

Teachers' Readiness for Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English Instruction

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum changes are a common strategy to enhance the quality of education. The transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum requires teachers to be adequately prepared to comprehend changes in content, structure, planning, implementation, and evaluation of the new curriculum, particularly in the 2023-2024 academic year. This study aims to assess the readiness of teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum for English instruction in elementary schools. A qualitative case study approach was employed, focusing on grade 1 and grade 4 teachers who have implemented the curriculum. Data collection methods included interviews, observations, and document analysis. The data analysis process followed three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The findings reveal that teachers demonstrate readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, preparing lesson plans, and adapting to its new elements. Despite the introduction of new terms and curriculum structures, teachers are utilizing online resources and textbooks as primary teaching aids. However, challenges persist, particularly as English is now a core subject, and many teachers lack formal training in English language education. Additionally, while formative and summative assessments have been incorporated, diagnostic assessments at the beginning of the learning process remain underutilized, limiting teachers' ability to assess students' prior knowledge and learning gaps. This study contributes to policy development and teacher training by highlighting the need for targeted professional development programs, particularly in English language education, and suggesting the importance of incorporating diagnostic assessments to better address students' learning needs from the outset.

Keywords: *Merdeka Curriculum; Teacher Readiness; English Instruction; Curriculum Implementation; Assessment Practices*



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INTRODUCTION

The educational system in Indonesia has undergone continuous changes and developments, driven by the government's efforts to adapt to global educational trends [1]. As the system evolves to meet the challenges of the modern era [2], one key component is curriculum reform. The curriculum, defined as a structured plan of educational objectives, content, and teaching methods [3], plays a vital role in shaping educational outcomes. Since 1947, Indonesia's curriculum has been revised multiple times to reflect societal progress, culminating in the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in 2022. This curriculum, developed in response to the learning crisis exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, emphasizes flexibility, student character development, and competency-based learning [4].

A critical aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum is its focus on essential content, soft skills, and project-based learning in alignment with the Pancasila learner profile. The introduction of English as a core subject in elementary schools, previously an optional local content subject, represents a significant shift in the curriculum [5]. This change aims to equip young learners with foundational communication skills and global perspectives from an early age [6]. However, it also poses challenges for teachers, particularly those without an English educational background, in effectively implementing this new curriculum. This study focuses on a state elementary school in Kendari, which has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum since the 2023/2024 academic year for grades 1 and 4. The aim is to analyze teachers' readiness to teach English, despite their lack of formal English education, and explore how they navigate this new requirement within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

METHOD

To gather information on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, this study employed a qualitative case study approach. Descriptive studies primarily focus on providing detailed descriptions rather than analyzing relationships or associations (Siedlecki, 2020). The qualitative case study method was chosen for its suitability in descriptively analyzing data from the subjects.

Research Time and Setting

The research was conducted in May 2024 at a state elementary school in Kendari, which comprises eight classes: one grade 1 class, two grade 2 classes, two grade 3 classes, and one class each for grades 4, 5, and 6. The school serves 175 students and employs eight classroom teachers and four subject teachers.

Research Participants

Two teachers from grades 1 and 4 were selected as participants using purposive sampling, a technique that involves selecting individuals based on specific characteristics relevant to the study [7].

Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through three main methods: interviews, observations, and document analysis. These methods were used to gather comprehensive insights into the teachers' experiences and practices in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

- a. Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected grade 1 and grade 4 teachers. The interviews aimed to capture teachers' perceptions, challenges, and strategies in adapting to the new curriculum. These were designed to explore their understanding of the curriculum changes, as well as their preparedness to teach English.
- b. Observations: Classroom observations were carried out to examine how teachers applied the Merdeka Curriculum in practice, focusing on lesson delivery, use of resources, and student engagement. The observations provided a direct insight into the teachers' instructional methods and classroom dynamics.

- c. Document Analysis: This involved reviewing teachers' lesson plans, teaching materials, and assessment records to understand how the new curriculum was incorporated into daily teaching practices. The documents also helped identify any gaps in the implementation of the curriculum.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the data in the form of words. The theory used in this data analysis is by Miles & Huberman [8] and consists of three steps data condensation, data display, and drawing a conclusion or verification.

- a. Data Condensation

Data condensation includes the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data from the respondent fully, which is written in field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other instruments. By using condensation, the data gained were transformed by selecting, summarizing, and coding into the data that is ready to use.

