



The Preparedness of English Teachers to Use The "Merdeka Belajar" Curriculum When Instructing English

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Abstract

A curriculum is the structured plan or framework outlining the educational content and experiences provided by a school or institution. The Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) is part of Indonesia's educational reform initiative, introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The purpose of this study was to look into the preparation of English teachers and the challenges they encountered when implementing the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. We spoke with two English teachers from SMAN 06 Bengkulu Utara about the challenges they encountered implementing the Merdeka Belajar the curriculum. Interviews used for qualitative analysis were recorded, categorized, and conclusions were made. The results of the interviews indicated that teachers have challenges while developing learning objectives and implementing differentiated instruction. Despite being category ready, teachers still need seminars and training focused on evaluation and IT utilization in order to produce engaging material. This will help the teachers apply the Merdeka Belajar curriculum more preparedly. In conclusion, it is not surprising that the curriculum, one of the fundamental elements that acts as a guide or direction for teachers, will undergo a variety of alterations in order to accommodate current advances. Because of this, the Merdeka Curriculum is designed with teachers as its primary focus, but it also influences all other parts, particularly those in the academic domain.

Keywords: *English teacher preparedness, Merdeka Belajar Curriculum*

Introduction

The curriculum is thought to be a fundamental component that guides instruction and learning in educational institutions. Curriculum refers to the learning materials that help pupils realize their goals and acquire knowledge. According to Pajarwati, et al (2021), curriculum in Indonesia has been developed every ten years in response to changes in the political landscape, the demands of the society, and fresh insights into the learning process.

Its goal is to become a determinant and enhance the caliber of both the learning design and the teaching-learning process.

Changes cannot be disputed in a number of ways, neither can the curriculum nor the times. This transformation happened in part because the community was never happy with the outcomes of schooling and was constantly looking for ways to make it better. Science and technological advancements bring about changes in society, and as a result, curricula must automatically adjust to meet these needs. Santika (2021) asserts that curricular revisions are necessary to produce a superior and morally upright future generation of citizens. The government uses curriculum development as a creative move or renewal in the sphere of national education to address a variety of issues or difficulties in the classroom.

There was an urgent need for curricular development in the Indonesian educational system. The 2013 Curriculum competences were found to be overly broad, challenging to comprehend, and challenging for teachers to implement, based on the findings of the document assessment and curriculum application of the Ministry of Education's Education Criteria, Program, and Evaluation Organization. Curriculum development must be taken taking into account as a component in deciding the future of the country since teachers must also create extremely intricate and detailed lesson plans (RPPs), Ekawati (2016).

When there is a change in the curriculum, it is not only because of structural shifts in educational institution leadership that takes place, but also because of the demands of the educational community. Wirianto (2014) states, when these curricula are examined in more detail, they are all seen to have benefits and drawbacks. Additionally, curriculum creation serves as a tool to raise educational standards, Rahayu et al (2022). The Merdeka Belajar curriculum, which gives schools, teachers, and students the freedom to innovate and learn independently and creatively, is one of the reforms being made by the Ministry of Education and Culture in an effort to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, Sherly, et al (2020).

The Ministry of Culture and Education in Indonesia introduced a series of educational policies known as "Merdeka Belajar" with the goal of updating the nation's educational framework. A crucial element of these policies is the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, which aims to advance 21st-century skills development, digital literacy, and student-centered learning. Kemdikbudristek gives the school the freedom to create a curriculum based on the needs of the pupils and to organize and carry out the learning process, Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo (2022). Accordingly, Mustaghfiroh (2020) clarified that Merdeka Belajar shares the same goals and direction as John Dewey's notion of progressivism in education.

Merdeka Kurikulum is one of the responses and remedies offered by the government to the loss of the significance of education prior to, during, and following the Covid-19 pandemic, which precipitated a humanitarian crisis that could be appropriately managed. The Merdeka Belajar curriculum concept is also the solution to issues with the learning practice process; teachers are allowed autonomy in designing and evaluating student learning, administrative support, and openness to any challenges they may encounter when creating lesson plans, Yamin & Syahrir (2020).

