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# TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE ERA OF KURIKULUM MERDEKA:

## *Policy Platform and Pedagogical Practice*

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## *Policy Platform and Pedagogical Practice*

Penerbit widina

# TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE ERA OF KURIKULUM MERDEKA: POLICY, PLATFORM, AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE

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**www.freepik.com**

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Proofreader:
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ISBN:
**978-634-317-137-9**

First Printing:
**Juli, 2026**

Hak Cipta Dilindungi Oleh Undang-Undang
**by Penerbit Widina Media Utama**

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# FOREWORD

The implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* marks a significant milestone in the ongoing transformation of Indonesian education. Moving beyond curriculum revision, this reform represents a paradigm shift toward learner autonomy, contextualised teaching, and professional empowerment of educators. In this evolving landscape, teachers are no longer positioned merely as curriculum implementers, but as reflective practitioners and instructional leaders who actively shape meaningful learning experiences.

This book offers a comprehensive and timely contribution to understanding the philosophical foundations, technological infrastructure, and pedagogical implications of the *Merdeka Belajar* initiative, particularly within the field of English Language Teaching. By integrating policy analysis, exploration of the Platform Merdeka Mengajar, and practical classroom applications, the author successfully bridges the gap between national educational reform and everyday teaching practice. The work provides both conceptual clarity and actionable guidance for teachers navigating the complexities of curriculum change.

It is hoped that this book will serve as a valuable reference for teachers, teacher educators, researchers, and educational stakeholders committed to improving the quality of English education in Indonesia. More importantly, it invites educators to engage critically, reflect professionally, and continuously innovate in response to the dynamic demands of twenty-first-century learning. Through informed practice and collaborative professional growth, the vision of *Kurikulum Merdeka* may be realised in meaningful and sustainable ways.

# TABLE OF CONTENT

**FOREWORD** ..... **iii**
**TABLE OF CONTENT** ..... **iv**

**EMPOWERING ENGLISH TEACHERS THROUGH**
**THE MERDEKA MENGAJAR APPLICATION** ..... **1**
Chapter One Understanding The Merdeka Belajar Framework ..... 2
Chapter Two The Platform Merdeka
Mengajar — Architecture and Features ..... 8
Chapter Three English Language Teaching In The Kurikulum Merdeka ..... 14
Chapter Four Professional Development Through PMM ..... 21
Chapter Five Assessment Practices In Merdeka Belajar ELT ..... 25
Chapter Six Designing Differentiated English Learning Experiences ..... 28
Chapter Seven Digital Literacies and Technology Integration ..... 31
Chapter Eight Implementation Challenges and Strategic Solutions ..... 34
Chapter Nine Monitoring, Reflection, and Continuous Improvement ..... 38
Chapter Ten Future Directions In Indonesian ELT Reform ..... 41
References ..... 45
Index ..... 47

**STRENGTHENING INSTRUCTIONAL ALIGNMENT** ..... **49**
Unit 1 of 7 Foundations of Instructional Alignment ..... 50
Unit 2 of 7 Understanding and Unpacking Capaian Pembelajaran ..... 55
Unit 3 of 7 Designing the Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP) ..... 59
Unit 4 of 7 Backward Design in ELT Module Planning ..... 63
Unit 5 of 7 Assessment Design and Instructional Alignment ..... 67
Unit 6 of 7 Integrating P5 in Aligned ELT Modules ..... 72
Unit 7 of 7 Evaluating and Refining Module Alignment ..... 75
References ..... 79
Appendix A: Module Glossary Of Key Terms ..... 81

**INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES**
**FOR VOCABULARY ACQUISITION** ..... **83**
Chapter One Vocabulary Acquisition In Second Language Learning ..... 84
Chapter Two The Merdeka Curriculum And Efl Vocabulary Teaching ..... 93
Chapter Three Contextual and Communicative Vocabulary Strategies ..... 98
Chapter Four Multimodal and Visual Vocabulary Strategies ..... 104

Chapter Five Game-Based and Playful Vocabulary Learning ..... 109
Chapter Six Reading-Based Vocabulary Development ..... 114
Chapter Seven Technology-Enhanced Vocabulary Learning ..... 118
Chapter Eight Collaborative and Socially
Mediated Vocabulary Learning ..... 123
Chapter Nine Vocabulary Assessment In Lower Secondary EFL ..... 126
Chapter Ten Planning and Implementing
A Vocabulary Development Programme ..... 131
References ..... 136
Appendices ..... 140
Index ..... 144

# **EMPOWERING ENGLISH TEACHERS**
# THROUGH THE
# ***MERDEKA MENGAJAR* APPLICATION**

*A Strategic Response to Curriculum Reform in Indonesia*

# CHAPTER ONE
# UNDERSTANDING THE MERDEKA BELAJAR FRAMEWORK

This chapter establishes the conceptual and policy foundations upon which the entire edifice of this reference book rests. A thorough understanding of the Merdeka Belajar framework — its historical antecedents, philosophical underpinnings, and structural dimensions — is indispensable for any educator seeking to engage meaningfully with the Platform Merdeka Mengajar and the pedagogical changes it supports.

