

ABSTRACT

Keny, Anatasia. (2026). *The Influence of Merdeka Curriculum on the Identity Construction of Gen Z Novice EFL Teachers in Rural and Urban Areas: Agency and Resilience*. Yogyakarta: English Education Master's Program, Department of Language and Art Language Education, Faculty of Language Teachers Training and Education, Sanata Dharma University.

The Merdeka Curriculum is challenging to implement in Indonesia because of the differences and gaps that occur between urban and rural areas. The differences, such as limited resources and support, affect how the curriculum is implemented. The Merdeka Curriculum promotes autonomy, character development, and project-based learning. However, this issue also raises questions about how Gen Z novice EFL teachers deal with the demands in their teaching profession.

This study aims to explore how Gen Z novice EFL teachers construct their professional identity while implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. It focuses on their agency and resilience in responding to challenges. Specifically, this study answers the following questions: (1) What are the challenges of Merdeka Curriculum implementation for Gen Z novice EFL teachers in rural and urban areas?; (2) How does the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum influence Gen Z novice EFL teachers' agency and resilience in constructing their professional identity?

To explore teachers' lived experiences, a qualitative interpretative approach is used in this study. Data were collected through reflective journals and semi-structured interviews. This study involved six Gen Z novice teachers with 0-5 years of experience in teaching from different areas. Three participants from urban areas and three from rural areas. Thematic analysis is applied to analyse the data and enable the researcher to identify the patterns, meaning, and themes of the study.

The findings show that rural and urban teachers face different challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Teachers in rural areas face limited opportunities, resources, and support. However, urban teachers deal with high expectations and pressure from both parents and the school. Despite challenges, both teachers from urban and rural areas demonstrate agency and resilience in constructing their professional identity. Teacher identity is developed through professional development and ongoing support from the environment.

Keywords: *agency, Merdeka Curriculum, resilience, rural and urban education, teacher identity*

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Kurikulum Merdeka sulit diterapkan di Indonesia karena adanya perbedaan dan kesenjangan antara daerah di kota dan di desa. Keterbatasan sumber daya, dukungan serta perbedaan lingkungan belajar sangat mempengaruhi bagaimana Kurikulum Merdeka diterapkan. Kurikulum Merdeka mendorong kemandirian, pengembangan karakter, dan pembelajaran berbasis proyek. Namun hal ini juga menimbulkan pertanyaan mengenai bagaimana guru-guru menghadapi tuntutan dan permasalahan di awal karier mereka, khususnya guru bahasa Inggris dari Generasi Z.

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengkaji bagaimana guru pemula Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing (EFL) dari Generasi Z membangun identitas profesional mereka saat menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka. Penelitian ini berfokus pada kemampuan bertindak dan ketangguhan para guru dalam menghadapi tantangan. Secara khusus, penelitian ini berfokus menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan berikut: (1) Apa saja tantangan dalam penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka bagi guru pemula EFL Generasi Z di daerah pedesaan dan perkotaan? Dan (2) Bagaimana implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka mempengaruhi inisiatif dan ketangguhan guru EFL pemula Generasi Z dalam membangun identitas profesional mereka?

Untuk menggali pengalaman nyata para guru, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif interpretatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui jurnal reflektif dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Penelitian ini melibatkan total enam peserta: tiga guru Generasi Z dari daerah perkotaan dan tiga dari daerah pedesaan. Semua guru dalam penelitian ini adalah guru pemula dengan pengalaman 0–5 tahun. Analisis tematik diterapkan untuk menganalisis data dan memungkinkan peneliti mengidentifikasi pola, makna, serta tema-tema dalam penelitian ini.

Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru di daerah pedesaan dan perkotaan menghadapi tantangan yang berbeda. Guru di daerah pedesaan menghadapi keterbatasan peluang, sumber daya, dan dukungan, sementara guru di daerah perkotaan harus menghadapi ekspektasi dan tekanan yang tinggi baik dari orang tua maupun sekolah. Terlepas dari semua tantangan tersebut, para guru menunjukkan inisiatif dan ketangguhan dalam membangun identitas profesional mereka. Pembentukan identitas guru dikembangkan melalui pengembangan profesional dan dukungan berkelanjutan.

Kata kunci: *agency, Merdeka Curriculum, resilience, rural and urban education, teacher identity*