

ABSTRACT

Zahra, Salma Nisrina (2025), Exploring the English Pre-Service Teachers' Strategies in Implementing Student-Centered Learning During the Teaching Practicum.

The implementation of student-centered learning (SCL) is a key requirement of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, but its translation into practice, especially for pre-service teachers, still poses complex challenges. The gap between constructive beliefs about SCL and actual classroom practices is a pressing issue that warrants investigation, given that pre-service teachers are key actors in educational transformation. This study aims to: (1) analyze the implementation strategies of SCL by pre-service English teachers, and (2) identify the beliefs underlying their practices during the teaching practicum.

This study uses a qualitative case study approach with three pre-service teachers from the English Education study program. Data were collected through triangulation of three sources: analysis of observation videos (9 recordings), in-depth semi-structured interviews, and analysis of teaching module documents. Data analysis was conducted thematically to answer the two research questions.

The findings reveal that SCL implementation remains partial and is in a transitional phase. On the one hand, participants demonstrated competence in designing and facilitating active, collaborative learning, including group discussions and contextual tasks. On the other hand, aspects of SCL that require high student agency, such as meaningful choice, learning autonomy, and self-regulation, are still very limited. Furthermore, a significant belief-practice gap was found. Although the three participants held strong, theoretically consistent beliefs about the principles of SCL and the role of teachers as facilitators, these beliefs were not fully operationalized in practice. Their implementation was more of a contextual adaptation moderated by time constraints, student heterogeneity, curriculum demands, and caution in classroom management.

The research conclusion emphasizes that the successful implementation of SCL within the *Merdeka Curriculum* framework not only depends on conceptual understanding and positive beliefs, but more on the capacity to transform these beliefs into consistent pedagogical practices amid the complexity of the classroom context. Therefore, the main recommendations focus on the need for reflective mentoring and focused practical training in pre-service teacher education to bridge this gap, as well as on creating a supportive school ecosystem to facilitate a more authentic realization of SCL.

Keywords: Student-Centered Learning (SCL); Pre-service Teachers; *Merdeka Curriculum*; Teachers' Beliefs; Belief-Practice Gap.