

# English Teachers' Perception at Junior High School Level on The Implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Banjar District

Siti Raudah<sup>a,1,\*</sup>, Pajrian Noor<sup>b,2</sup>, Lailatun Najmiah<sup>c,3</sup>

<sup>a, b, c</sup> Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Kalimantan Selatan, Gambut, Indonesia.

<sup>1</sup> noorbintu@gmail.com\*; <sup>2</sup> Fajrian.yzb@gmail.com; <sup>3</sup> lailatunnajmiah17@gmail.com

\* corresponding author

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## ABSTRACT

Curriculum revisions are nothing new in Indonesia. Three curricular revisions have occurred throughout last two decades. Finally, the post-Covid-19 emergency curriculum was changed to Independent Curriculum, which purportedly streamlines K13. Merdeka Curriculum is only one year old, of course it still requires adjustments, especially in implementation. For this reason, researchers decided to examine teachers' perceptions (as the front guard of education) regarding the Independent Curriculum which focuses on implementation in teaching English at junior high school level in Banjar Regency, including regarding obstacles in implementation. This research uses descriptive qualitative with interviews as the data collection method. The type of interview used was semi-unstructured in-depth interview with 7 English teachers in 4 Junior High Schools in different sub-districts in Banjar District which implemented Merdeka Curriculum as respondents, determined using purposive sampling method. Following the investigation, respondents acquired 9 positive and 8 negative perceptions. According to the teacher's perception, Independent Curriculum has evolved to the times with usage of digital media/internet as a learning ied, making learning resources more abundant, there are also fun projects students can do, Aside from that, this curriculum is thought to be more supportive of students by using terms like student center, positive discipline, and differentiation approach, which allows teachers to provide more opportunities for students develop themselves by understanding them personally and providing comfortable environment. The obstacles encountered are mostly related to the facilities, teacher readiness, and increasingly limited time due to large number of tasks that teachers must complete as result of this curriculum.

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## I. Introduction

Curriculum is a matter of choice. This choice is usually made by the "powerful party" or Government [1]. Changes in the education curriculum are nothing new, especially for developing countries which are still trying to determine policies that suit the circumstances and needs of their society. According to [2] "This change occurred because many countries that had become independent from colonialism needed human resources that were in line with their country's national needs,". Educational curriculum development departs from and is based on the main decisions of the curriculum itself, and depends on the philosophical basis that influences the organization and implementation of the curriculum. However, of course the curriculum must also be refined in response to current developments, science and technology, level of intelligence, culture, systems and the needs of society [3].

In almost the last 2 decades alone, there have been 3 changes to the Indonesian education curriculum. Starting from the change from the 2004 Curriculum to the 2006 Education Unit Level Curriculum or commonly called KTSP (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan), in Herman Zaini's (2015) research entitled "Characteristics of the 2013 Curriculum and Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP)" it said that in this curriculum schools are given autonomous rights in developing curriculum to syllabus development [4]. In terms of learning, KTSP focuses on cognitive knowledge which focuses on science such as mathematics, science, etc., so that in terms of deepening basic knowledge, KTSP is an ideal

curriculum. However, in this curriculum teachers play a more active role in both classroom teaching and administration, therefore in this curriculum teachers are given a large burden.

After Covid-19 subsided and the situation had improved, the emergency curriculum was changed to the Kurikulum Merdeka which was a simplification of K13. It is also claimed that the Kurikulum Merdeka can be a learning loss recovery for the world of Indonesian education in the Covid-19 era[5]. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020) Learning loss is a state of loss of academic skills and knowledge due to cessation of learning in the world of education. The Kurikulum Merdeka is believed to be a learning loss recovery as stated by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, Nadiem Anwar Makarim (2020) "The Kurikulum Merdeka was created to overcome learning loss due to the Covid-19 pandemic." The Kurikulum Merdeka itself has several characteristics which are intended to perfect the previous curriculum, the following are the characteristics of the Kurikulum Merdeka: Focus on essential material so that it can be worked on in more depth, more time is spent on developing competence and character which is carried out by learning using groups that discuss the context In reality, lesson hours are more flexible and learning outcomes are per phase, educators will have more freedom in developing learning and receive support from teaching tools and training materials to develop educational unit curricula, and prioritize mutual cooperation or cooperation from various units [6].