## 1. Historical and Policy Context

Indonesian education policy has undergone numerous significant transformations since independence in 1945. From the highly centralised curriculum of the New Order era under President Soeharto to the progressive decentralisations of the reformasi period, the trajectory of national education has consistently reflected broader political, economic, and ideological shifts. The Competency-Based Curriculum (Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi, KBK) of 2004, the School-Level Curriculum (Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan, KTSP) of 2006, and the widely implemented Curriculum 2013 (Kurikulum 2013, K-13) each represented attempts to modernise educational provision in response to domestic imperatives and international benchmarks.

The Kurikulum 2013 introduced a scientific approach (pendekatan saintifik) to learning and placed significant emphasis on character education (pendidikan karakter). However, its implementation was widely criticised for the administrative burden it imposed on teachers, the misalignment between its ambitious aspirations and the professional preparedness of the workforce, and its rigidity in the face of the enormous diversity of educational contexts across the Indonesian archipelago. Evaluations by the Ministry and by independent researchers consistently found that a substantial proportion of teachers struggled to implement K-13 as intended.

It was against this backdrop that Minister of Education Nadiem Anwar Makarim, appointed in 2019, announced the Merdeka Belajar initiative. The policy was framed as a systemic response to the chronic underperformance revealed by national and international assessments, including the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the National Assessment (Asesmen Nasional, AN). PISA 2018 results placed Indonesian

# CHAPTER TWO
# THE PLATFORM MERDEKA MENGAJAR — ARCHITECTURE AND FEATURES

The Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) is the primary digital infrastructure through which the Merdeka Belajar educational reform reaches teachers across Indonesia. Developed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in collaboration with leading technology partners, PMM is designed as an integrated professional learning ecosystem — a single, coherent digital environment that provides teachers with access to assessment tools, professional learning content, collaboration platforms, and portfolio management features. This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the PMM's architecture, principal modules, and pedagogical rationale.

## 1. Overview of the Platform Ecosystem

The PMM is conceptualised not merely as a repository of teaching resources — which would represent a relatively modest ambition — but as a holistic professional learning environment. Its design reflects an understanding of teacher professional development as a continuous, collaborative, and contextually embedded process, rather than a set of discrete training events. The platform's architecture embodies three interconnected functions: informing (providing teachers with knowledge and resources), enabling (supporting teachers in designing and delivering quality learning), and connecting (facilitating professional community and collaboration).

The PMM is accessible through multiple channels: a web-based interface accessible via any internet-connected browser, and dedicated applications for iOS and Android mobile devices. The mobile application is particularly significant for the Indonesian context, where smartphone penetration substantially exceeds fixed broadband connectivity, especially in rural and remote areas. The availability of a mobile-first interface ensures that professional learning resources are accessible to teachers regardless of their geographic location, subject to the availability of mobile data connectivity.

# CHAPTER THREE
# ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN THE KURIKULUM MERDEKA

The Kurikulum Merdeka's English language curriculum represents a significant conceptual and structural departure from its predecessor frameworks. This chapter provides a thorough examination of the English Capaian Pembelajaran, the process of constructing Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran, and the principles and practices of Modul Ajar development for English Language Teaching. Mastery of the content in this chapter is foundational to effective curriculum leadership by English teachers.

## 1. *Capaian Pembelajaran* for English

The Capaian Pembelajaran (CP) — translated as Learning Outcomes — constitutes the foundational specification of what students are expected to know, understand, and be able to do in English at each developmental phase. Unlike the Kompetensi Dasar (Basic Competencies) of Kurikulum 2013, which specified discrete, granular performance indicators for each semester of each grade level, the Capaian Pembelajaran of Kurikulum Merdeka are expressed as holistic, phase-level descriptors that articulate the integrated competencies expected at the end of each two-to-three-year developmental phase.

