

The implementation of the Merdeka English Curriculum in the teaching and learning process at SMA N 7 Halmahera Selatan

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Abstract : This research aims to investigate the implementation of the English Merdeka Curriculum in the teaching and learning process and to identify the problems encountered by teachers during the implementation of the English Merdeka Curriculum in the teaching and learning process at SMA Negeri 7 Halmahera Selatan. In Indonesia, the government has introduced the Merdeka Curriculum as part of an educational transformation aimed at improving learning outcomes, fostering critical thinking, and enhancing student engagement. The implementation of the Merdeka English Curriculum introduces new teaching methods, learning assessments, and technological integration, which significantly impact the teaching and learning process in senior high schools. The subject of this research is an English teacher who teaches class X students at SMA Negeri 7 Halmahera Selatan. The researchers used several techniques to collect data for this study. The methods used are observation, interview, and documentation. The result of this research was the English Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 7 Halmahera Selatan has been implemented well, following national education standards and fostering a positive learning environment. However, challenges such as teacher adaptation, resource limitations, student readiness, and professional development need to be addressed to further improve the curriculum's effectiveness.

Keywords : *English Merdeka Curriculum, Curriculum Implementation, English Curriculum*

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I. Introduction

Education is a fundamental pillar in building the future of a nation, as it equips students with the knowledge and skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing world. In Indonesia, the government has initiated the Merdeka Curriculum as a key step in its educational reform efforts. This curriculum aims to enhance the quality of learning by promoting critical thinking, encouraging active student participation, and improving overall learning outcomes. At its core, the Merdeka Curriculum focuses on student-centered learning, allows for greater flexibility in teaching methods, and adopts a competency-based approach to ensure students are better prepared to face real-life challenges and demands.

As a global language, English plays an important role in Indonesia's education system. At the senior high school level, it is a mandatory subject, and students are expected to build competence across the four main language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The introduction of the Merdeka English Curriculum marks a significant shift in how English is taught and learned. This curriculum brings in innovative teaching strategies, modern assessment practices, and the use of technology to support learning. These changes aim to create a more dynamic and interactive classroom environment, ultimately enhancing students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

According to the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia, (Makarim, 2022) the Merdeka Curriculum is designed to provide greater flexibility for teachers in delivering learning materials based on students' needs. He emphasizes that this curriculum focuses on competency-based learning rather than rigid subject-based instruction, allowing students to explore and develop their abilities more effectively. Similarly, (Richards, 2014) highlights that communicative language teaching approaches, which emphasize real-life language use and student interaction, align well with the objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum in English learning.

Although the Merdeka English Curriculum offers numerous advantages, its implementation also presents several challenges for both teachers and students. Educators are required to shift their teaching approaches by adopting innovative strategies, developing engaging lesson plans, and incorporating various learning media to meet the curriculum's goals. At the same time, students are expected to embrace a more independent and exploratory learning style that emphasizes active involvement and critical thinking. However, the success of this curriculum can be limited by factors such as insufficient teaching resources, a lack of comprehensive teacher training, and inadequate school infrastructure, particularly in under-resourced areas.

Educational experts such as (Bruner, 1996) advocate for constructivist learning, which suggests that students learn best when they actively construct their own understanding. This concept is embedded in the Merdeka Curriculum, where students are encouraged to explore knowledge through project-based learning and problem-solving activities. Furthermore, (Brown, 2007) argues that successful language acquisition requires an engaging and meaningful learning environment, which is a core principle of this curriculum.

Curriculum changes of course also apply to all subjects including subjects English lessons. Learning English is intended to develop four language skills that a person has. In English learning activities, teachers are required to be able to develop four language skills that students have. Whatever curriculum is set by the government, teachers are always expected to be able to develop the four language skills possessed by students. Revealed by Pranowo (2014: 236) (An-Nuha, 2015).

In this research, SMA Negeri 7 Halmahera Selatan was chosen. Based on information obtained from observations, SMA Negeri 7 Halsel is one of the new institutions that have received recognition from the general public, both in terms of quality and quantity, as

evidenced by the large number of students who have complied. This school has three classes. The grades are tenth grade, eleventh grade, and twelfth grade. Currently, SMA N 7 Halsel uses the Merdeka and K13 Curriculum. The implementation of these two curricula is because the school is making adjustments in stages. The Independent Curriculum is implemented in grade 10, for grades 11 and 12, K13 is still used. Therefore, researchers will conduct research in the tenth grade.

