

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a brief explanation of some theories that support the study. The theories are related to *Merdeka* curriculum, English activities in the *Merdeka* curriculum, and English teachers' challenges.

2.1. *Merdeka* Curriculum

In 2021 Indonesia introduced a new curriculum called *Merdeka* curriculum. *Merdeka* curriculum is a curriculum with a variety of intra-curricular learning where the activities will be at a more optimal time so that students have sufficient time to strengthen competencies and explore concepts. Teachers, students, parents, and community members developed the *Merdeka* curriculum through extensive consultation with The Ministry of Education and Culture (Alamsyah, 2022). Prepares students for a future where technology and digital literacy play a significant role, The Ministry of Education and Culture is aimed to develop a curriculum that reflects the national vision and mission and addresses the current needs and challenges of society. *Merdeka* curriculum comprises three components: character education, basic competency, and enrichment.

The *Merdeka* curriculum comprises four key components aimed at enhancing human resources (Prakoso et al., 2021) The school-based test has substituted the national-based school examination (*USBN*). The Minimum Competency Assessment and Character Survey have taken the place of the national examination (*UN*) as a graduation requirement. Simplification of lesson plan (*RPP*). Enhancing the zoning system in the New Students Admission (*PPDB*) process.

Furthermore, based on the Ministry of Education and Culture (2021), the *Merdeka* curriculum is characterized by three key elements the implementation of project-based learning to nurture soft skills, focus on essential materials so that there is sufficient time for in-depth study of

basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy, and the flexibility for teachers to employ differentiated learning approaches based on students' capabilities, adapting to local circumstances and content.

The previous curriculum, which was criticized for being too focused on rote learning and memorization, *Merdeka* curriculum represents a significant departure. *Merdeka* curriculum aims to strengthen creativity, problem-solving, and critical thinking. *Merdeka* curriculum provides a varied range of learning opportunities within the curriculum that will allow learners to take deeper into concepts and improve their skills. With the diverse learning styles and interests of their students, teachers have the freedom to select different teaching methods. *Merdeka Belajar* is the core of this *Merdeka* curriculum. In this curriculum, there are projects to encourage the achievement of the *Pancasila* student profile. It can be concluded that the *Merdeka* curriculum represents an Indonesian government education policy aimed at advancing student-centered and competence-driven learning.

Therefore, it provides teachers with the flexibility to tailor and shape the national curriculum in accordance with their school's specific conditions. Additionally, the curriculum is crafted to grant students greater flexibility in selecting their areas of study and how they choose to engage with the material, to empower students to be accountable for their education. Furthermore, this represents a strategic initiative by the government to attain educational outcomes.

2.2. English Learning in Merdeka Curriculum

English subjects not only instruct in language skills and practices but also instill a global perspective, enabling students to more readily identify cultural variances and foster tolerance. According to *Kajian Akademik Kurikulum Untuk Pemulihan Pembelajaran (Pusat Kurikulum dan Pembelajaran, 2022)*, English language learning takes one of the areas given priority in the *Merdeka* curriculum as part of the government's endeavor to enhance all aspects of the *Pancasila* student

profile, including global diversity. Consequently, there is a growing emphasis on introducing English instruction at the elementary level.

Additionally, General English learning in the national curriculum at the Primary and Secondary Schools levels provides students with the opportunity to develop insights into their own identities, social relationships, culture, and the range of international career prospects available (Kemendikbud, 2022). Then, through the study of English, students can gain entry into the broader world and explore a variety of thought processes.

The objectives of the English subject for the students are to be able to develop communicative competence in English with various multimodal texts (oral, written, visual, and audio-visual), develop intercultural skills to comprehend and value the viewpoints, practices, and products of Indonesian and foreign cultures, develop self-confidence to express as an independent and responsible individual and develop critical and creative reasoning skills.

Additionally, English learning centers on enhancing the ability to effectively use the English language across six language skills, which encompass listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting, across various text types through an integrated approach. Moreover, the results in these six English language skills are consistent with the guidelines set out in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning, Teaching, and Assessment (CEFR) (Pertiwi & Pusparini, 2021). According to *Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan* (2022), the English learning outcomes for Phase D (Junior High School or equivalent) are outlined as follows:

A. Listening- Speaking Element

At the end of Phase D, students employ English to interact and share thoughts, experiences, interests, opinions, and perspectives with instructors, peers, and individuals in an increasing range of both formal and informal settings. They grasp the key

concepts and crucial details of discussions or presentations on various general interest topics, demonstrating comprehension through repetition and rephrasing. They engage in debates by articulating their ideas, drawing comparisons, and stating their choices. Students elucidate and clarify their responses utilizing basic sentence structures and verb tenses.

B. Reading-Viewing Element

At the end of Phase D students have the ability to read and respond openly to both familiar and unfamiliar texts characterized by foreseeable structures and vocabulary. They find and analyze fundamental concepts and specific details in the text of diverse genres, whether in printed or digital forms, which may incorporate visual, multimodal, or interactive elements. Students discern the purpose of texts and embark on the process of making inferences to grasp implicit information within the text.

C. Writing-Presenting Element

At the end of Phase D, students convey their thoughts and experiences through simple, organized paragraphs, showcasing a developing use of specific vocabulary and simple sentence structures. Employing models, they strategically devise, generate, and present informative, creative, and compelling texts using both simple and compound sentences to structure arguments and provide explanations or justifications for their positions. They incorporate essential information and detail into their writing and also vary their sentence construction in their writing.

