A study on how the Merdeka curriculum promotes multilingualism in Indonesian ELT classrooms

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Abstract
This study investigates the teachers' perspective, the implementation process, and the effects of the *Merdeka* curriculum on promoting multilingualism in ELT classrooms in Indonesia. This study utilized a qualitative research design, explicitly a case study approach. This study has two samples selected through purposeful sampling by the researchers. The research employs in-depth interviews, field notes, and documentation as its primary instruments. This study demonstrated that adopting the *Merdeka* curriculum was transformative and empowering, as evidenced by participants' experiences and prior knowledge. The perception of the *Merdeka* curriculum implementation was based on various factors such as content, differences, reactions, expectations, advantages, disadvantages, supports, and hindrances. In supporting multilingualism, the process in the school began with the principal's initiation, followed by training to comprehend the curriculum. Subsequently, each set of materials was developed, and the learning and assessment principles were implemented to achieve the *Pancasila* student profiles. As a result of this curriculum, teachers have become more flexible and put in more effort to cater to students' preferences. After that, students exhibit heightened confidence, ingenuity, and engagement in the learning process, so availing themselves of increased opportunities for self-exploration. Through implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum, the promotion of multilingualism in the classroom has many advantages, including enhancing the well-being of students, encouraging intercultural perspectives within the classroom, and placing value on all languages in the classroom.
Key words: ELT classroom, Indonesian, Language Instruction, Merdeka Curriculum, Multilingualism

Introduction

In 2019, Indonesia commenced the development of a novel curriculum in response to an educational crisis further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The government initiated the promotion and implementation of novel curricula as a response to educational disruptions and to mitigate educational crises, including learning gaps and loss. According to Donnelly and Patrinos (2022), students lost learning during the pandemic. In the first phase, the Indonesian government streamlined the curriculum to function as an emergency curriculum by selecting vital materials. The emergency curriculum implementation policy has demonstrated superior performance in assessments, particularly in numeracy and literacy tests, compared to the policy that continues implementing the 2013 curriculum (Anggraena et al., 2022). During the period of the Covid-19 epidemic, the government developed an emergency curriculum called the *Merdeka* curriculum. The learning that takes place within this curriculum is oriented toward the talents and interests of the students. For this curriculum to be implemented, teachers must understand the students' personalities and talents. The *Merdeka* curriculum is a model for the curriculum that refers to constructing a *Pancasila* student profile. This model aims to build students' character and diverse abilities as essential to implementing learning.
Hence, Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) makes every effort to provide a curriculum that offers students

exercises that strengthen their ability to speak multiple languages. A wide range of languages has consistently been a defining feature of historical and modern communities within specific geographical limits. These practices also occurred in Indonesia. The identity of Indonesia is reflected in its rich multiculturalism, diverse communities, and many races. Furthermore, considerable linguistic variety is seen in Indonesian classrooms, where students communicate in distinct native tongues.

A study conducted by Hasudungan and Ningsih (2021) revealed that learning loss posed a threat to disadvantaged students and remote regions during that period. Nevertheless, during the following two years, student engagement in the learning process escalated due to several factors: the implementation of an adaptive curriculum, which the government subsidized, and the instructors' adaptations to long-distance learning strategies. Nonetheless, the emergency curriculum proved to be a temporary remedy, as detractors contend that it merely constituted a bumper policy in response to learning deficits and losses caused by the pandemic. Subsequently, the *Merdeka* curriculum focused on completing the emergency curriculum, which aimed to permanently address the issues of learning loss and deficits.

For these reasons, the modified curriculum will serve as a driving force in enhancing education standards in Indonesia. Students have the opportunity to develop a deeper connection to multilingualism practices through the *Merdeka* curriculum, which creates these chances. This curriculum represents productive periods for linguistic diversity and multilingualism, with the provision and development of students to promote language learning in schools. Currently, this curriculum is being implemented throughout Indonesia. Students in Indonesia have been living with the *Merdeka* curriculum since it was implemented. This curriculum recognizes languages' cultural, ancestral, and spiritual worth, fostering equity and diversity. The *Merdeka* curriculum allows students to enhance their metalinguistic awareness while providing scaffolding for their multilingualism practices through trans-languaging methodologies.