### a. The Structure of the English CP

The English CP is organised around six Elements of Competency that correspond to the core language skill areas and linguistic knowledge domains relevant to communicative language development:

1) *Menyimak* (Listening): The capacity to comprehend spoken language across a range of contexts, registers, and text types.
2) *Membaca dan Memeriksa* (Reading and Viewing): The capacity to comprehend written and multimodal texts, including the ability to locate, interpret, evaluate, and integrate information from diverse text types.
3) *Berbicara dan Mempresentasikan* (Speaking and Presenting): The capacity to produce spoken language for communicative purposes, including both informal conversational interaction and more formal presentational modes.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PMM

Teacher professional development is among the most powerful levers available to education systems seeking to improve the quality and equity of student learning outcomes. The research literature on effective professional development is extensive and consistently identifies a set of features that distinguish impactful professional learning from superficial, episodic training. This chapter examines the PMM's professional development architecture through this evidence-based lens, with specific attention to the Pelatihan Mandiri module, the Komunitas Belajar feature, and the formal recognition mechanisms embedded in the platform.

## 1. Pelatihan Mandiri as Self-Directed Continuous Professional Development

Self-directed learning (SDL) is widely recognised as a foundational competency for professionals operating in rapidly changing knowledge environments (Knowles, 1975; Candy, 1991). In the context of teacher professional development, SDL is operationalised as the teacher's capacity and disposition to identify their own learning needs, set professional learning goals, locate and engage with relevant learning resources, monitor their progress, and evaluate the impact of their learning on their practice.

The Pelatihan Mandiri module is designed explicitly to scaffold and support self-directed professional learning. The platform's personalisation algorithms surface relevant learning recommendations based on the teacher's profile data; the modular course structure allows teachers to identify and pursue specific areas of professional need; and the reflective tasks embedded in each course promote metacognitive engagement with professional learning content.

### a. Designing a Personal Professional Development Plan

While the PMM provides a supporting infrastructure for professional learning, the teacher's agency in directing that learning remains paramount. English teachers are encouraged to approach Pelatihan Mandiri engagement strategically, using the following process to design a coherent Personal Professional Development Plan (PPDP):

# CHAPTER FIVE
# ASSESSMENT PRACTICES IN MERDEKA BELAJAR ELT

Assessment is the cornerstone of effective teaching and learning. In the Kurikulum Merdeka framework, assessment is reconceptualised as an integral, continuous, and formative process — a process that is inseparable from instruction and that serves primarily to support learning rather than to sort and rank students. This chapter examines the assessment principles that undergird the Merdeka Belajar framework, the diagnostic assessment tools available through the PMM, and the design of effective formative and summative assessment strategies for English language teaching.

## 1. Assessment Principles in Kurikulum Merdeka

The Kurikulum Merdeka's approach to assessment is grounded in several interconnected principles that collectively constitute a significant philosophical departure from the assessment culture that dominated Indonesian education under the previous curriculum frameworks.

Assessment for and as Learning: The primacy of formative assessment — assessment designed to provide ongoing, actionable feedback to both teachers and learners — is foundational to the Kurikulum Merdeka's assessment philosophy. This contrasts with the test-driven, summative-focused assessment culture of the Ujian Nasional era, in which assessment was primarily conceived as a mechanism for certifying achievement at the conclusion of a learning period.

Holistic and Authentic Assessment: The Kurikulum Merdeka advocates for assessment instruments and tasks that evaluate the full range of competencies specified in the Capaian Pembelajaran, including not only discrete linguistic knowledge but also communicative performance, critical thinking, creativity, and character. Authentic assessment tasks — tasks that require students to use language for genuine communicative purposes — are preferred over de-contextualised, isolated skill tests.

Diagnostic-First Orientation: The insistence on diagnostic assessment at the commencement of each learning unit reflects a commitment to the principle that effective instruction must begin with evidence-based understanding of where learners currently are. Teaching that begins from the teacher's assumptions about learner readiness, rather than from evidence of actual readiness, risks both under-challenging and over-challenging significant proportions of the class.

# CHAPTER SIX
# DESIGNING DIFFERENTIATED ENGLISH LEARNING EXPERIENCES

The diversity of Indonesian English classrooms is one of their most defining characteristics. In a single class, a teacher may encounter students whose English proficiency ranges from complete beginner to near-fluent; whose prior educational experiences and opportunities have been radically divergent; whose learning styles, cognitive strengths, and motivational profiles vary widely; and who come from home backgrounds that range from highly language-rich to entirely monolingual in local vernacular languages. Meeting this diversity with integrity — designing learning experiences that genuinely serve each learner — is among the most demanding and most important challenges of English language teaching.

## 1. Learner Diversity and Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction (DI) is defined as a teacher's proactive approach to curriculum, instruction, and assessment in response to the varying needs, readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles of students (Tomlinson, 2001). In the context of Kurikulum Merdeka, DI is not merely a pedagogical preference but an explicit curriculum expectation — the framework's emphasis on meeting students where they are, and the assessment structures designed to reveal where that is, creates a compelling professional obligation to differentiate.

