



An Analysis of English Teachers' Perception Toward Merdeka Curriculum Implementation at Sekolah Penggerak in Padang Ulak Tanding

Received: September 24, 2025

Revised: December 08, 2025

Accepted: December 22, 2025

Publish: December 25, 2025

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Abstract:

Background: The success of the Independent Curriculum implementation largely depends on teachers' perceptions, particularly in English language teaching at the elementary level.

Aims: This study aims to analyze English teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Driving Schools at the elementary level, specifically at SD Negeri 20, SD Negeri 166, and SD Negeri 82 Rejang Lebong in Padang Ulak Tanding. The research focuses on teachers' understanding and evaluation of the curriculum in terms of its concepts, content, and classroom implementation.

Method: A qualitative descriptive method was employed. Data were collected through a 37-item Guttman-scale questionnaire adapted from Perdana (2021) and in-depth interviews with three English teachers. Questionnaire data were analyzed using percentage agreements, while interview data were analyzed thematically to support the findings.

Results: The results indicate that English teachers generally have positive perceptions of the Independent Curriculum. Most indicators received approval rates between 80% and 100%, particularly those related to learning flexibility, character education, teacher student collaboration, and the use of varied learning resources. However, lower approval rates (33.3%–66.7%) were found in aspects related to limited training opportunities, assessment difficulties, and challenges in conducting outdoor learning activities. Interview findings further revealed that the curriculum promotes students' creativity and active participation, although limitations in facilities and teacher readiness remain.

Conclusion: English teachers perceive the Independent Curriculum positively and believe it enhances the quality of English language learning. Nevertheless, continuous support, teacher training, and adequate resources are necessary to ensure effective and sustainable implementation.

Keywords: English Teaching, Merdeka Curriculum, Sekolah Penggerak, Teachers' Perception.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Government of Indonesia officially implemented the Independent Curriculum as a national curriculum through Permendikbudristek Number 12 of 2024 (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This curriculum emphasizes learning flexibility, differentiation, project-based learning, and character development that is in line with the Pancasila Student profile, which aims to answer the diverse needs of students and competencies in the 21st century (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

The Independent Curriculum positions teachers as facilitators of student-centered learning and gives schools greater autonomy in designing learning experiences. The success of curriculum implementation is greatly influenced by teachers' perceptions and readiness, as teachers are key actors who translate policies into classroom practice. Previous studies have shown that positive teacher perceptions contribute to effective implementation, innovative pedagogy, and improved student learning outcomes (Saputra & Hadi, 2022; Kulsum & Suloso, 2024; Tohamba & Ansyar, 2025). This issue becomes even more critical in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where teachers are required to apply complex pedagogical approaches such as differentiation, project-based learning, and authentic assessment (Susanti & Mulyaniapi, 2023; Kumayas et al., 2025; Hanum & Dalimunte, 2025). At the elementary school level, particularly in the Driving School, English teachers face additional challenges. Initial observations and interviews at SD Negeri 20, SD Negeri 82, and SD Negeri 166 Rejang Lebong revealed that teachers experienced difficulties in understanding learning outcomes, preparing teaching modules, and implementing formative assessments that were in line with the Independent Curriculum. Limited training,

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inadequate learning facilities, and increased workload were also identified as significant constraints. These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that English was not a compulsory subject in the previous curriculum at the elementary level, which required teachers to make substantial pedagogical adjustments (Cantika et al., 2022; Wildani et al., 2025). Although some studies have explored teachers' perceptions of the Independent Curriculum, most have focused on secondary education or non-English subjects and conducted in urban contexts (Priyambudi et al., 2023; Riyadi, 2023).

