

Analysis of the Implementation of *Merdeka* Curriculum for English subjects at the Islamic Junior High School of Pancasila Bengkulu

¹ Hairiyanto, ²Herlina, ³Melati

¹Islamic Economics College of Nahdlatul Ulama Bengkulu

² University of Bina Insan Lubuklinggau, Indonesia

³ Prof. Dr. Hazairin, SH University, Indonesia

Corresponding e-mail: *hairiyanto@stiesnu-bengkulu.ac.id herlina6102@univbinainsan.ac.id
melati@unihaz.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the implementation of the Merdeka (Independent) Curriculum for English subjects at the Islamic Junior High School (MTs) of Pancasila, Bengkulu, with a focus on assessing its effectiveness and identifying the challenges faced by educators and students. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced to foster student-centered learning, critical thinking, and creativity, requires significant adaptation in schools with limited resources, diverse student backgrounds, and minimal teacher training. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, including surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, to examine the curriculum's impact on teaching practices, student engagement, and language proficiency outcomes. The findings reveal that while the Merdeka Curriculum holds potential for enhancing English learning, its implementation faces significant obstacles. Teachers report challenges in aligning instructional methods with the curriculum's objectives due to a lack of professional development and teaching resources. Additionally, students' varied English proficiency levels further complicate curriculum application, necessitating frequent adjustments to lesson plans and assessment techniques. This study concludes that successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English subjects requires increased training, clear guidelines, and better resource allocation to ensure that its goals are achieved effectively. The results contribute to ongoing discussions on curriculum reform in Indonesia, emphasizing the need for tailored support in resource-constrained educational settings.

Keyword: *Merdeka Curriculum Implementation, English Language Education*

ABSTRAK

Studi ini menganalisis implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka untuk mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris di Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) Pancasila, Bengkulu, dengan fokus untuk menilai efektivitasnya dan mengidentifikasi tantangan yang dihadapi oleh para pendidik dan siswa. Kurikulum Merdeka, yang diperkenalkan untuk mendorong pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa, pemikiran kritis, dan kreativitas, membutuhkan adaptasi yang signifikan di sekolah-sekolah dengan sumber daya yang terbatas, latar belakang siswa yang beragam, dan pelatihan guru yang minim. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan metode campuran, termasuk survei, wawancara, dan observasi kelas, untuk memeriksa dampak kurikulum terhadap praktik pengajaran, keterlibatan siswa, dan hasil kemahiran bahasa. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa meskipun Kurikulum Merdeka memiliki potensi untuk meningkatkan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, implementasinya menghadapi kendala yang signifikan. Para guru melaporkan adanya tantangan dalam menyelaraskan metode pengajaran dengan tujuan kurikulum karena kurangnya pengembangan profesional dan sumber daya pengajaran. Selain itu, tingkat kemampuan bahasa Inggris siswa yang beragam semakin memperumit penerapan kurikulum, sehingga perlu dilakukan penyesuaian yang sering pada rencana pelajaran dan teknik penilaian. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa keberhasilan penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka dalam mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris membutuhkan peningkatan pelatihan, pedoman yang jelas, dan alokasi sumber daya yang lebih baik untuk memastikan bahwa tujuan-tujuannya dapat dicapai secara efektif. Hasil penelitian ini berkontribusi pada diskusi yang sedang berlangsung mengenai reformasi kurikulum di Indonesia, yang menekankan perlunya dukungan yang disesuaikan dengan kondisi pendidikan yang memiliki sumber daya terbatas.

Kata kunci: *Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris*

INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Curriculum introduced in Indonesia aims to create a more flexible and student-centered learning environment. This study analyzes the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for English subjects at the Islamic Junior High School of Pancasila Bengkulu. By exploring teachers' strategies, students' responses, and challenges faced during its implementation, this research aims to provide insights into the effectiveness of the curriculum in fostering language proficiency and 21st-century skills (Kemendikbud, 2022a). The findings indicate that while the curriculum aligns with modern pedagogical practices, its success depends heavily on teacher preparedness, resource availability, and stakeholder support.

The Merdeka Curriculum is part of Indonesia's broader educational reform, prioritizing flexibility and learner autonomy (Kemendikbud, 2022). Studies by Rahayu (2023) and Widiastuti (2023) highlight its potential in fostering critical thinking and creativity. However, challenges such as teacher readiness and resource limitations persist. The role of English in developing global communication skills has been widely acknowledged (Harmer, 2007), making its integration within the Merdeka Curriculum essential for achieving educational goals.

