

ANALYZING THE EFFECT OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION ON TEACHING ENGLISH IN SECOND GRADE OF MTS NWDI PERIAN

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate the effect of the implementation of the merdeka curriculum on teaching English. The method that used in this study was Descriptive Qualitative research, wish used interview and classroom observation as the reseach instrument. The classroom observation was focuising on learning activity process, students' behaviour, teaching methods, and curriculum based-activities. While the interviews, using semi-structured interview that focusing on student's opinion, student's motivation, student's experiences, and the challenges that faced when learning English process. The merdeka curriculum implementation on teaching English is one of the educational systems, whether from the curriculum of teaching, methods of teaching, models of teaching and results of learning. This curriculum is regarded as a flexible, effective and adaptive solution for learning process that can be applied. However, the main challenges observed on this research included students' varying proviciency levels of English and the limited oportunities for the students on practicing English outside the School. Althought with these challenges, the implementation of the merdeka curriculum is produced an adaptive English learning environment that efficiently improve the students' communicative skills, critical thinking, and the students' confidence.*

Keywords: merdeka curriculum, teaching English, curriculum implementation, descriptive qualitative research

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INTRODUCTION

In this increasingly modern era, there are many changing that happened. It does not rule out the possibility of the changing education system. Moreover, nowadays educational world has a big impact on technology and communication namely Artificial Intelligence (AI). Consequently, instructors become educators who gain pedagogical skills, extensive content knowledge, and digital technologies are always adaptable to contemporary dynamics (Ginting, 2019; Ginting et. al, 2022). Teachers should balance between theoretical and practical knowledge to provide students with skills in the digital age (Sharma, 2017). There for, the Indonesian government has a big influence that given on the world of educational system in Indonesia by creating a new curriculum, namely Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the Ministry of Education and Culture (kemendikbud) 2022, The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that gives educators and students the freedom to determine methods, goals and learning models that suitable on their needs, interests and talents. The Merdeka Curriculum was developed as a more adaptive curriculum framework as a part of a learning reform program, emphasizing the material important for character development and student competencies. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, Education is the place where all seeds of potential are planted. From this perspective, the purpose of education is to help students

grow and achieve their fullest capabilities. Schools should not be viewed as prisons, but rather as spaces that nurture, harmonize, and develop a variety of skills. Apart from that, education in Indonesia has also been made worse by the learning crisis due to the Covid-19 pandemic. To address the challenges of 21st century skill and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Indonesia, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, took a strategic step by launching the Merdeka Curriculum (Fauzi, 2022; Yulianti & Hadi, 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum is introduced as a solution that gives a greater flexibility to schools and educators (Yulianti & Hadi, 2023). Therefore, the government presents the Merdeka Curriculum as an adaptive, efficient and flexible learning solution, that also has a big impact on Teaching English as a foreign language.

English language as a foreign and Global Communication language which is used in teaching and learning process is the international language which is used to be an official language in more than 50 countries. The changing of curriculum in the world of English learning presents new challenges for developing effective lesson plan, creativity and meaningful teaching, and evaluation of learning output (Sofiana, et al., 2019).

However, English Language is a language that important to learn in this era. Moreover, seeing the rise of the system of technology which is growing rapidly nowadays. It can affect learning activities in class mostly. Therefore, the government issued that is Merdeka Curriculum as a solution to optimize learning teaching process to the teachers to adjust students' learning needs at school.

In the context of English language teaching, the Merdeka Curriculum plays a crucial role. English is widely confirmed as the global lingua franca that opens up numerous opportunities, especially on academic and professional (Putri & Sya, 2023). Based on this, the Merdeka Curriculum prioritized the integration of character development and the competencies of 21st century, as like critical thinking and creativity, which are on the top relevant in language learning (Kamil, 2023). The student-centered learning approach supported by the Merdeka Curriculum, for example through the implementation of Project Based Learning (Pjbl) or role-playing techniques, it has been proven to have a significant potential for improving students' communicative abilities (Ginting et al., 2022).

