

ENGLISH TEACHING IN KURIKULUM MERDEKA FOR JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL: ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Based on the background of the study above, the authors formulate a research question, the question is: What are the barriers imposed by the English teachers in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka? What are the teacher's efforts in coping with the barriers based on Kurikulum Merdeka? This study employs a qualitative instrumental case study design to investigate English teaching within the Kurikulum Merdeka for Junior High Schools. Qualitative research seeks to elucidate perspectives and experiences, aiming to clarify and explain specific phenomena (Creswell, 2014). Informative case studies provide insights into particular problems and data that can modify established generalizations (Creswell, 2014). Based on observational data, the conclusion from the three teachers is that teachers have their own way of overcoming Barriers to implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka and for internal and external factors the three of them are not much different. These observations and interviews were conducted with three English teachers at one of the junior high schools in Cirebon. The three teachers were chosen based on the specific characteristics that the author needed, namely knowing the Kurikulum Merdeka and using the Kurikulum Merdeka in their learning.

Keywords: *kurikulum merdeka, teacher, teacher efforts, barriers, junior high school*

Sari

Berdasarkan latar belakang penelitian di atas, penulis merumuskan pertanyaan penelitian sebagai berikut: Apa saja hambatan yang dihadapi oleh guru Bahasa Inggris dalam mengimplementasikan Kurikulum Merdeka? Apa saja upaya guru dalam mengatasi hambatan tersebut berdasarkan Kurikulum Merdeka? Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus instrumental kualitatif untuk menyelidiki pengajaran Bahasa Inggris dalam Kurikulum Merdeka di tingkat Sekolah Menengah Pertama. Penelitian kualitatif bertujuan untuk menjelaskan perspektif dan pengalaman, serta menjelaskan dan mengklarifikasi fenomena tertentu (Creswell, 2014). Studi kasus

informatif memberikan wawasan terhadap permasalahan tertentu dan data yang dapat mengubah generalisasi yang sudah ada (Creswell, 2014). Berdasarkan data observasi, dapat disimpulkan bahwa ketiga guru memiliki cara masing-masing dalam mengatasi hambatan dalam penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka. Baik faktor internal maupun eksternal yang dihadapi oleh ketiganya tidak terlalu berbeda. Observasi dan wawancara dilakukan dengan tiga guru Bahasa Inggris di salah satu SMP di Cirebon. Ketiga guru tersebut dipilih berdasarkan karakteristik khusus yang dibutuhkan oleh penulis, yaitu mengetahui dan menggunakan Kurikulum Merdeka dalam proses pembelajaran mereka.

Kata kunci: *Kurikulum Merdeka, guru, upaya guru, hambatan, sekolah menengah pertama*

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Introduction

Education is a process of facilitating learning, or acquiring knowledge, skills, values, morals, beliefs, and habits (Suardi, M., 2018; Hodson, D., 2009). Through education people can have an understanding of something that makes them human beings who are critical in thinking and acting. The measure of educational success is seen from the involvement and participation of teachers as educators, students as learners, learning materials provided, teaching methods and infrastructure provided.

The new Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, Nadiem Makarim, since issuing circular letter number 1 of 2020 concerning the Merdeka Belajar policy in determining student graduation has raised pros and cons from various groups, "Merdeka Belajar" or "Kebebasan Belajar". The concept of "Kebebasan Belajar", namely freeing educational institutions and encouraging students to innovate and encourage creative thinking. This concept was then accepted considering the vision and mission of Indonesian Education in the future for the creation of quality human beings who are able to compete in various fields of life.

The concept of Merdeka Belajar is a response to the needs of the education system in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0. Nadiem Makarin as Minister of Education of the Republic of Indonesia, as quoted by tempo.com 2019, emphasizes that Merdeka Belajar is freedom of thought that starts with the teacher. According to Bell Hooks on

Osman, ahmed., and special akello (2015) educating as a practice of freedom is a form of teaching and learning that is interesting and fun for teachers and students. In the practice of this freedom, both parties are players in contributing and sharing learning experiences (Simonson, M., Zvacek, S. M., & Smaldino, S., 2019). Learners are not only taught 2 information that they expect to recall and remember when asked, instead they learn to think critically in a non-conformist and unfettered way. Teachers who educate as a practice of teaching freedom not only to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of students.

Learning Merdeka Belajar creates students who are not only smart in memorizing learning but have sharp analysis and reasoning in solving a problem. Students are also expected to have character. In independent learning, teachers must have the ability to master learning material and develop it in depth into interesting and fun material to discuss by using technology as a medium in learning, so that students have high motivation in learning to develop the abilities that exist in them. Students' creativity and creativity will grow if the teacher is able to design learning that challenges them to be actively creative.

With the development of educational policies, of course teachers must be able to adapt to the policies that apply. Teachers have a very important role in learning. As professionals, teachers must be able to organize quality learning, which can produce an educated generation, a generation that is able to compete globally and have good morals (Murniarti, 2021). Teachers must be able to change the old paradigm by following new policies. In facing the industrial era 4.0, teachers must be able to upgrade themselves by developing their pedagogical competence, so that they are able to guide and direct students to use their reasoning power well. Teachers who have freedom of thought are certainly able to provide a stimulus that stimulates students to use their reasoning power well and have creativity in accordance with the talents and abilities they have.

