



English Teachers' Readiness in Implementing of 'Merdeka Belajar' Curriculum in Teaching English at Junior High School in Padang

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate English teachers' readiness and the obstacles that faced in implementation of Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Thirteen junior high school English teachers from eight piloting schools (Sekolah Penggerak) in Padang were assigned to complete a questionnaire about their readiness and were interviewed the obstacles that faced in implementation of Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Quantitative analyses were employed in the research which using likert scale approach to measure the questionnaire and calculated in the average score, while data from interview were transcribed, classified and then draw conclusion. The results from quantitative analysis showed that teachers' readiness to implement the curriculum in level 3 or in category ready but need a little improvement with average score 3,20. The interview result showed that teachers have obstacle in formulating learning outcomes and applied differentiated learning in the process in teaching learning. Even the teachers is in category ready, they still need workshop and training which focused on assessment and utilization IT to help teacher create interactive media, so the teacher will be more prepare to implementation of Merdeka Belajar curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

Curriculum development is an innovation step or renewal taken by the government in the field of national education to provide solution in several cases or problems in education. As a consequence of the outdated or current curriculum's lack of relevance in addressing general issues, curriculum development occurs as a result of curriculum review or reform (Ikbogwe, Mezieobi & Eke, 2014). Curriculum development in Indonesia occurs to recover and improve the quality of education in Indonesia by developing and advancing science and technology (Darwisah, 2020).

Development in the Indonesian educational system curriculum was an absolute necessity. According to the results of document evaluation and implementation of the 2013 curriculum of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency of

The Ministry Of Education, the 2013 Curriculum competencies were too broad, difficult to understand, and to be implemented by teachers. Starting from the less flexible curriculum structure, the lesson hours are determined per week, and the material is too dense so that there is not enough time to carry out in-depth learning and according to the stage of development of students. Furthermore, teachers are busy to preparing learning process in the classroom. Teachers also have to make a very detailed and complicated lesson plan (RPP), thus, curriculum development is needed to consider as a determinant of the nation's future (Ekawati, 2016).

Moreover, curriculum development is an instrument to improve the quality of education (Rahayu et al., 2022). Ministry of Education and Culture, to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia, is making efforts to reform learning by designing a Merdeka Belajar curriculum which gives schools, teachers and students the freedom to be free to innovate, free to learn independently and creatively (Sherly, Dharma & Sihombing., 2020). The concept of Merdeka Belajar curriculum is also the answer to problems in the learning practice process, these educators are facilitated in administration and given freedom in how to design and assess student learning, openness to all obstacles experienced by educators such as making lesson plans (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020).

Curriculum change is not solely in terms of the name only but also the structure of the new educational plan includes many highlights, including the way things are coordinated, the objectives to be accomplished in training, cycles of educating, learning and appraisal, lastly how it the educational program will prepare for the future students (Thura & Khaing, 2020). In the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, one of the reforms that need to be considered is related to the Lesson Plan. Nowadays, government already provide the lesson plan in Merdeka Belajar curriculum which teacher has given the freedom to use, modify or compose their own modules by adjusting to the characteristics and needs of students refers to Pancasila Student Profile element. Beside, lesson plan in previous curriculum has too many components and teachers are required exhaustively for every part that outcomes on in additional of 5 pages of lesson plan. In Merdeka Belajar curriculum, teachers now can focus only on 3 main components; teaching and learning objectives, learning process and assessment that can be shortened into a page of lesson plan, while the other components are complementary (Aulia, 2021).

In this case, concerns regarding the new curriculum and its implementation in schools are likely to vary among teachers. According to Khoboli & O'toole (2012), due to their understanding and the management conditions in their schools, teachers may have different concerns about implementing the new curriculum and adapting a new practice. Some teachers may willingly contribute in the process of new innovations but others might find it hard to accept change. This happens when they are confronted with with changes in their characteristics and convictions based on previous experiences and practices (Mandukwini, 2016 in Karakuş, 2021). Uncertainty, teachers may tend to be confused and/or resist such common practice and new ideas when changes demand an innovation is beyond their experiences. In addition, they must still be supported and followed up on throughout the reform's implementation (Leung, 2008 in Tafai, 2017).

Therefore, teachers should have a deep and thorough understanding of the concept of the Merdeka Belajar curriculum and need to change their mindset about reforms in this curriculum so that they can master what the Merdeka Belajar curriculum is and how it is structured the system is running too. The desire of teachers to innovate and want to develop themselves in the face of curriculum changes also needs to be considered. If the teacher does not want to make changes and is not able to operationalize the principles contained in this curriculum, then the expected educational goals will not be achieved optimally.

