (2025) analyzed English language instruction, assess the alignment of 2013 lesson plans and the Merdeka Curriculum principle, emphasized key elements such as encouraging learning autonomy, empowering students learning creativity, and promoting active engagement in learning process. Related study also had done by Astuti et al.(2024) examined the challenges and barriers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum to science education, identified how many obstacle faced by teachers attempted to put forward strategies to addresses these challenges, and provided valuable insights to educational reform practices.

These previous studies have made valuable contributions into curriculum suitability, teaching and learning devices, students' learning engagement, and concentrate on curriculum alignment. Hence, they still have a critical need for research that rove the systemic broadly and challenges contextually to the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum within Indonesia's diverse educational system renovation (Wuryanto et al., 2025). However, this present study aims to address this gap through focus on the pedagogical approach, deeper structural, new perspectives, and socio-cultural issues that can be appeared as long as the Curriculum implementation (Faradella & Egar, 2024) Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining how English teachers adapt CLT under the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia, particularly in underserved and rural areas. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on localized innovation within a national curriculum reform an area that remains underexplored in ELT scholarship.

Based on the background and the focus of this study, researcher formulate some questions namely; How can Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)-based approaches be adapted to support innovative English Language Teaching (ELT) practices under the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia? What are the primary challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian secondary or high schools? How do English teachers perceive and apply CLT-based methods in response to the curriculum's demands for student-centered and competency-based learning? How do students perceive English language learning under the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian secondary school

LITERATURE REVIEW

The implementation of curriculum reforms often demands significant pedagogical shifts, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT), where communicative competence has become a global standard (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In response, many educational systems, including Indonesia's, have adopted Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to promote learner-centered instruction, language use in real contexts, and active student's participation (Freeman & Anderson, 2011)

In the Indonesian context, the Merdeka Curriculum was introduced as part of national efforts to improve educational quality through freedom of learning *Merdeka Belajar*. This curriculum emphasizes student autonomy, differentiated instruction, and competency-based learning, requiring teachers to shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to more interactive and reflective approaches (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Studies have shown that while the Merdeka Curriculum allows greater flexibility, its success largely depends on teachers' readiness, classroom resources, and contextual adaptability (Rahmawati, 2023) and (Nasution & Yusrizal, 2025)

Even though CLT is basically and theoretically compatible with the philosophical foundation of Merdeka Curriculum's, yet the practical application in Indonesian classroom complex. For example, in the implementation curriculum still there their challenges such as limited teacher training, rigid exam-oriented cultures, and unequal access to learning materials especially for rural areas. Hence, in rural areas itself, the issues are often appear worsen of the infrastructural constrain and insufficient professional development opportunities (Sari & Oktaviani, 2021). Besides, it is seemed that limited resources and insufficient professional development expand the gap or disparity between the requirements of Merdeka Curriculum and teacher's actual classroom practices This indicates that CLT's success under the Merdeka Curriculum is closely tied to broader systemic inequalities, not simply teacher skill or willingness.

Despite these barriers showed evidence of document meaningful local adaptation and localized innovation and creativity such as teacher are not passive recipients of policy. Instead, the teachers actively reshaped CLT principles to match their classroom activities., mix traditional and communicative elements to maintain both student's engagement and curricula compliance (Yuwono & Harbon, 2010) Therefore, these findings suggests that teacher agency should play a critical role, not merely following policy guidelines but actively designing classroom practices in deciding whether CLT can be well practically and actively within diverse Indonesian school context. Moreover, lees attention to student's motivation, engagement, and anxiety are included in central focus of the Merdeka Curriculum's student-centered orientation, yet understanding student's perspective, learning assessment in the implementation curriculum remain

incomplete. Absolutely, this gap highlights need much consideration by the educators executor. Dörnyei, 2005; Setyowati & Sutikno, (2024) Therefore, this study highlights a significant gap through examining both teachers' and students' perfectives dealing with adaptation of CLT for secondary schools and ELT practices in the context of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum Overall, these study contributes to the expanding research based on curriculum reform the adaptation teaching approaches, and the real or authentic contextual challenges involve in innovating ELT practices in Indonesia.

METHOD

A. Type of Research

This study used a qualitative descriptive design by Creswell and Poth (2017) to explore how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)-based approaches are being adapted in response to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian secondary schools. The focus was on four main areas:

1. Adaptation of CLT to support innovative English Language Teaching (ELT) practices;
2. Main challenges in implementation;
3. Teachers' perceptions and classroom application of CLT in student-centered, competency-based learning;
4. Students' perceptions of learning English under the Merdeka Curriculum.

B. Research Subjects

Participants included 20 English teachers and 15 secondary school students (both junior and senior high school levels). The teachers were selected from schools in four rural provinces: Central Java, West Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi, and Papua. The student participants represented a range of school types (public and private), academic backgrounds, and regional contexts. All participants were chosen through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in teaching experiences and educational settings.

C. Research Procedure

1. Observation

Classroom observations were carried out to observe and investigate real-time teaching practices, classroom interactions, and the implementation of CLT strategies. The observation guided detailed the indicators of assessment during lesson observations, such as how the implementation of CLT, how the interaction run between teacher and students, student participation patterns, classroom atmosphere, and activities supported and related with Merdeka Curriculum competencies. These structured categories helped researcher to ensure the consistency data across observations. The observations also supported data triangulation and added contextual depth to the interview findings. Additionally, relevant teaching documents (such as lesson plans or activity sheets) were examined to validate instructional practices.

