

Exploring Adaptation Strategies Of Pre-Service English Teachers During PPL at Junior High School Implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka

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Abstract. *This study explored the adaptation strategies of pre-service English teachers during their teaching practicum (PPL) in junior high schools implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. The aim of the study is to explore how pre-service English teachers integrate the flexible and student-centered curriculum while adjusting to a variety of problems in a real-world classroom environment. Semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations were used in this qualitative study to collect data from six pre-service teachers. The results showed that pre-service teachers used a variety of strategies to deal with procedural, managerial, psychological, instructional, and cultural obstacles, such as reflective practices, collaborative mentoring, and differentiated instruction. In addition to highlighting the necessity of successfully promoting Kurikulum Merdeka, the study emphasizes the value of mentorship and reflective practices in promoting professional development. These findings help to enhance programs for preparing future teachers and offer insightful advice to pre-service English teachers as they enter into professional teaching roles.*

Keywords: *Adaptation strategies, Pre-service teachers, English, Kurikulum Merdeka, Teaching practicum.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching practicum, or PPL (Program Pengalaman Lapangan), represents a foundation of teacher education programs, which bridge theoretical knowledge and real-world application obtained in the classroom. This practicum offers pre-service English teachers a crucial chance to gain practical teaching experience, adjust to various classroom environments, and sharpen critical professional skills. Pre-service English teachers have particular difficulties and challenges in carrying out the PPL. These challenges include managing classrooms with varied student needs, designing effective lesson plans, and navigating institutional expectations (Prilla & Angelina, 2019). Understanding teacher preparation programs and guaranteeing the growth of qualified educators, it is crucial to comprehend how pre-service teachers adjust throughout this crucial stage.

Moreover, Pre-service English teachers must be able to adapt to the ever-changing world of education, especially when implementing Kurikulum Merdeka. This curriculum strongly emphasizes adaptability, varied instruction, and project-based learning to foster students' complete development. Although its goals align with worldwide education trends, putting it into practice can be extremely difficult, particularly for pre-service English teachers navigating junior high school environments during their practicum.

Previous studies examined how pre-service teachers used project-based learning and creative tools in Kurikulum Merdeka, emphasizing elementary school settings (Khunaivi et al.,

2023). The curriculum's application to inclusive education, specifically for students with special needs, was further examined by Mulyani et al. (2023). Astuti et al. (2023) examined differentiated instruction under Kurikulum Merdeka in junior high schools, emphasizing teacher and student perceptions. Furthermore, Mutmainah and Widhiatama (2024) explored the issue in-depth about the strategies used by pre-service teachers in understanding the Merdeka curriculum. Similarly, Mulyani et al. (2023) explored the curriculum's application to inclusive education, particularly for students with special needs. Apart of that, Previous studies have emphasized the significance of reflective practices, mentorship, and feedback as critical components of successful adaptation (Nuraeni & Heryatun, 2021). Furthermore, other previous research explored the strategies of reflective practice used by pre-service English teachers during their teaching practicum to promote professional development ((Nuraeni & Heryatun, 2021).

The adaptation strategies used by pre-service English teachers during their teaching practicum in junior high schools that were implementing Kurikulum Merdeka are examined in this study. The aim is to investigate the adaption strategies used by pre-service English teachers in Jakarta junior high schools throughout their practicum. By identifying these strategies adaptation, the study hopes to explore how pre-service teachers deal with the difficulties and challenges of learning settings while navigating the complicated reality of teaching. By providing valuable insights for enhancing teacher preparation programs and assisting aspiring educators in their transition from theory to practice, the study's findings will add to the expanding corpus of information on teacher education.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pre-service English teachers