### a. The Four Dimensions of Differentiation

Drawing on Tomlinson's (2001) influential framework, differentiation in English language teaching can be operationalised across four key dimensions:

- Content Differentiation: Adjusting the nature or complexity of the input — the texts, vocabulary, topics, or grammatical structures — that different groups of learners engage with. This might involve providing simplified versions of a base text for lower-proficiency learners, or extension materials with greater linguistic and conceptual complexity for advanced learners.
- Process Differentiation: Varying the learning activities through which students engage with and make sense of the target content. Process differentiation might include providing structured scaffolds for some

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# DIGITAL LITERACIES
# AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

The twenty-first century English language classroom is defined, to an extent unprecedented in the history of language teaching, by its entanglement with digital technologies. Students live, communicate, and construct knowledge through digital platforms, social media, streaming services, and interactive applications. English, as the dominant language of the global digital information ecosystem, is both a medium through which students encounter digital content and a competency whose development is increasingly inseparable from the development of digital literacy. This chapter examines the theoretical frameworks that contextualise digital literacy in ELT, the PMM's role as a technological scaffold for teachers, and strategies for technology-enhanced language learning.

## 1. Digital Competence Frameworks

Several internationally recognised frameworks provide conceptual architecture for thinking about digital competence in education. The DigComp 2.1 framework (Carretero et al., 2017), developed by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre, defines digital competence across five areas: information and data literacy; communication and collaboration; digital content creation; safety; and problem-solving. Each of these areas has direct relevance to English language teaching and learning.

For Indonesian teachers and students, the Framework for 21st Century Learning (P21) is also widely referenced, with its emphasis on the four Cs — Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration, and Creativity — providing a vocabulary for articulating the broader competency goals of technology-enhanced ELT. The PMM's Pelatihan Mandiri content on digital literacy is aligned with these frameworks, providing teachers with both conceptual grounding and practical strategies.

## 2. PMM as a Technological Scaffold for Teachers

The PMM itself is a primary vehicle for the development of teachers' digital literacy in the Indonesian context. By requiring teachers to navigate a sophisticated digital platform, manage a professional portfolio, engage with multimedia learning content, and participate in online professional

# CHAPTER EIGHT
# IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC SOLUTIONS

No educational reform, however well-designed in principle, is implemented in a vacuum. The Merdeka Belajar reform and the PMM platform encounter an Indonesian educational landscape characterised by extraordinary geographic, socioeconomic, and infrastructural diversity, alongside long-established professional cultures and institutional habits that may resist or complicate transformation. This chapter provides an unflinching assessment of the principal challenges that English teachers and school leaders face in implementing PMM-supported curriculum reform, and proposes evidence-based strategic solutions.

## 1. Barriers to PMM Adoption

Research on the adoption of educational technologies identifies a range of first-order barriers (related to resources and access) and second-order barriers (related to beliefs, attitudes, and professional culture) that impede the integration of technology into teaching practice (Ertmer, 1999). Both types of barriers are evident in the Indonesian PMM implementation context.

### a. First-Order Barriers

Infrastructure and Connectivity: In large numbers of Indonesian schools — particularly those in rural, remote, and 3T (Terdepan, Terluar, Tertinggal — frontier, outermost, underdeveloped) regions — the internet connectivity necessary for reliable PMM access is limited or unavailable. The platform's mobile application design mitigates this challenge to some extent, enabling offline access to previously downloaded content, but significant connectivity gaps remain.

Device Access: While smartphone penetration in Indonesia is relatively high compared to fixed broadband connectivity, the quality and reliability of available devices vary widely. Teachers in lower-income contexts may be working with older devices that struggle to run the PMM application effectively, creating a de facto inequity in access to professional development resources.

# CHAPTER NINE
# MONITORING, REFLECTION, AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

The aspiration for continuous improvement lies at the heart of the Merdeka Belajar educational philosophy. Continuous improvement is not, however, a spontaneous outcome of good intentions; it requires systematic practices of monitoring, evidence collection, and structured reflection that translate experience into professional learning and learning into improved practice. This chapter examines the reflective practice frameworks that inform professional self-evaluation, the use of PMM data for professional improvement, and the conditions necessary for sustaining a culture of continuous professional learning.