2. Interview

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with both teachers and students. Interviews which distributed to teachers were focus on understanding and practice of CLT under the Merdeka Curriculum, the perception about challenges, and their pedagogical adjustment.

Interviews which distributed to students Were to find out the students' engagement, motivation, language anxiety, preferences for learning activities, and perceptions of curriculum changes. These interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of personal experiences and beliefs.

3. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman & Salsana (2015) with three steps:

- a. Data reduction means the raw data from observation and interview were reduce through transcribed, coded, and categorized through inductive way to identify recurring terms and meaningful patterns.
- b. Data display means showed the data findings by organizing summaries, give narration and description to the finding, showed interpretation.
- c. Conclusion drawing and verification means conclude all findings as final description were developed through reflection, comparison, and cross-checking of all data findings to convince and ensure the accuracy and credibility data.

This method enabled the researchers to identify localized innovations, practical challenges, and teaching strategies that align with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the adaptation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)-based approaches in response to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian secondary schools. The research focused on four key areas: (1) adaptation of CLT to innovative ELT practices, (2) primary implementation challenges, and (3) teachers' perceptions and application of CLT under student-centered, competency-based learning, (4) students' perception to ward English language learning under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Data were collected through observation and semi-structured interviews with 20 English teachers from junior and senior high schools across rural area namely Central Java, West Nusa Tenggara, South Sulawesi, and Papua. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure contextual and demographic variation. Classroom observations and document analysis were conducted to triangulate findings. In addition, 15 students focus on deep interview were conducted to capture learner perspectives and experiences.

The data analysis process adopted from Miles, Huberman & Salsana (2015) which involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This process helped arises how teachers adapted CLT in teaching practices. Hence, showed the contextual challenges, and how these correlated with principle of Merdeka Curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section showed findings and discussed the findings about research question of this research. The findings here displayed out for answering the problem statement or research questions namely; how can Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)-based approaches be adapted to support innovative English Language Teaching (ELT) practices under the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia? What are the primary challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian secondary or high schools? How do English teachers perceive and apply CLT-based methods in response to the curriculum's demands for student-centered and competency-based learning?

A. Adapting Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to Support Innovative ELT Practices within the Framework of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia.

This section presents the findings of the study regarding how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)-based approaches are being adapted to support innovative English Language Teaching (ELT) practices within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. Referring to classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student focus interview across diverse educational contexts, the data reveal that teachers are not simply implementing CLT in its conventional form, but are actively reconstructing its principles to align with the philosophical and pedagogical goals of *Merdeka Belajar* namely: 1) Localization of communicative task, 2) Integration of Project-Based and Inquiry-Based Learning 3) Redefining the Role of the Teacher, 4) Technology-Enhanced CLT in Low-Resource Settings.

Localization of communicative task: this term was the findings of localized CLT task adaptation to suit the sociocultural context of students in Indonesia. It was found that teachers provided traditional CLT materials, usually driven from western context, which were unsuccessful or ineffective in gathering students with their life experiences. This task created in context like bargaining in market, discussing environmental issues in their communities. This localization task not only improved the student engagement but also reached the goals of contextual learning. Teachers argued that students were more interested in communication when task reflected familiar setting. The findings support the assumption that effective communicative language competence in teaching language must be clearly and culturally responsive. Rather than impressing content, teachers' power in local realities as their course foundation in teaching language learning. Thus, it aligns with the Merdeka curriculum that emphasize local wisdom and students-centered learning.

Integration of Project-Based and Inquiry-Based Learning: the study also revealed that teachers adapted CLT principle by elaborating project-based learning (PBL) and inquiry-based learning model into their lessons. The activities of those learning model were instead avoiding role-play exercises, and engaged students in broader or expanding projects such as creating English language dialogue, podcast, making school newspapers, or local tourism brochures. Hence, these projects let the sustainable communication practices while expanding and improving students' critical thinking, work collaboration, and creativity core competencies scheme in the Merdeka curriculum. Teachers assessed the students' task referred to project-based on CLT that encourage students to practices English more authentically where the task like interviewing community members or searching local interesting topic which had made in clear with purposes and audience. These adaptations reflect a significant pedagogical innovation such as increasing communicative competence as the one objective to embrace extensive educational goals.

Redefining the role of the teacher: as the goal under Merdeka curriculum, the role of teachers shifted executor transmission of knowledge be facilitator on the learning process. the findings showed that teachers applying CLT-based approaches stay along with this shift by adapting more flexible, well organized group discussion, peer teaching, and self-reflective after learning. Furthermore, the use of scaffolding techniques also implemented such as sentence forms, vocabulary support, and guided practice to students who has limited English proficiency to active participated in meaningfully communication task. Besides, teachers also employed formative assessment tools such as portfolio and students' journal progression in order that easier to control the progression These practices served autonomy, feedback, and holistic development were consistent with both CLT principle and the focus of Merdeka belajar.

