

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the research findings and discussions derived from the data collection and analysis process. The findings presented are the result of interpreting field data collected through interviews with English teachers. All findings are systematically organized to provide a comprehensive overview of the actual implementation of Independent Curriculum-based English learning in junior high schools.

Specifically, the findings and discussions in this chapter are designed to answer the research questions focused on the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum in English teaching in junior high schools in Hulu Sungai Selatan Regency. The discussions cover various aspects, from lesson planning and classroom implementation to assessment and evaluation. Therefore, this chapter is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics, obstacles, and complexities faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum in the context of English learning.

A. Findings

Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in English language learning at the junior high school level is a complex process that requires teachers to be prepared to face various pedagogical changes. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, flexibility in planning, the application of differentiated learning, and the use of technology as part of the learning process. However, in the real-world context, particularly at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan, the implementation of these principles is not without challenges faced by English teachers. These challenges arise from various factors, such as differences in student abilities, teachers' limited understanding of the components of the Independent Curriculum, students' increasing dependence on artificial intelligence, and the need to strengthen teacher competencies through mentoring and continuous professional development. Therefore, this Findings section details the various challenges experienced by English teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum in English language learning at junior high schools in Hulu Sungai Selatan, based on empirical data obtained from interviews.

1. Interview result the challenges faced by English teacher in implementing the Merdeka curriculum in English language teaching at junior high school in Hulu Sungai Selatan

The following are the result of interview that researcher conducted with two English teacher who teach at the MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan :

1.1. Supervision of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Based on in-depth interviews with both participants, it was discovered that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan began simultaneously, in line with the school's official policies and directives. The two teachers did not implement this curriculum on their own initiative, but rather as part of an institutional program when the school was designated as an educational unit implementing the Independent Curriculum. This indicates that the implementation process of the Independent Curriculum at the school was systematic and coordinated, involving all educators simultaneously. However, the initial implementation was not yet fully optimal because the teachers were still in the process of understanding the new concepts, principles, and demands brought by the curriculum.

More specifically, Participant 1 stated *“Saya mulai menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka sejak tahun 2022, waktu sekolah mulai diarahkan untuk menggunakan kurikulum ini. Awalnya memang belum maksimal, tapi sambil berjalan mulai dipahami.”* that he began implementing the Independent Curriculum in 2022, coinciding with the school's policy to transition from the previous curriculum. In the initial stages, implementation was carried out in stages by adjusting teaching materials, such as learning modules, learning objectives, and more flexible teaching strategies. Participant 1 acknowledged that initially there were limited understanding and readiness, but over time, understanding of the Independent Curriculum began to improve. A similar sentiment was expressed by Participant 2 stated *“Kalau saya mulai benar-benar menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka sekitar tahun 2022. Masih dalam tahap menyesuaikan karena banyak hal yang berbeda dengan kurikulum sebelumnya.”*, who revealed that the more intensive implementation of the Independent Curriculum began in the same year, namely 2022. According to him, the adaptation process is still ongoing due to significant differences between the Independent Curriculum and the previous curriculum, both in terms of lesson planning, teacher roles, and a more student-centered learning approach. This condition indicates that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is an ongoing process that requires time, adjustment, and

reflection from teachers.

Regarding the main differences between the Independent Curriculum and the previous curriculum, Participant 1 stated *“Perbedaannya terasa sekali pada fleksibilitas. Guru tidak lagi terlalu dikejar target materi, tapi lebih fokus pada bagaimana siswa memahami dan mencapai tujuan pembelajaran.”*, base on that stated emphasized fundamental changes in learning flexibility and the role of teachers in the teaching and learning process. According to him, the Independent Curriculum provides teachers with greater freedom to adapt strategies, methods, and learning materials to suit the needs, abilities, and characteristics of students. Teachers are no longer solely tied to the demands of completing material within a specified timeframe, but are instead directed toward achieving meaningful learning objectives. This encourages teachers to focus more on student understanding of concepts, active engagement in learning, and gradual competency development. Participant 1's statement indicates that the flexibility offered by the Independent Curriculum shifts the learning paradigm from content-oriented to student-centered learning.