Kemendikbudristek states that the *Merdeka* curriculum uses diversification to address learning loss about school conditions, regions, and students' potential. This curriculum tries to be adaptable, prioritize critical concepts, and help students cultivate their character and soft skills. The government also emphasized national character formation towards developing *Pancasila* student profiles. At each stage of the educational process, the government stresses the importance of instructors gauging their students' current knowledge and skill levels to tailor lessons to individual classes (Khoirurrijal et al., 2022). Here, various treatments lead to students in the same class having varying degrees of knowledge and comprehension, exacerbating the learning gap. Next, to assist students in reaching their learning objectives related to sustainable living, the learning design should consider the student's environment and socio-cultural background (Anggraena et al., 2022).

The government has additionally suggested the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which aims to enhance students' learning outcomes by adopting targeted instruction at the proper levels (TaRL), facilitating differentiated teaching methods, and providing responsive learning opportunities. TaRL enables teachers to instruct students without regard to their grade level, allowing for the adaptation of instructional materials, strategies, methods, and learning approaches according to the student's developmental stage (Asiza et al., 2023). Within the framework of differentiated teaching, teachers can cater to students' unique requirements and attributes during the learning process. This can be achieved by employing differentiated learning strategies encompassing differentiated materials, methods, and products. Tomlinson & Mc Tighe (2006) assert that differentiated education centers on the students, the setting, and the instructional methods. Additionally, they

emphasized that diversified instruction seeks to guarantee the efficacy of the teaching process and methods employed by the teacher in accommodating diverse persons. When implementing diversified learning, the teacher must consider the individual students' characteristics, backgrounds, requirements, and preferences to facilitate their learning success.

Following the initial year of implementation, the *Merdeka* curriculum was extended to *non-Sekolah Penggerak* and *SMK Pusat Keunggulan*. The government granted schools the autonomy to implement the curriculum through three models: *Merdeka Belajar, Merdeka Berubah, and Merdeka Berbagi*. The first mode incorporates specific ideas from the *Merdeka* curriculum in conjunction with the framework of the 2013 curriculum, known as *Merdeka Belajar*. The second model initiates the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. However, the school can adapt and alter the curriculum framework by drawing inspiration from other educational institutions or government initiatives, such as *Merdeka Berubah*. The final component is the model, which determines the framework of their curriculum and can be disseminated to other schools, specifically *Merdeka Berbagi*.

Furthermore, the *Merdeka* curriculum in English education aims to allow students to better understand themselves, social and cultural dynamics, and global career prospects. It also emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills, particularly in fostering effective communication in English, which is considered an essential life skill. To achieve these objectives, the *Merdeka* curriculum emphasizes six specific skills: listening, reading, viewing, speaking, writing, and presenting. The Common European Framework of Reference (CERF) for Language Learning, Teaching, and Assessment includes these competencies.

Several previous studies have discussed the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum. First, Asrifan et al. (2023) examined *Sekolah Penggerak*'s implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum and the difficulties encountered by teachers during the process. SDN 2 Timreng Panua and SDN 2 Sereang's *Sekolah Penggerak* served as the centers for the study. They discovered that the schools had been using the curriculum for two years. At the outset of the *Merdeka* curriculum's implementation, modules, examinations, and *Pancasila* student profile strengthening projects (P5) were developed. Additional information was required, and the school needed help to prepare the modules and exams, all contributing to the difficulties in implementing the curriculum. Teachers were assisting one another in finding solutions, and the headmaster's role in providing guidance and assistance to the faculty in implementing the curriculum also played a part in reducing the difficulty of the situation.

Rahayu et al. (2022) examined the merits of introducing the *Merdeka* curriculum to *Penggerak* public schools. Their findings demonstrated that implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum was effective and will continue. Nevertheless, there was still room for improvement in its execution. The transformed headmaster and teacher hold the key to success. In order to apply successfully the *Merdeka* curriculum, the principal, as a leader, must alter the perspective of the school's human resources department.

Meanwhile, Tricahyati & Zaim (2023) researched the competency of Padang's JHS English teachers, particularly those working in the Sekolah Penggerak pilot schools, and how to prepare them best to teach English using the *Merdeka* curriculum. A readiness to implement the *Merdeka* curriculum was discovered among the English teachers. For instance, attending a workshop or training on the *Merdeka* curriculum's evaluation and interactive media-making practices may produce better results. They also discovered that instructors might use some guidance when creating learning goals and implementing customized lessons.

