

Digital Innovation in Teacher Development: The Impact of the Platform *Merdeka Mengajar* on English Teachers' Pedagogical Competence at MAN Pinrang

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Abstract

This research aims (1) to find out the activities carried out by English teachers using Platform Merdeka Mengajar at MAN Pinrang to improve their pedagogical competence, and (2) to explore the perception of English teachers in using Platform Merdeka Mengajar at MAN Pinrang to improve their pedagogical competence. In this study, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative method. Three teachers who use Platform Merdeka Mengajar were selected as participants. Data were collected through observations and interviews. The results showed that there are several activities carried out by teachers in using Platform Merdeka Mengajar, namely in terms of developing lesson plans, improving self-development, using technology in the teaching process, and utilizing Platform Merdeka Mengajar features such as teaching tools (modules, teacher manuals student books), inspirational video, and portfolio evidence. Teachers utilize these features to find references in designing lesson plans and to find inspiration and creative learning methods. The perceptions of teachers using Platform Merdeka Mengajar to improve their competence are that teachers can easily access the various features provided. The available features are also beneficial in improving their competence by providing various references, such as modules and various best practice videos that can be used to adjust learning methods. This finding improves English teachers' pedagogical competence, especially in adjusting learning methods and finding references. In addition, several obstacles are experienced in using Platform Merdeka Mengajar, such as the account used to access the platform being deleted and experiencing network constraints that are sometimes less stable. This shows the importance of improving infrastructure and technical management to maximize and ensure that the platform's potential can be fully utilized to improve teachers' pedagogical competence.

Keywords: *Platform Merdeka Mengajar, Pedagogical competence, English Teacher.*

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum revision is common practice in all educational systems, including Indonesia. Indonesia's curriculum has been updated at least twelve times, from *Rencana Pembelajaran* 1947 to *Merdeka* Curriculum. The *Merdeka* curriculum offers a variety of extracurricular activities with better content to allow students to discover new ideas and develop their skills. The *Merdeka* curriculum is a program that is very much in line with the agenda of improving the quality of education that has been promoted since the Indonesian nation became independent.

Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (*Kemendikbudristek*) is developing the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* to facilitate the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. This will provide teachers with references, inspiration, and enhance their understanding and skills in executing the *Merdeka* curriculum through collaboration and sharing (Arnes et al., 2023). This platform can be used by teachers throughout Indonesia who are under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology at the Department of Education and the Ministry of Religion with an active learning account. *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* aims to enhance teachers' competencies, facilitate the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, and advance Indonesia's initiatives in digital education while supporting teachers in teaching, learning, and creativity (Sari et al., 2022).

Teacher competence in Indonesia needs improvement to produce quality human resources. As Mulyasa (2009) and Febriana (2019) mentioned, teachers must possess knowledge, skills, and behaviors to execute their professional futures effectively. *Undang-Undang Guru dan Dosen No.14 Tahun 2005 Bab I Pasal I* states that teachers are professional educators whose primary responsibility is to educate, teach, guide, direct, train, assess, and evaluate students. Pedagogical, professional, personality and social competence are the four essential competencies teachers must have to carry out these responsibilities. The Ministry of Education and Culture aims to increase teacher competence and inspire others through the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* (Aulia et al., 2023).

Becoming a qualified teacher requires developing four competencies: pedagogical, professional, social, and personal. Pedagogical competence is an essential skill that all teachers must possess. It refers to a teacher's ability to manage students effectively and understand their development in various areas, including moral, emotional, and intellectual, to facilitate learning and education (Aulia et al., 2023). This competence is evident in a teacher's ability to plan learning programs, conduct interactions, and manage the teaching and learning process (Febriana, 2019). According to Habibullah (2012), there are several aspect of pedagogical competence must master: (1) Comprehending the physical, moral, spiritual, social, cultural, emotional, and intellectual attributes of students, (2) Gaining an understanding of educational learning theory and principles, (3) Create a curriculum that is relevant to the subjects being taught, (4) Plan instructional activities, (5) Make use of communication, information, and technology to enhance learning, (6) Assisting students in realizing their diverse potential, (7) Interact with students in an efficient, sympathetic, and courteous manner, (8) Setting up evaluation and assessment procedures for learning objectives and process, (9) Make use of assessment and evaluation results to enhance learning, (10) Taking thoughtful steps to raise the standard of instruction. Teachers can improve their skills by joining discussion groups, reading relevant books and articles, and participating in webinars and training (Alamsyah & Gandana,

2023). Additionally, *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* provides *Pelatihan Mandiri* features, allowing teachers to participate in online session to expand their knowledge and competence.