Technology-Enhanced CLT in Low-Resource Setting: the important finding was the creative use of low-cost or miss technology to adapt CLT in under-resourced schools. Teacher in rural areas frequently face difficulties or struggle in using digital media because of limited internet access. Consequently, tools as resources such as WhatsApp group, voice recording, and both online and offline media are seldom used to support communicative task or interactive activities. In some cases, students frequently memorizes and recorded reading dialogues by themselves without teacher-presented materials and then distributed the files for peer review Hence, this approach could not help interaction beyond classroom while guessing the spirit of communicative learning. Absolutely, this innovation showed that ELT through did not require high technology or imported software be effective. Instead, Indonesian teachers considered applying CLT through accessible tools that described the practical conditions of their school such as represented embody the Merdeka Curriculum's vision namely flexibility, inclusivity, and technology-integrated learning, then focused on local needs.

Overall, those findings indicated that CLT-Based approaches significantly enhanced ELT innovation and was fully adapted within the Merdeka Curriculum framework.. However, Indonesian teachers were not only implementers of foreign approaches but also, they were active innovators and executors who conceptualize, innovate, and expand CLT to reach the national goals and realities. Finally, these adaptations bridge out the gap between theoretical concept and ideas in practicing teaching classroom, providing a powerful model of ELT to the curriculum transformation.

Table 1:
Summary of Adaptations of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) under the Merdeka Curriculum

Theme of Adaptation	Description	Examples from the Field	Alignment with Merdeka Curriculum Principles
1. Localization of Communicative Tasks	Teachers modified CLT materials to reflect local contexts and cultural norms.	Roleplays about bargaining at local markets, interviews with village elders, discussions on local environmental issues.	Promotes <i>kearifan lokal</i> (local wisdom) and contextual learning; increases student engagement and cultural relevance.
2. Integration of Project-Based and Inquiry-Based Learning	Teachers integrated CLT with project- and inquiry-based learning to foster authentic use	Creating podcasts, brochures, school newspapers, interviews, local topic research.	Encourages collaboration, creativity, and real-world communication aligned with Merdeka Belajar's emphasis on holistic learning.

	of language and critical thinking.		
3. Redefining the Role of the Teacher	Teachers shifted roles from knowledge transmitters to facilitators and guides.	Use of peer teaching, group discussions, sentence scaffolds, self-reflection journals, and formative assessment.	Reflects student-centered learning, autonomy, and emphasis on feedback and holistic development.
4. Technology-Enhanced CLT in Low-Resource Settings	Teachers used accessible technologies to support CLT in rural or under-resourced areas.	WhatsApp-based discussions, offline recordings, voice messages for speaking tasks, peer audio feedback.	Supports flexible and inclusive learning through practical, low-cost tech integration adapted to local infrastructure.

B. The primary challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian secondary or high schools.

Based on the data from observation and interviews with 20 English teachers across urban and rural secondary schools in Central Java, South Sulawesi, West Nusa Tenggara, and Papua, through analysis of school documents and teachers lesson plan, this study could not cover all core challenges. These challenges touched both systemic issues and classroom realities that affect the appropriateness and effectiveness of Merdeka Curriculum implementation in ELT. The challenges included both general and specific challenges.

The general challenges found from interview data included those reported by teachers such as: Curriculum Ambiguity: 55% of English teachers argued that they faced difficulties to align lesson plans with the Merdeka Curriculum due to unclear learning outcomes and insufficient training.

1. Resource Gaps: 47% of schools limited access to upgrade and update teaching materials operated digital equipment required for flexible in use and students-centered approaches supposed by the curriculum
2. Assessment Confusion: some teachers commented about uncertainty instrument of formative and summative assessment under the new curriculum, usually inconsistent practice in the classroom.
3. Time Constrains: many teachers reported that adapting more communicative practices and project-based English course required more teaching time than allocated weekly schedule.

As specific challenges identified from interview data included those reported by teachers, such as:

a. Inadequate Understanding of Curriculum Principles

A major challenge reported by 50% of the participants was the limited understanding of the philosophical and pedagogical foundation of the Merdeka Curriculum. While teachers were aware that the curriculum emphasized flexibility, student-centered learning, and competency-based outcomes, many lacked clarities on how to translate these principles into practice particularly in the context of English instruction.

Several teachers admitted they were still applying teaching approaches rooted in the 2013 Curriculum, focusing heavily on grammar drills, textbook-based learning, and summative assessments. When asked about the competencies outlined in the *Capaian Pembelajaran* (CP), more than half of the teachers struggled to explain how these differed from the *Kompetensi Inti* and *Kompetensi Dasar* used in the previous curriculum. This mismatch suggests a disconnect between policy design and teacher preparedness.

b. Insufficient Professional Development and Training Support

The study revealed that only 32% of teachers had attended official government or school-led training on Merdeka Curriculum implementation specifically for English. Among those who had, most described the sessions as “theoretical,” “general,” and “not focused on practical classroom application”. Teachers in rural districts were especially disadvantaged due to limited access to workshops, coaching programs, or collaboration with peers from *Sekolah Penggerak*.

One teacher from rural East Lombok noted:

“We only received one briefing during the semester break, and it was not specific to English. I still don’t know how to design a lesson based on the Profil Pelajar Pancasila”.

Lack of continuous mentoring and peer teaching networks leaves many teachers relying on guesswork, outdated materials, or YouTube tutorials to develop classroom strategies, leading to inconsistent implementation across school.

c. Limited Resources and Instructional Materials

Resource constraints are a major barrier in aligning English instruction with Merdeka Curriculum expectations. Approximately 61% of teachers stated that their schools had not yet received official learning modules or instructional tools designed to support the new curriculum. In several cases, teachers reported that English textbooks had not changed since 2016, making it difficult to shift toward project-based or inquiry-based tasks. Access to digital resources was also uneven. In schools with poor internet connectivity, online ELT platforms and multimedia tools essential for communicative, tech-integrated lessons were virtually inaccessible.