According to the previous explanation, the researchers were intrigued by investigating the application of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which promotes multilingualism, particularly in the context of ELT classrooms. The researchers aimed to investigate: 1) teachers' perspectives regarding the implementation of *the Merdeka* curriculum; 2) how English teachers in these schools implement the *Merdeka* curriculum and how they support multilingualism in the class, and 3) the effects of the *Merdeka* curriculum on the teaching and learning process in the ELT classroom.

Research Method
For this investigation, the researchers utilized qualitative methodology. This research is categorized as a case study by the participants in the study. Case studies are an appropriate method that the researcher can employ to respond to a research question that is either descriptive or explanatory. The subject matter is centered on a particular unit of study, which is referred to as a bounded system. This could be an individual instructor, a classroom, or an entire school.

On top of that, it focuses on a particular circumstance or occurrence (Mills & Gay, 2019). The researchers utilized purposive sampling to collect a wealth of information and acquire appropriate assumptions and insights from the study subject to answer the research questions. Both the English teacher from *Sekolah Penggerak*, which is UPT SPF SMP Negeri 13 Makassar, and the English teacher from the school that applied the *Merdeka* curriculum via *Merdeka Berbagi*, which is UPT SPF SMP Negeri 6 Makassar, are the subjects of this research. Both of these schools are located in Makassar. This study was conducted in October 2023. The researcher utilized an interview to investigate the variables of teachers' perceptions, the process of curriculum implementation, and the impacts of implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum. Furthermore, the field notes and documentation are used as the variables of the curriculum implementation process. The researcher used the qualitative data analysis interactive model of Huberman et al. (2002) to analyze the data from interviews, observation, and documentation: data condensation, data display, and data conclusion drawing/verifying.

Findings
The Teachers' Perception of the *Merdeka* Curriculum Implementation
The studies observed that teachers perceive the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum using their prior data or expertise and compare it to the old curriculum. The *Merdeka* curriculum implementation is perceived as accessible and transformative in these findings. Teachers saw the *Merdeka* curriculum as the flexibility to educate and choose methods, media, strategies, and assessments. Teachers regarded *Merdeka* as a transition from the prior curriculum. Different learning styles and intra- and co-curricular activities distinguish it from the previous curriculum. The teachers at a junior high school in Makassar perceived the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum differently. They perceived the *Merdeka* curriculum based on their experiences and previous knowledge. They use top-down processing in perceiving the *Merdeka* curriculum implementation. Rookes & Willson (2005) stated that top-down processing needs more cognitive influence, which needs previous data or prior knowledge to interpret the information we receive in our sense or sensory input at the bottom.

Teachers mainly see the introduction of the *Merdeka* curriculum as liberating and revolutionary. They felt it gave them more leeway to teach as it revamped the prior curriculum. The teachers' perceptions were shaped by the following factors: the substance of the *Merdeka* curriculum, its differences from other curricula, their reactions during implementation, their expectations for the implementation of the

Merdeka curriculum, and the pros, cons, supports, and obstacles to its implementation.

The teachers defined the *Merdeka* curriculum as transformational and focused on student-centered learning. This aligns with Anggraena et al. (2022), who stated that some educators believed the *Merdeka* curriculum advocated for students. Additionally, the instructors feel that the curriculum allowed them more leeway and autonomy in the classroom because, according to this curriculum, each teacher is responsible for selecting the course content based on an analysis of the expected learning outcomes rather than a set of predetermined competencies that must be fulfilled in a single semester. It also aligns with Prakoso et al. (2021), who explained that teachers perceive the *Merdeka* curriculum as freedom in teaching.

Teachers thought that the government had already decided what students should be able to do by the conclusion of the phase based on the learning outcomes. Competency, content, and student traits can be found in the learning outcomes. As Sufyadi et al. (2021) stated, the *Merdeka* curriculum lays out the learning outcomes for each subject sequentially, detailing the skills and traits students will acquire due to the learning process. The *Merdeka* curriculum's learning outcomes are a set of skills and traits students will acquire through their education. These outcomes are organized into sentences and cover specific information, perspectives on the learning process, personal growth, and competencies.

The teacher saw the *Pancasila* student profiles as the curriculum's end goal of moulding students' personalities and subject matter expertise. Before, Sufyadi et al. (2021) stated that *Pancasila* student profiles have a vital role in the *Merdeka* curriculum, which is a direct guide to all policies and updates concerning the educational system in Indonesia. Whatever is to be developed concerning education in Indonesia should consider *Pancasila* student profiles.