## 1. Reflective Practice Frameworks

The concept of the reflective practitioner, articulated influentially by Donald Schon (1983), proposes that the most important form of professional knowledge is not the codified propositional knowledge taught in pre-service programmes but the situated, experiential knowledge developed through systematic reflection on professional action. For teachers, reflective practice involves the deliberate, analytical examination of one's own teaching — its intentions, actions, and consequences — with the purpose of identifying patterns, surfacing assumptions, and generating insights that lead to improved practice.

Several frameworks for structured reflective practice are well-established in the ELT professional development literature. Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle (1984) describes a four-stage process of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation — a cyclical sequence in which teachers move from experiencing a teaching event through reflecting on it, drawing theoretical conclusions, and trying out modified approaches. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988) provides a more structured six-stage framework particularly useful for reflective writing.

### a. Structured Reflection for ELT Practice

For English teachers using the PMM's Bukti Karya module to document professional artefacts, the following structured reflection protocol is recommended as a framework for the reflective commentary that should accompany each artefact:

# CHAPTER TEN
# FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN INDONESIAN ELT REFORM

The trajectory of English language teaching reform in Indonesia is shaped by forces at multiple scales: the evolving aspirations of national education policy; the dynamics of global English language education and applied linguistics as academic and professional disciplines; the technological transformation of communication and information access; and the complex, urgent demands of economic development, social equity, and global citizenship that Indonesian society faces in the twenty-first century. This final chapter examines emerging trends and challenges, proposes policy recommendations for the sustained improvement of ELT quality, and articulates a vision for Indonesian English education in 2030 and beyond.

## 1. Emerging Trends and Challenges

### a. Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Language Learning

The rapid advancement and popularisation of generative artificial intelligence — including large language models capable of generating fluent, contextually appropriate English text — is perhaps the most disruptive emerging trend in the global ELT landscape. AI tools have the potential to transform virtually every dimension of English language teaching and learning: providing personalised, immediately responsive language practice and feedback; enabling low-cost access to near-native-level language modelling; automating aspects of routine assessment and feedback; and generating customised teaching materials at scale.

For Indonesian English teachers, AI presents both extraordinary opportunities and significant professional challenges. The opportunity lies in the potential for AI-powered tools to extend the reach and quality of English language practice for the millions of Indonesian learners who currently have limited access to qualified English teachers. The challenge lies in ensuring that the integration of AI into English learning environments is pedagogically considered, critically informed, and equitably implemented — and that the development of human communicative competence, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness is not displaced by the convenience of AI-generated text.

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# INNOVATIVE PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR VOCABULARY ACQUISITION

## IN LOWER SECONDARY EFL CLASSROOMS

*Based on the Merdeka Curriculum*
*A Comprehensive Reference for EFL Educators at the SMP/MTs Level*

# CHAPTER ONE
# VOCABULARY ACQUISITION
# IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

*Theoretical Foundations*

Understanding the nature of vocabulary knowledge and the processes through which it is acquired provides the essential theoretical foundation upon which all informed vocabulary pedagogy must rest. This chapter examines the key dimensions of vocabulary knowledge, the major theoretical frameworks that have shaped our understanding of vocabulary acquisition, the distinction between incidental and intentional vocabulary learning, the relationship between vocabulary size and EFL proficiency, and the pedagogical implications of these theoretical insights for lower secondary EFL in Indonesia.

## 1. The Nature of Vocabulary Knowledge

The deceptively simple question 'What does it mean to know a word?' has generated a substantial and rich body of research in applied linguistics and vocabulary studies. The answer, it turns out, is considerably more complex than lay understanding typically suggests. Knowing a word is not a binary condition — knowing versus not knowing — but a multidimensional, developmental achievement that unfolds over many encounters with the word across varied contexts and communicative situations.

Paul Nation's (2001) influential taxonomy of word knowledge identifies three major dimensions that together constitute full knowledge of a word: form knowledge (the ability to recognise and produce the spoken and written forms of the word, and to understand its morphological relationships with related forms); meaning knowledge (the ability to understand the word's basic meaning, its conceptual referent, its connotations and associations, and its figurative and extended uses); and use knowledge (the ability to deploy the word in grammatically appropriate collocational patterns, in contextually appropriate registers, and in semantically appropriate syntactic environments).

Nation's (2001) further distinction between receptive and productive knowledge adds a critical additional dimension. Receptive vocabulary knowledge — the ability to understand a word when encountered in reading or listening — develops earlier and is more extensive than

# CHAPTER TWO
# THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM AND EFL VOCABULARY TEACHING

The Kurikulum Merdeka represents a fundamental reconceptualisation of the structure, philosophy, and pedagogical practice of English language education in Indonesian lower secondary schools. For vocabulary teaching, it creates a policy environment that is genuinely enabling: one that prioritises depth over coverage, learner agency over passive reception, and meaningful contextual learning over rote instruction. This chapter examines the specific features of the Merdeka Curriculum most relevant to EFL vocabulary development, the vocabulary-related dimensions of the English Capaian Pembelajaran, and the connections between vocabulary development and the Profil Pelajar Pancasila.

