

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF *MERDEKA* CURRICULUM IN ENGLISH TEACHING LEARNING

Arum Ambar Sari^{1)*}, Nor Laili Fatmawati²⁾.

¹⁾ UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta

²⁾ UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta

arumambarsari93@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In Indonesia, the phenomenon of curriculum change continues to experience various changes and improvements starting from the 1947 curriculum to the one that is being hotly discussed "*Merdeka* Curriculum". The research aimed to describe the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching English and identify the teacher's problem during this process at the seventh grade of SMPIT Insan Mulia Surakarta in the academic year 2022/2023. The study used a qualitative descriptive method, collecting data through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data were gathered from two class observations and an interview with an English teacher. The findings revealed that the *Merdeka* Curriculum had been successfully integrated into English teaching. The teacher developed lesson objectives and teaching modules based on the *Merdeka* Curriculum, tailored to the characteristics of the educational unit. Additionally, the teacher followed a learning cycle and conducted assessments aligned with the *Merdeka* Curriculum. All components of learning, including objectives, materials, methods, media, and evaluation, were incorporated into the English teaching. However, the teacher encountered challenges such as limited time to design differentiated learning for individual student needs and difficulty in maintaining student engagement throughout the lesson.

Keywords: Implementation, *Merdeka* Curriculum, Teacher's Problem

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is one of the most crucial components of education since it serves as a general framework or design for a course and explains how the material is converted into a teaching and learning picture that enables the achievement of the intended learning objectives (Richards, 2013). Since gaining independence, Indonesia has made numerous enhancements and modifications to the curriculum. At least ten of these modifications have had an impact on learning styles. Beginning with the 1947 Curriculum and moving on to the much-discussed "*Merdeka* Curriculum" of late.

Merdeka curriculum that was introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture under Nadiem Makarim's orders adds to the fact that Indonesia has updated its curriculum three times in less than a decade (Sugiri & Priatmoko, 2020). These adjustments are a reaction to the challenges and adjustments that Indonesia faces on a regular basis. They are all designed to improve Indonesian education by improving learning objectives, models, and tactics that align with how learning is implemented. With these adjustments, Indonesia seeks to better prepare students for both academic and non-academic endeavors.

There have been numerous adjustments made to the phases of planning, implementing, and assessing learning as a result of the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the *Merdeka* Curriculum. To strengthen the competency of both students and teachers, new terms like *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* (ATP), *Modul Ajar* (MA), *Capaian Pembelajaran* (CP), *Kriteria Ketercapaian Tujuan Pembelajaran* (KKTP), *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, diagnostic assessments, and teacher and student reflections have been introduced. (Hardanie, 2022). In fact, this adjustment motivates educators to keep learning and growing in order to successfully apply the *Merdeka* Curriculum's new paradigm of instruction.

Minister Nadiem listed a number of benefits of putting the *Merdeka* Curriculum into practice. Because this curriculum will concentrate on fundamental content and the continuous development of student competencies, one of them is more detailed and straightforward. The teacher will adapt their instruction to the developmental and attainment levels of each student. Teaching at the Right Level is a term used in the *Merdeka* Curriculum to describe a method of instruction that takes student ability or achievement into account. Teaching at the Right level (TaRL) refers to the ability level of the learner rather than the class level. (Kemendikbud, 2022).

The learning system must adapt as a result of the numerous procedures, preparation time, and resources needed to apply the *Merdeka* Curriculum in English language instruction. The *Merdeka* Curriculum is implemented with the greatest degree of comfort in order to enhance the process of teacher-student interaction. This is in line with the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which uses the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching Assessment (CEFR) when addressing at least six English language abilities. The observable requirements of a student's capacity to sustain engagement and communicate a desired message are reflected in the CEFR (Kemendikbud, 2021).

Based in part on the findings of their preliminary investigation, the researchers spoke with Mrs. VZM, an English teacher at SMPIT Insan Mulia Surakarta, who expressed her confusion about the *Merdeka* Curriculum and her belief that she was not qualified to teach in accordance with it. But the researchers also observed firsthand the instructional activities at SMPIT Insan Mulia Surakarta. The teacher administer a pretest to students studying English in the classroom. Based on the pretest results, the teacher then divided the class into groups. This demonstrates the teacher have a strong desire to implement *Merdeka* Curriculum-based teaching and learning activities at SMPIT Insan Mulia, where instruction is tailored to the needs of the students. As demonstrated by the fact that groups are divided according to pretest results, according to how prepared students, students collaborate and map the content.