Aspects	*Merdeka* Curriculum	2013 Curriculum
Basic Framework	*Pancasila* Student profiles	-
Targeted competencies	• Learning outcomes achieved in one phase, three years in junior high school	• Based Competencies (KD) achieved per semester. Every semester has different based competencies.
Learning	• The learning used differentiated instruction. • There are intra-curricular activities, co-curricular activities, and extracurricular as supplements.	• The learning used a scientific approach. • There are intra-curricular and extracurricular activities as a supplement.
Assessment	• Diagnostic assessment is used to determine the prior knowledge and characteristics of the students. • Formative assessment determines the learning progress and design of the next lesson.	• Formative and summative assessment by the teacher aims to check the learning progress and the result of learning

	• Summative assessment to determine the learning achievement	

Table 1 The differences between the *Merdeka* Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum

The table above shows how teachers perceived that the *Merdeka* curriculum differed from the previous curriculum. One of the primary goals of the *Merdeka* curriculum is to help students develop the traits outlined in the *Pancasila* model. The learning objectives of the *Merdeka* curriculum are designed to be completed in one phase: three years at junior high school. Each semester in the 2013 curriculum had its own unique set of based competencies (KD), which students would accomplish in a single semester. Intracurriculars, cocurriculars (which contain *Pancasila* student profiles), and extracurriculars are the three main components of the educational program. In 2013, as an additional component, the curriculum was split into intra- and extracurricular activities. There are three types of assessments: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Diagnostic tests determine students' background knowledge and personality traits; formative assessments track students' progress toward learning outcomes; and summative assessments determine students' final grade point averages. Both formative and summative assessments of student performance are a part of the 2013 curriculum.

Teachers report high satisfaction with the curriculum's implementation, citing the opportunity to build operational curricula and lesson plans through collaboration with colleagues as a critical factor. It is supported by the research of Anggraena et al. (2022), which found that several teachers admitted that the curriculum brings new nuances to increase collaboration between fellow teachers.

Teachers believe the curriculum may also be used in other disciplines since it allows them to teach according to their preferences. Teachers also believe that the curriculum can shape students' personalities and ensure they fully grasp the course material.

The teachers saw the merit of using the *Merdeka* curriculum. They said the curriculum was helpful since it allowed teachers to see how far their students had come thanks to the assessments included within it. Students needing help to understand the content will receive help from the teacher. After that, they have more leeway in determining what is necessary. It aligns with Muin et al. (2022), who state that the *Merdeka* curriculum allows teachers to tailor their lessons to each student's unique needs and progress in both outcomes and developmental stages. The curriculum also has the added benefit of describing the student's competencies rather than focusing on their test scores. The *Pancasila* model saw both in-class and extracurricular activities as opportunities for students to grow as individuals. It is in line with the statements by Marlina (2022) about one of the learning principles of the *Merdeka* curriculum, which supports the students' holistic competences and characteristic development.

The next advantage is that the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform can complete this curriculum, which means that it is simple to comprehend via the use of this platform. The teachers noted that differentiated instruction can be an advantage of applying the *Merdeka* curriculum, particularly in product differentiation. This was particularly the case at the product differentiation level. Regarding the heart of the materials, the students are free to collect any product they choose. The final advantage is the

adaptability of the teaching because this curriculum is structured in stages that span three years. Because no fixed number of based competencies will be obtained each semester, the instructors are free to be flexible when arranging the material to be taught in one phase, determining which material should be taught first, and so on. In that case, the instructor is not required to use a particular book. As a result, teachers can collect the content from any source and create the teaching material based on the characteristics of the students. That aligns with what Miladiah et al. (2023) stated, that this curriculum is more straightforward and profound, focusing on essential material and students' competence development stage.

On the other side, teachers only found a few disadvantages in this curriculum implementation, with one being that some schools might experience the disadvantages of this curriculum regarding the strengthening project of *Pancasila* student profiles. However, this disadvantage can be avoided if the teacher can utilize the school's facilities effectively.

The next factor is the indicator of support received. The teachers received support in the *Merdeka* curriculum implementation from the principal, fellow teachers, and the community of parents, and the quality of human resources of the school can also support the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum. The principal can support the teacher in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum by facilitating the teachers, such as holding workshops regularly. The fellow teachers support each other through collaboration in understanding the curriculum and making teaching sets, and the parents support it through emotional support and class activities. It is supported by the research of Irawati et al. (2022), who found that the teacher mindset, leadership, work cultures, and collaboration between teachers and parents can support the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum.