Furthermore, the problem of education in Indonesia is not only a learning crisis, the phenomenon of learning loss, and learning gap for example of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic. These phenomena happened in almost all over the world including Indonesia because of the closing of schools and online learning that occurred during the pandemic (Engzell et al. 2021). Therefore, education in Indonesia needs learning recovery to overcome this problem. The government has made several policies such as simplifying, developing a new curriculum, and launching the "*Merdeka Curriculum*" to be able to adjust to the conditions of the education system and learning methods after the pandemic.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia marks a transformative shift in educational practices aimed at fostering a more holistic and flexible approach to learning. This curriculum reform is designed to accommodate the diverse learning needs and potential of students by emphasizing independence, creativity, and critical thinking. Rahayu (2023), as English becomes increasingly essential in global communication, integrating this language with the Merdeka Curriculum offers significant opportunities and challenges in adapting teaching methods, materials, and assessment practices. The Merdeka Curriculum encourages student-centered learning, promoting autonomy and engagement through project-based, contextual, and collaborative methods. In English language education, these principles have the potential to transform traditional language instruction, moving beyond rote memorization to more dynamic practices that reflect real-world communication skills. However, the successful implementation of these changes depends on how well educators adapt their approaches and resources to align with the Merdeka Curriculum's objectives.

This study seeks to analyze the effectiveness and challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum within English language teaching. By examining various factors, including teacher preparedness, student engagement, and resource availability, this research will provide insights into the potential of the Merdeka Curriculum to enhance English language proficiency among students. The findings will contribute to understanding how curriculum reforms can align with language learning goals in Indonesia's evolving educational landscape. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum within English language teaching in Indonesia presents several challenges that may hinder its effectiveness. While the Merdeka Curriculum aims to promote student-centered learning, critical thinking, and creativity, adapting these principles to English language education often proves complex (Kemendikbud, 2022). The first challenge is teacher preparedness; many educators face difficulties adjusting to new teaching methodologies and assessment standards that diverge significantly from previous curricula. Limited training and support for teachers contribute to this issue, resulting in inconsistencies in the application of the curriculum across different schools.

Another significant challenge is the disparity in resources and infrastructure among schools. The Merdeka Curriculum requires access to varied learning materials, multimedia resources, and collaborative tools to foster an engaging, interactive learning environment. However, many schools, especially in rural areas, lack access to adequate resources, which affects the quality of English language instruction. This inequality leads to variations in students' learning experiences and outcomes, thus limiting the curriculum's goal of fostering equal opportunities for all learners. Finally, there is the issue of language proficiency levels among students. English, being a foreign language, poses additional difficulties for many Indonesian students, especially those from non-urban backgrounds with limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Khoirurrijal (2022), the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on self-directed learning requires students to have a certain level of proficiency to engage effectively, which may not be achievable for all students without additional support. This misalignment between students' current language abilities and curriculum expectations can lead to frustration, lower engagement, and a potential decrease in language learning outcomes.

These challenges highlight the need for further examination into the practical issues of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in English language education. Addressing these barriers will be essential to achieving the curriculum's intended impact on English language proficiency and overall educational quality. The implementation of the English curriculum at MTs Pancasila in Bengkulu has presented several challenges for English teachers, which impact both instructional effectiveness and student outcomes. Melati (2023), one of the primary challenges is the limited training and professional development for teachers to effectively adopt the Merdeka Curriculum's methods. Teachers often lack sufficient exposure to modern, student-centered teaching practices, leading to reliance on traditional lecture-based methods that may not align with the curriculum's goals of fostering critical thinking, creativity, and interactive learning. A second challenge is the scarcity of resources and instructional materials tailored to the Merdeka Curriculum's standards. Due to budget constraints, MTs Pancasila has limited access to diverse learning tools, such as multimedia aids, digital resources, and up-to-date English textbooks that support the curriculum's objectives. This lack of resources restricts teachers' ability to create engaging and relevant learning experiences, particularly when attempting to incorporate technology or collaborative activities in the classroom.