Research examining the perceptions of English teachers at the elementary level, particularly in non-urban Driving Schools, is still limited. This gap is significant, as teachers' perceptions directly affect curriculum acceptance, implementation quality, and sustainability, especially in the context of limited resources (Adha & Fadhila, 2023; Arfandi Waruwu, 2024). Therefore, this study focuses on the analysis of English teachers' perception of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in three elementary driving schools in Padang Ulak Tanding. This study specifically examined teachers' perceptions of (1) curriculum concepts, including flexibility, differentiation, and student-centered learning; (2) curriculum content and components, such as assessment and planning documents; and (3) the application of the curriculum in English language learning, including instructional strategies, assessment practices, and challenges faced. These findings are expected to contribute to the development of curriculum policies, targeted teacher training, and more effective implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the context of basic EFL, especially in non-urban areas.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the perception of English teachers towards the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Driving Schools in Padang Ulak Tanding. Qualitative research focuses on understanding participants' perspectives and experiences in their natural context (Creswell & Poth, 2016). This design is considered appropriate because this study seeks to capture the subjective understanding, instructional practices, and challenges of teachers in implementing the newly introduced curriculum rather than generalizing the findings statistically. The participants of this study were three English teachers who were deliberately selected from three Driving Schools: SD Negeri 20, SD Negeri 82, and SD Negeri 166 Rejang Lebong. Purposive sampling was applied because all participants were directly involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of English language learning based on the Independent Curriculum. Given the small sample size, this study was context-bound and did not aim for

generalization. Instead, it emphasizes depth of understanding, providing a rich description of teachers' perceptions in the context of non-urban Driving Schools. Therefore, these findings represent the specific conditions of the selected school and may not fully reflect perceptions in other areas with different resources or policy support. This study used qualitative instruments, namely structured perception questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Questionnaire The questionnaire consists of 37 dichotomies (agree/disagree) based on the Guttman scale, adapted and contextualized from previous studies of teachers' perceptions of curriculum implementation. The items cover three domains: (1) curriculum concepts, (2) curriculum content and components, and (3) curriculum implementation in English language learning. The validity of the instrument through: first, Content validity, achieved by aligning all items with official Independent Curriculum policy documents and relevant literature. Second, Expert assessment, where the questionnaire is reviewed by two experts in curriculum studies and English education to ensure clarity, relevance, and appropriateness. Third, the reliability of the instrument is strengthened by ensuring the internal consistency of the items in each indicator. The Guttman scale was chosen because it provides a clear and consistent response pattern that is suitable for perceptual analysis in small-scale qualitative studies. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to get a deeper explanation of the teacher's questionnaire responses. These instruments allow for flexibility while maintaining a focus on key aspects of curriculum understanding, instructional practices, challenges, and support needs. Data collection was carried out in two stages. First, the questionnaire was distributed to the participants and filled out individually. Second, face-to-face interviews are conducted and audio recorded with the consent of the participants. All interview recordings are transcribed verbatim to ensure data accuracy. First, the Guttman Scale Analysis, questionnaire data is analyzed by calculating the percentage of agreement for each item and indicator. The results were interpreted using a categorical range (e.g., perceptions of very positive, positive, moderate, and low) to provide meaningful qualitative interpretations rather than mere numerical reporting. Second Thematic Analysis The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following a six-step procedure by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) Introduction to the data through repeated transcript reading, (2) Initial coding of meaningful units, (3) Searching for themes related to teachers' perceptions, challenges, and support needs, (4) Reviewing themes for coherence, (5) Defining and naming themes, and (6) Interpreting themes in relation to research questions. To increase the credibility of the findings, methodological

triangulation was applied by comparing data from questionnaires and interviews. Source triangulation was also carried out by analyzing responses across participants from various schools. The consistency between quantitative trends (Guttman's results) and qualitative themes strengthens the reliability of the data. In addition, member examinations were conducted by confirming the interpretation of the main interview with the participants to reduce the researcher bias.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The results of this study illustrate the perception of English teachers towards the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in three Driving Schools in Padang Ulak Tanding, namely SDN 20, SDN 82, and SDN 166 Rejang Lebong. The findings were compiled into three main aspects of curriculum concept, curriculum content, and curriculum implementation and further analyzed through cross-teacher comparisons and mapping of relationships between perception variables. Data were obtained from a Guttman-scale questionnaire and supported by semi-structured interviews

Table 1. Summary of Teacher Perceptions Across Schools (Summary Results)

Aspects	SDN 20	SDN 82	SDN 166
Curriculum Concept	Very positive; student-centered learning well accepted	Positive; cautious about student independence	Positive; conceptually accepted but reserved
Curriculum Content	Flexible and relevant	Flexible but requires guidance	Good but increases preparation burden
Implementation	Confident and adaptive	Adequate with classroom control issues	Challenging due to limited resources
Facilities & Support	Relatively adequate	Limited	Very limited
Main Challenges	Module preparation	Student management	Facilities and training
Learning Impact	High student engagement	Moderate-high engagement	Engagement limited by resources