This curriculum, which is only one year old, certainly still requires adjustments, both in terms of implementation, implementation and evaluation. This attracts the interest of researchers who ultimately compete to conduct research to find solutions to problems or public curiosity about this Kurikulum Merdeka. So far there has been a lot of research related to the Kurikulum Merdeka carried out by a number of researchers, both regarding training, planning, implementation, and regarding the perceptions of teaching staff across subjects regarding the Kurikulum Merdeka. For this reason, the researchers finally studied teachers' perceptions of the Kurikulum Merdeka which focused on its implementation in teaching English at the junior high school level, including perceptions regarding the difficulties and differences felt by teachers when implementing this curriculum with the previous curriculum.

Teachers as figures who practice the Kurikulum Merdeka directly with students in the field certainly have their own perceptions in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. The teacher's perception is very important as material for the government's evaluation of whether this curriculum is ready to be implemented for all schools or still needs improvement. Reflecting on these, the researchers finally decided to conduct research on teacher perceptions, but in this research the researchers will specifically use the perceptions of English teachers from Junior High Schools especially in Banjar District. The reason this research was conducted in Banjar District is because according to the Regent of Banjar District, Saidi Mansur, in 2021-2026 [7], so by conducting this research, it will help to evaluate the education in Banjar District, especially regarding teachers' perceptions Junior High School in English subjects.

The subject of English is a subject that always experiences tug-of-war in its implementation in every educational curriculum, especially at the elementary school level[8]. In K13, the first school level curriculum makes English one of the subjects. It is mandatory, but at the elementary school level, especially in state schools, the subject of English is eliminated and is only available in certain private schools or international schools. The inconsistent existence of English subjects at the basic level in each curriculum certainly has an effect on secondary schools, namely Junior High Schools. because of this dynamic, the researchers finally chose the title "English Teachers' Perception at Junior High School Level on the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in Banjar District" as the title of their research. This research itself will be carried out in four state in Banjar District, with the following research questions: 1. What are the perceptions of English teachers regarding the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka? 2. What are the obstacles in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in English subjects?

## II. Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive technique that focuses on the perceptions of English teachers of Junior High Schools in Banjar District regarding the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. To select respondents, the researchers used a purposive sampling method where the researchers would select informants based on certain criteria[9], namely English teachers who teach using the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at the junior high school level in Banjar District, in more detail, 7 English teachers from 4 different schools in 4 different sub-districts in Banjar District, namely: Gambut, Martapura, Sungai Tabuk, and Astambul sub-districts. As for the data collection method used, namely in-depth interviews with semi-structured questions. The selection of this method is based on the fact that the researchers intends to

obtain data through interviews that flow and are not bound by a list of questions, even so, the researchers also made a list of questions that serve as a guide so that the focus of the research is maintained, here is the list of questions:

Table 1 List of Questions

No	Variables	Questions
1.	Teaching Approach used <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of approach do teachers take, especially in English subjects, in implementing the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>?</li> <li>• Does the teacher have a different approach from the previous curriculum, especially in learning English?</li> </ul>
2.	Teaching obstacle used <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What obstacles do teachers feel, especially in English subjects, in implementing the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>?</li> <li>• Are these obstacles related to facilities or something else?</li> </ul>
3.	Differences from the previous curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the differences in implementing the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i> and the K13 curriculum, especially in English subjects?</li> <li>• Which one feels better according to your personal perspective?</li> </ul>
4.	Student response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do students respond to the implementation of the <i>Kurikulum Merdeka</i>, especially in English subjects?</li> <li>• Do students welcome the implementation of this curriculum or vice versa?</li> </ul>

The data analysis used by the researchers is data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions as proposed by Miles and Huberman [10].