Meanwhile, Participant 2 stated *“ Yang paling terasa itu di perencanaan dan penilaiannya. Sekarang harus menyusun ATP dan penilaian yang lebih menekankan proses belajar siswa, bukan hanya hasil akhir.”* Base on that stated highlighted significant differences in the aspects of lesson planning and the assessment system. He explained that the Independent Curriculum requires teachers to be more careful, structured, and reflective in developing lesson plans, particularly through the development of Learning Objective Flows (ATP). Furthermore, changes are also evident in the assessment system, which no longer focuses solely on final results but places greater emphasis on the learning process experienced by students. Teachers are required to continuously observe student progress, document the learning process, and provide constructive feedback. Participant 2's views indicate that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum requires increased teacher competency in planning and assessment, as well as a readiness to conduct continuous reflection on learning practices implemented in the classroom.

Regarding the training and socialization of the Independent Curriculum, both participants stated that they had participated in various activities organized by relevant parties as a form of initial support for the implementation of the new

curriculum. These training and socialization activities were seen as important steps in introducing the concepts, principles, and direction of learning changes mandated by the Independent Curriculum. Although both participants had the opportunity to participate in these activities, their experiences and perceived levels of usefulness varied, depending on the format of the training, the material presented, and its relevance to classroom learning needs.

Participant 1 stated *“Saya beberapa kali ikut pelatihan, baik dari Kemenag maupun melalui PMM. Dari situ lumayan membantu memahami konsep Kurikulum Merdeka.”* Base on that stated revealed that he had participated in several Independent Curriculum training sessions, both online and offline, organized by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and through the Merdeka Mengajar (PMM) Platform. He found these training sessions quite helpful in developing a basic understanding of the Independent Curriculum concept, including changes in learning paradigms, the development of teaching materials, and the role of teachers in student-centered learning. Access to flexible training materials through PMM also provided Participant 1 with the opportunity to study independently according to his time and needs. This demonstrates that structured and diverse training can positively contribute to improving teacher readiness for curriculum changes.

In contrast to Participant 1, Participant 2 stated *“Saya pernah ikut sosialisasi dan pelatihan, tapi kebanyakan masih teori. Untuk praktik di kelas, masih perlu banyak belajar sendiri.”* Base on that stated the training and outreach she attended were still general in nature and emphasized theoretical aspects over classroom learning practices. She felt that the training materials did not fully address the real challenges teachers face in implementing the Independent Curriculum, such as classroom management, developing contextual ATP, and implementing process-based assessments. As a result, Participant 2 had to learn a lot independently through direct classroom experience, discussions with colleagues, and exploration of other learning resources. This finding indicates a gap between the training materials provided and teachers' practical needs, so that the Independent Curriculum training needs to be designed to be more applicable and contextual to support more effective implementation.

1.2. Student over-reliance on Artificial Intelligence

Based on the interview results, both participants expressed a relatively

balanced view of the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in education, particularly in English language learning. Participant 1 viewed AI as a form of technological innovation that is inevitable with the development of the times and the digitalization of education. According to him, AI has great potential to support the learning process if utilized appropriately and proportionally. AI can help students find ideas, enrich vocabulary, and provide examples of language usage, such as sentences or texts in English. This view indicates that Participant 1 views AI as a learning tool that can increase students' access to learning resources and facilitate a more effective learning process, especially for students who still have limitations in language proficiency.

Nevertheless, Participant 1 “*Menurut saya, AI itu sebenarnya bisa membantu pembelajaran, terutama untuk mencari ide, kosakata, atau contoh kalimat dalam Bahasa Inggris.*” Base on that stated emphasized that the use of AI must remain under the supervision and direction of teachers to prevent students from reducing their critical thinking and independence. Similarly, Participant 2 stated “*AI memang membantu, tapi kalau terlalu sering dipakai tanpa batasan, siswa jadi kurang berusaha dan tidak mau berpikir sendiri.*” base on that stated expressed a more cautious view of AI's role in education. He acknowledged that AI has certain benefits, but assessed that uncontrolled use could negatively impact students' learning independence. Excessive reliance on AI is feared to cause students to put less effort into understanding the material and tend to rely on instant results without engaging in in-depth thought. These findings indicate that while AI has the potential to be an effective learning resource, teachers need to manage, limit, and implement clear usage policies to ensure the technology supports learning without hindering the development of students' cognitive abilities and independent thinking.

