


# Teachers Reflective Practices and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning English in the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

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## A B S T R A C T

The Merdeka Curriculum is a groundbreaking curriculum from the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia that aims to further empower all educational units and teachers in developing the potential possessed by students in the current advanced era, which requires competent abilities and skills. The objectives of this research are (1) to describe the reflective teaching practices of the Merdeka Curriculum in English at NW Mataram Junior High School, grade 2, and (2) to explore the impact of teacher reflection on English teaching and learning in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Using a qualitative case study approach where data is collected from several sources, with the data sources coming from the 8th-grade English teacher, the researcher then conducts direct observations, in-depth interviews with the teacher, and analyzes documents related to the teacher's activities on reflective teaching. This study involves a class and a teacher as participants. Based on the findings (1) English teachers previously used reflective practices to prepare and deliver English teaching to students by assessing previous achievements setting constructive criteria and modifying teaching methods for future success in teaching English. (2) Reflective teaching practices have a significant impact on English teaching and learning, as they can enhance teachers' competencies and teaching quality, optimize students' learning outcomes, and strengthen students' critical and collaborative thinking skills.

**Keywords:** *Reflective, Merdeka Curriculum, Teacher Reflective, Strategies*

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## INTRODUCTION

Merdeka Curriculum is a flexible curriculum that focuses on essential materials. This curriculum aims to develop students' competencies as learners with Pancasila character. This Merdeka Curriculum has been developed by the central government to renew knowledge and support the continuous development of science and technology in accordance with the needs and changes of the times.

The Merdeka Curriculum is also established as the basic framework and structure of the curriculum for all educational units in Indonesia, aimed at improving the quality of education for all students. The Merdeka Curriculum is expected to facilitate teachers and school principals in improving the quality of learning and other indicators measured in the National Assessment/Education Report, school/madrasah accreditation, as well as the minimum education service standards. In its implementation, the focus of teachers will be as facilitators and as evaluative media in the learning of the curriculum used.

However, in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, teachers face many challenges in carrying out the Merdeka curriculum in the field. One of the challenges faced by educators is the readiness of teachers to implement classroom learning. According to Mulyasa in Ningsih (2023), the Merdeka Curriculum policy requires self-reflection to address

educational challenges in line with the times. Curriculum changes must be accompanied by teachers' readiness to implement the curriculum.

Teachers' limited understanding of the implementation of the independent curriculum often becomes the main obstacle. Therefore, Marshall (2020) suggests that teachers engage in reflective practice to evaluate the learning process and enhance their knowledge and skills in implementing the independent curriculum.

Reflective practice allows teachers to critically analyze the strengths and weaknesses in teaching and identify areas for improvement (Cherrington & Loveridge, 2014). Through continuous reflection, teachers can adjust their planning and teaching methods to more effectively facilitate student learning outcomes. Thus, the implementation of the independent curriculum in Indonesia requires efforts to enhance teachers' competencies, especially through strengthening reflective practices in evaluating the learning process, particularly for English language learning.

Many researchers have conducted on reflective teaching research. For example, the study conducted by Ayu, et al (2022) this study conducted by teachers at MTsS YMPI Rappang face in doing reflective teaching through students' feedback. The researcher found the teacher implemented reflective teaching through students' feedback in 4 steps, namely data collection, data analysis, reflection, and plan for action. The obstacle that the teacher at MTs YMPI Rappang faced in doing reflective teaching through students' feedback is time because he has to provide time to teaching in the school, teaching in his English course, and providing time as teacher guidance and counseling.

The study conducted by Muna Aryal (2024) the study conducted by researcher about the importance of reflective teaching and check the teachers' awareness of reflective teaching. It shows the need for reflective practice in classroom practices or how a teacher's practice in the classroom can be improved through reflective teaching. The information of this study was generated through secondary sources and interviews of research participants, two English teachers of public schools from different parts of Nepal. Also, the study examines how the teacher educator created opportunities for student teachers to develop their reflective practices during their practice teaching sessions.