Several previous studies have been conducted related to the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*. The first study was from Aulia, Murni, and Desyandri (2023) under the title Improving the Competence of Elementary School Teachers Through the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*. The researcher concluded that teachers must have four essential competencies, pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competence to improve the quality of education and learning. Therefore, improving the quality of teachers in elementary schools can be done by maximizing the use of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*. The other research was from Budiarti (2022) with the title *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform as a Supporter of the Quality of Mathematics Learning in East Java. The researcher found that using *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* positively impacted teacher competence. The study revealed that 87,6% of respondents agreed that the platform helped develop teacher competence through inspirational video features and independent training. In addition the research from Arnes, Musparidi, and Yusmanila (2023) under the title Analysis of the Use of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* by *PPKn* Teachers to Accelerate the Implementation of *Merdeka* Curriculum. Thirty-one *PPKn* teachers in Sijunjung Regency experienced the benefits, as evidenced by interview data and questionnaires that they filled out. The teachers explained that they were motivated to learn, teach, and work through the features provided by *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*, such as inspirational videos and independent training.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to identify the use of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* to improve the pedagogical competence of English teachers. Data were collected through observations and interviews. Three MAN Pinrang English teachers who use *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* were selected as participants. Observations were made to determine the activities of English teachers carried out using *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*. In contrast, interviews were used to discover the perceptions of English teachers at MAN Pinrang using *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* to improve their pedagogical competence. The researcher used Miles and Huberman data analysis, which consists of three activities carried out: (1) Data reduction, the researcher reduces the data from interview transcripts and observation sheets; (2) Data Display, the data selection process is simple in words, sentences, and narratives, so the researcher controls the data collected as a basis for conclusions; (3) Conclusion and Verification, verification means testing the validity of temporary findings, which shows that after data is obtained, its validity continuously analyzed and verified.

FINDINGS

Teachers' Activities Using Platform Merdeka Mengajar to Improve Their Pedagogical Competence

The findings of this research reveal various levels of engagement among English teachers in utilizing the features of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*. The table below provides a detailed overview activity, highlighting how specific features contributed to pedagogical development.

Tabel 1. Teachers' activities using Platform *Merdeka Mengajar*

No.	Indicator	Description of Activity	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3
1.	Online Training	Teachers participated in formal online training, such as <i>Diklat Pintar Pusdiklat</i> , to enhance pedagogical competence. However, none of the teachers used the Independent Training feature within the Platform <i>Merdeka Mengajar</i>	No	No	No
2.	Collaboration with Fellow Teachers	None of the teachers utilized the Community feature for direct collaboration. However, teacher 1 uploaded best practices as reports through the portfolio evidence feature.	Yes (portfolio evidence feature)	No	No
3.	Lesson Plan Development	All teachers actively used the teaching tools feature to find references and support the development of effective lesson plans.	Yes	Yes	Yes
4.	Observation and Feedback	Each teacher conducted a question-and-answer session to assess students' understanding at the end of their teaching.	Yes	Yes	Yes
5.	Application of Technology in Learning	All teachers integrate technology into their teaching, supported by facilities such as smart TVs. Teacher 2 also uses a clip-on microphone so students can listen to the explanation well.	Yes	Yes	Yes
6.	Self-Development	Only teacher 1 engaged in self-development using the platform by accessing the inspirational videos feature and uploading teaching practices through the portfolio evidence feature	Yes	No	No

The findings of this research show the result of the observation. It was found that the first teacher carried out several activities using *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* to improve his pedagogical competence. These activities include using the teaching tools, inspirational video, work evidence, and using technology in the learning process. On the other hand, it was found that the activities carried out by the second and third teachers in using *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* to improve their pedagogical competence were using teaching tools feature. The feature that three teachers actively use is the teaching tool, which is used to find references in the form of modules that can be used to design lesson plans. The three teachers also utilize technology in the learning process. One of the technologies facilitated by the school is a smart TV, which allows teachers to present more creative and diverse material more efficiently. Besides that, the interesting that was found was that the second teacher used a clip-on microphone to make students focus more on listening and following learning process.

English Teachers' Perception on Using Platform Merdeka Mengajar to Improve Their Pedagogical Competence

a. Acceptance

1) Understanding of Using Platform Merdeka Mengajar

Based on interview conducted with three English teachers at MAN Pinrang, the researcher found that *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* has a user-friendly design that is easy for teachers to understand and access. Proper categorization of feature allows teachers to save time finding relevant teaching materials and supports them in preparing efficient lessons. Three teachers emphasized that the content division on this platform, such as the video section, teaching modules, and others, is clear. This information was obtained based on the answers from the research subjects, as in the following quote:

Extract 1 (AK/29/11/2024)

"Iya gampang dimengerti, apa yang dicari lebih mudah didapatkan di sana karena sudah jelas pembagian fitur dan kontennya yang mana bagian video, bagian modul ajar, jadi kita mudah mencari apa yang dibutuhkan."

