

## **The Problems in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in English Classrooms**

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### **Abstract**

This study aims to reveal the problems faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English classrooms and the problems found by English teachers based on length of teaching and employment status. This study employed mixed methods as the research design. The samples in this study were English teachers who taught in grades 7 and 10 at Sekolah Penggerak batches 1 and 2 in Bengkulu Province. Data collection was conducted using interviews and questionnaires. The questionnaire was made based on Permendikbud Number 16 of 2022 concerning education process standards, which was then validated by experts. The study revealed that the problems English teachers faced in implementing the Merdeka curriculum fell into a fairly difficult category in three aspects: planning, implementing, and assessing the learning process. English teachers most often find problems during the implementation of the learning process, with a percentage of 35% and a weighted mean of 2.48. This could be due to the fact that they are in the switching phase from the 2013 to the Merdeka curriculum, which makes it difficult to adapt to the new curriculum. However, teachers who found fewer problems were those who had taught for more than 10 years and were certified teachers. This might imply that the certification program has had an impact on teachers' quality.

**Keywords:** English Classrooms; Kurikulum Merdeka; Teachers Problems.

### **Introduction**

Education is transforming to improve deficiencies in the system and obtain superior human resources. The new curriculum, Kurikulum Merdeka, is one of the educational transformations. The Kurikulum Merdeka is the curriculum using a variety of intra-curricular learning thus students can further strengthen their competence (Kemdikbud, 2022). Teachers have the freedom to select appropriate instructional materials for their students. Kurikulum Merdeka is designed to recover from learning loss and various challenges to education in Indonesia. The center of education is the curriculum, while the center of the curriculum is the learning process. To be able to achieve optimal learning, the government always improves quality by innovating. Nurfitri et al., (2020) argued that curriculum evolves to meet changing needs and enhance educational standards. Transformations in the curriculum from the 2013 version to the Kurikulum Merdeka certainly transform several components: Learning Objectives Flow (ATP) which is equivalent to the syllabus; Core Competencies (KI) and Basic Competencies (KD) which turn into Learning Outcomes (CP); Lesson Plan (RPP) which turns into a teaching module; strengthening the profile of Pancasila students; and also assessment (Barlian et al., 2022; Jannah et al., 2022). These transformations need to be understood by the teachers so that they can establish a systematic, effective, and efficient learning process.

The changing curriculum regulations certainly make teachers encounter various problems in implementing them. In implementing Curriculum 2013, teachers often find problems in preparing a complete lesson plan, time constraints, teachers' lack of mastery of the learning model used in the 2013 curriculum (scientific learning), difficulty managing the class, limited facilities and infrastructure, and

difficulties in implementing authentic assessment (Apsari, 2018; Lestari & Hidayati, 2022). To attain the purpose of the new curriculum, which is learning recovery after the pandemic, it is necessary to take into account and overcome implementation issues with the 2013 curriculum in the Kurikulum Merdeka. The implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka is contained in Permendikbud Number 16 of 2022 pertaining education process standards and the Permendikbud No. 56/M/2022 pertaining to curriculum implementation instructions within the context of learning recovery. Curriculum implementation is divided into three activities: planning, implementation of learning, and assessment of the learning process.

In lesson planning, teachers are asked to analyze learning outcomes, which then determine the flow of learning objectives first, then develop them into teaching modules. Currently, the government gives teachers the freedom to take and modify teaching modules provided by the government, or they can design their own teaching modules to be used. In carrying out learning, teachers are encouraged to build an interactive, challenging, innovative, motivating, and fun learning atmosphere. In addition, teachers should apply Pancasila student profiles and new learning principles, one of which is differentiated learning. Differentiated learning is the use of a variety of instructional media and instructional methods to satisfy the distinctive educational requirements of every pupil (Herwina, 2021). Meanwhile, in assessing the learning practice, teachers are asked to assess based on the characteristics of each student, make criteria for achieving learning objectives, and also have to decide on summative and formative assessment techniques and instruments based on the learning activities (Kemdikbud, 2021). As a consequence, teachers must have a thorough comprehension of the Merdeka Curriculum in order to execute it optimally while complying with the curriculum's process standards and goals.

