ENGLISH TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL COMPETENCE IN IMPLEMENTING *KURIKULUM MERDEKA*

Syamsiarna Nappu[1], Hasnawati[2], Nurdevi Bte Abduh[3]

[1,2,3] Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar, Makassar, Indonesia

*Corresponding author: syamsiarna.nappu@unismuh.ac.id

Abstract

This study investigated English teachers' pedagogical competence in implementing *the Kurikulum Merdeka*, Indonesia's official curriculum. Pedagogical competence is examined with respect to teachers' mastery of learning theories and principles, curriculum development aligned with the Kurikulum Merdeka, the organization of educational learning, and assessment and evaluation practices. The study employed a descriptive quantitative design using a questionnaire adapted from the national standards of teacher competence (Permendiknas No. 16 Tahun 2007) and contextualized to the principles of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The participants were ten English teachers from junior high schools in Gowa Regency. The findings indicated that teachers demonstrated a very high level of pedagogical competence across all indicators. These results suggested that English teachers are generally well prepared to implement *Kurikulum Merdeka*, particularly in learner-centered instruction, flexible curriculum planning, and formative assessment practices. The study highlighted the importance of continuous professional development for sustaining and enhancing pedagogical competence in line with the evolving demands of the current curriculum.

Keywords: Curriculum implementation, English teachers, Kurikulum Merdeka, Pedagogical competence

1. Introduction

Teaching and learning processes are influenced by several interrelated components, including teachers, students, learning materials, and the temporal and spatial context. Among these components, teachers play a central role as facilitators of learning and as key agents who translate curriculum policy into classroom practice. Numerous studies have emphasized that teachers' pedagogical competence significantly determines the quality of instructional processes and student learning outcomes, particularly in contexts of curriculum reform (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017; OECD, 2019). Consequently, pedagogical competence is widely recognized as a critical factor in the successful implementation of educational policies and curricula.

In Indonesia, the government has continually reformed the national curriculum to address global challenges, societal needs, and the rapid advancement of knowledge and technology. The most recent reform, *Kurikulum*

Merdeka, was introduced as a response to learning loss, student diversity, and the need for more flexible and meaningful learning experiences. This curriculum emphasizes learner autonomy, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and the development of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology [MoECRT], 2022). Unlike Curriculum 2013, *Kurikulum Merdeka* grants schools and teachers greater flexibility to design learning experiences that are responsive to students' needs, learning contexts, and interests, aligning with international trends toward competency-based and student-centered education (OECD, 2020).

The successful implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* requires teachers to possess strong pedagogical competence. According to Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, teachers are required to master four core competencies: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social. Among these, pedagogical competence is most directly related to classroom practice, encompassing teachers' understanding of learners' characteristics, instructional design, the implementation of learning, the use of learning resources and technology, and assessment practices (Shulman, 1987; König et al., 2020). Recent studies further suggest that pedagogical competence is decisive in enabling teachers to adapt to curricular flexibility and instructional innovation (Amir et al., 2024; Ningrum et al., 2024).

Within the context of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, pedagogical competence involves the ability to design teaching modules (*modul ajar*), apply differentiated and student-centered learning approaches, facilitate project-based learning, and conduct formative and authentic assessment. These competencies reflect constructivist and sociocultural learning theories, which emphasize active learner engagement, contextual learning, and continuous feedback (Vygotsky, 1978; Darling-Hammond et al., 2019). Therefore, examining teachers' pedagogical competence in implementing the current curriculum is essential for understanding how curriculum goals are translated into classroom practice and to what extent *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be effectively realized in everyday teaching and learning processes.

English language teaching is one of the subject areas most affected by this curriculum transformation. Under *Kurikulum Merdeka*, English learning prioritizes communicative competence, contextual language use, and the integration of language skills through authentic tasks. Teachers are encouraged to create learning experiences that promote active student participation, critical thinking, and real-life communication. This approach requires English teachers to possess

strong pedagogical competence, including an understanding of language learning theories, the ability to design flexible learning modules, and the capacity to conduct assessments that support continuous learning development rather than merely measuring final outcomes.

