

Teaching English Based on the Application of the Merdeka Curriculum at the MAN 1 Praya

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Abstract: This study seeks to explain how English instruction is implemented through the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Praya, Central Lombok. The participants included an English teacher, students, and the school principal. The research utilized both primary and secondary data gathered from three main sources: an English teacher who taught classes under the Merdeka Curriculum, students who experienced learning through this curriculum, and the principal. The researcher acted as the primary research instrument. The findings reveal several important points. First, to prepare for the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, English teachers participated in training sessions, workshops, and professional guidance programs. They also designed instructional materials aligned with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. Second, in classroom practice, teaching activities were organized into three stages: opening activities, core learning activities, and closing activities. Third, teachers conducted assessments based on the Merdeka Curriculum framework. However, challenges emerged, particularly in adapting their mindset due to the coexistence of two curricula, which led to differentiated instruction and additional administrative demands. As a solution, teachers attended workshops and engaged in collaborative knowledge-sharing to strengthen their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

English has become a global lingua franca and functions as an international medium of communication. Many countries use English as either a first or second language, and millions of people rely on it to exchange information in daily interactions. Its widespread use in business, government, education, and media has strengthened its position worldwide. In education, teachers play a crucial role in transmitting knowledge and skills. Teaching involves guiding students toward essential content while encouraging critical thinking and intellectual growth so they can develop into competent and thoughtful adults (Hasanova et al., 2021).

In Indonesia, teaching English aims to enable learners to communicate effectively in spoken and written forms according to their social contexts. It can occur in formal institutions such as

schools and universities, as well as in informal courses. Within language education, the curriculum is fundamental because it directs learning objectives and instructional processes. Historically, the term “curriculum” derives from Greek and Latin roots related to a racecourse, symbolizing a structured path toward educational goals (Hamdi, 2023). Modern perspectives view curriculum not only as lesson plans but as the entire set of learning experiences within and beyond school settings (Olusegun et al., 2022).

Indonesia’s curriculum has evolved over time, including the 2013 Curriculum, which emphasized character building, creativity, and integrated knowledge (Madina & Kardena, 2021). This framework has now been revised into the Merdeka Curriculum, designed to improve educational quality and respond to contemporary societal and technological demands. “Merdeka,” meaning independent, reflects a flexible approach that allows students greater autonomy in shaping their learning paths (Agus, 2023). It seeks to overcome the rigidity of traditional systems by encouraging innovation and personalized learning.

According to Candrasari (2022), the Merdeka Curriculum promotes creativity among teachers and students. Officially introduced online on February 11, 2022, it is implemented gradually depending on each school’s readiness. While schools may still adopt the simplified 2013 Curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum is offered as an alternative reform initiative. Preliminary observations at MAN 1 Praya through questionnaires and interviews revealed that the Merdeka Curriculum began on July 1, 2023, initially applied only in Grade X (Phase E). However, challenges persist. Teachers are still adapting to differentiated instruction, and diagnostic assessments are not consistently conducted. Learning materials are categorized into varied levels of difficulty, requiring educators to tailor instruction to diverse student needs. These conditions create obstacles in teaching English effectively under the Merdeka Curriculum, motivating further investigation into the issues and challenges faced at MAN 1 Praya.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. According to Eze (2023), qualitative research aims to gather non-numerical information to develop deeper understanding and insights. It does not rely on statistical procedures and may use semi-structured or unstructured formats. In qualitative studies, data are generally expressed in words rather than numbers (Busetto, 2020). Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on phenomena that cannot be measured quantitatively (Aspers & Corte, 2019).

The research was carried out at MAN 1 Praya, involving English teachers, students, and the school principal as participants. Both primary and secondary data were utilized. Primary data refer to information collected directly by the researcher for the first time, while secondary data consist of existing materials compiled by other sources. Primary data were obtained through interviews, observations, questionnaires, and surveys. Secondary data were derived from books, academic journals, government documents, online sources, and institutional records (Ajayi, 2023). The three main data sources included English teachers implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, students experiencing the curriculum, and the school leadership. The researcher functioned as the primary research instrument (Kamaludin, 2022).

Data collection involved interviews, questionnaires, and observations (Ivypanda, 2020). The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, focusing on actual field conditions rather than statistical calculations (LP2M, Medan Area University, 2020). The findings are presented narratively. The qualitative analysis process consisted of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions (Al Mahdi, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching English through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has proven effective in renewing and strengthening the role of teachers by providing greater flexibility in instruction. Teacher autonomy in managing the learning process reflects the core principle of independence in meaningful learning. This curriculum offers broad opportunities for educators to adapt teaching strategies to students' characteristics and needs (Hidayat et al., 2023). At MAN 1 Praya, the Merdeka Curriculum has been applied since July 2022, enabling schools, teachers, and learners to develop their potential in line with students' abilities and achievements. Education plays a vital role in human liberation and personal development (Mahur et al., 2019). Problem posing education supports freedom by transforming restrictive conditions into more humane learning environments (Pouwels, 2019). This indicates that education is not limited to cognitive growth but also fosters other dimensions of human development. Findings show that the Merdeka Curriculum allows students to explore their talents and capacities during the learning process. Therefore, enforcing uniform demands on students with diverse abilities is considered inappropriate. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Praya covers all subjects, particularly English language learning. Although English instruction under this curriculum has been implemented quite well, several challenges remain during its application. Nevertheless, the process continues to progress positively. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to analyze preparation, implementation, assessment, challenges, and solutions in teaching English under the Merdeka Curriculum.

