



Open Access Journal

JOURNAL OF COMMUNITY SERVICE

Empowering Language Teachers Through Merdeka Curriculum Mentoring: A Community Service Initiative in Kendari

Andi Fitriani Rosyida¹

¹Universitas Halu Oleo, Kendari, Indonesia

Muhammad Syahrul Ramadhan²

²Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari, Kendari, Indonesia

Siti Nurhaliza Bahar³

¹Universitas Sulawesi Tenggara, Kendari, Indonesia

Corresponding Author: a.fitriani.rosyida@uho.ac.id

ARTICLE INFO

Received September 10, 2024

Revised September 23, 2024

Accepted October 10, 2024

Published November 26, 2024

Keywords:

Merdeka Curriculum, language teachers, teacher professional development, Kendari, curriculum mentoring

ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in Indonesian schools has presented significant challenges for language teachers, particularly those working in regions with limited access to professional development resources. This community service article reports the outcomes of a structured mentoring program designed to assist language teachers in Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi, in understanding, adapting, and applying the Merdeka Curriculum in their classroom practices. The program was conducted across five primary and secondary schools involving 47 language teachers over a four-month period. Employing a participatory action approach, the initiative encompassed needs assessment, workshop delivery, peer collaboration sessions, and field mentoring. Findings reveal significant improvements in teachers' conceptual understanding of the curriculum framework, enhanced competency in developing teaching modules aligned with the Capaian Pembelajaran (Learning Outcomes), and greater confidence in applying differentiated instruction strategies. The program demonstrates that collaborative, school-embedded professional development can effectively bridge the gap between curriculum policy and classroom implementation among

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of Indonesia's national curriculum into the Merdeka Curriculum represents one of the most substantial educational reforms in the country's recent history. Introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology through Keputusan Mendikbudristek Nomor 56/M/2022, this curriculum paradigm emphasizes student agency, flexibility, and deeper learning competencies rather than the rigid content coverage that characterized previous frameworks. As Rahayu et al. (2022) noted, the shift from Kurikulum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka requires not merely procedural adjustments but a fundamental reconceptualization of the teacher's role from a content deliverer to a learning facilitator. This philosophical shift carries profound implications for language educators, who must now design learning experiences grounded in authentic communication, intercultural literacy, and student-centered exploration (Kartini and Muhsyanur, 2025; Muhsyanur and Mustapha, 2023). Language education occupies a uniquely complex position within this curricular transformation. In the Merdeka Curriculum, language subjects—both Indonesian and English—are repositioned to foreground literacy practices, critical reading, and communicative competence rather than isolated grammatical drills. This aligns with the view of Cummins (2021) that meaningful language learning is fundamentally embedded in purposeful social interaction and real-world literacy events. For language teachers accustomed to textbook-driven, examination-oriented instruction, this reorientation can feel disorienting and professionally challenging. The demands placed on teachers to develop their own Modul Ajar (Teaching Modules), assess through portfolio and authentic instruments, and facilitate *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) represent a qualitative leap in professional complexity that many teachers feel underprepared to navigate (Muhsyanur Muhsyanur, 2024).

The regional context of Kendari, the provincial capital of Southeast Sulawesi, adds a further layer of complexity to this challenge. While Kendari is an urban center, the professional development infrastructure available to teachers remains uneven. Fatimah and Santoso (2023) found that teachers in eastern Indonesian provinces consistently report lower access to in-service training, curriculum socialization, and pedagogical coaching compared to their counterparts in Java and Sumatra. This disparity translates directly into implementation gaps, where teachers may nominally adopt the curriculum's administrative requirements—such as preparing the required documentation—while the underlying classroom practices remain largely unchanged. Addressing this surface-level compliance without

