

An Evaluation of the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum Policy in English Lesson: A qualitative study in upper secondary school

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Abstract

Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum substituting the previous national curriculum known as Curriculum 2013, and has been widely used in schools since 2022. This curriculum is believed to contribute the quality of education in Indonesia, mainly for English teachers. Thus, this study examines the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum policy in English lesson in Indonesian secondary schools. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach, concentrating on the teaching strategy, teaching and learning process, and assessment methods used. The context and the participant of this study is two English teachers at one of state senior high schools in Jakarta, Indonesia. The findings show that teachers have created instructional modules that include a variety of learning mediums and methodologies, with a preference for digital media. Multiple-choice quizzes, essays, and projects are used to assess learning, which aligns with the curriculum's focus on critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach to ensuring the *Merdeka* Curriculum's successful implementation.

Keywords: Merdeka curriculum; English lesson; upper secondary school

1. Introduction

English is one of the main languages used globally (Crystal, 2003) in education, business, and economics, as well as a universal language (Harmer, 2015). Hence, English Teaching and Learning has been carried out as one of the main subjects the students must learn in Indonesian schools as regulated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in learning recovery (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

The Indonesian education system has seen considerable modifications in recent decades. The student curriculum is one of the most important parts of this shift. The curriculum acts as a learning pattern, intending to provide students with the knowledge as well as the abilities they need to be successful members of society. Education is only effective if the curriculum is innovative and fits societal requirements. According to Findikoğlu (2016), innovation in the curriculum is the key to major educational improvement. Thus, education and curriculum are interwoven and mutually beneficial, leading to the expansion of both areas (Campbel, 2020).

Following this, Indonesia launched a new curriculum named the Merdeka Curriculum to contribute to educational improvement. The curriculum itself has been implemented in Indonesian schools as an option based on their readiness in 2022-2024. The Republic of Indonesia's Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology announced the



Guidelines for Implementing the Curriculum in the Order of Recovery Learning in 2022. It stated that the curriculum intends to overcome learning loss and gaps caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to give a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to education that emphasizes character development, creativity, and critical thinking abilities in addition to academic knowledge.

This study's significance lies in the contribution to the understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy in English subject in secondary schools in Indonesia. The aim is to provide insights into the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy from teaching plan, teaching & learning process, assessment, and learning media and materials. Thus, the research question addressed is: How do English teachers perceive on the implementation of Merdeka curriculum in the aspects of teaching plan, teaching & learning process, assessment, and learning media & materials?

Curriculum in English learning context

Since the process of learning and teaching English has evolved, the Indonesian government aims to improve education quality across all levels by introducing modern competencies into the curriculum (Sukirman, 2022). Shofiyah (2018) stated that curriculum development ought to pay attention to two principles: 1) general principles such as relevance, flexibility, sustainability, practicality, and effectiveness, and 2) specific principles for example: educational purpose, content, teaching, and learning process, use of technological resources, and evaluation. In line with this, Arifa (2022) highlighted three key variables to expedite education recovery: 1) indicating the availability of specific regulations; 2) creating a budget that is manageable for schools, especially smaller ones; and 3) ensuring human resources, facilities, and infrastructure are ready for implementation. Kemdikbud (2021) found that the Merdeka curriculum improves teaching and learning by emphasizing key resources for learning objectives (Mubarok et al., 2023). The Minister also claimed that their goal is to enhance Indonesia's talent capacity by establishing a positive and comfortable atmosphere for learning (Pertiwi et al., 2022).

Teachers usually confront problems when implementing the curriculum, including planning, implementation, as well as evaluation (Sofiana et al., 2019). Furthermore, There is a lack of apparent description of how each activity is implemented (Krishnapatria, 2021). Teachers are asked to select relevant learning activities to meet the goals of the lesson. Teachers with training, confidence, and pedagogical capabilities serve as crucial aspects for effectively communicating material to students and adapting to curriculum changes (Thompson et al., 2013).

Curriculum implementation itself can be defined in many ways. According to Adewumi (2023), the curriculum refers to school-planned and led teaching and learning activities, whether conducted individually or in groups, inside or outside the school setting. The curriculum includes learning outcomes based on knowledge, attitudes, abilities, competencies, and work experience (Solikhah & Budiharso, 2019). Indonesian Unit of Standard's (2022) learning objectives emphasize improving English proficiency in six language skills: listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting in various contexts. The six English language skills have minimum learning outcomes corresponding to level B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (CEFR). Level B1 (CEFR) focuses on students' ability to communicate clearly in various contexts, express main points comprehensively, and maintain communication even with lags.