Numerous pertinent research pertaining to the *Merdeka* curriculum have been carried out. As studies conducted by Aini Qolbiyah et al. (2022), talks about how the driving school is using the *Merdeka* Curriculum. This study clarified why infrastructure and amenities are essential to the *Merdeka* Curriculum's successful implementation in driving schools. Additionally, studies carried out by Susilowati (2022), in relation to the use of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in the areas of Islamic Religious Education for the development of student character. Nevertheless, all of the relevant research does not focus on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in learning English which is a novelty form of this research. Given the above context, the goal of this study was to describe how the *Merdeka* Curriculum was implemented in English teaching and learning, as well as identify any issues that the teachers encountered. The research was conducted in the seventh grade at SMPIT Insan Mulia Surakarta during the academic year 2022–2023.

METHOD

The researchers employed a descriptive qualitative methodology in this research. As stated by (Creswell, 2014), A qualitative approach is an investigation technique that aims to understand a social or human issue by using words to create a detailed, thorough picture that details the perspectives of individuals involved and is carried out in a real-life situation. In essence, qualitative approaches involve analyzing social events that emerge organically from the surrounding conditions, situations, and problems.

The subject of this study is a teacher at SMPIT Insan Mulia Surakarta who teaches seventh graders. The seventh grade students at SMPIT Insan Mulia Surakarta were the researchers' attention as the teaching and learning process. Because class VII is using the Merdeka Curriculum, the researcher went there to observe. Researchers in classes VII B and VII C have limited research.

Techniques for gathering data include documentation, interviews, and observation. The observation data used in this study comes from English teachers in classes VII B and VII C who are implementing the Merdeka Curriculum into their lessons. The researchers take a passive participation in this observation. Passive participation is present at the scene of activity but does not actively participate or interact (Sugiyono, 2015). Interviews are another technique that researchers employ to get data. Structured interviews were done by the researchers. Structured interview is an interview that follows a set of planned questions or a methodology (Sugiyono, 2009). In order to answer the formulation of the problem, the researchers asked about the difficulties teachers were having applying the Merdeka Curriculum in the teaching and learning process. In addition, the researchers made use documentation. Researcher employ this methodology due to the document's suitability, richness, and support as naturalistic test evidence. Researcher require the following documents for this study such as *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP)*, *Modul Ajar (MA)*, and student worksheets.

Researchers employed Miles and Huberman data analysis for this study. As stated by Miles & Huberman (2014), three steps make up data analysis are reducing data, displaying data, making conclusions and verifying data. The process of choosing, concentrating, streamlining, abstracting, and changing the information found in the observation sheet or written transcription is known as data reduction. A display is a well-curated collection of data from which decisions and actions can be made. The process of assembling the information gathered into a coherent statement with lucid data is the conclusion. Testing the validity of interim conclusions indicates that, upon data acquisition, it undergoes ongoing analysis and validity verification. This process is known as verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in English Teaching Learning at SMPIT Insan Mulia Surakarta

According to the BSKAP of the Ministry of Education and Culture's regulations for the *Merdeka Curriculum's* implementation in educational units, implementing a curriculum has three stages: planning, implementation, and assessment.

a. Planning

Based on the head of BSKAP's decision number 044/H/KR/2022, there are three possibilities for implementing the *Merdeka Curriculum*: *Mandiri Belajar*, *Mandiri Berubah*, and *Mandiri Berbagi*. SMPIT Insan Mulia chose *Mandiri Berbagi* to apply the *Merdeka Curriculum* in educational units, allowing them flexibility in building their own varied teaching tools.