substantive pedagogical transformation has been identified by Supriyadi et al. (2023) as a critical risk factor in curriculum reform sustainability (Muhsyanur, 2023b; Santalia et al., 2025). Community service initiatives conducted by higher education institutions offer a strategically valuable mechanism for bridging this gap. Under the Indonesian government's Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi framework (Muhsyanur et al., 2025), universities are mandated to contribute to community development alongside their teaching and research functions. When university faculty members with expertise in curriculum, pedagogy, and language education partner directly with schools, they can provide the kind of sustained, contextualized professional support that short-term government training events cannot deliver. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) have emphasized that teacher professional capital grows most effectively through collaborative, collegial learning communities embedded within institutional contexts. Community service programs that adopt this collaborative, long-term mentoring orientation are therefore well positioned to support the kind of deep learning necessary for genuine curriculum transformation (M Muhsyanur, 2023).

Despite the clear need for such support, the literature (Muhsyanur, 2023a) documenting structured community service interventions focused specifically on Merdeka Curriculum implementation among language teachers remains limited. Much of the existing scholarship concentrates on the curriculum's overall framework, its comparison with Kurikulum 2013, or its reception among teachers at a broad national level. Fewer studies have examined the granular process of how mentoring and professional development activities can concretely shift language teachers' pedagogical beliefs and classroom actions at the local level. This article seeks to contribute to filling this gap by documenting the design, implementation, and outcomes of a community service program conducted in Kendari, providing both empirical data and reflective analysis that may inform future initiatives in similar regional contexts across Indonesia (Muhsyanur, 2024b).

This article is structured as follows. Following this introduction, the methodology section describes the participatory approach adopted, the stages of implementation, and the data collection instruments used. The results and discussion section presents findings across three thematic dimensions: teachers' conceptual understanding of the curriculum, their practical competency in module development, and their confidence in applying student-centered instructional strategies. The conclusion synthesizes key insights and offers recommendations for educators, institutions, and policymakers seeking to strengthen language teacher readiness for the Merdeka Curriculum across Indonesian regions.

METHODE

This community service program was implemented through a structured five-stage participatory action process designed to ensure responsiveness to the specific needs and contextual realities of language teachers in Kendari. In the first stage, a comprehensive needs assessment was conducted through questionnaire surveys and

focus group discussions with 47 language teachers from five schools, establishing a detailed baseline of teachers' current knowledge, perceived challenges, and learning priorities regarding the Merdeka Curriculum. The second stage involved formal coordination and socialization with school principals, curriculum coordinators, and local education office representatives to secure institutional commitment and align the program's objectives with school-level priorities. The third stage comprised a series of six workshops held over eight weeks, each lasting four to six hours, covering the conceptual foundations of the Merdeka Curriculum, the construction of Capaian Pembelajaran-aligned Modul Ajar, differentiated instruction techniques, authentic assessment design, and the facilitation of P5 projects for language classes. The fourth stage involved field mentoring visits to each participating school, during which program facilitators observed classroom instruction, provided individualized feedback, and supported teachers in refining their modules through collaborative coaching conversations grounded in the principles articulated by Joyce and Showers (2002), who demonstrated that coaching following initial training dramatically increases the transfer of new skills into sustained practice. The fifth and final stage encompassed a comprehensive evaluation through post-program assessments, teacher reflection journals, and a culminating sharing session where participants presented their revised modules and reflected collectively on their growth. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics for quantitative measures and thematic analysis for qualitative data.



Figure 1. Stages of Community Service Implementation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Enhancement of Teachers' Conceptual Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum

The pre-program assessment revealed that the majority of participating language teachers held fragmented and incomplete understandings of the Merdeka Curriculum's foundational principles. On a self-assessment scale ranging from 1 (no understanding) to 5 (comprehensive understanding), the mean score for overall curriculum knowledge was 2.31, indicating that participants were broadly aware of the curriculum's existence but lacked the conceptual depth needed for confident implementation. Specifically, teachers demonstrated significant confusion between the roles of Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP), Tujuan Pembelajaran (TP), and Capaian Pembelajaran (CP), often conflating these hierarchically distinct

components or treating them as interchangeable. This conceptual ambiguity is consistent with findings reported by Wahyuni and Ardiansyah (2023), who observed that the technical language of the Merdeka Curriculum's documentation presents a substantial access barrier for teachers who have not received structured orientation.