[Yes, it is easy to understand, and what we are looking for is easier to find there because it is clear which division of feature and content is the video section and the teaching module section, so we can easily find what we need]

2) Use of the Platform

The first teacher actively uses teaching tool, inspirational videos, and work evidence to find learning references that can be applied in the classroom and access various learning resources that can improve teachers' pedagogical competence. As said by the first teacher as follows:

Extract 2 (AK/29/10/2024)

"Fitur yang sering saya gunakan itu di bagian mengajar, ada modul ajar di sana yang bisa kita jadikan referensi-referensi, langkah-langkah pembelajaran yang menarik yang bisa diterapkan. Saya juga suka fitur video inspiratif dan bukti karya karena di sana sudah lebih ilmiah praktik"

baiknya, saya suka menonton video-video di sana, biasanya itu kalau ada kesulitan atau kendala ketika mengajar, setelah mengajar saya biasa lihat-lihat video di sana. Saya juga pakai fitur bukti karya, kebetulan saya sudah pernah unggah best practice”

[The features that I often use are in teaching section, where there are teaching modules where we can find references and interesting learning steps that can be applied. I also like the inspirational videos and work evidence because there is more scientific best practice. I like watching videos there. Usually, if there are difficulties or obstacles when teaching, I look at the videos afterward. I also use *bukti karya*, and I happened to have uploaded my best practice]

The second and third teachers utilize the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* to find references, such as teaching modules, which can be obtained through the teaching tool feature. Unlike the first respondent, the second and the third teachers revealed that they rarely use *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* but found it very helpful with the teaching tool feature, which is expressed below:

Extract 3 (FA/01/11/2024)

“Kalau saya itu jarang pakai Platform itu, saya biasanya pakai untuk cari referensi-referensi modul ajar lewat fitur perangkat ajar ketika ingin merancang rencana pembelajaran. Saya biasanya pakai fitur perangkat ajar karena di dalamnya itu ada banyak contoh-contoh modul yang sangat membantu karena memberikan gambaran kalau saya buat rencana pembelajaran.”

[I rarely use the platform, but I usually use it to find references to teaching modules through the teaching tool when I want to design a lesson plan. I usually use the teaching tool because there are many examples of modules in it, which are very helpful because they provide an overview of what I need to do when I make a new lesson plan or tool]

b. Evaluation

1) Influence on Pedagogical Competence

Three teachers realized that by utilizing the various best practices shared, they felt more confident in fulfilling the students’ needs because of the many references in the form of modules provided. The three teachers felt that their pedagogical competence has improved because they could adapt learning strategies that were more relevant and interesting to students. This is expressed in quote such as the following:

Extract 4 (AK/29/10/2024)

“Pasti kurang lebihnya bertambah, seperti yang saya bilang tadi ada praktik baik yang dibagikan oleh berbagai kalangan guru, ada banyak referensi-referensi yang dapat meningkatkan metode pembelajaran kita. Saya kira secara tidak langsung itu menambah kompetensi pedagogik.”

[It must increase more or less. As I said, various teachers share best practice, and many references can improve our learning method. I think that indirectly adds to pedagogical competence]

2) Obstacles

The obstacles experienced by the first teacher is that learning account used to access *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* was deleted. The account deletion occurred due to violations committed by other users in the form of usage exceeding the provided drive limit of 50 GB, causing the email to be used to access the platform. The information was revealed by the teacher as follows:

Extract 5 (AK/29/10/2024)

“Kalau saya kendala yang saya hadapi dalam menggunakan Platform Merdeka Mengajar itu masalah akun belajar dan kebetulan akhir-akhir ini Kemenag juga sudah dihapuskan akun belajar itu jadi kita sudah bisa akses. Kalau dari fiturnya ada beberapa yang tidak saya gunakan karena menurut saya beberapa fitur itu lebih ke arah guru di bawah naungan Kemendikbud seperti fitur pelatihan mandiri.”

[For me, the obstacles I face in using *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* is the problem of learning accounts, and it so happens that recently, the Ministry of Religious (*Kemenag*) affairs has also abolished the learning account (*akun belajar*), so we cannot use it. As for the features, there are some that I do not use because some of the towards teachers under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture (*Kemendikbud*), such as the independent training]

Obstacles in obtaining the learning account reduced the second teacher's enthusiasm to use it. This was expressed in the following quote:

Extract 6 (FA/01/11/2024)

“Awalnya itu saya sangat antusias sama platform ini, tapi karena ada masalah akun belajar itu lambat saya dapatkan sehingga saya juga hampir tidak gunakan platform ini.”

[At first, I was very enthusiastic about this platform, but because there was a problem with the learning account, I was slow to get it, so I almost did not use it]

The third teacher said the obstacles were related to internet access, which was unstable. This is expressed in the following quote:

Extract 7 (NL/05/11/2024)

“Adapun kendala atau hambatan yang sering saya hadapi itu akses internet yang kadang tidak stabil. Masala akun belajar juga yang buat kita susah untuk akses platform ini.”

[The obstacles that I often face are unstable internet access. The learning account problem also makes it difficult for us to access this platform]

DISCUSSIONS

Teachers' Activities Using Platform Merdeka Mengajar to Improve Their Pedagogical Competence

One feature frequently used by the three teachers is the teaching tool. The teaching tool feature allows teachers to get relevant material according to student needs and provides an opportunity to update their teaching approaches and methods. This shows that the teaching tool feature is helpful for teachers in developing relevant materials and understanding student needs. This is in line with the result of research conducted by Arnes, Musparidi, and Yusmanila ((2023), which revealed that teacher can get the latest references and various teaching tool that can be downloaded and shared through the features on the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*. The use of the teaching tool feature allows the teacher to update their learning approaches and methods, as well as understand more about the needs of students by aspects of pedagogical competence that must be mastered by teachers, namely mastering the characteristics of students.

The other features are inspirational videos and work evidence. The inspirational videos can also help teachers understand various teaching techniques that can be applied in the classroom. This aligns with the pedagogical competence teachers must master, namely mastering the theory and principles of educational learning and organizing educational learning. Meanwhile, work evidence feature, can help develop teacher competence because it can enrich shared learning experiences, allow teachers to provide feedback to each other, and adopt good practices from other teachers who may be more experienced. Priantini, Suarni, and Adnyana (2022) reveal that teachers can enjoy multiple learning and teaching material on the platform.

The schools support of facilities that support the application of technology in learning is essential in applying the material and inspiration obtained from *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*. Facilities like smart TVs in each class make learning more interesting and fun. In addition, the second respondent also used a clip-on microphone when teaching. Using clip-on microphones also helps the learning process because they can increase student attention and make more precise sounds so all student can hear the explanation well. Technology like this can also create a more enjoyable learning atmosphere, increasing student motivation and attention. This also reinforced by research results, which state that technology can increase student engagement and understanding in the learning process (Jamain et al., 2022).

Although there are differences in the activities carried out by teachers to improve their pedagogical competence using *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*, overall, this platform impacts teachers' pedagogical competence by showing improvement in several aspects of pedagogical competence, such as increasing mastery of student characteristics, mastering learning theories, and educational learning principles, organizing educational learning principles, organizing educational learning, and utilizing technology for learning purpose.

English Teachers' perception on Using Platform Merdeka Mengajar to Improve Their Pedagogical Competence

a. Acceptance

1) Understanding of Using Platform Merdeka Mengajar

Platform Merdeka Mengajar is designed to provide easy and convenient access to teachers in developing their competencies, especially regarding pedagogical competence, which is a

crucial part of the success of the teaching and learning process. Therefore, a deep understanding of the features available in this platform is key to optimizing its functionality. As stated by Kusumastuti (2023), the existence of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* is one of the efforts made by the Ministry of Research and Technology to improve competence for teachers, where teachers can access various features that are expected to facilitate teaching and learning activities. However, teachers must follow the training provided to understand the platform features and ensure optimal use thoroughly. Ramdani (2022) revealed that training is crucial in optimizing the use of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*.

Teo, Luan, and Sing (2008) state that teachers' acceptance of technology is strongly influenced by the ease of use and the attitude of teachers toward understanding their needs. In the context of the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*, this platform's success in providing features that are easy to understand and use has a positive impact on teachers' acceptance and understanding. One of the advantages of this platform is that it enables teachers to learn independently and flexibly. This convenience is in line with the findings of Triscova, Rahma, and Nurlillahi (2022), who revealed that the display of the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* is easy to understand and use so that teachers can access the features and material provided, which in turn can improve their pedagogical competence.

2) Use of the Platform

Platform Merdeka Mengajar supports teachers' efforts to improve their pedagogical competence. The function of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* can be used as a source of teaching materials by teachers. Various features allow teachers to access multiple resources that can assist them in improving their pedagogical competence and developing their teaching skills. This is in line with the results of research by Hakim and Abidin (2024), which revealed that *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* facilitates varied learning methods and materials, responds to the unique needs of each student, and supports the development of their competencies more effectively.

