

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the study. It consists of the background, formulation of the problems, operational definitions, aims, and significance of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum signifies a transformative development in Indonesia's educational system, shifting the focus toward student-centred learning, differentiated instruction, and competency-based approaches. As a recently introduced curriculum, its effectiveness largely depends on how it is perceived, interpreted, and enacted by teachers, particularly those teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Teachers serve as central figures in the implementation process, and their perceptions provide valuable insights into how the curriculum is translated into classroom practice. These perceptions influence not only pedagogical choices but also student learning experiences and the overall success of the curriculum reform. Therefore, examining how English teachers engage with and respond to the Merdeka Curriculum is essential for understanding its practical impact. In order to contextualise this development, it is essential to examine the historical development of curriculum policies in Indonesia.

Throughout its history, curriculum implementation in Indonesia has experienced multiple changes from 1940 to 2022. The curricula mentioned include the 1947 *Rentjana Pelajaran* curriculum (curriculum 1947), the 1952 *Rencana Pelajaran Terurai* curriculum (curriculum 1952), the 1964 *Rencana Pendidikan* curriculum (curriculum 1964), curriculum 1968, curriculum 1975, curriculum 1985, Competency-based curriculum (*KBK* curriculum 2004), the Education Unit Level curriculum (*KTSP* curriculum 2006), the 2013 curriculum (K-13 curriculum) (Alhamuddin, 2014). The curriculum modifications in Indonesia demonstrate the adjustment of education to effectively tackle the changing requirements and difficulties encountered by

the country. The changes are motivated by the dynamic needs of the Indonesian population, which consistently undergoes evolution (Ananda, A. P., & Hudaibah, H., 2021). Due to evolving demands in the field of education, the curriculum becomes dynamic, adapting to the current tendencies. The history of the curriculum in Indonesia shows that the education system consistently undertakes dynamic adjustments to effectively respond and adapt to evolving circumstances (Dewantara, 2020; Santika et al., 2022).

Numerous national and international studies indicate that the educational system in Indonesia has faced a prolonged crisis. Research has revealed a significant disparity in education levels across various regions of Indonesia, further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Mansyur, 2020; Falah, A. I., and Hadna, A. H., 2022; Widyasari et al., 2022). Tampubolon, R., Gulo, Y., & Nababan, R. (2022) argue that implementing systematic changes in the education sector, particularly regarding the curriculum, is essential to address this issue. Consequently, the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education has established a curriculum known as the *Merdeka Curriculum*. According to Maskar et al. (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic affects the acquisition of various student competencies in schools. To tackle this issue, Nugraha (2022) argues that implementing the curriculum is vital to revitalise student learning. This implementation should be tailored to meet the needs of student participation and should prioritise the development of student skills in each school.

The Ministry of Education and Culture developed the *Merdeka Curriculum* to enable schools to enhance their students' abilities with the facilities and resources available. Furthermore, the *Merdeka Curriculum* grants teachers the freedom to impart educational content, while students enjoy greater flexibility in realising their potential, thereby maximising their outcomes. The implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in Senior High Schools follows the Ministerial Decree of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology number 56 for the year 2022 regarding guidelines for the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* aimed at early childhood education

(PAUD), elementary school, and middle education (Junior High School and Secondary High School). In the ministerial decree, it is outlined that the structure of the educational curriculum in Junior High School and Secondary High School is divided into two main activities: intracurricular learning and the Strengthening of the Pancasila Student Profile Project (Program Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)) (Kepmendikbudristek, 2022).

The *Merdeka* Curriculum offers the advantage of being more streamlined than its predecessor. For example, when schools are granted the autonomy to manage and design learning programs in line with the requirements of academic units and students, learning becomes more interactive and efficient (Almarisi, 2023; Numerayasa et al., 2022; Pratycia et al., 2023). Moreover, Arifin and Razak (2022) state that the lesson plan in the *Merdeka* Curriculum simplifies the administrative process for teachers due to the creation of lesson plans that consist of only three core components: learning objectives, learning activities, and assessment. However, Priantini et al. (2022) note that one weakness of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is its potential for unclear strategies, methods, and effective learning media, as teachers may overlook the entire process.

