English Teachers' Challenges In Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract: This study investigated the challenges that found by English teachers in implementing Merdeka curriculum at MAS Al – Amin Mompang. This research is descriptive qualitative research. The data collected by using interview. The participants of the study was four English teachers at MAS Al – Amin Mompang. The findings of this study highlight the need for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to provide more support and resources to teachers to facilitate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This includes providing training and guidance on how to teach using the new curriculum, as well as providing access to resources and infrastructure that support technology-enhanced learning.

INTRODUCTION

According to Susetyo (2020), a curriculum is a comprehensive plan that outlines the objectives, content, and learning materials to be used as guidelines for organizing learning activities to achieve the goals of education. As the primary tool to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia, the curriculum is constantly evolving to incorporate new and innovative approaches. The curriculum is a written document outlining objectives, learning activities, materials, schedules, and evaluations. It can be defined as a set of instructions or a guiding document that helps learners navigate a program or lesson plan (Sukirman, et al., 2021; Julaeha, 2019). In the educational realm, the curriculum plays a pivotal role. It is essential for educators to grasp its contents, as the curriculum serves as the foundation upon which educational objectives are built, allowing for a seamless, interactive, and effective learning process to unfold (Dewi,2021). The curriculum is a planned and structured framework that outlines the goals, objectives, and content of a educational program or course. It serves as a guide for teachers to organize and deliver instruction, and helps learners to achieve specific learning outcomes. The curriculum typically includes a range of elements such as learning objectives, teaching methods, assessment strategies, and resources needed to support student learning.

A good curriculum is designed to be relevant, challenging, and engaging, and is tailored to meet the needs of the learners. It should also take into account the values, attitudes, and behaviors that educators want students to develop. The curriculum can be broad or narrow in scope, ranging from a specific subject area to a comprehensive program of study. Effective curricula are regularly reviewed and updated to ensure they remain current and relevant.The curriculum is an essential tool for educators as it provides a roadmap for instruction, helps to ensure consistency across different teachers and classrooms, and allows for the measurement of student progress and

achievement. A well-designed curriculum can have a significant impact on student learning outcomes, helping to prepare them for future success in academics, career, and life. In addition, a curriculum that is responsive to the needs of diverse learners can help to promote equity and social justice in education.

The Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology introduced a new curriculum, known as the Merdeka Curriculum, which features four main components: a comprehensive assessment system called USBN, a replacement for national exams, condensed lesson plans, and more flexible school zoning through the PPDB system (Septrida, 2023). Merdeka Curriculum symbolizes a curriculum defined by a flexible approach to learning that promotes depth in involvement rather than range in knowledge while also focusing on promoting character development and soft skills that are dependent to global demands.

The Merdeka Curriculum is an interdisciplinary curriculum that allows students to explore concepts in-depth and develop their competencies. Teachers have the flexibility to select various teaching methods to cater to the unique learning needs and interests of each student (Syarifah, 2023). In Merdeka Curriculum also incorporates technology to enhance learning experiences in the fast-paced digital era. It provides students with access to a range of digital resources, interactive materials, and global networks, enabling them to collaborate across borders, develop a global perspective, and acquire digital literacy skills (Muhammad.R.Z, 2023).

According to Reza and Ageng (2022), the Merdeka Curriculum is a policy program implemented by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The initiative aims to revamp the national education system to align with the 1945 Constitution and enhance the quality of Indonesia's human resources, particularly in light of the intense competition brought about by the Industrial Revolution 4.0. The Merdeka Curriculum grants autonomy to all education stakeholders - schools, teachers, and students - to innovate independently and creatively, promoting freedom and flexibility in education.

Depends on the aims of Merdeka Curriculum is to develop students' language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing, to enhance their communication abilities. To achieve this goal, the Merdeka Curriculum introduces a range of innovative teaching methods and tools, such as project-based learning, role-playing, and debates. These approaches aim to simulate real-life situations and encourage students to think critically and communicate effectively in English. Additionally, the curriculum incorporates authentic materials and resources from various cultural contexts to promote cultural awareness and understanding. By adopting these approaches, students will be equipped with the language skills and confidence to communicate effectively in English in a globalized world.

