CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will present an in-depth explanation of the theories used for the research. These theories relate to the definitions of curriculum, models of curriculum, implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, definitions of young learners, characteristics of young learners, principles of teaching English to young learners, teaching English to young learners in Indonesia, and the policy of English for Young Learners in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Definitions of Curriculum

As a key element in the education system, the curriculum has a rich and complex definition. According to Tyler (1949), the curriculum refers to the overall planning oriented toward goals, organization, implementation, and evaluation. Meanwhile, Brown (1995) explains that the curriculum involves several elements, such as needs analysis, goals and objectives, testing, materials, instruction, and program evaluation. This perspective highlights that the curriculum is a system with many different parts. Based on this viewpoint, Primary et al. (2023) stress the importance of the evaluation process in the curriculum. They argue that curriculum development is not a one-time thing but should continuously evolve.

However, there is another perspective that describes the curriculum as a learning experience. This view is proposed by Kelly (2004) and Tanner & Tanner (1975). Kelly (2004) describes the curriculum as the totality of learning experiences that students undergo in the educational environment. Meanwhile, Tanner and Tanner (1975) explain that the curriculum is a planned and guided learning experience to maintain student competencies and achieve learning goals. Based on these views, the curriculum can be considered as a planned system consisting of various aspects to produce learning experiences that align with specific learning objectives.

The definitions show that the curriculum is not simply a part of learning, but rather, it is more detailed and broad. It involves how it is designed and organized, taking into account many factors, such as analyzing needs to ensure that the planning fits students' situations. Additionally, there are some steps, including the definition of learning goals, deciding on what to teach, testing, teaching methods, evaluating, and assessing to ensure effective learning. The curriculum also needs to be developed from time to time. All of these parts determine how successful learning will be, not just in mastering specific subjects but also in providing good learning experiences.

2.1.2 Models of Curriculum

Fundamentally, curriculum models are conceptual frameworks that guide the processes of planning, implementation, and evaluation in education. When developing curriculum models, various approaches influence how education is designed and executed. Two main models often discussed are the product model and the process model (Munna & Kalam, 2021). The product model emphasizes the results of learning, while the process model focuses on the learning activities and methods used in the learning process (Bhuttah et al., 2019).

In the curriculum as a product model, the focus is on the targets or objectives of the learning process as the core of curriculum development (Kelly, 2004). In this model, the curriculum will first establish learning objectives before determining the subjects and activities that students should engage in. In other words, the main goal of the curriculum is to achieve predetermined learning outcomes, and the curriculum structure is based on these objectives. The most popular approach to this model is Tyler's (1949). Additionally, Wheeler (1967), Taba (1962), Nicholls (1981), and Tanner (1975) also tend to emphasize curriculum as a product (Palupi, 2018).

On the other hand, the curriculum as a process places the learning process at the center of learning development activities. The outcome of overall objectives is not a series of short-term goals or objectives but rather a detailing of the principles inherent in those objectives, which inform and guide subsequent practice. This type

of curriculum assumes that each child has specific learning needs, and in line with constructivism and pragmatism philosophies, curriculum and learning practices need to be contextualized and personalized (Kelly, 2004). Palupi (2018) reveals that Stenhouse (1975) and Kolb (1984) developed their models based on the view that curriculum is a process.

1.1.3 Implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* was introduced in early 2022 by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Anwar Nadiem Makarim. The emergence of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* was based on a response to educational developments in Indonesia. Previously, Indonesia used the 2013 Curriculum in its education system. However, the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with technological advances and rapid changes in times, has underscored the urgency of updating the curriculum in Indonesia. This curriculum provides a new nuance to Indonesia's education system. According to Nurani et al. (2022), the content of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is more condensed and straightforward because it focuses on essential materials for developing student competencies in each phase. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* applies differentiated learning, allowing teachers to create and manage the curriculum according to students' needs, making its implementation more flexible. Therefore, in this curriculum, teachers are given freedom and significant responsibility in carrying out the teaching process. In carrying out their responsibilities, teachers must know the things in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* features distinct characteristics compared to the previous curriculum. These include the Pancasila Student Profile, as well as differences in learning outcomes, teaching modules, subjects, and assessments.