The previous studies show some teachers perceived impact of reflective teaching. Most of study conducted their research at university and school by examining lectures, teachers, and students. Meanwhile, in this study, the researcher focuses her investigation on the teachers' reflective practices in the class and its impact for teachers and student learning. Also, the implementation of reflective teaching with the teachers' understanding about reflective teaching and the implementation in curriculum Merdeka for reflective teaching in teaching and learning process.

## METHOD

One In this study, the researcher uses case studies as part of qualitative research to assist the researcher and investigate the previously described issues. Creswell prefers the case study approach for qualitative research. Creswell also suggests that researchers who are developing case study research should first consider the most appropriate type of case. The case may take the form of a single case, a collective case, a case that spans multiple locations, or a case that focuses on a specific issue (intrinsic or instrumental). Second, when choosing the case for study, we can examine it from various angles, including different perspectives on the issue, process, or event. You can choose from ordinary cases, accessible cases, or unusual cases. In this research, the data were selected information suited with the proposed research questions. Thus, data represented the answers of the research questions. According to Creswell technique of collecting data in qualitative research involve basic types: Observation, document analysis and Documentation, the researcher used some steps to collect the data. Data will be analyzed in qualitative analyzing these following from Robert (1982) namely data managing, Clarifying, Description and interpreting.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter features the results of this research. In this chapter, the research results conducted by the researcher will be discussed. The results are derived from observations conducted by the researcher both inside the classroom and from interviews with sources as data for the researcher in conducting the study.

**The Finding**

The researcher can describe the findings from the data source, namely the teacher from SMPN NW Mataram, as the data source. The teacher has 22 years of experience in teaching, specifically in teaching English. According to the researcher, the teacher has experienced curriculum changes from KTSP to 2013 and now Merdeka curriculum.

At SMP NW Mataram School, the Merdeka curriculum will be implemented in 2023 and will go through several stages that need to be completed. The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SMP NW Mataram School will commence with curriculum adjustments, followed by a phase in Human Resources, where teachers will assume the role of educators, and finally, the development of supporting teaching facilities. Also, the readiness of teachers to prepare all the learning needs, especially in this case, English language learning.

The teacher also shared their views on the curriculum changes, how they responded to them, and their effects, as asked by the researcher during the interview. The researcher also observed how the teacher delivered material and conducted evaluations in the 8th-grade SMP classroom.

The evaluation used by the teacher is reflective teaching from the teacher and feedback from student reflections in English lessons using the Merdeka curriculum and appropriate method, the teacher uses a journal as a support in reflective teaching and listens to students' feedback regarding the lessons that will and have been conducted.

Thus, from several types and tools in teacher reflection that can be done here, the researcher has explained to the teacher how to understand the reflective process and tools used in implementing the independent curriculum. The researcher conducted observations in both the classroom and the teacher's room. The researcher found that the teacher implemented reflective learning strategies both during and after classroom sessions. The results clarify as the following below:

*Teachers' Understanding of the Independent Curriculum Concept*

The researcher interviewed the teacher to understand how the teacher's understanding of the Merdeka curriculum has been implemented in learning. The researcher interviewed the teacher after the learning process took place, and the teacher explained the answers to several questions asked by the researcher.

The 8th-grade English teacher of SMP NW Mataram explained that the independent curriculum was used before learning was held. All teachers were given seminar training on the independent curriculum. Both broadly and in-depth. However, during the process, both seminars were held by providing material widely and introducing the objectives of the Merdeka curriculum. In its implementation, according to the English teacher. Since the attendees are teachers from various subject areas, the material provided is kept general.

In the material provided by the seminar speakers, English teachers have gained an understanding of the Merdeka curriculum universally such as the learning flow, learning scope, learning objectives which are generally in accordance with the Pancasila profile where according to the Merdeka curriculum which prioritizes student activities is prioritized over teachers.

