

THE PERCEPTION OF THE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON THE ADOPTION OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM AT MTS MUHAMMADIYAH 02 PEKANBARU

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates English teachers' perceptions of the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum at MTs Muhammadiyah 02 Pekanbaru. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach with an evaluation research design, data were gathered through interviews and questionnaires involving English teachers as key participants. The findings indicate that teachers generally perceive the Merdeka Curriculum positively, highlighting its flexibility and potential to enhance meaningful English language learning. However, several challenges were also identified, including limited understanding of the curriculum structure, insufficient training, and inadequate digital literacy and technological infrastructure, particularly among senior teachers. Despite these challenges, teachers view the Merdeka Curriculum as a progressive framework that promotes inclusive, creative, and student-centered learning. They also acknowledge that successful implementation requires additional preparation, adaptation, and continuous professional development. Overall, the study concludes that while the Merdeka Curriculum presents opportunities for educational improvement, it demands sustained institutional support and teacher capacity-building to ensure effective application.

Keywords : Merdeka Curriculum, Teacher Perception, Adoption Of Merdeka Curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia (Kemendikbudristek), led by Nadiem Makarim, introduced three curriculum options for schools: the 2013 Curriculum (K13), the Emergency Curriculum, and the Prototype Curriculum. The Emergency Curriculum simplified the 2013 Curriculum to support online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, while the Prototype Curriculum, later known as the Merdeka Curriculum, was designed as a competency-based framework emphasizing project-based learning to support learning recovery.

The Merdeka Curriculum emerged as a response to educational challenges caused by the pandemic, focusing on flexibility, essential learning content, and the development of students' character through the Pancasila Student Profile. It grants teachers and schools greater autonomy in designing learning experiences that accommodate students' interests and potential. Since its national rollout in 2022, the Merdeka Curriculum has been gradually adopted across various education levels, including elementary, junior, and senior secondary schools.

At MTs Muhammadiyah 02 Pekanbaru, the Merdeka Curriculum began implementation in March 2023, including in English language instruction. However, the adoption process has encountered several obstacles. Many teachers have not yet received official training, guidance materials, or adequate exposure to the Merdeka Belajar platform, which is essential for professional development under the new curriculum. Preliminary interviews and questionnaire data indicate that several English teachers still lack a full understanding of how to operationalize the curriculum in classroom practice. Common challenges include difficulties in utilizing learning media, limited digital competence, and continued reliance on traditional teaching methods.

Previous research, such as Alfina (2021), explored English teachers' perceptions of the 2013 Curriculum in MAN 1 and SMA Muhammadiyah 2 Bandar Lampung, focusing on teachers' perceptions of its strengths and weaknesses. While similar in examining teachers' perceptions, the present study differs by focusing on the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum in an Islamic junior high school context (MTs Muhammadiyah) and specifically in English language teaching. This study aims to explore English teachers' perceptions, challenges, and readiness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at MTs Muhammadiyah 02 Pekanbaru.

METHODOLOGY

This research is qualitative research descriptive analysis. With this type of research Evaluation Research, this research was carried out after other research and carried out in the form of new research and also exploration. The purpose of this type of research is to evaluate the success, benefits, uses, and feasibility of a program. Creswell (2016) stated that qualitative research is a type of research that explores and understands the meaning of a number of individuals or groups of people originating from social problems. Qualitative research can generally be used for research on peoples, lives, history, behavior, concepts, or phenomena, social problems, and so on. One of the reasons of the researcher for using a qualitative approach is the researcher want to know the teacher perceptions of the Merdeka curriculum.

The participant from this research was two persons of the English teachers at MTs Muhammadiyah 02 as a participant in the results. In this research, the researcher used two types of techniques in collecting the data. Two types of techniques in collecting the data were Questionnaire and Interview.