## 1. Kurikulum Merdeka: Key Features and EFL Implications

The Kurikulum Merdeka's departure from its predecessors is not merely structural but philosophical. Where previous curricula specified detailed content inventories — including vocabulary lists — that teachers were expected to transmit systematically, the Merdeka Curriculum specifies phase-level competency outcomes and trusts teachers to make professional judgements about the specific content, vocabulary, and activities most appropriate for achieving those outcomes with their specific student populations.

This philosophical shift has far-reaching implications for vocabulary pedagogy. It liberates teachers from the tyranny of exhaustive vocabulary lists that must be covered regardless of their relevance or accessibility to a specific class. It creates space for vocabulary instruction that is responsive to students' interests, prior knowledge, and communicative needs. And it invites teachers to design vocabulary learning experiences that are genuinely engaging and meaningful — because the curriculum framework provides the flexibility to do so — rather than merely efficient in terms of content coverage.

### a. The Principle of Esensialisme (Content Essentialisation)

The Kurikulum Merdeka's principle of esensialisme — the deliberate narrowing of prescribed content to focus on the most essential, foundational knowledge and skills — has direct implications for vocabulary

# CHAPTER THREE
# CONTEXTUAL AND COMMUNICATIVE VOCABULARY STRATEGIES

*Teaching Words Through Meaning and Use*

The most powerful principle in contemporary vocabulary pedagogy is deceptively simple: words are best learned when encountered in meaningful contexts that support inference of their meaning and that require their use for genuine communicative purposes. This chapter examines a set of instructional strategies grounded in communicative language teaching and contextual learning principles, providing both theoretical justification and concrete, classroom-ready guidance for each approach.

## 1. The Communicative Language Teaching Framework

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) — the dominant paradigm in contemporary EFL pedagogy — is grounded in the conviction that language is fundamentally a tool for communication, and that language instruction should therefore prioritise the development of communicative competence: the ability to use language appropriately and effectively in real-world communicative contexts. For vocabulary teaching, the CLT framework implies that words should be taught and practised not as isolated items but as components of meaningful communicative acts — as the building blocks of messages that are addressed to real or imagined audiences, for genuine or simulated communicative purposes.

The implications of CLT for vocabulary instruction are captured in the distinction between focus on form (deliberate, isolated attention to vocabulary as a linguistic object) and focus on meaning (attention to vocabulary as a vehicle for communicative purposes). CLT-aligned vocabulary instruction integrates both: it creates contexts in which students are genuinely motivated to communicate meaning — through tasks, problems, narratives, and debates — while also providing focused attention to the vocabulary resources needed for that communication.

# CHAPTER FOUR
# MULTIMODAL AND
# VISUAL VOCABULARY STRATEGIES

*Seeing, Drawing, and Making Meaning*

The contemporary applied linguistics and educational psychology literature provides compelling evidence for the superior effectiveness of multimodal over unimodal vocabulary instruction. When vocabulary is presented and practised through multiple representational modes — visual, auditory, kinaesthetic, gestural, and graphic — the richness and durability of lexical encoding in long-term memory is substantially enhanced. This chapter examines the theoretical basis for multimodal vocabulary instruction and provides detailed guidance on a range of visual and multimodal strategies that are particularly well-suited to the lower secondary EFL classroom in Indonesia.

## 1. Multimodality and Vocabulary Learning

Paivio's (1986) Dual Coding Theory provides the foundational cognitive rationale for multimodal vocabulary instruction. Dual Coding Theory proposes that verbal and visual information are processed and stored in separate cognitive systems — a verbal system for language-based representations and a nonverbal system for imagistic representations — and that information encoded in both systems simultaneously is more richly represented in memory and more easily retrieved than information encoded in only one system. For vocabulary instruction, this theory directly implies that combining verbal (spoken or written word form) and visual (image, diagram, gesture) presentation of new words produces stronger lexical encoding than verbal presentation alone.

Mayer's (2001) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning extends and operationalises Dual Coding Theory for educational practice, proposing principles — such as the multimedia principle, the contiguity principle, and the redundancy principle — that guide the design of effective multimodal instructional materials. These principles are directly applicable to the design of vocabulary displays, digital vocabulary materials, and vocabulary workstation activities in the lower secondary EFL classroom.