Pre-service English teachers who enrolled in teacher education programs and are getting ready to teach English as a subject are known as English teachers. They usually work to get pedagogical knowledge and real-world teaching experience during their learning. As they journey from student to professional educator, pre-service teachers frequently participate in teaching practicums where they put their theoretical knowledge to use in authentic classroom environments. To provide effective education, pre-service teachers need to acquire a combination of pedagogical skills and topic knowledge. This involves knowing how to deliver information in a way that students can easily acquire and find interesting (Rana, 2011). Furthermore, one of the most important aspects of pre-service teacher preparation is reflection. In order to improve their practices, it allows people to critically assess their instructional

strategies, classroom dynamics, and learning objectives (Azizah et al., 2018). Besides that, pre-service teachers can close the gap between theory and practice through hands-on teaching experiences, including those obtained during teaching practicums. Building self-esteem and classroom management abilities requires these experiences (Genc, 2016). Also, Pre-service teachers' instructional practices are influenced by their preexisting ideas and opinions about teaching. Comprehending these convictions is essential for molding their pedagogical approach and accommodating classroom requirements (Merisi & Pillay, 2020).

Reflective practices help English Pre-service English teacher bridge the gap between theory and real-world classroom application, which is a major benefit of their training. By assisting educators in assessing their pedagogical approaches and adjusting to the varied requirements of their students, reflection fosters self-awareness and professional development. Moreover, for pre-service English teachers, Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK), which blends subject-matter expertise with successful teaching techniques, is essential. Because of this basis, teachers can create lessons that accommodate different student proficiency levels (Rana, 2011). Additionally, Mentor instructors are essential in influencing the attitudes and behaviors of pre-service teachers during practicums. Bridging gaps in the pre-service training process, effective mentoring provides crucial feedback and encourages the development of practical skills (Astutik et al., 2021). Other than that, pre-service English teachers must be flexible to deal with various school circumstances because they frequently operate in multilingual and multicultural environments. Inclusivity and culturally sensitive instruction must be prioritized in training programs (Shaw & Andrei, 2019).

Adaptation strategies

Adaptation is believed to be a dynamic process involving interactions between past developmental experiences and present conditions. According to Roufe et al. (1990), this hypothesis emphasizes how early experiences shape adaptive actions throughout time. The theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) strongly emphasizes how people's adaptation tactics are influenced by their attitudes, subjective standards, and perceived behavioral control. The viability (perceived ease) and attractiveness (perceived worth) of particular acts are frequently what motivate adaptation (Deng et al., 2017). Moreover, (Sternad, 2011) made a distinction between dynamic "processes of adaptation" (where entities respond and change to remain relevant) and static "states of adaptation" (where an entity maintains fit with the environment). It is especially relevant when making decisions in the face of ambiguity. Besides that, (Rudolph et al., 2017) emphasizes how people use adaptation resources like curiosity, confidence, and

control to adjust to obstacles linked to their careers. The process entails preparation, investigation, and self-efficacy to go through transitions.

Adaptive teaching entails changing teaching methods to suit students' requirements, interests, and skills. According to (Parsons et al., 2017), successful teachers modify their approaches regularly in response to classroom dynamics and continual assessment. Also, enhancing student participation and engagement is closely related to adaptation strategies. For instance, to handle unforeseen difficulties or take advantage of teaching moments, educators modify their lesson plans on the go (Scales, 2009). In order to help various learners, especially those with barriers or difficulties, teachers in inclusive classrooms modify their lesson plans and activities. These modifications could involve modifying the pace of instruction, adding visual aids, or making activities more straightforward (Scott et al., 1998). Besides that, Textbook adaptation techniques in language instruction include rearranging topics to meet the needs of students better, adding materials, or eliminating unnecessary passages. This approach demonstrates the teacher's capacity to connect contextual realities with standardized information (Mede & Yalçin, 2019).

According to (Bartell, 2005), new instructors confront particular difficulties in managing classrooms, keeping records, and becoming acquainted with school processes due to their inexperience. They must adapt to the stress of their jobs, adopt good teaching and curriculum strategies, comprehend professional standards, engage with the varied cultures of their students, and negotiate the school's political and broader professional environments.

