



A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF TEACHING STRATEGIES USED BY NOVICE AND EXPERIENCED ENGLISH TEACHERS IN SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to compare the teaching strategy preferences between novice and experienced English teachers in one of the Senior High School in Gianyar regency, in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation. This research employed a qualitative descriptive design. The subjects were one novice teacher and one experienced teacher, while the objects were their teaching strategies preferences. The data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and teaching strategies checklist. The findings revealed that the novice teacher preferred Project-Based Learning and Cooperative Learning, which foster collaboration, creativity, and active student involvement. Meanwhile, the experienced teacher tended to use Discovery Learning and Integrated Learning, which promote student independence and the integration of cross-disciplinary knowledge to deepen understanding. These findings indicate that teaching experience influences the selection of teaching strategies and highlight the importance of ongoing professional development to equip teachers with appropriate pedagogical approaches in alignment with 21st-century education demands.

Keywords: teaching strategy, novice teacher, experienced teacher, Merdeka Curriculum, qualitative research



Submitted: 17 July 2025	Revised: 15 March 2026	Accepted: 18 March 2026
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INTRODUCTION

English is recognized as a global language and has become one of the core subjects in Indonesian schools, particularly at the junior and senior high school levels (Mulatu & Regassa, 2022; Septiani et al., 2019). In this globalized era, the ability to communicate in English is considered essential, not only for academic purposes but also for professional and intercultural communication. Therefore, the development of an effective curriculum is necessary to ensure that English language instruction meets the demands of the 21st century.

In Indonesia, the curriculum serves as a fundamental guide to achieving educational objectives. It provides structure for teaching content, learning activities, and assessment practices (Sari, 2022). Over time, the Indonesian government has implemented several curriculum reforms to respond to dynamic changes in society, advancements in technology, and global challenges. One major change occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the Ministry of Education issued the Emergency Curriculum. This policy allowed schools to adapt the existing 2013 Curriculum by simplifying learning content to suit the conditions of distance learning (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020a; Suksesi & Subkhan, 2022).

In early 2022, the Merdeka Curriculum was introduced as an alternative curriculum to recover learning loss caused by the pandemic. This curriculum promotes student-centered learning through a flexible approach that enables schools and teachers to adapt learning to students' needs, interests, and contexts (Anwar, 2022; Kasnowo & Hidayat, 2022).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is closely aligned with the principles of 21st-century learning, which focuses on developing four essential competencies known as the 4Cs: critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Kustiawan et al., 2022). In this new paradigm, teaching is no longer solely about content delivery, but also about facilitating student engagement and personal growth. As such, teachers must choose appropriate teaching strategies that can effectively support these competencies (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013; Hayati et al., 2021).

Teaching strategies are the planned methods and techniques used by teachers to help students achieve learning objectives. These strategies are influenced by



Submitted: 17 July 2025	Revised: 15 March 2026	Accepted: 18 March 2026
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various factors, including the teacher's beliefs, subject matter, classroom context, and notably, teaching experience (Helmie, Giani, and Saepuloh 2024). Novice teachers, who have less than three years of experience, often focus on managing classrooms and adhering to structured lesson plans. In contrast, experienced teachers, typically with five or more years of teaching, tend to be more adaptive, reflective, and focused on instructional goals and student learning outcomes (Carter & Nunan, 2001; Koni & Krull, 2018).

Several studies have highlighted the differences between novice and experienced teachers in terms of their teaching approaches. Novice teachers often rely on teacher-centered strategies due to their limited experience and high cognitive load. Meanwhile, experienced teachers draw from their accumulated knowledge to implement flexible and student-centered approaches that encourage active learning, collaboration, and critical inquiry (Surma et al., 2022; Sun & Zhang, 2022; Torabzadeh & Tavassoli, 2021). Despite these findings, there is still limited research that explores such differences specifically within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Given the importance of teaching experience in influencing pedagogical decisions, this study aims to compare the teaching strategy preferences between novice and experienced English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This study was conducted in one of the senior high school in Gianyar Regency, Bali. The school was selected due to the presence of both novice and experienced English teachers who meet the criteria for this research. The findings are expected to provide insights into how teaching experience shapes strategy preferences, particularly in the context of supporting 21st-century learning under the Merdeka Curriculum.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Theory of Teaching

Teaching is a purposeful and structured process where teachers assist, guide, and facilitate student learning. Brown (2000) defines teaching as guiding and facilitating learning, enabling learners to grow through meaningful engagement. It involves not only the delivery of information but also the creation of a supportive learning environment. Sayed and Afzal (2021) describe teaching as a dynamic process that includes goal setting, resource development, and instructional planning, while Rajagopalan (2019) emphasizes that teaching encompasses knowledge



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transfer and relationship-building through interactive activities such as demonstrating, explaining, guiding, and providing feedback. Similarly, Hadi and Al-Taai (2021) argue that teaching requires more than mere knowledge transmission; it demands strategic planning, appropriate method selection, and the ability to foster a classroom atmosphere that supports student engagement. Together, these perspectives highlight that effective teaching depends on a teacher's ability to integrate pedagogical principles with the diverse learning needs of students.