Data analysis techniques are efforts made by working with data, organizing data, sorting it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for and finding what is important and what to learn and deciding what can be told to others. Then the technique data collection the researcher used by Milles and Hubberman model: 1) Data collection, 2) Data reduction, 3) Data presentation, 4) Drawing conclusions.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Result

1. The English Teachers' Perception on the Adoption of Merdeka Curriculum

The data takes from questionnaire by teacher 1 and teacher 2, found that:

1. Teachers Perception and Understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum

Table 1. Teacher Questionnaire Answer (1-15)

NO	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
1	3	3
2	4	3
3	1	2
4	3	3
5	1	2
6	2	3
7	1	3
8	3	2
9	1	2
1	1	3
1	4	3
1	4	3
1	4	3

1	1	2
1	1	2

It can be concluded that the results of the additional questionnaire regarding the percentage of teachers regarding the Merdeka curriculum are that their curriculum can improve language learning, in the views of the two teachers are slightly different. Teacher 1 is more vocal that the independent curriculum can provide better learning outcomes, such as developing students' interests, talents and abilities, while teacher 2 answered more neutrally because the independent curriculum has not been implemented in his class.

2. English teachers' perception on the Adoption of Merdeka Curriculum

Table 2. Teacher Questionnaire Answer (16-25)

NO	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
16	4	3
17	4	3
18	3	3
19	1	2
20	1	2
21	3	1
22	2	1
23	4	3
24	3	1
25	3	1

Based on the results of the answers from the two teachers above, it can be seen that the two teachers have different opinions about the adaption of Merdeka curriculum that in the implementation of the independent curriculum in the classroom, teachers teach learning according to students' interests so that they can find out the potential interests, talents, and abilities of students. Although in finding references for implementing the curriculum is limited.

3. English teachers' perception of difficulties in adoption the Merdeka curriculum.

Table 3. Teacher Questionnaire Answer (25-30)

NO	Teacher 1	Teacher 2
26	3	2
27	4	2
28	2	2
29	2	2
30	3	2

Based on the results of the answers from the two teachers above, it can be seen that the teachers have more difficulty developing teaching materials and taking more time to understand the material because, as explained in chapter one, teachers are not given training so they need more time to implement learning in accordance with the independent curriculum.

2. The Difficulties Faced by Teacher in Adoption The Merdeka Curriculum

a. Teacher knowledge

1) Teacher knowledge of Merdeka curriculum

In this study, not all teachers understood the Merdeka curriculum because the Merdeka curriculum had not been implemented in every class. In addition, that teacher understanding was only limited to the basic principles of the Merdeka curriculum. Then they said that the Merdeka Curriculum made teachers freer to develop materials according to student characteristics and also students are freer to express themselves. The teacher's description can be seen as follows:

Teacher 1: "Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum where teachers are free to develop

materials and children are also free to express themselves".

Teacher 2: "a curriculum that emphasizes teacher freedom in developing teaching materials according to the characteristics of students".

The Merdeka curriculum gives freedom and makes it easier for educators to apply deeper learning, in accordance with the needs of students, and focus on strengthening character. And the principles of Merdeka curriculum they focus on essential content, character development and more flexible.

The concept of Merdeka learning basically aims to make students, parents and the community ready to face various conditions in the future (Permanasari, 2022).

2) Teacher knowledge of the purpose of Merdeka curriculum.

Both teachers expressed the same opinion where they said that the purpose of the Merdeka curriculum is more contextual. The teacher's description can be seen as follows:

Teacher 1: "If the Merdeka curriculum has more contextual learning objectives, which are useful for society and exist in the real world".

Teacher 2: "The goal of the Merdeka curriculum is to realize holistic and contextual student".

The Merdeka curriculum has several main objectives that form the basis for changes in education in Indonesia; one of the main objectives of the Merdeka curriculum is to increase the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of students and local. Another goal of the Merdeka Curriculum is to improve the quality of education in Indonesia. By giving schools autonomy to design their own curriculum, it is hoped that education can focus more on developing student competencies. The Merdeka Curriculum also aims to improve teachers' ability to design and implement the curriculum. By giving teachers a more active role in this process, it is hoped that they will become more effective educational leaders. Then by giving schools the freedom to design the curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum is also expected to encourage innovation in education. Schools can create more creative, interesting, and effective learning approaches.

b. Teacher readiness

1) Teacher planning

In preparing teachers to implement the Merdeka curriculum, according to one teacher, it is more about the basic principles of the Merdeka curriculum. As described below:

Teacher 1: "The preparation is more about preparing materials and choosing the right strategy for each type of student".