A teacher in Papua shared:

“We are supposed to implement student projects in English, but we don’t even have audio equipment or a projector. It’s difficult to create interaction with just a whiteboard.”

d. Misalignment between Assessment and Curriculum Goals

The study found a significant tension between the flexible use of curriculum, formative assessment, philosophy of Merdeka curriculum and the standardized, summative assessment culture that still dominates many schools. Teachers reported pressure to prepare students for national exams or school accreditation evaluations, which often prioritize vocabulary lists, reading comprehension, and grammar knowledge. More than 70% of teachers indicated they still used multiple-choice tests and grammar-based evaluations because they lacked training on how to design authentic performance assessments, rubrics,

or reflective tasks. As a result, even when teaching strategies were adapted, assessment practices remained misaligned with curriculum objectives.

e. Classroom Management and Student Readiness

Another key challenge were classroom management and students' readiness in receiving learning materials particularly in schools where students enter secondary education with low English proficiency or minimal exposure to communicative activities. Teachers shared that many students were uncomfortable speaking or writing freely in English, preferring structured, controlled tasks. Moreover, classroom management became more demanding under the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages group work, peer discussion, and open-ended projects. In large classrooms 35–40 students, teachers struggled to monitor progress, provide individual feedback, and ensure equal participation.

One teacher in South Sulawesi remarked:

"Group work sounds good in theory, but with 38 students, limited time, and no teaching assistant, it becomes chaotic. Only the confident students dominate the activities."

f. Resistance to Pedagogical Change

Some teachers particularly those with over 10 years of experience expressed **hesitation or resistance** to abandoning traditional teaching methods. These teachers voiced concerns about classroom discipline, effectiveness, and time management when asked to shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-led activities.

A veteran teacher from Central Java explained:

"We are used to teaching in a structured way. This new curriculum feels experimental. It may work in theory, but in reality, we need structure and control."

This indicates that successful curriculum reform requires not only policy directives but also mindset shifts, sustained motivation, and institutional encouragement. However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in secondary school ELT faces multi-layered challenges namely lack knowledge of practical curriculum, insufficient training, resource disparities, misaligned assessment criteria on the system, students' readiness issues, and resistance to alternate pedagogical approach. These challenges were interconnected and pinpoint the urgent need for context-sensitive teacher development, equitable resource, allocation teaching time, and creation of collaborative support systems that empower teachers to innovate their teaching practices.

Table 2:
Summary of Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Category of Challenge	Description	Field Evidence / Examples	Policy & Practice Implications
1. Curricular Ambiguity	Learning outcomes in the Merdeka Curriculum are perceived as vague;	55% of teachers reported confusion with aligning plans to <i>Capaian Pembelajaran</i> due to unclear	More curriculum orientation and localized instructional models are needed to

Category of Challenge	Description	Field Evidence / Examples	Policy & Practice Implications
	teachers lack clarity on lesson alignment.	guidance and lack of practical examples.	support teacher interpretation.
2. Limited Understanding of Curriculum Principles	Teachers lack deep understanding of Merdeka's pedagogical and philosophical underpinnings.	50% still rely on methods from the 2013 Curriculum; many could not distinguish between old and new competency terms.	Continuous, practical training is needed to help translate policy into classroom reality.
3. Insufficient Professional Development	Few teachers have access to specific, hands-on training for English under the Merdeka Curriculum.	Only 32% received relevant training; rural teachers had no access to coaching or peer collaboration.	Scalable, subject-specific and context-sensitive PD models must be prioritized.
4. Resource Gaps	Schools lack updated teaching materials and tools needed for CLT and project-based learning.	61% reported no new English modules; textbooks are outdated; multimedia resources are limited or unavailable.	Equitable distribution of curriculum-aligned materials and offline tools is essential.
5. Assessment Misalignment	Teachers are confused about new assessment principles; summative tests still dominate.	70% still rely on grammar/vocabulary tests due to lack of training in performance-based assessment.	Clear assessment guidelines, training, and exemplar tools should be developed and disseminated.
6. Student Readiness & Classroom Management	Low English proficiency and large class sizes hinder effective communicative teaching.	Students lack confidence in open-ended tasks; in 35–40 student classrooms, teachers struggle to monitor engagement.	Smaller class sizes or more support (e.g., teaching assistants) may be needed, along with differentiated instruction models.
7. Resistance to Pedagogical Change	Some experienced teachers resist moving away from traditional, structured methods.	Teachers express concern about classroom control, effectiveness, and feasibility of student-led tasks.	Change management strategies, peer mentoring, and showcasing successful classroom adaptations can help shift mindsets.

C. English teachers perceive and apply CLT-based methods in response to the curriculum's demands for student-centered and competency-based learning?

This study explored the perceptions and classroom practices of 20 English teachers across junior and senior high schools in four regions of Indonesia West Java, East Kalimantan, West Nusa Tenggara, and Maluku regarding the adaptation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in response to the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on student-centered, competency-based education. The findings revealed a mixed situations of awareness, interpretation, and application

of CLT-based methods among teachers, shaped significantly by their prior training, teaching experience, and depth understanding of CLT-based.

