



## Investigation of the English Teachers' Pedagogical Competence in Implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Public Junior High Schools in Praya West Nusa Tenggara

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### **Abstract**

Teachers with sound pedagogical competence is a key to successful curriculum implementation. This study is intended to identify and describe teachers' pedagogical competence in relation to Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This study is qualitative in nature using interviews and observation as the method of data collection. Content analysis was used as the data analysis. Three teachers from three government junior high schools in Praya were involved to be the study participants. The participants were selected purposively. The study found that only one out of two teachers showed pedagogical competence sufficient for implementing the Indonesian new curriculum. It is advisable that teachers need to improve their pedagogical knowledge, ability, and skills through a number of teacher training and workshops.

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Competence; English Teachers; Merdeka Belajar Curriculum*

### **Introduction**

Globalization brings with it complex demands that require individuals to have knowledge, skills, and attitudes to successfully act in almost all aspects of life. In the education sector, the demands require teachers to become professional educational staff with the values, attitudes, knowledge, and skills needed in the teaching profession. Being professional, teachers would be able to provide the quality education necessary for their students to gain success in life. As quality education is closely related to effective teaching, pedagogical competence becomes essential to a teacher's professionalism. Richard (2010) refers to pedagogical competence as the knowledge and ability of teachers to employ methods, techniques, and activities as informed by teaching and learning theories, principles, and beliefs which are suitable for their students. Furthermore, Richard makes a clear distinction between professional competence and pedagogical competence. While the formers represent content knowledge, the latter suggests procedural knowledge or an understanding of how learning materials are organized and presented to students. Not only includes the ability to organize and present the materials, pedagogical competence as Goodwin, et al (2014) suggest, also involves teachers' capability to manage the teaching and learning method from the design to the evaluation stages.

More specifically, Mulyasa (2007) defines pedagogical competence as a teacher's ability to manage students' learning by planning, implementing, and evaluating the process and the learning outcome which consists of teacher understanding. From the concepts of pedagogical competence presented above, it can be implied that pedagogical competence would determine the success of the teaching and learning process and the student's learning outcomes. Investigating pedagogical competence is therefore important as it is studying how to develop teacher quality which in turn improves students' learning achievement. Thus, this study focuses on investigating the pedagogical competence of English teaching in implementing the latest Indonesian Curriculum known as the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. As it is a new curriculum, there has been little research conducted on this topic. Therefore, this study is intended to identify and describe which components of teachers' pedagogical competence involve when English teachers implement the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in three government junior high schools in Praya, West Nusa Tenggara. The study would hopefully contribute to providing the actual condition of the pedagogical competence of English teachers in the school under the study in particular and in West Nusa Tenggara in general. The study would also be a consideration for schools, universities, and the Ministry of Education in making education policies considering the level of teachers' competence.

## ***Research Methods***

### **Types of Research**

This study is qualitative in nature, focusing on providing an understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The aim of this study is to gather in-depth information on how English teachers employ their pedagogical competence knowledge in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.

### ***Setting and Participants***

This study was conducted in three government junior high schools in Praya, West Nusa Tenggara. The participants of the study included nine English teachers consisting of three teachers of each school. They were selected purposively as they were the only English teachers teaching at grade 7 (seven) in the schools where the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum was recommended to be implemented.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

The data of the study were collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, observation and audiovisual materials analysis. The collected data were then analyzed using thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke's (2006) procedures of content analysis were followed, consisting:

- 1) Familiarization: transcribing the record of the English teachers after the interview, reading the data from classroom observation, and teachers' lesson plans.
- 2) Coding: highlighting the interview transcripts using Atlas T.I. and manually after printing the transcript.
- 3) Generating theme: Grouping the codes into some themes based on the needs of the research questions. After that, the data from the interview were connected to the observation data to check the consistency of the data.
- 4) Reviewing themes: discarding some data which were not relevant to research questions.
- 5) Defining and naming themes: Naming the groups.
- 6) Writing up: Writing up the gathered data.