At the planning stage, the teacher prepares *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* and *Modul Ajar*. An interview with Mrs. VZM, an English teacher, revealed that:

"Teachers create their own *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* and *Modul Ajar* based on the school's format since integrated Islamic school graduates have unique competency levels. Even

if the government has offered *Modul Ajar* that are ready for use, we continue to use *Modul Ajar* autonomously in the format provided by the school and in accordance with the peculiarities and needs of students. (I/17-1-23/M/VZM)

Based on the facts given above, the teacher creates *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* and *Modul Ajar* using templates from the school. This is in agreement with the notion of *Modul Ajar*. Education units can employ numerous teaching resources, including *Modul Ajar* or lesson plans, with varying components and forms according to the characteristics and needs of students. (Kemendikbud, 2021).

b. Implementation

According to the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's directive No. 56 of 2022, the *Merdeka* Curriculum is being implemented in the framework of learning recovery and as a supplement to the prior curriculum. The *Merdeka* Curriculum is implemented in stages, with provisions for the first year, which includes ages 5 and 6, grades 1, 4, 7, and 10. The interview with Mrs. VZM, an English teacher, revealed the following:

"The *Merdeka* Curriculum begins to be implemented at SMPIT Insan Mulia in the academic year 2022/2023 in grade 7 while grades 8 and 9 continue to use the 2013 curriculum". (I/17-1-23/M/VZM)

According to the facts above, SMPIT Insan Mulia Surakarta implements the *Merdeka* Curriculum in the academic year 2022/2023, namely in the first year by implementing it in seventh grade.

The teacher has applied the *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching and learning at all stages, beginning with the opening stage, continuing through the implementation stage, and concluding with the closing stage.

Laangkah-langkah Pembelajaran	
Pertemuan 1	<p>Pendahuluan:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Salam 2. Berdoa sebelum pembelajaran 3. Mengecek kehadiran siswa 4. Menyampaikan skenario pembelajaran 5. Pertanyaan pemantik <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bagaimana aktivitas kegiatan Belajar ananda selama seminggu terakhir? • Apakah ananda sudah siap untuk mengikuti pembelajaran hari ini? 6. Guru membimbing siswa untuk berdiskusi tentang materi yang akan dipelajari 7. Guru menyampaikan tujuan pembelajaran dan kegiatan yang akan dilaksanakan

Picture 1. Opening stage (*Modul Ajar* English Teacher)

According to the data, the teacher always asks trigger questions at the start of the lesson, which is one of the *Merdeka* Curriculum's hallmarks. Trigger questions encourage student participation and allow students to immediately engage with the issue under discussion. In addition to offering trigger questions, the *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching and learning is implemented through differentiated learning.

Learning at Merdeka Curriculum reinforces differentiated learning based on the stage of student achievement (Nisa', 2022). Mrs VZM said that:

"This curriculum emphasizes differentiated learning, so that learning materials are more varied according to students' understanding." (I/17-1-23/M/VZM)

Differentiated learning meets students' learning requirements (Astuti, 2020). The teacher assists students based on their needs because each student has unique traits and cannot be treated equally. As a result, the teacher previously used the *Merdeka* Curriculum to teach students English. This is demonstrated by the provision of learning resources that alter depending on the students' understanding. Where the teacher adjusts learning through differentiation based on the student's learning readiness. The teacher delivers easier information to students who are less prepared to learn, as well as more difficult material to students who are well prepared. The goal of differentiated learning in this *Merdeka* Curriculum is to accomplish each student's expected learning goals (Kemendikbud, 2022).

Table 1. Learning implementation cycle

Description of Activity	Does	Doesn't
The teacher conducts an assessment at the beginning of learning	✓	
The teacher modifies the plan or makes adjustments for some students.	✓	
The teacher carries out learning by using formative assessment methods	✓	
The teacher conducts an assessment at the end of the lesson	✓	

(Kemendikbud, 2022: Panduan Pembelajaran dan Asesmen)

Based on research findings, teachers have incorporated learning implementation cycles in the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Before students begin learning, the teacher administers pre-tests. The purpose of doing an assessment at the beginning of learning is to determine each student's readiness to study the material that has been designed (Kemendikbud, 2022). The teacher also makes changes for students based on the outcomes of the assessment. Following that, the teacher uses formative assessment approaches to facilitate learning. Learning progress is monitored through the use of formative assessment approaches (Kemendikbud, 2022). At the end of the lesson, the teacher administers post-tests. An assessment is conducted at the end of the learning process to determine the achievement of learning objectives. (Kemendikbud, 2022).

