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TEACHER'S CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION OF *KURIKULUM MERDEKA* IN TEACHING ENGLISH AT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Abstract

Teacher encounter numerous challenges when implementing Kurikulum Merdeka in senior high schools, underscoring the complexities and demands of adapting to this new educational framework. This study explores challenges as well as the various solutions teachers employ to address these challenges, focusing on how teacher navigate the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in senior high schools. This research Utilize a qualitative method with a case study approach. The instruments used are interviews, observations, and questioners. The results showed that the challenges faced are (1) lack of understanding, (2) difficulty implementing differentiated learning, (3) lack of training, and (4) challenges in implementing P5. On the other hand, the solutions are (1) teachers are still learning about Kurikulum Merdeka, (2) grouping students from 3 aspects (cognitive, affective, psychomotor), (3) conducting training independently at school, (4) extracurricular activities, and character week. In conclusion, there are still many problems that teacher face in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, so there needs to be a more relevant solution from further research.

Keywords: *Kurikulum Merdeka, Teacher Challenges, Teaching English, The Solution*

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the world of education has undergone many changes. One of them is the urgent need for a more dynamic and flexible curriculum. Therefore, the Indonesian Minister of Education, Nadiem Makarim, started a new curriculum program called “*Kurikulum Merdeka*”. According to Saleh (2020 as cite in Reza et al., 2023), the *Kurikulum Merdeka* program intends to investigate the potential of teachers and students to encourage a more optimal level of learning in the classroom. This means that *Kurikulum Merdeka* is a new effort where more in-depth facilitation is related to students and teachers. Furthermore, this paradigm shift in education is very different from traditional education techniques, because *Kurikulum Merdeka* focuses on revolutionizing how students learn and teachers educate. therefore, collaboration between teachers and students is needed in learning, both readiness for how teachers teach according to *Kurikulum Merdeka* in class and how students should be able to learn to follow the right learning flow. Thus, it is hoped that the learning objectives in *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be realized.

As part of the learning transformation project, *Kurikulum Merdeka* was created as a more adaptable curriculum that focuses on essential information while enhancing students' character and talents (kemendikbud, 2022). Reviewing this opinion means that *Kurikulum Merdeka* is a government effort to improve the existing education system, namely by focusing more on the essence of core education, namely “educating the nation's children” by focusing on each child's interests and talents. In addition, *Kurikulum Merdeka* exemplifies a new attitude of innovation or freedom where every diverse student in Indonesia can learn independently by developing their natural talents. This concept comes from a strong belief that education should focus more on developing individual potential to meet the needs of an ever-changing era.

The traditional curriculum previously implemented in Indonesia is often seen as restrictive and content-focused, providing a limited chance to engage with the subject matter and reflect on learning properly (Anggraena et al., 2021). Thus, over a long period, this restrictive curriculum has inhibited innovation and limited students' capacity to fully engage in their learning experiences. In response to the need for change, education stakeholders have collaborated to create a curriculum that not only conveys knowledge but also encourages overall student growth. As a result, *Kurikulum Merdeka* comes as a reformation of the limitations inherent in the traditional education model.

All students have a different level of intelligence in absorbing educational knowledge (Naufal, et al (2020, as cited in Aminah & Sya'bani, 2023). That means each students have a different personality. These differences include interests and talents, hobbies, and differences in the potential that exists within them. One small example that has been normalized a lot is “children are considered stupid if they cannot do math or science lessons”. Therefore, putting students at the center of the learning process is expected to empower them to take control of their education, explore their interests, and develop their unique abilities. The important thing that we must realize is that every student needs to develop the confidence and independence needed for lifelong learning, so there is hope that students can continue to give the best they can.

Teachers are one of the important essences in the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, especially the implementation of English language learning. This is by Ainia, (2020 as cited in Sunario Tanggur, F. 2023) who argues that the teacher is the main subject whose role is expected to be a driving force to take actions that provide positive things to students. Based on this opinion, teachers play an important role in the success of this curriculum. Thus, teachers must have sufficient knowledge so that this curriculum can be implemented properly. Furthermore, the teacher also acts as a figure who must provide positive things to students. finally, students can get good morality that comes from good figures.