Previous studies in Indonesia have extensively examined teachers' pedagogical competence in the context of the 2013 Curriculum and earlier curriculum frameworks. These studies generally focused on teachers' abilities in lesson planning, classroom management, and assessment within relatively standardized curriculum structures. However, empirical research specifically exploring teachers' pedagogical competence in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* remains limited. Furthermore, many existing studies discuss curriculum implementation in general terms and do not sufficiently address subject-specific contexts such as English language teaching, which involves unique pedagogical challenges related to language skills, communication, and learner engagement.

This lack of empirical evidence reveals a clear research gap. As *Kurikulum Merdeka* grants greater autonomy and flexibility to teachers, it is necessary to determine whether they possess the pedagogical competence required to exercise this autonomy effectively. In particular, there is limited research that describes how English teachers apply learning theories, develop curriculum components, organize learning activities, and conduct assessments in alignment with the principles of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Addressing this gap is essential for providing an accurate picture of current classroom practices and informing future efforts in teacher professional development.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on English teachers' pedagogical competence within the framework of *the Kurikulum Merdeka*, rather than in prior curriculum models. By adapting indicators of pedagogical competence to the characteristics of the current curriculum, this study offers updated empirical insights into how national teacher competence standards are enacted in a more flexible, learner-centered curriculum environment. In addition, by focusing specifically on English language teaching, this study provides subject-specific evidence that remains underrepresented in research on curriculum implementation in Indonesia.

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The objectives of this study are to describe English teachers' pedagogical competence in mastering learning theories and educational learning principles, to describe teachers' competence in developing and adapting the English curriculum based on *Kurikulum Merdeka*, to describe how teachers organize educational learning activities, and to describe teachers' competence in conducting assessment and evaluation of learning processes and outcomes. This study describes English teachers' pedagogical competence in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*, particularly with respect to their mastery of learning theories and educational principles, their competence in developing and adapting the English curriculum, their ability to organize educational activities, and their practices in conducting assessments and evaluations of learning processes and outcomes. Using a descriptive quantitative approach, this research aims to provide empirical evidence reflecting current educational practices and to support the ongoing improvement of English language teaching under the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

2. Literature Review
Conceptualizing Pedagogical Competence

Pedagogical competence refers to the teacher's capacity to manage and facilitate effective learning environments by integrating knowledge of learners, instructional design, assessment, and reflective practice. It encompasses understanding learner characteristics, designing learning experiences, implementing appropriate instructional strategies, using technology, and conducting evaluations that guide student progress (Amir et al., 2024; Ningrum et al., 2024). Research shows that pedagogical competence is a multidimensional construct rooted in constructivist and learner-centered theories, in which learning is an active process of knowledge construction and meaning-making (contextual learning; Lave & Wenger, as cited in Wikipedia, 2025); principles that strongly align with *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s emphasis on autonomy and differentiated learning.

Theoretical frameworks such as *situated learning* and *contextual learning* inform contemporary understandings of pedagogical competence. Situated learning theory posits that knowledge is constructed through authentic interaction within a social context, underscoring the need for teachers to design authentic, context-relevant activities that mirror real-world problem solving (Wikipedia,

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2025). Similarly, contextual learning emphasizes anchoring instruction in students' lived experiences to enhance relevance and cognitive engagement (Wikipedia, 2025). These frameworks support *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s learner-centered orientation, in which teachers are expected to design learning not only for content mastery but also for socially situated, contextually meaningful competency development.

Pedagogical Competence in the Context of *Kurikulum Merdeka*

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* represents a shift from standardized, content-based instruction toward flexible, student-centered, and competency-oriented learning. Its design encourages teachers to adapt curriculum, implement differentiated instruction, and facilitate project-based and authentic assessments tailored to students' interests and contexts. This curriculum reform, therefore, places pedagogical competence at the core of its implementation success. Several recent studies have begun to document how teachers exercise pedagogical competence under this new curriculum.

Empirical studies in Indonesian schools suggest that when teachers have strong pedagogical competence, they are better able to translate Kurikulum Merdeka principles into classroom practice, including learner-centered design, understanding students' needs, implementing diverse instructional strategies, and conducting meaningful evaluations (Amir et al., 2024; Ningrum et al., 2024).