Preparation of English Teachers

Teacher preparation involves several aspects. One key factor is participation in training and professional guidance. Training is a systematic effort to improve teachers' skills and competencies to meet educational objectives (Malik et al., 2020). Guidance supports continuous self-development and professional growth (Liling, 2020). Prior to implementation, English teachers at MAN 1 Praya attended training sessions, workshops, and mentoring programs organized by the government and other institutions. In addition, teachers shared experiences and knowledge through subject-teacher forums (MGMP) to strengthen their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum. Another important aspect is the preparation of learning tools. Learning tools include teaching materials, modules, and instructional plans that support effective learning (Arvianto & Ardhana, 2019). Teachers prepared essential documents such as the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP), Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), Learning Objective Flow (ATP), and teaching modules. Although terminology differs from the 2013 Curriculum, the substance remains similar, requiring teachers to thoroughly understand the new framework.

Implementation of English Teaching

English instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum consists of three stages. The initial activity serves as an opening to connect students' prior experiences with the lesson objectives and to build readiness and motivation (Hani, 2017). The core activity involves interactive learning processes where students engage with materials through inquiry, discussion, and differentiated instruction. Teachers encourage students to identify problems, discuss solutions, practice language skills, and present their work. Finally, the closing activity focuses on evaluation and reflection. Teachers invite students to summarize learning outcomes and conclude the lesson by introducing material for the next meeting (Idrus, 2019).

Assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum

Evaluating learning outcomes is a crucial component of instructional practice. Several interconnected concepts underpin this process, including assessment, measurement, and evaluation. Assessment broadly refers to various techniques used to determine students' performance and achievement, while measurement involves assigning numerical values to characteristics or abilities (Am, 2018). Under the Merdeka Curriculum, students are granted greater autonomy in learning, which also influences assessment practices. At MAN 1 Praya, evaluation methods include practical tasks, written examinations, and oral tests. Assignments are adapted to learners' abilities and needs; therefore, students may achieve different results while still working within the same material scope and objectives.

English Teaching through the Merdeka Curriculum

Implementing a new curriculum presents challenges, as teachers must adjust their instructional strategies to align with updated standards (Rahim et al., 2021; Pertiwi et al., 2022). The transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum has required adaptation at MAN 1 Praya. The effectiveness of its implementation largely depends on teachers' capacity to manage these changes. One major obstacle is difficulty in shifting established mindsets and habits. Teachers sometimes revert to previous teaching or assessment models, leading to a blend of two curricula and less effective instruction. Additionally, differentiated learning has not yet been fully optimized. Although teachers attempt to adjust methods to students' varied characteristics, selecting suitable models and media remains challenging. Another issue concerns the preparation of multiple learning tools, especially since different grade levels use different curricula.

Teachers' Solutions

To address these challenges, teachers enhance their understanding of innovative teaching methods and increase creativity in designing instructional tools. Participation in internal and external workshops strengthens their competence in implementing differentiated learning. Furthermore, sharing knowledge with colleagues particularly through professional forums supports consistent curriculum application and helps resolve emerging problems collaboratively.

CONCLUSION

Implementing English instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum at MAN 1 Praya has revealed various challenges and obstacles arising from multiple factors. These issues relate to the stages of preparation, implementation, and assessment, as well as the strategies employed to address emerging difficulties. Teachers have also developed several solutions to respond to these challenges in applying the Merdeka Curriculum. First, teacher preparation plays a crucial role. English teachers prepared themselves by participating in training sessions and professional guidance programs to deepen their understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum framework. They also developed essential instructional documents, including the School Operational Curriculum (KOSP), Learning Outcomes (CP), Learning Objectives (TP), and teaching modules aligned with curriculum requirements.

Second, the implementation of English teaching follows three main phases: opening activities, core learning activities, and closing activities. These stages structure classroom instruction in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum principles. Third, assessment practices include assignments, written examinations, oral tests, and other evaluation forms designed to measure students' learning progress. However, applying the Merdeka Curriculum has required

teachers to adjust their instructional approaches to meet new standards. Key challenges include difficulty in changing long-established teaching mindsets, suboptimal implementation of differentiated learning, and the additional workload of preparing instructional tools for both the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum simultaneously.

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