One modification in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum that needs to be taken into account is the lesson plan. The Pancasila Student Profile aspect allows teachers to create their own modules based on the requirements and characteristics of their pupils, based on the lesson

plans already provided by the government in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Teachers can now concentrate on just three key components of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum: teaching and learning objectives, the learning process, and assessment. Each of these components can be condensed into a single lesson plan page, and the other components are supplementary, Aulia (2021).

Concerns regarding implementing the new curriculum and a new practice may be specific for teachers, depending on their perception of the situation and the management style of their schools, according to Khoboli & O'toole (2012). While some educators may gladly participate in the development of new ideas, others may find it difficult to embrace change. This occurs when people are faced with beliefs and traits that have changed as a result of prior encounters and behaviors Mandukwini (2016). Uncertainty: When changes need an invention that is outside of their experience, teachers may react by becoming confused, resisting new ideas, or both. Furthermore, they need to remain.

An informal conversation with two teachers at Sman 06 Bengkulu Utara involved in the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum revealed that although the issues vary, they are usually determined procedurally. Teachers need to make quick adjustments to adapt to the new curriculum so they can accommodate it. Because they do not yet have experience implementing the curriculum, as evidenced by the implementation of the new lesson plans in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, some teachers still feel uncomfortable. Many studies on English teachers' readiness for the introduction of the new curriculum have been conducted. While previous research has discussed general curriculum changes and teacher readiness, this study uniquely focuses on English teachers in the context of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. There is a gap in understanding how context affects the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum by teachers, especially in rural areas such as North Bengkulu Regency. This study highlights the procedural challenges faced by English teachers, particularly in preparing lesson plans under the Merdeka Belajar framework. Therefore, the researcher aims to investigate the readiness of English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, which is crucial for highlighting areas that require improvement, particularly at SMAN 06 Bengkulu Utara. After reviewing the aforementioned studies, the researcher has decided to investigate "The Readiness of English Teachers in Implementing the Readiness of English Teachers to Use the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum When Teaching English at SMAN 06 Bengkulu Utara."

Research Methodology

This research was classified as qualitative research. According to Creswell (2014) "qualitative research is handled for understanding and exploring the meaning individual or group for human or social problems". It could be written or spoken data which got from observed person or the behavior categories and research petterns. This research was designed by using qualitative descriptive. According to Lambert & Lambert (2012), qualitative descriptive studies are usually drawn from naturalistic inquiry, which affirms a commitment to studying something in its natural state as far as possible within the setting of the studies arena. According to Sugiyono (2014), qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups that deal with social or human issues.

Meanwhile Sutton & Austin (2015) argue that descriptive qualitative research depends on the human researcher to collecting the data. Moreover, Kumar (2015) states that descriptive qualitative research is intended to systematically describe a situation, problem, phenomenon, service or program, provide information about the living condition of a community, and describe attitudes toward an issue. Thus, the selection of a qualitative descriptive method is an appropriate choice for the research to be carried out because the process of this study includes data collection that examines Merdeka curriculum problems that exist in Education series.

Research method since its goal is to determine how prepared English teachers are to use the Merdeka Belajar curriculum when instructing English at SMAN 06 Bengkulu Utara. The data collection methods used were observation and a semi-structured interview. The observation was conducted, including pre-observation within two days and observation to gain the data within two days. The researcher carried out pre-observation as a guide to identify the school's environment and gather preliminary evidence of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English learning. During the data collection, the researcher used video recording to maintain the reliability of the information. The researchers act as observers who did not participate in teaching and learning activities. Thus, during the observation, the researcher conducted immersive fieldwork related to the teaching-learning activities, including behavior, actions, and interactions between students and teachers in real-time. Sample of this research is two English teachers who have used the Merdeka Belajar curriculum serve as the research sample.