The Pancasila Student Profile is one of the characteristics of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* that aimed at shaping the character of better Indonesian students. Pancasila students possess global competence and exhibit behavior that follows Pancasila values. These values include having faith, devotion to God Almighty, noble character, appreciation for global diversity, a spirit of cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity (Juliani & Bastian, 2021). Besides

focusing on academics, teachers are also required to create Pancasila students during the teaching process.

Learning outcomes (CP/*capaian pembelajaran*) are the term used to describe the learning objectives in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Learning outcomes are competencies students must achieve at each phase. Learning outcomes are used as a basis for teachers to develop learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments that suit student needs. It will be turned into a teaching module, which the teacher use as a learning direction. According to Kemendikbudristek decree no. 033/H/KR/2022 (2022), the phases used in the learning outcomes system in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* consist of phases A to F, from elementary school to senior high school.

Table 2.1 Grade Phase of *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Phase	Grade
A	I & II Elementary School
B	III & IV Elementary School
C	V & VI Elementary School
D	VII, VIII, & IX Junior High School
E	X Senior High School
F	XI & XII Senior High School

Teaching modules are present in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* as another form of *RPP* in the 2013 curriculum. Teaching modules are learning tools or designs based on the curriculum implemented to achieve predetermined competency standards (Primayana, 2022). In teaching modules, teachers are free to compose them without following a particular template, unlike RPPs, which have templates that teachers must follow. However, several criteria must be met in preparing teaching modules. These criteria include essential, engaging, meaningful, challenging, relevant, contextual, and continuous. Teacher professionalism, such as pedagogical, personality, professional, and social competence, is needed because it is the primary key so that the modules created can suit needs and can be implemented in the learning process well (Sanjaya et al., 2022).

Another difference distinguishing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* from the previous curriculum is several new provisions in the subjects taught. For example, in the case of elementary school subjects, science, and social studies lessons are combined into MIPAS, and English is becoming a new elective subject (Nurani et al., 2022). Apart from that, lesson hours are also made different. Lesson hours in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* are set for one year, after previously one week.

The last differences are that the national standard school examination (USBN/*ujian sekolah berstandar nasional*) is no longer used as a determinant of graduation, and the computer-based national examination (UNBK/*ujian nasional berbasis komputer*) is no longer used to measure the quality of Indonesia education. The national standard school examination was changed to a more flexible assessment test where schools and teachers can carry it out through written tests or other more comprehensive assessments. Then, the computer-based national examination was changed to a computer-based national assessment (ANBK/*asesmen nasional berbasis komputer*), which was done very differently. If the computer-based national examination is carried out at the final level of students who will graduate, namely grades 6, 9, and 12, the computer-based national assessment is carried out at lower levels, namely grades 5, 8, and 11 (Primayana, 2022).

Implementing a *Kurikulum Merdeka* is something that takes time to be done. Several strategies are used to implement it. Namely, the gradual adoption of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, providing assessment and teaching tools, providing *Kurikulum Merdeka* and teacher learning resources, and supplying *Kurikulum Merdeka* resource persons (Kamila & RM, 2023). Currently, the curriculum implementation stage has entered the end, where schools that have registered begin to implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. There are three categories for schools that implement a *Kurikulum Merdeka*, namely independent learning, independent change, and independent sharing (Nurani et al., 2022). Schools can freely choose this category depending on their readiness to implement the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

2.1.4 Definitions of Young Learners

The term "young learners" has garnered varied interpretations. According to Zein and Butler (2023) young learners encompass children aged between 6 and 12 years old. Additionally, other experts have proposed alternative definitions. Scott and Ytreberg (1990) categorize young learners into two groups: those aged 5-7 years old and 8-10 years old. This division is predicated on the differing abilities and characteristics observed in children within each age range. Furthermore, Pinter (2011) delineates young learners as children aged 3-12 years old, further dividing them into two subgroups: preschool (3-7 years old) and primary school (7-12 years old). Fundamentally, the term "young learners" refers to a specific age group.

In essence, preceding viewpoints posit that young learners encompass children at both preschool and primary school levels, ranging from 3 to 12 years old. Moreover, in language learning, Cameron (2001) identifies young learners as individuals aged 5-12 years old who are in the process of learning a second or foreign language. Thus, it can be inferred that young learners in this context are elementary school children under the age of 12 years old who are engaged in the learning process of a second or foreign language.