Teacher 2: "Before preparing and implementing it, teachers must understand the basic principles of the Merdeka learning curriculum, such as independence and collaboration".

A teacher planning or teaching plan is a document that outlines the structure and details of a single session. A good teaching plan is a comprehensive write-up of the step-by-step teaching methods, the estimated duration of each segment of teaching, and the materials and resources needed for the session. A teaching plan also includes the key questions that reveal misinformation or larger misconceptions about the topic, the questions that will generate discussions or analyses, the predicted answers a professor could provide, and possible contingency plans when tangential questions or conversations arise.

2) Teacher adoption

As is known, the curriculum has been established for more than a year, then the two teachers expressed their readiness to implement the Merdeka curriculum, although not completely, because it has been policies from the government.

Teacher 1: "The readiness is around 60% because teachers have not had any special training for implementing the Merdeka curriculum, for private teachers".

Teacher 2: "yes".

A teaching plan is a document that outlines the structure and details of a single session. A good teaching plan is a comprehensive write-up of the step-by-step teaching methods, the estimated duration of each segment of teaching, and the materials and resources needed for the session.

3) Teacher assessment

In learning evaluation, teachers conduct evaluations together with students and teachers in summative form.

Teacher 1: “Yes, there is, in the learning process and final assessment to measure the achievement of CP and ATP in summative form”.

Teacher 2: “yes”

Teacher Assessment refers to the process of evaluating prospective teachers based on defined standards and criteria to ensure the quality of their teaching abilities. It plays a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences and requires the development of effective strategies to enhance the quality of assessments in teacher education.

Teacher assessment literacy has been recognized as a key component of effective teaching and learning, research has continued to point out how teachers demonstrate low levels of assessment literacy and tend to perceive themselves as not confident in assessing student learning (DeLuca and Bellara, 2013; Poskitt, 2014; Stiggins, 2017).

c. The Differences between the previous curriculum and Merdeka curriculum.

The two teachers have a little similar opinion on the Merdeka curriculum and the 2013 curriculum. According to one of them, the Merdeka curriculum places more emphasis on flexibility and freedom in compiling the school-level curriculum, whereas in the 2013 curriculum, learning uses more thematic approach.

Teacher 1: “The difference is that in the Merdeka curriculum, children are more practical, and in the 2013 curriculum, learning is more thematic”.

Teacher 2: “The Merdeka curriculum emphasizes flexibility and freedom in compiling the school-level curriculum, while the 2013 curriculum adopts a thematic approach”.

In the 2013 curriculum, differentiated learning has not been implemented as a learning strategy or method. However, in the Merdeka Curriculum, a different strategy is required in assessment. In the 2013 Curriculum, assessment or assessment is divided into three, namely attitude, knowledge, and psychomotor values. Each aspect of the assessment is assessed separately. However, in the Merdeka Curriculum, assessments are integrated into one value that includes these three aspects. That is, the assessment no longer separates attitude, knowledge, and psychomotor values, but combines them into one overall value.

d. Pedagogical Practices

I. Instructional strategies

The learning approach is a conceptual framework or teacher's perspective in carrying out the learning process. And teacher has differences of opinion;

Teacher 1: “The strategies are like group work, PBL, PBP, INQUIRY and others”.

Teacher 2: “differentiation approach”.

The approach to learning English in the Merdeka Curriculum uses a differentiation approach and a learning model based on contextual and constructivism. In addition, learning English in the Merdeka Curriculum also utilizes digital technology, and the teaching approach uses group work, PBL, PBP, inquiry, which are included in the differentiation approach.

e. The difficulties during the preparation of the lesson plan for Merdeka curriculum.