Evaluation is an essential component of the educational curriculum. Evaluation provides a review of the strengths and limitations of school-based curriculum development (Purwaningsih & Dardjito, 2021). The achievement of an educational process is decided by a well-organized curriculum (Görkem Erdogan & Mede, 2021). To ensure success, schools and educational institutions must mobilize all of their possibilities, assets, and resources. Henceforth, it is important to evaluate the Merdeka curriculum's implementation in the educational setting because it is critical for analysing the purposes, advantages, effects, outcomes, and obstacles, along with the plans and attempts that must be made to overcome challenges that arise from the current Merdeka curriculum implementation (Damayanti & Muhroji, 2022).

The implementation of Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia

Several studies have been done to discuss the Merdeka Curriculum implementation. Zidan & Qamariah (2023) discussed the implementation of the curriculum that emphasizes the use of technology to enhance the learning experience and to develop each unique ability that students possess. Sofiana et al. (2019) believe that the teacher's learning process has adopted student-centred learning in a variety of ways, as well as the usage of existing instructional materials such as books and student worksheets. In line with this, Kharimah et al. (2023) stated that the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to transform the education system in Indonesia, but its successful implementation requires a comprehensive approach that involves teachers, students, and the community. The curriculum should be tailored to the needs of each level of education, with a focus on developing the students' Pancasila profile. Human tendency to communicate and interact is not a phenomenon that emerges recently. These symptoms appear in line with the development of human civilization. Whether for the motive of developing power, politics, survival, and slavery; it has been a long time since humans are out of their closest social environment. This is what leads to the movement of people from one region to another, both in the form of individuals/families and in large waves.

2. Method

This research was conducted with a qualitative descriptive design. The participants in this research are two English teachers in one of state upper secondary schools in North Jakarta, Indonesia taking into account that this school has already implemented the *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching and learning activities. The two English teachers are both females and have been certified as professional English teachers. They have been teaching English for more than ten years. In collecting qualitative data, a classroom observation was applied to gain information about EFL teaching and learning process, as well as the teaching plan. The other instrument was by the researchers was a semi-structured interview with the two teachers to acquire information regarding the teaching materials and media used in EFL classroom activities carried out afterward. Each teacher had 15-20 minutes for the interview. The two English teachers are labelled with ET01 and ET02. The data collected were analyzed using Miles & Huberman formulas (Miles et al., 2014).

3. Findings and Discussion

Findings

a. Teaching Plan

From classroom observations in which the teaching modules were examined, it was found that English teachers in this school developed the teaching modules before the start of the teaching and learning process. These modules are prepared for all meetings in classes throughout the year. The format for the modules—previously called lesson plans—used refers to the *Merdeka* Curriculum which is slightly different than the one used in previous curriculums; Curriculum 2013 (K13) & competency-based curriculum (KTSP). Although there are some differences, most parts of the modules are still similar to the previous ones.

In addition, the results showed that the modules incorporated a variety of learning media. These included audio media, audiovisual media, and visual media. Furthermore, the learning methods section included several methodologies like problem-based learning and project-based learning. The modules did not, however, go into detail about the individual stages of these procedures. The assessment methods differed depending on the topic that students needed to master and these included different individual and group assignments.

b. Teaching & Learning Process

During the classroom observations, the teacher greeted the students in the beginning before checking their attendance. After that, apprehensive was given by the teacher to ensure the students knew what they were going to learn that day. The teacher used a translanguaging technique which meant the class was run in two languages; English and Bahasa Indonesia so the students did not have any difficulties in understanding the materials. There was a lot of enthusiasm filled the class when the lesson started.

In the core activities, it was found than the teacher presented the subject with the help of PowerPoint as the learning media. They also linked the subject to daily life context so that the students could relate to it and be easier for them to understand the subject. Almost both English teachers had integrated learning tactics, even if they did not explicitly mention specific strategies. For reading and writing materials, the teachers favored the discussion technique in small groups or individually. When the material involved speaking and listening, they preferred the paired discussion method. Despite some students ignoring the teacher's explanations and not opening their web-learning page as instructed, overall student participation in the teaching and learning process was commendable. This is evidenced by the majority of students following the teacher's instructions for each learning activity.

During the closing activities, teacher summarized the material that had been learned and provided a preview of the material that was delivered at the next meeting. Following that, the teacher assigned assignments based on the subject and concluded the class with greetings.

c. Assessment

From the interviews conducted with the English teachers after the observations, it was found that teachers usually gave the students learning assessments in the form of multiple choices and essays. However, according to the subject, they sometimes gave the students a project assignment as well. For multiple-choice assignments and essays, the teacher usually used Google Classroom or Google Form other than the school's web-based learning page. Below are the excerpts from the teachers.