2.1.5 Characteristics of Young Learners

Understanding the characteristics of young learners is essential for educators and policymakers as it enables them to tailor teaching methods and curricula to meet the specific needs of children. Young learners differ significantly from adults, necessitating additional efforts from teachers in their instruction. Teaching young learners can present unexpected challenges due to the impact of their traits on their learning process (Pertiwi et al., 2020). Thus, it is crucial to delve into their characteristics to understand their cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. This comprehension empowers educators to create learning environments conducive to their growth and academic success. Here are some perspectives on the characteristics of young learners.

Shin and Crandall (2013) argued that young learners possess the following characteristics:

1. Energetic and physically active

2. Spontaneous and not afraid to speak out or participate

3. Curious and receptive to new ideas

4. Imaginative and enjoys make-believe

5. Social and learning to relate to others

6. Easily distracted and have short attention spans

7. Egocentric and elates new ideas to himself

It can be concluded that young learners exhibit a variety of traits that educators should be aware of, both positive and negative. On the positive side, they possess high energy levels and are typically physically active, displaying a preference for movement and participation in physical activities. Additionally, young learners are spontaneous and uninhibited, readily expressing themselves and engaging in various situations without hesitation. They also demonstrate a strong sense of curiosity and eagerly embrace new ideas with enthusiasm. Moreover, young learners frequently engage in imaginative play, where they create fictional scenarios and stories. Furthermore, they are in the process of learning to socialize with others, which they often enjoy. However, on the negative side, they are susceptible to distractions and may struggle to maintain focus. Additionally, they may exhibit self-centered tendencies and have difficulty understanding others' perspectives.

Meanwhile, Brewster and Ellis (2002) argue that young learners have 12 characteristics as follows:

1. Need to be physically active

2. Have a wide range of emotional needs

3. Emotionally excitable

4. Developing conceptually and are at an early stage of their school

5. Still developing literacy in their first language

6. Learn more slowly and forget things quickly

7. Self-oriented

8. Get bored easily

9. Excellent mimics

10. Can concentrate a long time if interests

11. Easily distracted

12. Enthusiastic

In summary, young learners possess several important traits that educators need to understand. They enjoy being physically active and have various emotions that need attention. Additionally, they are easily distracted but can maintain focus for extended periods if interested. They are currently developing their understanding and literacy skills in their first language, therefore they learn at a slow pace and are prone to forgetting quickly. Despite this, they excel in imitation and are typically enthusiastic. However, educators should also be mindful of young learners' tendency to focus on themselves and their quick boredom.

In general, both perspectives express similar views regarding the characteristics of young children. Regarding physical activity, they tend to be highly active. Socially, they exhibit tendencies toward egocentrism or self-focus. Emotionally, they are not yet fully capable of regulating their feelings. On the other hand, they also possess strengths, such as curiosity and high enthusiasm, which make them unhesitant to engage in activities provided by the teacher. Understanding these characteristics deeply can empower educators to craft learning experiences that resonate with children, fostering their growth and success in educational environments.

2.1.6 Principles of Teaching English to Young Learners

Teaching is a complex process where teachers and students interact dynamically to help students understand, develop skills, and maximize learning potential (Gage, 2009). Teaching children is different from teaching adults, especially in language learning. English is an essential international language for both personal and professional contexts. Therefore, teaching English to children is crucial. However, there are specific principles that teachers need to consider when teaching English to young learners.

Shin and Crandall (2013) mentioned some principles that teachers need to know when teaching English to young learners:

1. They need a learning environment similar to first language acquisition.
2. They learn language through lots of meaningful exposure and practice.
3. They do not learn language through explicit grammatical explanations.