In the difficulties faced by teachers in preparing this lesson plan, one teacher did not answer because he did not teach using the Merdeka curriculum, while according to the opinion of other teachers, said that the difficulties faced were in the large number of teaching

materials prepared. As described below:

Teacher 1: “Yes, there are many teaching materials to collect, even though there is only one lesson plan, the teacher must prepare more teaching materials”.

Teacher 2: -

Teachers are faced difficulties when preparing lesson planning, namely when analyzing the Learning Outcomes to be achieved by students because they are made per phase, then formulating them in the form of Learning Objectives (TP) and breast feeding them in the form of Learning Objectives Flow (ATP). Not only that, teachers who cannot use technology well will have difficulty in making lesson plans.

f. Teacher Behavior

1. Teachers step used

All teachers apply learning according to students' learning styles, although not completely. Like the answers of the two teachers described below.

Teacher 1: “Yes, learning styles are applied as much as 50%, because of the difficulty of too many students in the classroom, and the teacher's skills are still lacking from what is desired”.

Teacher 2: “yes”

In general, learning style is an overall pattern that gives direction to learning and teaching. Learning style can also be described as a set of factors, behaviors, and attitudes that facilitate learning for an individual in a particular situation, such as kinesthetic, visual, auditory and other learning styles. The application of learning based on student learning styles is an effort by teachers to adjust teaching methods with students' needs. The goal is to create an inclusive and effective learning environment.

g. Learning outcomes change.

On improving student learning outcomes, after implementing the Merdeka curriculum teachers assume that it does provide a little change because it is constrained so that it is not too involved in the changes, it's just that now students seem braver in expressing their abilities.

Teacher 1: “there is a little change, because there are many obstacles so the changes are less visible. However, for now the children are more courageous to express their abilities”.

Teacher 2: “not yet known”

Learning outcomes are measurable statements that articulate at the outset what students should know, be able to do, or be valued for as a result of taking a course or completing a program (also called Flipped Course Design).

It should be underlined that the teacher sample used was 2 teachers, one of whom had implemented the Merdeka curriculum in his/her class, while the other teacher had not implemented the Merdeka curriculum, because the school only implemented the Merdeka curriculum in the seventh grade. So maybe the answer of one of the teachers was not satisfactory in this sample collection.

Discussion

Based on the result of the research, the teacher's perception of the Merdeka curriculum is that not all teachers understand the Merdeka curriculum because the Merdeka curriculum has not been implemented in every class. And that understanding is only limited to the basic principles of the Merdeka curriculum. In line with research conducted by Febrianingsih and Ramadan (2023), shows that teachers still lack understanding regarding the structure of the Merdeka curriculum and still need training related to the preparation of teaching modules, learning assessments and still need readiness of facilities and infrastructure to support success in implementing the Merdeka curriculum. Teachers still do not have a clear picture

regarding the adoption of this curriculum

There are also difficulties that teachers face when implementing this Merdeka curriculum learning, such as when searching for and understanding material takes time, with different teaching methods also making teachers take time to be able to understand and adapt how to convey it to students, and sources of material that do not have to come from books can be from the internet, only other obstacles are also due to network constraints or there are also old teachers who are not good at using gadgets so they mix it with traditional learning styles or old learning styles. Other difficulties are also when teachers have to prepare lesson plans which are said to be few and easy, but there are other additions such as student learning reports which sometimes take longer to be able to find material for the next day's lesson. In line with research conducted by Windayanti et al. (2023), shows that the difficulties for teachers in implementing the Merdeka curriculum are teachers' understanding of the Merdeka curriculum, about knowledge, assessment, and minimal teaching materials.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research carried out at MTs Muhammadiyah 02 Pekanbaru, the researcher concluded what has been discussed in the previous chapter as follows: (1) Teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the independent curriculum can have a positive impact. Because teachers are more flexible in teaching and organizing more inclusive learning, so that teachers are more competent in teaching. And the independent curriculum also provides flexibility for teachers to develop materials according to student characteristics, so that students can also develop their abilities. (2) The difficulties faced by teachers are that the independent curriculum has just been implemented, teachers have not been given counseling and training on how to implement the independent curriculum, so teachers must be independent in finding out how the learning process, teaching materials, which require more time to be implemented.

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