Currently, there are two categories of schools that implement the Kurikulum Merdeka: schools that join the Sekolah Penggerak program and schools that implement it independently. The Ministry of Education provides Sekolah Penggerak with assistance and facilitators as it implements Kurikulum Merdeka. The goal of the Sekolah Penggerak program is to create a developed, sovereign, self-governing, and personality-driven Indonesia by means of the development of a Pancasila student profile that is devoted to God Almighty, possesses a noble character and is steadfast and intact (Kemdikbud, 2021).

Several previous studies have investigated the problems in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka. Jannah et al. (2022) found that teachers must be more proactive and innovative in devising teaching modules, comprehending CP, creating ATP, and strengthening the Pancasila student profile daily with students. Susanti et al (2023) claimed that the problems found by teachers in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka came from less than optimal coaching. Furthermore, teachers have limitations in utilizing the Merdeka Mengajar Platform and using technology for learning.

The teachers at Sekolah Penggerak have implemented the Kurikulum Merdeka in accordance with the regulations provided. However, the lack of readiness of certain teachers and the ongoing adaptation process, as the Kurikulum Merdeka is still relatively new, have caused teachers to encounter several problems in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. Therefore, this study is conducted to resolve two specific research questions in light of the aforementioned problems: 1) what are the problems faced by the English teachers in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka?; and 2) what is the relationship among employment status, length of teaching, and the problems experienced by English teachers in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka?

## **Methods**

This research used a sequential explanatory mixed-method design. This is because quantitative and qualitative data were acquired in two phases. The data form of these phases was separated but connected (Creswell, 2009). This type of research design was chosen because it is considered adequate for addressing research questions and achieving the objectives, which were to find out the problems in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. Furthermore, this design helped the researchers explore in more detail the results that were not obtained from surveys or questionnaires that were distributed.

Two generations of Sekolah Penggerak teachers comprised the population for this research. Batch 1 of Sekolah Penggerak included 10 secondary schools (6 SMP and 4 SMA), while Batch 2 included 19 secondary schools (13 SMP and 6 SMA). In each school, there are one to three English teachers. Purposive total sampling was used in this study, which means that the participants were chosen based on the concerns and criteria set by the researchers to help with the study. In purposive sampling,

the selected sample is believed to be representative of the population to provide their understanding of the research problems (Gay, 2012; Ary et al, 2010). Therefore, this research selected all secondary school English teachers in Bengkulu province who have participated in Batch 1 and Batch 2 Sekolah Penggerak programs and have implemented the Kurikulum Merdeka in their classes (7th and 10th grade).

This research used two instruments to answer the research questions. First, this research used a questionnaire to obtain quantitative data. The questionnaire contains statements made based on research indicators. The research indicators in this research were obtained based on the Permendikbudristek No. 16 of 2022 regarding educational process standards. There are 32 statements, which are divided into three parts: planning, implementation, and assessment. This instrument has been validated by two experts. Following the accumulation of quantitative data, qualitative information was acquired through means of interviews in the second phase. Semi-structured interview was selected because it allows the interviewer to follow up on intriguing developments and gives the interviewee the opportunity to elaborate on particular themes.

In collecting data, researchers distributed questionnaires to all respondents using the Google Form. The distribution of the questionnaire link was assisted by the facilitator of the Sekolah Penggerak. The researchers also distributed questionnaires personally to English teachers in several schools. To support the data from the questionnaire, the researchers conducted interviews with English teachers from secondary schools as informants. Interview data collection was carried out by audio-taping interviews. Due to the distance between the interviewees and the interviewer, the interviews were conducted over the phone and via Google Meet.

Using version 25 of the Statistical Program for Social Science (SPSS), the weighted mean of each statement was calculated to analyze the quantitative data. Meanwhile, the qualitative data was analyzed using three concurrent flows by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014): data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The researchers used the following score interval criteria to determine the weight mean category:

**Table 1:** Score interval criteria

Interval	Classification
3.26 – 4.00	Very Difficult
2.51 – 3.25	Difficult
1.76 – 2.50	Fairly Difficult
1.0 – 1.75	Not Difficult

## Result and Discussion

### Findings

#### English Teachers' Problems in Implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*

The most difficult aspect of administering the *Merdeka* Curriculum was implementing the learning process, with a percentage of 35% and a weighted mean of 2.48.