Overall, initial findings at the research site, MTs NWDI Perian also noted major challenges, namely varying levels of students' proficiency on English and limited opportunities for the students to practice English outside the environment of the school. Despite these challenges, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has been successful in improving an adaptive English learning environment that increases communicative skills, critical thinking, and the student's confidence. As in that, the institutions of education had different students background and various readiness levels, the Merdeka curriculum implementations may present different outcomes. For this reason, it is important to analyze how English teaching in MTs NWDI Perian has been affected by the Merdeka curriculum era and what extent it positively impacts on English teaching in the second grade of MTs NWDI Perian.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this article is descriptive qualitative research, involving content analysis. This research is fundamentally rooted in the Naturalistic Paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2020) which asserts that reality is a social construct and must be understood in its original, complex, and unmanipulated context. Consequently, this study is focusing on natural classroom setting without manipulating variables.

Based on Clifford Geertz 2021, the core aim of adopting this qualitative method is to achieve a Thick Description. A thick description goes beyond merely documenting the facts (teaching activities), it seeks to interpret the underlying meaning, intention, and context from the perception of the teachers and students. This process ensures a comprehensive understanding of the implementation effects rather than just a superficial report (Robert Stake, 2010). This method is used to describe the effect of the Merdeka curriculum implementation on English teaching.

Population and Sample / Participants of the Study

This study was conducted with 17 students from VIIIC of MTs NWDI Perian. The researcher chosen this class because in the beginning of the semester the researcher is being assigned to be a teaching assistant in this class. The teacher allowed to the teaching assistant to teach and manage the class by the way it is suitable based on the assistant, whether from the methods of teaching, media of teaching, the model of learning process, and the results of teaching.

Research Settings

MTS NWDI Perian is one of the educational institutions that took place in Perian village, west Lombok Regency. MTS NWDI Perian is the place of this research was conducted, which is the place of the researcher has been a teaching assistant for four months. This school is selected because it has so much facilities which can be used to enhance the skills of the students in English teaching and this school supported teaching English using Merdeka Curriculum more than a year, especially the 2nd grade.

The teacher makes a various learning media and methods to use in teaching to see the effect on the students. Based on the role of the Merdeka curriculum, this curriculum frees teachers in managing the class during learning teaching process.

Research Instrument

The instruments used in this study is classroom observation and interview, this observation was applied while teaching process at the Second Grade C (VIIIC) of MTs NWDI Perian, and this observation focusing on learning activities process, student's behavior, teaching methods, and curriculum-based activities. While interview, this study used semi-structured interviews with students, and the questions focused on students' opinions, motivation, experiences, and the challenges that faced.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study, in MTs NWDI Perian especially the second grade, English is a required subject. The challenge often lies in students' that face in this study is varying proficiency levels of the students, limited space to showed up English outside school, and teaching aids availability. Effectiveness on English teaching typically involves interactive strategies.

A. The Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Teaching English

The researcher found several findings based on research that had been conducted uses interviews and observations classroom learning process. Based on the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in learning English, the researcher found several implementation findings had been applied. Three participants (P1, P2, and P3) has different perspective on this study about Merdeka curriculum implementations. The findings showed that the Merdeka curriculum should adjust and adapt to the characteristics of the students at

school. Then, in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, teachers are required to apply varying and differentiated learning. There included one point of view that related to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in learning teaching process on English subject that suggested the Merdeka curriculum is similar with projects, the learning process is implemented using a project based. This curriculum is good because it helps students a lot on pushes them into more communicative skills and mental tests. The Data from classroom observations and teacher interviews highlighted three key aspects of this implementation.

1. Flexibility in Teaching Learning Module and Learning Design

The main of Merdeka Curriculum implementation is the freedom that given to the English teacher in managing the learning process. The teacher said in the interview that they felt more independent in choosing methods of teaching and media of teaching that directly suitable with students' readiness. Based on the lesson plans, the teacher developed a **modul ajar** that combined the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) values, significantly focusing on creativity and mutual cooperation.



Picture 1. Profil Pelajar Pancasila

The observation data proves this flexibility. For instance, in a recount text class session on telling story which is need speaking skill, the teacher utilised a story of "Celebrating an Independence Day" that printed as the main media, which is practising by a story telling where students that expressed their opinion in English. This approach is a real reflection of the Merdeka Curriculum's purpose to make learning more relevan and contextual (Yulianti & Hadi, 2023).

2. Variety in Learning (Content, Process and product)

The unique findings found are efforts to implement differentiated learning to students' variety learning ability levels, an acknowledge difficulty in the Introduction (Putri & Sya, 2023).