“Usually, we conduct multiple-choice assessments via Google Classroom and Google Form, and then CBT. We also use project assessments.” (ET01)

“It's usually multiple choices, essays and projects. The assessment is the same as in the previous curriculum.” (ET02)

It was also found that the given assignments were not very different from previous curriculum assignments. It was done in the classroom, given to the students as homework, or based on the teacher's observation as the two teachers pointed out,

“Essentially, the assessment is still the same as the previous curriculum, only the terms of it that changed. For example, ‘Eh kita ulangan umum!’ We don’t use ulangan umum anymore, that’s called a final assessment now.” (ET01)

“We actually give the assessment when the students are active in the learning process, do their assignments, exams, and we allow them to perform in front of the class, that’s part of the student assessment too.” (ET02)

d. Learning media and materials

The results also demonstrated that the media used for the assignments was the same as the media for delivering the learning subjects; it was the same as the ones being used in previous curriculum as well. The teachers usually used PowerPoint, video, Quizizz, and any other digital media they could use. Once in a while, the teachers used an ice-breaking game in the teaching and learning process. The conventional media like textbooks was still used; however, it was reduced because the students seemed to be fond of digital learning more. Below are the excerpts from the teachers.

“...it is still the same as the previous curriculum with additional media. It can be boring for the students to use some conventional media from back then—like textbooks now for it is we can learn from anywhere and anytime with a lot of interesting media. We, teachers, should be able to use technology as well so we’re not left behind.” (ET01)

“The media is still the same as the previous curriculum, PowerPoint, then Quizizz. The other day I added Edu-play—a sort of game with frogs. I set the game. When a student couldn’t answer the questions, the frog fell to the river and lost one life. There are five questions and three chances to answer and yet everyone couldn’t stay alive until the end of the questions. (Laughs) They asked me to do it again and we’re still using some videos for explaining the materials.” (ET02)

From the interviews with the English teachers, it was found that they had to be creative in modifying the media and assignments given to the students so the students could work on the assignments properly while still following the Merdeka Curriculum-based assessment regulation. The two English teachers’ views from the interview are described below.

“It’s named Merdeka Curriculum for a reason. We’re given the freedom to choose the media we’re using so that students understand the material, then we can collect the results (assessment scores). Regardless of any media we’re using, if the students can do a presentation (of the material) that’s already enough.” (ET01)

“We can’t say really say it’s appropriate or not because everything depends on the students—sometimes we thought that the media are suitable to deliver the lesson, but the students didn’t think so. We can’t be so sure about the media being required to use by the Government as well since we don’t really know about it.” (ET02)

Discussion

The study’s findings emphasize several details about the Merdeka Curriculum’s implementation in English lesson in Indonesian secondary schools. First, it was discovered that teachers employed digital as well as conventional media in their instruction, with a preference for digital media. The study also demonstrates that teachers had created instructional modules that included a variety of learning media and approaches. In addition, the study disclosed that teachers used a variety of methods for learning assessment, such as multiple-choice tests, essays, and projects.

This aligns with the Merdeka Curriculum’s emphasis on fostering critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, as well as student-centered learning. It is also in line with Sofiana et al. (2019) in terms of emphasizing the teaching and learning process to be more student-centered. In Zidan & Qamariah’s (2023) study, the implementation of the curriculum should emphasize the use of technology to enhance the learning experience in order to develop each unique ability that students possess, as well as with Kharimah et al. (Kharimah & Qamariah, 2023) that stated curriculum should be suited to develop students’ Pancasila profile.

In relation to the learning assessment provided by English teachers to assess the students’ English ability such as objective tests, essays, and projects and it might integrate some models of assessment: diagnostic assessment, formative and summative assessment (Kasman & Lubis, 2022; Yulianto, 2022). The current study also discovered that some learning media were used by English teachers to support English learning activities. It was said that the media included PPT, videos, other digital applications such as Quizizz and Edugame (Rosyid et al., 2024). All these learning media were believed to promote the students’ motivation in English practice (Ariyanti & Apoko, 2022).

4. Conclusion

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum for English subject in Indonesian secondary schools has yielded promising outcomes. Teachers have developed teaching modules that include a variety of learning mediums and approaches, in line with the curriculum’s focus on leveraging technology to improve the learning experience. Multiple-choice quizzes, essays, and projects are used to assess students also align with the curriculum’s objective of developing students’ critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

However, there are limitations in this study. First, the sample of this study only consists of English teachers in one school. Furthermore, the study was conducted in only one class session. Thus, the result of this study could not represent all the school that uses Merdeka Curriculum. It is recommended that future study employs a bigger sample of teachers' and students' perspectives to get a more comprehensible understanding.

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