

## English Teachers' Challenge in Implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum at Islamic Boarding School

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**Abstract.** The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Islamic boarding schools presents unique challenges for English language teachers. While much research has focused on the *Merdeka* Curriculum in general education, studies on its application in pesantren, especially in English language teaching (ELT), remain limited. This research gap is significant, as pesantren play a crucial role in Indonesia's education system. This study examines the challenges faced by teachers in designing lesson plans, delivering instruction, utilizing media, and conducting assessments in English language teaching under the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected from two teachers one experienced and one novice through semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and classroom observations. The findings identified four main challenges: limited understanding of the curriculum, diverse student needs, low student motivation, and inadequate teaching resources. Despite these challenges, teachers employed strategies such as integrating religious content into English lessons, utilizing digital tools, and applying innovative teaching methods to engage students. This study highlights the need for professional development, mentoring programs, and improved access to teaching resources to support the effective implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in *pesantren*.

**Keywords:** English Teachers, Islamic Boarding School, *Merdeka* Curriculum

### 1. INTRODUCTION

English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia has developed rapidly, influenced by changes in national education policies and global pedagogical trends [1]. In particular, with the introduction of the *Merdeka* Curriculum by the Ministry of Education and Culture which emphasizes flexibility, differentiated learning, and project-based assessment. The *Merdeka* Curriculum is designed to promote student autonomy, critical thinking, and competency-based learning, aligning with the principles of 21st-century education [2]. Teachers play a pivotal role in designing, executing, and evaluating the English language education program, as they are key agents in ensuring effective learning outcomes [3] [4].

Although the *Merdeka* Curriculum has been progressively implemented in public and private schools, its implementation in Islamic boarding schools (*Pesantren*) presents unique challenges. Islamic boarding schools represent traditional educational institutions in which Islamic teachings are the primary focus. These schools are generally led by a *kyai*, who holds a central position in both pedagogical and administrative affairs [5]. Unlike public schools, Islamic boarding schools adopt a dual education model that integrates Islamic studies with general subjects such as English language instruction. This integration offers both unique opportunities and particular challenges in language teaching [6]. This integration poses significant challenges for teachers, as they must balance modern teaching methodologies with traditional Islamic values and institutional expectations.

In the field of English language teaching (ELT), educators often encounter numerous challenges arising from various contextual, pedagogical, and institutional factors [7] [8] [9]. One of the obstacles that hinders teachers in achieving learning objectives is related to the implementation of the curriculum in educational institutions. In Indonesia, the *Merdeka* Curriculum provides teachers with greater autonomy to design lesson plans that are tailored to students' individual needs and learning contexts [2], [10], [11]. English is included in the *Merdeka* Curriculum because it serves as a global language. Teaching English focuses on developing students' communicative competence, enabling effective interaction in diverse international contexts [12]. The implementation of English language teaching in Islamic boarding schools requires a special approach due to various challenges, such as limited learning resources, traditional

teaching methods, misalignment between general and religious education, and a lack of professional training for teachers in modern ELT approaches [11]-[13].

Indonesia has implemented the *Merdeka* Curriculum in which the educational approach focuses on essential material and instills a commitment to achieving deep understanding [16]. This strategy provides educators with the flexibility to customize learning, allowing them to select specific sections of the textbook or combine materials from different grade levels to meet the diverse learning needs of students. Besides using textbooks as the primary source, educators are also encouraged to utilize a variety of additional resources, including those available through the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform [17]. In addition to academic lessons, the *Merdeka* Curriculum also provides special time for strengthening students' character through the five principles values (*Pancasila*).

The *Merdeka* Curriculum emphasizes experiential learning, which is grounded in constructivist theory, where students acquire knowledge through real-world experiences. Teachers' understanding and readiness to implement constructivism play a crucial role in the successful implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum [18]. In Islamic boarding schools, teachers are required to integrate the national curriculum with religious content, which creates specific challenges in English language teaching particularly in balancing communicative objectives with institutional and religious values [19].

Concerning this, several studies have reported the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the curriculum in various contexts. The challenges of curriculum implementation in high schools found that the main challenges faced by teachers were a lack of resources, inadequate training, and high workload [20]. Several studies have examined the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in state schools and vocational institutions [21] [22], [23], while its implementation in Islamic boarding school educational institutions aims to improve the quality of education [24]. Teaching English and Plus Curriculum: Teachers' Challenges and Strategies in an Indonesian *Madrasah* [25]. The difficulties of teaching English in rural elementary schools in Bangladesh identified that most challenges stemmed from inadequate teacher training, improper teaching methods and materials, limited face-to-face hours, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient pedagogical knowledge [26]. Transforming islamic education through *merdeka* curriculum in *pesantren* [27]. Additionally, Nigeria highlighted that maximizing the use of technology and providing adequate supporting facilities are effective solutions to curriculum implementation issues [28].