##### a. Teachers' Problems in Planning Learning in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*

The result of teachers' problems in planning learning is shown in the table below:

**Table 3:** The Results of English Teachers' Problems in Planning Learning

No	Statements	Mean	Category
1		2.11	

	I have difficulty analyzing the learning outcomes related to the listening-speaking elements to develop learning purpose that will be developed into teaching modules		Fairly Difficult
2	I have difficulty designing teaching modules independently, so I prefer to modify existing modules	2.56	Difficult
3	I have difficulty in formulating/modifying learning purposes according to learning outcomes	2.22	Fairly Difficult
4	I have difficulty finding the right way to modify the teaching module according to the traits of the students and the conditions of the school	2.67	Difficult
5	I have difficulty analyzing the Learning Outcome regarding the reading-viewing element	2.33	Fairly Difficult
6	I have difficulty when developing student-centered learning activities	2.22	Fairly Difficult
7	I have difficulty determining formative assessment techniques to monitor student learning progress	2.33	Fairly Difficult
8	I have difficulty in developing/designing formative assessment instruments	2.33	Fairly Difficult
9	I have difficulty developing/designing summative assessments to determine the achievement of learning objectives	2.33	Fairly Difficult
10	I have difficulty analyzing the Learning Outcomes related to the writing-presenting element	2.44	Fairly Difficult
11	I have difficulty determining the kind of activity that corresponds to the students' competencies, characteristics, and requirements.	2.44	Fairly Difficult
12	I have difficulty designing cognitive diagnostic assessment instruments to identify students' competencies, strengths and weaknesses	2.33	Fairly Difficult
13	I have difficulty in carrying out cognitive diagnostic assessments to identify students' competencies, strengths, and weaknesses	2.22	Fairly Difficult
Average		2.35	Fairly Difficult

Table 3 above showed that the average weight mean for the *Merdeka* curriculum learning planning is 2.35 with a fairly difficult category. In learning planning, the statements with the highest weighted mean in the difficult category are statement number 2 with the weight mean of 2.56 and also statement number 4 with the weight mean of 2.67.

The interview revealed that the teachers modified the teaching module for use in their classrooms. Teachers discovered that one of the challenges was deciding which activities to implement based on the types of learning, characteristics, and situations of students and schools. Moreover, as the majority of *Sekolah Penggerak* in Bengkulu Province are located in rural regions, the teaching modules on the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform were not suited for their schools. In contrast, the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform's teaching modules have, on average, employed middle- to high-level learning methods and qualified technology. Thus, teachers require more time to consider the content of the teaching modules they make.

- b. Teachers' Problems in Implementing the Learning Process in the Kurikulum Merdeka**  
The result of teachers' problems in learning process is shown in the table below:

**Table 4:** The Results of English Teachers' Problems in Implementing Learning Process

No	Statements	Mean	Category
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14	I have difficulty in creating an interactive learning atmosphere because of the lack of active participation of students in the learning process	2.56	Difficult
15	I have difficulty changing the mindset and habits of students in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum learning	2.78	Difficult
16	I have difficulty using electronic media connected to the internet during the learning process due to the inadequate internet connection	2.56	Difficult
17	I have difficulty using different learning methods according to the requirements, interests, talents, and ways of learning of pupils	2.33	Fairly Difficult
18	I have difficulty finding the right way of teaching to implement the Merdeka Curriculum	2.33	Fairly Difficult
19	I have difficulty mastering IT in the learning process	2.11	Fairly Difficult
20	I have difficulty in using various learning media in the learning process	2.44	Fairly Difficult
21	I have difficulty getting references to differentiated learning models	2.67	Difficult
22	I have difficulty managing limited study time to carry out effective learning activities	2.44	Fairly Difficult
23	I have difficulty using various learning resources so I only focus on using textbooks	2.33	Fairly Difficult
24	I have difficulty in increasing student motivation to learn in order to achieve learning goals	2.67	Difficult
25	I have difficulty instilling Pancasila values in several student characters	2.44	Fairly Difficult
26	I have difficulty finding references to learning resources that are appropriate to the material to be taught	2.56	Difficult
27	I have difficulty in carrying out the evaluation at the end of the lesson because the class conditions were not conducive	2.44	Fairly Difficult
Average		2.48	Fairly Difficult

Table 4 showed that the weight mean for the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum learning process is 2.48, which is in a fairly difficult category. This score was close to the difficult category. In the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum learning process, there were several statements with difficult categories, including statement number 14, statement number 16, and statement number 26, which had a weighted mean of 2.56. Subsequently, statement number 21 and statement number 24 had a mean weight of 2.67. Moreover, the statement with the highest score was statement number 15 regarding the difficulty of changing students' mindsets, which had a weighted mean of 2.78. Meanwhile, the other statements fell into a fairly difficult category.

