

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter briefly explains some theories that support the study. The Theories relate to the definition of perspective, the *Merdeka Curriculum*, and EFL Learners.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Perspective

Linguistically, the word perspective comes from the Latin word '*perspicere*', from the Proto-Indo-European (PIE) root 'per' meaning 'through' and the PIE root '*spek*' meaning 'to observe, look at'. Cambridge Dictionary defines perspective as a particular way of considering something. According to Charon (2012), perspective is a conceptual framework, an assumption, and ideas that will affect perceptions and actions later in certain situations.

Based on the description above, it can be concluded that perspective is a way of thinking and a person's behaviour toward a problem or activity. In this case, perspective refers to the thinking and behaviour of participants in understanding how to implement the *Merdeka Curriculum* in teaching English to EFL learners.

2.1.2 *Merdeka Curriculum*

2.1.2.1 The Concept of *Merdeka Curriculum*

The Ministry of Education and Culture defined the *Merdeka curriculum* as focusing on essential materials, character development, and student competencies to cultivate children's interests and abilities from an early age. In February 2022, the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Higher Education of Indonesia unveiled the *Merdeka Curriculum* as part of the *Merdeka (Merdeka Belajar)* program to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia.

Students must meet content standards that align with the competency levels outlined in graduate competencies, study material competencies, subject competencies, and learning syllabi. Content standards serve as

recommendations for establishing curricula at the education unit level, encompassing the basic framework and structure of the curriculum, student learning load, and the educational calendar. Meanwhile, graduation competency standards function as assessment guidelines to determine a student's eligibility for graduation. These standards for graduate competencies include competencies across all subjects and subject groups and the competence of individual subjects or subject groups as a whole. At the same time, graduate competency represents a qualification of a graduate's abilities, which include attitudes, knowledge, and skills that adhere to national standards and benchmarks.

The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of Indonesia has released on their website a set of operational rules for the organization of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, such as;

1. Student-centered; The student's potential, developmental needs, learning stages, and interests must be considered throughout instruction.
2. Contextual; Demonstrate distinctiveness in line with the characteristics of educational units, socio-cultural and environmental contexts, and the world of work and industry, particularly for vocational schools. Additionally, showcase the unique traits of students with special needs, especially in schools catering to these individuals.
3. Essential; Includes all essential information elements required and utilized in educational units. The language used is clear, concise, and easy to understand.
4. Current; Accountable because it is data-based and actual.
5. Involving various stakeholders; The curriculum development of education units involves education unit committees and various stakeholders, including parents, organizations, various centres, as well as individuals and the world of work for the vocational school, under the coordination and supervision of the education office or ministry

office that organises government affairs in the field of religion by their authority.

In conclusion, the Merdeka Curriculum represents a strategic effort by the Indonesian government to reform the national education system by prioritising essential content, character development, and competency-based learning. Designed to cultivate students' interests and abilities from an early age, the curriculum emphasises a student-centred, contextual, and collaborative approach. Its structure is supported by clear content and graduation competency standards that guide teaching, learning, and assessment practices. Additionally, the curriculum's development and implementation are grounded in stakeholder involvement and responsiveness to educational, cultural, and industrial contexts. These principles collectively aim to enhance the relevance and quality of education in Indonesia, preparing students to meet both national and global challenges.

2.1.2.2 English Learning in *Merdeka* Curriculum

The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education has identified English instruction in the *Merdeka* Curriculum as a way to prepare Indonesian students for global challenges. English learning in the *Merdeka* Curriculum aims to provide students with opportunities to gain insights into themselves, their social relationships, their culture, and the global opportunities available to them.

This objective aligns with the findings of Rayner's (2001) study, which indicates that the English language has absorbed many positive elements from various language cultures. These elements influence all spheres of life, including science, politics, economics, culture, cinema, and the digital world. The developers of the *Merdeka* Curriculum argue that students' understanding of socio-cultural and intercultural knowledge can enhance their critical thinking skills.

2.1.2.2.1 Focus of English Learning

English Learning in the *Merdeka* Curriculum focuses on enhancing the ability to utilize English across six language skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and integrating various text forms. The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of Indonesia stated on their official website that the minimum standards for these six English skills are in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) and are equivalent to level B1.