Therefore, since the school just started using the Merdeka curriculum in 2023, it still requires adjustments for the 8th-grade implementing curriculum. In this case, it refers to the abilities of the students and the teacher involved. The teacher's ability refers to how the teacher prepares the upcoming lessons, while the students' ability refers to their capacity to absorb the knowledge taught by the teacher.

Also, there are following the results of interviews conducted by the researcher with the English teacher in the school, namely SMPN NW Mataram.

*Learning Pattern in Independent Curriculum*

Learning in the independent curriculum is carried with varied or differentiated learning according school level and student understanding or competence both teachers and students. Because each teacher will have a different style and method in implementing the curriculum in learning. As the answer from the teacher who said:

*"Each student and teacher have a different pattern in learning and teaching depending on each individual's ability, interest, or learning style. Usually, a lesson plan that will accommodate the needs of the teacher and students in learning." (TS, Translated in English)*

Based on the explanation given by the 8th grade English teacher of SMP NW Mataram, the learning pattern has a different process according to the individual's ability to gain knowledge and how to identify it through patterns or models that will be prepared by the teacher and provide lessons. This was also added by the 8th grade teacher from SMP NW Mataram that:

*"In the Merdeka curriculum, students will be prioritized to solve problems relevant to the learning process. They will be more required to think critically and try to solve the issues given by the teacher. Where the teacher only becomes a facilitator and provides feed to the students to solve the problem. So, it all depends on students, not teachers anymore as the door to knowledge."*

Teachers from SMP NW Mataram provide real problems to students that are in accordance with the learning context and material at that time. This is very different from what the Merdeka curriculum explains.

#### *Implementation of Independent Curriculum in English Subject*

After listening and reading the explanation from the teacher about how the pattern or model used by the teacher in learning at school. The researcher showed the results of interviews with teachers regarding the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum using patterns, models or methods that have been adjusted to needs.

Regarding the implementation of the independent curriculum in English subject, the teacher of SMP NW Mataram explained as follows:

*"Students here still need to improve their ability in learning English. Because students here need something that can arouse interest in learning English materials and because this curriculum refers to several aspects of independent teaching so that teachers who originally pushed all students must listen in the future to become students who come forward to provide the materials that have been instructed by the teacher."*

*"Usually, they will be in a group in dealing with the issues given by the teacher."*

Based on the teacher's answer, it can be shown that the teacher uses the group work method in improving students' ability to understand the content of the material or the context of the lesson. The teacher who is usually at the front teaching and the students focus on facing forward because the teacher as a window of knowledge, now changes to the position of the student who is in the front while the teacher is in the back paying attention and giving direction in learning.

#### *The Difficulties and Attempt to Overcome the Difficulties*

This last point is related to the previous one because challenges must be experienced when undertaking actions that are undoubtedly followed by efforts to surmount these obstacles. The author will elucidate the challenges faced by educators in executing the independent curriculum and the endeavors required by instructors, the government, or educational institutions to successfully apply it. This section pertains to the challenges and endeavors encountered by students in the English learning process through the self-paced program.

First, teachers have difficulties in implementing the Merdeka curriculum and students also follow the difficulties they face. It can be seen from teachers who already have high flying hours and enter retirement experience difficulties in implementing the curriculum. The following answer was given by a teacher from SMP NW Mataram regarding this matter,

*"The difficulties we face are of course there both us as teachers and students. The students come from the ability of the students themselves to receive lessons based on the Merdeka curriculum which is more complex for them and too many demands that sometimes do not guarantee that their ability can be improved directly, but if it can be gradually faced with various methods and patterns accompanied by adequate infrastructure."*

*"As for the teachers themselves, they have limitations, as I am facing. There are many aspects that must be understood but the ability is still at the basic stage to achieve these demands. I am in the retirement phase. So as much as I can in providing materials."*

*"In evaluating learning requires reflective techniques, I choose as an evaluation method that allows me to develop in creating innovations to improve students' abilities"*

Based on the answer from the teacher of NW Mataram Junior High School, he stated that the difficulties were felt, including because of the ability of the students even though they were in 8th grade but still at the basic level. Even though the ability is required to be in the middle lever.