Both participants stated that they were aware of students' use of artificial intelligence (AI) in English learning, particularly in completing written assignments such as translation and writing. This phenomenon is seen as part of technological developments that are increasingly accessible to students, both through personal devices and online applications. Student use of AI is no longer sporadic but has become a fairly common practice in daily learning activities. This indicates that AI has entered the realm of learning in a tangible way and is influencing the way students complete academic assignments.

Participant 1 stated “*Sekarang hampir semua siswa tahu dan pernah pakai AI, terutama untuk tugas menulis atau menerjemahkan.*” base on that stated

revealed that students' use of AI has become increasingly visible in recent years, along with the increasing popularity and ease of use of various AI-based applications. According to him, almost all students are already aware of AI and have used it, especially to help compose written texts or translate sentences in English. This indicates that students tend to use AI as a quick solution to complete assignments, especially when they have difficulty expressing ideas or understanding language structures. Participant 1's statement emphasized that AI has become an alternative learning resource widely used by students, although it is not always accompanied by a deep understanding of the material.

Meanwhile, Participant 2 stated "*Biasanya kelihatan dari hasil tugasnya, bahasanya bagus tapi tidak sesuai dengan kemampuan siswa sehari-hari.*" Base on that story that students' use of AI was relatively easy to identify from the characteristics of the submitted assignments. He explained that student-produced texts often had overly neat language structures, relatively uniform vocabulary, and a language level that did not match students' abilities in daily classroom learning activities. The striking difference between students' oral performance and the quality of their written assignments was a key indicator of AI use. These findings suggest that while AI can improve the quality of final assignments, uncontrolled use has the potential to create a mismatch between the learning process and the outcomes, and make it difficult for teachers to assess students' authentic abilities.

Regarding the differences in assignment results between students who used AI and those who did not, both participants agreed that assignments completed with the assistance of artificial intelligence (AI) generally demonstrated better language quality, particularly in terms of grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary choice. At first glance, the assignments appeared neater and closer to good linguistic standards. However, this quality often did not align with students' level of understanding of the material being studied. Participant 1 stated "*Kalau ditanya secara lisan, siswa sering tidak bisa menjelaskan isi tulisannya sendiri.*" Base on that stated explained that this discrepancy was evident when students were asked to explain the assignment's content orally, where many students were unable to outline the main idea, purpose of the writing, or meaning of the text they had submitted. This suggests that the use of AI tends to produce good final products, but does not always involve students' deep thinking and understanding.

In contrast, Participant 2 stated "*Walaupun masih banyak salah, tapi*

kelihatan itu hasil usaha sendiri.” Base on that stated revealed that assignments completed without AI assistance generally still contained various errors, both in terms of grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary choice. Nevertheless, the results of these assignments were considered to better reflect students' true abilities and the learning process they underwent. The errors that emerged provided a more authentic picture of students' language proficiency, making it easier for teachers to identify their learning difficulties and needs. This view suggests that while the use of AI can improve the quality of final assignments, over-reliance has the potential to obscure assessments of students' true abilities and diminish the assignments' function as a meaningful learning assessment tool.

In managing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom, the two participants implemented different strategies based on their respective perspectives and teaching experiences. Participant 1 stated *“Saya izinkan AI dipakai untuk mencari ide, tapi hasil akhirnya harus dikembangkan sendiri dan dijelaskan secara lisan.”* Base on that stated chose an adaptive approach, directing the use of AI as a learning tool, not as a means to complete assignments instantly. She allowed students to utilize AI for the initial stages of learning, such as generating ideas, enriching vocabulary, or understanding examples of language usage. However, students were still required to develop these results independently and to be able to explain their thinking processes and the content of their assignments through oral activities in class. By emphasizing process assessment and direct explanation skills, Participant 1 sought to ensure that the use of AI did not diminish students' cognitive engagement but instead supported a deeper understanding of the learning material.

Meanwhile, Participant 2 stated *“Saya lebih sering memberi tugas yang dikerjakan di kelas supaya siswa benar-benar berpikir sendiri.”* Base on that states adopted a more restrictive approach to managing AI use by imposing stricter restrictions. She designed process-based learning tasks and classroom activities that required direct student involvement, making them difficult to manage with AI assistance. Direct-to-class assignments, such as discussions, guided writing exercises, or oral presentations, aimed to encourage students to think independently and demonstrate their authentic abilities. This strategy reflected Participant 2's efforts to minimize Student over-reliance on AI and ensure that learning truly occurred through direct classroom interaction, practice, and reflection.