This curriculum provides opportunities for students to choose subjects that match their interests or talents (Reza et al., 2023). students have the opportunity to be able to develop without pressure, meaning that students can develop their abilities according to their desired interests. Regarding this, of course, the teacher as a facilitator must help students develop themselves according to their interests and talents. As a result, according to the essence of the independent curriculum students are more independent in learning can be realized.

The relevant research results related to *Kurikulum Merdeka* state that some teachers face challenges when implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Although this system is newly implemented, teachers are responsible for introducing students to the established curriculum (Alsubaie, (2016, as cited in Reza et al., 2023). This raises various confusions for teachers. Research results show that some teachers face challenges such as 1) lack of facilities and infrastructure, 2) lack of mastery of information technology, 3) lack of social interaction, 4) difficulty providing concrete images to students, 5) too much student workload, 6) reduced

time allocation of lesson hours, and 7) lack of parental involvement and supervision (Wibowo, 2021). These obstacles are a challenge for teachers to find effective solutions in classroom learning.

In addition, the results of research from Windayanti et al. (2023) highlighted several challenges observed by teachers in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*, including 1). many teachers still lack the necessary understanding to manage *Kurikulum Merdeka* because they do not have the appropriate previous experience, 2). some teachers do not understand the core meaning related to *Kurikulum Merdeka*, 3). teachers also have difficulty finding references, making it difficult for them to create and implement lesson plans, 4). In other cases, teachers also still use a classroom-based or assignment-based learning approach, which makes learning in general monotonous. Although it does not only come from teachers, the findings show that the central government has not optimized the resources available for teachers to learn. Hence, the resources available from the center are still limited. 5). teachers have problems using and reinforcing *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (P5) and 6). diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment formats are still manually created due to the lack of formats provided by the government.

Apart from the important role of teachers as one of the success factors in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* researchers know that teachers still face many challenges. Thus, further research needs to be conducted to support education that continues to be dedicated to all levels of society. One of the compelling reasons this research is important is the lack of empirical research on the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* on EFL teachers. In addition, the difficulties practical difficulties that teachers face daily will be thoroughly discussed in this study. Furthermore, this research will complete one of the problems of previous research which is the lack of theoretical exploration in the research, therefore this research will be supported by strong theory to support this research. This becomes a strong motivation for researchers to conduct this research.

This study focuses on explaining the problems experienced by English teachers and the solutions teachers can use to overcome these problems. The researcher hopes that the findings from this study will significantly contribute to improving the education standard in Indonesia, which is why this study was conducted.

METHOD

The researcher employed a qualitative research method based on the procedures they followed to collect this research. Creswell (In Abdi, 2020, as cited in Wicaksana & Rachman, 2018) defines qualitative research as an approach that uses interviews, direct observation, and document analysis to investigate and comprehend central symptoms. Additionally, supporting this viewpoint, qualitative research typically examines a few real-world events. As a result, qualitative research is frequently employed in social science, culture, and other fields that require a deep comprehension of people and society.

A case study is a type of research design used to examine actual social phenomena. In a case study, the researcher examines the case in detail, collecting information by using various methods, such as observation, interviews, document analysis, etc. In addition, case studies also keep an eye on external influences that may have an impact on the phenomena that occur, such as government policies or due to technological developments. Furthermore, the purpose of a case study is to obtain a thorough in-depth understanding of a phenomenon. According to Assyakurrohim et al. (2022), case studies are useful for researchers who aim to gain a thorough understanding of a particular problem or situation. Finally, case studies can also be used to identify cases that are rich in information, meaning that a broad problem

can be studied from several examples of certain phenomena that occur in society or education.

