



## An Analysis of English Teachers' Challenges in Implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum at Sman 3 Solok Selatan

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### Abstract

This research was done to investigate the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing *Merdeka* curriculum at SMAN 3 Solok Selatan. To find out the answers, researcher used descriptive qualitative method with in-depth interview and documentation instrument were employed in this study. The participants of the study were three English teachers at SMAN 3 Solok Selatan. The result showed that there were five challenges faced by English teachers in implementing *Merdeka* curriculum. Those five challenges in implementing *Merdeka* curriculum were designing lesson plan, lesson implementation, using media, classroom management, and learning assessment. Through this research, it is expected the result from this finding can help the English teachers to cover the challenges in implementing *Merdeka* curriculum.

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## INTRODUCTION

The newest curriculum today is the *merdeka* curriculum or independent curriculum. The primary goal of developing this curriculum is to strengthen Indonesia's struggling educational system, which has been in crisis since COVID-19 (Marisa, 2021). Further studies conducted by Engzell (2021) and Bonal (2021) confirm that the Covid-19 pandemic causes significant learning loss and learning gap. According to Ministry of Education and Culture (2021), learning loss prevents Indonesian citizens from reaching their full potential in terms of literacy and numeracy. Thus, the new curriculum, *merdeka* Curriculum with its four main programs including: comprehensive USBN Assessment, national examination replaced with assessment, shortened lesson plan, and more flexible PPDB zoning was released by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology.

*Merdeka* curriculum is defined as a learning plan that provides opportunities for students to learn and show their natural talents in a calm, relaxed, enjoyable, and

stress-free environment (Ainia, 2020). The benefits of this curriculum include project-based learning, which helps students develop their soft skills and personalities in line with the Pancasila Profil Pelajar (Pancasila profile students), more focus on essential subjects like literacy and numeracy, and flexibility for teachers to adapt their lesson plans based on the needs of individual students. The main purposes of Profil Pelajar Pancasila are to maintain noble values and morals of the nation, readiness to become a citizen of the world, the embodiment social justice, as well as the achievement of competence 21st century (Nugrohadhi, 2022).

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 West Sumatra, there are 282 schools that have implemented the independent curriculum through the mobilizing school (*sekolah penggerak*) program from the PAUD-SMA/SMK level. This was conveyed by Sri Yulianti as the head of the teacher training center, when interviewed by Jefli Bridge, a reporter from the Haluan newspaper on Wednesday, 21 December 2022 (Bridge, 2022)

Therefore, the Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum can be applied as a preparatory curriculum. To implement this curriculum, schools must register and fill out a questionnaire about their readiness. The results of the questionnaire will determine the best alternative that can be used by schools. Education units are given the freedom to implement several sections and principles, but do not change the previously implemented curriculum. In the Independent Curriculum, teachers can provide subject matter according to the needs and abilities of students. It doesn't need to be given in an orderly manner. Teachers can plan lessons creatively based on their needs. The minimum passing score is also determined by the conditions of the student and the school. Other differences are Learning Outcomes, Learning Objective Flow, and twenty percent project-based learning process. Changing the curriculum from K13 is a challenge for teachers (Rizki, 2022).

The challenge of implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum is facing development technology in the era of industry 4.0 in high school, it is more about the implementation of learning among others are 1) demands for continuous improvement of teacher competence; 2) demands for the availability of adequate infrastructure; and 3) demands for the independence of educational institutions (Sinulingga, 2022). In addition, Arifa (2022) find several kinds of challenges in implementing *Merdeka* curriculum include; competency readiness, teacher's skill, mindset of educators as implementers of education, and readiness of infrastructure, facilities and infrastructure.