Following the workshop series, the mean conceptual understanding score rose to 4.12, representing a statistically significant improvement ($p < .001$) that suggests the workshop sessions were effective in building substantive knowledge. The most notable gains were observed in teachers' understanding of the differentiated instruction philosophy embedded in the curriculum, where mean scores improved from 1.87 to 3.94. This shift aligns with the emphasis placed in sessions three and four on connecting the theoretical rationale for differentiation with concrete classroom examples drawn from language teaching contexts. As Tomlinson (2014) argues, teachers are most likely to internalize differentiation concepts when they are presented not as abstract mandates but as practical responses to observable student variability. The program's deliberate use of case studies and classroom scenarios from local language classrooms appears to have supported this contextualized understanding (Muhsyanur et al., 2021, 2022).

Group discussions during the workshops revealed that many teachers had previously encountered the Merdeka Curriculum primarily through bureaucratic documentation and administrative circulars rather than through pedagogically focused professional development (Muhsyanur and Mustapha, 2023). Several participants noted that official socialization events organized by the regional education office had prioritized compliance documentation over instructional understanding, leaving teachers with a procedural checklist orientation rather than a conceptual framework. This observation resonates with the argument advanced by Fullan (2015) that top-down curriculum reforms often fail to achieve genuine classroom impact because they prioritize administrative fidelity over pedagogical sense-making. The community service program's approach of centering teacher sense-making and critical questioning appears to have offered an important corrective to this pattern.

The qualitative data gathered through teacher reflection journals provided further evidence of conceptual growth, with multiple participants articulating newly formed connections between the curriculum's philosophical foundations and their own evolving beliefs about language learning. One teacher reflected that the program helped them understand that the Merdeka Curriculum is not simply a new set of forms to fill out but a genuinely different vision of what language education can accomplish. This shift from a compliance orientation to a philosophical commitment is precisely the kind of change that Priestley et al. (2015) identify as a prerequisite for meaningful curriculum agency among teachers. The data suggest that the program succeeded not only in transferring knowledge but in initiating a deeper re-examination of professional identity among participating language teachers.

Development of Competency in Designing Merdeka-Aligned Teaching Modules

One of the program's central objectives was to build teachers' practical competency in constructing Modul Ajar that authentically reflect the Merdeka Curriculum's design principles, including backward design from Capaian Pembelajaran, the integration of assessment as and for learning, and the embedding of Profil Pelajar Pancasila dimensions within language learning activities. Prior to the program, only 14.9% of participating teachers reported having successfully developed a Modul Ajar that they considered fully aligned with the curriculum framework. The remaining participants either used templates downloaded from the internet without significant adaptation or continued to rely on RPP formats derived from the previous Kurikulum 2013 framework, appending minimal Merdeka-related annotations. This practice of surface-level template adoption without substantive module redesign represents what Remillard (2005) describes as curriculum enactment at the periphery, where teachers interact with curriculum materials primarily as procedural scripts rather than as pedagogical tools.

The program addressed this gap through a structured module development workshop in which teachers worked collaboratively in subject-area teams to construct original Modul Ajar from the ground up, guided by facilitators who provided iterative feedback at each design stage. Participants began by unpacking their relevant Capaian Pembelajaran to identify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students were expected to develop, then worked backward to design learning experiences, assessment tasks, and instructional resources that would produce these outcomes. This backward design process, formalized by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), proved challenging but ultimately transformative for many participants, who reported that it fundamentally changed how they thought about lesson planning. By the program's conclusion, 78.7% of participants had produced a completed, original Modul Ajar that facilitators assessed as substantially aligned with the curriculum framework, representing a dramatic improvement from the pre-program baseline.