Many studies have explored the *Merdeka* Curriculum, but research on its implementation in Islamic boarding schools remains limited. This gap in research is crucial to address, as Islamic boarding schools play a significant role in the education system, and understanding the specific challenges they face can provide valuable insights for improving teaching practices and curriculum implementation. This study aims to analyze teachers' challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum for English Language Teaching (ELT) in Islamic boarding schools and explore the strategies they use to overcome these challenges. By addressing the gap, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of teacher training programs, the formulation of curriculum policies, and the improvement of English teaching practices in Islamic boarding schools. The research questions of this study are: What are the teachers' challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum for teaching English in Islamic boarding schools? What strategies do teachers use to overcome these challenges?

## 2. METHOD

Qualitative research with a case study approach was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the challenges that teachers faced in teaching English using the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Islamic boarding schools. Case studies were instrumental in qualitative research because they allowed for a comprehensive analysis of a particular case so that detailed information could be revealed about phenomena such as activities, processes, or groups of individuals [29]. Participants were selected through purposive sampling by applying a practical case strategy. Purposive sampling is employed when the researcher intends to select participants with deep insight or firsthand experience related to the phenomenon under investigation [30]. This study involved two participants, English teachers who taught at an Islamic boarding school. The first participant was an experienced teacher who had more than five years of experience teaching English. The other participant was a novice teacher with one year of experience teaching English. Experienced teachers possess a more advanced professional vision in classroom management, characterized by more selective visual attention and deeper knowledge-based reasoning compared to novice teachers [31].

The data collection involved semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and observations. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with English teachers to identify their challenges in

teaching English using the *Merdeka* Curriculum. To support the interview findings, relevant documents like lesson plans and teaching materials were also analyzed. Meanwhile, classroom observations were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of how the *Merdeka* Curriculum was implemented in real teaching situations. These observations focused on teaching strategies, student engagement, and the challenges encountered during classroom instruction. Document analysis and observation were used in conjunction with interviews to corroborate data from various sources. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. It involved organizing and preparing data, reading all data thoroughly, conducting a detailed analysis with the coding process, creating data descriptions, representing themes in qualitative narratives, and interpreting data [32].

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of interviews with two English teachers, document analysis, and classroom observation in the Islamic boarding school revealed that they face several challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. These challenges include difficulties in designing lesson plans, obstacles in lesson implementation, limited access to and utilization of learning media, and obstacles in conducting learning assessments. To overcome these challenges, the teachers have implemented various strategies and participated in training programs to enhance their understanding of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

#### Teachers' Challenges in Designing the Lesson Plans

Based on the interviews and document analysis English teachers face challenges in designing lesson plans based on the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

Teacher 1 said, *"Kurangnya pemahaman tentang Kurikulum Merdeka menyebabkan kesulitan dalam membuat modul pembelajaran, seperti cara menyusun hasil belajar dan tujuan pembelajaran. Selain itu, di pesantren, keberagaman siswa juga menjadi tantangan dalam menyesuaikan materi dengan kebutuhan belajar siswa yang fokus pada pelajaran agama."*

*"Lack of understanding of the Merdeka curriculum so that there are difficulties in creating teaching modules such as how to compile learning outcomes and learning objectives. In addition, in the Islamic boarding school, the students are diverse, which is also a challenge to adjust the material to the learning needs of students who focus on religious lessons."*

Teacher 2 said, *"Guru di pesantren sering menghadapi kendala seperti kurangnya pengetahuan tentang kurikulum Merdeka yang baku, keterbatasan akses terhadap sumber belajar modern, dan keterbatasan waktu karena adanya integrasi pelajaran agama. Selain itu, santri memiliki tingkat kemampuan bahasa Inggris yang berbeda-beda, sehingga sulit untuk merancang pembelajaran yang tepat."*

*"Teacher in Islamic boarding school often face obstacles such as a lack of knowledge about the standardized Merdeka curriculum, limited access to modern learning resources and time constraints due to the integration of religious lessons. In addition, students have different levels of English language ability, making it difficult to design appropriate learning."*

One of the main challenges is the lack of understanding and standard guidelines regarding the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Islamic boarding schools so teachers have difficulty in compiling appropriate teaching modules. Teachers have difficulty in determining learning objectives and achievement targets, especially since the *Merdeka* Curriculum emphasizes flexible and competency-based learning. Challenges in determining learning objectives and achievement targets arise due to a shift in orientation from content-based achievements to competency-based achievements, which require careful planning, such as formulating learning outcomes, learning objectives, and learning trajectories. The unique characteristics of Islamic boarding schools that are different from public schools also require careful adaptation and integration so that Islamic values are maintained without ignoring the essence of the national curriculum.

