

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

In the field of education, the curriculum holds significant importance as it serves as a comprehensive plan or design for a course. It outlines how the content of a course is structured and presented, creating a holistic framework for teaching and learning. The curriculum plays a crucial role in facilitating the attainment of desired learning

outcomes (Richards, 2013). Curriculum change policies have happened in Indonesia several times in the past, particularly when the Covid-19 Pandemic struck (Sakkir, 2021, p. 515). In less than 10 years, the country has undergone three updates to its curriculum, as highlighted by (Sugiri, 2020). These changes are a response to the evolving challenges and societal shifts in Indonesia, aiming to enhance the quality of education. The updates encompass learning objectives, models, and strategies aligned with the evolving landscape of education. Through these modifications, Indonesia aspires to prepare students with strong potential in both academic and non-academic realms.

The transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum has brought about substantial changes in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of learning. Notably, new terms such as *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP)*, *Modul Ajar (MA)*, *Capaian Pembelajaran (CP)*, *Kriteria Ketercapaian Tujuan Pembelajaran (KKTP)*, *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*, diagnostic assessments, student reflections, and teacher reflections have been introduced. As highlighted by Hardanie (2022), these changes aim to enhance the competence of both students and teachers. The shift encourages teachers to engage in continuous learning and adaptation to effectively implement the new learning paradigm introduced by the Merdeka Curriculum.

The Merdeka Curriculum is a recently implemented curriculum in Indonesia, starting in 2021. *Merdeka Belajar* launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture under the guidance of Nadiem Makarim, underscores the dynamic nature of curriculum development in Indonesia. Its objective is to revolutionize the education system, making it more comprehensive, centered around learners, and

aligned with the current demands of society (Kasman & Lubis, 2022). The curriculum places a strong emphasis on fostering critical thinking, digital literacy, and the cultivation of character. Additionally, it is designed to contribute to the advancement of Indonesia's digital economy and equip students with the skills needed to tackle the challenges of the 21st century.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) sought to create a curriculum that aligns with the national vision and mission, tackles present societal challenges, and readies students for a future heavily influenced by technology and digital literacy. The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to address the swift globalization that characterizes the 21st century. The current demands of the era necessitate that educational institutions remain adaptive and offer solutions through their curriculum. This responsiveness to the challenges of a globalized world is a key feature of the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum signifies a notable departure from the previous curriculum, which faced criticism for its heavy emphasis on memorization and rote learning. As explained above this curriculum is designed to promote critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among students. Certainly in concerning the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum there is a relevant Qur'an verse as follows in QS. Al-Mujādilah (11)

يَأْتِيهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا قِيلَ لَكُمْ تَفَسَّحُوا فِي الْمَجَالِسِ فَأَفْسَحُوا يَفْسَحِ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ وَإِذَا قِيلَ انشُرُوا فَانشُرُوا يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١﴾

In this verse, it is discussed the bestowal of wisdom to whomever Allah wills. The emphasis on wisdom can be interpreted as encouragement to think critically and creatively in seeking solution. This concept aligns with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum that designed to promote students critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills. The pursuit of wisdom, as mention in the verse, parallels the educational objective of empowering students to think independently and innovative within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in teaching English involves

various processes, time, and preparation, leading to changes in the learning system. The objective is to ensure that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum occurs smoothly, creating a conducive environment for interaction between teachers and students. According to (Bangkara et al., 2022) the implementation of such an extensive curriculum presents notable challenges for Indonesian schools, including issues related to resource availability, teacher training, and student evaluation.

In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers play a crucial role by understanding key components such as *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP)*, *Modul Ajar (MA)*, and Project Modules, as well as evaluating student progress (Nurhidayat et al., 2022). This underscores the strategic responsibility of teachers in realizing national education goals through effective teaching and nurturing. Therefore, there is a need for a focused effort to develop teachers as professionals who are not only morally grounded but also adhere to rules, uphold professionalism, and demonstrate competence. In the Merdeka Curriculum, students are positioned as learning centers, often referred to as Student Centers. Recognizing students as the essence of education, the learning process must revolve around facilitating the development of their talents, interests, and potential in the field of English. Facilitators in this context encompass teachers, principals, and other staff members.