It can be concluded the aim of phase D as encouraged to employ various text types, including narratives, descriptions, procedures, and special text (like short messages and advertisements), with authentic text serving as the primary learning references during this phase of English language learning. Students utilize English as a means to discuss and articulate their desires and

emotions. Their comprehension of written content is progressing, and the emergence of inference skills becomes evident in understanding implicit information. They can produce written and visual text in English, showcasing a more diverse vocabulary. Additionally, they demonstrate an understanding of objectives when producing written text and visual in English.

Hence, the *Merdeka* curriculum underscores the mastery of English through the cultivation of skills in the six language domains, encompassing speaking, listening, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting across a range of text types. Therefore, the *Merdeka* curriculum for English learning aims to enable students to engage in effective communication and express their intentions clearly in diverse contexts. This involves articulating ideas comprehensively and practicing communication, even if fluency is not yet achieved.

2.3. English Teachers' Challenges in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum

Implementing changes in the curriculum to expedite education recovery is crucial. However, if these changes are immature, hastily executed, and too rapid, they can impose significant challenges on schools and other educational entities tasked with implementation. This results in a lack of enthusiasm among teachers who may not be prepared for the curriculum change, especially when they have to revamp the lesson plans (RPP) and associated tools, particularly in terms of learning assessments. Insufficient preparation may hinder the attainment of optimal educational results, leading to experimental outcomes. Consequently, schools face the ongoing challenge of meeting demands for continuous adjustments. This is due to the fact that the previous curriculum has not been adequately implemented before being replaced with a new curriculum (Fitriyah et al., 2022). Concerning these challenges, schools must develop strategies for the successful implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum.

In the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum so far, teachers persist in utilizing conventional lecture-based methods, and the learning process still lacks a comprehensive shift towards a student-centered approach. Consequently, the changes in the curriculum have not brought about a significant impact on the achievement of learning objectives. This situation is influenced by the changing environmental conditions as society adapts to post-pandemic life. In essence, the *Merdeka* curriculum does not deviate much from the K13 curriculum. The terminology employed in the *Merdeka* curriculum essentially encapsulates concepts from the K13 curriculum, albeit with different terms. So that teachers need to innovate and apply effective teaching methods during face-to-face learning at school (Bead et al., 2022).

The introduction of the *Merdeka* curriculum faces the challenges of adapting to technological developments in the era of Industry 4.0 in the school, the focus primarily revolves around the execution of learning, which includes factors such as 1) the need for ongoing enhancement of teacher skills, 2) the requirement for sufficient infrastructure, and 3) the necessity for educational institutions to operate independently (Sinulingga, 2022). Furthermore, Fitra & Tiarina (2022) identifies various challenges in the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum, encompassing designing lesson plan, lesson implementation, using media, classroom management, and learning assessment.

It can be concluded that teachers have several challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum because curriculum changes are too fast, school infrastructure is still not supportive, and teachers' skills still need to be improved.

2.4. Study of the Relevant Research

There is much research investigating challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum. The study conducted by Ndari & Mahmudah (2023) entitled Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum and Its Challenges with the findings the challenges of implementing the

Merdeka curriculum in SD Muhamadiyah Warungboto schools in Yogyakarta, starting with the application of independent curriculum the changing, the learning used by teachers still lecturing learning not students-centered, students based on interest and talents are still just following the choice of friends, lack of enthusiasm of teacher who are not ready for curriculum changes.

Another relevant investigation conducted by Pertiwi & Pusparini (2021) aimed to identify the teachers' perspectives on the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in terms of its concept and lesson plan the finding revealed the struggles encountered by English teachers in grasping the *Merdeka* curriculum concept and managing the absence of government supervision and assessment.

Ainiyah et al., (2023) the study examined the challenges in implementing the independent curriculum a study case at SMA Negeri 8 Malang. Changes to the new curriculum have an impact on teachers, they are required to readjust to the new curriculum, namely an independent curriculum because there is a change in the concept of learning activities that must be achieved. Therefore, this encourages researchers to explore what challenges English teachers face in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum, especially at the planning, implementation, and assessment stages, and how to overcome challenges at these three stages. Based on the results that have been found, in general teacher experience difficulties in understanding the *Merdeka* curriculum while the guidebook has not been obtained, then it is difficult for teacher to adapt learning styles to differences in students' English abilities, and determine appropriate assessments.

Another relevant investigation conducted by Fitra & Tiarina (2023) entitled An Analysis of English Teachers' Challenges in Implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum at Sman 3 Solok Selatan the finding revealed that there were five challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum. Those five challenges in

implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum were designing lesson plans, lesson implementation, using media, classroom management, and learning assessment.

The study conducted by Novtian & Yavani (2023) aimed to find out the challenges in implementing the Learning model faced by English teachers in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in the classroom. The finding revealed that English teachers both at *Sekolah Penggerak* and non-*Sekolah Penggerak* junior high school faced challenges in the learning process such as student's condition, differentiated instruction adjustment, English as a foreign language position, and the need for more preparation in the provision of learning media.

However, there are several limitations of the studies above, such as the context and the deep investigation of English teachers of the implementation of *Merdeka* curriculum in vocational high school, senior high school, and elementary school. Therefore, the researcher conducts this study with the concern of investigating English teachers' challenges in Tasikmalaya Junior High School toward the use of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.