

English Teachers' Perception on the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at Private Vocational High School

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ABSTRACT

Curriculum is a set of plans and tools to establish the objectives, subject matter, and curriculum material as well as the learning activities to be carried out in order to achieve particular educational goals. This research was conducted to ascertain English teachers' perception of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in one of the vocational high schools, called Centers of Excellence (SMK PK). The researcher used a descriptive qualitative method as a research design, and data obtained through observation and interview. The subjects were four English teachers. This research is focused on the following six areas of implementation Merdeka Curriculum: 1) Understanding of subject 2) Content administration reduction in MBKM 3) Learning process and P5 in MBKM 4) Assessment 5) Teacher experience in MBKM 6) Obstacles. The results of the research found that the Merdeka curriculum in one of the vocational high schools had been implemented. However, an obstacle arose related to teacher are still adapting to the new term in the Merdeka curriculum. The teachers are unable to manage time effectively in the learning process and have limited references. The teachers must provide handling during the administration of the evaluation because the students are different, resulting in less engaged students for whom the teacher is only a facilitator. Other problems included teachers who rarely utilized the Merdeka curriculum's assessment methods. Additionally, the English teacher has a way to overcome some of the obstacles and make sure the Merdeka curriculum succeeds.

Keywords; *Implementations, Merdeka Curriculum, Teachers' Perceptions*

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INTRODUCTION

In the field of education, the word "curriculum" is widely used to describe how education is structured. The nation's curriculum is essential for education since it will explain its way of life and retain its identity (Kusuma, 2021). A set of plans and agreements known as a curriculum establishes the objectives, subject matter, and curriculum material as well as the learning activities to be carried out in order to achieve particular educational goals (Muhson, 2022).

The Merdeka curriculum is a suitable curriculum that takes intellectual freedom into account. The Ministry of Education and Culture decided on the Merdeka curriculum to provide ability-based learning modifications (Galuh Anggita Damayanti, 2022). One of this curriculum's key elements that promotes learning recovery is project-based learning for the improvement of soft skills and character in line with the Pancasila students' profile. So that you have adequate

time to thoroughly learn reading and numeracy, focus on the essentials. The teachers have more freedom to modify the curriculum in accordance with each student's needs, talents, and environmental factors in the classroom (Ujang Cepi Barlian et al., 2022).

Schools that are prepared to resume instruction from 2022 to 2024 due to the pandemic should use the Merdeka Curriculum (Ahmad, 2022). However, it seems like teachers are having trouble putting it into practice. One of the discrepancies between the government's needs and teachers' expectations is that, while the government wants this autonomous curriculum to improve the teaching and learning process, it appears that teachers still know nothing about it. This can occur when the teachers don't properly grasp the autonomous curriculum's core idea (Saputra, 2019). The implementation of the new curriculum, including the development of teaching modules, the planning of learning plans, and the progression of learning outcomes, learning objectives, flow of learning (CP, TP, and ATP), may cause teachers to lose some of their understanding of the subject matter. Because teachers and students must re-adapt to the new curriculum, this curriculum shift also has an effect. Despite the fact that the curriculum has been updated, teachers continue to have trouble adopting the Merdeka curriculum. Regarding

those aspects, this study is raising questions:

1. How is the English Teachers' Perceptions on the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Private Vocational High School?
2. What are the Obstacles on the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Private Vocational High School?

RESEARCH METHOD

In this research apply descriptive qualitative research (Field Research), "Qualitative research is a method for examining and comprehending an individual's or a group's interpretation of a social or human situation (Cresswell, 2014, p. 32)". The topic in this research is the English Teachers' Perception on the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. The subjects that were included in this research is are four English teachers from private vocational high schools. The data for this research will be teachers' perceptions and their personal perceptions. To collect the data, this research used observation, interviews, and documentation as the instrument. Meanwhile, to analyze the data using data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

In this section, the researcher presents the results of data collection

conducted through observations and interviews. The researcher discusses the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum as well as the obstacles in teachers' perceptions.

1. English Teachers' Perception on the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

a. Understanding of Subjects'

The data collected through interviews showed that all participants knew the term Freedom to Learn or Merdeka Curriculum. All teachers consider Merdeka Learning as a curriculum that provides more flexible for teachers and students learning in terms of method, place, and time. Not that teachers and students can be free without guidelines on the contrary, students and teachers have full rights to choose what methods and materials are suitable to be applied by taking into account the abilities of students such as situations, needs and conditions. Here are some of the teacher's statement regarding Merdeka Curriculum:

(T-D): *"Persepsi saya tentang merdeka belajar sangatlah baik. Saya merasa kurikulum merdeka sesuai perkembangan jaman. Kurikulum sebelumnya sudah baik dan lebih baik dengan adanya kurikulum merdeka ini. Guru diberikan kesempatan untuk memilih materi sesuai kebutuhan*

murid pada suatu instansi C sesuai tempat mengajar guru tersebut".