1.3. Insights related to Differentiated Learning.

Based on the interview results, both participants demonstrated a fairly good understanding of the concept of differentiated learning as emphasized in the Independent Curriculum, although the level of implementation in the classroom showed differences. Participant 1 stated “*Saya cukup sering mencoba menerapkan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, misalnya dengan memberi tugas yang berbeda sesuai kemampuan siswa.*” Base on that stated that she had attempted to implement differentiated learning in English learning, particularly by adjusting the difficulty level of assignments and providing a variety of learning activities according to students' abilities and needs. This effort was carried out by providing different assignments for each student, both in terms of material complexity and activity format, so that students could learn according to their level of readiness. Participant 1's statement demonstrated a pedagogical awareness to accommodate the diversity of student abilities in the classroom and encourage more inclusive learning.

However, Participant 1 acknowledged that the implementation of differentiated learning has not been consistent. Limited learning time, demands for material completion, and a high administrative burden are the main factors hindering optimal implementation. Meanwhile, Participant 2 stated “*Secara konsep saya paham pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, tapi untuk praktiknya masih jarang diterapkan secara maksimal.*” base on that stated revealed that although he understands the concept and importance of differentiated learning in the Independent Curriculum, its implementation in the classroom is still rarely carried out optimally. He believes that differentiated learning requires careful planning and teacher readiness in managing heterogeneous classes, so in practice it remains a challenge. These findings indicate a gap between conceptual understanding and implementation of differentiated learning in the classroom, indicating the need for further support for teachers so that the approach can be implemented sustainably and effectively.

Regarding the difficulties in implementing differentiated learning, both participants revealed that the diversity of student abilities within a class was the main challenge they faced. Participant 1 stated “*Dalam satu kelas, kemampuan siswa sangat beragam, ada yang cepat paham dan ada yang sangat dasar.*” Base on that stated explained that students' English proficiency levels varied widely, ranging from those who were able to grasp material quickly to those who were still at a basic level. These differences included vocabulary mastery, understanding of

language structures, and the ability to express ideas orally and in writing. This situation made it difficult for teachers to design learning that could optimally accommodate all students at once, especially when learning must proceed according to limited time allocations.

In addition to the diversity of abilities, Participant 2 stated *“Jumlah siswa banyak, jadi agak sulit membagi perhatian dan menyiapkan materi yang berbeda-beda.”* Base on that stated added that the large number of students in a class also increases the challenges in implementing differentiated learning. Classes with large numbers of students make it difficult for teachers to provide individual attention and monitor each student's learning progress. Furthermore, preparing different materials, assignments, and learning strategies according to student needs requires more time, effort, and complex planning. These findings indicate that implementing differentiated learning not only requires teachers' pedagogical understanding but is also heavily influenced by classroom conditions and structural limitations, which ultimately impact the consistency of its implementation in the field.

In addition to structural challenges, both participants also revealed that limited practical understanding of differentiated learning strategies poses a significant obstacle to their implementation in the classroom. They stated that the concept and theory of differentiated learning have often been presented in various training and outreach activities for the Independent Curriculum. However, this understanding has not been fully supported by concrete and contextual examples of implementation, tailored to real-life classroom conditions. As a result, teachers still experience difficulties translating the concept of differentiation into everyday learning practices, such as determining appropriate forms of differentiation, developing varied assignments, and effectively managing heterogeneous classes.

Regarding the support needed for optimal differentiated learning, both participants agreed that practical and applicable training is essential. Participant 1 stated *“Kami butuh contoh konkret, seperti modul ajar yang sudah jadi dan bisa disesuaikan dengan kondisi kelas. jadi saya beberapa kali mengikuti seminar tentang pembuatan modul ajar kurikulum merdeka”* base on that stated specifically emphasized the importance of providing ready-to-use examples of teaching tools, such as teaching modules, lesson plans, or examples of differentiated assignments that can be directly adapted to the characteristics and needs of students in the classroom. According to him, the presence of examples of best practices will help

teachers understand the flow of implementing differentiated learning more concretely, thereby reducing the uncertainty and planning burdens they have experienced.