- b. Data Display

Data Display represents the result of data condensation, which is then arranged to be structured information. In this phase, narrative text is used to interpret the data that has already been prepared.

- c. Drawing Conclusion or Verification

The last phase of analyzing the data is drawing the conclusion or verification. The result of data coding and display will then be drawn to a conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

To obtain information on the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum, this research used a qualitative method as case study in a school to answer the research question. Descriptive studies primarily aim to provide detailed descriptions rather than explore relationships or associations. As a result, the choice of descriptive qualitative research was made due to its appropriateness for analyzing the data from the subjects in a detailed and narrative manner.

Level of understanding

The researcher conducted interviews with the class teachers of classes I and IV at the school. Two people were informants who were asked for information regarding the topic being studied in this research, namely class I teacher, Mrs. Y, and class IV teacher, Mrs. L. Based on the results of interviews conducted by the researcher regarding the readiness of teachers in implementing the Merdeka curriculum, the following information (data) was obtained as stated by Mrs. Y as class I teacher.

“Jika dilihat kurikulum merdeka hampir mirip dengan kurikulum 2013 namun bagi kami yang menerapkan cukup susah apalagi rasanya terlalu banyak tuntutan karena kurikulum 2013 saja baru kita terapkan hampir merata sekarang sudah ganti lagi. Meskipun dengan kurikulum merdeka ini guru dan siswa lebih diberikan kebebasan menyusun. Kemudian ada juga struktur yang berupa fase A, B dan fase C. Sebelumnya ada KI dan KD sekarang diganti capaian pembelajaran, tujuan pembelajaran, alur tujuan pembelajaran jadi sedikit bingung dalam menempatkan poin pengganti KI dan KD ini yang mana. Jadi, untuk dokumen pembelajaran diambil dari internet, tidak disusun sendiri.”

Based on the findings above, it can be described that several teachers experienced obstacles and difficulties in implementing the Merdeka curriculum, some teachers were also confused about the mechanism for implementing the Merdeka curriculum and had difficulty in placing replacement components or points in the 2013 curriculum. Next, the researcher continued the interviews with high classroom teacher, namely class IV teacher, Mrs. L, starting from Mrs. L's opinion.

“Kurikulum Merdeka kalau menurut saya cukup baik diterapkan karna peserta didik itu lebih aktif kemudian lebih menantang juga. Kemudian dalam proses memahami Kurikulum Merdeka itu sendiri rasanya tidak begitu sulit dan menurut saya pribadi adanya capaian pembelajaran, tujuan pembelajaran, dan alur tujuan pembelajaran sangat bagus diterapkan karena upaya penyederhanaan ini sangat membantu peserta didik untuk memiliki waktu yang memadai serta dapat menguasai kompetensi dengan baik. Kurikulum Merdeka dirasa mudah dipahami seperti sekarang itu sudah ada kualifikasi kelas seperti fase A, fase B dan C. Selain itu Kurikulum Merdeka lebih sederhana dan membantu sekali bagi tenaga pendidik proses pembelajarannya juga lebih mendalam dan menyenangkan bagi peserta didik kemudian dari pemerintah juga menyediakan wadah untuk para tenaga pendidik memahami seperti apa sih Kurikulum Merdeka ini melalui pelaksanaan pelatihan disitu para tenaga pendidik diberi penjelasan mengapa kurikulum berubah, kenapa perlu berubah dan apa saja perubahannya, selain itu juga diberikan sosialisasi melalui platform merdeka mengajar (PMM).”

The understanding related to the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum that researcher found illustrates that some teachers have difficulty understanding the Merdeka Curriculum with various influencing factors, such as some teachers finding it difficult to use technology. The socialization time is less effective so the socialization process is less than optimal. Behind some of the obstacles felt by the teachers, there are also several other teachers who can be said to understand the Merdeka curriculum, such as the mechanism for implementing the Merdeka curriculum, the structure of the curriculum and how to design learning.

Utilization of learning resources

The planning of the learning process in the Merdeka curriculum has undergone several changes which actually have the same goals as the previous curriculum. Learning principles that refer to the realization of the Pancasila student profile. Then in the 2013 curriculum, teachers are required to create a learning process design which we know as lesson study. The Merdeka curriculum also requires teachers to be able to create or prepare learning plans known as teaching modules. The teaching module is an implementation of the flow of learning objectives with the Pancasila student profile as the target. Based on the results of observations made by researcher, it was found that the teachers had designed teaching modules consisting of general information, core components and attachments. Teachers have also studied the flow and learning objectives to develop teaching modules.