The diversity of students' educational backgrounds and different levels of English proficiency are important factors to consider. These differences present challenges for teachers in designing lesson plans that can accommodate all students. Some students have experience learning English at their previous schools, while others are just starting to learn the language. This situation requires teachers to work harder in adjusting the materials and teaching methods so that they can be understood by all students, both those who are already proficient and those who are still beginners. If not handled properly, these

differences in ability can cause some students to feel left behind or lose confidence in learning. Therefore, it is important for teachers to use a flexible approach and develop teaching strategies that meet the needs of each student.

Based on the findings from the interviews with English teachers at Islamic boarding schools, religious education is considered a priority in the overall learning process. This influences the way general subjects such as English are taught. Teachers explained that English language instruction must align with the values and goals of religious education. As a result, English teaching cannot be separated from the religious context of the school, but needs to be designed in such a way that it does not distract from the main focus of religious studies. Some teachers expressed concern that if English lessons become too dominant, students' focus on religious subjects may decrease. Therefore, they emphasized the need for an integrative approach, where English materials can be linked to Islamic content. This approach is intended to maintain a balance between English language learning and the strengthening of religious values, while ensuring the learning process aligns with the vision of the Islamic boarding school.

Students' diverse educational backgrounds including differences in learning styles, comprehension levels, and learning pace significantly influence their readiness to enter the teaching profession and present ongoing challenges for educators in adapting their instructional approaches [33] [34]. Meanwhile, this study highlights the various difficulties in designing lesson plans at Islamic boarding schools and their impact on the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. This study explores the educational context in Islamic boarding schools, which has unique characteristics, including the integration of religious education and varying levels of English proficiency among students. It provides practical insights into the challenges teachers face in adapting teaching methods in an environment with limited resources and access to a modern curriculum.

### Teachers' Challenges in Lesson Implementation

After preparing the lesson plan, the next challenge faced by English teachers in Islamic boarding school based on interviews and classroom observation is implementing the learning process in the classroom.

Teacher 1 said, "*Guru mengalami kesulitan dalam menggunakan buku kurikulum merdeka yang lebih banyak memuat gambar sehingga guru juga harus mencari tahu dan menyesuaikan materi apa saja yang akan dipelajari. Siswa juga lebih fokus pada pelajaran agama dan menganggap bahasa Inggris kurang penting dan pemahaman mereka terhadap pelajaran bahasa Inggris menjadi lambat.*"

"Teachers have difficulty in using the *Merdeka* curriculum book which contains more pictures so teachers also have to find out and adjust what material will be studied. Students also focus more on religious lessons and consider English less important and their understanding of English lessons becomes slow."

Teacher 2 said, "*Salah satu tantangannya adalah menyeimbangkan pengajaran bahasa Inggris dengan pelajaran agama yang seringkali menjadi prioritas bukan berdasarkan kurikulum Merdeka yang berlaku. Banyak siswa yang kurang terpapar bahasa Inggris di luar kelas, sehingga penguasaan bahasanya pun lambat. Guru juga menghadapi siswa yang menganggap bahasa Inggris kurang relevan dengan pelajaran agama di pesantren.*"

"One of the challenges is balancing English teaching with religious lessons which are often a priority not based on the applicable *Merdeka* curriculum. Many students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, so language acquisition is slower. Teachers also face students who consider English less relevant to religious lessons in Islamic boarding school."

Various challenges in teaching English in Islamic boarding schools, especially in adapting the *Merdeka* Curriculum to the needs of students. One of the main obstacles is the use of *Merdeka* Curriculum books that contain more images, requiring teachers to adapt the material themselves to be relevant to the learning context in Islamic boarding schools. Teachers feel the need to modify or add their own content so that the material remains in line with the values of the Islamic boarding schools and can be understood by the students. This study also found that not all teachers have the skills or time to carry out this adaptation effectively, which affects the overall quality of learning. Therefore, it is important for teachers to get support in the form of training or additional resources that can help them integrate English material with approaches and values that are appropriate to the Islamic boarding school environment.