Table 2. Relationship among Perception Variables

Relationship	Pattern Identified
Concept → Implementation	Strong conceptual understanding leads to positive implementation perception
Facilities → Implementation	Limited facilities correlate with cautious or critical perceptions
Content Flexibility → Workload	Flexibility increases creativity demands and preparation time
Implementation → Learning Impact	Effective implementation improves student activeness and confidence

Overall, English teachers demonstrated positive perceptions of the Independent Curriculum across conceptual, content, and implementation dimensions. However, variations among schools indicate that contextual support, particularly facilities and training, plays a decisive role in shaping implementation perceptions. Teachers who strongly understood curriculum concepts tended to perceive implementation more positively, while limited resources led to more critical views. Despite these challenges, all teachers

reported increased student engagement and motivation in English learning.

Comparison of Teacher Perceptions Across Schools

Although all three teachers generally expressed positive perceptions, variations emerged throughout the school, especially in aspects related to student independence, administrative workload, and learning facilities.

a. Teachers from SDN 20 showed the most consistent positive perception in these three aspects. These teachers strongly agree with student-centered learning,

flexibility in learning design, and assessment autonomy. Interview data revealed that the school had relatively better access to learning resources and internal peer support, which contributed to the smooth implementation of the curriculum.

b. Teachers from SDN 82 showed a positive perception of the concept and content of the curriculum but expressed doubts about the full independence of students and outdoor learning activities. This teacher emphasized that elementary school students still need strong teacher guidance, especially in English learning, due to the limited exposure to students' language and classroom management challenges.

c. Teachers from SDN 166 show the most critical perceptions, especially related to curriculum implementation. While agreeing with the curriculum philosophy, this teacher highlighted limited facilities, lack of instructional media, and inadequate training as the main obstacles. As a result, the perception of feasibility of implementation is more cautious compared to the other two schools.

These differences suggest that school context and resource availability affect teachers' perceptions, even when curriculum understandings are relatively similar.

The Relationship Between Concept Perception and Implementation

These findings reveal a clear relationship between teachers' perceptions of curriculum concepts and their perceptions of implementation. Teachers who strongly agree with the principles of flexibility, differentiation, and student-centered learning are also more likely to report greater confidence in carrying out learning and assessment activities. For example, teachers who consider the Independent Curriculum to support creativity and character development (100% agree) also report freedom in designing learning and assessment steps (100%). In contrast, teachers who expressed uncertainty about student independence (33.3%) were more likely to report challenges in classroom control, outdoor learning, and project-based activities. This suggests that conceptual understanding serves as a basis for practical implementation. Teachers who internalize the curriculum philosophy more deeply tend to feel fewer obstacles in classroom practice.

The Relationship of Facilities and Teacher Perception

Another important pattern is the relationship between perceived sufficiency of facilities and overall perception of implementation. Interview data consistently shows that teachers who perceive learning facilities and resources as limited are likely to express concerns about workload, complexity of assessment, and feasibility of

student-centered learning. Teachers who reported limited access to media, technology, and learning materials were more likely to: firstly question the effectiveness of project-based and outdoor learning, second felt burdened with the preparation of teaching modules, third emphasized the need for hands-on instruction rather than independent exploration. This shows that negative perceptions are not directed at the curriculum itself, but rather at structural and contextual constraints that hinder its optimal implementation.

Integrated Patterns of Teacher Perception

Overall, the results show a consistent pattern: first a positive perception of curriculum concepts → a positive perception of implementation, secondly limited facilities and training → a more cautious or critical perception of implementation, third strong conceptual acceptance but weak institutional support → implementation challenges. Despite these challenges, all teachers reported increased student activity, confidence, and motivation in English language learning, especially when project-based activities and interactive methods were applied. It confirms that the Independent Curriculum has a positive pedagogical impact, although its success relies heavily on contextual support.

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study show that English teachers' perceptions of the Independent Curriculum are not only shaped by their agreement with the principles of the curriculum, but by how those principles interact with pedagogical demands and contextual conditions. From a theoretical perspective, this supports the view that curriculum implementation is a multidimensional process influenced by cognitive understanding, instructional capacity, and institutional support of teachers (Fullan, 2023). Teachers' positive acceptance of curriculum concepts reflects alignment with constructivist and learner-centered theory, which emphasizes flexibility, student agency, and meaningful learning experiences (Alghamdi, 2024; Hattie, 2014). However, the challenges of implementation suggest that conceptual acceptance alone is not enough to guarantee effective practice.