Category	Examples
Procedural	Familiarity with school and district procedures and expectations for personnel
Managerial	Classroom management strategies; time management; setting up the classroom; getting materials and supplies; scheduling; taking attendance; grading practices; keeping records
Psychological	Managing stress; gaining self-confidence; handling challenges and disappointments; transitioning from student to teacher role; attending to physical and emotional well-being
Instructional	Grade-level curriculum standards and expectations; lesson planning; instructional resources; assessing student progress and using results to shape instruction; using a variety of instructional practices; adapting instruction to meet individual student needs
Professional	Teaching norms and practices; appropriate boundaries and relationships between faculty and students; legal issues; the role of professional organizations; professional development opportunities

Cultural	Developing rapport with students and parents; understanding and appreciating environment; using community resources; valuing diversity; developing cultural proficiency
Political	Getting to know colleagues; contributing to extracurricular programs; building relationships with colleagues, staff, and administrators; understanding the broader context of teaching and reform efforts

Table 1. New Teachers Need (Bartell,2005)**Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka)**

Kurikulum Merdeka is being implemented in Indonesia and will become the revolutionary educational framework to advance competency-based education, customized instruction, student-centered learning, and flexibility to improve student competence and character development. Pre-service English teachers encounter specific difficulties adjusting to this curriculum, especially during their junior high school teaching practicum (PPL). It emphasizes:

a) Student-Centered Learning

It addresses students' unique learning needs by letting them discover their interests and skills. Encourages active learning and critical thinking through project-based and experiential activities (Wardana, 2024).

b) Flexibility in Implementation

Both schools and teachers can adapt the curriculum based on local contexts and student needs (Fitriyah & Wardani, 2022).

c) 21st Century Skills Development

Created to equip students with creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication skills to compete in a globalized world (Mongkau & Pangkey, 2024).

d) Competency-Based Assessment:

It aims to integrate formative and summative assessments that focus on both the process and outcomes of learning (Armiyati & Agung, 2023).

Furthermore, the adaption techniques used by English teachers under Kurikulum Merdeka have been the subject of numerous research studies. For example, Riskianto et al. (2023) found that to meet the curriculum requirements, teachers used various instructional strategies, such as vocabulary mastery and technology use. However, the study discovered that many teachers struggled with challenges like inadequate training and a lack of resources, and many did not have an explicit knowledge of Kurikulum Merdeka (Riskianto et al., 2023). In

order to engage young learners, Khunaivi et al. (2023) emphasized the use of innovative pedagogical techniques such as project-based learning and gamified activities. Although the study shed light on methods for teaching at the elementary school level, its conclusions are less relevant to the requirements of junior high schools.

Reza et al. (2023) identified several issues that English teachers encountered under Kurikulum Merdeka, such as restricted resource availability, inadequate teacher preparation, and concerns with time management and individualized instruction. These difficulties were exacerbated in classrooms with diverse student backgrounds and skill levels. Similarly, Astuti et al. (2023) highlighted that although teachers and students had a positive perception of differentiated instruction, a lack of consistent resources and direction made it difficult to execute. The study results are useful for comprehending how specialized teaching methods might aid in overcoming learning challenges. Moreover, Lestari et al. (2023) investigated the application of the genre-based method in Kurikulum Merdeka English instruction. Although this method aligned with the curriculum's goals, teachers frequently omitted important steps, such as collaborative text creation, and gave students little feedback. This emphasizes the necessity of thorough professional development to improve training efficacy.

Kurikulum Merdeka's research emphasized applying creative strategies meant to promote competency-based learning and active student participation. For example, when Cahyani et al. (2024) investigated project-based learning, they discovered that teachers frequently modified activities to fit different classroom settings. Although these modifications increased student motivation, they were hampered by teachers' lack of preparation for developing context-specific modules. Similarly, Mali et al. (2023) showed that using technology-enhanced language learning tools facilitated Kurikulum Merdeka differentiated instruction. Teachers used digital tools to encourage group projects and critical thinking. However, the efficacy of these tactics was frequently constrained by instructors' technical proficiency and access to technology. According to several studies, pre-service teachers encounter difficulties adjusting to Kurikulum Merdeka's demands and flexibility. According to Lestari and Sumual (2023), pre-service teachers frequently had trouble managing their time and lacked the necessary skills to balance curriculum goals and creative flexibility. These difficulties were especially noticeable in schools where students came from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Besides that, Kamal (2024) emphasized in a different study the challenges of adopting Kurikulum Merdeka in junior high schools in both urban and rural areas. While urban instructors had to deal with huge class numbers and the difficulty of adapting

education to meet the diverse needs of their students, rural teachers had limited access to resources. This emphasizes how important institutional support is in closing these inequalities.