### III. Results and Discussion

#### A. Result

In this study, researchers conducted interviews with 7 English teachers in 4 Junior High Schools in 4 different sub-districts in Banjar Regency, namely Astambul sub-districts, Martapura sub-districts, Sungai Tabuk sub-districts and Gambut sub-districts. The identity of the resource person will be indicated by the initials of the source's name, for example SR. The following is the coding of the respondent's initials: R, AR, and PH (Gambut sub-district), Mi (Sungai Tabuk sub-district), W (Martapura sub-district), P and Mu (Astambul sub-district).

In this section the researchers described the perceptions of the interview results with tables for each variable in the list of questions presented in the previous chapter. The following are teachers' perceptions obtained through interviews:

In the first and second questions, the researchers intended to find out teachers' perceptions regarding the approach they used in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and what differences the teachers implemented from the previous curriculum.

1<sup>st</sup> question: What kind of approach do teachers take, especially in English subjects, in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*?

R: The approach I use is the CTL (Contextual Teaching and Learning) and PBL (Project Based Learning) methods, then the media used to improve children's abilities is electronic gadget media. The teaching used is often project-based which has a lot to do with the real environment. Electronic media itself is a necessity to adapt to the times, with CTL and PBL children certainly need media that can help them.

AR: In the *Kurikulum Merdeka* there is an approach called the Differentiation Approach, namely the teacher must recognize the character and background of the students first, that is the approach I take.

PH: The approach I take is more about encouraging students to memorize vocabulary, the books provided in this curriculum are very helpful in that area, because of the realization that students have not learned English in elementary school so now in junior high school learning starts from chapter 0.

Mi: I use a CTL approach that adapts to the surrounding conditions and real life.

W: This *Kurikulum Merdeka* teaches students to learn independently, students are made not to be too dependent on teachers, if previously it was the teacher center, now it is the student center. There are lots of learning resources to achieve learning goals, especially in today's digital era.

P: The approach is still relatively the same, perhaps the difference is using more digital media to help students learn.

Mu: In this curriculum students are required to be more active and the teacher becomes a facilitator.

2<sup>nd</sup> question: Does the teacher have a different approach from the previous curriculum, especially in learning English?

R: Personally, there is no difference in method or approach, because from the start in the previous curriculum I was used to using CTL and PBL methods, I was used to using projects that used technology.

AR: The difference in approach is that the previous curriculum focused more on teachers and this curriculum focuses more on students.

PH: The difference is that the material in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is simpler, simpler and more focused.

Mi: The difference in approach in this curriculum is a differentiation approach, or personal approach, whereas in the previous curriculum there was none.

W: The difference in approach is that in the past children were immediately taken to an external environment or discovered with direct objects, now more often than not on the internet, you could call an expert or take them to a museum, for example, but that would be too time consuming and expensive.

P: The difference may be that now children are more free, they can't do too much homework, it's more in that direction. Apart from that, there is a P5 program which indirectly reduces study hours.

Mu: The only difference is that the media and learning resources are richer.

It can be seen from the answers to the 2 questions related to the teacher approach used by the *Kurikulum Merdeka* above that teachers have various perceptions, although not all of them are different. A number of teachers choose to use the approach proposed by the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, namely the differentiation approach, which is a type of approach that requires teachers to know or find out the background and character of students, although from the statements of several teachers, this approach is actually not foreign and in terms of implementation in schools they really have to know the character of the students. Apart from that, teachers also implement project-based learning which requires digital media or cell phones as tools to help students so that the student center tagline can be implemented, however, in this curriculum the teacher also believes that the preparation of material becomes easier and more organized because English learning starts from basic material. From the perception above, it can also be seen that there are also teachers who do not take a different approach from the previous curriculum, either because they have been using the same approach for a long time or teachers who feel that there is no need for a different approach.

From a number of perceptions above, we can certainly understand that there are a number of different approaches taken by teachers when implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, both in terms of new or changed terms or the media used, because there are also teachers who are used to taking a similar approach in the previous curriculum but with different mentions.