Based on the results of informal discussions with several teachers at the pilot school who implemented Merdeka Belajar curriculum in Padang, it was found that the problems varied, the problems were typically discovered at the procedural level. In order to accommodate the new curriculum, teachers have to adapt for new curriculum in very short period of time. Some teachers were not yet comfortable due to the lack of experience in implementing the curriculum viewed from their knowledge of curriculum as reflected in the conduct a new form of lesson plan in Merdeka Belajar curriculum. Because the new curriculum is only for first-year students, teachers find it difficult to implement because they must simultaneously teach two different curriculums for at least two years before all students who used the previous curriculum graduate from the school. Thus, that there is a gap between common practice and new ideas. As a result, the teachers faced difficulties and obstacle in implementing Merdeka Belajar curriculum.

There are several previous study have been conducted about English teacher readiness in implementation new curriculum. Sundayana (2015) has done a research about teacher readiness in implementation the 2013 curriculum as new curriculum related to their comprehension, ability and self-efficacy in conduct lesson plan based on principle of syllabus development which showed that Most of the time, teachers don't understand or comprehend the fundamentals of the curriculum well enough to be able to use them effectively in the classroom. Thus, teachers' attitude, motivation, belief, and commitment concerning the implementation of the 2013 curriculum need to be further investigated.

Mubarak (2018) conduct the research aimed to investigate teachers' readiness, teachers' commitment and their correlation in implementing the 2013 curriculum. Teachers' self-efficacy, motivation, and knowledge of the curriculum were viewed as particularly indicative of their readiness. The commitment to the organization, the profession, and the students were the criteria used to evaluate it. The finding demonstrated that teachers' commitment to school, profession, and students was influenced by their teaching experience, normative attitudes, and certification incentives. Then, research about the readiness of EFL Teachers in Implementing The 2013 National Curriculum by Puspayanti et al., (2018), had objective to analyze the readiness of English as Foreign language teachers to implement the 2013 National English Curriculum (NEC) seem by teacher competency, teachers' mindset, and commitment. It showed that the In accordance with the national education standard, EFL teachers in Jambi city were ready to implement the NEC13 properly.

Based on previous studies, there are mostly focused on teacher readiness on design instructional plan, teachers' commitment, self-efficacy and motivation in implementation the 2013 curriculum. Therefore, Sundayana in his study suggested to

examined teachers' attitude, motivation, belief, and commitment regarding the implementation of curriculum. As stated by Weiner (2009 in Sundayana, 2015) that a school's readiness to implement the change—the new curriculum—depends on a variety of factors, including their perception, attitude, motivation, knowledge of the program, and their capacity to put it into practice. Thus, the researcher wants to analyze English teacher readiness in implementation Merdeka Belajar curriculum which focused in teachers' comprehension to conduct lesson plan and teachers' attitude such as motivation, self-efficacy, and commitment in facing change.

Hence, studies related to teachers' readiness in implementation of the new curriculum (Merdeka Belajar curriculum) are important to portray the aspects which need to be strengthened, specifically among junior high school English teachers in Padang. From the analysis above, the researcher is interested in investigating “English Teacher Readiness in Implementation of ‘Merdeka Belajar’ Curriculum in teaching English in Padang”.

RESEARCH METHOD

This is a quantitative method since it aims to identify English teachers' readiness in implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in teaching English at Junior High School in Padang. The sample of this research is 13 teachers who have implemented *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.

To collect the data, the researchers applied questionnaires and interview as the instrument. The questionnaire is divided into 4 indicators they are knowledge and skill in developed lesson plan (Kemendikbudristek, 2022), motivation (Hezberg in Sakan, 2019), self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993), commitment (NCTE, 1998) with total 74 statements that adapted and developed by those researches. The questionnaire data is shown on 1 to 4 ranges, from strongly disagree to strongly agree related to likert scale approach. The data are calculated using likert scale in average score, then analyzed in category through the interval score based on model by Aycin and Tasci (2005) as follow:

Table 1 Interval score

Level	Interval score	Category
Level 1	1 – 1,75	Not ready, needs a lot of improvement
Level 2	1,76 – 2,5	Not ready, needs a little improvement
Level 3	2,51 – 3,25	Ready, needs a little improvement
Level 4	3,26 – 4	Ready, could be continued

Then, the researcher interview 6 teachers who were selected from the the lowest questionnaire score categorize by using open-ended questions to gather the data about the obstacle that faced in implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. The questions consist of 3 indicators that discuss about teachers obstacle in developed lesson plan, implementation in the class, and school's facilities and infrastructure.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

1. Questionnaire

The data of this study were gathered through a questionnaire. The questionnaire is divided into 4 indicators, they are knowledge and skill; motivation; self-efficacy; and commitment with total 74 statements. The researcher drew the research findings of the questionnaire analysis, as follow:

Table 2 English Teacher's Readiness in Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum

No	Indicator	Average score	Category
1	Knowledge and Skill	3,25	Level 3
2	Motivation	3,14	Level 3
3	Self-Efficacy	3,12	Level 3
4	Commitment	3,31	Level 4
Total		3,20	Level 3

Based on the result of the data analysis, it was discovered that all of the responses from the teachers for each indicator in implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum are ready, means that the teacher are ready in terms of knowledge and skill, motivation, self-efficacy and commitment.