Kurikulum Merdeka is a differentiated education that emphasizes the importance of customizing classes to meet the requirements of each student. In their investigation into pre-service teachers' preparedness to apply inclusive approaches, Nursaputri and Sabat (2023) discovered a great deal of variation in their comprehension of differentiation. Teachers needed further training to provide classes that met the needs of children with varying learning styles and capacities. Similarly, Mulyani et al. (2023) also examined how Kurikulum Merdeka promotes inclusive education. They discovered that although the curriculum offered chances for individualized instruction, its effective execution hinged on the availability of materials and steady teacher assistance. Learning outcomes and student engagement increased in schools that invested in inclusive strategies.

3. METHODS

The qualitative research approach used in this study is especially well-suited to examining pre-service English teachers' challenges and situation-specific experiences during their practicum (PPL) in junior high schools using Kurikulum Merdeka. Qualitative methods enable an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives, behaviors, and adaptation strategies in real-life settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This method provides the flexibility to investigate participants' responses while maintaining a structured format to ensure data comparability (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). This study used semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations as its data collection techniques in order to obtain rich and thorough data. The observation approach verified interview data by seeing participants' actions and routines in their natural environments. The semi-structured interview is used to collect data because it compromises participant consistency and open-ended inquiry. While observations offered real-time insights into how these strategies were applied in practice, interviews recorded participants' perceptions and reflections on their adaption strategies during PPL. Combining these techniques made it possible to cross-validate the results, which improved the study's legitimacy and breadth. Bartell's theoretical framework was used in formulating the interview questions to guarantee that they aligned with the study's emphasis on adaption techniques. Every query relates to one of the groups listed in Bartell's model:

Category	Related Aspect	Interview Question Construct	Purpose
Procedural	Challenges and Responses	What school or district procedures were difficult to understand during your PPL? How did you learn and adapt to the school procedures and rules during your PPL?	To explore how pre-service teachers navigate procedural challenges and adapt.
Managerial	Classroom Management	What strategies did you use to manage the classroom effectively during PPL? How did you handle time management and scheduling challenges?	To identify how teachers adapt managerial strategies to align with Kurikulum Merdeka.
Psychological	Motivation and Stress Management	How did you manage stress or challenges in transitioning from student to teacher during PPL? What methods did you use to build self-confidence in your teaching abilities?	To understand psychological adaptations and resilience in the teaching role.
Instructional	Differentiated Instruction and Genre-Based Approach	How did you design lessons to meet the diverse needs of your students? Can you explain how you used different teaching methods to meet your students' needs?	To explore instructional strategies and their alignment with Kurikulum Merdeka objectives.
Professional	Professional Development	How did you build relationships with staff and other teachers during PPL? Did you receive any professional support, and how did it help in adapting to the curriculum?	To examine professional learning and its role in adapting to teaching demands.
Cultural	Inclusive Practices	How did you address cultural diversity in your classroom? How did you make your classroom welcoming and inclusive for all students?	To explore how pre-service teachers develop cultural proficiency and inclusivity.
Political	Networking and Collaboration	How did you collaborate with other teachers, administrators, or staff to support your teaching practices? How did external programs (seminar, etc) or colleagues (mentors, teacher, staff) help you adapt your teaching during PPL?	To investigate how external collaboration supports adaptation to Kurikulum Merdeka.