Meanwhile, Participant 2 stated “*Biasa ada pendampingan langsung dan supervisi, kami jadi lebih percaya diri untuk menerapkannya di kelas.*” Base on that stated highlighted the importance of ongoing mentoring and direct supervision from the school and educational supervisors. He argued that direct mentoring in the classroom, accompanied by constructive feedback, can increase teachers' confidence in implementing differentiated learning. Supervision that is constructive, rather than simply assessing, is considered capable of helping teachers reflect on their learning practices and make gradual improvements. These findings indicate that the successful implementation of differentiated learning depends not only on individual teachers' understanding, but also on systemic support in the form of relevant training, ongoing mentoring, and a supportive school environment.

1.4. Teacher Participation in PMM (Independent Teaching Platform)

Based on the interview results, the two participants expressed differing views on the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* (PMM), although both agreed that the platform plays a significant role in supporting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. PMM is viewed as a supporting tool provided by the government to help teachers understand curriculum policies, improve pedagogical competence, and provide various learning resources and references. The differences in views between the two participants emerged primarily regarding the level of utilization and the benefits directly experienced in daily learning practices.

Participant 1 stated “*Menurut saya, PMM sangat membantu guru, terutama untuk memahami Kurikulum Merdeka dan mencari referensi pembelajaran.*” Base on that stated had a positive view of PMM and considered the platform a useful learning resource for teachers. He believed that PMM helps teachers understand the concepts and principles of the Independent Curriculum and provides various learning resources that can be used as guidelines for designing teaching materials. He also assessed that the availability of training modules, learning examples, and other supporting materials facilitated independent learning and tailored learning to students' needs. This view demonstrated that Participant 1 was able to utilize PMM as a professional development tool that supported teachers' readiness to implement the Independent Curriculum in the classroom.

Meanwhile, Participant 2 stated “*PMM itu sebenarnya bagus, tapi belum bisa saya manfaatkan secara maksimal.*” Base on that stated viewed PMM as a platform that is inherently beneficial, but has not yet been fully utilized optimally. He revealed that there are various limitations that hinder the maximum utilization of PMM, such as time constraints, teacher workload, and difficulties in accessing or implementing the materials available on the platform. As a result, despite recognizing PMM's potential as a learning resource, Participant 2 has not yet experienced significant benefits in daily learning practices. This finding indicates that the successful utilization of PMM depends not only on the availability of the platform, but also on the readiness, support, and working conditions of teachers that enable its continued use.

Regarding the benefits of the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* (PMM) for teacher professional development, both participants acknowledged that the platform has made a positive contribution, although the perceived benefits differed. PMM is viewed as a supporting tool that provides various learning resources for teachers to improve their professional and pedagogical competencies. The difference in views between the two participants primarily lies in the extent to which the materials and features available in PMM can be directly implemented in classroom learning practices.

Participant 1 stated “*Di PMM banyak modul dan contoh pembelajaran yang bisa langsung dicoba di kelas.*” that PMM provides various features that directly support teacher competency improvement, such as training modules, teaching tools, and examples of best practices that can be immediately implemented in learning. He believed that the material available in PMM is quite relevant to teachers' needs, particularly in understanding and implementing the Independent Curriculum. The availability of applicable learning examples is considered to help teachers design more structured and innovative learning, so that PMM functions not only as a source of information but also as a practical guide for implementing learning in the classroom.

In contrast to Participant 1, Participant 2 stated “*PMM menambah wawasan, tapi untuk diterapkan di kelas masih perlu disesuaikan dengan kondisi siswa.*” Base on that stated assessed that the benefits of PMM were more apparent in terms of expanding insight and conceptual understanding of the Independent Curriculum. She revealed that the material in PMM helped broaden teachers' understanding of

learning approaches, planning, and assessment, but its implementation in the classroom still required adjustments to the real-world conditions of students and the school environment. This suggests that while PMM plays a crucial role in enhancing teachers' theoretical understanding, additional support is still needed to effectively adapt the material obtained from the platform to diverse learning contexts.