Rahayu et al. (2022) found that the *Merdeka* Curriculum enhances interactivity and effectiveness in learning. This is achieved by giving schools the freedom to choose among three options for its implementation: incorporating some principles of the *Merdeka* Curriculum without replacing the existing curriculum in schools; implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum by utilizing current facilities and infrastructure; or applying the *Merdeka* Curriculum using self-created teaching tools. Furthermore, it was discovered that in the *Merdeka* Curriculum, the principal plays a crucial role in the school, as they have significant power to promote its progress. This stems from the principal's responsibilities to safeguard, guide, motivate, mentor, and steer educational initiatives toward a more favourable outcome trajectory.

Based on the decree of the Head of the Education Standard, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency, Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher

Education Number 022/H/Kr/2023, English learning in the *Merdeka* Curriculum aims to enhance proficiency in English through various forms of communication, including oral, written, visual, and audiovisual methods. It also seeks to foster intercultural understanding and appreciation for both Indonesian and foreign cultures. Additionally, the curriculum aims to build confidence in self-expression as an independent and responsible individual while developing critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills.

In educational institutions, teachers play a crucial role in implementing the new curriculum as they are responsible for its adoption throughout the schools. Anriani & Lubis (2023) and Jannati et. al. (2023) emphasized that teachers must incorporate the *Merdeka* Curriculum into their instructional practices, as it significantly improves curriculum implementation. Additionally, it was suggested that teachers should actively develop, monitor, and implement the curriculum to ensure effective learning and achieve desired objectives. Thus, teachers, being the primary agents of education, are expected to fulfil their duty as skilled educators, curriculum facilitators, and designers.

According to a prior study, several challenges are associated with implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Sumarmi (2023) notes that instructors face difficulties in planning, implementing, and assessing learning. The research findings by Sumarmi highlight the obstacles teachers encounter in preparing lesson plans, particularly in analysing and organizing learning goals into coherent objectives. Moreover, educators lacking technological proficiency may face issues when developing instructional strategies. Sumarmi also observed that during the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, teachers struggle to identify appropriate instructional methods and strategies that ensure an engaging learning experience for students and promote their active participation in the learning process.

From this standpoint, the researcher presents the case of English teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Senior High School EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. This case is explored in a study entitled 'Perspective of Teachers on the

Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Teaching English for EFL Learners.' The focus is on how teachers interpret, respond to, and apply the curriculum in their teaching practices, including the challenges they encounter and the strategies they utilise during implementation. Thus, this research examines English teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum concerning its implementation, strengths, and weaknesses.

1.2 Formulation of the Problem(s)

The issue examined in this study is to uncover English teachers' perceptions of the *Merdeka* curriculum regarding its implementation, strengths, and weaknesses. Consequently, this study will concentrate on the standard curriculum aspect of implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum by observing the planning and execution of English learning based on teacher input perceptions. By then, this study will raise one fundamental question: "What are English teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in EFL classrooms at the Senior High School level?"

1.3 Operational Definitions

To prevent any confusion regarding the terminology employed in this study, the researcher provides a set of definitions of the subject matter as follows:

Perspective : Particular way of considering something; someone's opinion on how they consider something; particular way of thinking about or understanding something, influenced by personal experiences, background, or position.

Curriculum *Merdeka* : A set of standards-based planned learning experiences designed to nurture students' interests and talents, focusing on essential content, character

formation, and the development of competencies through flexible and student-centered approaches.

EFL Learner : A study of English by learners dwelling in locations where English is neither the first nor the second language.

1.4 Aim(s) of the Research

The primary objective of this research is to reveal the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum. The findings are anticipated to serve as an assessment tool for Indonesian curriculum developers as they strive to create a new curriculum.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The significance of the study is:

Theoretical Use : This study investigates teachers' views regarding the *implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum* in teaching English to EFL students.

Empirical Use : The research will provide fresh insights into the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum in teaching and learning activities from the teachers' perspective.

Practical Use : Pragmatically, Indonesia's curriculum developers can use this study's findings as a reference and point of consideration when developing a new curriculum.