Table 2. Interview Instrument

Next, data were collected through interview sessions conducted with pre-service English teachers. Follow-up questions were used to clarify and expand on initial answers, enhancing the depth and richness of the data. To ensure the reliability and validity of the

findings, triangulation was used to analyze the consistency, and disparities were found by comparing data from several subjects. Member Checking was used to guarantee accuracy; interviewees were given a chance to review their transcripts and offer comments, and to minimize potential biases, a fellow researcher examined the thematic analysis and coding procedure. This is aligned with (Riege, 2003) said results that can be cross-verified, for example, by integrating interview data with observation or document analysis

4. RESULTS

The interview data analysis results were gathered from six pre-service English participants in the PPL (Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan) under Kurikulum Merdeka. Based on Bartell's framework, the results are arranged according to the adaption techniques obtained via thematic, axial, and selective coding. Descriptive statistics summarizes the frequency of themes, but qualitative insights give the conclusions more depth. Furthermore, Glaser and Strauss (1967) established the qualitative research methodology known as Grounded Theory, which includes thematic, axial, and selective coding as essential components. The focus of this method is on methodically developing theory from data. Miles (1014) said qualitative research frequently employs coding techniques to guarantee methodical data analysis. They make it possible to abstract facts into conclusions leading to or validating theory. The following table organized the findings by these codes and categories.

Category	Thematic Code	Axial Code	Selective Code
Procedural	Observing routines, asking mentors for feedback, documenting procedures (e.g., picket book).	Adapting to institutional rules and procedures through mentorship and observation.	Procedural adaptation is facilitated by mentorship and self-initiative.
Managerial	Using positive reinforcement, setting collaborative classroom rules, creating schedules.	Classroom and time management strategies for maintaining order and structure.	Managerial skills rely on clear communication, collaborative rule-setting, and structured planning.
Psychological	Managing stress through reflection, seeking mentor feedback, and focusing on self-improvement.	Building psychological resilience through self-reflection and mentorship.	Psychological adaptation involves reflective practices and emotional resilience developed via professional support.
Instructional	Differentiating instruction, using multimedia tools, group activities, addressing special needs students.	Instructional flexibility to address diverse student needs.	Instructional adaptation involves tailoring teaching to student abilities and preferences.
Professional	Collaborating with colleagues, attending seminars, and sharing teaching strategies with mentors.	Leveraging professional relationships to enhance teaching quality.	Professional adaptation involves collaboration and leveraging mentorship for instructional improvement.
Cultural	Incorporating students' cultural backgrounds, fostering inclusivity, and adapting curriculum to diversity.	Promoting cultural inclusivity in the classroom.	Cultural adaptation relies on valuing diversity and integrating it into teaching practices.
Political	Collaborating with administrators, engaging in school activities, and gaining feedback from staff.	Navigating school culture and building professional relationships.	Political adaptation involves developing professional networks and contributing to the school community.

Table 3. Coding Analysis

The results show that pre-service English teachers used a mix of reflective practices, collaborative approaches, and mentorship to deal with the procedural, managerial, psychological, instructional, professional, cultural, and political demands of their PPL experience. The development of professional networks and the promotion of cultural inclusivity were important components of their adaptation, even though mentorship and instructional differentiation were crucial. These data are consistent with Bartell's (2005) paradigm, which highlights the value of professional development and mentoring in assisting teachers in adapting.

The following table summarizes the frequency of adaption strategies that participants described, giving a general idea of the focus on different themes:

Adaptation Category	Frequency Across Participants	Percentage
Procedural Adaptation	8	14.8%
Managerial Adaptation	10	18.5%
Psychological Resilience	10	18.5%
Instructional Differentiation	15	27.8%
Professional Collaboration	9	16.7%
Cultural Responsiveness	6	11.1%
Political Adaptation	6	11.1%

Table 4. Frequency of Adaptation Strategies

According to the data, instructional differentiation was given the most weight (27.8%), followed by managerial adaptation and psychological resilience (18.5% each). Furthermore, interview data supported the aim by emphasizing frequent teacher-student interactions and differentiated practices during class activities. The observation data strongly supports the interview findings by validating the adaptation strategies of pre-service English teachers during their PPL under Kurikulum Merdeka.