To maintain consistent participation in the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* (PMM), both participants implemented different strategies according to their individual circumstances and habits. Both recognized that continued participation in PMM is crucial for supporting teacher professional development, particularly in understanding and implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. However, the differences in strategies reflected varying levels of independence and the need for external support to optimally utilize the platform.

Participant 1 stated “Saya biasanya meluangkan waktu tertentu, misalnya setelah jam pelajaran, untuk membuka PMM.” Base on that stated she tries to organize and schedule specific time to access PMM, especially during his free time or after teaching hours. By intentionally setting aside time, Participant 1 can participate in training modules, read materials, and explore learning resources available in PMM in a more focused manner. This strategy demonstrates personal awareness and commitment to professional development, as well as the ability to manage time independently amidst the various demands of his duties as a teacher.

Meanwhile, Participant 2 stated “*Kalau ada pendampingan dari sekolah, mungkin kami bisa lebih rutin menggunakan PMM.*” base on that stated revealed that he still needed encouragement and guidance from the school to ensure more focused and sustainable participation in PMM. He believed that mentoring, guidance, or school policies supporting the use of PMM would help teachers become more motivated and consistent in accessing the platform. This perspective demonstrates that, in addition to individual motivation, institutional support from the school also plays a crucial role in encouraging teacher engagement in PMM as part of ongoing professional development efforts.

B. Discussion

This section aims to interpret and analyze the research findings presented in the previous section, particularly those related to the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum. This discussion not only

recaps the findings but also relates them to the learning context, the role of teachers, and real-world conditions. The discussion focuses on four main aspects: supervision of the Independent Curriculum implementation, students' dependence on artificial intelligence (AI), the application of differentiated learning, and teacher participation in the Independent Teaching Platform (PMM).

1. The Main Challenges Faces by English Teacher in Implementing in Independent Curriculum

1.1. Supervision of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Based on interviews, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in English learning at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan began simultaneously in 2022 as part of the school's institutional policy. Although its implementation was carried out systematically and coordinated, English teachers still faced various challenges, especially in the initial stages of implementation, due to limited understanding, readiness, and significant differences between the Independent Curriculum and the previous curriculum. The shift in learning paradigm that emphasizes flexibility, student-centered learning, the development of Learning Objectives (ATP), and process-based assessment requires increased teacher competency in planning, assessment, and reflection on learning. Furthermore, although teachers have participated in training and socialization of the Independent Curriculum through the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Merdeka Teaching Platform (PMM), the training, which tends to be theoretical, has not fully addressed practical needs in the classroom, so teachers still have to adapt independently. This condition indicates that the main challenges for English teachers at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan lie in the ongoing adaptation process, limited practical support, and the need for more applicable mentoring and supervision in implementing the Independent Curriculum.

The findings of this study align with the Independent Curriculum Implementation Monitoring theory proposed by (J. Nafi'ah, 2023), which states that the Independent Curriculum was designed in response to the post-pandemic impacts of COVID-19, particularly learning loss and gaps in student learning outcomes. The findings indicate that English teachers at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan began implementing the Independent Curriculum institutionally in 2022, with an emphasis on learning flexibility, student-centered learning, and process-based assessment, as mandated in the theory. However, in practice, the flexibility

provided by the curriculum presents new challenges for teachers, particularly in terms of readiness, conceptual understanding, and the ability to translate curriculum policies into contextual learning practices. Furthermore, training and outreach, which are still theoretical in nature, do not fully support teachers' needs in addressing student ability gaps due to learning loss, so the process of adaptation and reflection on learning is still ongoing. Thus, these findings confirm that the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum is highly dependent on ongoing monitoring, mentoring, and supervision to ensure that curriculum flexibility truly addresses the challenges of post-pandemic learning, particularly in English language learning.

1.2. Student over-reliance on Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Based on the interviews, both participants held a relatively balanced view of the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in English learning, acknowledging its benefits as a learning aid while also cautioning against the negative impacts of uncontrolled use. AI is seen as capable of assisting students in generating ideas, enriching vocabulary, and improving the quality of written assignments, but on the other hand, it creates dependency that has the potential to reduce students' independence and thought processes. Both teachers recognized that students' use of AI has become common practice, particularly in writing and translation assignments, and can be identified by the mismatch between the quality of writing and students' oral skills. Assignments produced with AI assistance tend to be linguistically sound but do not always reflect students' understanding, while assignments without AI, despite having many errors, are considered more authentic. To address these challenges, teachers employ different management strategies, ranging from directing the use of AI as a limited aid to limiting its use through process-based assignments and classroom activities, to ensure that English learning remains cognitively engaged and reflects students' actual abilities.