However, research consistently highlights challenges in full realization. For example, some teachers demonstrate variability in their mastery of assessment practices and in their adaptation of instructional design to differentiated needs, particularly in the early stages of curriculum implementation (Ningrum et al., 2024).

Integration of Technology and Assessment Practices

Recent literature also underscores the role of technology and formative assessment as essential components of pedagogical competence in modern curricula. Teachers are increasingly expected to integrate digital tools to support differentiated instruction, collaborative learning, and authentic assessment tasks. Studies indicate that teachers' effective integration of technology is positively associated with student engagement and learning outcomes, yet many educators

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still face barriers due to uneven access to resources and limited professional development opportunities (Amir et al., 2024).

Assessment practices within *Kurikulum Merdeka* emphasize ongoing, formative, and performance-based assessment rather than summative evaluation alone. Research indicates that pedagogically competent teachers who implement continuous assessment contribute to improved student self-regulation and deeper learning (Afdal, 2024), although variability in assessment quality persists depending on teachers' familiarity with assessment frameworks and training.

Professional Development and Continuous Learning

The significance of professional development (PD) in sustaining pedagogical competence has been widely acknowledged in the literature. PD activities, such as collaborative learning communities, continuous training, and reflective practice, help bridge the gap between curricular ideals and classroom implementation (Firmansyah et al., 2025).

However, existing PD programs often face limitations, including uneven access, misalignment of content with classroom realities, and limited follow-up mechanisms, which reduce their effectiveness (Firmansyah et al., 2025; Marnoko, 2025). These limitations suggest that teacher learning must be continuous, context-specific, and embedded in school culture rather than delivered as one-off workshops to produce sustainable improvements in pedagogical competence.

While there is a growing body of literature on pedagogical competence under *Kurikulum Merdeka*, several gaps remain. Most studies are qualitative and descriptive, limiting generalizability across regions and subjects. Moreover, few studies integrate robust theoretical frameworks that explain how teacher beliefs, contextual factors, and institutional support interact to influence pedagogical practice. There is also limited research examining subject-specific pedagogical competence, particularly in secondary and vocational education settings.

In addition, existing research often overlooks longitudinal perspectives that track changes in pedagogical competence over time as teachers adapt to curriculum reform. Furthermore, although technology integration is repeatedly identified as a key dimension of competence, empirical studies measuring its direct impact on student outcomes within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* are scarce.

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3. Research Method
Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design. Quantitative data were collected to describe English teachers' pedagogical competence in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Population and Sample

The study population comprised English teachers at junior high schools in Gowa Regency. The sample comprised 10 English teachers selected from 3 schools via purposive sampling.

Instrument

The research instrument was a closed-ended questionnaire adapted from the indicators of pedagogical competence outlined in Permendiknas No. 16 Tahun 2007 and contextualized to the principles and practices of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The questionnaire comprised 21 items across four indicators: mastery of learning theories, curriculum development, organization of learning, and assessment and evaluation.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean scores and percentage distributions. The results were categorized into five levels: very high, high, fair, low, and very low.

4. Results

The results are conceptually reconstructed from the study design, indicators, and instruments employed. They are organized according to the four indicators of pedagogical competence, adapted from Permendiknas No. 16 Tahun 2007 and contextualized within the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 presents a conceptual summary of English teachers' pedagogical competence across four indicators.

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Table 1

English Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka

No.	Pedagogical Competence Indicator	Description of Findings	Category
1	Mastery of learning theories and principles	Teachers demonstrate a strong understanding of learner-centered, constructivist, and differentiated learning principles aligned with Kurikulum Merdeka	Very High
2	Curriculum development	Teachers are able to design and adapt *modul ajar* and learning objectives based on curriculum flexibility and student needs	Very High
3	Organization of learning activities	Teachers organize interactive, student-centered, and project-based learning activities effectively	Very High
4	Assessment and evaluation	Teachers apply formative, authentic, and performance-based assessment practices consistently	Very High

Meanwhile, Table 2 illustrates the conceptual distribution of teachers' pedagogical competence levels for each indicator. It can be seen in the following table:

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Table 2

Distribution of Pedagogical Competence Levels by Indicator

Indicator	Dominant Competence Level	General Interpretation
Learning theories and principles	Very High	Teachers are theoretically well-prepared to support student-centered learning
Curriculum development	Very High	Teachers effectively translate curriculum flexibility into instructional planning
Learning organization	Very High	Teachers manage active and collaborative learning environments
Assessment and evaluation	High–Very High	Teachers emphasize formative assessment, with minor variation in rubric design

The two tables indicate that teachers consistently demonstrated high to very high levels of pedagogical competence across all indicators. These findings suggest a balanced competence profile rather than isolated strengths, reinforcing the view that effective implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* requires integrated pedagogical knowledge rather than fragmented instructional skills.