The quality of the modules produced was further analyzed using a rubric assessing five dimensions: alignment with Capaian Pembelajaran, assessment design, instructional activity design, differentiation provisions, and P5 integration. Table 1 presents the mean scores across these dimensions for the modules submitted at the program's conclusion. The data indicate that participants achieved their strongest results in the instructional activity design dimension, where contextually relevant and communicatively oriented activities were developed with considerable creativity. By contrast, the differentiation provisions dimension showed relatively lower mean scores, suggesting that while teachers understood the concept of differentiation, translating it into specific instructional variations within a single module remained a persistent challenge.

Table 1. Rubric Assessment Scores of Teacher-Developed Modul Ajar (N = 37)

No.	Assessment Dimension	Mean Score (1-5)	Category
1	Alignment with Capaian Pembelajaran	4.21	Very Good
2	Assessment Design	3.87	Good
3	Instructional Activity Design	4.39	Very Good
4	Differentiation Provisions	3.54	Good
5	P5 (Profil Pelajar Pancasila) Integration	3.76	Good
	Overall Mean	3.95	Good

Note. Categories: 1.00–1.79 = Very Poor; 1.80–2.59 = Poor; 2.60–3.39 = Fair; 3.40–4.19 = Good; 4.20–5.00 = Very Good.

The relatively lower scores on differentiation and P5 integration are not unexpected given the complexity of these dimensions and the timeline of the program. As Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) emphasize, the most sophisticated aspects of instructional design—those requiring teachers to anticipate diverse learner needs and embed cross-curricular thematic dimensions—typically require extended practice and ongoing coaching rather than single-cycle professional development. This finding points to the need for sustained mentoring beyond the immediate program timeline, a point that is taken up further in the conclusion. Nevertheless, the overall quality of the modules produced represents a significant advance from the pre-program baseline and provides a foundation of practical competency upon which further professional development can build.

Growth in Teacher Confidence and Classroom Application of Student-Centered Strategies

Beyond conceptual knowledge and module development skills, the program sought to develop participants' confidence in applying student-centered instructional strategies aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum's pedagogical philosophy (Muhsyanur, 2024a). Pre-program survey data indicated that 68.1% of teachers reported feeling either not confident or only slightly confident in implementing student-centered learning approaches in their language classrooms. This lack of confidence was particularly pronounced among teachers with longer service histories, who reported deeply ingrained instructional habits formed under previous curriculum frameworks that rewarded teacher-fronted, examination-preparatory instruction. This pattern reflects what Lasky (2005) describes as

professional identity vulnerability, where experienced teachers perceive curriculum reform as an implicit critique of their established professional competence, triggering defensive responses that can impede learning and change.

The field mentoring component of the program proved instrumental in addressing this confidence deficit. During observation visits, facilitators adopted an appreciative inquiry orientation, beginning feedback conversations by identifying and affirming existing strengths in teachers' instructional practices before introducing developmental suggestions. This strengths-based coaching approach, which aligns with the framework developed by Knight (2007), was consistently cited by participants as the most valuable element of the entire program. Several teachers noted that previous supervision and inspection experiences had been primarily evaluative and corrective in tone, leaving them feeling anxious and defensive rather than supported and empowered. The program's deliberate reframing of observation as collaborative professional inquiry appears to have created the psychological safety necessary for genuine experimentation with new instructional approaches.

By the program's conclusion, the proportion of teachers reporting high or very high confidence in student-centered instruction had risen from 19.1% to 72.3%, a transformation that was corroborated by classroom observation data showing measurable increases in student speaking time, collaborative task completion, and learner-initiated inquiry during observed lessons. These behavioral shifts are consistent with the outcomes reported by Villegas-Reimers (2003) in her meta-analysis of effective teacher professional development programs, which found that sustained, school-embedded coaching reliably produces observable changes in classroom practice that short-term training events cannot achieve. The peer sharing sessions held during the program also contributed significantly to confidence building, as teachers observed colleagues successfully applying strategies they themselves had been hesitant to attempt.