Furthermore, in the third and fourth questions the author intends to find out teachers' perceptions of what obstacles teachers feel when implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and whether the obstacles are related to facilities or something else:

3<sup>th</sup> question: What obstacles do teachers feel, especially in English subjects, in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*?

R: The obstacles are because students have to complete projects using technology, whereas there are situations where not all children have smartphones.

AR: there are no significant obstacles except for the administration which is more complicated.

PH: If there are obstacles in the approach or implementation for students, it's not really urgent.

Mi: The obstacle that I feel is the need for more time to understand students. Apart from that, administratively it is also more complicated, especially for teachers who are not skilled at using IT.

W: The obstacles I feel are more about the difficulty of teachers in implementing a differentiated approach to all children, there is not enough time.

P: The obstacle is more about the reduced time students spend studying because there are other *Kurikulum Merdeka* programs, apart from that it is more about the reduced enthusiasm of children in recording material.

Mu: I think the obstacle is not from the curriculum but from children's concern for their learning needs. In English subjects, children are required to have a dictionary.

4<sup>th</sup> question: Are these obstacles related to facilities or something else?

R: This curriculum is required but not obligatory, so facilities cannot demand much because it is not mandatory.

AR: For facilities, can only adjust to what is available at the school, but here the facilities are okay, such as the internet network is adequate.

PH: There are also more obstacles to facilities, because children have to access the internet and use their own cellphones, student automatically bring cellphones to school and teachers cannot always provide supervision or always keep the cellphones.

Mi: The school's actual facilities are quite adequate, computers and projectors and internet are smooth.

W: Because everything is required to be connected to the internet, the facilities here are very limited, not all classrooms have adequate facilities.

P: In facilities, almost 100% of children have personal cellphones, in schools there are also computer labs that can be used, so so far it's safe.

Mu: As for facilities, previously there were no books, but starting from next semester there will be. For rooms, sometimes if needed we can use *Lab Kom*.

Based on teachers' perceptions regarding the obstacles to implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* above, teachers feel that the obstacles that exist mostly come from facilities, whether from children's personal cell phone devices or school facilities, although there are also schools that are adequate in terms of facilities but are still inadequate. to be used simultaneously, apart from that there is also anxiety that hinders teachers, namely the lack of student awareness of basic needs (tools) such as dictionaries. Then another obstacle felt by teachers is related to the need for more time for teachers to carry out a personal approach to implementing the differentiation approach, while teachers also have the obligation to carry out administration, this is of course also an obstacle for teachers, obstacles related to time are also felt. teachers regarding the existence of other *Kurikulum Merdeka* programs such as P5 which reduces children's learning time.



Still related to the burden that teachers must bear in adapting to the implementation of this latest curriculum, next the researchers will discuss the differences that teachers feel regarding the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the previous curriculum (K13), the following are the perceptions conveyed by teachers:

5<sup>th</sup> question: What are the differences in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the K13 curriculum, especially in English subjects?

R: According to my personal perception, in terms of implementation, there is no significant difference. Apart from that, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the previous curriculum are actually the same, it's just that there are several different names.

AR: The difference lies in the emphasis, in this curriculum students have more freedom in learning, unlike the previous curriculum the teacher had to adjust more.

PH: The difference is in the approach and more basic material for student who previously had not studied English in elementary school.

Mi: The difference is in approach. In the previous curriculum there were targets that students could achieve or not, while this was adjusted to the students' abilities.

W: The biggest difference in the previous curriculum was that we didn't use the internet much, but it must be fully realized that technology is a tool.

P: Personally, in my opinion, the practice for students is the same, the difference may be from administration such as imputing grades, some new terms such as ATP, P5, and so on.

Mu: The difference is that teachers only supervise more, although it cannot be denied that classical methods still cannot be abandoned.

6<sup>th</sup> question: Which one feels better according to your personal perspective?

R: Both were equally comfortable to implement. Because actually the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and K13 are the same, only the terms or names have changed.