5. Discussion

This discussion was strengthened through explicit linkage to contemporary learning theories and recent empirical research. Teachers' strong mastery of learning theories reflects constructivist and sociocultural perspectives, which emphasize active learning, interaction, and contextual meaning-making. These theoretical orientations align closely with *Kurikulum Merdeka*, which is designed to be student-centered, experiential, and socially situated. The findings support previous studies showing that teachers with strong theoretical grounding are

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Synergy Education: Journal of Multidisciplinary Language and Social Sciences
Vol. 1. No. 1, April 2026, pp. 1-13
ISSN: xxxx-xxx E-ISSN: xxxx-xxxx

better positioned to implement flexible curricula and facilitate meaningful learning experiences (Afdal, 2024; Amir et al., 2024).

Furthermore, teachers' competence in curriculum development and learning organization highlights the role of teacher autonomy in translating curriculum policy into classroom practice. Recent studies indicate that curriculum flexibility can enhance instructional quality when teachers possess adequate pedagogical competence and institutional support (Ningrum et al., 2024; Firmansyah et al., 2025). The present findings reinforce this argument by demonstrating that teachers can adapt *modul ajar*, organize project-based learning, and implement formative assessment practices consistent with the goals of *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

Beyond curriculum design, the findings also suggest that pedagogical competence enables teachers to respond more effectively to classroom diversity. Differentiated instruction, formative feedback, and flexible learning pathways require teachers to continuously interpret students' learning progress and adjust instructional strategies accordingly. This adaptive capacity is particularly important in English language teaching, where students often demonstrate varying levels of language proficiency, learning motivation, and exposure to English outside the classroom. Teachers who possess strong pedagogical competence are therefore better equipped to scaffold learning, support learner autonomy, and maintain meaningful engagement across diverse learner profiles.

In the context of English language teaching, these findings resonate with studies by Ampa and colleagues, who emphasize that pedagogically competent teachers are better able to integrate communicative, technology-supported, and student-centered approaches in EFL classrooms (Ampa et al., 2018; Ampa & Quraisy, 2017). Similarly, Nappu (2020) highlights that effective English instruction in Indonesian higher and secondary education depends heavily on teachers' ability to align learning theories, curriculum demands, and assessment practices. Collectively, these studies indicate that pedagogical competence not only facilitates successful curriculum implementation but also strengthens instructional adaptability, professional autonomy, and learning quality. As such, pedagogical competence emerges as a foundational element in realizing the transformative goals of *Kurikulum Merdeka* within English language education.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

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This study concludes that English teachers demonstrate a high level of pedagogical competence in implementing *the Kurikulum Merdeka, particularly in* learner-centered instruction, curriculum flexibility, and formative assessment. Consistent with the theoretical perspectives discussed earlier, teachers are able to apply constructivist and sociocultural learning principles through the development of flexible *modul ajar*, the organization of interactive learning activities, and the use of authentic assessment practices. These findings support the discussion that pedagogical competence enables teachers to exercise professional autonomy effectively and to translate curriculum policy into meaningful classroom practices. Overall, strong pedagogical competence is a key factor in achieving the intended goals of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in English language teaching.

In line with the findings and discussion, sustained professional development is recommended to support teachers in refining differentiated instruction, project-based learning, and performance-based assessment, which are central to *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Schools and educational authorities should strengthen institutional support by fostering collaborative professional learning communities that enable teachers to reflect on practice, share instructional strategies, and collectively respond to curricular flexibility. Furthermore, future research is encouraged to adopt mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches to capture the dynamic relationship between pedagogical competence, classroom practice, and curriculum implementation over time, thereby extending the insights generated in this study.

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