In observation practices, procedural adaptation was aligned through participants' reliance on mentorship and structured observation as pre-service English teachers effectively navigated school routines and administrative tasks. In line with the data in the interview section for preserving order and student participation, managerial techniques, including cooperative rule-making and positive reinforcement, were regularly seen in classrooms. Moreover, In interviews, participants mentioned employing multimedia technologies for instructional differentiation; however, observations during class activities supported these practices. Furthermore, lesson plans offered more proof that their strategy was consistent. Practices including incorporating multimedia resources, group activities, and customized assignments for students with varied skill levels demonstrated instructional differentiation, which was often

highlighted in interviews. The effectiveness of reflective techniques for psychological resilience was further supported by observations, showing that participants addressed difficulties by writing and participating in mentor discussions. The observation about mentor-guided lesson planning and active seminar engagement reinforced professional teamwork, a significant theme in the interviews. Additionally, observations confirmed that participants were culturally sensitive by incorporating students' cultural backgrounds into classes and demonstrating political adaptation by participating in school events and meetings. This data strengthens the findings' credibility by showing a high correlation between observation activities and the interviews section.

5. DISCUSSION

This study aims to explore the adaption strategies used by pre-service English teachers in junior high schools during their Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan (PPL) using the Kurikulum Merdeka framework. The primary goal was to understand how instructors responded to procedural, managerial, psychological, instructional, cultural, and professional issues during their practicum. This research also emphasized the importance of mentoring in psychological and procedural adaptation. Kurikulum Merdeka also strongly emphasizes instructional differentiation to fulfill learners' varied requirements, and cultural responsiveness is incorporated as a crucial teaching method for inclusive classrooms. The study results align with other studies on teacher adaptation, including Bartell's (2005) paradigm, which emphasizes the value of cooperation, mentorship, and differentiated instruction. The validity of the adaption strategies indicated by pre-service English teachers during PPL is confirmed by the integration of observational data and interview findings. The consistency between self-reported techniques in the interview and observation highlights the importance of mentorship, reflective practices, and instructional differentiation in teacher adaptation. This data provides a thorough knowledge of pre-service teachers' experiences under Kurikulum Merdeka by presenting subjective (interviews) and objective (observations) viewpoints.

This study, however, offers particular insights into how these strategies appear in the Kurikulum Merdeka environment, specifically about:

- The focus on differentiating instruction to meet curriculum flexibility.
- Using cultural sensitivity to promote diversity in the classroom.
- The use of reflective techniques for psychological stress management.

6. CONCLUSION

The adaption strategy used by pre-service English teachers in junior high schools under Kurikulum Merdeka during their PPL (Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan) was investigated in this study. The results show that guiding instructors through institutional routines requires procedural adaptation through organized observation and mentoring. Maintaining classroom engagement and meeting students' unique needs required managerial and instructional adaption techniques such as differentiated education, collaborative rule-setting, and positive reinforcement. Professional collaboration improved the quality of instruction through professional growth and feedback, whereas reflective practices and mentor support promoted psychological resilience. While the degree of cultural integration varied across participants, cultural and political adaption strategies emphasized inclusivity and active engagement in school communities. In order to provide an understanding of Pre-service English teacher adaptation under Kurikulum Merdeka, the interview and observation data validate the alignment between the interview data and observation report. This study highlights the significance of mentorship, reflective practices, and individualized instruction in assisting pre-service teachers during their practicum.

LIMITATION

The study has limitations; it is important to consider them when evaluating the results. First, there were only six pre-service instructors in the sample, which limits how broadly the findings may be applied. The limited sample size might not adequately represent the range of experiences or approaches pre-service teachers use in different settings. Second, the results only focus on junior high schools employing Kurikulum Merdeka, making them highly context-specific. As a result, these ideas might not be as applicable to different school levels or curricula. Lastly, the study relied on interview-based self-reported data, which could be biased. Instead of giving a comprehensive account of their activities, participants may have focused on strategies they thought were advantageous or expected. These limitations emphasize the necessity of more studies using more significant, more varied sample sizes and different data-gathering techniques to confirm and triangulate the results.

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