AR: Testing a curriculum certainly takes time, because it has only just been implemented and of course it is not possible to judge which one is better. However, in terms of learning it is still the same, but administratively it is more time consuming

PH: I think it's the same, everything has its pluses and minuses.

Mi: In my perception, this curriculum is better because it adapts to the era that has entered the digital era.

W: Everything is situational.

P: In my opinion, it's the same, in terms of implementation it all depends on the teacher.

Based on the perceptions conveyed by the teachers above, there are several things related to the differences between the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and the previous curriculum, namely in terms of emphasis on learning, if in the previous curriculum the focus was more on the teacher, the teacher being the center of learning, the teacher being the main focus of students, on the other hand, in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, students are emphasized more to be the center, students are supported more actively than the teacher. In this curriculum there is also the term differentiation approach where teachers are encouraged to know and find out more about students' backgrounds and characters, although a number of teachers admit that in practice this approach has been applied for a long time, but the term has only recently emerged. Apart from that, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is also considered a curriculum that is suitable for the current digital

era. However, even though there are various perceptions regarding the differences between this curriculum and the previous curriculum, what about student responses according to teacher perceptions?

Furthermore, in questions seventh and eighth, the researchers intended to find out students' responses to the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* base on teacher's perception and whether students could accept it or not:

7<sup>th</sup> question: How do students respond to the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, especially in English subjects?

R: Students depend on how the teacher brings them, In the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, it is true that it adapts to what children like, but it goes back to how the teacher brings the child to like what the teacher gives so that its implementation is easily accepted.

AR: Because this curriculum places more emphasis on students, this curriculum is very adapted to the students, so that students get more practice and it is more fun for students.

PH: In this curriculum there is something called positive discipline where teachers cannot reprimand harshly and loudly, they must use positive words. Although of course it's good because children don't learn under pressure, but in spirit it feels lacking because the pressure isn't there.

Mi: Student acceptance is good, because it adapts to abilities, there are no targets, and the learning is more modern.

W: Actually, students depend on their teachers, so learning is fine. but now teachers find it difficult to reprimand students, because even a little glare is a problem, punishment is not allowed.

P: Because there are many other programs, I think students actually enjoy it. In the English subject itself, children still give the same response.

Mu: There is no change from the students, because it all depends on the teacher.

8<sup>th</sup> question: Do students welcome the implementation of this curriculum or vice versa?

R: Students just accept it positively.

AR: I think students are fine with this curriculum change.

PH: Students just follow along.

Mi: Of course students gave positive responses.

W: Students don't mind that much.

P: Students just accept it.

Mu: The response was positive.

According to the teacher's perception regarding student responses above, all of them have a uniform opinion, namely that students accept this curriculum, because this curriculum has the slogan "Independence" and adapts to the character and needs of students, apart from that because in reality the curriculum or teaching all depends on how the teacher delivers it, but there is a policy which is called positive discipline which according to some teachers can reduce student's enthusiasm because of the pressure that makes teachers not be able to give firm warnings, although this is not a negative thing, according to a number of teachers it reduces children's enthusiasm for learning, the same as the policy of not providing target to students, according to the teacher's perception above, this can reduce students' enthusiasm for learning and competitive spirit.

## B. Discussion

In the research results section, the researchers has written down the perceptions of Junior High School English teachers regarding the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Banjar District, then in this discussion section the researchers will categorize these perceptions into positive and negative list based on data in the form of perceptions resulting from interviews that have been conducted, as follows. is the data presentation:

Positive perception:

- 1) There is a necessity to use digital media or the internet as a tool in completing project-based learning.
- 2) More organized material in English textbooks.
- 3) The existence of the term student center means that students are no longer too dependent on teachers.
- 4) There are more learning resources.
- 5) There are directions and instructions for teachers in dividing study groups in this curriculum.
- 6) The *Kurikulum Merdeka* is more in line with the times.
- 7) Learning is adjusted to students' abilities.
- 8) There is positive discipline that protects children from harsh reprimands that put pressure on students.  
There are fun projects for students.