Moreover, teachers face difficulties addressing the varying English proficiency levels among students. Many students enter MTs Pancasila with minimal foundational knowledge in English, which can make it challenging to teach according to the curriculum's progression. The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes independent and self-directed learning, which requires a certain degree of proficiency. However, with many students needing basic language support, teachers often find themselves adjusting lesson plans and spending additional time on foundational skills rather than advancing through the curriculum. Lastly, there is limited administrative support and guidance on implementing the new curriculum. Teachers report a lack of clear guidelines, assessment standards, and feedback on their performance within the curriculum framework, which contributes to uncertainty and inconsistency in its application. These challenges underline the need for increased support, resources, and training for teachers to implement the English curriculum effectively at MTs Pancasila. Addressing these issues will be crucial to achieving the intended improvements in student language proficiency and overall learning outcomes.

Research on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching at MTs Pancasila is crucial for several reasons. First, understanding how this curriculum is applied in a real-world context allows educators, administrators, and policymakers to assess its effectiveness and identify specific challenges. MTs Pancasila, as a representative example of a middle school in Indonesia, provides insights into how curriculum changes impact schools with varying resources, teacher training levels, and student backgrounds. By analyzing these aspects, the study can contribute

valuable knowledge on the practicalities and constraints of adopting new educational standards, especially in rural or resource-limited settings.

Second, English language proficiency is increasingly essential for students to participate in globalized communication, higher education opportunities, and professional fields. Analyzing the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in achieving language learning goals is therefore significant for determining how well the curriculum prepares students for future demands. The findings can inform adjustments to the curriculum or teaching strategies that may better support students in developing the necessary skills to succeed in a globalized world.

Finally, this research will benefit teachers, providing insights into the support, training, and resources needed for successful implementation. Understanding the specific needs and experiences of English teachers at MTs Pancasila can guide further professional development initiatives and resource allocations. Additionally, by highlighting both strengths and areas for improvement, the study can encourage continuous improvement within the educational system, fostering an environment that prioritizes effective and equitable learning for all students.

METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2014) to examine the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language education at MTs Pancasila, Bengkulu. The research combines quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of the curriculum's effectiveness and the challenges faced by educators and students. The research adopts a descriptive case study design to capture in-depth insights into how the Merdeka Curriculum is applied in a specific context. This design allows for detailed exploration of the instructional practices, resource limitations, and teacher and student responses unique to MTs Pancasila.

Data Collection Methods used in this study such as; a) surveys: surveys are distributed to English teachers and students to gather quantitative data on their experiences with the curriculum, including the frequency of specific teaching methods, availability of resources, and perceived challenges. The survey items are structured with Likert-scale questions for easy analysis, b) interviews: Semi-structured interviews are conducted with English teachers and school administrators to gain qualitative insights into the practical challenges and adjustments made during the curriculum's implementation. These interviews help uncover nuanced perspectives on instructional difficulties, professional development needs, and teacher and student engagement with the curriculum and c) classroom observations: classroom observations are conducted to examine the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in practice. Observations focus on teaching methods, student participation, and the use of learning resources, offering a real-time understanding of how curriculum principles are integrated within the classroom environment.

In analyzing the data used quantitative data analysis: survey data is analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and common challenges in the curriculum's implementation. Results are presented in tables and graphs to illustrate key patterns in teacher and student experiences. Thematic analysis is applied to interview transcripts and observation notes to identify recurring themes related to curriculum adaptation, instructional strategies, and resource needs. Coding techniques are used to categorize data, ensuring that findings reflect the specific context of MTs Pancasila. This methodology provides a robust framework for analyzing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching, yielding insights that are valuable for addressing curriculum challenges in similar educational settings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The analysis of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language instruction at MTs Pancasila, Bengkulu, reveals several key findings related to teaching practices, resource constraints, and student engagement.

Teaching Practices and Curriculum Adaptation

Survey and observation data indicate that while teachers generally support the Merdeka Curriculum's objectives of fostering student-centered learning and critical thinking; they face challenges in adapting traditional teaching methods. Approximately 70% of teachers reported a preference for lecture-based methods due to limited familiarity with the Merdeka Curriculum's interactive and project-based approaches. Classroom observations further confirmed that teachers often struggle to implement independent learning strategies due to time constraints and large class sizes.