The relationship between teachers' understanding of curriculum philosophy and their belief in implementation is in line with constructivist curriculum theory, which posits that teachers must internalize curriculum values before they can translate them into instructional actions (Adiyani et al., 2025). In this study, teachers who demonstrated a strong conceptual understanding of differentiation and student-centered learning were more likely to perceive implementation as feasible. These findings reinforce previous research showing that teacher curriculum literacy plays an important role in shaping classroom practices, especially in competency-based and project-oriented learning

environments (Rahmawati et al., 2024). Thus, the data support the theoretical claim that curriculum reform is essentially a learning process for teachers, not just a structural change.

Despite the positive conceptual alignment, the gap between curriculum content flexibility and perceived workload highlights a tension commonly identified in the curriculum reform literature. While flexible curricula are designed to reduce rigidity and encourage creativity, they often demand higher pedagogical competence and planning efforts (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). The finding that simplified lesson planning does not necessarily reduce teachers' workload reflects this paradox and is in line with research showing that reduced administrative formats do not automatically translate into decreased cognitive or instructional demands (Wulandari, 2024). This suggests that curriculum simplification must be accompanied by concrete instructional support to prevent reform fatigue among teachers.

Assessment emerges as another critical area where theory and practice intersect. Although competency-based assessment frameworks such as AKM are theoretically based on authentic and formative assessment principles (Hattie, 2014), teachers feel the challenge of implementing them at the elementary level. These findings support previous research showing that assessment reform requires gradual adaptation and contextual sensitivity, especially for younger learners and in resource-constrained settings (Fatmiyati, 2022; Renny Nur Afida et al., 2024). The data imply that assessment literacy is just as important as curriculum comprehension, especially in the context of EFL where language proficiency, cognitive development, and affective factors interact.

The influence of contextual factors, especially facilities and training, on teacher perceptions confirms Fullan's (Fullan, 2023) argument that curriculum reform is only successful if it is supported by systemic capacity development. Careful perceptions of teachers in schools with limited resources suggest that the effectiveness of student-centered and project-based learning is limited by environmental readiness. This supports international findings that innovative pedagogy relies heavily on access to learning media, technological tools, and sustainable professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). Therefore, the challenges identified in this study do not show resistance to change, but rather reflect structural limitations that mediate implementation outcomes.

The specific research context also requires critical consideration. Conducted at a non-urban Driving School in Padang Ulak Tanding, the study reflects the educational realities that differ significantly from urban settings where policy implementation is often supported by better infrastructure and access to training. Teachers in rural or semi-rural areas often experience delayed policy socialization and uneven distribution of resources, which affect their perceptions and instructional decisions. These contextual limitations

suggest that findings should be interpreted in the socio-geographic setting of the study and highlight the need for different implementation strategies that take into account regional gaps.

In summary, this discussion shows that teachers' perceptions of the Independent Curriculum are best understood as the result of a dynamic interaction between curriculum philosophy, pedagogical demands, and contextual support. While teachers largely embrace the conceptual foundation of the curriculum, effective implementation depends on ongoing professional development, adequate resources, and contextual responsiveness. These findings reaffirm that curriculum reform is not a linear process but a complex and localized practice that requires ongoing support for teachers as the primary agents of change.

3.2.1 Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for education practice and policy. First, the positive general perception of English teachers towards the Independent Curriculum shows that the philosophy of the curriculum, especially flexibility, differentiation, and character education is well received at the elementary level. This suggests that policymakers and school leaders can confidently continue to implement the Self-Driving Curriculum, provided that adequate support systems are in place. Second, the strong relationship between conceptual understanding and teacher implementation highlights the importance of strengthening teacher curriculum literacy through sustainable professional development. Third, the findings reveal that contextual factors such as facilities, learning resources, and training significantly affect teachers' perceptions of implementation. Therefore, equitable distribution of resources and targeted assistance, especially in non-urban Driving Schools, is essential to ensure equitable curriculum implementation. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the curriculum's emphasis on project-based and student-centered learning has practical implications for improving students' motivation, confidence, and communicative competence at the elementary level.