1. Positive Perceptions with Varied Depth of Understanding

The majority of participating teachers around 20 expressed favorable views of CLT, describing it as a modern approach, Interactive teaching and learning, and more interesting method of teaching English. Teachers generally believed CLT was aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on active learning, creativity, and communication. However, their depth of understanding varied. While younger teachers (less than 10 years of teaching experience) were more confident in explaining CLT principles such as task-based instruction, interactional competence, and learner autonomy, more experienced teachers tended to associate CLT mainly with "group work" or "speaking practice," lacking a broader pedagogical grasp.

A junior high school teacher in West Java said:

"CLT means we ask students to speak English more. It's better than just grammar. They need to practice in pairs or groups, so they don't depend on the teacher."

In contrast, another senior teacher in Maluku shared:

"We are told to use student-centered methods, but sometimes I am not sure what exactly CLT involves. Is it a specific method or just any active learning?"

This finding suggests that while the perception of CLT is mostly positive, the conceptual clarity remains uneven, especially in schools lacking access to targeted professional development.

2. Selective Application of CLT Principles in Practice

Classroom observations and lesson plan analyses revealed that only partial aspects of CLT were being implemented in many classrooms. For instance, while most teachers incorporated pair or group activities, these were often mechanical rather than communicative in nature (e.g., scripted dialogues or controlled role plays). Teachers rarely incorporated open-ended, real-life tasks that encouraged spontaneous communication or negotiation of meaning. Only 6 out of 20 teachers designed lessons that integrated CLT authentically such as debates, collaborative projects, interviews, and student-led presentations. These practices were most common among teachers with access to Komunitas Belajar (teacher learning communities) or those teaching in pilot Sekolah Penggerak.

A teacher from East Kalimantan shared:

"I ask students to create short dialogues about daily life. But we don't have time for projects or debates. Sometimes we have to finish textbook chapters too."

This reflects a common tension: curriculum goals vs. classroom realities, where time, assessment expectations, and school culture still favor conventional task completion over communicative, process-oriented learning.

3. Efforts to Align CLT with Competency-Based Learning

The study found emerging efforts among teachers to integrate CLT with the Merdeka Curriculum's competency framework, particularly with regard to Capaian Pembelajaran

(Learning Outcomes) and Profil Pelajar Pancasila. Several teachers reported designing activities that foster both language skills and soft skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, and cultural awareness. Examples included: A group project where students created a community health awareness video in English, Pair interviews where students asked peers about their dreams and career aspirations, Role-plays simulating civic participation (e.g., student council meetings). Such activities showed an increasing understanding of the need to balance linguistic competence with character development, as envisioned by the curriculum.

However, only a small number of teachers (10 out of 20) actively referred to competency descriptors or assessment rubrics aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. This gap suggests that while practices are changing, assessment literacy remains underdeveloped.

4. Barriers to Full CLT Implementation

Despite willingness and positive attitudes, teachers faced several barriers in fully applying CLT-based methods:

- a. **Large Class Sizes:** Many teachers reported classes of 35–40 students, making it difficult to manage pair or group activities effectively.
- b. **Time Constraints:** The weekly time allocation for English (2–3 hours) was seen as insufficient for task-based or project-based learning.
- c. **Assessment Pressures:** Teachers were still expected to provide written scores and complete documentation for school reports, leading some to prioritize measurable tasks over communicative ones.
- d. **Lack of Resources:** In several schools, teachers lacked audio-visual tools, internet access, or printed materials that could support rich language interaction.

These constraints influenced how CLT was applied often in simplified, adapted forms that prioritized classroom control and syllabus coverage over deeper engagement with communicative tasks.

In assumption, the findings suggest that English teachers perceive CLT positively and recognize its compatibility with the Merdeka Curriculum's goals, especially in promoting student centered and competency-based learning. However, actual classroom implementation tends to be selective and superficial, constrained by limited understanding, lack of support, and institutional pressures. While examples of innovative practice do exist especially in better-supported or trial schools scaling these efforts requires more context-sensitive training, curriculum integration tools, and assessment reform to enable CLT to function as a transformative pedagogy under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 3:
Summary of English Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of CLT in the Context of the Merdeka Curriculum

Theme / Aspect	Findings	Evidence / Examples	Implications
Perceptions of CLT	Generally positive attitudes toward CLT as an engaging and modern	Younger teachers described CLT in terms of learner autonomy, task-based	There is a need for deeper conceptual training on CLT

Theme / Aspect	Findings	Evidence / Examples	Implications
	method; understanding varies by teaching experience.	learning, and interaction. Senior teachers linked it vaguely to “group work” or “active learning.”	principles, especially for senior or untrained teachers.
CLT Classroom Practice	Partial implementation: Teachers use group/pair activities, but these often lack communicative authenticity.	Only 6 of 20 teachers integrated CLT meaningfully (e.g., debates, interviews, presentations). Others relied on scripted or textbook-based tasks.	CLT is adapted to fit existing practices. To improve fidelity, practical classroom models and examples are needed.
Integration with Competency-Based Learning	Some teachers align CLT activities with <i>Capaian Pembelajaran</i> and <i>Profil Pelajar Pancasila</i> , though this is limited.	Examples included: community projects, civic role-plays, and peer interviews. Only 10/20 used curriculum-linked rubrics or competencies.	Training should emphasize how to embed CLT in broader curriculum competencies and character outcomes.
Institutional and Structural Barriers	Large class sizes, limited time, rigid assessment requirements, and lack of resources hinder effective CLT use.	Teachers cited difficulty managing 35–40 students, limited English hours, pressure to provide scores, and lack of multimedia tools.	Without addressing these systemic issues, CLT adoption will remain partial or symbolic. Investment in classroom support is essential.
Teacher Innovation and Support Networks	Innovative CLT practices are more common in schools with access to <i>Komunitas Belajar</i> or <i>Sekolah Penggerak</i> .	These teachers designed interactive tasks and linked lessons to competencies and student interests.	Supportive ecosystems (peer networks, mentoring, school leadership) enhance teachers' capacity to adopt CLT meaningfully.