The findings of this study align with theories regarding students' dependence on artificial intelligence (AI) as proposed by (Mauriyat, 2020), (M. H. Santosa, 2022), and (Richards, 2021). The findings indicate that students at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan tend to utilize AI as an instant solution in English learning, particularly in writing and translation assignments, resulting in low levels of critical thinking and independent learning. This condition is exacerbated by students' weak English language foundations and the diversity of language abilities

in the classroom, as explained in the theory, making it easier for students to rely on AI to compensate for their limitations. In response to these challenges, English teachers at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan have adapted their teaching strategies by limiting the use of AI, emphasizing process-based tasks and classroom activities, and directing AI as a learning aid, not a substitute for student thinking. This strategy reflects the role of teachers, as emphasized by (Richards, 2021), namely managing the use of technology wisely to support learning objectives, develop creativity, and strengthen students' language competencies on an ongoing basis. Thus, managing students' dependence on AI through adjusting teaching strategies is an important solution in facing the challenges of English learning at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan.

1.3. Insights related to Differentiated Learning

Based on the interview results, both participants had a fairly good understanding of the concept of differentiated learning in the Independent Curriculum, but its implementation in the classroom was still suboptimal and inconsistent. The wide diversity of students' English proficiency levels and the large number of students in a single class presented major challenges to implementing differentiated learning effectively. Furthermore, time constraints, administrative burdens, and the complexity of lesson planning hindered teachers from adapting strategies and materials to student needs. Both participants also revealed that although they had learned the concept of differentiated learning through training, the lack of concrete and contextual examples made it difficult for teachers to apply it in daily learning. Therefore, support in the form of more applicable training, the provision of ready-to-use teaching materials, and ongoing mentoring and supervision were deemed essential for the optimal and sustainable implementation of differentiated learning.

The findings of this study are in line with the Insights related to Differentiated Learning theory proposed by (Rohmah, 2024), which emphasizes that teachers still greatly need systematic, planned, and continuous supervision and mentoring in implementing the Independent Curriculum. The findings indicate that although English teachers at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan have understood the concept of differentiated learning, they still experience confusion and difficulty in implementing it consistently in the classroom, especially in accommodating diverse student abilities and managing heterogeneous classes. This condition is in line with Rohmah's (2024) view that unclear understanding of the important components of

the Independent Curriculum, including differentiated learning, requires intensive mentoring so that learning strategies can be designed and adapted appropriately. In addition, teachers' need for concrete examples of practice and ready-to-use teaching tools also reinforces the importance of guidance in integrating the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, such as environmental awareness, into English learning materials contextually. Thus, these findings confirm that the success of differentiated learning at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan is highly dependent on systemic support in the form of continuous supervision and mentoring so that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can align with curriculum objectives and real needs in the classroom.

1.4 Teacher Participation in PMM (Independent Teaching Platform)

The findings indicate that the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* (PMM) is considered important by both participants as a means of supporting the professional development of English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, although the level of utilization and perceived benefits differed. Participant 1 considered PMM very useful because it provides training modules, teaching tools, and examples of good practices that are applicable and can be directly implemented in the classroom, thus supporting teacher readiness practically and independently. In contrast, Participant 2 acknowledged the benefits of PMM more in increasing insight and conceptual understanding, but its utilization has not been optimal due to time constraints, workload, and the need to adapt to real school conditions. To maintain participation, Participant 1 implemented an independent time management strategy by scheduling PMM access, while Participant 2 emphasized the importance of institutional support and mentoring from the school so that teacher involvement in PMM can be consistent and sustainable.