The researcher discovered from Teacher "D" statement that the Merdeka of learning is seen as very positive. Teacher "D" believed that the curriculum was develop of the times and that teachers had the freedom to select their own instructional materials based on the demands of their students. It is also revealed that the Merdeka curriculum was created as a more flexible framework for a curriculum centered on essential content, depending on the needs and skills of students and teachers who were given the confidence to carry out Merdeka learning (Nurliani.,et al, 2022). On the other hand, three other interviewees explained that the Merdeka curriculum helps teachers in terms of teachers are given the opportunity to choose material according to students' abilities.

(T-C): *"Persepsi saya Merdeka belajar itu lebih bagus daripada K13 sebelumnya, karena disitu guru diberikan kebebasan untuk menentukan materi apa saja yang diberikan oleh peserta didik sesuai dengan kemampuan dari peserta didik. Selain itu kurikulum merdeka ini lebih kreatif, mandiri, dan inovatif"*.

Teacher "C" also added,

Merdeka Learning encourages teachers and students to grow creative, independent and innovative. In short, students must have a sense of independence to learn. However, this independence will not happen achieved if the teachers themselves fail to understand the concept of Freedom to Learn. This statement supported by (Nurlisa et al., 2019) that Merdeka learning can be interpreted as independent thinking, where teachers and students are given the freedom to innovate in creating fun, independent, and creative learning.

Based on the data above, it can be concluded that the teachers at the SMK agree with the existence of a Merdeka curriculum. The teachers respond positively because the Merdeka curriculum provides freedom or is more flexible. The teachers also state that the Merdeka curriculum is better than K13, because the Merdeka curriculum is more creative, independent, and innovative.

b. Content Administration Reduction in MBKM

Lesson plans can be simplified by the modified one-sheet RPP policy, which will free up teachers to focus more on designing and evaluating the learning process. There are no fixed rules, claims the (Mendikbud) the

Ministry of Education and Culture. The rules for lesson plan creation for teachers. Insofar as it is efficient and student-centered, there won't be any issues. In order to successfully accomplish the aims, the thoughts are organized in line with the needs, objectives, and conditions of the students.

All teachers stated that the teachers already knew the lesson plans. The teacher too explained briefly that this new form of RPP lightened their burden. However, there is one teacher who is not suitable for the one-sheet RPP to be applied to. Because the teaching module must involve several important points, such as the explanation of Pancasila Students Profile (P5) and the selection of teaching methods:

(T-D): *“Menurut saya RPP yang disederhanakan kurang cocok untuk diterapkan dalam kurikulum merdeka. Hal tersebut dikarenakan modul ajar harus menyangkut beberapa poin penting seperti penjelasan profil pelajar Pancasila, penjelasan pemilihan metode mengajar”*.

The researchers can infer from Teacher "D" statement that Teacher "D" is not a suitable option for a reduced lesson plan to be used in the

Merdeka curriculum. This is due to the fact that the teaching module must cover a number of crucial topics, such as an explanation of the Pancasila student profile and an explanation of the choice of teaching methodology materials. This is supported by research that shows teachers are required to be able to create lesson plans for Merdeka Learning in compliance with relevant rules. Teachers are expected to be able to create lesson plans correctly and in accordance with any applicable learning requirements (Septimiranti et al., 2022). Otherwise, three teachers stated differently. This participant accepts that this lesson plan can lighten their burden, because it is only a one-page lesson plan and doesn't take too much time to process. As stated by one of the teachers:

(T-A): *“Sangat membantu guru karena tidak memakan banyak waktu / dapat dikerjakan dalam waktu singkat”*.

Regardless of those interviews above, the participants supported it because it lightened their administrative burden in making lesson plans so that the teacher can focus more on preparing and evaluating the learning process. This statement is supported by (Rahayu et al., 2021) that compiling a simple lesson plan allows

teachers to save time, save energy, and ease the teacher's administrative.