In terms of hindrances, the teachers said that the facility that is needed to implement the curriculum is in line with what Arifa et al. (2023) and Nurcahyono & Putra (2022) found, namely that the lack of facility and teachers' understanding can hinder the curriculum implementation. In this case, the strategy of implementing the P5 can disrupt the intra-curricular process when the school does not place it at the proper time. Nurcahyono & Putra (2022) supported this in their research and found that the hindrance of this curriculum is the learning design; if the teachers need to understand this curriculum, it can impact implementation. However, only some have the same mindset from the teacher's perspective. Some teachers are ignorant and stuck in a comfort zone. This is one of the limits in designing the learning activities. These findings are supported by previous research stating that the lack of teachers' understanding of the *Merdeka* curriculum implementation concept makes the curriculum implementation ineffective (Arifa et al., 2023; Irawati et al., 2022; Nurcahyono & Putra, 2022).

The *Merdeka* Curriculum Implementation Process
The *Merdeka* curriculum implementation process has three stages: curriculum understanding, teaching set, and classroom implementation. The researcher provides the diagram below to explain the process of the findings.
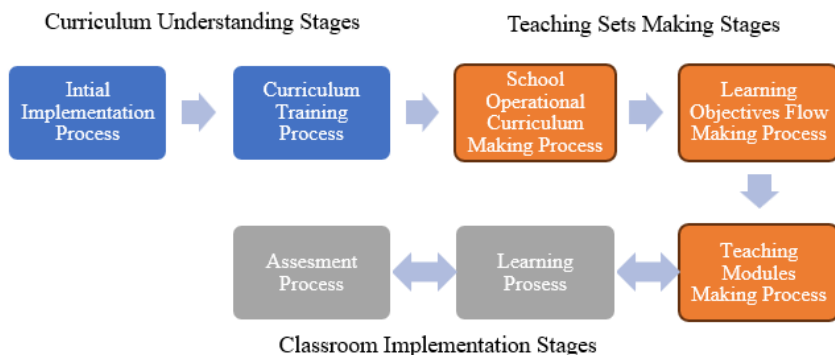
Figure 1. *Merdeka* **Curriculum Implementation Process**

The process starts with understanding the curriculum, including the initial implementation and curriculum training processes. In the initial implementation process, either the principal enrolled in the ministry's program for transformational principals or just introduced it to the teachers in the school. Next, the principal created a team for the curriculum implementation. Further, there was an online training series for transformational schools or independent study in PMM for independent implementation schools. Then, a comparative study will be carried out in on the previously implemented *Merdeka* school curriculum.

The following process is the curriculum training process. In this process, the school held in-house training for the *Merdeka* curriculum and module-making training for the teachers who will teach using the *Merdeka* curriculum. This training invites the supervisor to help make the correct teaching module. The training can also be held in online meetings using Zoom. Another part of the curriculum training process is instruction from the principal to open the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform routinely and learn independently there. It is in line with the study of Almarisi (2023), who stated that the *Merdeka* curriculum should be supported by training, workshops, learning sources, and innovative teaching provisions by the principal and local educational affairs, and also microlearning in digital platforms such as the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform.

The next process is the stage of making a teaching set, which includes the school's operational curriculum, the learning objective flow, and the teaching module. After understanding the process of the *Merdeka* curriculum, the teachers move to the next stage in curriculum implementation, which is making a teaching set. According to the law of Indonesia, number 20 of 2003 on the national standards of education stated that a curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements about objectives, contents, and learning materials and methods to guide learning activities in order to achieve specific educational goals (Muin et al., 2022). In the *Merdeka* curriculum, the school should make its operational curriculum. It can be understood that the teachers can make the operational school curriculum by observing, imitating, and modifying the existing school operational curriculum and adjusting it to the school's characteristics. Another approach is to work in a team to make the operational curriculum by dividing jobs into teams and aligning the perception after the teamwork.

Concerning the learning objective flow-making process, the teacher can obtain it from the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform and modify it according to the student's characteristics. However, the teaching material is adapted according to the provided students' book. Then the teacher also makes the learning objectives another way by

examining the learning outcomes. The teacher then arranges the learning outcomes from the easiest to the hardest within the semester in one phase. The teacher can flexibly arrange the learning objectives according to their understanding.