In addition to customized learning, the *Merdeka* Curriculum values the character of Pancasila students. This is consistent with the core framework of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which is based on the goals of the national education system and national education standards and generates the Pancasila Student Profile (Nisa', 2022). The Pancasila student profile consists of a variety of characteristics and competences that students are required to attain in accordance with Pancasila's noble values. According to the Kemendikbud, (2021), Pancasila students' profiles are shaped daily by school culture, intra-curricular, co-curricular, and extra-curricular learning. Mrs. VZM issued the following statement:

"That is actually already included in the learning of the Integrated Islamic School because we are integrated so one of the things emphasized there is faith and piety, that's God

willing, every time we discuss new material, we will link it with the Qur'an ..." (I/17-1-2023/M/VZM)

Based on the findings above, Pancasila student profiles have been used to teach English. It is intended that by tying each material to the Qur'an, one of the Pancasila student profile aspects, faith and piety, will be achieved. Aside from that, the teacher facilitates group learning, which is a type of mutual cooperation in the Pancasila Student Profile. There is also an application of learning from the teacher that is interactive and based on student findings, so that students can be more creative and reason critically according to the profile of Pancasila students.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum divides learning outcomes into phases to provide students enough time to master competencies. Mrs. VZM issued the following statement:

"Learning Outcomes per phase is a simplification effort so that students can have adequate time to master the competency. Thus providing opportunities for students to learn according to their level of achievement, needs, speed, and learning style." (I/17-123/M/VZM)

Based on the results presented, in compliance with the Nisa' (2022), The learning outcomes in the *Merdeka* Curriculum are organized by phase. This is done to simplify the process and give students more time to grasp the competency. It can enable students to learn based on their level of achievement, needs, speed, and learning style. So that teachers can tailor learning to the needs and characteristics of their students. In contrast, the allocation of instruction hours in the *Merdeka* Curriculum is prepared in entirety in one year based on the conditions, needs, and features of the education unit. (Nisa', 2022).

Merdeka Belajar can serve as an indicator of learning innovation in an era of technological advancement by incorporating technology into the learning process. The use of technology can increase the appeal of presenting material, encouraging teachers to become more media literate. This is supported by the following comment from the English teacher:

"Sometimes I use PowerPoint, sometimes videos. Students feel happy when watching videos in learning English. Even though they are still processing it because of a different language. Then, they were asked to retell even though they had to be stimulated first, the main thing is that the media has to be interactive when learning English, especially videos and PowerPoint so they don't get bored..." (I/17-1-23/M/VZM)

Although the teacher incorporates a variety of technology into the learning process, SMPIT Insan Mulia continues to use textbooks for English instruction and study. Mrs. VZM has given the following statement:

"We have textbooks that are used as learning resources and media which are very important to help students understand new material. But in the delivery of the material using a more varied media. Apart from that, if the material in the textbook is felt to be incomplete, I usually take it from various sources, especially now that some are already provided by the government." (I/17-1-23/M/VZM)

According to the findings above, while textbooks are available as learning tools at SMPIT Insan Mulia, teachers always use interactive media such as PowerPoint and videos. Interactive learning will increase students' interest and ability to build their competency, while also creating a joyful learning environment.

c. Assessment

The evaluation stage describes how the teacher conducts an assessment based on the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Mrs. VZM, an English instructor, explained:

“For the assessment process there is a formative and summative assessment. So, if it is formative, we will do an assessment at the beginning of learning and during the learning process. Then for summative, we do an assessment at the end of learning”. (I/17-1-23/M/VZM)

Based on the data, the English teacher at SMPIT conducts appropriate *Merdeka* Curriculum evaluations, such as formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment occurs at the start of learning and throughout the learning process. The *Merdeka* Curriculum uses reinforcement in formative assessment to customize curriculum based on student accomplishment levels (Nisa’, 2022). It is the following statement from Mrs. VZM:

“Here the emphasis is on formative assessment. So that the teacher can design learning according to the stage of the learner. This assessment can improve, change, or modify the learning process to make it more effective.” (I/17-1-23/M/VZM)

As a result, the teacher can divide the students into groups according to their level of readiness. While the assessment carried out throughout the learning process tries to track student learning progress as it occurs. On the one hand, a summative assessment is administered at the conclusion of the lesson. It is designed to evaluate the achievement of learning objectives.