Based on the results of the interview above, it can be seen that there is one teacher who responds that this simplification of lesson plans is not suitable for application. Because teaching modules must involve several important points such as the explanation of Pancasila students profile (P5) and the selection of teaching modules. On the other hand, the three teachers at the Vocational High School responded positively to the simplification of the lesson plan, because this simplification of the lesson plan helps teachers because it doesn't take time.

c. Learning Process and P5 in MBKM

The four English teachers answered during the interview that the teachers had used learning methods according to the Merdeka curriculum. Some teachers think that the method used is sometimes easy, and sometimes difficult. The three teachers chose to use the Project Based Learning (PJBL) and Problem Based Learning (PBL) method. As stated by one of the teachers:

(T-D): *“Menurut saya mengajar kurikulum merdeka lebih mudah. Saya sudah mencoba beberapa*

metode yakni project based learning, problem based learning. Saya menggunakan kedua metode tersebut sesuai dengan kurikulum merdeka”.

Teacher "D" claimed that using the Merdeka curriculum was simpler. Project-based learning (PJBL) and problem-based learning (PBL) are two techniques that Teacher "D" has tested. According to a different source, project-based learning is anticipated to be able to give students the opportunity to learn through experience, integrate various essential competencies with various disciplines, and try to provide a more flexible learning structure in accordance with the needs of their respective schools (Riyan Rizaldi & Fatimah, 2022). On other hand, one of the teachers chose a group discussion as a learning method:

(T-A): *“Mudah-mudah sulit. Metode yang saya pakai menggunakan diskusi kelompok. Karena metode ini mendorong siswa untuk berinteraksi dan saling membantu memahami pendapat berbeda yang mungkin muncul selama kegiatan pembelajaran. Selain itu dapat melatih siswa bagaimana menghargai pendapat orang lain melalui diskusi kelompok”.*

This statement is supported by (Wahyurianto, 2019) that in the group discussion the students could increase

their solidarity to the others. In addition, to support this research, the researcher continued the interview about Pancasila Students Profiles (P5). All teachers already understand about Pancasila Students Profiles (P5). One of the teachers explained that teachers have implemented several P5 in the teaching process:

(T-C): *“Mungkin disitu di P5 murid lebih mengeksplor dengan kemampuannya yang mereka punya. Contoh yang pertama pada poin beriman, bertaqwa kepada Tuhan YME yaitu berdoa dan membaca asmaul husna, yang kedua kreatif dimateri job application letter, yang ketiga gotong royong yaitu procedure itu saya mengimplementasikannya membuat proyeknya berupa poster tentang materi procedure tapi teks prosedurnya sesuai dengan jurusan peserta didik. Contohnya saya mengajar TKJ seperti cara mematikan computer, cara merakit PC”.*

This impression is supported by sources that claim students who have trust in faith, fear of God YME and noble character Student are related Pancasila Student Profiles. Application of this value in learning occurs both before and after prayer. This prayer exercise will assist pupils in comprehending and realizing the

reality of the One All-Powerful God. Students will be pointed in the direction of a man with noble traits, such as morals in religion, personal, interpersonal, natural, and state, as is the case with this value. Additionally, pupils are encouraged to develop into social beings to support one another at this moment of mutual cooperation. The three components of mutual cooperation, namely collaboration, care, and cooperation can be identified in the Pancasila Student Profile. Regarding the following topic, creativity, students are encouraged to demonstrate their ability to do innovative things that can be useful (Murdolifah et al., 2023).

Based on data obtained from interviews, teachers at vocational schools have implemented methods according to the Merdeka curriculum. Some teachers choose to use the PJBL, PBL, Group discussion methods. But some teachers respond that in teaching using methods according to this Merdeka curriculum, the teacher thinks that sometimes it is easy and sometimes it is difficult. Besides that, teachers at SMK have also implemented several points on the Pancasila student profile according to the majors of each student.

d. Assessment

From the data of interviews, it is known that several teachers have implemented assessments, and teachers have responded positively to the assessment in the Merdeka curriculum, which consists of diagnostic, formative and summative assessment:

(T-B): *“Lebih bagus karena dalam kurikulum merdeka lebih pas / komplit, seperti adanya tes diagnostik, formatif, dan summatif”*

(T-A) also added:

“Pertama yaitu saya melakukan assessment diagnostik terhadap peserta didik untuk mengetahui kemampuan awal serta karakteristik siswa. Sebelum melanjutkan materi ajar dan untuk assessment formatif biasanya saya lakukan selama pembelajaran berlangsung. Dan assessment sumatif dilakukan sesuai dengan kebijakan sekolah”.