## METHODS

To complete this research, researchers used descriptive research methods. According to Mackey (2005), belongs to descriptive data that does not use statistical procedures. It is concerned with developing an explanation of a social phenomenon to assist us in understanding our social world in which we live. This research used interview as the instrumentation. The participants of this research were the English teacher of SMA N 3 Solok Selatan. The researchers chose three English teachers as

the sample. In this research, researcher used purposive sampling. Purposive sampling involves the researcher specifying the characteristics of the population of interest and locating individuals who meet those criteria (Christensen, 2008)

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***Research Finding***

The researchers have finished the research procedure through interview. It can be seen from the result of interview. The researcher interviewed three English teachers of SMAN 3 Solok Selatan on June 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Those teachers were teaching in grade X. The interview was carried out to find out the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing *Merdeka* curriculum at SMAN 3 Solok Selatan. There are five indicators of interview questions namely, designing lesson plan, lesson implementing, using media, classroom management, and learning assessment. The challenges faced by English teacher were:

#### **1. Teachers' Challenges in Designing the Lesson Plan of *Merdeka* Curriculum**

Based on the result of the interview that has been carried out, the researcher obtained some data regarding the challenge in designing lesson plans in the *Merdeka* curriculum. The challenge is that teachers must know in advance the extent of knowledge possessed by each student, so that each student gets treatment according to their abilities. This can be seen from the statements of teachers who were interviewed.

Teacher A said that the challenge that she felt was to make learning materials suitable for students, while students have different knowledge. I also have to make different lesson plans for each class, because each class has a different way of learning too. This statement was also supported by teacher B who stated that the challenge is because the modules we make must be according to the ability level of students. While our students have different levels of ability and have a different way of learning. The answer from teacher C is also not much different from teacher A and teacher B. She stated that the challenge is to determine whether the learning material is suitable for students or not. That's what we have to think about first. So, those students can get material or treatment that suits each individual.

From the three answers from the English teacher, the challenge faced by English teachers in designing lesson plan is they have to design activities and learning materials that suit the abilities of these different students. Each class has a different way of learning and understanding so that the teacher cannot just use one lesson plan for other classes. Hence, teachers have to make lesson plans for as many classes as they teach.

#### **2. Teachers' Challenges in Lesson Implementation**

The next challenge faced by English teachers after designing lesson plans is lesson implementation. Researchers found teacher challenges in implementing lessons, namely regarding time constraints. Thus, there are several indicators that cannot be conveyed in classroom. This can be seen from the statements given by the English teacher during the interview.

According to teacher A, the biggest challenge is limited time. Hence, all the learning steps that have been planned cannot be implemented properly. The

statement given by teacher A is also clearly supported by the statement given by teacher C. She stated that the most influential challenge is time. We cannot implement all the indicators in the modules we have designed. So there are several steps that we skip so that all the material is achieved.

While the answer from teacher B explained in more detail the challenge she felt when implementing the lesson she had previously designed. Teacher B said that the challenge is implementing it to students. Because students have different knowledge earlier. For students whose interest and ability are not in English or students who are low on motivation, that is a challenge for me. Hence, I need extra time to give them a further understanding. The statement from teacher B can be concluded that she needs a lot of time, so that the lesson she gives can be conveyed perfectly to each individual.

### **3. Teachers' Challenges in Using Media**

In this curriculum, teachers and students are required to be able to use technology as a learning medium. The challenge that researcher encountered in using media during the implementation of this *Merdeka* curriculum is that there are still many platforms that can be used as learning media that teachers cannot operate. The following are the results of interviews regarding the challenges faced by English teachers in using media.

Teacher A said that as we know that we have used this curriculum for one year. To be honest, there are still many learning platforms that I cannot use in class because they are still relatively new. That means teacher A feels challenged to be able to use this technology so that it can be used as a learning medium in the classroom. Additional information from the statement can be seen from teacher B is answer which stated that the challenge that is more pronounced in using the media is because there are still many students who cannot use the media. Thus, when using the media I have to teach the use of the media first. So it's wasting time."

In addition, the internet is also a challenge for teachers in using media during the teaching process. As stated by teacher C, the challenge she found was that the internet here was not very good, apart from that there are many good platforms that she could not use yet.