The Merdeka Curriculum is currently in its early implementation stages, and its impact on Indonesian education is yet to be fully understood. While it holds considerable potential for enhancing the quality of education in Indonesia, it also presents notable challenges. Therefore, it is crucial to examine the difficulties and possibilities associated with its execution in Indonesian schools. This examination can offer insights into how to refine the curriculum and support the creation of a more robust and pertinent education system (Tedjokoemo, 2020).

There are several important reasons to study the challenges and opportunities of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian schools. Firstly, the successful execution of Merdeka Curriculum is crucial for realizing its stated objectives of cultivating a more pertinent and comprehensive education system. Recognizing the challenges and opportunities linked to Merdeka Curriculum implementation can aid policymakers and educators in formulating strategies to

overcome hurdles and capitalize on opportunities to meet these objectives. Secondly, delving into the challenges and opportunities of Merdeka Curriculum implementation can assist in addressing concerns regarding the practicality of the curriculum. Critics or those who disagree have voiced concerns regarding the accessibility of resources, the training of teachers, and the schools' capacity to effectively put the curriculum into practice (Yusa et al., 2023).

Based on the explanation above, the researcher decided to choose this topic based on observations and awareness of students in MTSN 2 Hulu Sungai Selatan are low levels of concern and understanding of English learning. This situation indicates that learning is not yet fully engaging and engaging students. Therefore, a more in-depth study is needed to identify factors influencing the learning process. In the context of implementing the Independent Curriculum, teachers are required to be more creative, adaptive, and oriented towards student needs. Therefore, this study aims to identify the various challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum. This study is expected to provide an overview and relevant solutions to improve the quality of English learning in schools.

B. Definition of Key Term

To prevent any misunderstandings in this research, the researcher has explicitly defined the key terms employed in the study, and they are detailed below:

1. Challenges

Challenges may include impediments to curriculum adoption, resource constraints, and complexities related to pedagogical approaches. In this study, challenges encompass the various obstacles and difficulties encountered by English teachers during the execution of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching at Junior High School in Hulu Sungai Selatan.

2. Implementing

Implementing refers to the active execution and application of the Merdeka Curriculum within the English language teaching context at Junior High School in Hulu Sungai Selatan. It involves translating the curriculum's theoretical framework into practical actions, encompassing the planning, execution, and assessment of instructional strategies

3. Merdeka Curriculum

The "Merdeka Curriculum" is a specific educational framework designed to foster critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills among students. In the context of this research, it represents the guiding principles and content that English teachers are expected to integrate into their teaching practices at Junior High School in Hulu Sungai Selatan.

C. Research Question

Based on the background of this study, this research aims to answer the main question:

1. What are the main challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum?
2. What strategies can English teachers implement to increase the effectiveness of implementing the Independent Curriculum in learning?

D. Objective of Study

Based on the explanation above, the objective of this research is:

1. To identify and comprehensively understand the challenges encountered by English teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum
2. To describe strategies that English teachers can employ to enhance the effectiveness of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

E. Significant of Study

Based on this research, the researcher hope this study will be useful for:

1. Theoretically

This research enhances the theoretical understanding of post-pandemic curriculum implementation challenges. By investigating the hurdles English teachers face in adopting the Independent Curriculum, it contributes to curriculum theory, shedding light on the changing dynamics of education in a global context.

2. Practically

- a. For English Teacher

This research offers actionable strategies to aid English teachers in navigating challenges and improving the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The findings empower teachers with effective approaches, fostering adaptability and innovation in their methods, ultimately enhancing

the quality of education.

b. For Students

This study is significant for English students as it aims to create a responsive and student-centric learning environment. By addressing curriculum implementation challenges, the research contributes to optimizing the educational experience, fostering better engagement, and nurturing critical skills development among students.

c. For other researchers

This study serves as a valuable reference in the field of post-pandemic curriculum implementation. It provides a foundation for further research, encouraging a deeper exploration of strategies and challenges in adapting curricula to the rapidly changing educational landscape.