In addition, students prioritize religious lessons and consider English less important, making it increasingly difficult for teachers to build student motivation in studying the subject. Classroom observation confirmed these findings, during English lessons, many students appeared disengaged some were talking to each other, while only a few were actively participating. The teacher often had to switch to the local language to explain concepts, which showed students' low English comprehension. Out of 19 students, 14 were also reported to be less enthusiastic about attending English classes and considered the subject less important than religious studies. For most students, English is not considered an important skill to master, so they do not have a strong motivation to study it seriously. As a result, their understanding of the material develops slowly. In some cases, students seemed more responsive when the material was connected to religious content, such as vocabulary related to Islamic values.

Another challenge is balancing English teaching with religious studies, which remains a major focus in Islamic boarding schools. 15 out of 19 students said they were less exposed to English outside the classroom because they were more focused on memorizing the Al-quran, which slowed down their language acquisition. Students are rarely exposed to English, making the learning process less effective due to limited opportunities for independent practice. The lack of use of English in everyday life in Islamic boarding schools further slows down their English development. This poses a challenge for teachers, as they need to find the right strategies to keep students engaged in learning, even though a supportive environment for developing English skills is not readily available.

The challenges of motivating, guiding, and encouraging students, especially when they face learning difficulties and perceive English as a difficult subject [35] [36]. These findings align with the results of this study, which indicate that students in Islamic boarding schools are less motivated to learn English because they prioritize religious studies and consider English less relevant. However, this study provides more specific insights into the Islamic boarding schools context, where limited exposure to English outside the classroom and a lack of environmental support further slow students' language development. This study highlights the challenges teachers face in adapting the *Merdeka* Curriculum materials to meet the needs of Islamic boarding schools students, an aspect not extensively covered in previous research.

## Teachers' Challenges in Using Media

In the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, the use of technology as a learning medium is an essential aspect expected to enhance teaching effectiveness. Based on the interviews teachers and classroom observation in Islamic boarding school face various challenges in integrating technology into the teaching and learning processes.

Teacher 1 said, "*Kurangnya sarana prasarana yang mendukung proses pembelajaran seperti buku, proyektor, dan akses internet. Ketersediaan sarana prasarana yang masih kurang dan siswa yang tinggal di asrama sehingga tidak menggunakan ponsel juga menjadi kendala, siswa hanya bisa mendapatkan informasi dan ilmu dari guru. Sebagai guru masih kurang memiliki keterampilan dalam menggunakan teknologi dan membuat video pembelajaran yang menarik.*"

"Lack of infrastructure that supports the learning process such as books, projectors and internet access. The availability of infrastructure is still lacking and students who live in dormitories so they don't use cellphones are also a challenge, students can only get information and knowledge from teachers. As teachers, they still lack skills in using technology and making interesting learning videos"

Teacher 2 said, "*Guru sering kali kesulitan dengan keterbatasan akses ke sumber daya digital, seperti proyektor komputer atau koneksi internet yang dapat membuat pembelajaran menjadi kurang menarik. Kurangnya buku teks atau materi interaktif terkini dapat menghambat perkembangan bahasa Inggris siswa. Anggaran sekolah yang terbatas juga menyebabkan investasi pada media pembelajaran modern sehingga penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka kurang optimal di pesantren.*"

"Teachers often struggle with limited access to digital resources, such as computer projectors or internet connections that can make learning less interesting. The lack of up-to-date textbooks or interactive materials can hinder students' English development. The limited school budget also invests in modern learning media so that the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum is less than optimal in *pesantren*"

Lack of infrastructure and limited access to technology were found to be key challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the Islamic boarding schools observed in this study, especially in teaching English. Based on teacher interviews and classroom observation, the school had limited facilities such as books, projectors, and internet access, which made the learning process less effective. Teachers had to rely on printed materials and verbal explanations because digital tools were not available or accessible. During English lessons, the internet connection was often unstable, preventing the use of online resources such as educational videos or interactive learning platforms. As a result, teachers could not fully utilize digital materials that might have enhanced student engagement and understanding. Moreover the english teachers mentioned that they had never received training in creating interactive or technology based media, such as educational videos or digital applications, which limited their ability to make learning more interesting. This lack of technological infrastructure and professional development support has made it difficult for teachers to implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum effectively in this Islamic boarding schools context.