In summary, young learners will learn the language faster if the learning environment resembles their first language acquisition. They will be highly motivated if they learn a language based on real-world needs and surroundings. Additionally, the environment plays a significant role in language learning. Young learners acquire language through ample exposure and practice that is meaningful to them. Unlike their first language (L1) acquisition, where exposure happens naturally, learning English usually occurs only during class time. Therefore, teachers must provide comprehensive input using visuals, gestures, real-life situations, and simplified language. This approach makes it easier for students to grasp the material. Furthermore, young learners do not learn language through explicit grammar explanations. Direct grammar instruction can be confusing, but grammar is essential for language proficiency. Teachers can teach grammar by embedding it into real contexts and providing explanations within that context. This method ensures that young learners do not have to endure tedious and perplexing grammar explanations.

However, Cameron (2001) has a different view on the principles of teaching English to young learners. He argues that young learners:

1. They actively try to construct meaning.
2. They need space for language growth.
3. Language in use carries cues to meaning that may not be noticed.
4. Their development can be seen as internalizing from social interaction.
5. Their foreign language learning depends on what they experience.

From these principles, it can be concluded that young learners actively try to construct meaning. The limited vocabulary knowledge of students makes them still trying to understand what the teacher is saying. Therefore, when creating classroom activities, teachers should consider from the students' perspective whether they understand what is being said or not. Next, young learners need space for language growth. It is believed that ZPD (zone of proximal development) and

the use of learning strategies such as learning routines and scaffolding have a significant impact on providing effective support for their growth. Furthermore, language in use carries cues to meaning that may not be noticed. Young learners do not always understand a foreign language through formal grammar rules alone. Instead, they need help in highlighting and understanding the important parts of the language that convey meaning. This underscores the importance of an approach focused on meaning, the use of communication-oriented methods, and the use of real-world contexts in language teaching to young learners. Another viewpoint is that development can be seen as internalizing from social interaction. Language can grow through social interaction; teachers can encourage young learners to interact so that they can independently expand their vocabulary and sharpen their language skills. The last opinion is that young learners' foreign language learning depends on what they experience. This illustrates that the learning environment, direct experience with the language, and interaction with the foreign language in real-life contexts are crucial factors influencing young learners' ability to learn the language.

From the two opinions outlined, several important conclusions can be drawn about teaching English to young learners. When teaching English to young learners, it's important to make learning feel natural, like how they learn their first language. This means giving them chances to use English in real-life situations and practice a lot. Also, when teaching grammar, it's best to show how it works in real situations instead of just explaining rules. And don't forget, young learners are actively trying to understand and learn language, so let's give them plenty of opportunities to talk and interact with others. Teaching English to young learners means balancing real-life learning, practical grammar lessons, and lots of chances for socializing and hands-on experience. Following these ideas can make learning English fun and effective for young learners.

2.1.7   Teaching English to Young Learners in Indonesia

English is essential in today's era. It is a global language studied in many countries worldwide (Kharimah et al., 2023). Many countries teach English from childhood even more. Many opinions say that young learners are the right time to

teach language because they have more time to learn it, find it easier to choose words, gain better pronunciation and fluency, have global awareness and interpersonal competence, and have a flexible mentality for things from various directions (Shin & Crandall, 2013).

Teaching English to young learners (TEYL) has been taught for a very long time in Indonesia. The government determined that English should be one of the local content subjects in the elementary education curriculum through a survey that was done in 1989 (Primary et al., 2023). According to Zein et al. (2020), English has been a required subject in the primary school curriculum since the fourth grade in 1993. Then, in the 2006 curriculum, the government permitted schools to offer English as early as grade one due to parents' desire to enroll their kids in English from the lower grades. The 2013 Curriculum brought about significant changes. This curriculum removed English language education from elementary schools and continued until the 2013 Curriculum was revised in 2017. It occurred because the 2013 Curriculum prioritized character education, so students focused more on their mother tongue or regional language.

The elimination of English in elementary schools has raised concerns among some parties. The position of English as an international language makes it essential to master. Teachers and parents feel this will reduce children's ability to master English. They think that children will find it difficult to master English if it is taught at the junior high school level because children are no longer in their golden age (Sulaiman, 2022). In addition, the position of English in Indonesia as a foreign language makes it increasingly difficult for students to master English because of the lack of places for them to practice. In connection with this and the importance of English, along with the launch of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the government has determined that English should be taught again in elementary schools.