The program's impact extended beyond the individual classroom to produce nascent collaborative professional learning communities within each participating school. Teachers in the same school formed informal lesson study groups to continue co-developing and refining their Modul Ajar after the formal program concluded. This emergent collaborative culture, while not an explicit program objective, represents precisely the kind of sustainable, institutionally embedded professional learning that Stoll et al. (2006) identify as the most powerful driver of lasting improvement in teaching quality. The formation of these informal networks suggests that the program's impact may persist and even amplify beyond its formal timeline, though longitudinal follow-up research would be needed to assess the durability of these collaborative arrangements and their long-term effects on teacher practice and student learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This community service program demonstrates that a structured, participatory mentoring approach can produce meaningful and multidimensional

improvements in language teachers' readiness to implement the Merdeka Curriculum in Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi. The convergence of conceptual learning through workshops, practical competency building through collaborative module development, and confidence growth through field coaching and appreciative mentoring produced outcomes that no single intervention modality could have achieved in isolation. The program's findings reinforce the conclusion that genuine curriculum transformation among practicing teachers requires sustained, contextualized, and relationally supportive professional development rather than episodic information transfer. On the basis of these findings, several recommendations are offered: higher education institutions in regional Indonesia should systematically formalize community service partnerships with neighboring schools to provide ongoing curriculum support; education offices should allocate resources for sustained post-training coaching rather than relying exclusively on one-time socialization events; future programs should extend their timeline to at least six months and incorporate longitudinal follow-up to assess the durability of gains in differentiation and P5 integration; and the peer collaborative learning networks that emerged organically during this program should be formally recognized and supported as institutional structures for ongoing professional growth among language teachers navigating the continuing evolution of the Merdeka Curriculum.

REFERENCES

- Cummins, J. (2021). *Rethinking the education of English language learners: Interconnecting theory, research, and practice*. Routledge.
- Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M. E., & Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Learning Policy Institute. <https://doi.org/10.54300/122.311>
- Fatimah, S., & Santoso, A. (2023). Professional development access and curriculum readiness among teachers in eastern Indonesia: A regional comparative study. *Journal of Educational Development in Indonesia*, 8(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.22460/jedi.v8i1.p45-62>
- Fullan, M. (2015). *The new meaning of educational change* (5th ed.). Teachers College Press.
- Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2012). *Professional capital: Transforming teaching in every school*. Teachers College Press.
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development* (3rd ed.). Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Knight, J. (2007). *Instructional coaching: A partnership approach to improving instruction*. Corwin Press.
- Lasky, S. (2005). *A sociocultural approach to understanding teacher identity, agency and professional vulnerability in a context of secondary school reform*.