The results of the questionnaire were in line with the results of interviews. Teachers still find it difficult to make the classroom more interactive, boost students' motivation, and change their mindsets. This was due to the students' laziness and habit of only accepting what the teachers told them and what was in their textbooks. Furthermore, the *Merdeka* Curriculum demanded that teachers be skilled with digital technology, especially internet-connected devices. Despite this, teachers encountered difficulties

while attempting to utilize the Internet in the classroom. This was owing to the fact that the majority of *Sekolah penggerak* in Bengkulu Province are located in rural areas with unstable internet access.

Besides, there is still confusion among teachers about how to design and implement differentiated learning. In order to achieve differentiated learning that is effective and in line with the objectives of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, instructors require a model of its implementation that can be imitated and modified. Moreover, the problem that is clearly felt by teachers is that textbooks, which serve as the primary source, are not in line with the situation and conditions of students and schools and are different from those on Platform. Thus, teachers have to look for complementary materials from other sources. However, another problem is that teachers find it difficult to find those learning materials in full.

**c. Teacher Problems in Learning Assessment in the *Kurikulum Merdeka***

The result of teachers' problems in learning process is shown in the table below:

**Table 5:** The Results of English Teachers' Problems in Learning Assessment

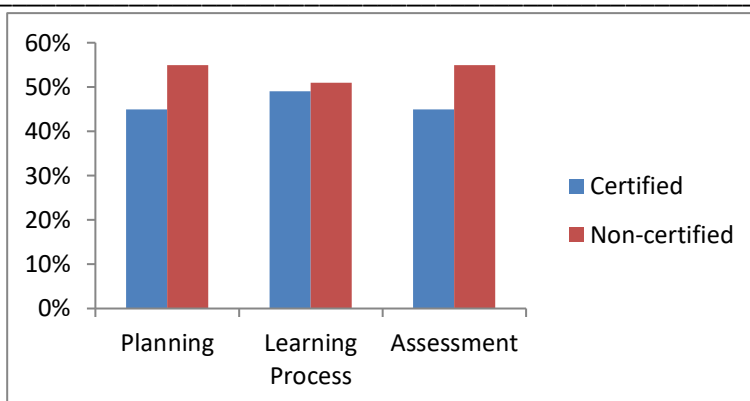
No	Statements	Mean	Category
28	I have difficulty giving assessments since I must consider the diverse characteristics of the students	2.11	Fairly Difficult
29	I have difficulty determining the Learning Objectives Achievement Criteria (KKTP)	2.22	Fairly Difficult
30	I have difficulty in observing and reflecting on the planning and implementation of learning with other English teacher	2.33	Fairly Difficult
31	I have difficulty making a recapitulation of assessments on the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum	2.11	Fairly Difficult
32	I have difficulty discussing with colleagues who teach the same subjects regarding the planning and implementation of learning	2.33	Fairly Difficult
Average		2.22	Fairly Difficult

As indicated in table 5, it can be known that the average score on the assessment of the learning process of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is 2.22, which is in a fairly difficult category. The statements with the highest mean are statements numbers 30 and 32 regarding the difficulty of teachers in discussing and reflecting with fellow English teachers.

The results of the questionnaire were in line with the results of interviews. Teachers are constrained in terms of reflecting on or discussing with peers, especially English teachers, because the majority of *Sekolah Penggerak* in Bengkulu province only have one English teacher who teaches both the 7th and 10th grades. Additionally, the number of teachers from different *Sekolah Penggerak* in one district is limited. Also, teachers who have more knowledge about this *Merdeka* Curriculum are those who are members of the Learning Committee and have access to the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform. The learning committee only contains representatives of each subject teacher. Thus, they find it difficult to discuss lesson plans with fellow English teachers.