Three fundamental characteristics define the Merdeka Curriculum. Firstly, it is student-centered, prioritizing learning experiences that cater to students' individual needs and interests. Secondly, it is competency-based, focusing on the development of students' skills and abilities. Finally, it is flexible, granting teachers the autonomy to design learning experiences in a way that suits their teaching style and student needs (Merlina, 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

The researcher employed a qualitative descriptive approach for their study. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews with three English teachers at MAS Al-Amin Mompang. The interviews took place on June 22, 2024. To analyze the data, the researcher followed the procedure outlined by Miles and Huberman (1990), which involves data reduction, display, and conclusion-drawing. First, the researcher condensed the data collected from the informants. Next, they presented the data in table form. Finally, they drew conclusions based on the analyzed data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
1. Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

The findings of this study revealed that the English teachers at MAS Al-Amin Mompang faced various challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. One of the challenges was the lack of training and guidance on how to implement the new curriculum. One of the main hurdles to effective instruction is the instructors' limited understanding of the curriculum, which can impede their ability to teach and implement it effectively. The rollout of the Merdeka Curriculum is hindered by concerns about educational quality (Rahman et al., 2023), while the integration of specific subjects like Japanese language and biology into the curriculum also poses unique challenges (Usman et al., 2023). According to Teacher A, "We didn't receive any specific training on how to teach English using the Merdeka Curriculum. We had to figure it out on our own, which was quite challenging." This lack of training led to confusion and uncertainty among the teachers, making it difficult for them to design effective lesson plans that align with the curriculum.

Another challenge was the limited availability of resources and infrastructure to support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Magdalena et al. (2023) highlighted the comprehensive nature of the Merdeka Curriculum, encompassing five key components: objectives, content, delivery methods, media, and assessment. Teacher B stated, "We don't have enough computers or internet access to facilitate online learning, which is a key component of the Merdeka Curriculum." This lack of resources hindered the teachers' ability to incorporate technology into their teaching practices, making it difficult to achieve the curriculum's goals.

Furthermore, the findings showed that the teachers struggled to adapt to the student-centered approach of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka learning curriculum incorporates the innovative approach of differentiated instruction, which involves tailoring teaching methods to meet the diverse needs of students, as advocated by researchers such as Novtian et al. (2023) and Yaftani et al. (2023). Teachers B and C mentioned, "I'm used to being the center of attention in the classroom, but with the Merdeka Curriculum, I have to take a step back and let the students take control of their learning." This shift in teaching approach required significant changes to their teaching practices, which was challenging for some teachers.

2. Challenges in teaching English in Merdeka Curriculum

The study also found that the English teachers at MAS Al-Amin Mompang faced specific challenges in teaching English using the Merdeka Curriculum. One of the challenges was the lack of suitable teaching materials and resources that align with the curriculum. According to teacher A, "We don't have enough textbooks or online resources that cater to the needs of our students. We have to create our own materials, which is time-consuming and exhausting." This lack of resources made it difficult for the teachers to design engaging and effective lesson plans. Each class has a different way of learning and understanding so that the teacher cannot just use one lesson plan for other classes (Septrida, 2023).

Another challenge was the difficulty in assessing student learning outcomes in English. Teacher C stated, "It's hard to measure student progress in English, especially when it comes to speaking and listening skills. We need more effective assessment tools and strategies to evaluate student learning." This challenge made it difficult for the teachers to identify areas where students need improvement and provide targeted support. During the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, researchers faced the challenge of navigating the wide range of available learning media platforms, with many teachers struggling to operate and effectively utilize them (Septrida, 2023).

Furthermore, the findings showed that the teachers struggled to integrate technology into their English language teaching practices. Teacher A and B mentioned, "I'm not tech-savvy, and I find it hard to incorporate technology into my teaching practices. I need more training and support to use technology effectively." This lack of technological expertise hindered the teachers' ability to use digital resources and tools to enhance student learning. Meanwhile, According to Bennett et al. (2008), "technology has the potential to revolutionize teaching and learning by providing new ways to access information, communicate with others, and engage in learning activities. The integration of technology in education has been shown to have a positive impact on student outcomes, including improved academic performance, increased motivation, and better preparation for the workforce (Huang et al., 2013; Papastergiou & Solomos, 2014).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching at MAS Al-Amin Mompang posed significant challenges for the teachers. The lack of training, resources, and infrastructure, as well as the difficulty in adapting to the student-centered approach, made it challenging for the teachers to implement the curriculum effectively. Moreover, the teachers faced specific challenges in teaching English using the Merdeka Curriculum, including the lack of suitable teaching materials, difficulty in assessing student learning outcomes, and integrating technology into their teaching practices.

The findings of this study highlight the need for the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to provide more support and resources to teachers to facilitate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. This includes providing training and guidance on how to teach using the new curriculum, as well as providing access to resources and infrastructure that support technology-enhanced learning.

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