The researcher used interviews as her instrument to gather data. The interview is used to validate and support the results gained from observation. Three indications make up the questions, which address the challenges instructors have when creating lesson plans, implementing them in the classroom, and maintaining the school's infrastructure. The researcher then conducted interviews with the two chosen English teachers. by collecting information about the challenges encountered in putting the Merdeka Belajar curriculum into practice through the use of open-ended questions. The interview session was supported by audio recording, and the questions related to the teacher's perspective and feelings while implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. After collecting all the data, the researcher processed it by transcribing the interview, analyzing the data, clearly describing and examining the results in each study's scope and areas, then summarizing the study's results.

Findings

The findings of the interviews demonstrated that, as evidenced Three metrics were used to evaluate all English teachers: developing lesson plans, putting them into practice in the classroom, and maintaining school buildings and infrastructure. who were chosen as respondents encountered a number of challenges when putting the Free Learning curriculum into practice.

The Merdeka curriculum now uses teaching modules instead of lesson plans (RPPs). This teaching module only requires one paper for one meeting, in contrast to the RPP. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Technology, and Research standards are among the elements that are specified as indicators in the teaching module. These components include the

following: general information (e.g., the module author's identity, initial competency, the Pancasila Student Profile, facilities and infrastructure, target learners, and the learning model); core components (e.g., learning objectives, assessment, meaningful understanding, trigger questions, learning activities, and reflection by both students and teachers); attachments (e.g., student worksheets, enrichment and remedial materials, reading materials for teachers, a glossary, and a reference).

First, because the sentences are deemed too vague, each teacher will generate a variety of views and interpretations when analyzing the learning results and formulating the learning target. This is the challenge faced by English teachers. In the old curriculum, the Ministry of Education and Culture gave the materials to be taught at every level. This is a new task to complete before beginning instruction.

“The problems faced by English teachers in analyzing learning outcomes and formulating clear and specific learning objectives are very relevant in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers the freedom to develop the curriculum according to the context and needs of students. This flexibility can help teachers adjust learning objectives that are more specific and in accordance with the results of the learning analysis. However, this can also be a challenge due to different interpretations and perceptions.” (Teacher 1)

“In the context of the RPP (Learning Implementation Plan) and the Merdeka Curriculum, there are several problems that arise related to the learning objectives, which are previously called KI (Core Competencies) and KD (Basic Competencies), as well as teacher independence in organizing and selecting modules or materials. Not all teachers may be ready or have sufficient skills to independently design and select appropriate learning materials. Lack of training and support can result in teachers' inability to design lesson plans that are effective and relevant to student needs.” (Teacher 2)

In order to solve the challenge, teachers participate in PPG, MGMP, and PMM (Platform Merdeka Mengajar) to assist in creating lesson plans and setting up the teaching and learning process.

Second, when differentiated learning was implemented in the classroom, instructors discovered a new technique that required them to assess each student's requirements and characteristics, including preparedness, competency, and learning style. It is difficult because of the big class size and the short instructional days, which makes it useless to concentrate on the distinctions between each kid at every meeting.

“In the independent curriculum, teachers need to analyze students' characteristics and needs, including competencies, learning styles, and student readiness. This is a crucial first step in differentiated learning to ensure that each student gets a learning experience that meets their needs. However, this analysis requires significant time and effort. One of the main obstacles is the large number of students in one class. The more students there are, the more difficult it is for teachers to conduct an in-depth analysis of each individual. This can lead to less accurate generalizations and less effective learning for some students. The amount of time available for each lesson is very limited. With limited time, teachers often find it difficult to implement different learning strategies for each group of students, let alone each individual. This can result in differentiated learning not being implemented optimally.” (Teacher 1)

“In some cases, schools may not have sufficient resources to support differentiated learning, such as supplemental materials, technology, or educator assistance. This limitation can limit the teacher's ability to provide varied learning according to the needs of each student.” (Teacher 2)