The research findings align with the theory of teacher participation in PMM, which emphasizes the importance of learning communities and access to ongoing professional development. Participant 1's perspective, which actively utilizes PMM through training modules, teaching tools, and examples of good practices, reflects PMM's role as a self-directed and collaborative learning space that enables teachers to flexibly improve their understanding of learning policies and practices, as suggested by (Vien, 2017) and (Aulia, 2023). Meanwhile, Participant 2's experience, which has not yet optimally utilized PMM, demonstrates that the success of digital platforms as learning communities is determined not only by the availability of

learning resources but also by institutional support, time management, and facilitation from the school to ensure consistent teacher engagement. Thus, these findings confirm that PMM serves as a strategic tool for teacher professional development in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, but its effectiveness depends heavily on a combination of individual motivation and systemic support that enables teachers to participate actively and sustainably.

2. The English Teachers Strategies that Implement to Increase the Effectiveness of Implementing the Independent Curriculum in Learning

2.1. Study on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum

Based on the research findings, the challenges faced by English teachers at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan are primarily related to the adaptation process to the Independent Curriculum, limited practical support in planning and assessment, and the need for concrete examples of student-centered learning implementation. In this context, the strategic study of the Independent Curriculum implementation as proposed by (Andika 2025) can be seen as a relevant and applicable solution. Through learning implementation activities, English teachers can observe and adapt good practices from schools or educators who have successfully implemented the Independent Curriculum, thereby minimizing the gap between theoretical understanding and classroom learning practices. This strategy provides a concrete picture of the implementation of communicative learning, differentiated learning, the utilization of everyday life contexts, and the use of media and technology in English learning, which have been challenges for teachers. Furthermore, understanding authentic assessment that continuously assesses learning processes and outcomes also helps teachers overcome difficulties in implementing process-based assessment. Thus, the study of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum plays a role as a professional development strategy that not only improves teachers' pedagogical competence, but also supports the realization of English learning that is more meaningful, flexible, and aligned with the objectives of the Independent Curriculum and the strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan.

2.2. Management of the Use of Artificial Intelligent in the Classroom

The findings of this study are in line with the theory of managing the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the classroom proposed by (Andika, 2025). The findings show that English teachers at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan have recognized the

potential and risks of using AI in learning, thus implementing directed and controlled management. The strategies implemented by teachers, such as limiting AI only as a tool for finding ideas and vocabulary, emphasizing process assessment through oral explanations, and designing class activity-based assignments, reflect efforts to establish goals, limits, and rules for using AI as explained in the theory. In addition, the teachers' efforts in distinguishing authentic and AI-assisted student work demonstrate the application of the principles of academic honesty and a critical attitude towards AI output. Thus, these findings confirm that systematic and responsible AI management plays an important role in reducing student dependency, maintaining learning independence, and ensuring that the use of AI truly supports cognitive engagement and the development of students' thinking skills in English learning.

2.3. Differentiated Learning Seminar

Based on the research findings, the Differentiated Learning Seminar can be a relevant and solution-oriented strategy in addressing the challenges faced by English teachers at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan in implementing the Independent Curriculum, particularly regarding the understanding and application of differentiated learning. The findings indicate that teachers still experience confusion in adapting learning content, processes, and products to the diversity of student abilities, interests, and characteristics, resulting in learning that is not fully optimal and student-centered. This is in line with the objectives of the Differentiated Learning Seminar as stated by (Andika, 2025), which emphasizes strengthening teachers' conceptual understanding and practical skills through the presentation of strategies, examples of good practices, and reflective discussion forums. Through this seminar, teachers can improve their professional capacity in designing more inclusive and adaptive English learning, while also obtaining solutions to obstacles faced in the classroom, so that the implementation of differentiated learning can run more effectively and align with the principles and objectives of the Independent Curriculum.

2.4. Teacher Assignment to Access PMM

Based on the research findings, assigning teachers to access the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* (PMM) can be understood as a relevant strategy to address the challenges of English teacher professional development at MTsN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan. Differences in PMM utilization levels among participants indicate that even

though the platform is available, not all teachers are able to utilize it optimally without clear direction and support. In line with theory (Andika, 2025), official assignments from educational units encourage teachers to be more active and focused in accessing PMM features, such as teaching tools, independent training, and learning communities, so that their use is not incidental. This strategy also has the potential to overcome time constraints and lack of consistent participation by making PMM part of teachers' professional responsibilities. Through these assignments, teachers are encouraged to engage in continuous reflection and self-development, which ultimately supports the creation of more innovative, relevant, and student-centered English learning practices in accordance with the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum.