

EXAMINING THE IMPACT OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM ON TEACHING ENGLISH: A STUDY OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS IN SMP WAHID HASYIM MALANG

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Abstract

This study examines English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Wahid Hasyim Malang, focusing on its impact on teaching practices. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced in February 2022 by Kemendikbudristek, emphasizes student creativity, independence, and character development through project-based learning, essential competencies, and flexible teaching approaches. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the research involved in-depth interviews, and observations to gather data from English teachers at Wahid Hasyim Junior High School. The findings reveal that the Merdeka Curriculum provides greater flexibility and autonomy in lesson planning, incorporating diverse and interactive methods that enhance student engagement and critical thinking. Teachers noted significant changes in their teaching styles, emphasizing project-based and technology-integrated learning, and fostering better teacher-student interactions. The curriculum positively impacts student motivation and character development but requires robust support and collaboration from all stakeholders for successful implementation. The study concludes with recommendations for institutions, teachers, and future researchers to enhance the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in English education.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, English teacher perceptions, teaching Process.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum changes in Indonesia have occurred frequently. In February 2022, Kemendikbudristek introduced the Merdeka Curriculum which emphasizes

the development of students' creativity, independence, and character. According to Fatma and Ratmanida (2023), Merdeka Curriculum has three main features: project-based learning to strengthen students' Pancasila profile, focus on essential materials to develop basic competencies, and flexible learning so that teachers can adapt the curriculum to student characteristics. This curriculum gives teachers and students freedom in choosing learning techniques that suit students' needs and interests, aiming to create a learning environment that is fun and conducive to student development. Of course, this curriculum change has a major impact on educational institutions, especially in the design of lesson plans.

The Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers the freedom to create teaching modules that suit students' needs and interests. This also necessitates a change in the learning model, where teachers must adapt teaching to the needs of diverse students. In addition, project-based learning to improve student character becomes very important, as noted by Dewi (2022), the success of project-based learning is highly dependent on the teacher's role as a facilitator. Therefore, this change has a huge impact on teachers, as they are the ones who will implement this curriculum in the field. Improving the quality of education is difficult without the support of qualified teachers. Curriculum changes certainly affect teachers' perceptions of the new curriculum, which is an important component in the education system. Fatma and Ratmanida (2023) state that perception is a response given to obtain information, while Sutjipto (2018) mentions that teachers' perspectives on the curriculum greatly affect its implementation. Therefore, this study will investigate teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum.

As several previous studies have examined how teachers perceive the Merdeka Curriculum. Prakoso et al. (2021) found that Merdeka Belajar policy provides an effective learning environment for integrating local wisdom. Hidayah et al. (2022) revealed that teachers' perceptions of curriculum change are most influenced during the selection and interpretation phases. Aulia (2021) found that teachers prioritize three components in lesson plans: learning objectives, activities, and assessments. A previous study by Athifah et al. (2023) showed that

teachers still face challenges in implementing this curriculum, suggesting that this issue is still significant. Based on this, this study aims to examine teachers' perceptions of the impact of Merdeka Curriculum, especially in the English language teaching process. Because the new curriculum brings significant changes in teaching methods, learning materials, and student evaluation. Teachers face challenges in adapting their teaching practices to the demands of this new curriculum. In addition, when the researcher underwent PPL at the research location, it was found that some students had difficulty understanding English lessons because they were not taught in elementary school. This made the researcher choose Wahid Hasyim Junior High School in Malang as the research location. In addition, Wahid Hasyim Junior High School has A accreditation and has used the Merdeka Curriculum, which at the time of the research, the Merdeka Curriculum had not been implemented in all schools but only in a few schools.

English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum can provide valuable insights into how curriculum implementation affects their teaching practices. This study explores English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum and how they adapt their teaching methods to the curriculum objectives. It is hoped that this research can provide useful information for the further development of the Merdeka Curriculum and provide insights for educators in designing effective teaching strategies. Through this research, it is expected to reveal whether the Merdeka Curriculum has successfully achieved the objectives of English education at the secondary level as well as provide an overview of changes in teachers' teaching practices. With a deeper understanding of the impact of this curriculum, it is expected to make a positive contribution to improving the quality of English education at the secondary level.

METHOD

Design

In this study, researchers used a qualitative descriptive approach because this approach helps researchers understand in depth and analyze in detail the

context, processes, and perceptions involved in the research, so as to provide richer insights and capture situations that are difficult to measure quantitatively. According to Sugiyono (2017), qualitative research methods are used to research on natural object conditions, where researchers are key instruments, data collection techniques are combined, data analysis is inductive or qualitative, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization. The type of research used is field research because it allows direct access to the research subject, so that the data collected is more accurate and detailed.

The presence of researchers in this study is very important and necessary because researchers function as valid data collection tools. According to Moleong (2014), the presence of the researcher or the help of others is the main tool in qualitative data collection. Sugiyono (2017) also states that in qualitative research, there is no other choice but to use humans as the main research instrument because the problem, research target, methodology, theory used, and expected results cannot be determined with certainty and clarity beforehand.

This research was conducted at Wahid Hasyim Junior High School in Malang, a secondary school that has a good reputation in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The selection of this location is based on the many characteristics of students and teachers, as well as supporting infrastructure that provides a complete picture of how this curriculum is modified and implemented in the real world. The researcher has established good relationships with the teaching staff and school administration, allowing easy access to relevant data and insights.

Participants

The data sources in this study consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data is obtained directly from people or informants who have in-depth knowledge of the problem under study, in this case, English teachers who implement the independent curriculum, while secondary data is obtained indirectly, such as through documents and research-related materials. In this study,

the main focus is on the perceptions of English teachers at Wahid Hasyim Junior High School in Malang on the impact of Merdeka Curriculum on classroom learning practices. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, surveys, and observations that documented teachers' subjective views of the curriculum and their adaptation efforts in the classroom.

Data collection and analysis procedures

Data collection procedures involve various methods such as observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to gain a thorough understanding and comprehensive data. Semi-structured interviews allowed flexibility in extracting more in-depth information. Documentation included photo recordings of teaching and learning activities and learning modules. Triangulation was used to verify data, by collecting data from various sources and methods. Data analysis was conducted inductively, starting from the data obtained and developing into hypotheses. This process includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to ensure the validity and accuracy of the data obtained.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Findings

Lesson Planning in the Merdeka Curriculum

How is the Learning Process for the Independent Curriculum and the Previous Curriculum, from

the results of interviews with the two informants, it is concluded that Merdeka Curriculum is more flexible than the previous curriculum, with broader learning objectives such as critical thinking, effective communication, and active engagement. This curriculum also gives teachers greater autonomy in developing the curriculum and allows students to choose learning methods and subjects according to their interests.

For questions regarding the Independent Curriculum Learning Planning Components, both of them explained that in Merdeka Curriculum learning planning, there are several main components such as learning outcomes, learning objectives, learning materials, teaching methods, assessment, and learning media and resources. The resource persons also added that important elements in Merdeka Curriculum learning planning include constructivism, inquiry-based learning, questioning techniques, learning communities, reflective practice, and authentic assessment. It can be concluded that Merdeka Curriculum is designed with important elements for effective and results-oriented learning, including clear learning objectives, diverse materials, varied methods, and integrated assessment. It also emphasizes the principles of constructivism, inquiry, learning community, reflection, and authentic assessment.

Turning to Student Needs and Diversity in Independent Curriculum Planning, it was found that learning planning in the Merdeka Curriculum must be tailored to the needs of diverse students, using methods such as inquiry and project-based learning, and integrating the Pancasila learner profile to develop character. A personalized and adaptive approach is essential for effective learning.

Teaching Process in the Merdeka Curriculum.

a. Learning Strategies Used in the Implementation of the Free Curriculum

“Mr. Ms. stated that common strategies in the Merdeka Curriculum for English include Project-Based Learning (PBL), Collaborative Learning, Flipped Classroom, and Contextualized Teaching (CTL). “

“Mrs. Ns. added that these methods focus on the practical and relevant use of English, enhance students' communication interactively, and encourage active participation in learning.”

The conclusion of the second resource person, who expressed the opinion that the three Learning methods or strategies are effective in increasing students'

active involvement and developing various essential skills in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum.

b. Changes in Teaching Style

“Mr. Ms. stated that Merdeka Curriculum makes learning more flexible through the adaptation of projects and content, increasing the focus on 21st century abilities such as critical thinking and creativity, and the use of more comprehensive evaluation with technology.”

“Mrs. Ns. added that teachers focus more on project- and technology-based learning, connect language content to real life, and offer more opportunities for independent exploration.”

Based on the data, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in junior secondary schools has changed English teaching methods, with an emphasis on project-based learning, use of technology, and customization of content to students' needs. It enhances 21st century skills such as critical thinking and creativity, and uses authentic evaluations such as presentations and projects.

c. Interaction between Teachers and Students in the Classroom

“Mr. Ms. stated that Merdeka Curriculum improves teacher-student interactions through interactive teaching, enables active student participation, and builds better relationships.”

“Mrs. Ns. added that Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers the flexibility to design interesting and relevant learning experiences, increasing interaction and collaboration in the classroom.”

The Merdeka Curriculum strengthens the relationship between teachers and students by increasing interaction in the classroom, creating a collaborative and creative learning environment, and allowing teachers to understand the unique needs of students.

d. Teachers' Views on the Effectiveness of Merdeka Curriculum

“Mr. Ms. stated that the Merdeka Curriculum improves the quality of education by increasing student motivation, offering more subject choices, and enabling talent exploration.”

“Mrs. Ns. added that the Merdeka Curriculum provides flexible teaching methods, creative and student-centered approaches, and improves student learning outcomes and understanding.”

The Merdeka Curriculum has a positive impact on secondary education by increasing students' motivation, offering freedom in subject selection and developing their potential. It also emphasizes national character values through aspects of Pancasila, allowing teachers to design engaging and interactive learning experiences.