### **4. Teachers' Challenges in Classroom Management**

Based on the interview results the challenge faced by English teacher in classroom management is to motivate students in order to want to take part in learning until it is finished. It showed by the answers from the teacher. Teacher A stated that the biggest challenge is student motivation. When they entered this high school, most of their input was lacking in English, meaning that they did not understand the basic of English material. Meanwhile, we will continue the advanced material. If they do not understand, in the end they are not motivated and are not interested in taking English lessons in class, especially since this is not their everyday language. So, they look for excuses to leave class, such as permission to go to the toilet, canteen and so on.

Teacher B also gave an opinion related to teacher A with a slightly different delivery. She said that she felt challenge in classroom management if there is

material that is a little difficult, she find it difficult to manage them in class because their minds are not learning anymore. They are not interested in following the lesson. Furthermore, teacher C gave a response about the challenge that she found in classroom management. She said that student motivation is a challenge for teachers. Because to arouse student motivation the teacher must think about how learning is not monotonous. Teacher must use variants of media, so that students can be enthusiastic in learning.

### **5. Teachers' Challenges in Learning Assessment**

Here were the results of interviews with English teachers. The challenge that teacher A felt in conducting the assessment is the processing of assessment. Because the template used is different from the previous curriculum. In addition, the challenge is to give a description to each student according to their abilities, while she cannot know all students well because one class consists of 35 students with one meeting every week. With limited time she cannot recognize one by one from the students.

Statements like the above were also conveyed by teachers B and C based on the experience they had gained for one year using the *Merdeka* curriculum at SMAN 3 Solok Selatan. Teacher B said that she gets each student score from the process. From the process she can determine the score of students. The biggest challenge is the process. In the learning process she is constrained by time. Furthermore, according to teacher C, the challenge is about time. We cannot see the abilities and talents of students more deeply, moreover in this curriculum students are required to choose subjects that are in accordance with their majors in college later. It's a matter of time. Because there is not enough time for teachers to see students' abilities and talents in diagnostic tests which are only carried out once and formative, summative assessments which are only twice in one semester. Thus, it is rather difficult for teachers to give the right scores to students.

From the sources above it shows that the challenge for English teachers in conducting learning assessments is in processing grades and also having to recognize each student's abilities with limited time for English subjects.

### **Discussion**

Based on the findings above, we can discuss each of the indicators as follows;

#### **1. Teachers' Challenges in Designing the Lesson Plan of *Merdeka* Curriculum**

Lesson plan is one of the learning tools that must be made by the teacher before carrying out the learning process. From the results of the interview, the challenge faced by English teachers in designing lesson plan is they have to design activities and learning materials that suit the abilities of these different students. Because good or bad teachers in preparing lesson plan can be the reason for the success or failure of a lesson (Archana, 2017). Each class has a different way of learning and understanding, so that the teacher cannot use one lesson plan for other classes. Hence, teachers have to make lesson plans for many classes that they teach.

*Merdeka* curriculum is not much different from the 2013 curriculum. In the previous curriculum, a teacher compiled KI and KD, so in the *Merdeka* curriculum it was called CP, if previously it was called RPP, then the *Merdeka* curriculum called it

a teaching module. The challenge is when teachers develop their own learning objectives. Teachers are given independence, but in terms of ability there are still many teachers who are not ready (Arifa, 2022). It can be seen from the answer of teacher C. She said that the challenge is to determine whether the learning material is suitable for students or not. That's what we have to think about first. So, those students can get material or treatment that suits each individual.

## **2. Teachers' Challenges in Lesson Implementation**

The results of the interviews above showed that the challenge for English teachers in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum lesson plan is the existence of time constraints. Based on teacher C, the most influential challenge is time. We cannot implement all the indicators in the modules we have designed. Because in the *Merdeka* curriculum there is a project namely, project profile reinforcement *Pancasila* student. This activity is carried out by taking 30% of the total JP per year (Ministry of Education, 2022). Because of this time allocation there is a reduction in JP in each subject. Thus, there are several English teachers facing challenges in implementing the lesson plans that have been designed. Because of that, not all indicators are conveyed properly in class. That's why English teachers have to look for alternatives, so that all learning indicators are well conveyed to students.