In the Merdeka Belajar program the teacher must have free and independent thinking in designing existing learning according to the needs of students. Teachers have independence in choosing elements of the curriculum to be developed in the learning process according to the needs of students. The freedom that the teacher has in choosing the elements in the curriculum must be able to create learning that challenges

students to have critical thinking in solving various existing problems, be able to foster creative creativity and have good character in establishing communication and collaboration with other people. Therefore, the aims of this study are to find out the barriers imposed by English teachers in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka and to find out the teacher's strategies in teaching English.

Methods

Design and Participants

A qualitative instrumental case study was employed (Creswell, 2014). Three English teachers (one male, two female) at a junior high school in Cirebon were purposively selected because they had begun implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka.

Data Collection

Data were gathered in August 2023 through:

1) Classroom observations

Three sessions per teacher (15–20 minutes each) focusing on internal (frequency of English use, enthusiasm, media mastery) and external (facilities, curriculum understanding, class management) factors.

2) Semi-structured interviews

Six open-ended questions adapted from prior research (Ismaili, 2013; Nurmala Sari & Aminatun, 2021), lasting 5–10 minutes each.

Data Analysis

Observation notes and interview transcripts were reduced, coded, and displayed to identify patterns. Findings were grouped into barriers and teacher efforts. Credibility was enhanced by triangulating observation and interview data.

Results and Discussion

Observations and interviews revealed that the three participating English teachers faced similar patterns of challenges in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. Internally, they struggled to master the new curriculum requirements and the diverse teaching media it recommends, which led to continued reliance on textbooks and mixed-language instruction. The frequency of English use varied with students' readiness: Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 attempted to use English dominantly but frequently

switched to Indonesian for clarity, while Teacher 2 used Indonesian more heavily at the outset to accommodate Grade 7 students with little prior exposure to English. Maintaining enthusiasm and student engagement also became increasingly difficult across meetings, as students showed low motivation, shyness, and uneven participation. Externally, limited school facilities—including restricted internet access, multimedia equipment, and up-to-date textbooks—curtailed the variety of activities envisioned by the curriculum. Large, mixed-ability classes and unclear guidance on certain curriculum components further complicated lesson delivery and classroom management.

Despite these constraints, all three teachers demonstrated creative adaptive strategies. Teacher 1 gradually increased the proportion of English used in lessons and provided explicit grammar and pronunciation support to help students follow along. Teacher 2 incorporated mobile phones and Google Translate as learning tools to scaffold vocabulary and make lessons more interactive. Teacher 3 used songs, games, and icebreakers to build confidence and sustain enthusiasm while still familiarizing herself with the curriculum. All three experimented with informal assessment and feedback to monitor student progress, although only one teacher reported sustained collaboration with parents. Together, these findings portray the teachers as resilient and resourceful, striving to bring Kurikulum Merdeka principles into their classrooms despite structural and pedagogical limitations.

These results highlight that the success of Kurikulum Merdeka in English classrooms depends heavily on individual teacher initiative and the support structures surrounding them. The adaptive practices observed—mixing English and Indonesian strategically, integrating mobile technology, and using affective strategies such as songs and games—reflect the spirit of Kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes contextual adaptation and student-centered learning. However, without systematic training, adequate facilities, and support for parental engagement, such adaptations risk inconsistency and may fall short of achieving the curriculum's full objectives, particularly in project-based learning and character development. The study underscores that teacher enthusiasm and creativity can partially bridge the gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities, but lasting success will require coordinated efforts

including ongoing, practice-oriented professional development, better access to teaching materials and facilities, and stronger channels for parental and community involvement.

Conclusion & recommendation

This data relates to junior high school teachers' perspectives on barriers to the Kurikulum Merdeka. During the data collection stage, the author conducted observations and interviews with teachers with the aim of answering research questions regarding the barriers experienced by teachers and teachers' efforts in dealing with them. These observations and interviews were conducted with three English teachers at one of the junior high schools in Cirebon. The three teachers were chosen based on the specific characteristics that the author needed, namely knowing the Kurikulum Merdeka and using the Kurikulum Merdeka in their learning. The participants consisted of one male and two females who had different backgrounds of knowledge about the Kurikulum Merdeka in its implementation.

Teachers' efforts in implementing it are very diverse, starting from planning where the three teachers have their own ways, such as the first teacher who is more into authentic material by bringing several tools such as drawing cards for children's games, for the second teacher more preparing learning media such as application technology and usually using YouTube to watch some material so that students are more focused and more comfortable in learning, and for the third teacher prefers to open the class with ice breaking such as singing so that children are more enthusiastic in learning and remembering previous learning. The delivery of the material presented also has its own character, such as being accustomed to holding the class so that students are orderly and there are also those who cannot yet so they must always be reprimanded. And for evaluation, they all have their own way of assessing their students. It can be seen that some can do it immediately, some have to wait in full.

This study has an important meaning because it reveals the obstacles faced by teachers so that we can find out how big the teacher's role is and the teacher's efforts to minimize it. In terms of future research, the findings of this study only offer insight into the perspective of teacher obstacles and teacher efforts in implementing English at the junior high school level in the Merdeka Curriculum, for further research is needed to gain an understanding of the school background and the training that teachers received.

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Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest is reported.

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