II. Review of Literature

Curriculum

Curriculum linguistically comes from ancient Greek, namely curriculum. Curriculum comes from the word *Curir*, which means runner, and *Curere*, which means a place to race. Thus, from the linguistic meaning of curriculum, it can be interpreted as the distance that must be covered by runners on a certain route to arrive at a certain destination. From the linguistic meaning in the definition above, the curriculum in educational terms is widely interpreted as lessons that must be taken by students at school with certain lessons to obtain predetermined educational goals. (Drajat, 2020).

According to (Tyler, 1949) the curriculum includes the educational goals to be achieved, the educational experiences provided to achieve the goals, how to organize these educational experiences effectively, as well as indicators that determine that these goals have been achieved. In conclusion, the curriculum is the core of education that is used as a reference for educational elements to achieve educational goals.

According to (Print, 1993), a curriculum includes several things, including planning learning experiences, an educational institution's program which is realized in a document, and the results of the implementation of the document that has been prepared. From this definition, it can be concluded that the curriculum is a plan consisting of learning experiences given to students so that they can achieve their learning goals in terms of skills and knowledge.

Based on some of the definitions above, it can be concluded that the curriculum is an educational program or device that contains teaching materials and learning experiences that are programmed, planned, and systematically designed based on applicable norms and used as guidelines in the learning process for education staff and students to achieve maximum educational goals.

Merdeka Curriculum

According to (Pendidikan, 2022) is a curriculum with diverse intra-curricular learning where the content will be more optimal so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competencies. In the learning process, the teacher has the freedom to choose a variety of teaching tools so that learning can be tailored to the learning needs and interests of students.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum was launched by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Makarim, 2022) as a form of evaluation of the 2013 Curriculum improvement. Previously, this curriculum was also referred to as the Prototype Curriculum which is one part of the government's efforts to produce a more competent next generation in various fields.

The Independent Learning Curriculum is the development and implementation of the emergency curriculum that was launched to respond to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The definition of Independent Learning is an approach taken so that pupils and students can choose the subjects they are interested in. One of the programs initiated by the Minister of Education and Culture, Mr. Nadiem Makarim, is "Freedom to Learn" to create fun learning activities (Hasyim, 2022)

Basic Implementation of the curriculum Merdeka

The basis for implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum refers to the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 56 of 2022 concerning guidelines for the implementation of the curriculum in the context of learning recovery (*Merdeka* Curriculum) as a complement to the previous curriculum. This Ministerial Decree stipulates 16 decisions, namely as follows:

- a. Education units need to develop a curriculum with the principle of diversification in accordance with the conditions of the education unit, regional potential, and students.
- b. Curriculum development refers to the 2013 Curriculum, the simplified/revised 2013 Curriculum, and the *Merdeka* Curriculum.
- c. The curriculum refers to the National Education Standards to realize the goals of national education.
- d. Curriculum 2013 is implemented according to legislation
- e. The simplified 2013 Curriculum is determined by the head of the main unit in charge of curriculum, assessment, and bookkeeping.
- f. The *Merdeka* Curriculum is regulated in the attachment to the Decree of the *Mendikbudristek*.
- g. Fulfilling the workload and structuring the linearity of certified teachers in the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum and the simplified 2013 Curriculum are carried out following statutory regulations.
- h. Fulfillment of the workload and structuring the linearity of certified teachers in the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum is regulated in Appendix II of this decree.
- i. Participants of the *Penggerak* School program and the SMK Pusat Keunggulan program use the *Merdeka* Curriculum and fulfill the workload and linearity according to the two attachments to this decree.
- j. The simplified 2013 Curriculum can be applied from class I to class XII.
- k. The *Merdeka* Curriculum is implemented in stages with the following provisions.
- l. 1st year: Age 5 & 6 years (grades 1, 4, 7, and 10)
- m. 2nd year: Age 4-6 years (grade 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11)
- n. 3rd year: Age 3-6 years (grade 1-12)
- o. The implementation of the curriculum uses the main textbook set by the Book Center.
- p. The *Merdeka* Curriculum will take effect in the 2022/2023 academic year.