In addition, teachers A and B also stated that the challenge in implementing the lesson plan was the limited time. Even though the lesson plan has been designed as well as possible and an estimated time per activity has been made, the conditions in the class are not in accordance with what has been designed in the lesson plan, because part of the time of main activities is always used for preparation and motivating student activities. This challenge was also found in previous research related to implementing lesson plans by Usman (2019), challenges in the implementation of learning consist of teacher difficulties in pre-activities such as preparation and motivating students to learn and connecting students' prior knowledge with the material being studied.

## **3. Teachers' Challenges in Using Media**

Based on teacher A and B, the challenge faced by teachers in using media is that teachers and students are not familiar with many media so they are challenged to be able to use various kinds of media so that classes are not boring. Because in this curriculum, teacher teaching tools don't have to only come from books. The teaching tools in the *Merdeka* Curriculum use textbooks, non-text books, teaching modules, project modules to strengthen the *Pancasila* student profile, and educational unit operational curriculum platforms. Therefore the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum certainly requires supporting facilities and infrastructure (Arifa, 2022). At this time there are many media that can be used by teachers to teach in class both online and offline. Based on the interview transcripts by teacher C, it can be concluded that the challenges faced by teachers in using media are that there are still many platforms that teachers cannot use. The use of media in online form is also a challenge for teachers because of the unstable internet network.

#### **4. Teachers' Challenges in Classroom Management**

Based on the findings, the challenges faced by teachers in classroom management are motivating students to stay in class following learning until it is finished. Because most students are not interested in learning English, especially since this is not their daily language. This statement was made by teachers A and B. They said that the biggest challenge was student motivation, because most of them are not interested in learning English. So, in the classroom the teacher must be able to motivate students not to leave the classroom during class hours.

Furthermore, teacher C stated that student motivation is a challenge for teacher. Thus, teacher must think about how learning is not monotonous, use different of media in order to make students enthusiastic in learning English. From this statement, it can be concluded that in this curriculum the teacher is not only as a teacher, but must also be a parent, coach, and also a facilitator for students. In the *Merdeka* Curriculum, there is a change in the function of educators who originally taught with a uniform approach or one size fits all, to become someone who is able to create students as lifelong independent learners. In this case, the teacher must become a mentor, facilitator, or coach in active project-based learning activities (Marisa, 2021). Teachers must encourage the students to ask and argue or give their opinion and adjust the subject matter with the speed and ability of students to learn. The results of the interviews show that the teacher's challenge in classroom management is to motivate students to want to take part in learning until it is finished.

#### **5. Teachers' Challenges in Learning Assessment**

Based on the statement conveyed by teacher C in the interview, the challenge encountered in the learning assessment is that the teacher cannot see the talents and abilities of each individual only in a meeting once a week. Thus, in general student scores are obtained from test scores and just being active in the classroom activities. According to Usman (2019) the challenge in the learning assessment consisted of teachers' difficulty to cover all aspects of assessment. The students' condition and limited time were the contributing factors that make the teachers difficult to cover all aspects of assessment in the area of students' knowledge and skill.

From the others sources showed that the challenge for English teachers in conducting learning assessments is in processing grades and also having to recognize each student's abilities with limited time for English subjects.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the research that has been examined by researcher, the conclusions are as follows:

1. Teachers' Challenges in Designing the Lesson Plan of *Merdeka* Curriculum  
The challenge faced by English teachers in designing lesson plan is they have to design activities and learning materials that suit the abilities of these different students.
2. Teachers' Challenges in Lesson Implementation  
The challenge for English teachers in implementing the independent curriculum lesson plan is the existence of time constraints.

3. Teachers' Challenges in Using Media

The challenges faced by teachers in using media are that there are still many platforms that teachers cannot use.

4. Teachers' Challenges in Classroom Management

The teacher's challenge in classroom management is to motivate students to want to take part in learning until it is finished.

5. Teachers' Challenges in Learning Assessment

The challenge for English teachers in conducting learning assessments is in processing grades and also having to recognize each student's abilities with limited time for English subjects.

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