- a. Differentiated Content: a student with higher proficiency on English were given more reading materials (short stories) in English connected to the theme currently used, while the student with lower proviciency levels received scaffolded materials with written vocabulary definitions.
- b. Differentiated Process: while in a group work, students were allowed to choose their method of presentation that interested. One group, included of kinesthetic learners, choose to present their project by a role-play simulation, then another group of auditory learners choose to record a short story podcast.
- c. Differentiated Product: for the final project of the section, students could choose the product they would submit that is (1) a written travel brochure, (2) a short

video documentary about the school, or (3) a presentation slide. This freedom of choice, central to the Merdeka Belajar Philosophy, was noted to significantly boost the student motivation on their learning process.

B. Impact on Students' Communicative Skills and Confidence

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, specifically through PjBL and differentiated activities, presented a positive effect on both students' communicative skill on English and their confidence.

1. Improvement in Speaking Fluency

Observation results showed indicated a noticable increase in students' willingness to speak and attempt communication in English, even with errors of gramatical. The frequent use of collaborative task and role-play techniques stucked in the PjBL framework that cheered up the students to practice the language naturally (Ginting et al., 2022). Students, especially who were passively, become more active in the class discussion and group problem solving activities. The teacher's prioritized on formative assessment where mistakes were treated as an opportunity of learning instead of imposing a punishment in reducing students' affective filter, allowed them to take more speaking risks.

2. Enhancement of Critical Thinking and Creativity

The integration of Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5) values in the English learning process maintaned higher order the skills of thinking. For example, during the story telling process, students were required t analyze the pros and cons of the celebrating and justify their opinions using vocabulary that more specific. This moves the learning process beyond rote grammar memorization rules to the application language in solving contextual problems (Kamil,2023).

The creative freedom in product selection (Differented Product) was also a key factor. One group which choose to create a short documentary has to collaboratively script, film, and edited their video entirely in English., demonstrating both technological literacy and creativity on skill of problem solving, which aligning with the demands of the 21st century.

C. Opportunities and Challenges

The findings showed the conceptual benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum flexibility and student centredness as also reported in national research (Fauzi, 2022). The autonomy granted to the teacher in designing specifix context of modul ahar proved highly effective in addressing the specific needs from students of MTs NWDI Perian. This level of adaptability sharply with the rigidity often associated with the previous curriculum. However, the core challenge identified earlier students' varying proficiency levels and opportunities of English practice that limited persists despite the differentiated approach. While differentiation in process and product was successfully implemented, the teacher admitted recognized facing difficulties in consistently providing highly individualized differented content due to time restriction and the need to manage a large class. This aligns with national findings that highlight the need for extensive teacher professional development regarding the practical execution of differentiation (Dewi et al., 2021). Furthermore, the limited availability of up to date and varied teaching tools, especially digital resources, as noted in the introduction, occasionally hampered the full potential of digital based PjBL, requiring the teacher to rely more on conventional methods (Sofiana et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the Merdeka Curriculum has successfully established ad adaptive environment that fosters communicative competence and confidence through flexible

methodology and differentiation. Yet, it is long term effectiveness depends on professional support for teachers to master it completely learning strategies and improved resource infrastructure to support digital learning activities.

CONCLUSIONS

This article showed that the implementation of the merdeka curriculum in MTs NWDI Perian has a big effect on learning teaching process. The implementation of this curriculum is seen a positive way, giving a solution to optimize the teaching and learning process and address the learning crisis that caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. The Merdeka curriculum grants an educator the freedom to choose and decide a suitable method, models, and learning goals based on what the students' need and interest in learning teaching process. The primary challenges on the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in MTs NWDI Perian is the students has varying proficiency levels, limited opportunities on using English, and the availability of the teaching aids. Overall, the merdeka curriculum implementation improves an adaptive English learning environment that increase communicative skills, critical thinking, and student confidence with English.

Although, the Merdeka Curriculum has created an adaptive and effective learning environment, key challenges related to varying student proficiency levels and limited opportunities for practicing English outside of school remain obstacles that need to be addressed. The long term success of the Merdeka Curriculum requires ongoing support in the form of in-depth professional training for teachers to master more individualized differentiation strategies, as well as improvements to school infrastructure to support digital resources.

Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum represents an adaptive and effective educational system solution for teaching English at MTs NWDI Perian, with significant potential to continue developing students' competencies holistically.

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