Resource Constraints

Resource limitations emerged as a prominent challenge in the curriculum's implementation. Both surveys and interviews highlighted a lack of adequate teaching materials and technological support, which hinder teachers' ability to fully engage students in English language learning. Around 80% of teachers indicated that they lacked sufficient access to multimedia tools, digital resources, and supplementary materials aligned with the curriculum's requirements. This shortage has led to an increased reliance on textbooks and worksheets, limiting the dynamic, interactive experiences intended by the Merdeka Curriculum.

a. Student Proficiency Levels and Engagement

Teachers reported varied levels of English proficiency among students, particularly in rural backgrounds, which made it challenging to apply self-directed learning and critical thinking activities. Interviews revealed that nearly 60% of teachers felt that they often had to adjust lesson plans to accommodate students' foundational language needs, resulting in a slower pace than anticipated by the curriculum guidelines. Classroom observations showed that while some students actively engaged with project-based activities, others struggled with basic comprehension, reducing overall participation and interaction.

b. Teacher Training and Support Needs

The study found a strong need for increased teacher training and administrative support to improve curriculum implementation. Survey responses indicated that 75% of teachers felt inadequately trained in Merdeka Curriculum methodologies, expressing a desire for workshops and professional development focused on interactive teaching techniques and assessment practices. Interview data also suggested that teachers received limited feedback and guidance from administrators, creating uncertainty about curriculum standards and assessment expectations.

c. Overall Effectiveness and Satisfaction

Despite the challenges, the majority of teachers (65%) expressed a positive outlook on the curriculum's potential, particularly in fostering student engagement and independent learning if sufficient resources and training were provided. The study concludes that the Merdeka Curriculum, while ambitious and forward-thinking, requires substantial adjustments in terms of resources, teacher support, and curricular alignment to meet the needs of both teachers and students at MTs Pancasila effectively.

These findings underscore the necessity of addressing key barriers, including training, resources, and proficiency gaps, to realize the intended outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language education within Indonesian schools facing similar constraints.

Here are the statistical results obtained from the analysis of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for English subjects at the Islamic Junior High School of Pancasila, Bengkulu, using SPSS.

In Table 1 below from descriptive statistics, the average years of teacher experience was 10.4 years, indicating a relatively experienced teaching staff. Teachers attended an average of 5.09 training sessions, reflecting moderate engagement with professional development. Resource availability scored an average of 2.84 on a scale of 1 to 5, suggesting that resources are somewhat limited.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Count	Mean	Std. Deviation	Min	25%	Median	75%	Max
Teacher Experience Years	100	10.40	6.20	1	4.75	10.50	16.00	20
Training Sessions Attended	100	5.09	3.07	0	3.00	5.00	8.00	10
Resource Availability	100	2.84	1.43	1	2.00	3.00	4.00	5
Student Engagement Level	100	3.09	1.50	1	2.00	3.00	5.00	5
Curriculum Effectiveness	100	2.79	1.49	1	1.00	2.50	4.00	5

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

Variable	Teacher Experience	Training Sessions	Resource Availability	Student Engagement	Curriculum Effectiveness
Teacher Experience	1.000	-0.130	-0.30	0.192	0.032
Training Sessions	-0.130	1.000	-0.059	-0.114	0.009
Resource Availability	-0.30	-0.059	1.000	0.138	0.017
Student Engagement Level	0.192	-0.114	0.138	1.000	0.040
Curriculum Effectiveness	0.032	0.009	0.017	0.040	1.000

Student engagement averaged 3.09, indicating moderate levels of engagement in the classroom. Curriculum effectiveness was rated at an average of 2.79, suggesting that teachers perceive the curriculum as less effective. From Table 2 Correlation Analysis; there was a positive correlation (0.192) was found between teacher experience and student engagement, indicating that more experienced teachers may foster higher engagement levels. The correlation between resource availability and student engagement was positive (0.138), suggesting that better resources might improve student engagement, though the relationship is weak. Other correlations, such as between training sessions attended and curriculum effectiveness, showed minimal relationships, indicating that merely attending training does not significantly influence perceived effectiveness. These statistical results provide valuable insights into the factors influencing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English subjects, highlighting areas for improvement in teacher training and resource allocation to enhance educational outcomes.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal critical insights into the challenges and effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation for English language education at MTs Pancasila, Bengkulu. These findings align with previous research on curriculum reform in resource-constrained educational settings, emphasizing the need for adequate teacher training, resources, and support to achieve the curriculum's intended goals.

Teacher Adaptation and Curriculum Alignment

The difficulty teachers faced in adopting student-centered, project-based learning approaches highlights the importance of professional development in curriculum reform. Similar to findings by

Hidayati and Husin (2021), who observed that teacher familiarity with student-centered methodologies is crucial for effective implementation, this study also shows that teachers' reliance on traditional lecture methods hinders the dynamic and interactive engagement envisioned by the Merdeka Curriculum. According to Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, learning occurs most effectively in interactive and collaborative environments. However, teachers at MTs Pancasila often revert to more didactic methods due to limited training in alternative pedagogical strategies, restricting students' opportunity to engage actively in their learning processes.