In the teaching modules-making process, the teachers also made them by observing, imitating, and modifying the existing module from the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform and adjusting it to the students' characteristics. The teacher also obtained it from MGMP training, training with a supervisor, and training from a fellow eligible teacher who has received module-making training previously. Then, the teacher can also make the teaching module by analyzing the learning outcomes to be material that covers one phase, since the learning outcomes of the subject cover one phase or three years in junior high school. After that, teachers see the learning objectives and divide them into semesters, then break them into several indicators.

The next stage is classroom implementation. Learning and assessment in the *Merdeka* curriculum cannot be separated (Anggraena et al., 2022). The learning can be started with a diagnostics assessment to get the students' prior knowledge and characteristics. During the learning process, formative assessments will be used to discover the learning progress, and the teacher can design the subsequent learning based on the result of this formative assessment. Then, there is a summative assessment, which assesses the scope of material or several indicators (Portolés & Martí, 2020). For the assessments, based on observation, the teacher used diagnostic tests, orally and in writing, to check the initial understanding of the material.

The Effects of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Promoting Multilingualism in the ELT Classroom

For this, the teacher can ask or show several questions about the material to be learned that day to test the student's prior knowledge, or the teacher can provide ten multiple-choice questions to measure the student's prior knowledge and hold the test before coming to the new topics. The result of the diagnostic assessment can also be used to divide the students into groups to do the learning activities. Then, in the reservation, the teacher uses formative tests to check students' understanding of the learning topics learned in that meeting. The teachers include the formative assessment in the student worksheet. Based on the principles of the assessment in the *Merdeka* curriculum, the assessment should be integrated with the learning process. The technique is flexible and can be decided by the teachers (Anggraena et al., 2022).

The researchers found other things in the classroom implementation, such as the teaching strategies, differentiated instruction, and the implementation of *Pancasila* student profiles. In the *Merdeka* curriculum implementation, there is no specific teaching strategy. The teacher can use their teaching style to make students comfortable with learning. The teachers can use their style, which refers to student-centered scientific learning, which makes the students more active in learning. Based on one of the characteristics of the English subject in the curriculum, *Merdeka* stated in the decree of *BSKAP Kemdikbudristek* that the learning process focuses on the student-centered approach, which focuses on changing the students' mindset from a lack of understanding to understanding and from unskilled to skilled. Then, in implementing the *Pancasila* student profiles, the researchers found that the teacher implements it directly and indirectly.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum was established as a more flexible framework, focusing on vital content and building Indonesian students' multilingual characters and competencies. It aligns with French's framework (2019) of students' multilingual practices below:
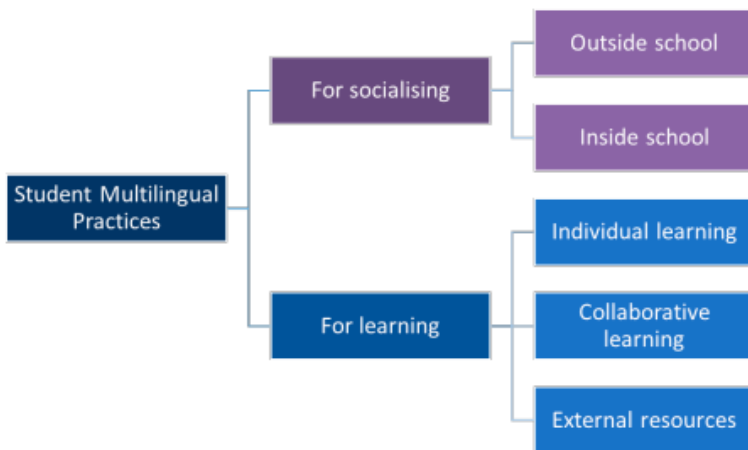
Figure 2. Students' Multilingual Practices

The students used their multilingual resources on their own, which included the translation of terminology and concepts, ways to consolidate and transfer knowledge, and strategies for writing in many languages. In addition, collaboration was an essential component of multilingual academic practice, and students utilized common linguistic resources to support their classmates and seek assistance (García, 2012; Portolés & Martí, 2020; Sachtleben, 2015). Students could also obtain information from external sources, such as the internet, print media, and members of language groups, by utilizing their multilingual talents—these patterns of how students engaged in translanguaging techniques and utilized available resources in multiple languages. *Merdeka*'s curriculum has encouraged schools and teachers to be innovative to make learning engaging and pleasurable for students. Thus, the *Merdeka* Curriculum is implemented in three different ways: (1) through self-directed learning, (2) through self-directed transformation, and (3) through self-directed sharing. As a result, students were more creative, critical, and collaborative and had communication abilities because of individual competencies and linguistic situations that occurred in different civilizations in Indonesia. Thus, supporting multilingual learning is increasingly important in various educational contexts since it is essential for promoting students' academic achievement and overall well-being (Bernstein et al., 2023; Otwinowska et al., 2023)