According (Cantika, et al, 2022) to supports this by stating that while the teacher assessed the Project of Pancasila Student Profile using assessments, it was evaluated using descriptive notes for the assessment of student learning outcomes. Assessment is done through evaluation in the forms of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment to evaluate learning outcomes and the Project of

Pancasila Student Profile. From a statement the teacher thinks that the teacher already understands the three assessments. But in implementing the assessment, one of the teacher never did it.

(T-D): *“Perubahan evaluasi / assessmen dalam kurikulum merdeka yang saya tahu adanya assessment non kognitif dan kognitif pada awal pembelajaran yang sebelumnya saya tidak pernah lakukan”*.

Based on the interviews above, it can be explained that the English teacher already understands the three assessments. But there are some teachers who are still lacking in implementing the assessments.

e. Teacher Experiences in MBKM

As a teacher who has attended training and has become a driving force in implementing Merdeka curriculum, all teachers already know what components are in the teaching module. As one of the teacher said:

(T-A): *“Guru harus menentukan komponen-komponen yang akan disederhanakan dalam bentuk modul yang sesuai dengan jurusan yang ada di SMK dan materi ajar”*.

This is supported by several sources, which claim that the structure, content, and length of writing for Minister

Nadiem's policy directives are all examined. The format of choice and its development are both free. There are now only three components instead of the prior thirteen. The three elements are assessments, learning activities, and learning objectives (Ndiung & Menggo, 2021). From another statement that the teachers at vocational high school has already implemented it so the teachers know the steps in adjusting lesson plan.

(T-C): *“Mempelajari dengan mengikuti pelatihan IKM (Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka). Kemudian memahami cara penyusunan CP, TP, ATP. Kemudian setelah itu baru kita membuat modul ajar sesuai dengan kebutuhan”*.

This is supported by further sources that claim that teachers' abilities to put together instructional modules are crucial for implementing the Merdeka curriculum. The first are Understanding of Learning Outcomes or (CP), followed by proficiency in creating Learning Objective or (TP) and Flow of Learning or (ATP), and finally proficiency in creating lesson plans or modules.

Based on the results of interviews, the English teachers at vocational high schools have experience in adjusting the preparation

of lesson plans. Teachers at SMK understand the steps for preparing lesson plans well. The English teacher has implemented components in the form of modules in accordance with the majors in the SMK.

2. The Obstacles of the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

In implementing the Merdeka curriculum, the teacher has several obstacles. Researchers found several obstacles when teachers implemented a Merdeka curriculum. The first at the time of application of the lesson plan. The teachers have experienced the obstacles such as limited references, adapting back to the Merdeka curriculum, understanding the material if the teacher changes teaching permission not to teach.

(T-C): *“Minimnya pengalaman dan pemahaman terhadap kurikulum merdeka itu sendiri dan keterbatasan referensi. Kendalanya itu harus beradaptasi dengan kurikulum merdeka Karena itu butuh proses”*.

To supporting this statement, The Merdeka learning curriculum has altered due to the Merdeka curriculum policy, which has an impact on the teacher's function and educational issues. As a result, teachers must be good at found references social media, internet and must develop their own competences and learning competencies. Furthermore,

teachers are essential to the success of a curriculum and must be competent in employing the pertinent curriculum to carry out the learning process (Daimah, 2023).

The second on the assessment, where here the teacher experiences several students who are differentiated and require special handling during assessment, and during the summative assessment of the material MGMP and the grid is missed because here the material must be according to student abilities.

(T-A): *“Ada, karena ada beberapa siswa berdiferiensi yang membutuhkan penanganan khusus dalam pelaksanaan evaluasi”*.

As part of the teacher's plan for students following the Merdeka curriculum, the class is separated into low, middle, and high groups when it is not possible to treat everyone equally. Therefore, the evaluation must be diverse, and the teacher cannot evaluate all students equally (Agus, 2023).

The third is that English teachers have experienced problems when implementing the Merdeka curriculum in the learning process. The teachers' respond' that the implementation of this Merdeka curriculum makes students less active, because the teacher is only a facilitator.

(T-B): *“Pernah, kendalanya siswa*

jadi kurang aktif dikarenakan gurunya hanya sebagai fasilitator”.

One of the journal's state that the teacher has discretion over a student's to aptitudes supports this. This indicates that the teacher's function as a learning facilitator is crucial in making a difference. In order to facilitate learning, teachers must be able to plan engaging lessons (Kusumaningtyas & Eka, 2022). Teachers also have experience problems on the PJBL learning method, where teachers are unable to manage time and students are constrained by the cost of completing projects.