The highest score was teachers' commitment with average score 3,31 (Level 4) in category ready, could be continued. Then followed by teachers' knowledge and skill with average score 3,25 (Level 3) in category ready but need a little improvement and the average score of teachers' motivation with average score 3,14 (Level 3) in category ready which need a little improvement. The last is teachers' self-efficacy with average score 3,12 (Level 3) in category ready which need a little improvement. After calculating all of the data, the total average score was 3,20 (Level 3) means that the teachers are in category ready but still need a little improvement to implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.

2. Interview

Based on the results of the interviews, it was revealed that most of the teachers who were selected as respondent faced several obstacles in implementing the Free Learning curriculum as seen from three indicators, namely the development of Teaching Modules, classroom implementation, school facilities and infrastructure.

The first obstacle that English teachers faced is analyzed learning outcomes then formulated into learning objective in which each teacher will generate many perceptions and interpretations because the sentences are considered too general. This is also a new thing to do before starting learning where in the previous curriculum the material to be taught at every level had been provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture. The teacher said "*The lesson plan is actually just a name change from the previous RPP. In the lesson plan there are learning objective that were previously called KI, KD. Something new that I found in this Merdeka Belajar curriculum is that independent teachers arrange and choose modules or materials to be used in learning outcomes. Then it formulated into learning objective and the teacher needs to analyze what learning outcomes must be achieved in phase D or at the junior high school level by looking at what students have learned in phase C or elementary school level. It is a new challenge where in the previous curriculum the*

material to be taught at each level has been provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Basically, this curriculum becomes more flexible because it is adjusted to the circumstances of the school and the characteristics of students". To overcome the obstacle, teachers take part of MGMP, PPG and join in PMM (Platform Merdeka Mengajar) to help them to develop lesson plan and prepare teaching learning process.

Second, in applied in the class, teachers found a new practice namely differentiated learning which teacher need to analyze the characteristic and needs of student like competency, learning style, readiness of students. It is tough to do because that the large number of students and the limited hours of lessons so that focusing on student differences at each meeting is also ineffective. The teacher said *"In Merdeka Belajar curriculum, teachers are required to know and analyze student's need and characteristic because the input or ability of students is low, even though students have been grouped based on differentiation (visual, audio, kinesthetic) by the counseling teacher. However, applying dials are still difficult because of the large number of students and the limited hours of lessons so that focusing on student differences at each meeting is also ineffective. This makes the teacher sometimes forget about differentiation because the teacher focuses on how the teacher attracts students' attention to be able to focus in each meeting".* Other teacher said *"Carrying out differentiated learning is quite time-consuming because of the need to grouping students in class. However, there are only a few students who have high input or ability, so it is difficult for teachers to classify students who are high, middle and low in the same group. Sometimes teachers focus on differentiated learning so that it takes short lesson hours and the material being taught is also not achieved".* To overcome the obstacle, teachers try and learn, then improve the competency become teacher who is creative and innovative in providing learning in a differentiated learning process, then teachers provide the same material but different worksheets for each students.

Third, the facilities and infrastructure of school, the teacher said that facilities and infrastructure are more than adequate to help successful of implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. For the future, the teacher needs workshop and training agenda will be added which focused on develop lesson plan and assessment and used IT, so the teacher will be more prepare to implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum.

Discussion

The English teachers' readiness in implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in teaching English at junior high school in Padang are in category ready but still need a little improvement. The teacher responses were based on their experience in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. There were four significant indicators of readiness of the teacher. First, the teacher's competency readiness, which mainly discusses about knowledge and skill of the teachers on developed lesson plan. Next, the teachers' emotional attitudinal readiness will be based on teachers' motivation, self efficacy and commitment towards being English teachers in implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. From four indicators, the finding shows that English teachers are ready to implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum for each indicator. In line with previous study, Mubarak (2018) in his research "Readiness and Commitment of Senior High School English Teachers to

Implement Curriculum 2013: A Case of Indonesia” found that teachers’ readiness and commitment were in “good” level to implement curriculum 2013. This study also used four indicators to see teachers’s readiness and commitment to implement curriculum 2013. The result also showed that the teachers are ready for each readiness.