Furthermore, students who live in dormitories are not allowed to use mobile phones, which further limits their access to information and learning resources outside the classroom. As a result, students rely entirely on teachers to obtain learning materials. The limited school budget for investing in modern learning media also poses a challenge, leading to suboptimal implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Islamic boarding schools. Investments in modern technological tools, such as language laboratories, interactive learning software, or better internet access, are often not a top priority. These limitations affect students' English language development, as they do not have access to more diverse and interactive learning materials.

The research conducted highlights challenges in the use of technology in education, particularly regarding the limitations of hardware, software, and access to a stable internet connection [37] [38] [39] [40]. Their studies indicate that these constraints can hinder the effectiveness of learning, both in utilizing digital resources and in facilitating teacher-student interactions. These findings align with this study, which also emphasizes infrastructure limitations in Islamic boarding schools, including restricted internet access, the absence of devices such as computers and projectors, and the lack of interactive learning materials, all of which affect the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. However, this study has the advantage of providing a more specific perspective on the context of Islamic boarding schools, where technological limitations not only impact learning in general but are also exacerbated by internal policies, such as the prohibition of mobile phone use for dormitory students. This study highlights the challenges related to teachers' readiness to integrate technology into the learning process, an aspect that has not been extensively discussed in previous research.

## Teachers' Challenges in Learning Assesment

In the assessment process, teachers face various complex challenges, particularly in processing student evaluation results.

Teacher 1 said, *"Keterbatasan waktu juga menjadi tantangan dalam melakukan asesmen terhadap siswa karena jumlah pertemuan hanya satu kali dalam seminggu. Kurikulum Merdeka sangat menganjurkan pembelajaran yang berdiferensiasi bagi setiap siswa yang memiliki gaya belajar dan minat yang berbeda, namun karena keterbatasan waktu, hal ini menjadi kendala dalam pelaksanaan pembelajaran dan sulitnya melakukan asesmen secara efektif."*

"Time constraints are also a challenge in assessing students because the number of meetings is only once a week. The *Merdeka* curriculum strongly encourages differentiated learning for each student who has different learning styles and interests, but due to time constraints, this becomes an obstacle in implementing learning and it is difficult to carry out assessments effectively."

Teacher 2 said, *"Menilai kemampuan bahasa Inggris siswa sulit dilakukan karena perbedaan tingkat kompetensi. Kurikulum Merdeka menekankan penilaian formatif yang berfokus pada pengembangan individu siswa. Selain itu, guru yang tidak terbiasa dengan format penilaian menjadi tantangan bagi mereka."*

"Assessing students' English skills is difficult because of the different levels of competence. The *Merdeka* curriculum emphasizes formative assessment that focuses on the individual development of students. In addition, teachers who are not familiar with the assessment format are a challenge for them"

Time constraints are one of the main challenges in assessing students' English language skills in Islamic boarding schools. With classes held only once a week, teachers struggle to implement effective assessments, especially in adapting evaluation methods to meet the needs and development of each student. The *Merdeka* Curriculum emphasizes differentiated learning and formative assessments that focus on individual student progress, but time constraints make this difficult to implement. Teachers must balance delivering materials, practicing language skills, and conducting assessments, which often feel lacking. The limited time allocated for English language learning in Islamic boarding schools presents significant challenges for teachers in delivering lessons and conducting assessments effectively.

In addition, students' varying English proficiency levels further complicate the assessment process. Teachers face challenges in evaluating students with different learning styles and levels of understanding. Another obstacle is the lack of understanding among teachers regarding the assessment format recommended in the *Merdeka* Curriculum. As a result, the assessments conducted do not fully reflect each students' individual progress. In a single class, students demonstrate varying levels of understanding, ranging from those with a strong foundation in English to those who are completely new to the language. The *Merdeka* Curriculum encourages differentiated assessments that are tailored to each student's needs and learning styles. However, in practice, this is challenging due to time and resource constraints. Teachers must find ways to assess students fairly and accurately despite these limitations and their heavy workloads. Adapting to the new assessment system presents another challenge for teachers. Not all of them are familiar with the assessment format introduced in the *Merdeka* Curriculum, requiring them to adjust to a more formative and student-centered evaluation method. The lack of training in understanding the new assessment system makes it difficult for some teachers to implement it effectively.

Time constraints as a major obstacle in English language learning and assessment, resulting in the inability to comprehensively teach and evaluate all language skills [6]. This finding aligns with the present study, which reveals that the limited English learning sessions only once a week in Islamic boarding schools hinder teachers from effectively delivering lessons and conducting assessments. However, this study provides a more specific perspective by addressing the complexity of assessment in the unique context of Islamic boarding schools, where the primary focus is on religious education, students exhibit highly diverse levels of English proficiency, and resources are limited. This study identifies teachers' lack of understanding of the assessment format in the *Merdeka* Curriculum which has not been extensively explored in previous research.