To collect valid data, the researcher interviewed English teacher at one senior high school in Majalengka. Furthermore, data will be collected through observation, questionnaires, and interviews. First, interviews and questions will be conducted to get direct insights from teachers regarding their experiences and impressions of curriculum implementation. The interview questions are intended to elicit their comprehension of the curriculum objectives, the challenges they confront, and the techniques they have taken to solve them. Meanwhile, observation will allow researchers to watch teacher's instructional approaches in the classroom directly. Furthermore, observation includes observing teacher-student interaction, instructional methods, and the utilization of *Kurikulum Merdeka's* relevant learning materials and tools. The last one is a questionnaire to find out the solutions that teacher use to overcome these challenges and also to strengthen the data of the interview. By combining these three tools, the research can give a comprehensive picture of the issues experienced by English teachers when implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*. furthermore, this study collects data through 3 instruments of research, these are observation, questionnaires, and interviews.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The data from the interview as the primary data shows that one of the biggest challenges that teachers have while implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* is a lack of understanding, particularly when it comes to teaching English. Teachers continue to be confused about how to integrate English language instruction utilizing a *Kurikulum Merdeka*. As an illustration, consider the fact that teachers are still confused about how to apply *Kurikulum Merdeka* in the classroom correctly. Teachers are also still exploring and being aware when implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* in the classroom because they are still afraid of being incorrect about whether their teaching methods and strategies align with the curriculum or not. This is because the curriculum is still relatively new. Despite preparations for *Kurikulum Merdeka* being made over the past year, teachers of English language learners are nonetheless confused by concerns about the curriculum themselves.

There are difficulties in combining *Kurikulum Merdeka* with current teaching methods, as evidenced by observations showing that teachers find it difficult to comprehend how to apply the curriculum in the classroom. To achieve more comprehensive and relevant educational goals that are in line with contemporary demands, this limitation may limit the effectiveness of teachers and lower the quality of student learning. Consequently, it is essential to improve teachers' comprehension of the educational objectives and principles and to give them the necessary assistance and training. This would give teachers more tools to assist students in acquiring a variety of comprehensive skills that align with the desired learning objectives.

Furthermore, the findings of the interview also Demonstrate habituation is one of the problems that teachers confront. The main focus of *Kurikulum Merdeka's* learning is on students, also known as student-centered learning. It was done in the previous curriculum, but under *Kurikulum Merdeka*, each student is facilitated and privileged in their study. Furthermore, each student has unique demands, and one of the obstacles that teachers confront is becoming accustomed to identifying each student's basic needs. Teachers must make every effort to become facilitators to satisfy the requirements of all students.

Based on the findings of the conducted interviews, it appears that teachers continue to face challenges when using (P5). This arises from the fact that teachers don't fully comprehend (P5). Teachers are still perplexed and do not know how to apply a self-contained curriculum based on the competencies or characteristics that would be attained under (P5). Therefore,

teachers continue to apply these constraints as much as possible while still doing the best they can given their current skill level.

The interview results also demonstrate that teacher's use of teaching methods is still restricted, which is consistent with the observational data. Furthermore, teachers are still exploring teaching methods that align with *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Furthermore, just Project Based Learning (PJBL) and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) procedures are employed. However, students learn more project-based learning because the most often utilized approach to date is simply PJBL. Additionally, the decision of which of the two approaches is preferable to adopt is still being made. As a result, efforts are currently being made to determine the best teaching strategies to support learning by *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

The observation results also show that the teacher still does not use a variety of teaching methods that accommodate auditory, kinesthetic, and visual learning types. Each student has a unique learning style, which can have an impact on the learning process. By incorporating all three learning types into teaching approaches, the teacher can assist students in better understanding the topic and increase their participation and engagement. Furthermore, adopting a variety of teaching styles helps create a more inclusive classroom climate in which all students feel supported and respected. This strategy targets not just individual learning demands but also promotes student collaboration and creativity. As a result, the general quality of education improves, and pupils are more likely to succeed academically. Besides that, the findings of the interview demonstrate next challenge relates to differentiated learning. Differentiated learning is an important pillar of *Kurikulum Merdeka* and is one of the differences from the previous curriculum. Differentiated learning provides equal opportunities for each student to learn more freely according to their interests and talents. It is also a challenge for teachers because teachers act as facilitators and must be able to provide equal opportunities for each student to develop themselves in various ways. It also becomes a challenge for teachers because teachers act as facilitators and must be able to provide equal opportunities for each student to develop themselves in diverse ways.