In order to get above the challenge, teachers must first learn, then develop their competency to become creative and innovative educators who deliver instruction in a personalized learning environment by giving each student a unique worksheet with the same content. Some solutions that can be implemented by English teachers are: Grouping Students based on their similar characteristics or learning needs can help reduce the burden on teachers, Use of Technology: Utilizing educational technology can help in managing and tracking student progress more efficiently. Based on each student's progress, adaptive learning platforms can modify the curriculum needs, and Training and Professional Development: Provide ongoing training to teachers on differentiated learning strategies and effective classroom management.

Third, the teacher stated that the school's infrastructure and facilities are more than sufficient to encourage the Merdeka belajar curriculum's effective implementation.

“Even though the facilities and infrastructure are sufficient, teachers feel the need for additional workshop and training agendas. This training focuses on several important aspects: Development of RPPs (Learning Implementation Plans): Teachers need special training to develop effective RPPs in accordance with the principles of the Independent Learning Curriculum. This includes techniques for formulating learning objectives, arranging materials, and developing innovative learning strategies, Assessment: Training is also needed to improve teachers' abilities to carry out assessments in accordance with the new curriculum. This includes formative and summative assessments, as well as authentic assessment techniques that can measure students' skills and understanding more comprehensively, and Utilization of IT (Information Technology): Teachers need to be better prepared to utilize information technology in the learning process. This includes using digital tools and applications to organize materials, manage classes, and administer assessments online.” (Teacher 1 & 2)

For the future, the teacher needs workshop and training agenda will be added which focused on develop lesson plan and assessment and used IT, so the teacher will be more prepare and to help successful of implementation of Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Both teachers and students, as well as all other stakeholders in education, must adapt and realize that change must be accompanied by the belief that something good requires a process.

Discussion

The preparedness of English teachers to use the “Merdeka Belajar” curriculum when instructing English in SMAN 06 Bengkulu Utara are in category ready however they still require some work. The answers from the teachers were based on the application of the Merdeka Belajar syllabus. The teacher's level of preparation was indicated by four noteworthy factors. First, let's talk about the teacher's competency ready, which mostly covers their knowledge and expertise with created lesson plans. Next, in order to apply the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, the instructors' emotional attitude readiness will be determined by their motivation, sense of self-efficacy, and dedication to teaching English. The results

indicate that English teachers are prepared to apply the Merdeka Belajar curriculum for each of the four parameters. Consistent with other research, Mubarak (2018) discovered that teachers' preparedness and commitment to apply Curriculum 2013 were at a "good" level in his study "Readiness and Commitment of Senior High School English Teachers to Implement Curriculum 2013: A Case of Indonesia." In addition, this study used four characteristics to evaluate the readiness and commitment of instructors to implement the 2013 curriculum. Additionally, the outcome demonstrated that the teachers are prepared for every readiness.

In contrast to the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, the teachers have typically completed multiple steps in the created lesson plan in terms of knowledge and skill. Certain signs are infrequently occurring, such developing learning objectives based on learning outcomes and conducting diagnostic assessments, which some teachers have not yet done using written, oral, and observational testing. The study's findings, which were based on a qualitative analysis, demonstrated that teachers were prepared to create lesson plans and apply the curriculum, although they still needed some development. Another research was conducted by Sundayana (2015) in his research "Readiness and Competence of Senior High School English Teachers to Implement Curriculum 2013" shares similar conclusions, especially when it comes to their understanding of the English curriculum and how it is incorporated into lesson plans using the curriculum's recommended principles for syllabus construction.

Another researcher is Puspayanti, et al (2018) which in their research "The Readiness of EFL Teachers in implementing the 2013 National Curriculum", showed that the readiness of EFL teachers in Jambi city was at the high level. The EFL teachers in Jambi City were equipped to use the NEC13 in a way that was appropriate, as per the national education standard. The results of this research provide insight into how leaders and legislators view EFL teachers' preparedness to appropriately apply NEC13.