# CHAPTER FIVE
# GAME-BASED AND PLAYFUL VOCABULARY LEARNING

*Engagement, Retrieval, and Retention Through Play*

The case for incorporating game-based activities into vocabulary instruction is not merely motivational — though the motivational benefits of learning games are well-documented and significant. It is, fundamentally, a cognitive and pedagogical case: well-designed vocabulary games create the exact conditions that the vocabulary acquisition research literature identifies as most conducive to durable lexical learning — active retrieval, spaced practice, deep semantic processing, and high engagement. This chapter examines the research basis for game-based vocabulary learning, provides a comprehensive taxonomy of vocabulary games for lower secondary EFL, and offers detailed guidance on designing and facilitating effective vocabulary game activities.

## 1. The Research Case for Game-Based Vocabulary Learning

The application of game-based learning to vocabulary instruction is supported by a convergent body of evidence from cognitive psychology, educational psychology, and applied linguistics. From a cognitive psychology perspective, games naturally induce the conditions of desirable difficulty (Bjork, 1994) — conditions in which learning is challenging enough to require genuine cognitive effort but not so challenging as to be demotivating — that research consistently associates with durable long-term learning.

From an applied linguistics perspective, vocabulary games align precisely with the retrieval practice and spaced repetition principles identified as most effective for lexical retention. When students play a vocabulary game, they are repeatedly required to retrieve target words from memory under conditions of productive tension — the competitive or collaborative pressure of the game — that enhance the depth and durability of retrieval practice. Research by Allen (1983), Wright et al. (2006), and Mayer and Harris (2010) has consistently demonstrated significant vocabulary gains from game-based instruction, with effects that are robust across a range of game types, student ages, and vocabulary levels.

# CHAPTER SIX
# READING-BASED VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

*Extensive and Intensive Approaches*

Reading is, for most EFL learners, the single most important source of incidental vocabulary growth beyond the classroom. The relationship between reading and vocabulary development is, moreover, reciprocal and mutually reinforcing: wider vocabulary enables more successful reading, and wider reading in turn builds vocabulary. For lower secondary EFL in Indonesia, where curriculum time is limited and the volume of intentional vocabulary instruction that can realistically be provided is constrained, reading-based vocabulary development is not merely one strategy among many but a fundamental component of any serious vocabulary development programme.

## 1. The Reading-Vocabulary Connection

The centrality of reading as a vocabulary-development mechanism rests on a simple empirical reality: the English language contains vastly more vocabulary than any course of intentional instruction can cover. Nation (2001) estimates that the English language contains approximately 54,000word families — a number that dwarfs the productive vocabulary target of even the most ambitious EFL programme. The only realistic pathway to developing the breadth of English vocabulary that higher-level EFL proficiency requires is through extensive reading — sustained, voluminous engagement with English texts across a wide range of genres, topics, and difficulty levels.

Research on the vocabulary learning rates achievable through extensive reading (Nation & Waring, 1997; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006) suggests that engaged EFL readers can acquire approximately 1,000 new word families per year through extensive reading alone — a rate that, compounded over the three years of lower secondary education, represents a substantial contribution to vocabulary development. This potential is, however, conditional on several design features of the extensive reading programme, which are examined in detail in Section 6.2.

# CHAPTER SEVEN
# TECHNOLOGY-ENHANCED VOCABULARY LEARNING

*Digital Tools, Apps, and AI in the EFL Lexicon*

The landscape of technology-enhanced vocabulary learning has been transformed in recent years by the convergence of several powerful technological developments: the ubiquitous availability of smartphones in Indonesia; the rapid expansion of high-quality, freely accessible vocabulary learning applications; the growth of online platforms for language learning; and the emergence of artificial intelligence tools capable of providing individualised vocabulary practice and feedback at unprecedented scale. This chapter examines the research basis for technology-enhanced vocabulary learning and provides practical guidance on the most effective digital tools and strategies for lower secondary EFL in Indonesia.

## 1. Digital Tools and Vocabulary Acquisition

The research literature on technology-enhanced vocabulary learning is broadly positive, demonstrating advantages for digital vocabulary learning tools over traditional paper-based approaches in several key dimensions: the ability to implement spaced repetition algorithms that optimise the timing of vocabulary review; the provision of immediate, individualised feedback on retrieval attempts; the availability of multimedia (audio, visual, animated) vocabulary presentation that supports dual coding; and the motivational appeal of digital game-like formats that sustain engagement over extended practice periods.

A critical caveat, however, is that not all digital vocabulary tools are equally effective, and the research literature points to significant variation in the pedagogical quality of available applications. Tools that implement evidence-based principles — spaced repetition, retrieval practice, contextualised practice in authentic sentences — produce stronger vocabulary gains than tools that merely provide engaging interfaces without pedagogically principled learning mechanisms. Teachers selecting digital vocabulary tools for classroom or homework use should evaluate them against these evidence-based criteria rather than relying solely on student engagement or technological novelty.