D. Students' Perceptions of English Language Learning Under the Merdeka Curriculum

This section presents the findings derived from semi-structured interviews with 15 secondary school students (aged 13–17) from both junior and senior high schools in four Indonesian provinces: Central Java, South Sulawesi, East Nusa Tenggara, and West Papua. These students were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring variation in school status (public and private), urban-rural representation, and academic performance. The interviews focused on their experiences, attitudes, and expectations related to English language learning within the Merdeka Curriculum framework. Four key themes emerged from the data: (1) increased relevance and engagement, (2) language anxiety and confidence issues, (3) preference for interactive and creative tasks, and (4) unequal access to learning resources.

1. Increased Relevance and Engagement

A majority of students 6 stated that they found English lessons under the Merdeka Curriculum to be more engaging and meaningful compared to previous approaches. Several

students appreciated the integration of real-life topics and locally relevant content, which made the language feel more applicable to their daily lives.

S1, a student from a junior high school in East Nusa Tenggara explained:

“Before, we only learned grammar from books, but now we can make videos or talk about problems in our village using English. I feel more interested because it connects to our lives.”

S2, a tenth-grade student, shared:

“Before, English class was mostly about grammar and memorizing. But now, we talk about things that happen in real life, like making posters about social media or doing interviews. It feels more useful.”

S4, explained:

“I enjoy learning English now because the topics are about daily life. Last week, we made a dialogue about asking directions, and I actually used it when a tourist asked me something.”

S7, commented on the project-based approach:

“I feel more excited when we work on group projects, like making a video or presentation. It’s not boring like reading from the book only. We can also be creative and choose our own topics.”

S9, from a rural school, stated:

“We don’t have a lot of internets, but the teacher still uses stories or topics from around us. Like last month, we had to make a story about our village in English. It made me proud.”

S13 emphasized autonomy:

“Now we can decide how to finish the task, like making a podcast or poster. It gives me freedom to show my ideas and improve my English in my own way.”

This aligns with the curriculum’s emphasis on contextualized and student-centered learning. Students felt that English was no longer taught in isolation but connected to broader themes such as the environment, community, and identity.

2. Language Anxiety and Confidence Issues

Despite the increased relevance, 5 students expressed ongoing feelings of anxiety and self-doubt when asked to speak or write in English, particularly in open-ended or spontaneous tasks. This was more common among students in rural or under-resourced schools, where prior exposure to English had been limited.

A senior high school student from West Papua shared:

“I want to speak, but I’m afraid I make mistakes and my friends laugh. Sometimes, I just keep silent.”

The shift from teacher-centered to student-active learning has placed more communicative responsibility on students, which some found empowering but others found intimidating. Students mentioned the need for more support, such as vocabulary lists, sentence starters, and peer practice sessions, to build their confidence gradually.

S2, a student from a public high school, shared:

"I'm afraid if I say the wrong word, my friends will laugh or correct me. It makes me nervous even though I understand the topic."

S5, comment:

"I usually feel shy when I asked to speak in front of class facing other students directly. Exactly I know the answer but unfortunately, I cannot express any words because I don't know how to say it, because I am not sure if my grammar corrects."

This anxiety sometime arises and often led students to keep silent or avoid any participation during the communicative lesson, even when they know the ideas or content engaging. Dealing with students from lower-level proficiency background, they expressed a gestures due to their weaknesses of vocabulary and prior lack of English exposure. For example:

S8, remarked:

"In my school, we are not always speaking in English, mostly never practice, we only doing writing. So, when I am asked to speak in group work, I feel behind my group classmate"

S10, explained:

"Sometime I only memorize lines for speaking task. I do not seriously understand what I said and I am afraid if I will make mistakes"

With these challenges, there were few students claimed that teachers had supportive behavior such as firm correction, encouragement, gather in peer work collaboration, helped students to reduce anxiety over time

3. Preference for Interactive and Creative Activities

Five students stated a clear preference for doing interactive activities such as role plays, group work in project, digital storytelling, and learning through English games. These activities make them feel more enjoyable and bring along them in less stressful than traditional written task or learning grammar drills.

A student from Central Java remarked:

"When we are doing presentation in group or make a short film, I am quite good in practice English because no nervousness arises. It is like learning by playing"

Based on the data above, we can assume that students were helped in practicing English, and let them freely to develop other skills such as collaboration teamwork, leadership, innovative and creativity outcomes related with Profil Pancasila targeted which as stated in the Merdeka Curriculum. Through interview students, clear choices of statement emerged for English learning activities that seemed interactive, hands-on, and briefly structured when it compared with textbook-based instruction. Students also reported about their feeling with higher motivation and relax when they are engaged in difficult task that forced them to express themselves independently, collaboration with peers, and practice English real-life or imaginative context.