Introducing new ideas into the classroom will present challenges for teachers. For example, an English teacher may find it challenging to apply the Merdeka Belajar curriculum in the classroom and to use it effectively for both teaching and learning. Following an analysis of the interview data, it became clear that teachers had certain difficulties when putting the Merdeka Belajar curriculum into practice.

First, English teachers face challenges in analyzing learning outcomes and formulating clear objectives under the Merdeka Curriculum, which allows flexibility for tailoring the curriculum to students' needs. This flexibility, while beneficial for specific learning goals, can lead to varied interpretations and perceptions. Additionally, issues arise with the RPP (Learning Implementation Plan) related to the former Core Competencies (KI) and Basic Competencies (KD). Teachers may struggle with the independence required to select and organize materials, often due to insufficient training and support, leading to difficulties in creating effective and relevant lesson plans.

Second, in the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, teachers need to analyze students' characteristics, including competencies, learning styles, and readiness, to provide differentiated learning. This analysis is crucial but time-consuming, especially with large class sizes, making it challenging to accurately assess each student. Limited lesson time further hampers the ability to implement varied learning strategies effectively. Additionally,

insufficient resources, such as materials, technology, and educator assistance, can restrict teachers' capacity to cater to individual student needs.

To get around that roadblock, the educators employ the variety approach. The teacher can try a different approach if the first one is ineffective in helping the differentiated children meet the learning objectives. Teachers also provide the same learning model as one of their other activities. and have not given attention to a single kid demographic. Put otherwise, the difficulty levels of the students determine the basis for the worksheets.

Based on the results of the interview, the challenges encountered by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Belajar curriculum were similar to those reported by Darwisah (2020). These challenges included the teachers' inability to understand the basic framework and curriculum structures, their limited time with complex materials, their difficulty in creating lesson plans, their inability to apply a scientific method, their incapacity to use electronic media like laptops and projectors, and their inability to incorporate education character into the teaching and learning process. They argued that to overcome these obstacles, they needed to understand all the current curricula in use.

One of the elements influencing the Merdeka Belajar curriculum's implementation is facilities and infrastructure. According to the findings of the interviews, every school that has adopted the Merdeka Belajar curriculum already has the necessary infrastructure and resources in place to enable the program's successful implementation. In keeping with the findings of study by Nur & Madkur (2014), infrastructure amenities directly impact how well students understand the 2013 curriculum. Even with adequate facilities, teachers need additional workshops and training in key areas. These include: Developing effective Learning Implementation Plans (RPPs) aligned with the Independent Learning Curriculum, covering learning objectives, material organization, and innovative strategies, improving assessment skills to include formative, summative, and authentic assessment techniques and, enhancing the use of information technology for organizing materials, managing classes, and conducting online assessments.

Conclusion

The preparedness of English teachers to use the "Merdeka Belajar" curriculum when instructing English SMAN 06 Bengkulu Utara are ready. This can be seen from the teacher readiness indicators related to knowledge and skills for the learning plans being developed, English teacher motivation, teacher self-efficacy readiness, and teacher commitment preparedness to carry out the Merdeka Belajar curriculum even though it needs a minor enhancement. There are several obstacles faced by English instructors using the Merdeka Belajar curriculum. During the execution of the lesson plan, the English instructor encountered difficulties in creating learning objectives. The challenge in putting the Independent Learning curriculum into practice in the classroom is differentiated learning, where learning differs based on the abilities and characteristics of the students. Teachers must fully identify each student's unique characteristics in order to comprehend them. can affect kids' capacity for learning. In order to apply learning in the classroom through the use of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers must be prepared, imaginative, and inventive. It is therefore

not surprising that the curriculum, one of the fundamental elements that acts as a guide or direction for teachers, will undergo a variety of alterations in order to accommodate current advances.

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