The ability of grade 8 students is still at the basic level because the vocabulary chosen is still lacking and the interest of the students themselves is lacking. Meanwhile, the teacher himself because he still adheres to the lecture system and has not fully understood the method that is in accordance with the curriculum that is taught, which is the independent curriculum used by the school. In addition to the abilities of teachers and students, the difficulties faced are the means and infrastructure in supporting teaching and learning activities.

Second, it is related to how teachers can overcome difficulties in implementing the Merdeka curriculum in learning. The following answers was given by a teacher from SMP NW Mataram:

*"Usually in overcoming these difficulties, we buy books to study together. At school, the internet is provided but because the use of the internet is limited and students can only be used to study, so teachers provide books as one of the sources of information that can be used at any time." (TS. Translated in English answer for question number seven)*

*"This also applies to teachers. Teachers are asked to always attend every seminar held either offline or online. Teachers' participation in seminars to provide a good understanding and education about the Merdeka curriculum, especially in learning English, is still lacking and lacking in the delivery of materials related to the Merdeka curriculum for English lessons."*

It can be concluded that what teachers can do to overcome these difficulties by using various means that can be achieved, namely books and technology such as the internet that can make it easier for students to solve problems given by teachers in learning. However, another problem apparently arose after the researcher asked how the understanding in applying it in the learning obtained by the teacher in the Merdeka curriculum in terms of concept and context whether it is appropriate or not.

This can be seen in the teacher's answer regarding the in-depth concept of the Merdeka curriculum itself.

*"I understand how in general what the Merdeka curriculum wants, but there are still many aspects of the Merdeka curriculum itself that still make me confused about how to apply it in the classroom."*

*"Most of us seem to be given only theories that for how to apply them in learning have not been described with specific steps that are definitively and in accordance with the demands of the Merdeka curriculum itself."*

The difficulties faced by teachers at SMP NW Mataram in applying the Merdeka curriculum reap various kinds of confusion that still cannot be understood in depth due to the lack of adequate and intense socialization.

Intensive assistance is required to ensure the proper understanding and implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum concept. Observation findings indicate that most teachers continue to utilize conventional learning methods and have not incorporated activities or assessments that promote 21st-century skills and learning independence. The analysis of lesson plans and teacher learning evaluations indicates a lack of alignment with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. In conclusion, most teachers' comprehension of the Merdeka Curriculum remains limited and incomplete. Intensive assistance is necessary for the effective application of the concept in daily learning and assessment.

#### *Lesson Preparation and Planning*

The lesson plan made by the English teacher of SMP NW Mataram still uses a combination of the 2013 curriculum and the Merdeka curriculum. Because, according to him, the Merdeka curriculum and the 2013 curriculum have similarities even though they are only different formats and have materials with the same purpose, only different applications. This can be explained by the teacher in a previous interview.

*"I don't have a format that is in accordance with the Merdeka curriculum so I still use the old format and only change the method a little."*



Figure 1. Photo of the Atmosphere of the Learning Process

The learning process depicted in the image above is one of the learning processes that use the lecture method. Regarding the learning process that occurs with the teacher using reflective teaching in the implementation of learning, it is as follows:

#### *The First Day*

The process that occurs on the first day of learning is that the teacher explains the learning material by standing in front of the class with the students looking forward to hear the explanation from the teacher. In this process, the teacher explains the learning with the position of the teacher explaining by looking at how the student's pay attention to learning, but because the learning time is during the day, namely in the learning entry to 5 and 6 o'clock which shows the time to the second break where it is time for the zuhur prayer. During this period the teacher sometimes sat down to write in a journal at the table.

Researchers found patterns during the learning period in the classroom. So the teacher reflects when he is in the middle of learning while observing the students in carrying out learning activities by giving individual tasks, namely finding and finding the meaning of the words used in class activities.