Theory of Teaching Strategies

Teaching strategies are deliberate actions used by teachers to help students achieve learning goals, and are structured instructional decisions grounded in pedagogical principles (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, these strategies are essential and continuously evolve, particularly with the integration of technology (Sahoo, 2019; Ghory & Ghafory, 2021). The Merdeka Curriculum promotes student-centered and flexible strategies such as Project-Based Learning, Discovery Learning, and Cooperative Learning (Hosaini et al., 2022). In line with this, the eleven teaching strategies relevant to this study include Project-Based Learning, Discovery Learning, Problem-Based Learning, Cooperative Learning, Integrated Learning, Learning Strategy Training, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Active Learning, Flipped Learning, Competency-Based Learning, and Differentiated Learning. These approaches aim to enhance student engagement, promote critical and creative thinking, and support learner autonomy, while also fostering the development of 21st-century competencies in alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on flexibility, student-centered instruction, and meaningful learning experiences.

Theory of Novice Teachers

Novice teachers are typically those with less than three years of classroom experience and often focus on classroom management and the implementation of structured lesson plans (Carter & Nunan, 2001). They may face challenges in organizing instruction, managing time, and adapting to unexpected classroom situations (Freeman, 2001; Freiberg, 2002). Due to limited experience, novice teachers tend to rely heavily on theoretical knowledge and may struggle to interpret classroom dynamics effectively, sometimes becoming overly focused on teaching



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activities rather than actual student learning (Eckert, 2016). To support their professional development, mentoring, support systems, and reflective practices are essential (Othman & Senom, 2020). Reflective practice, in particular, helps novice teachers evaluate their instructional effectiveness, adjust strategies, and consider students' perspectives. Additionally, developing strong teacher-student relationships is crucial for fostering student engagement and building trust in the classroom (Freeman, 2001).

Theory of Experienced Teachers

Experienced teachers are those with at least five years of teaching experience and are characterized by more stable and flexible teaching practices, enabling them to make real-time adjustments based on student needs (Carter & Nunan, 2001). They demonstrate a deeper understanding of curriculum content, student behavior, and classroom management, often relying on internalized lesson structures rather than detailed written plans, allowing for a more adaptive and responsive approach (Orlich et al., 2010). According to Koni and Krull (2018), experienced teachers are more adept at anticipating classroom challenges and integrating practical solutions into their instruction. Sun and Zhang (2022) emphasize that these teachers possess advanced pedagogical thinking and decision-making skills, contributing to well-organized classrooms with established routines and strategies that enhance student engagement. Furthermore, Stronge (2007) notes that experienced teachers are more effective at differentiating instruction, employing diverse strategies, and facilitating meaningful and impactful learning experiences.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to examine the teaching strategy preferences used by novice and experienced English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Qualitative research focuses on understanding human behavior and social phenomena through narrative data, using tools such as interviews, observations, and checklists (Hennink et al., 2020). The descriptive qualitative approach allows for systematic and in-depth exploration of teaching practices and preferences (Yuliani, 2018). This research was conducted at one of the senior high schools in Gianyar regency, selected for its implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the presence of both novice and experienced English teachers. The research subjects consisted of one novice English teacher with less than three years of teaching experience and one experienced English teacher with



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more than five years of experience who is certified and a civil servant. The object of this study was the preference for teaching strategies used in English language instruction. Data were collected through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and a teaching strategies checklist. Observations were conducted in four 40-minute sessions per teacher to capture real-time teaching strategies and interactions. In-depth interviews were used to explore each teacher's beliefs and reasoning regarding their choice of teaching strategies, while the checklist served to support comparative analysis. The instruments used included an observation checklist, interview guide, and teaching strategies checklist, each designed to capture different but complementary dimensions of the data. The data collection procedures involved securing permissions, preparing instruments, conducting classroom visits, and recording observations and interviews. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman (1994) model, which includes data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied Denzin's (2009) four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, and method triangulation. These combined strategies strengthened the credibility, dependability, and validity of the findings in analyzing the instructional preferences of novice and experienced teachers within the Merdeka Curriculum context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the teaching strategy preferences of novice and experienced English teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Sukawati in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings were derived from three main instruments: teaching strategies checklist, classroom observations, and in-depth interviews. Each teacher was observed in four different classroom sessions, and the data collected were analyzed systematically to identify trends, strategy implementation patterns, and pedagogical decision-making processes.

The checklist results revealed that the novice teacher applied between 50–100% of the teaching strategies recommended in the Merdeka Curriculum. These included Metacognitive, Cognitive, Social/Affective, Project-Based Learning (PjBL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), Discovery Learning, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Cooperative Learning, and Integrated Learning. This pattern suggests a preference for student-centered learning approaches that promote critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and independence through exploration and interaction. In the observed sessions, the novice teacher consistently



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implemented PjBL and Cooperative Learning, using real-world contexts such as school issues to create posters, presentations, and video projects. These tasks encouraged students to work in groups, express their opinions, and construct knowledge actively. Classroom practices were structured but flexible, with the teacher acting as a facilitator who guided students through scaffolded learning sequences.