According to Mrs. Y as the class teacher, she relates to the learning plan, namely:

“Untuk penyusunan modul ajar untuk kelas yang masih tahap awal apalagi siswa kelas I, kami masih belum terlalu memahami untuk menyusun sendiri. Tapi kami masih berusaha mengikuti panduan yang dikeluarkan pemerintah dan menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka. Kalau buat modul agar kami dapat mengatasi kesulitan tentu kami bekerja sama, dan kalau ada yang tidak dipahami nanti ditanyakan kepada guru lainnya atau pihak yang sudah paham tapi intinya

kami upayakan sesuai dengan fokus pada literasi dan numerasi pada penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka di fase A ini. Untuk perancangan pembelajaran diupayakan kami ciptakan pembelajaran yang menyenangkan apalagi siswa kelas I mereka baru dari level TK atau PAUD dengan suasana berbeda jadi kita menyesuaikan karena membuat modul kita perlu memperhatikan karakter anak, perkembangannya jadi banyak pertimbangan dalam menyusun modul ajar yang akan digunakan.

Based on the interview above, Mrs. Y emphasized that in designing learning and creating teaching modules, she experienced several obstacles, plus the different abilities of students made it difficult for teachers to prepare for the learning process. Furthermore, several other obstacles were found in preparing the module presented by Mrs. L:

“Untuk rencana pembelajaran kami menyusun pembelajaran sesuai dengan tahap perkembangan peserta didik dan berusaha merancang pembelajaran yang tentunya mendukung perkembangan kemampuan peserta didik. Kami juga melihat contoh kemudian kami sesuaikan dan analisis kembali berdasarkan karakter peserta didik. Kemudian yang menjadi kendala dalam merencanakan pembelajaran seperti membuat modul ajar ini ya kita bingung apakah yang kita buat ini benar atau salah, jadi itu cukup menjadi hambatan bagi guru. Kita melihat contoh yang dari internet kemudian kita pelajari selanjutnya kita buat tiru dan tidak mencontoh sepenuhnya tapi dimodifikasi sesuai dengan kebutuhan dan karakteristik peserta didik kita.”

Based on the findings above, it can be described that teachers have difficulty in designing teaching modules, which is caused by several factors, including adjustments to students' developmental stages and the absence of clear rules regarding the preparation of modules, which makes teachers feel confused about whether the teaching module is right or wrong. Efforts made by teachers to overcome this problem are by working in teams and trying to analyze existing examples and then modifying them according to the characteristics, competencies and interests of students.

Learning Process

Learning activities are the core activities of all plans that have been made and implemented. The plans made can be said to be successful if the learning process run well. At this stage the researcher will provide an overview of how the learning process in the Merdeka curriculum includes learning development, how teachers implement differentiated learning. This was conveyed by Mrs. Y as the homeroom teacher of class I:

“Dalam proses pembelajaran di Kurikulum Merdeka kita sebagai tenaga pendidik memiliki kebebasan untuk merancang pembelajaran, namun untuk kelas I kita dituntut untuk lebih kreatif agar peserta didik tetap bisa belajar sambil bermain dan dapat menarik perhatian peserta didik. Kemudian sebagai tenaga pendidik juga dalam proses pembelajaran tidak mungkin asik saja memberi materi tanpa tahu keadaan peserta didik, jadi saya beri perhatian lebih dulu pada peserta didik yang memiliki kekurangan misalnya kan ada beberapa peserta didik yang memang benar benar tidak bisa membaca jadi kita kasih perhatian lebih kepada peserta didik tersebut. Khusus untuk Bahasa Inggris, tidak banyak yang kami bisa ajarkan karena keterbatasan kemampuan juga jadi hanya mengikuti yang tertulis di buku cetak.”

Based on the findings and results of the interviews above, it is said that teachers feel they have a demand to be creative and innovative, especially in class I which is in the transition

period from early childhood level to elementary school where the spirit of play is still high, so teachers have to work hard to think about how to develop learning that attracts participants' interest. Furthermore, the researcher continued the interview with Mrs. L as the homeroom teacher of class IV, she stated:

Untuk proses pembelajaran saya berusaha sebaik mungkin untuk memberikan pengalaman baru bagi peserta didik. Karena bahasa Inggris juga termasuk mata pelajaran baru, jadi hanya berusaha semampunya guru kelas. Selain itu kita juga menerapkan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi yang tentunya mengakomodir kebutuhan dari peserta didik peserta didik saya. Pembelajaran diferensiasi ini maksudnya bukan membeda-bedakan siswa tetapi menyesuaikan agar dalam pengembangan pembelajaran, semua siswa dapat memahami dan menerimanya. Guru dalam mengajar berusaha agar dapat dipahami oleh siswa yang berbeda dalam kemampuan dan gaya belajar. Untuk kegiatan P5 belum diselenggarakan di sekolah kami.