Assessment of the Learning Process in the Merdeka Curriculum

In terms of Assessment during the Learning Process in the Independent Curriculum, both resource persons stated that assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum is holistic, focuses on learning processes and outcomes, uses formative assessments such as quizzes, assignments, and projects to monitor progress. added that English language assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes critical and analytical thinking skills, with rubrics categorizing student achievement as 'Adequate,' 'Good,' and 'Very Good'. From this, it is concluded that assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum is holistic and focuses on developing 21st century skills and intercultural competence. These assessments use a variety of formative and summative methods, following national standards to ensure students are prepared for future challenges.

Then To Evaluate the Effectiveness of Student Learning, the resource persons stated that as an English teacher in the Merdeka Curriculum, assessment is carried out through quizzes, discussions, authentic evaluations, journals, and student portfolios, as well as using classroom observations, anecdotal notes, feedback from students and parents, and statistics on student achievement. Another resource person also added that the evaluation of learning effectiveness

includes learning assessment and digital learning evaluation to ensure consistency and quality. Based on these results, evaluating the effectiveness of learning in the Merdeka Curriculum involves continuous and authentic assessment in real contexts, as well as evaluating digital learning to ensure it meets educational objectives and quality standards.

In terms of the focus of teacher assessment during the learning process, Merdeka Curriculum aims to create a comprehensive and student-centered education system, focus on essential competencies, and provide freedom in choosing areas of interest. Likewise, in student involvement in the Learning evaluation process, both resource persons agreed in stating that in the Merdeka Curriculum, students are involved in evaluating learning through self-assessment, peer assessment, reflection, learning journals, open debates, and feedback forums, as well as using real-world tasks, and students' active participation in evaluation increases their sense of responsibility, leadership, and understanding of the learning process. Therefore, student involvement in learning evaluation in the Merdeka Curriculum helps increase self-awareness, responsibility, and leadership, and ensures that assessment is relevant and beneficial to their development.

Discussion

The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture introduced the Merdeka Curriculum to provide teachers and schools with more autonomy in designing educational processes, fostering innovation and independent learning (Kasman, 2022). Minister of Education Nadiem Makarim emphasizes creating joyful learning experiences and prioritizing student participation over teacher-centered methods (Suhartoyo et al., 2020). Research by Werdiningsih et al. (2022) indicates that teachers believe the curriculum improves student learning, but successful implementation requires collaboration among all stakeholders, clear government guidance, and community and parental involvement (Prakoso et al., 2021). Teacher perceptions, shaped by their experiences and backgrounds, are crucial as they affect planning and execution of the curriculum (Anggila, 2022; Khotimah et al., 2019).

Teachers at Wahid Hasyim Junior High School in Malang see the Merdeka Curriculum as flexible, accommodating student characteristics, local needs, and global trends. It emphasizes academics, character development, and essential skills like critical thinking and creativity. Teachers appreciate the curriculum's flexibility in choosing learning resources and methods, contrasting it with the rigid, competency-based 2013 Curriculum (K13) (Prakoso et al., 2020).

The Merdeka Curriculum aims to create an inclusive, adaptive learning environment tailored to student needs, enhancing their potential, self-reliance, critical thinking, and social sensitivity. At Wahid Hasyim, teachers actively develop and tailor the curriculum during the planning process, incorporating project-based learning, inquiry, and problem-solving to engage students. They assess students' needs and employ suitable methods, emphasizing a holistic approach that includes character and social skill development. In English instruction, teachers use project-based learning and real-life contexts, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving through discussions and debates. Parent involvement and collaboration are also key. In conclusion, the Merdeka Curriculum positively impacts teaching practices at Wahid Hasyim Malang High School, providing flexibility and a personalized approach that aligns with the curriculum's goals. Successful implementation requires strong support and collaboration from all stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and the government.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Wahid Hasyim Malang High School positively impacts English learning practices by offering increased teaching flexibility and a more personalized, comprehensive approach that supports student character and social skills development. This curriculum fosters innovation in teaching practices, encouraging teachers to use diverse and interactive methods that make learning more engaging and relevant to students' lives. However, challenges such as teacher and student preparedness and resource

availability persist, requiring robust support and collaboration from all stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, and government entities, to ensure effective implementation. To address these challenges, several recommendations are made:

For Institutions, it is expected to improve curriculum development strategies to enhance English language learning. Provide specialized training for English teachers to better understand and implement the curriculum. Ensure adequate facilities and resources, such as learning media, library, technology and appropriate classrooms.

Teachers are expected to increase collaboration and experience sharing among English teachers. Regularly reflect and evaluate teaching practices to be in line with Merdeka Curriculum. Develop creative teaching materials that match the values and objectives of the curriculum.

For Other Researchers, it is expected to conduct a follow-up study involving more schools or regions for a comprehensive impact assessment. Consider additional variables such as parental support, student motivation, and the role of technology in curriculum implementation.

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