### Teacher strategies to overcome challenges

Based on the interviews teachers have strategies to overcome challenges.

Teacher 1 said, "*Guru memaksimalkan pembelajaran secara kreatif dan efektif apabila tersedia media, guru memanfaatkannya dalam pembelajaran seperti menonton video dan menggunakan LKPD. Siswa menghafal kosakata sebelum memulai pembelajaran untuk memahami kata dalam bahasa Inggris. Guru dan sekolah bekerja sama untuk mendukung kelancaran pembelajaran bahasa Inggris di pondok pesantren.*"

"Teachers maximize learning creatively and effectively if media is available, teachers use it in learning such as watching videos and using LKPD. Students memorize vocabulary before starting learning to understand words in English. Teachers and schools work together to support the smooth learning of English in Islamic boarding school"

Teacher 2 said, "*Guru menggunakan berbagai strategi seperti mengintegrasikan bahasa Inggris ke dalam mata pelajaran agama agar pembelajaran lebih relevan dan menarik. Guru juga dapat menggunakan sumber daya atau media yang murah dan gratis untuk melengkapi pengajaran. Mencari metode pembelajaran yang menarik yang dapat mendorong dan membantu siswa belajar bahasa Inggris secara efektif.*"

"Teachers use various strategies such as integrating English into religious subjects to make learning more relevant and interesting. Teachers can also use low-cost and free resources or media to complement teaching. Look for interesting learning methods that can encourage and help students learn English effectively."

Teachers have strategies to overcome various challenges in teaching English in Islamic boarding schools. They try to find various sources of information to support the teaching process, look for references related to assessments, and attend regular training. They take online training independently, discuss with colleagues, and collaborate with the school to find the best solutions in implementing more effective teaching and assessment methods. By understanding the *Merdeka* Curriculum in more depth,

they can develop more effective teaching strategies that are tailored to students' needs. In class, teachers maximize learning creatively and effectively by utilizing available media, such as educational videos and Student Worksheets (LKPD), to make lessons more interesting and interactive. Students are also encouraged to memorize vocabulary before starting lessons to improve their understanding of English.

Additionally, teachers implement various strategies such as integrating English into religious subjects to make learning more relevant to students' daily lives and seeking engaging teaching methods by utilizing free or low-cost and easily accessible resources and media to support their instruction. By combining English with religious subjects, teachers help students see the connection between the language and their everyday experiences in the Islamic boarding school, which motivates them to study more diligently. These efforts aim to overcome limitations in infrastructure and resources, ensuring that English learning in Islamic boarding school becomes more effective. Teachers continuously seek innovative and engaging teaching methods to encourage students to learn English effectively, despite the existing constraints.

Professional development in the *Merdeka* Curriculum encompasses various aspects aimed at enhancing the capacity of teachers and education personnel. However, this research provides a more specific insight into the challenges faced by teachers in Islamic boarding schools, such as limited access to quality training, a lack of supporting facilities, and the need to adapt teaching methods to a religion-based curriculum. In addition, this study reveals how teachers in Islamic boarding schools implement creative strategies, such as integrating English into religious subjects and utilizing free resources, which have not been widely discussed in previous research. Therefore, this study expands the understanding of teacher professional development in the context of religion-based education, which presents unique challenges and dynamics different from public schools.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study identified four main challenges faced by teachers in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum for English teaching in Islamic boarding schools: difficulties in designing lesson plans, obstacles in lesson implementation, limited access to learning media, and challenges in conducting assessments. These challenges stem from a lack of curriculum understanding, students' low motivation, inadequate learning facilities, and time constraints for assessment. Despite these difficulties, teachers have employed strategies such as integrating English with religious subjects, utilizing digital resources, and adopting innovative teaching methods to enhance student engagement. The findings highlight the need for professional development programs, teacher mentoring, and increased access to teaching resources to support the effective implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Addressing these issues will not only improve English language teaching in Islamic boarding schools but also contribute to students' overall educational development. Additionally, collaboration between educational institutions, policymakers, and technology providers is crucial to overcoming these obstacles and ensuring that teachers are well-equipped to deliver quality English instruction. Further research is necessary to explore additional strategies and policy improvements that can facilitate better curriculum adaptation in similar educational contexts, ultimately fostering a more effective and supportive learning environment.

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