Furthermore, findings on observation also strengthen the results of the interview above, it appears that the teacher is not making the most of innovative teaching strategies in the classroom, which can have a big impact on students' overall learning outcomes. This restriction could lead to a lack of diversity in teaching strategies, which would decrease student engagement and interest. Using innovative teaching strategies like project-based learning, flipped classrooms, and cooperative learning can improve student engagement and help them understand subjects in more meaningful contexts. To meet the many needs and learning styles of students, teachers should challenge themselves to expand their repertoire of instructional strategies. More creative teaching methods can make the classroom more dynamic and better prepare students to face challenges in a society and labor market that are changing all the time.

The last challenge as the outcomes from the interview is the lack of government-provided specific training on *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Lack of training is a critical issue. It is the primary reason why teachers struggle to understand *Kurikulum Merdeka*. As a result, many teachers face confusion and obstacles in the classroom. As a consequence, this case must be anticipated collectively.

Additionally is about the solutions that teachers use to overcome the problems mentioned earlier. The results of the interview show that to overcome the challenges of a lack of understanding is to continue to deepen and explore *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Teachers have not fully found the maximum solution regarding how to solve this problem. However, what teachers are currently doing is to continue to understand, learn, and explore *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

The results of the questionnaire are also given. The results show that the real solution that teachers do is to continue to try to implement *Kurikulum Merdeka* according to the abilities that teachers have. This means that these challenges do not make teachers stop implementing this curriculum, but teachers continue to try all ways so that this curriculum can be implemented, which is continuing to implement it amid existing limitations according to their abilities.

Based on the results of interviews, it can be concluded that the efforts that teachers have made to overcome the challenges in understanding *Kurikulum Merdeka* are to continue to explore and continue to apply it according to their abilities. This is very interesting for researchers to study because behind the limitations that exist teachers do not give up and continue to carry out what is the responsibility that teachers must live.

Following that, the interview insight demonstrates strategies for overcoming habituation issues. One of the teacher's habituation challenges is determining each student's basic needs. Teachers face challenges in finding helpful information to satisfy each student's unique needs. The teacher's solution is to look for each student's needs in-depth, either directly or through a psychological method that is tailored to the student's psyche. Furthermore, because students' needs vary, teachers must utilize diverse techniques to address each student's diversity. As a result, teachers use learning models that are tailored to each student's specific needs.

The following are interview results that explain the solutions to overcome difficulties in implementing P5. The teachers provided two solutions: first, emphasizing extracurricular activities that help students apply Pancasila values such as cooperation, independence, responsibility, etc.; and second, Character Week, which involves weekly activities to instill P5 values in students. For example, a responsibility week focuses on projects that require students to work collaboratively, conduct group exercises once a week, and pray together to implement the first P5 value of being devoted to God. These activities are expected to ensure the successful implementation of P5.

The next solution addresses the limitations of the methods used. The interview findings indicate that teachers are still in the process of exploring and selecting the appropriate methods for implementation in the learning process. Additionally, teachers are still in the process of understanding and delving into methods that support the continuity of *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Therefore, in the field, teachers are currently using two methods (PJBL and PBL), and both methods are still in the selection and deepening stages.

Additionally, the findings of the questionnaire also show that it is important to assess the effectiveness of the methods we, as teachers, have used. One way to determine if these methods are effective is by observing student responses to whether they feel comfortable with the methods or if they are experiencing stress. Additionally, evaluating student progress is crucial; this involves checking if the development of these methods has led to improvements in students' knowledge or skills. Lastly, examining the extent to which learning objectives have been achieved is essential. If the teaching methods are inappropriate, achieving learning objectives will be challenging. Therefore, careful consideration of research methods is vital, as they significantly impact student learning outcomes.

Besides that, the data from the interview indicate that the solution to overcoming the challenges of differentiated learning is to thoroughly prepare students with various characteristics, whether they have special needs or not. The next approach is to categorize students into three aspects: affective, cognitive, or psychomotor. This is beneficial for supporting their diverse talents. For example, students who excel in the psychomotor aspect have non-academic skills, such as in sports. In such cases, teachers should support these

students by guiding them toward activities that can bridge their talents. A practical step to understand the students' characteristics in terms of affective, cognitive, or psychomotor aspects is to provide a questionnaire that includes these three aspects at the time of enrollment.