In contrast with *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, in aspect knowledge and skill, mostly the teacher has done several steps in the developed lesson plan. Some indicators have a low frequency, such as in formulating learning outcomes then formulated into learning objective and carrying out a diagnostic assessment where some teachers have not yet carried out a diagnostic assessment in the form of written tests, oral tests and observations.

The result of this research showed which based on qualitative analysis revealed that teachers had ready, need a liitle improvement to implement the curriculum and to develop lesson planning. Another reseach was conducted by Sundayana (2015) in his research “Readiness and Competence of Senior High School English Teachers to Implement Curriculum 2013” has similir findings which particularly viewed from their comprehension about the syllabus of English and its articulation into lesson plans based on the principles of syllabus development as suggested in the curriculum.

Another researcher is Puspayanti, Muhammad & Hadiyanto (2018) which in their research “The Readiness of EFL Teachers in implementing the 2013 National Curriculum”, showed that the readiness of EFL teachers in Jambi city was at the high level. In accordance with the national education standard, EFL teachers in Jambi city were prepared to implement the NEC13 in an appropriate manner. This study's findings shed light on how leaders and policymakers perceive EFL teachers' readiness to properly implement NEC13.

Implementing new thing in education will make the teachers faced some obstacles such as the English teacher have difficult how to implement *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in teaching at the class and also get difficulties in applying in the process of teaching and learning. After the data from interview analyzed, the result showed that teachers faced some problems in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. First, the teacher has difficulty formulating learning outcomes. Learning outcomes in the content standards is used as a reference for preparing material by analyzing whether the points are classified as knowledge or skills. It is too general that make many perceptions and interpretations from various teachers so it is necessary to unite ideas so that the flow and learning objectives can be created. This also causes difficulties in developing learning objective. The educators argued that in order to overcome those obstacles, they must comprehend in current curriculum. Additionally, the activities in MGMP and PPG would assist the educator in comprehending how to implement the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum correctly. In addition, PMM (Platform Merdeka Mengajar) which is an application from the government also assists teachers in developing lesson plan.

Second, in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in the classroom, the difficulty found is that there is differentiated learning where the differences in learning are according to the characteristics and abilities of students. Teacher should fully recognize how the characteristics of all students, so that they can adjust student learning abilities which may be at a high level middle and low with the learning style

that will be given (visual, audio, kinesthetic). Applying diads is still difficult because of the large number of students and the limited hours of lessons so that focusing on student differences at each meeting is also ineffective. Learning which only focuses on differentiated learning results in learning objectives not being achieved.

In overcoming that obstacle, the teachers use the variation method. If method is not effective, the teacher can try another method that can be used so that the learning objectives are achieved by differentiated students. Another thing that teachers do is to provide the same learning model. And have not focused on one group of children. In other words, student worksheets are based on student ability levels.

Based on the result of interview, the obstacle in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum was similar to Darwisah (2020), reveal that Teacher inability to comprehend the fundamental framework and curriculum structures, limited time with complicated materials, difficulty developing lesson plans, difficulty utilizing a scientific approach, inability to utilize electronic media such as laptops and projectors, and inability to integrate education character into the teaching and learning process are some of the obstacles teachers face in implementing the 2013 curriculum. They argued that in order to get past those obstacles, they needed to know all of the curricula that are still in use today.

Facilities and infrastructure are also one of the factors that influence the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. Based on the results of the interviews, it was found that all schools that have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum already have adequate facilities and infrastructure that can support the successful implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. In line with the results of research conducted by Nur & Madkur (2014) shows that infrastructure facilities have a direct effect on the success of learning the 2013 curriculum. Schools are expected to have complete infrastructure so that teachers and students can be assisted in complete completeness of existing facilities in the form of teacher and student handbooks, learning media, buildings that are suitable for use and various types of resources and other school facilities. Through the completeness of facilities and infrastructure can increase motivation for teachers and students. Lack of infrastructure will make students experience a decrease in learning power.

CONCLUSION

The English teacher readiness in implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in teaching English at Junior High School in Padang are ready. It can be seen from indicator of the teacher readiness related to knowledge and skill to developed lesson plan, the English teachers motivation, the teachers' self-efficacy readiness and the teachers' commitment readiness showed that the final result is categorized in "ready, need a little improvement" teachers which average score 3,20 (Level 3) means that the teachers are ready to implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum eventhought need a little improvement. There are some obstacles that English teachers face in implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. In conducting lesson plan, the English teacher finds problems in formulating learning outcomes. In implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum in the classroom, the difficulty found is that there is differentiated learning where the differences in learning are according to the characteristics and abilities of students, so the teacher must fully recognize

how the characteristics of all students are so that they can adjust student learning abilities.

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