(T-D): *“Ada, pada saat menerapkan metode project based learning. Saya merasa masih kurang maksimal dalam memanfaatkan waktu. Namun tidak dipungkiri hasilnya sangat memuaskan”.*

To support the statement (Martati, 2022) claimed that the PJBL approach requires a lot of time to accomplish the project.

From the results of the interview above, it can be seen that the English teacher at the Vocational High School experienced have several obstacles during the simplification of lesson plans, assessment and application of the curriculum in the learning process. But the teacher's solution to overcoming obstacles in the process of implementing Merdeka learning is good because the English

teacher is able to see in terms of the deficiencies and constraints that occur and has concepts or strategies to minimize this obstacle.

Discussion

1. English Teachers' Perception on the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

Previously, the results on teacher perceptions had been presented by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka curriculum at vocational high schools. Teacher perceptions of the Merdeka curriculum regarding implementation of the Merdeka curriculum reaped many positive responses from teachers and appreciated them very well. In the process of implementing teachers in vocational high schools, the teachers have experienced a Merdeka curriculum in accordance with government policy. So far, it's a load on the administration that arises from the preparation of a lesson plan that is dedicated to teachers' administrative burden. This is indeed proven based on the result of interviews with English teachers at SMK that the teachers feel relieved by the new policy. Teachers at the SMK have implemented components and several points from the Pancasila students profile in the learning process.

The outcomes of this study are in agreement with those of earlier work by

Ferdous & Novita, (2023), which concentrated on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. The following six areas are the main focus of the current study: Following the implementation of instructional modules are the teaching and learning processes, the use of learning resources, the use of learning media, evaluation or assessment procedures, and challenges. While this study has thus far focused on six areas, namely: subject understanding, content administration reduction in MBKM, learning process and P5 in MBKM, assessment, teacher experience in MBKM, and obstacles. It is commonly known that all English teachers comprehend the Merdeka curriculum and have done so.

2. The Obstacles on the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

After conducting interviews with research informants, the author faces three obstacles faced by the teacher in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. The study's findings are consistent with those of Supriatna et al., (2023), who found that the Merdeka curriculum appears forced and that not all teachers are in favor of it. These findings are factors that become obstacles in the process of implementing the Merdeka curriculum. There are three challenges when discussing the study's findings, starting with the first. A challenge in

implementing lesson plans is that teachers have few resources and must make additional adaptations. Second, the difficulty in identifying the criteria that must be met at the time of assessment. The third barrier to implementation in the learning process is that because the teacher is simply a facilitator when using the PJBL learning technique, which takes a lot of time and money, students are less engaged in the process.

Based on the discussion of the research's findings, the teacher's solutions to overcome difficulties in implementing Merdeka learning are good because the English teacher is able to recognize difficulties and limitations that arise and has ideas or strategies to reduce these challenges.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

From the data above, it can be concluded that private vocational high school has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum for English learning, which places an emphasis on teachers and students having more independence in the student-centered learning process. In line with this, the English teachers give positive perceptions to welcomed the Merdeka curriculum. In terms of understanding, the teacher already understands the Merdeka curriculum well. This is because teachers have attended training on the Merdeka curriculum (IKM) several times. However,

there are several obstacles in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. Namely, the changes in the simplification of the teacher's lesson plan are not compatible with the simplification of the lesson plan in the Merdeka curriculum. Because it must involve an important point in Pancasila students' profiles (P5). Then, in the learning process, the teacher experienced problems with the PJBL method. Due to this method, the teacher does not have much time and students are burdened with the cost of completing the project. In the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, several teachers experienced obstacles such as limited references, students were less active because the teacher was only a facilitator, and there were several different students who needed handling in the evaluation. Teachers are required to be more creative and innovative. However, the existence of obstacles does not cause problems for teachers because teachers can minimize these obstacles so that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum is successful.

The implications of this research are, the implementation of Merdeka curriculum is very important to develop and will have an impact on teachers and students, so that this research can be used as material for consideration for schools to further improve the quality of education in schools, both in increasing teacher competence and school

principal for maintenance the Mobilization School Program can run well and improve teacher skills in developing learning appropriate to the stage of development and the needs of students as well efforts to realize the Pancasila Student Profile and provide teachers with an understanding of the use of the Merdeka curriculum.

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