Differentiated learning is a key feature of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Students exhibit varying levels of abilities, both academically and non-academically. These abilities fall into three main categories: 1). Cognitive Abilities, involve the mental processes related to acquiring knowledge, understanding, and thinking. They include skills such as remembering information, comprehending concepts, analyzing data, making judgments, and solving problems. 2). Affective Abilities, these involve emotions, feelings, attitudes, values, and motivation. They encompass how an individual emotionally perceives and responds to situations and information. 3). Psychomotor Abilities, these pertain to physical skills and motor coordination. They include activities involving body movements, hand-eye coordination, and manipulation skills. In an educational setting, students exhibit these three types of abilities to varying extents. Consequently, it is the teacher's role to design a learning approach that supports the development of these abilities in students.

Research findings indicate that to overcome the challenges of differentiated learning, teachers implement a strategy by providing a questionnaire to each student at the beginning of school enrollment. This questionnaire covers the three fundamental abilities of students: affective, cognitive, and psychomotor. The purpose of the questionnaire is to identify the basic characteristics of students in these three aspects. This approach helps teachers analyze students' abilities once they start classroom learning. Consequently, the next task for teachers is to guide students according to their talents.

Additionally, the interview process also revealed the solution implemented by teachers to address the lack of training they received. To anticipate this challenge, the school principal and teachers conducted self-led training sessions at the school to enhance their understanding of the new curriculum. This initiative is aimed at minimizing potential obstacles.

Inadequate training remains a significant issue in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Interview results show that teachers complain about the lack of sufficient training on *Kurikulum Merdeka* to date. This has left teachers confused about how to properly implement this curriculum. Although there are digital platforms provided by the government, they seem insufficient to fully help teachers understand *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Therefore, teachers urgently need training sessions that can help them further explore and understand the curriculum. Ultimately, it is the teachers who must have the most comprehensive understanding of this curriculum, as they are the ones directly involved in its practical application in the classroom.

As the great solution for teachers is to continue studying and deepening their understanding of *Kurikulum Merdeka* on their own. One approach to accomplish this is to hold independent training sessions at school to improve their knowledge of applying *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Furthermore, teachers can continue conducting *Kurikulum Merdeka* within their current capacities. This way, *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be implemented despite current challenges. Thus, teachers will do their best to support this curriculum.

Finally, the questionnaire's answers show that teachers sincerely desire more support from many stakeholders so they can work as hard as possible to incorporate the *Kurikulum Merdeka* into the classroom. Teachers need this kind of help because they are still facing a lot of obstacles during the implementation phase. Increased assistance could come in the form of community, parent, and school administration collaboration, professional development opportunities, and resource access. In addition to relieving some of the

workload for teachers, an all-inclusive support system would improve the atmosphere in which the new curriculum may be implemented successfully. In the end, instructors can more successfully overcome challenges and guarantee that *Kurikulum Merdeka* fulfills its intended educational objectives, helping students and raising the standard of instruction overall.

The conclusions drawn from the findings indicate several challenges faced by teachers in implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka*. These challenges include a lack of understanding, adaptation issues, P5 implementation, limited methods, difficulties in applying differentiated learning, and insufficient training. Additionally, solutions to address these problems were also provided. It is hoped that these insights can serve as suggestions or recommendations for English teachers and other educators to better anticipate and address potential issues.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted at one of the high schools in Majalengka, it can be concluded that:

In the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, teachers face various challenges that have colored the journey of this new curriculum. Teachers encounter challenges such as not fully understanding *Kurikulum Merdeka*, difficulties with habituation, challenges in using research approaches or teaching methods, difficulties in implementing the strengthening project (P5), and lastly, a lack of training.

Teachers have employed various strategies to ensure the curriculum is successfully implemented. Teachers and school principals work together to find solutions and continue to implement the curriculum to the best of their abilities. Some of the solutions that teachers have employed to address these challenges include continuously studying and delving deeper into *Kurikulum Merdeka*, becoming facilitators to meet the diverse needs of students both directly and psychologically, conducting pre-planning, supporting students' talents through extracurricular activities, and organizing Character Week to instill Pancasila values in daily life. They also select the most appropriate teaching methods and conduct self-led training at the school. With the identification of these challenges, it is hoped that there will be support from all parties, including policymakers and other relevant stakeholders.

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