Based on the findings above, it can be said that the teachers tried to provide implementation the Merdeka Curriculum in the classroom. The learning process also went well because the teachers had direct experience, the teachers understood what had to be done during the learning process, such as how to attract students, what things students were interested in, where students were lacking and how to carry out direct practical activities. This is different from the learning planning process and understanding the concept of the Merdeka curriculum, teachers only accept the theory and then do not understand the provisions clearly.

From the observation of English learning, it showed that in classroom teachers did not prepare media in learning. They only used textbook. They also did not do variation in teaching, but they tried to make students active in the classroom by attracting them.

Assessment of Learning

Learning assessment in the Merdeka curriculum has 3 assessment qualifications. These include diagnostic assessments or initial assessments where the focus of the assessment is to learn where students' weaknesses, strengths and skills are and this assessment is carried out periodically, formative assessments are assessments carried out in one round or competency and summative assessment carried out at the end of the year. Based on the results of the researcher's interviews, it was found that the forms of assessment in classes I and IV were of course carried out in the same form and at the same time. This was explained by the homeroom teacher of class I, Mrs. Y:

“Untuk assesmentnya ya kami menyesuaikan saja, ada penilaian hariannya juga kemudian juga ujian sebenarnya tidak jauh berbeda dengan kurikulum sebelumnya.”

Similar to what Mrs. Y said, Mrs. L explained:

“Iya kami melakukan assesmen sesuai arahan bagaimana kalau di Kurikulum Merdeka, hampir sama ya dengan kurikulum sebelumnya, di Kurikulum Merdeka ada asesmen formatif ini kita sering lakukan seperti ulangan harian, juga ada asesmen □sumatif sesuai jadwal di akhir semester. Hanya untuk asesmen diagnostik kami belum melaksanakannya”

Based on the findings above, it can be said that the forms of assessment carried out by class I and IV teachers are all the same in accordance with the provisions of the Merdeka curriculum and school regulations, and the implementation time is not much different.

Discussion

Many factors can affect implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. Support from the school, educational government institutions' readiness and also teachers' readiness which play important roles in Merdeka curriculum implementation in the school. The implementation of independent learning encourages the role of teachers in developing the curriculum. The contribution of teachers in the curriculum development process is of course very important to adapt the curriculum content to existing needs in society. In line with this opinion, [9] believes that teachers are said to be the spearhead of success in the world of education because they are directly involved in developing, observing and implementing the curriculum so that learning can run smoothly and is able to achieve the desired goals. Based on the results of research on "Readiness of Teachers in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Elementary Schools" which was carried out in classes I and IV at the research site which were obtained through a series of research techniques, namely observation, interviews and document studies with the formulation of the problem of how the teachers are prepared in implementing the Merdeka curriculum. Researcher found that schools have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum in grades I and IV and teachers have participated in various socializations provided by the government to learn about the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Level of understanding

Understanding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is essential for teachers to ensure its optimal execution. During the development and implementation process of the curriculum, the intensity of teachers' involvement is crucial to ensure the curriculum is implemented appropriately and effectively [9]. The government has made efforts to provide understanding and outreach to teachers so they can learn about the Merdeka Curriculum and the changes that have occurred compared to the previous curriculum. One of the government's efforts is to provide various supports for teachers, such as the *Merdeka Mengajar* platform, which was created to support the practice of the Merdeka Curriculum and offer a space for teachers to learn and access references for its implementation [9].

However, despite the government's strong efforts, the process of socialization, which has been primarily conducted online using technology, poses challenges for some teachers, especially regarding technological skills. The rapid development of science and technology requires teachers to be literate in technology, information, and communication [9]. In this era of globalization, technological literacy for teachers is essential, not only for receiving information but also for designing and providing technology-based learning processes [10].