One of the features used by three teachers is the teaching tool. This feature provides resources for designing lesson plans, teaching materials, project modules, handbooks, and student assessment tools. The teaching tool is crucial because it makes it easier for teachers to develop systematic and structured learning material based on student characteristics and needs. This aligns with the primary function of the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*, which reveals that utilizing the learning tool makes it easier for teachers can focus more on determining and developing student potential according to student talents and interests (Elviana et al., 2023).

In addition to the teaching, the teacher also used the inspirational videos, which provided a variety of videos counting practical examples of effective and innovative learning methods. These inspiring videos allow teachers to access a variety of techniques and approaches that can help them overcome the challenges faced in the teaching and learning process. Another feature used is work evidence, allowing teachers to document the process and result of their work while using *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*. This is in line with research reveals that improving the quality of teachers can be done by maximizing the use of the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* because this platform has provided a variety of features that can assist teachers in getting references, inspiration, and understanding (Aulia et al., 2023).

b. Evaluation

1) Influence on Pedagogical Competence

Teachers' pedagogical competence is one of the important aspects of education that affects the quality of learning in the classroom. These competencies include teachers' understanding of effective teaching methods, choosing and adapting learning methods according to student characteristics, and designing and implementing quality learning. In their research, Purnasari and Sadewo (2020) revealed that a lesson is practical if the learning design positively impacts student learning outcomes and can solve problems or answer needs related to teaching and learning.

Platform Merdeka Mengajar allows teachers to access various learning resources that can help them find more innovative methods and inspiration. Teachers' ability to adapt learning methods to student needs is an important indicator of good pedagogical competence. Teachers who can adapt learning methods according to the learning environment and encourage student involvement in the learning process. Hattie (2008) in his book reveals that effectiveness is greatly influenced by the teacher's ability to choose and apply the proper methods for students.

The utilization of technology in learning is one of the key factors in improving teachers' pedagogical competence. According to Windasari, Karwanto, Supriyanto, and Setiani (2022), using technology in learning strongly influences teachers' pedagogical competence. By utilizing *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*, teachers can access various material and references that assist them in designing more innovative, interactive learning for students' needs. With various features available that provide best practice references and creative learning methods, the platform helps teachers improve their learning methods. This helps create a better student learning experience, as teachers are better equipped to adapt and innovate their learning methods.

2) Obstacles

One of the main obstacles teachers faced was the removal of their learning ID accounts, which prevented them from accessing the platform. The learning ID account is the gateway for teachers to access various features and material on the platform. This problem is a significant obstacle, especially for teachers relying on this platform to access learning references and develop their pedagogical competence. The deletion of this learning ID account is due to technical factors that need to be addressed immediately.

Platform Merdeka Mengajar, like other digital platforms, requires a good and stable internet connection to access the various features and material provided. This is based on the findings of Lena, Nisa, Putri, and Husna (2024), who revealed that internet connection limitations often became an obstacle to the use of educational technology in Indonesia. In this context, reliance on a stable internet connection makes it difficult for teachers to access the platform consistently, especially when they need essential resources to design effective learning. This platform would be better if it could be accessed offline so that users are not constrained by the network when applying it (Lena et al., 2024).

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, it can be concluded that:

- a. *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* provides various benefits and tools for teacher to develop their pedagogical competence, such as teaching tool, inspirational videos, and work evidence. These features allow teachers to obtain relevant reference materials, gain inspiration for new

learning methods, and collaborate with fellow teachers to share experiences and best practices. The support of adequate technological facilities at school also increases the effectiveness of applying material obtained from the platform, positively improve teachers' pedagogical competence. Some aspects of teachers' pedagogical competence that are significantly improved through the use of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* are mastering student characteristics because teachers can more easily recognize the needs and characteristics of students through material, mastering the theory and principles of educational learning where the inspirational videos provide various learning references that help teachers in developing this aspect, then conducting educational learning, the development of this aspect is also related to the inspirational videos where teachers can update their approach based on the reference obtained. The last is technology for learning purposes, with support of facilities such as smart TVs and clip-on microphones supporting creative and innovative learning.

- b. Teachers understand the benefits of *Platform Merdeka Mengajar*, emphasizing ease of access and flexibility in accessing various features that support the development of their pedagogical competence. However, although the platform is designed to support teaching effectively, some technical constraints, such as account deletion and unstable internet access issues, hinder optimal utilization. This shows the importance of improving infrastructure and technical management to maximize the use of the platform in supporting teachers' pedagogical competence.

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