The method used in learning is the lecture method where the focus during learning is the teacher while the student as an observer and receiver of information in one direction and does not use two directions or interaction from teacher to student and student to teacher.

Table 1. Types of reflecton

No	Types of Reflection	Exist	No Exist
1	Reflection-in-action	V	
2	Reflection-on-action	V	
3	Reflection-for-action	V	

The reflection method used during learning is the reflection-in-action type method, namely Teacher carries out such actions that employ a kind of knowing in action. So, teachers here will see how effective it is during the learning period. So, the teacher makes observations during the students carrying out activities

#### *The Second Day Research*

On the second day of learning, the teacher conducts learning activities with the composition of the teacher's opening, which attends to the students who are present after checking the students' attendance, followed by providing questions on the evolution of the previous learning material. Then the teacher allows students to ask questions relating to the prior material before moving on to the next material. The teacher heard only a few students respond to the previous material. Not long after, the teacher began to explain the second material but only gave a few points about the material using cardboard media as teaching material.

Then the teacher pointed out briefly, and it seemed that the teacher here only gave some explanations about the material. Furthermore, the teacher allows the students the opportunity to pay attention to the material on the board. The teacher goes to the teacher's side table to write some reflection notes in the middle of the lesson. Followed by the teacher allowing students to make groups of 4, where later the students will carry out activities to delve deeper into the material, with students allowed to be more advanced in interacting with and understanding the material that has been given previously.

The teacher provides dialogue activities between students, with one group being A and the other being B. The teacher pays attention to the interaction that occurs after giving the rules of the activity. The teacher has prepared an assessment sheet for the activities carried out by the students.

In this case, the material activity this time was very different from the previous day. Here, the students can interact more freely and are not teacher-centered but student-centered. The students are freer to express and explore the material in their way and look for solutions to the problems posed by the teacher.

According to the researchers' observations, teachers give students more time to explore all the methods to find the Solution. After completing the activity, the teacher provides an assessment to assess the extent to which the students understand and understand the material.

After getting the assessment results at the end of the lesson, the teacher conducts self-reflection using a journal. In the teacher's journal, they reflect on classroom conditions and the pros and cons of their methods. Given the effectiveness of today's learning using different methods from the previous day, there is a considerable difference that can be seen by researchers. The results obtained can be seen from the change in the classroom atmosphere; the methods used can affect the student's understanding of the material given by the teacher.

Table 2. Types of Reflections

No	Types of Reflection	Exist	No Exist
1	Reflection-in-action	V	
2	Reflection-on-action	V	
3	Reflection-for-action	V	

Teachers here use three types of reflection, they are reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action, and reflection-for-action. The teacher uses the three reflections at different times in assessing and finding weaknesses or advantages of teaching methods that are in accordance with the needs of the Merdeka curriculum.

#### *The Third day*

On the third day, the learning process continued with the method used by the teacher on the second day, with a mixed method change, namely the lecture method as teacher-centered and the self-student-centered method based on the activities of the previous two days last week. The teacher provided guidance related to the material given and then asked the students to present it again, with the teacher sitting in the chair at the front of the class, observing how the students conducted the presentation. The teacher noted several things while the students were giving their group presentations. The teacher scrutinizes the students' application of the work system and method.

Here, the teacher is seen conducting reflection in action as a consideration in evaluating the performance of both students and the teacher during the teaching process. The teacher provides guidance after completing the presentation. Thereafter, the teacher gives a final quiz

on the material to assess how well the students have absorbed the knowledge provided and have practiced it themselves.

The teacher here will look at which parts of the methods and learning strategies are suitable for improving students' abilities in the subject of English, due to the students' very limited abilities and skills in that subject, which are still in a transitional phase of understanding and acquiring knowledge.

After conducting all the activities and quizzes, the teacher ends the class. The next step involves conducting an evaluation based on the various notes previously made in the teacher's journal. The teacher evaluates performance after teaching by reviewing notes in the class journal.

According to the researchers, there is a noticeable difference in the learning outcomes achieved by both teachers and students. An increase in vocabulary for students and a change in teaching methods implemented by the teacher in conducting lessons.

*The Fourth day.*

On the fourth day, the researcher focused more on observing the teacher in the teacher's room and conducting interviews with the concerned teacher. At this stage, the researcher obtained several insights regarding the reflective teaching used and some information related to teaching experiences during the periods of the KTSP curriculum, the 2013 curriculum, the emergency COVID curriculum, and finally, the Merdeka curriculum. Teachers underwent various changes in their teaching methods during that period. The English teacher is more comfortable using the KTSP curriculum and the 2013 curriculum. The overall material and procedures are clear, making them easy for the teacher to implement.

The reflection method used over that period underwent some changes that were not too noticeable. The curriculum primarily focuses on implementing changes in methods, materials, and educational goals. For the Merdeka curriculum, the teacher conducts simple reflections because they are not yet sufficient to meet the demands of the Merdeka curriculum, which have not yet been significantly deepened.

The English teacher reflects on their teaching both before, during, and after lessons by taking notes that align with the activities in the learning process.

Observations carried out in the classroom confirm that teachers' activities in learning are still using conventional methods that do not reflect the independent curriculum approach. Where teachers dominate the classroom with lectures, questions and answers and giving assignments to students. Students become less motivated to improve their abilities independently. In addition, the results of the documentation carried out by teachers in conducting assessments on students show a lack of effort from them to follow existing learning.

In summary, it may be asserted that educators' reflection in the preparation and design of autonomous curriculum learning remains inadequate. They require comprehensive support and specialized training to effectively develop learning that is genuinely aligned with the independent curriculum.

*Teacher perceived impact of reflective teaching*

*Teacher perception on reflective teaching*

This study conducts the teacher perceived knowledge and opinion of reflective teaching. First, I asked how the strategy was used in teaching because the teacher had experience in teaching and whether he understood reflective teaching. The following answer:

*"Yes, I have heard about reflective teaching. What I understand is reflective teaching is and instructional approach that involves systematic and critical reflection on teaching practice to enhance learning quality"*

Based on this answer, the teacher already understands that reflective teaching is one of the strategies in increasing teaching effectiveness. Also, I asked the teacher his opinion about the three characteristics of reflective teachers that proposed by John Dewey (1933). The following answers:

*"My opinion about it is, Open Mindedness is concerns about the experiences and the ideas, Responsibility is concerns about responsibility for actions,*

*Teachers Reflective Practices and Its Impact on Teaching and Learning English in the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum decisions and learning and then wholeheartedness is concerns for recognizing strength, weakness and learning style."*

Based on this answer, the teacher has developed the three characters that proposed by John Dewey (1933). From these I conclude the teacher already perceived the reflective teaching and for the impact of reflective teaching strategy make an improve the student quality. Because from the interview also I asked about the impact from using reflective teaching for student the teacher following answer

*"The student from the assessment point of view, there is improvement, interaction still need more improvement and for vocabulary the student still need dictionary to use for learning in the class."*

From the explanation from the teacher, He has a clear perspective, knowledge, and concepts regarding reflective instruction and its effects on them. By implementing this technique, the majority acknowledge the significance of pedagogical development to enhance their quality and impact the student directly.

#### *Increasing Teacher Awareness of the Teaching Performance*

Teaching is a repetitive process of information sharing and explaining materials in which take a place between teachers and students. So reflective teaching is needed to involve teachers to evaluate teaching practices, strategies and can help identify which areas need improvement.

During the learning and teaching process, teachers often find various scenarios of the learning process and can stimulate teachers to increase awareness of teachers to innovate in learning. Teachers often reflect in teaching to develop the ability to adjust to the demands of students. As said by teacher:

*"By using this method, I became very aware that reflective teaching is one of the strategies that can increase my effectiveness in teaching. When I find various conditions when teaching in class and in that period of time find things that do not meet my expectations, I will do a self-evaluation to achieve goals that can change according to my expectations."*

Based on the statement above, the teachers concur that reflective teaching is a critical strategy for addressing the factors that are detrimental to the classroom. Consequently, it will facilitate their evaluation. These statements regarding the significance of reflective teaching among teachers and the beliefs surrounding strategies have a substantial impact not only on enhancing teaching abilities but also on the educational system. Furthermore, it enhances nearly every facet of educational continuity.

#### *Reflection on Teaching and Learning Process*

The results of reflection indicate that the teacher used reflective practices on the teaching and learning process based on the independent curriculum are still limited. From the in-depth interview, the researcher concludes the process reflective teaching and learning process as follows:

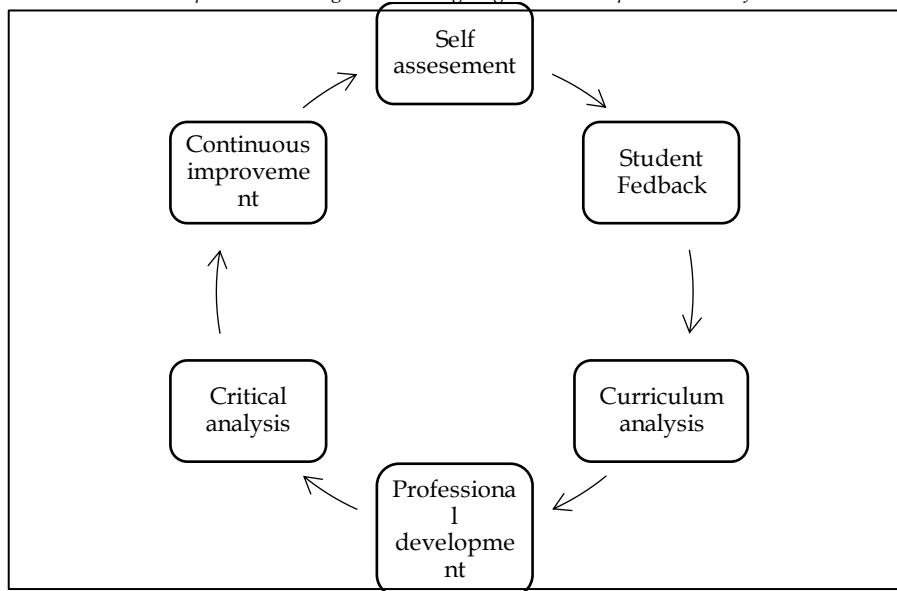


Figure 2 Teaching and learning process of the teacher

## Discussion

Based on the data findings previously obtained by the researcher, it can be described comprehensively and in-depth about the data findings from data sources or research sources. Here there are several things that need to be described in depth regarding the purpose of this research whether it is in accordance with the previous research problem stated in chapter I.

According to the data collected from the 8th grade English teacher of SMP NW Mataram, it can be described as follows:

*From the presentation explained by the speaker, namely an 8th grade English teacher at SMP NW Mataram regarding reflective teaching used in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. According to the English teacher, the Merdeka curriculum has advantages and disadvantages in containing all materials and methods to achieve the desired change goals.*

The Merdeka curriculum is a new curriculum and still has a lot of controversy for teachers, especially since this curriculum is a curriculum published after the previous COVID-19 emergency curriculum. According to the teacher's presentation, the socialization carried out in the implementation is still lacking, both from schools and from related educational institutions. Lesson formats increasingly require teachers to be more flexible and open to their students and allow their students to take over as the main actors in their own classes.

Teachers are only facilitators and lack evaluative materials that must be used in using materials from the Merdeka curriculum that have complexity in the goals that students want to achieve. English teachers at SMP NW Mataram experience this complexity from both teachers and students. Where the teacher still adheres to the lecture system or the one-way one while the students only become loyal observers when the teacher explains in class.

The perception of English teachers about reflective teaching based on the criteria of John Dewey (1933) can understand the three important characteristics in reflective teaching, where the three characteristics are Open-mindedness, Responsibility and Wholeheartedness. Where these three characteristics are very important for teachers to have in understanding what kind of reflective teaching should be used.

According to the 8th grade English teacher of SMP NW Mataram, these three characteristics initiated by John Dewey (1933) are in accordance with the criteria that already have been possessed in carrying out the reflective teaching process. So that to carry out reflective teaching that can adequately meet the demands desired by teachers to evaluate the teacher's performance in providing material and feedback from students is not met.

The results of the interviews show that teachers still do not understand the concept of the Merdeka curriculum. Teachers feel that even though they have been given socialization about the curriculum, it is not enough to really understand the curriculum. This is very much

in line with research conducted by Tanjung and Amalia (2023) regarding the discovery of difficulties faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka curriculum. Teachers really need in-depth socialization about the Merdeka curriculum so that the teacher can understand not only in theory but also in practice.

In addition, teachers in understanding reflective teaching have a good perception of how a teacher prepares all the needs in the learning process. Reflective teaching used by the teacher because it uses the Merdeka curriculum is still limited and less than optimal in its implementation. Where teachers still use the old format model in conducting teaching in the classroom so that the use of reflective teaching is still very lacking. Considering that in Muna Aryal's research (2024), teachers must be more aware of their own abilities in evaluating teaching and teachers must be able to take the opportunity to improve their abilities both for themselves and for students. In the implementation of learning, the teacher's reflections primarily focus on technical aspects and material delivery, without addressing the integration of substantive independence values.

The Findings of this current study also strengthen the previous study conducted by Hersulestuti, et.al (2024) indicating that EFL teacher-participants employ various methods to reflect on their teaching techniques, including evaluating class activities, soliciting student feedback, maintaining journals, engaging in self-observation followed by peer conversations, administering surveys, and conducting direct question-and-answer sessions. The selection of activities is contingent upon the learning environment, student attributes, instructional timetables, and institutional support. The findings indicate that EFL teachers can benefit from reflecting on their teaching methods, as this can help them identify and address problems, analyze their teaching more effectively, assess the effectiveness of their lessons, and refine their overall approach. It fosters and promotes creativity and invention, potentially providing a more precise depiction of students' academic performance and visible competencies. Furthermore, it can foster mutual comprehension between educators and learners.

Also, it is strengthened by Hersulestuti, et.al (2024) about the three significant obstacles challenge EFL teachers in reflecting on their teaching techniques. The findings indicate that barriers to reflection persist for teacher participants across all levels. These include educators' hesitance to explore innovative pedagogical methods and to engage in reflective practices, time limitations that hinder complete reflection due to substantial workloads, and insufficient resources and support from educational institutions.

This research provided significant insights into teachers' reflective practices about the implementation of the independent curriculum, a topic that remains underexplored. This study explains the evolution of literature concerning the role of reflection in curricular reform in Indonesia. Additional study employing diverse methodological techniques is strongly advised to enhance comprehension of this pertinent and important subject, hence facilitating the more effective and precise design of policies aimed at strengthening teacher abilities.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that reflective teaching plays a crucial role in sustaining teacher improvement by enabling educators to evaluate and enhance their own abilities. The Grade 8 English teachers at SMP NW Mataram have demonstrated a gradual yet positive impact on both teacher and student development, contributing to improved teacher competencies, teaching quality, optimized student learning outcomes, and strengthened critical and collaborative thinking skills. In implementing reflective teaching within the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers employ journals as a medium to facilitate three types of reflection – Reflection-in-action, Reflection-on-action, and Reflection-for-action – by preparing learning materials, selecting supportive media, and engaging in reflective activities before, during, and after lessons. These reflective practices, supported by journal-based documentation and assessment analysis, serve as key strategies to foster relevant, inclusive, and high-quality English learning in junior high schools.

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