Negative perceptions:

- 1) There are still children who do not have cell phones as learning aids.
- 2) Student's use of personal cell phones requires teachers to provide extra supervision.
- 3) Administration is more complicated
- 4) There is an *Kurikulum Merdeka* program (P5) which reduces children's study time.
- 5) Excessive time is needed to carry out a differentiated approach to each child (especially if the school has many students).
- 6) Teachers with poor IT skills experience difficulties.
- 7) There is still a lack of room facilities that support digital activities for some schools.
- 8) The existence of positive discipline makes teachers make mistakes in giving reprimands.

Based on the results of interviews conducted with 7 English teachers who implemented the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in Junior High Schools in the Banjar District above, 9 positive perceptions and 8 negative perceptions were found by the teachers. The first positive perception is that there is a necessity to use digital media or the internet as a learning aid. This perception is in accordance with the concept of independent learning which was also discussed by [11] in their research, where independent learning itself is part of Society 5.0, which is integrated with technological advances and social problems, can be seen from the need for technology for the social life of individuals. This independence can also be seen from the positive perception that follows, namely the existence of the term student center which means students are no longer too dependent on teachers. Student-centered learning is a 21st century concept that implements a new curriculum using technology and students' own abilities to achieve certain standards. higher than traditional learning styles (Overby, 2012).

Apart from adapting to the current era, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* itself has other positive perceptions, such as learning no longer having specific targets so that learning in this curriculum adapts to the students' abilities, especially in English subjects, this has been explained a little in the previous chapter. Then there is the term positive discipline which protects students from harsh reprimands that put pressure on students[13]. Positive discipline itself is a fostering and educational approach that is based on efforts to develop positive thinking and behavior, Kemendikbudristek 2022, "Kemendikbudristek is committed to continuing to create a safe and comfortable educational environment, and free from all forms of violence," (Ramadhani, 2022).

Apart from offering a safe and comfortable environment, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* also offers fun projects for students in accordance with the positive perceptions of the teachers above, this project is P5, the explanation of which is also in the previous chapter. Finally, regarding more organized material in English books, this can be seen from the book "English for Nusantara" where in the book the English



lesson material starts from chapter 0 studying the alphabet, numbers, colours and other basic material . Apart from that, this curriculum also provides direction and instructions for teachers in dividing study groups[15], this can be seen in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* module when P5 is implemented.

As for the negative perception obtained, namely regarding the use of digital-based media, in fact there are still students who do not have cell phones which can be used as learning aids. This obstacle was also found in research by [16] which discussed infrastructure constraints in implementing the independent curriculum. Not only related to the facilities in their research, (Koroh, 2022) also encountered other obstacles, namely related to the readiness of teaching staff, this is also in accordance with negative perceptions regarding teachers' lack of IT skills, as well as the complexity of administration found in the research that researchers have conducted.

This also includes reduced learning time due to the P5 program and the need for more time for teachers to carry out a differentiated approach to each student (especially if the school has many students) Plus teachers must provide extra supervision if students have to bring cellphones as learning aids. Several of these things become obstacles to the readiness of teaching staff in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Also related to teacher readiness, there is positive discipline which makes teachers make mistakes when giving reprimands to students.

#### IV. Conclusion

There are two categories of perception, namely positive and negative perceptions. Based on the results obtained, 9 positive perceptions and 8 negative perceptions were found, it can be concluded that the teacher gives the perception that this curriculum is a curriculum that really supports students, with the term student center which gives students more opportunities to develop themselves, then positive discipline which provides protection for students so that they are always in a comfortable environment, as well as a differentiation approach which makes students are understood personally. As for the obstacles, teachers perceive that in terms of facilities, the readiness of a number of teachers, and time are still the biggest obstacles, because this curriculum requires teachers to be versatile both in administrative management, understanding student character, as well as in time management, which teachers find it difficult to optimize simultaneously. All perceptions, whether positive or negative, given by the 7 English Teachers above regarding the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* can of course only be followed up by the government, especially the Ministry of Education which holds the highest throne regarding the education system in Indonesia.

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