For example, S3, a grade 11 student, explained:

“I very like when the learning practices by playing in short videos. It will be more fun without stress though and heart because we can act, laugh freely while speaking English”

Similarly, S6shared:

“I learn better when we play games or do group discussions. I feel I can remember the words more because it’s active. Just reading from the book makes me sleepy.”

Multiple students also mentioned enjoying project-based activities, such as making posters, presentations, or digital content. These tasks were seen as both enjoyable and practical:

S11, commented:

“When we created an English podcast about hobbies, it helped me practice speaking. I also learned how to make something useful, not just answer questions in the book.”

S12, added:

“We once made an English brochure about tourist spots in our town. That made me feel proud and improved my vocabulary.”

Students also expressed that these creative tasks made English feel more approachable and helped reduce pressure, especially when activities were conducted in groups. However, a few students noted that while they enjoyed creative tasks, time management and unclear instructions sometimes made these activities confusing or rushed. This highlights the need for well-structured task design and balanced scaffolding from teachers..4. Unequal Access to Learning Resources

While 4 students in urban or well-funded schools described access to English videos, project materials, and internet-based learning, those in rural or remote areas reported serious limitations. This disparity influenced their perceptions of English learning under the Merdeka Curriculum.

A student from a rural senior high school in South Sulawesi noted:

“We are asked to make digital projects, but we don’t have enough internet quota or good phones. Sometimes we cannot join the activity fully.”

Several students revealed they lacked consistent access to essential learning technologies such as internet connectivity, smartphones, or laptops. For instance:

S14, a student from a rural public school, stated:

“Our school doesn’t have a computer lab, and at home, we don’t have Wi-Fi. When the teacher gives tasks that need the internet or video making, I can’t do it properly.”

S9, echoed this issue:

“I want to make a video or use online dictionaries, but I only have a basic phone and no signal in my village.”

Students in more urban or better-resourced schools described having more access to digital learning materials, English applications, and online collaboration tools, allowing them to

complete tasks more easily. This contrast reveals a **digital divide** that disproportionately affects students in less advantaged regions.

Furthermore, disparities also extended to physical learning materials, such as English reading books, updated textbooks, or classroom media equipment.

S15, mentioned:

"We only have one old English book in class. There's no projector, and sometimes we just copy from the whiteboard. It's hard to follow group projects like other schools."

These gaps impacted not only student engagement but also learning outcomes, as some students struggled to meet project requirements or develop digital literacy skills expected under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Table 4:
Summary Table: Students' Perceptions of English Language Learning under the Merdeka Curriculum

Theme	Description of Findings	Representative Quotes	Implications
1. Increased Relevance and Engagement	Students found lessons more meaningful due to real-life topics, local content, and project-based tasks. These made English feel more connected to their lives and motivated them to participate.	- "Now we can make videos or talk about problems in our village using English." (S1) - "We talk about real life, like making posters about social media." (S2) - "I actually used it when a tourist asked me something." (S4)	Supports Merdeka's goals of contextual, student-centered learning. Encourages personal relevance and cultural responsiveness in lesson design.
2. Language Anxiety and Confidence Issues	Many students still experienced fear of making mistakes, especially during speaking tasks. Anxiety was higher among students from rural or low-exposure backgrounds.	- "I'm afraid I make mistakes and my friends laugh." (West Papua) - "Sometimes I know the answer, but I don't want to say it." (S5) - "I don't really understand what I'm saying, but I'm scared to make mistakes." (S10)	Highlights need for scaffolding (sentence starters, peer support), gentle correction, and confidence-building practices. Reflects a gap between curriculum intentions and student readiness.
3. Preference for Interactive and Creative Tasks	Students preferred hands-on and group-based activities like videos, role plays, and games over traditional drills. These tasks improved motivation, language use, and collaboration.	- "It's like learning while playing." (Central Java) - "We can act, laugh, and still use English." (S3) - "Creating an English podcast helped me practice speaking." (S11)	Shows the potential of interactive methods for both engagement and skills development. Suggests creative tasks align well with Profil Pelajar Pancasila competencies.

4. Unequal Access to Learning Resources	Students from rural or underfunded schools lacked access to internet, devices, or updated materials, limiting their ability to engage in digital or project-based tasks.	- “We don’t have enough internet quota or good phones.” (South Sulawesi) - “I only have a basic phone and no signal in my village.” (S9) - “We just copy from the whiteboard.” (S15)	Reveals digital and material inequalities. Suggests a need for differentiated planning, offline alternatives, and targeted resource support for equity in curriculum implementation.
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DISCUSSION

Overall, this finding highlights the need for equity focused interventions, such as infrastructure support, flexible task design, and offline alternatives to ensure that innovation in ELT reaches all students, regardless of location or socioeconomic background (Guskey, 2002). These gaps created frustration among students who wanted to participate but felt left behind due to infrastructural barriers. Some students suggested more offline, low-cost learning alternatives to support equal participation. However, students generally perceive English learning under the Merdeka Curriculum as more relevant, interactive, and connected to their real lives. They value tasks that allow creativity and collaboration. However, challenges remain, especially regarding language confidence and resource access. These findings underscore the importance of differentiated support and inclusive practices to ensure that all students can benefit from the curriculum’s innovations.