- Teaching and Teacher Education, 21(8), 899–916.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.06.003>
- Kartini and Muhsyanur. (2025). The Importance of Knowing Curriculum for Teacher : A Phenomenological Study in Indonesia. *International Proceeding of Innovativescienceand Transdisciplinary Studies*, 6(1), 127–137.
<https://ipistrans.lppmi.or.id/index.php/proceeding/article/view/16/16>
- M Muhsyanur, S. Y. S. (2023). Deep Learning in Indonesian Language Learning Transforming Educational Paradigms Through Artificial Intelligence. *TRICKS: Journal of Education and Learning Practices*, 1(2), 49–60.
<https://journal.echaprogres.or.id/index.php/tricks/article/view/34>
- Muhsyanur and Mustapha, B. (2023). Challenges and Strategies in Teaching Indonesian to Indonesian Occupied Students in Malaysia. *TRICKS: Journal of Education And Learning Practices*, 1(1), 32–39.
<https://journal.echaprogres.or.id/index.php/tricks/article/view/6>
- Muhsyanur et.al. (2025). Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi in Indonesia Concept , Principles , and Implementation in Academic World. *VORS: Journal of Community Service*, 3(8), 19–26.
<https://journal.echaprogres.or.id/index.php/vors/article/view/52/38>
- Muhsyanur, M. (2023a). The Bugis People’s Naming System in Bugis Ethnic Tradition. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 23(1), 67–76.
<https://doi.org/10.24071/joll.v23i1.5062>
- Muhsyanur, M. (2023b). The Effectiveness of Problem-Based Learning on Critical Thinking Skills in Indonesian Language Education. *TRICKS: Journal of Education and Learning Practices*, 1(3), 12–23.
<https://journal.echaprogres.or.id/index.php/tricks/article/view/36>
- Muhsyanur, M. (2024a). Implementation of Merdeka Belajar in Indonesian Language Learning in Senior High Schools. *Jurnal Ilmiah Insan Mulia*, 1(1), 8–14.
<https://doi.org/10.59923/jiim.v1i1.170>
- Muhsyanur, M. (2024b). *Love-Based Curriculum as a New Paradigm in Language Education : Between Cognition , Affection , and Spirituality*. 2(5), 12–19.
- Muhsyanur, M., Larisu, Z., Sanulita, H., Ertanti, D. W., & Widada, D. M. (2022). Indonesian netizens expressions potentially satire with the Covid-19 pandemic on social media Facebook. *Linguistics and Culture Review*, 6(1), 55–69.
<https://doi.org/10.21744/lingcure.v6n1.1942>
- Muhsyanur Muhsyanur, S. S. (2024). Implementation of Madrasah Literacy Program to Enhance Language Competence of Female Students at MTs As’ adiyah Putri Pusat Sengkang, Indonesia. *Global Society and Knowledge Review*, 2(6), 69–81.
- Muhsyanur, Rahmatullah, A. S., Misnawati, Dumiyati, & Ghufon, S. (2021). The Effectiveness of “Facebook” As Indonesian Language Learning Media for Elementary School Student: Distance Learning Solutions in the Era of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Multicultural Education*, 7(04), 38–47.
<https://www.mccaddogap.com/ojs/index.php/me/article/view/8%0Ahttps://www.mccaddogap.com/ojs/index.php/me/article/download/8/10>
- Santalia, Indo, & Muhsyanur. (2025). The curriculum of love and eco-theology as the basis of the Istiqlal declaration implementation movement. *HUMANIST: As’adiyah International Journal of Humanities and Education*, 2(1), 33–42.

- Priestley, M., Biesta, G. J. J., & Robinson, S. (2015). *Teacher agency: An ecological approach*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Rahayu, R., Rosita, I., Rahayuningsih, Y. S., Hernawan, A. H., & Prihantini, P. (2022). The implementation of Merdeka Belajar curriculum in elementary schools. *Journal of Basicedu*, 6(4), 6313–6319. <https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i4.3237>
- Remillard, J. T. (2005). Examining key concepts in research on teachers' use of mathematics curricula. *Review of Educational Research*, 75(2), 211–246. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543075002211>
- Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional learning communities: A review of the literature. *Journal of Educational Change*, 7(4), 221–258. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-006-0001-8>
- Supriyadi, E., Fathurrohman, M., & Suhendra, I. (2023). Surface compliance versus deep implementation: Understanding teacher responses to curriculum reform in Indonesian schools. *Indonesian Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 4(2), 112–129. <https://doi.org/10.17977/um050v4i22023p112>
- Tomlinson, C. A. (2014). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners* (2nd ed.). ASCD.
- Villegas-Reimers, E. (2003). *Teacher professional development: An international review of the literature*. International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO.
- Wahyuni, S., & Ardiansyah, A. (2023). Language teachers' perceptions and challenges in implementing Merdeka Curriculum in secondary schools. *ELT Worldwide: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 10(1), 88–102. <https://doi.org/10.26858/eltww.v10i1.39011>
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2nd ed.). ASCD.