

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a wide-ranging description of the study. It comprises the background, formulation of the problem, operational definition, aims of the study, and significance of the study.

1.1 Background

Indonesia's Minister of Education and Culture introduced *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum as a new-brand educational concept in 2019. *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum provides greater opportunities for teachers to adapt the national curriculum based on school circumstances and their students' abilities and needs. *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum emphasizes teachers by giving them freedom and allowing them to implement the national curriculum following the school's circumstances (Prakoso et al., 2021). The students must be able to think critically, communicate and collaborate effectively, and support each other to establish a young generation capable of dealing with future global difficulties (Nurhayati et al., 2022). Therefore, by implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, a good education for all students in Indonesia can be achieved.

In the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, there are some policy reforms, one of which is English learning. First, learning outcomes (*Capaian Pembelajaran/CP*) of English learning in *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum are more flexible than the previous curriculum. It is not only limited to one academic year and is divided into six phases with different levels. According to Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Assesmen Pendidikan (2022) secondary schools are in the phase D in English learning. In addition, project-based learning must be incorporated into learning to strengthen *Pancasila* students' profiles. *Pancasila* students' profile aims to build students' character to compete in global competition and apply behaviour based on *Pancasila's* values (Pamungkas & Sudigdo, 2022). Further, *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum emphasizes differentiated learning. Differentiated learning aims to conduct a teaching-learning process that can meet students' needs and be customized to students' abilities and interests (Wahyuningsari et al., 2022).

Therefore, English teachers in secondary school need to have effective strategies to teach English suitable to students' needs, interests and abilities so that the phase D learning outcomes can be achieved and can strengthen the *Pancasila* students' profile.

In the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, the teachers' teaching strategies are not specifically determined. They are free to develop their teaching strategies to meet learning objectives and develop students' abilities. Because the choice of teaching strategy is mostly determined by the knowledge or skill being taught, it may also be impacted by the students' learning style, attitude, talents, and excitement (Senthamarai, 2018). Moreover, the principal of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum emphasizes teaching at the right level (TaRL). The TaRL is done by providing varied learning materials according to students' understanding through differentiated learning (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Thus, designing suitable and proper teaching strategies will be one of the important ways to achieve expected learning objectives and teaching goals in the school.

In Tasikmalaya Indonesia, some secondary schools have implemented *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in their school. One of those junior high schools has implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum since the early 2022/2023 academic year. This school implements *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Berubah*, which is only for the 7th grade. Meanwhile, the 8th and 9th grades still use *Kurikulum Darurat*. This school has implemented characteristics of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, such as project-based learning to strengthen *Pancasila* students' profile. This school has done three projects to strengthen *Pancasila* students' profile. This case has several themes: sustainable lifestyle, local wisdom, and entrepreneurship. Regarding the teaching-learning process, differentiated learning has been elaborated in their learning activities. Moreover, the teachers implement the aspects of differentiated learning such as content, process, and product into the teaching-learning process and teach based on the students' characteristics and abilities. Thus, English teachers who teach the 7th grade employ proper and suitable teaching strategies based on the aspects of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum to meet students' needs and achieve Phase D learning outcomes.

In recent years there have been many studies regarding implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Existing research on the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum has mainly focused on several aspects. Pertiwi and Pusparini (2021) conducted a study about vocational high school teachers' perception on *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and the result showed that the teachers understood the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Another relevant study conducted by Gusteti and Neviyarni (2022), found that differentiated learning as one of the characteristics of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum could be used in mathematics learning because it can support students' learning based on their ability, profile, learning style and learning readiness. Despite there are many studies regarding the Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum but there has not been sufficient research regarding the teaching strategies used by the teachers in English learning in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Hence, to fill this void, this study focuses on teaching strategies used by English teachers in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum at junior high school.

1.2 Formulation of the Problem

A research question addressed in the present study is "What are teaching strategies used by the teachers on English learning in implementing '*Merdeka Belajar* curriculum'?"

1.3 Operational Definitions

To avoid misunderstanding about the terms set out in this study, the researcher provides some definitions related to this study, as follows:

1.3.1 *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum

Merdeka Belajar curriculum is a curriculum that gives freedom to teachers to design the lesson based on students' competences, interest and needs and adapted to school circumstances. *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is used in one of the junior high schools in Tasikmalaya Indonesia.

1.3.2 Teaching Strategy

Teaching strategy is a pattern of teaching acts including the planning, process and assessment to achieve learning outcomes that are in line with five learning principles of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. These teaching strategies are used by English teachers in one of the secondary schools in Tasikmalaya Indonesia.

1.3.3 English Learning in Secondary School

English learning is one of the subjects in secondary school. In this research the English learning is in line with *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum and it is taught in one of Junior High Schools located in Tasikmalaya, Indonesia.

1.4 Aim of the Study

The present study aims to find out teaching strategies of English learning in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.5.1 Theoretical use

This research enriches the theory and knowledge on teaching strategies of English learning in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.

1.5.2 Practical use

The research contributes to the English teachers to know the appropriate teaching strategies can be used in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in their classroom.

1.5.3 Empirical use

This research improves researcher's experiences regarding the teaching strategies of English learning in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.