2.1.8 The Policy of EYL in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*

English in elementary schools under the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is positioned as an optional subject and is not required to be taught. According to

Kemendikbudristek decree no. 262/M/2022 (2022), English is taught based on school readiness. Schools have the right to choose whether to provide English, with the maximum teaching requirement (JP/*jam pelajaran*) being 2 hours per week or 72 hours per year. In its implementation, English in elementary schools can be taught by competent class teachers, available English teachers, or students enrolled in the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* Program.

According to Kemendikbudristek decree no. 7 of 2022 (2022), several materials taught must include:

1. Simple interactional and transactional texts in the context of self, family, and school.
2. Simple multimodal texts, fiction, and non-fiction, in the context of self, family, and school.
3. Vocabulary and simple expressions in text in the context of self, family, and school.
4. Cultural diversity in Indonesia through simple text.
5. Moving and still images in simple text as part of visual literacy.
6. Vocabulary related to the development of visual literacy.
7. Strategies for understanding the contents of simple texts.

The Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology offers textbooks for English classes that can be utilized as teaching resources via the official *Kurikulum Merdeka* website. These books are accessible to educators and students in all grades. For elementary, the textbook is called "My Next Word".

2.2   Study of Relevant Research

Teaching English to young learners in Indonesia is a fascinating topic to discuss. Nufus (2018), in his research, reveals the state of TEYL in Indonesia. It is known that there are no regulations that require schools to provide English subjects from kindergarten to elementary school, so holding it depends on the school. Several schools still teach English, but many of the teachers they employ need an appropriate educational background. Apart from that, because it is not in the curriculum, teachers have difficulty teaching because there are no clear rules and

teaching materials. Lastly, TEYL in Indonesia forces students to know the rules and sentence forms, even though this is not how young learners learn a language. Since 2022, the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Research, Culture, and Technology has begun to improve the education system in Indonesia by creating a new curriculum. This curriculum is intended for recovery after the Covid-19 pandemic. Apart from the recovery of education after the COVID-19 pandemic, interestingly, this is also an update for TEYL in Indonesia. English is again included in the curriculum to be taught at the elementary school level.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* has just been implemented for all schools that have registered. Several studies have been conducted regarding implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at the elementary school level. The research was carried out based on implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* during the trial phase in 2022. This research provides an overview of how the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in elementary schools is carried out. In fact, everything new always produces different views, such as implementing a *Kurikulum Merdeka*. According to Wardani et al. (2023) and Ndari et al. (2023), implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has several positive and negative impacts.

The impacts of implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be seen in the short and long term. Wardani et al. (2023) view the *Kurikulum Merdeka* positive impact as a preparation for producing a golden generation in 2045. The Pancasila student profile in the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is believed to be able to form students with adaptive intelligence that AI cannot replace. a *Kurikulum Merdeka* basis that frees educators to provide learning according to students' needs is also one of the advantages because it can develop student potential. On the other hand, it has a negative impact because many policies differ. All policymakers in schools must work extra hard to prepare, implement, monitor, and evaluate so that this implementation runs well.

Stakeholders, such as students, teachers, principals, and others, must make relatively complicated adjustments to experience challenges when implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Ndari et al. (2023) stated that schools face difficulties in learning models, teacher readiness, student manner, student readiness, and costs.

The learning model that is determined must follow student potential so that teachers are required to develop their learning objectives that refer to student potential and the objectives of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Some teachers still need to prepare for a learning system like this. That is also strengthened by the need for teachers' ability to compile and create suitable teaching modules. Apart from that, students' manner is also a challenge in itself. The influence of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic makes it difficult for teachers to control students, and it is easier for students to lose focus. Learning that focuses on students' interests is a challenge in itself. Many students need more time to be ready, so they follow their friends to determine their goals instead of following their desires. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* requires teachers to carry out several projects as a direct illustration of the material provided. To carry out a project, teachers sometimes need money. This cost is sometimes an obstacle because no funds are available at the school. Students must pay their costs to carry out the project.

Previous research describes the implementation of a *Kurikulum Merdeka* in elementary schools. However, no research discusses the implementation of English using a *Kurikulum Merdeka* in elementary school and how it impacts teachers as the primary key in TEYL. Therefore, research to explore elementary teachers' challenges in English teaching under *Kurikulum Merdeka* is needed.