## Results and Discussion

This study found that the three English teachers followed the principles of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum in their teaching-learning process although they also admitted that they still mixed the way of teaching with the previous curriculum which was the K13 curriculum. This can be seen in the following interview data:

T3: Even though I am a senior in this school because in three or four years I would retire. I do study, but sometimes applying this new curriculum was a little bit difficult, as seen in class, only a few children want to pay attention to the lessons.

It was also observed that the classes were teacher-centered. For example, T3 wrote the material on the whiteboard, asked the students to memorize words, and then assigned them some language tasks to do. This is confirmed by the result of the interview below:

T3: sometimes students who were quick to understand the learning material, I give additional assignments and for students who were slow, I just let it go.

Similarly, T2 sometimes told the students what they would learn. She relied on her teaching English textbooks available for the students in the school. Using the traditional method of teaching, she read instructions from the textbooks and asked students to translate and answer the questions.

Although they still enjoyed using the traditional method of teaching, they seemed motivated to use the contemporary teaching method as suggested by the new curriculum as stated by T2:

*These students were the Gen Z generation, they grow with all visualization, we as a teacher should develop our methods and ways of teaching according to the development of students to be able to balance them.*

T2 also stated that the curriculum used in the class was a mix between Merdeka Belajar and K13:

*To be honest, in this school, we were still learning about the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Unfortunately, this school was not like other schools which may be massively conducting training for their teachers, but several times ago some of the driving teachers had come to conduct training but only for one day. There was training from the government but through Zoom and we took part in training, and also from the ministry inviting mobilizing teachers who had attended training to come to socialize at this school about the Merdeka Belajar curriculum.*

While T2 and T3 were partly implementing the Merdeka Belajar curriculum due to a lack of knowledge and ability to use more contemporary teaching methods and strategies as suggested in the new Curriculum, T1 seemed confident in implementing Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. She said that she managed to apply teaching models as assigned by the new curriculum and this run well. She also stated she enjoyed the Merdeka Curriculum because she felt like it was quite similar to the curriculum overseas as she participated in a student exchange program in 2008 to America. This can be seen in the following result of the interview with her.

T1: In my opinion, this Merdeka curriculum was good, because I had had experience studying abroad, so in my opinion, this curriculum was starting to apply a way of studying abroad. There, students could choose lessons according to their interests. Merdeka Belajar was a differentiated learning model, so this curriculum sees what the students need. Previously, I gave very basic teaching materials, right? It's because the students would not understand more advanced material. The students were still at a very basic level, especially because last year, under the K13 curriculum, English subject was not taught at

elementary schools, it became one of the most difficult for English teachers, so the students were taught from scratch.

From the result of observation and interviews, T1 looked more confident with her pedagogical competence compared to the other two teachers in implementing the new curriculum. By mentioning that students could select the learning source, T1 showed that she has sufficient knowledge of planning learning materials and activities suitable for students' needs and interests, which is an important aspect of teachers' pedagogical competence (Goodwin, 2014; Mulyasa, 2007; Richard, 2010). Compared to T1, T2 and T3 seemed to lack knowledge and ability to provide a lesson suitable for students with different needs. This difference appeared to be related to their different participation in teacher training and teachers' consultative group. This can be seen in the result of the interview with them below:

T1: I have joined the MGMP, I have a group of English teachers who always share about all materials, methods, and teaching-learning processes.

T2: I only access the page that has been prepared for the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, and I also have a group of fellow teachers.

T3: I have never joined MGMP, I do not have any group of teachers, I just found anything myself.

From the explanation, it could be implied that only one teacher who is well-informed with the new curriculum and has sound pedagogical competence who would be confidently and successfully implement the new Indonesian curriculum. The other two teachers, however, tried to implement its principles based on what she knew from the limited teacher training they had joined. This study is therefore in line with Tricahyati and Zaim's (2023) study that English teachers in Indonesia still need to improve their understanding of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, suggesting more workshops on the implementation of the new curriculum for teachers to join.

## Conclusion

For a successful implementation of curriculum implementation, sound pedagogical knowledge is essentially required especially because teachers are the key actors in the teaching and learning process. Based on the findings of this study, however, not all teachers have sufficient pedagogical knowledge to implement Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, the latest curriculum needed to be implemented nationwide. It is, therefore, advisable that government provides more effective teacher professional development training and workshops to develop teachers' professional and pedagogical skills.

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