# CHAPTER EIGHT
# COLLABORATIVE AND SOCIALLY MEDIATED VOCABULARY LEARNING

*Peers, Projects, and Communities of Practice*

The social dimension of vocabulary learning is, as Chapter 1 established, both theoretically central and empirically well-supported. This chapter examines the major collaborative and socially mediated approaches to vocabulary development that are applicable in the lower secondary EFL classroom, from cooperative learning structures and peer teaching to project-based vocabulary learning. These approaches are not merely pedagogically effective; they are also well-aligned with the Bergotong Royong dimension of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila and with the collaborative, community-oriented values that the Merdeka Curriculum aspires to develop.

## 1. Sociocultural Theory and Vocabulary Development

Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory provides the foundational framework for understanding why and how collaborative vocabulary learning is effective. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) — the region of learning in which a student can accomplish tasks with the support of a more knowledgeable other that they cannot yet accomplish independently — is directly applicable to vocabulary learning: students can engage with and retain vocabulary that is slightly beyond their independent level when supported by a teacher, a more proficient peer, or a collaboratively constructed shared understanding.

The concept of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) describes the specific support mechanisms through which a more knowledgeable other enables a learner to operate in the ZPD. In the context of vocabulary learning, scaffolding may take many forms: a teacher's contextual elaboration that makes the meaning of an unknown word inferrable; a peer's explanation of a word's meaning in L1 or simplified English; a group's collaborative construction of a definition or example sentence; or a digital tool's provision of contextualised example sentences and related words. All of these are scaffolding mechanisms that enable learners to access and internalise vocabulary that they would not independently encounter or retain.

# CHAPTER TEN
# PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING A VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

*From Theory to Classroom Practice*

The preceding nine chapters have provided the theoretical foundations, curriculum context, and pedagogical strategies that together constitute a comprehensive vocabulary teaching knowledge base. This final chapter synthesises that knowledge into practical guidance for programme planning and lesson design — addressing how teachers can translate the book's insights into a coherent, evidence-based, and contextually responsive vocabulary development programme for their specific lower secondary EFL context.

## 1. Designing a Vocabulary Curriculum for SMP/MTs

A vocabulary curriculum for lower secondary EFL should not be an exhaustive list of vocabulary items to be taught, but a systematic plan for creating the conditions in which vocabulary development can occur — through principled selection of target vocabulary, strategic design of instructional activities, and regular provision of assessment and review. The following framework provides a practical structure for vocabulary curriculum design aligned to the Merdeka Curriculum's phase-based approach.

### a. Vocabulary Selection: The Priority Principle

The first and most consequential decision in vocabulary curriculum design is vocabulary selection: which words deserve explicit instructional attention? Given the vast size of the English lexicon and the limited instructional time available, principled selection — guided by the frequency, relevance, and learnability criteria discussed in Chapter 6 — is essential. The following priority framework is recommended for lower secondary EFL vocabulary selection:

# TEACHING ENGLISH IN THE ERA OF KURIKULUM MERDEKA:

*Policy Platform and Pedagogical Practice*

The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka marks a significant transformation in Indonesia's educational landscape, emphasizing learner-centered education, competency-based learning, differentiated instruction, and the development of 21st-century skills. At the same time, the rapid advancement of digital technologies has reshaped English language teaching by providing innovative platforms, interactive learning environments, and data-driven instructional practices. Consequently, English teachers are expected not only to understand current educational policies but also to integrate digital technologies and effective pedagogical approaches that foster meaningful and engaging learning experiences.

Teaching English in the Era of Kurikulum Merdeka: Policy, Platform, and Pedagogical Practice is designed as a comprehensive reference for educators, researchers, teacher educators, and pre-service teachers who seek to understand the evolving landscape of English language teaching in Indonesia. The book explores the interconnection between educational policy, digital learning platforms, and contemporary pedagogical practices within the framework of Kurikulum Merdeka. It begins by examining the philosophical foundations, principles, and policy directions of the curriculum, highlighting their implications for English language teaching and the changing roles of teachers as facilitators, mentors, and reflective practitioners.The book further discusses a wide range of pedagogical approaches that support effective English language learning, including Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Project-Based Learning (PBL), differentiated instruction, task-based learning, collaborative learning, and authentic assessment. It provides practical guidance on designing learning experiences that develop students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills while promoting critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication.


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ISBN 978-634-317-137-9

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