Discussion

Based on the observation data, the researchers found that the teacher already follows the stage of a genre-based approach in teaching. The teacher first introduces the topic of the knowledge at the beginning of the activity. They do several things by asking questions about the topic, such as their routine. Then, the teacher shows the text example to be analyzed; in this case, the teacher gave an example of the topic's text, such as the routine activities, and allowed the student to read and compare it. Then, the teacher allows the students to produce the text individually or in a team, and the teacher guides them. In the observation, the teacher gave the student the task of rearranging a jumbled sentence, and the teacher let the student do it first, then gave an explanation and corrected the student's sentences. The last stage is independent construction, in which students produce their text. The genre-based approach stages

are building knowledge of the field stage, modeling the text stage, joining the construction of the text stages, and independent construction of the text stage.

For differentiated instruction, the teacher can use it in different ways. The teacher does it by differentiating the product and making the student collect any form of the task as long as it suits the competencies that will be achieved to support multilingual situations. For example, for the speaking task, the students can talk directly to the teacher, or they can make a video. Then, combining several models in one presentation provides the student with different learning styles. The teachers provide exciting pictures and videos for students with a visual learning style. For auditory students, the teacher provides oral or audio explanations for listening. For kinesthetic students, the teacher provides a game or an activity that makes them move from their seats, such as rearranging jumbled sentences and sticking them on the whiteboard. Another difference the researcher found in their observation was that the teacher divided the group based on the student's prior knowledge. For the students who already have a high-level understanding of the material, the teachers made them partners in assisting their friends to understand the material. Then, the teacher also assisted the students with a low-level understanding of the material.

According to Tomlinson & McTighe (2006), differentiated instruction focuses on the students, the location, and the procedures we use to ensure that the teaching process and procedure the teacher uses in learning are effective for different individuals. Then, according to Christian et al. (2021), it is divided into three: differentiated content or taught material, differentiated process or teaching style, and differentiated product or result or performance to be produced.

In implementing the *Pancasila* student profile, teachers indirectly focus on several dimensions. In the observation, the researchers found the dimension of having faith and devotion to the almighty god and a noble character, shown in the prayer before and after the learning and teaching process, then the teacher also reminded the students by lecturing them directly about the importance of praying five times a day, and the grace in learning. The dimension of cooperation is demonstrated in every meeting because the learning activities are done in groups, such as playing group games and collaborating on the worksheets. It is aligned with the principle of learning, which makes learning meaningful and enjoyable and supports students' holistic competencies and character development (Anggraena et al., 2022).

According to the teachers, they can sense the initiative's effect on better preparing and supporting students according to their preferences. In differentiated instruction, teachers cater to students with varying learning styles. For students who learn best through auditory means, teachers may deliver lectures; for students who learn best through visual means, teachers can show videos; and for students who learn best through kinesthetic means, teachers can prepare movement activities, like games, that require preparation. Educators should avoid being boring and instead be open to new ideas. In line with the research of Angga et al. (2022), the *Merdeka* curriculum has a profound effect on educators, inspiring them to think outside the box when implementing new strategies for student learning and instruction. Teachers are no longer confined to a single textbook, which has another effect: they are more open and approachable when choosing lessons. Educators should put in more time to learn. It suits Rahayu et al. (2022), who found that teachers are more flexible and creative.

As a result, students gain self-assurance and become more involved in their education. During the observation, the students responded thoughtfully to the teacher's questions, worked in small groups, reflected on the lesson, and finished. The students' self-assurance and originality have also increased. P5 students were encouraged to develop habits aligned with the *Pancasila* student profile in areas like daily idea presentations. Students' comfort with public speaking increased, and they became engrossed in the material. They can learn at their own pace, which opens up additional

options for self-discovery. Teachers do not emphasize having students complete standard assignments. Students are free to engage in one-on-one conversations with the instructor, take performance assessments, record themselves speaking, or create writing prompts that do not stray from the essential ideas presented in the lesson. It aligned with the study by Miladiah et al. (2023) that learners take an active role and can pursue their areas of interest in the classroom. Since the *Merdeka* curriculum places little emphasis on rank and numerical scores, the subsequent effect on students' academic performance presents a problem.