Interviews confirmed these observations. The novice teacher emphasized the importance of selecting strategies that engage students, particularly during the late afternoon lessons when students were often tired. He preferred PjBL due to its effectiveness in maintaining attention and encouraging problem-solving. Similarly, Cooperative Learning was used to foster group dynamics while maintaining individual accountability, especially in speaking assessments. These strategies aligned with the novice teacher's need for structure and classroom control while still encouraging student autonomy, reflecting an emerging pedagogical approach shaped by early teaching experience and the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum.

In contrast, the experienced teacher demonstrated a broader and more reflective approach to strategy implementation. According to the checklist data, the experienced teacher used a wide range of strategies, with implementation percentages ranging from 14.28% to 100%. These included Metacognitive, Cognitive, Social/Affective, CALL, Discovery Learning, PjBL, PBL, Integrated Learning, Competency-Based Learning, Active Learning, and Differentiated Learning. The observed sessions highlighted Discovery Learning and Integrated Learning as the teacher's primary strategies. In these sessions, the teacher encouraged students to explore concepts through guided inquiry, open discussions, and contextual problem-solving. Learning activities often began with provocative questions or multimedia stimuli, leading students to construct understanding collaboratively. For example, students were asked to determine the structure of exposition texts, connect classroom topics to current news events, and express opinions using English.

Interview excerpts supported these findings. The experienced teacher expressed a strong preference for student-led exploration, stating that students learn more effectively when they discover concepts independently. He highlighted the importance of contextual relevance by linking lessons to everyday issues, such as social media trends and natural disasters. Additionally, Integrated Learning was applied by combining English with other subjects like geography or social studies.



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This not only made learning more meaningful but also encouraged cross-disciplinary thinking. The teacher's approach was marked by adaptability, supportive feedback, and inclusive language practices, responding to individual student needs without compromising engagement or learning objectives.

A comparison of the two teachers revealed key differences in strategy preferences and implementation. Novice teachers leaned toward collaborative and structured strategies such as PjBL and Cooperative Learning, which provided predictable workflows and helped manage classroom dynamics. These strategies allowed novice teachers to maintain control while fostering student participation. In contrast, experienced teachers prioritized Discovery Learning and Integrated Learning, which required greater cognitive independence and integrated content knowledge (Helmie 2022). These differences reflect varying levels of pedagogical development, confidence, and responsiveness to student needs, shaped by teaching experience and exposure to the Merdeka Curriculum.

These findings support Carter and Nunan's (2001) theory that novice teachers emphasize classroom management and procedural implementation, while experienced teachers focus on instructional objectives and student engagement. Similarly, Sun and Zhang (2022) highlight that novice teachers rely on structured strategies to build their professional competencies, whereas experienced teachers use flexible and reflective approaches grounded in pedagogical intuition. The findings also align with Orlich et al. (2010), who noted that experienced teachers often abandon rigid lesson planning in favor of spontaneous, adaptive teaching informed by accumulated experience.

In light of these findings, several implications arise. Novice teachers require continuous support to refine their use of collaborative strategies and ensure equitable student engagement. Mentoring programs and targeted professional development in classroom management and student-centered instruction can enhance their pedagogical confidence. Meanwhile, experienced teachers benefit from ongoing training in scaffolding complex tasks and aligning cross-disciplinary content with curriculum goals. Schools can encourage peer collaboration and co-teaching between novice and experienced educators to promote mutual learning and pedagogical innovation.

In conclusion, while both novice and experienced teachers apply strategies aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, their preferences differ based on experience,



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classroom context, and instructional goals. Novice teachers prioritize structured, collaborative strategies to manage learning effectively, while experienced teachers adopt exploratory, integrative approaches to foster deeper learning. Understanding these differences is essential for designing professional development programs that support teachers across the continuum of their careers and contribute to more responsive, inclusive, and effective teaching practices in Indonesia's evolving educational landscape.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teaching strategy preferences between novice and experienced English teachers in one of the Senior High School in Gianyar regency, are significantly influenced by teaching experience, classroom conditions, and personal pedagogical beliefs. Novice teachers tend to favor structured, collaborative approaches such as Project-Based Learning and Cooperative Learning, which help them manage classrooms effectively while encouraging active participation. In contrast, experienced teachers consistently apply Discovery Learning and Integrated Learning strategies that emphasize student autonomy, critical thinking, and real-world connections. These differences reflect not only varying levels of instructional confidence but also the adaptation of teaching strategies to meet the demands of the Merdeka Curriculum. Both groups align with the curriculum's goals of fostering 21st-century competencies, though they express these goals through different instructional pathways. Understanding these differences highlights the importance of supporting teacher growth through tailored professional development and collaborative practices that bridge novice enthusiasm with experienced insight.

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Submitted: 17 July 2025	Revised: 15 March 2026	Accepted: 18 March 2026
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