3.2.2 Research Contributions

This research contributes both theoretically and empirically to the field of curriculum implementation and EFL education. Theoretically, it enriches the literature on teachers' perceptions of the Independent Curriculum by providing an integrated conceptual model that connects curriculum concepts, content, implementation, contextual support, and learning impact. Empirically, this study fills a significant research gap by focusing on English teachers at the elementary level in non-urban Driving Schools, a context that was underrepresented in previous research. Methodologically, the use of a qualitative descriptive approach combined with Guttman-scale analysis and thematic analysis offers a systematic way to capture teachers' perceptions in depth while maintaining analytical rigor. These findings also provide practical

evidence that teacher perceptions are the main determinants of successful curriculum implementation, especially in the context of limited resources.

3.2.3 Limitations

Despite its contributions, this research has some limitations. First, the sample size was limited to three English teachers from three Driving Schools, which limited the generalization of the findings. The results reflect certain contextual conditions and may not be representative of teachers' perceptions in urban schools or non-Driving School settings. Second, the study relied primarily on self-reported data from questionnaires and interviews, which may have been influenced by social desire bias. Third, this study only focuses on the teacher's perspective and does not include classroom practice observations or student perspectives, which can provide a more comprehensive understanding of curriculum implementation. Finally, the use of the dichotomy Guttman scale, while suitable for clarity, limits the nuances of the teacher's response compared to the multi-point Likert scale.

3.2.4 Suggestions

Based on the findings and limitations, several suggestions were proposed. Future research should involve more participants in different regions to improve the generalization of outcomes. Incorporating classroom observations and students' perspectives will also provide richer and more triangulated insights into the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. In addition, future studies may use mixed-method designs or more varied perception scales to capture more nuanced teacher responses. Practically, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education and local education authorities provide ongoing and in-depth training specifically for primary EFL teachers, with a focus on assessment, module development, and project-based learning. Schools should also prioritize improving learning facilities and resources to support student-centered and contextual learning. With continuous support and systematic evaluation, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can be more effective and equitable, especially in the context of non-urban primary schools.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that English teachers at the Driving School in Padang Ulak Tanding show a strong and reflective acceptance of the Independent Curriculum in all its conceptual dimensions, content, and implementation. Teachers consider the concept of the curriculum to be aligned with student-centered learning, differentiation, and character development, affirming that the philosophical foundations of the Self-Driving Curriculum are well understood and accepted at the basic EFL level. This conceptual understanding plays an important role in shaping teachers' confidence

and willingness to implement the curriculum in classroom practice.

Regarding the content of the curriculum, teachers generally consider the Independent Curriculum to be relevant, flexible, and adaptable to the real-life context of students. However, this flexibility also introduced new pedagogical demands, especially in lesson planning, assessment design, and material development. Teachers recognise the potential for competency-based assessment and project-oriented learning, but highlight the need for clearer guidance and practical support to effectively implement these components at the basic level.

In terms of implementation, teachers see greater autonomy in instructional practices and assessments, which positively affects students' engagement, activities, and confidence in English language learning. Nevertheless, the study identified key challenges, including limited facilities, uneven curriculum socialization, increased workload, and inadequate ongoing training. These constraints mainly affect schools in non-urban contexts, where the availability of resources and institutional support differ from urban settings.

The main novelty of this study lies in the integrative analysis of the perceptions of English teachers in elementary driving schools in non-urban contexts, linking curriculum concepts, content, implementation, and contextual support into a coherent framework. Unlike previous research that focused on secondary education or general subjects, this study highlights how EFL teachers negotiate curriculum reform at the elementary level of education.

Overall, the findings show that the success of the Independent Curriculum depends not only on curriculum design but also on sustainable professional development, adequate infrastructure, and contextual policy support. Therefore, the Independent Curriculum must be understood as a sustainable pedagogical transformation that requires collaboration between teachers, schools, policymakers, and local governments to ensure its effective and equitable implementation in various educational contexts.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We sincerely thank the Indonesian Journal of Pedagogy and Teacher Education for offering us the opportunity to publish this paper.

6. AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

All authors contributed equally to this study. The authors were involved in the conceptualization of the research, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the findings. All authors participated in drafting, reviewing, and revising the manuscript

critically for important intellectual content and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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