Unlike the 2013 curriculum, the *Merdeka* Curriculum includes a rigorous assessment of attitudes, knowledge, and abilities. According to conversations done with Mrs. VZM, an English teacher:

“In the *Merdeka* Curriculum, we carry out a thorough assessment. There is no separate assessment of attitudes, knowledge, skills as in the 2013 curriculum. So in the end these assessments will unite into one assessment.” (I/17-1-23/M/VZM)

Based on the conclusions stated above, it can be seen that the *Merdeka* Curriculum conducts a thorough examination of the assessment of attitudes, knowledge, and abilities. This is in conformity with Nisa’ (2022) that there is no distinction between attitudinal, social, and spiritual assessments. These examinations continue to exist as part of the 2013 curriculum, although they are not assessed individually. However, it was merged into a single examination. This is one of the *Merdeka* Curriculum assessment's distinguishing features: it is both comprehensive and straightforward. As a result, the teacher will have more freedom and flexibility, and the administrative burden will be decreased.

The Teacher's Problem during the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum did not go as planned, although the teacher also encountered some issues. The teacher thought that the *Merdeka* Curriculum's differentiated learning requires the teacher to create more than one material. However, the teacher must create materials of various types based on the variations. Mrs. VZM issued the following statement:

“Because the learning is differentiated, so we have to make the material not just one, meaning the material is the same but the type is different based on student learning readiness. And to make it certainly also takes time.” (I/17-1-23/P/VZM)

Based on the findings of the observations, the teacher splits the group according to learning readiness. So the teacher brings two distinct learning materials. This is in line with Kemendikbud (2022), It claims that diversified learning is difficult for a teacher to implement owing to time constraints in designing distinct classes depending on individual student needs..

Another issue with adopting the *Merdeka* curriculum in English subjects is that teachers struggle to retain student interest. Mrs. VZM issued the following statement:

“For English there are 3 hours of lessons every week. And 3 hours of lessons is a block system. So that at the end of learning sometimes it makes students bored because it's been too long.” (I/17-1-23/P/VZM)

Based on the facts given above, the instructor discovered a situation in which teachers are unable to retain student excitement. SMPIT Insan Mulia uses a block approach to manage lesson hours. As a result, the amount of time spent learning at once is extremely long. It makes it harder for the teacher to keep the students interested. This causes a difficulty in the dimension components, such as teacher, learning medium, and learning methodologies (Hamalik, 2014). The teacher's role in this dimension component is to create settings and conditions that ensure students are always ready and eager to study. Certainly, the teacher in the classroom needs appropriate learning tactics and learning material to capture students' attention and encourage the teaching and learning process.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of the preceding research, it can be stated that the *Merdeka* Curriculum has been implemented in English learning. During the planning stage, the teacher creates *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* and *Modul Ajar* that are tailored to the format and characteristics of the educational unit. Not only are teaching instruments restricted, but instruction hours are also allocated based on the educational unit's annual conditions. Meanwhile, learning outcomes in the *Merdeka* curriculum are organized by phase. The *Merdeka* Curriculum Implementation stage in the teaching and learning process consists of three activities: opening activities, major activities, and closing activities. In addition, the teacher has adopted a *Merdeka* Curriculum based learning cycle. According to the *Merdeka* Curriculum, the teacher has adopted differentiated learning based on the student's knowledge and readiness to learn. In addition, the teacher incorporates Pancasila student profile ideals into the learning process. The teacher delivers the material using a variety of media, including PowerPoint and videos. The teacher uses formative and summative assessments to assess students in accordance with the *Merdeka* curriculum. At the evaluation stage, attitudinal, social, and spiritual assessments are not separated, but rather combined into a single assessment.

The instructor faces a number of issues when applying the *Merdeka* Curriculum. First, there is differentiated learning, which requires the teacher to provide materials that vary or are tailored to the readiness of the students. As a result, the material production process is time-consuming. Second, the block system in lesson hours prevents the teacher from maintaining student enthusiasm until the completion of learning because it takes a long time.

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