However, scores are still considered when students apply to higher-level programs. Therefore, the teacher continues to provide students with valuable grades that will aid them in moving on to the next level of school. To mature into well-rounded members of contemporary societies, multilingual students require assistance developing their linguistic abilities and exposure to linguistic diversity. While acknowledging the apparent necessity for support and opportunities to explore linguistic diversity, it is contended that there remains a considerable distance to travel in integrating multilingual learning into daily educational environments worldwide. This must change so all students are welcomed and supported by their families, peers, and instructors.

The *Merdeka* curriculum promotes multilingualism in the classroom in numerous ways, including by allowing multilingual students to utilize all of their linguistic resources, valuing all languages present in the classroom, assisting students in maintaining their heritage languages and cultural identity, enhancing students' well-being, and by fostering intercultural perspectives (Okal, 2014). Teachers are the most critical individuals outside the family for supporting multilingualism (Rinker et al., 2022; Safira et al., 2023). Teaching behavior is influenced by their perspectives on multilingualism and the significance of language in various academic disciplines. Even in multilingual settings, teachers' subjective beliefs are shaped by their own linguistic and cultural experiences and are influenced by gender and multilingual heritage, according to international studies.

Conclusion

The researchers deduced that JHS teachers' perceptions of the *Merdeka* curriculum implementation relied on top-down processing, drawing on their prior knowledge and experiences. It is mainly seen as a liberatory and transformational curriculum. In addition, the teachers considered the content, differences, reactions, expectations, pros, cons, support, and obstacles when implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum. The first impression that the *Merdeka* curriculum gave to the instructors was that it was a liberating curriculum that allowed them more leeway to tailor their lessons to the needs of their students, namely those identified in the *Pancasila* student profiles.

There are three parts to the *Merdeka* curriculum, and the teachers followed them all: knowing the curriculum, developing lessons, and implementing them in the classroom. The principal's involvement in introducing the curriculum to his school is the first step, and the final step is the evaluation. In addition, implementing the *Merdeka* study scheme affected the instructors and the students. Teachers' ability to connect lessons to each student's individual needs and interests was improved by introducing the *Merdeka* curriculum. Teachers should learn more and think outside the box if they want their lessons to be exciting. Teachers also have more leeway in choosing lessons. There are more chances for students to explore themselves and be more self-assured and engaged in their studies. Also, since the curriculum no longer prioritizes numerical scores, the effect on academics must be revised.

After all, thanks to the *Merdeka* curriculum, which supports multilingualism, students engaged in a dynamic and flexible curriculum, where, at the same time, they incorporated family languages into their pedagogical practices, curriculum, and

assessment methods. The curriculum of *Merdeka* affords students opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of multilingualism practices. This curriculum signifies periods of linguistic diversity and multilingualism at their most fruitful, as it equips and cultivates students to advocate for language acquisition in educational institutions. The *Merdeka* curriculum promotes diversity and equity while recognizing the spiritual, ancestral, and cultural significance of languages, in which Indonesian students have always lived.

Some Technical Terms
Merdeka Curriculum: the Merdeka Curriculum was introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2021 to enhance the education system in Indonesia.

Sekolah Penggerak: This is an effort to implement the vision of Indonesian Education in realizing an advanced Indonesia that is sovereign, independent, and personable through the creation of Pancasila Students. The *Sekolah Penggerak* program focuses on developing holistic student learning outcomes that include competencies (literacy and numeracy) and character, starting with superior human resources (principals and teachers). *Sekolah Penggerak* is a refinement of the previous school transformation program.

Pancasila student profiles: The Pancasila student profile is a component of the independent curriculum that students must develop to the fullest extent. Professional educators are key in shaping students' character within the Pancasila student profile. Student feedback is essential to assess a teacher's professional competency in fostering students' character development in the P5 curriculum.

Mandiri Belajar: the *Mandiri Belajar* program provides freedom to education units when implementing several parts and principles of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, **without replacing the curriculum of educational units** applied to PAUD education units, grades 1, 4, 7 and 10.

Mandiri Berubah: the *Mandiri Berubah* program provides flexibility to education units when implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum **using teaching tools provided** in PAUD education units, grades 1, 4, 7 and 10.

Mandiri Berbagi: the *Mandiri Berbagi* program provides flexibility to education units in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum by **developing their teaching tools** in PAUD education units, grades 1, 4, 7 and 10.

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