Some teachers have expressed difficulties in studying the Merdeka Curriculum, especially with the online socialization, such as online meetings, online communities, or independent teaching platforms. They collaborated with other teachers who are more tech-savvy and sought guidance from those more familiar with technology. However, despite these challenges, it was found that teachers were generally ready to implement the Merdeka Curriculum. This is evidenced by their strong understanding of the mechanisms of the Merdeka Curriculum, including its concepts, objectives, and the learning structure within the curriculum.

Utilization of learning resources

The Merdeka curriculum has a concept similar to the 2013 curriculum, but it emphasizes flexibility and competency-based learning while being centered on the Pancasila student profile. [10] discuss the distinctive aspects of the Merdeka curriculum, such as the use of learning outcomes instead of the old terms of core competences and basic competences and the different structure of the curriculum. The curriculum offers schools flexibility in its implementation, with options like independent learning, independent change, and independent sharing, allowing teachers more freedom to adapt and be creative in their teaching [11].

Although there are obstacles faced by teachers, such as the difficulty in implementing the Merdeka curriculum in elementary schools, these challenges can be mitigated through collaboration with colleagues and senior teachers, which deepens their understanding and enhances the curriculum's implementation. The learning planning process has undergone significant changes, with the Merdeka curriculum replacing traditional syllabi and lesson plans with teaching modules [12]. Teachers are now required to design learning plans based on phases rather than the old competency standards. They must also conduct diagnostic assessments to evaluate students' strengths and weaknesses.

Good learning design is crucial for improving education quality, as it impacts student outcomes. Teachers face challenges in learning how to create teaching modules, especially in terms of formulating learning outcomes and objectives [13]. Despite these challenges, teachers continue to collaborate, observe, and adapt the provided modules, eventually gaining proficiency in designing effective learning objectives.

Learning Process

The Merdeka Curriculum focuses on differentiated learning to accommodate the diverse needs of students. This approach includes various learning models such as character-strengthening projects, thematic, subject-based, and cross-subject learning approaches. Differentiated learning recognizes that every student has unique interests, talents, and potential, requiring teachers to effectively manage these differences [14]. The goal of this approach is to build a more constructive conceptual structure in students by providing them with real or contextual learning experiences, making the learning process more meaningful. Schools should create meaningful learning experiences to help students grasp the concepts being taught [15].

For the 2023/2024 academic year, the school under study implemented subjects like Islamic religious education, Pancasila, Indonesian Language, Science, Arts, Mathematics, and Physical Education. However, the school has not implemented Project-based Learning to strengthen the Pancasila student profile. Instead, the school emphasizes self-development activities, particularly English language learning, which is aimed at enhancing students' speaking, writing, and listening skills. While English is a flagship program, there was no contextual implementation of the Project at the school.

Assessment of Learning

Assessment of learning outcomes is an essential process for teachers to collect data on student achievements, covering attitudes, knowledge, and skills. It is carried out systematically and continuously to track the learning process, monitor progress, and evaluate competency mastery [16]. The Merdeka Curriculum involves several assessment types, including diagnostic assessments to identify students' strengths and weaknesses before designing teaching modules, formative assessments for monitoring progress during the learning process, and summative assessments to evaluate the final achievement of learning objectives. The Merdeka Curriculum does not use Minimum Completeness Criteria (KKM) but instead allows schools to define their own criteria for assessing student achievements [17].

Research findings from the study show that teachers have been implementing formative and summative assessments but have not yet carried out diagnostic assessments. Teachers also employ remedial and enrichment activities based on students' achievements. Remedial activities involve targeted interventions for students struggling with specific learning outcomes, while enrichment programs aim to further challenge high-achieving students [18]. Assessment results are used to evaluate students' understanding of learning objectives, with criteria for class promotion based on student participation, subject completion, and competency in attitudes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that teachers have made efforts to prepare for and understand the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the classroom. They are adapting to new elements, such as the phases (A, B, C) and the inclusion of English as a new subject. Despite facing challenges during the first year, their efforts demonstrate readiness to implement the curriculum. In lesson planning, teachers primarily rely on online resources, only modifying the identity of the documents without creating their own materials. When teaching English, those without an English background rely heavily on textbooks and feel underqualified. They also have not yet fully implemented project-based learning and require further understanding of it. However, they are attempting to apply differentiated learning and are conducting assessments based on the Merdeka Curriculum. These assessments include formative and summative evaluations, which are used for grading and generating final reports. However, this study focused solely on analyzing teacher readiness in the planning, implementation, and assessment aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum. It did not explore the specific reasons why some aspects of the curriculum have not yet been fully implemented.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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