**The Relationship among Employment Status, Length of Teaching, and the English Teachers' Problems in Implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka***

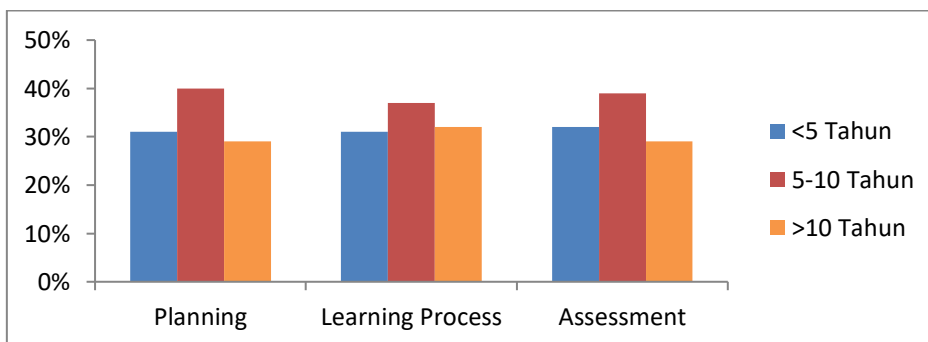
The Figure below shows the problems found by English language teachers based on employment status in three aspects.



**Figure 1:** Teachers' Difficulties Regarding to the Status of Employment

The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is more challenging for non-certified teachers. In preparing for learning, certified teachers struggle to determine how to adapt the teaching module effectively. In implementing the learning process, certified teachers encounter difficulties in creating an interactive learning environment, changing mindsets and habits, dealing with internet constraints, and understanding differentiated learning. In addition, certified teachers do not encounter significant difficulties when evaluating the learning process. Furthermore, Non-certified instructors faced greater and more varied challenges. The most challenging aspects of preparing for learning for non-certified instructors are designing teaching modules and determining the type of activity based on students' competencies, characteristics, and needs. In the learning process, teachers struggle with changing students' attitudes and habits, utilizing diverse learning methods and media, implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum with the proper teaching methods, comprehending differentiated learning, and obtaining appropriate textbooks. Furthermore, in learning assessment, almost all statements are close to the difficult category, including difficulties in providing assessments based on heterogeneous student characteristics and difficulties in reflecting and discussing with fellow English teachers.

Discussion



**Figure 2:** Teachers' Difficulties Regarding to Length of Teaching

In line with Figure 2 English teachers with more than ten years of experience found the least difficulty among the other groups. In contrast, English teachers who teach in the 5–10-year range are the ones who find the most difficulties in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The difficulties experienced by each group are described as follows: When preparing for learning, teachers with teaching experience under 5 years find difficulties in designing teaching modules and preparing student assessments. In the learning process, teachers have the most difficulty in instilling the character of Pancasila in several student characters. While in the assessment process, teachers find difficulties providing assessments based on heterogeneous student characteristics and reflecting on peers.

Teachers with 5 to 10 years of teaching experience find a lot of difficulties. In learning planning, teachers encounter the most difficulties in finding the right way to modify teaching modules and determining assessment techniques and instruments. In the learning process, teachers have most difficulty getting references to differentiated learning models. Besides, teachers with 5 to 10 years of teaching experience have the most difficulty making the format of the *Merdeka* Curriculum score list and discussing it with fellow English teachers.

The group with the least difficulty is teachers with more than 10 years of teaching. In planning learning, teachers have the most difficulty finding the right way to modify the teaching module. In the learning process, teachers have difficulties changing students' mindsets and habits, using the internet, and motivating students. In addition, teachers find little difficulty in determining the criteria for achieving learning objectives.

## **Discussion**

### **English Teachers' Problems in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka**

The primary purpose of this study is to identify the problems that teachers find in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in secondary school English classrooms. In this study, the researchers found that teachers modified the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform's teaching modules so they could use them in their own classes. However, the modifications made by teachers tend to be more extensive because the teaching modules contained on the platform tend to be difficult to apply to students in these *Sekolah penggerak*. As stated in the data above, the teaching modules contained in PMM are more appropriate if used in schools with qualified facilities and students with good student understanding. In contrast, the majority of *Sekolah penggerak* in the Bengkulu Province are located in rural locations, with all of their limitations which also make it difficult for them to realize school digitalization. Hence, when modifying teaching modules, teachers must devote more time and consideration to determining the content of modules that are good, acceptable, and capable of fostering an interactive classroom environment, based on the needs, characteristics, interests of students and schools conditions. This problem is similar to the problem with designing lesson plans in the previous curriculum, which was time constraint (Apriani et al., 2020; Nurfitri et al., 2020). This was aligned with Nurtanto et al (2021), that the construction of learning plans is not simple and that numerous elements, including curricular features, pupil characteristics, and the availability of learning support substances, must be taken into consideration. In addition, it was supported by Barlian et al (2022), that when designing teaching modules, learning must be suited to the achievement level and characteristics of students, as well as formative and summative assessment plans.

