

## **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 of the Study**

Learning loss has become a worldwide phenomenon, not only in Indonesia. This was caused by the Covid-19 pandemic where schools were temporarily closed and learning was shifted to online learning. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (2021), Indonesian citizens can prevent learning loss by escalating the potential of literacy and numeracy. The Ministry of Education and Culture always made efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, developing a curriculum is one of the efforts made by the government for better education in Indonesia. In order to restore and improve the quality of education in Indonesia by developing and advancing science and technology, curriculum development occurs. Therefore, as a result of Covid-19 which causes learning loss, the government is making efforts to improve education in Indonesia by changing the curriculum. To improve the quality of education in Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture is striving to reform the learning process by creating the Merdeka curriculum. This curriculum grants schools, teachers, and students the freedom to innovate, learn independently, and engage in creative learning (Sihombing et al., 2020). The independent curriculum or *Merdeka* curriculum is the newest curriculum currently. The aim of developing this curriculum is to strengthen Indonesia's struggling educational system, which has been in crisis since COVID-19 (Marisa, 2021). *Merdeka* curriculum is defined as a learning plan that provides opportunities for students to demonstrate their natural abilities in a calm, relaxed, enjoyable, and stress-free environment (Ainia, 2020). Furthermore, the purpose of the *Merdeka* curriculum is to change the

education system to be more holistic, relevant to the current society, and focused on students-centered (Kasman & Lubis, 2022). The curriculum reiterates character building, digital literacy, and critical thinking. The curriculum also aims to prepare students for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and support the development of Indonesia's digital economy. Therefore, the *Merdeka* curriculum is a curriculum that adapts to what the students need.

However, this curriculum has not been implemented fully and nationwide yet. Based on the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 56 of 2022 this curriculum will be implemented fully for all educational units in 2024 (Ministry of Education, 2021). In Tasikmalaya Indonesia, several Junior High schools have been implemented *Merdeka* curriculum in their school. One of those Junior High Schools has implemented *Merdeka* curriculum at the beginning of the 2022/2023 academic year. In the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum in the English subject, the first step taken is to conduct non-cognitive diagnostic assessment at the beginning of the semester. This aims to identify the needs and interests of the students. Following this, differentiated learning is conducted to cater to the learning styles of the students. Subsequently, cognitive diagnostic assessment is carried out to determine the students' competency achievements and adjust the learning accordingly. In this *Merdeka* curriculum, contextual learning, collaborative learning, and various teaching methods are employed. This school implements the *Merdeka* curriculum solely for the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. Meanwhile, the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades still use the 2013 curriculum. This school has incorporated features of the *Merdeka* curriculum, including the utilization of project-based learning to enhance the Pancasila students' profile. *Merdeka* curriculum has several themes Entrepreneurship, Global Diversity, and Creative. In terms of the instructional approach the school has implemented differentiated learning in their learning activities in this approach, schools adapt to students' learning styles; for instance, visual learners utilize visual media

such as images or videos, whereas kinesthetic learners engage in lighter practical activities. The freedom to implement several sections and principles can be used in education units but does not change the previously implemented curriculum. Therefore, teachers can provide subject matter according to the needs and abilities of students, in *Merdeka* curriculum. The challenge for teachers is changing the curriculum from K13 (Rizki, 2022). Therefore, it is important for English teachers to know what challenges they face when implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in grade 7 so that they can be ready to implement it in grade 8 and grade 9 in the future.

Some previous studies related to English teachers' challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum have been conducted by some researchers. Tricahyati & Zaim (2023) investigated English teachers' readiness in implementing of *Merdeka Belajar*' curriculum in teaching English at junior high school in Padang, they examined English teachers' who have an obstacle in formulating learning outcomes and applied differentiated learning in the process of teaching learning. Pertiwi & Pusparini (2021) explored teachers' perspectives on the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in terms of its concept and lesson plan. The result showed that not all teachers understand the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*, also the implementation of a one-page lesson plan had not met the expectations of *Merdeka Belajar*. Nevertheless, to improve education in Indonesia the government makes an effort to change the curriculum to enhance literacy and numeracy the name is the *Merdeka* curriculum, so that the teachers should be more critical of the curriculum issue. Furthermore, there has not been an adequate amount of research that investigated English teachers' challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in junior high school. In order to fill the gap in this study, this study focuses on the English teachers' challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in Tasikmalaya Junior High School. As we know in Tasikmalaya there are several schools that have just implemented the *Merdeka* curriculum, therefore the researchers believed that investigating English teachers'

challenges can be used as a reference and consideration to implement the *Merdeka* curriculum in Junior High Schools.

## **1.2. Formulation of the Problem**

The question of the research is:

What are English teachers' challenges in the implementation of *Merdeka* Curriculum in Junior High school?

## **1.3. Operational Definitions**

The researcher provides two definitions related to this study to avoid misunderstanding about the terms set out in this study as follows;

### **1.3.1 English Teachers' Challenges**

The challenges faced by English teachers in this research are the challenges encountered by English teachers in Tasikmalaya Junior High School when implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum. English teachers in this research have been teaching English for at least 5 years and used *Merdeka* curriculum in English learning activities.

### **1.3.2 Merdeka Curriculum**

The *Merdeka* curriculum is a curriculum with diverse intracurricular learning. In order that the students have enough time to explore and strengthen competencies so that the content will be optimized. The teachers have the flexibility to select various teaching tools so that learning can be customized to the students' need. In this research *Merdeka* curriculum used by one of the Junior High School in Tasikmalaya Indonesia.

## **1.4. Aim of the Study**

According to the research question, this research aims to describe English teachers' challenges in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in Tasikmalaya Junior High School.

## **1.5. Significances of the Study**

### **1.5.1 Theoretical Uses**

This research will provide as a reflection on how *Merdeka* curriculum has been implemented in English language teaching. The teacher

should be more critical of the curriculum issue by implementing *Merdeka* curriculum.

### **1.5.2 Practical Uses**

Practically, this study can be used as a reference and consideration to use implementing *Merdeka* curriculum English learning in Junior High School.

### **1.5.3 Empirical Uses**

This study will give insight into how teachers perceive the challenges use of the *Merdeka* curriculum and how it is preferred to implement the *Merdeka* curriculum in Junior High School.