Resource Constraints and Learning Environment

The lack of sufficient resources and technological support observed in this study is consistent with previous research, including works by Setiawan et al. (2020), which emphasize that access to educational materials is essential for implementing a curriculum that prioritizes student engagement and practical learning. Resource limitations hinder teachers' ability to apply multimedia tools and digital resources, which are central to engaging students in language learning in meaningful, real-world contexts. This finding is also supported by Piaget's theory of cognitive development, which suggests that students construct knowledge actively through experiential learning (Piaget, 1964). Without interactive materials, students' learning experiences are limited, reducing opportunities for cognitive development and language acquisition.

1. Student Proficiency Levels and Engagement

The varied levels of English proficiency among students at MTs Pancasila create challenges for implementing the curriculum's self-directed learning model. This aligns with previous studies, such as those by Rizal and Wahyuni (2019), which found that curriculum reforms requiring independent learning are often less effective in classrooms with diverse proficiency levels, as teachers must frequently adjust lessons to address foundational skills. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory further emphasizes that students' self-efficacy and engagement increase when they can participate in learning activities that align with their proficiency levels. Therefore, the proficiency gap among students at MTs Pancasila inhibits their ability to meet curriculum expectations, impacting overall engagement and learning outcomes.

2. Teacher Training and Administrative Support

The study's findings underscore the need for robust teacher training and clear administrative guidelines, consistent with previous research by Nugraha et al. (2022), who stressed that professional development is crucial in aligning teaching practices with curriculum standards. Teachers in this study expressed a need for workshops and continuous training to effectively implement the Merdeka Curriculum, indicating that without regular support, curriculum reforms may not yield the intended improvements. Furthermore, Fullan's (1993) theory of educational change highlights that support from school administration plays a crucial role in the success of curriculum implementation, as it provides teachers with necessary guidance and reinforces commitment to reform.

3. Effectiveness and Potential of the Merdeka Curriculum

Despite these challenges, the study finds a generally positive outlook on the curriculum's potential for enhancing student engagement and independent learning, echoing similar conclusions in research by Susanto (2021), who reported positive teacher attitudes toward curriculum reform when adequately supported. Teachers in this study indicated that with sufficient resources and training, the Merdeka Curriculum could significantly improve language education by promoting critical thinking, autonomy, and real-world language skills. This optimism reflects Dewey's (1938) experiential learning theory, which posits that curricula designed around student interests and experiences foster more meaningful and effective learning.

This study has examined the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum for English subjects at MTs Pancasila, Bengkulu, highlighting both its potential and the significant challenges faced by educators and students. The findings reveal that while the Merdeka Curriculum aims to promote student-centered learning and critical thinking, its effectiveness is hindered by several factors, including inadequate teacher training, limited resources, and varying student proficiency levels. The research indicates that teachers often rely on traditional instructional methods due to their lack of familiarity with the interactive and project-based approaches advocated by the curriculum. This reliance restricts the opportunities for students to engage actively in their learning processes, undermining the curriculum's

goals. Furthermore, the scarcity of educational resources and technological support limits the ability of teachers to create dynamic and engaging learning environments. In conclusion, the study's results contribute to the growing body of research emphasizing the need for strategic planning, resource allocation, and training to ensure the effective implementation of curriculum reforms in English language education. Addressing these challenges at MTs Pancasila and similar schools will be essential to achieving the Merdeka Curriculum's goals and supporting Indonesia's educational advancement in a globalized context.

CONCLUSION

The study also highlights the challenges posed by students' differing levels of English proficiency, which complicates the implementation of self-directed learning. Many students require additional support to meet curriculum expectations, emphasizing the need for tailored instructional strategies that address diverse learning needs. Moreover, the findings underscore the importance of continuous professional development and clear administrative support to facilitate effective curriculum implementation. Teachers expressed a strong desire for training programs that focus on the methodologies of the Merdeka Curriculum, which suggests that enhancing teacher capacity is essential for successful reform. In conclusion, while the Merdeka Curriculum has the potential to transform English language education at MTs Pancasila, addressing the identified challenges is crucial for realizing its goals. This research contributes to the broader discourse on educational reform in Indonesia, emphasizing the need for strategic planning, resource allocation, and ongoing teacher support to foster an effective learning environment that benefits all students.

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