This study set out to explore how English teachers in Indonesia adapt Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches under the Merdeka Curriculum, what challenges they face in doing so, how they perceive CLT, and how students experience English learning within this framework. The findings show both encouraging innovations and serious limitations, which can help us better understand how curriculum reforms succeed or struggle in real classroom (Shelton, 2007; Vavrus et al. 2013)

Access to resources was also a major barrier. Especially in rural schools, teachers lacked technology, books, and even stable internet. Yet many still tried to create meaningful learning using basic tools like hand-drawn materials or mobile phones. This reflects to Fieerrees & Chalaune (2021) idea of teacher agency: that even in difficult conditions, educators can find creative ways to support learning. But to make these efforts sustainable, schools need better infrastructure and support.

Cultural resistance also played a role. Some school leaders or older teachers were not ready to accept student-cenetred methods. They believed in traditional teaching, where the teacher controls the class and students listen (Muganga & Ssenkusu, 2019). This resistance is not surprising. As Guskey (2002) notes, deep change in teaching habits takes time and evidence. Unless teachers see clear results, they may be hesitant to shift their methods.

Teachers’ perceptions of CLT were generally hopeful but mixed. They liked the idea of making learning more active and student-driven. However, some worried that grammar and writing were being neglected. This suggests a need for blended approaches mixing communicative tasks with focused instruction on language form. Littlewood (2018) states that “CLT in constrained contexts” supports this balance. It reminds us that even in large or low-resource classrooms, small changes like pair work or reflective journals can make a difference.

The student perspective added valuable depth to the findings. Many students said they felt more connected to English because activities were relevant to their lives. This matches Vygotsky's (1978) theory, as cited in McLeod (2024) that students learn better when tasks are meaningful and social. However, students also reported feeling nervous when asked to speak English. This kind of language anxiety is well documented (Horwitz et al., 2019) and can block learning if not handled with care. Teachers must create safe, supportive spaces where mistakes are part of the process.

Students also said they enjoyed creative activities like games, group projects, and using media. These preferences align with CLT values, showing that students are ready for active learning when the environment supports it. But again, resource differences matter. In schools with limited internet or tools, students had fewer opportunities to do these activities. This reflects Warschauer's (2007) point that access to educational technology is about fairness, not just learning tools.

These findings suggest that while CLT can be adapted successfully under the Merdeka Curriculum, the process depends on ongoing support. For the curriculum to work well across Indonesia, teacher training, school resources, and assessment systems all need to be aligned with its goals. The study's findings are not only relevant for Indonesia but can also help other countries that are shifting toward student-centered, competency-based education in complex or unequal systems.

To address the challenges identified such as inconsistent understanding of the curriculum, lack of teacher training, misalignment with assessments, and resource disparities the following steps of ways to solve the challenges:

1. Gain and have own intensive CLT-focused professional development as English teachers, managing classroom with emphasizing adaptation and curriculum mastery development.
2. Clearer with curriculum guidelines to provide appropriate practical teaching models and give example materials contextually aligned with CLT principles
3. Doing evaluation and assessment by integrating communicative competence, do not focus on grammar only and certain vocabulary accuracy but should be more task exercise and speaking practices individually.
4. Ensure give accurate resources distribution, provide creative materials and digital tools, particularly for rural students' areas and underserved schools
5. Do collaborative teachers' networking to expand the best sharing practices and great contextual innovation.

This study presented a new and quite unique contribution by describing and exploring some teacher's condition in Indonesia dealing with how they gathered and adapted the communicative language teaching (CLT) within the newly and fresh implemented Merdeka Curriculum which forced them to deal with flexibility teaching or materials, student-centered learning, and contextualization both teaching materials and teaching strategy. While the realistic application in the field do not balance with CLT which had been deeply and widely studied global. This might be because little attention has been given to integrating teaching approaches within decentralized and culturally diverse curricular framework.. Therefore, this study revealed an innovative teaching trough grassroots-level adaptations of CLT practices, and dedicating insights into how the pedagogical models can improve and evolve the practical teaching with realities simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

This study promotes the evidence of that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language education is both potential and complex, particularly in how teachers adapted the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to serves more support and innovation on student-centred learning. The findings showed that teachers had been making meaningful efforts to integrate CLT by providing important things in teaching namely; interactive activity, collaborative work, contextual task and materials, and project-based practices. However, these efforts were mostly constrained by struggle internet connection, less understanding of curriculum, not enough professional development, and uneven or imbalance resource availability. Mostly students generally give positive responds to the curriculum's consent on relevance task materials and active involvement, yet the issues such as self-anxiety in practicing language, access barriers so arise difficulties connection, and inconsistent students' learning autonomy to shape their learning experiences.

Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum has strong power be potential to develop English language learning, but absolutely it will be success depends on maximize effort to do teacher training, full adaptation on pedagogical context-sensitive, and stronger institutional support. These results outline the need for strengthening corporation and collaboration among teachers, educational authority, government official, and school stakeholders to convince and ensure that the curriculum's goals are practically, effectively and equitably realized. By assessing how CLT-based practices were deciding in teaching classrooms, finding out the structural and pedagogical challenges involved. This study give contribution to the scientific field of language education, broader innovation in ELT by providing empirical knowledge into contextual adaptation, wide-open discussions on language education reform in developing contexts, improving pedagogical principles within a national curriculum framework. The most important contribution that advancing understanding the meaningful and inclusive educational implementation reform must be realized in developing country context. It underscores that meaningful and inclusive implementation requires not only sound policy design but also robust systemic support and responsive teaching practices (J et al., 2016)

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