In the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum learning process, it is known that data collected from interviews and questionnaires indicate that teachers face several problems in implementing *Merdeka* curriculum learning. In the *Merdeka* Curriculum, teachers only act as guides to help students understand what they are learning. Teachers only explain some of the content of what is being studied. Nonetheless, it is difficult for teachers in some English classes to simply act as a facilitator. The reasons include a lack of English language skills due to environmental conditions, economics, learning resources, and students' interest in reading, motivation, and mindset. This was reinforced by prior research by Suryani et al. (2023), who stated that students' desire to make curricular adjustments is also one of the barriers to the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum, as there are still students who are not particularly enthusiastic about learning in class. Also, teachers complain that the textbooks given to students at school are not in accordance with the school's situation and are different from the books on the Platform *Merdeka Mengajar*. Oktavia et al (2022) argue that the learning process for the *Merdeka* Curriculum carried out by teachers still uses learning media that are less interactive and the learning support facilities at school are still lacking.

Furthermore, according to surveys and interviews, assessing student learning presents no challenges for teachers. This is due to the fact that teachers modify the assessment format they obtain from both the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform and other internet sources. It was aligned with Rahayu et al (2022), who stated that the assessment in the *Merdeka* curriculum at the *Sekolah penggerak* is a comprehensive assessment that encourages students to have competence based on their abilities and interests, without burdening students with the attainment of a minimum score. *Merdeka* teachers are free to provide assessments.

### **The Relationship among Employment Status, Length of Teaching, and the English Teachers' Problems in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka**

The second objective of this research is to reveal the relationship among employment status, length of teaching, and the English teachers' problems in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Problems encountered by teachers when implementing the new curriculum can be influenced by the length of teaching or teaching experience and the employment status of the teachers. The finding of this study



showed that teachers' teaching experience or years of teaching determines the problems they faced in implementing the new curriculum. Alamsyah et al (2020) stated that the heavy burden on teachers caused by the increasing number of students and the increasing burden to meet their needs, as well as the rapid development of science and technology, causes these obligations not to be fulfilled properly and completely. Besides, the results of previous research claimed that teaching experience has a beneficial and substantial impact on teacher performance and pedagogic competence, but it needs to be accompanied by increased knowledge, information, and skills (Mulian et al., 2020; Ritonga et al., 2021).

Moreover, certified teachers find it easier to adapt to the new curriculum than non-certified teachers. This is supported by previous research, which stated that teacher certification has an effect on the improvement of the learning process based on seven aspects, including beginning lessons, exploration activities, delivering essential content, teaching attitudes, and closing lessons (Amiruddin, 2017; Ristianey et al., 2021). Another related study by Abubakar (2015) found that certified teachers' involvement in aspects that affect school quality (planning, implementing, and enhancing the learning process) demonstrates a high level of involvement.

## Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, researchers came to the conclusion that the problems English teachers faced in implementing the Merdeka curriculum fell into a fairly difficult category in three aspects: planning, implementing, and assessing learning process. English teachers most often find problems during the implementation of learning process with a percentage of 35% and a weighted mean of 2.48. Teachers find problems in modifying the teaching modules when preparing for learning. In the learning process, teachers have problems stimulating students' activeness and motivation, using textbooks that do not match those on the Merdeka Mengajar platform, and understanding the implementation of differentiated learning. On the other hand, teachers have no problem with learning assessment. However, teachers find it difficult to reflect on and discuss Merdeka curriculum planning and implementation with peers due to the lack of English teachers and their understanding of the Merdeka curriculum.

This study also found that there seems to be several factors that affect their abilities and the problems they face. The longer they have been teaching, might be indicate the fewer problems they have had. However, teachers with five to ten years of experience faced the most problems. This could be due to the fact that they are in the process of transitioning from the 2013 version to the Merdeka curriculum, which makes it difficult to adapt to the new curriculum. Furthermore, certified teachers found fewer problems than non-certified teachers. This might imply that the certification program has had an impact on teachers' quality.

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