According to the official website of the Council of Europe Portal (Coe.int, 2022), level B1 (CEFR) reflects the criteria that can be inferred from students' abilities to do the following:

1. Maintain intelligence and prepare something desired, in various contexts with clear articulation.
2. Express the main point to be conveyed comprehensively.
3. Maintain communication even if there are occasional lags.

2.1.2.2.2 English Learning Approach

A scientific learning approach, or differentiated learning approach, is typically used to teach English in the *Merdeka* Curriculum (bbgpjateng.kemendikbud.go.id, 2023). The differentiated learning approach is a systematic method designed to teach academically diverse learners. It involves a way of thinking about the classroom that honours each student's learning needs while maximizing their learning capacity. (Subban, 2006; Bushie, 2015; Osuafor, A. M., & Okigbo, E. C, 2013)

2.1.2.2.3 Time Allocation of English Learning

The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of Indonesia stated on their website that, in the *Merdeka* Curriculum, the allocation of English learning time is divided into several levels according to the level of education. As follows:

1. Elementary School/Islamic Elementary School/Equal Education Program: 2 hours of lessons per week with a total of 64 total lessons per year.
2. Junior High School/Islamic Junior High School/Equal Education Program. The curriculum structure at this level is divided into:
 - Grade 7 and 8: 3 hours of lessons for a total of 144 hours of learning per year.
 - Grade 9: 3 hours of learning with a total of 128 hours of lessons per year.
3. Secondary High School/Islamic Junior High School/ Vocational School/Equal Education Program. At this level of education, the learning structure is divided into two phases; such as:
 - Grade 10: 2 hours of lessons per week for a total of 72 hours of lessons per year.
 - Grade 11 and 12: 2 hours of lessons per week for a total of 72 hours per year.

The time allocation of English learning above are based on the decree of the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education No. 56 in 2022 regarding the guidelines for implementing the curriculum in the Context of learning recovery and Ministerial Decree No. 56 in 2022 about the rules of curriculum structure starting from the kindergarten level, elementary school, junior high school, Special Needs School, and equal education program

2.1.2.4 Learning Goals

According to the decree of the head of the Agency for Curriculum Standards and Education Assessment of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, the achievement of English learning in the *Merdeka* Curriculum aims to develop the following:

1. Communicative competence of English with various multimodal texts (oral, written, visual, and audio-visual).

2. Intercultural competence to understand and appreciate Indonesian and foreign cultures' perspectives, practices, and products.
3. Self-confidence to express as an individual and take responsibility.
4. Critical and creative reasoning skills.

2.1.3 EFL Learners

EFL learners are defined by Shu Dingfang (1994) as students who study English in non-English-speaking countries. Meanwhile, Gebhard's (2006) study supports this definition. According to the findings of both studies, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the study of English by individuals who do not speak it as their first or second language. From this definition, it can be concluded that EFL learners are students who are learning English as a foreign language because English is neither their native language nor the official language of their country of origin.

2.2 Study of the Relevant Research

The study of teachers' perspectives on the recent curriculum was conducted by Sunarni and Karyono (2023). They presented that teachers' perceptions are positive and that they appreciate the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Teachers are also capable of developing and applying curricula and designing classes to enhance the quality of teaching and learning processes. However, not all teachers implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum because they lack IT skills and struggle with maintaining a stable internet connection. Rahayu et al. (2022) mentioned that the *Merdeka* Curriculum can be fully implemented if the government provides training programs to help teachers become more proficient professionals.

However, the other study highlighted that after receiving professional training, English teachers can better apply the *Merdeka* Curriculum when teaching English to EFL learners. The professional training activity raises teachers' awareness of implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum, significantly impacting English learning (Kusumaningtyas and Sulistiyaningsih, 2022). Therefore, this is one of the considerations for understanding English teachers'

perspectives on implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching English, which will benefit Indonesia's curriculum developers as a point of reference when creating a new curriculum.

In conclusion, previous studies have shown that while English teachers generally hold positive perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum and recognize its potential to improve teaching and learning, successful implementation remains dependent on several factors. These include teachers' digital literacy, access to reliable internet, and participation in professional development programs. Training plays a crucial role in equipping teachers with the skills and confidence needed to effectively apply the curriculum in EFL classrooms. These findings highlight the importance of considering teachers' perspectives as a valuable input for curriculum development and refinement, particularly in the context of English language education in Indonesia.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