The Differences between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum

The difference between the 2013 Curriculum and the *Merdeka* Curriculum. These differences depend on subject units, learning hours, learning implementation, learning strategies, and the assessment process for graduation competency standards, etc. Curriculum 13 has a clear objective to shape national character, while the independent curriculum lesson objectives are presented in learning outcomes (CP). The independent curriculum also has assessments, namely non-cognitive and cognitive, where non-cognitive is intended for assessment outside of learning, while cognitive is an assessment in terms of knowledge.

Table 1. The Differences between the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum

No	Component	2013 Curriculum	Merdeka Curriculum
1.	Basic framework	Based on the objectives of the national education system and national education standards	Based on the objectives of the national education system and national education standards and develop the <i>Profil Pelajar Pancasila</i> .

2.	Targeted competence	<i>Kompetensi Inti (KI) and Kompetensi Dasar(KD)</i>	Learning outcomes are compiled for each phase (KI and KD are integrated) and there is <i>Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran</i> .
3.	Curriculum Structure	Allocation of lesson hours is set every week and has been systemized. Still focused on intra-curricular learning.	The allocation of Lesson hours is Regulated every year according to the conditions of the education unit. The first two lessons, namely intra-curricular and co-curricular.
4.	Learning	Learning uses a scientific approach for all subjects.	Strengthening differentiated learning according to the stage of student achievement.
5.	Assessment	a. Formative and summative assessment to detect the need for continuous improvement of student learning outcomes. b. Authentic assessment of each lesson. c. Assessment of 3 domains, namely attitude, social, and spiritual.	a. Strengthening the formative assessment to design learning according to the stage of student achievement. b. Authentic assessment,

Implementation of Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum

In the regulation of the Minister of National Education Number 36 of 2018, teaching problems are related to internal and external conditions. Internal conditions include teachers, materials, interaction patterns, media and technology, learning situations, and systems. While external conditions include the environment where the teaching and learning process takes place.

Based on (Kementerian Pendidikan, 2022), in implementing an independent curriculum, educators need to work on adjusting learning strategies to suit the learning needs of students. However, for some educators conducting differentiation learning is not a simple thing to do. Some educators experience problems due to limited time to design different lessons based on the individual needs of students. Another problem is the difficulty of educators in grouping students based on readiness due to the large number of students and limited classrooms.

Meanwhile, (Hamalik, 2014) states that teaching problems have two dimensions, namely component dimensions and interactions between components. The components here are learning, objectives, teacher, lesson plans, learning media, learning strategies, and learning evaluation. Interaction between components means whether these components are synergistic or dynamic. Example problems relate to the interaction process, namely the teacher's explanation is not clear, the media is not appropriate, students are not active, students are afraid to ask questions, students' vocabulary is lacking and assessments are not precise. Generally, the teacher problems in the teaching are material, method, and media (Hamalik, 2014).

Previous Study

Based on research findings of the results (Larasati, 2022) research on the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum shows that there is readiness and positive commitment among teachers in adapting to changes in approach learning. Through interview analysis, it can be seen that the teacher understands the concept. Realizing parental support is important, this research emphasizes the need to increase their understanding to influence the achievement of

curriculum objectives effectively. Significant obstacles arise due to differences with the curriculum previously, especially in project-based learning assessment, so it requires deeper understanding and additional training. Analysis of the assessment aspects shows the effectiveness of implementing formative and authentic assessments by teachers. However, the challenges are related to the lack of understanding of teachers and parents regarding the Independent Curriculum, in particular, Freedom to Learn can have an impact on achieving curriculum goals. Therefore, joint efforts are needed to increase parental understanding and support, as well as additional training for teachers regarding assessment in the context of the Independent Curriculum. The curriculum encourages teachers to design more interesting and interactive learning experiences, giving students the freedom to choose subjects and open opportunities to explore talents and potential in various fields.

Secondly, the results of (Fajri, 2022) research on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Bolo 01 High School, Kare District, Madiun Regency, show that teachers are ready and positive in accepting changes in learning approaches. Analysis of teacher readiness through interviews shows a strong understanding of the concept of Independent Learning and readiness to adopt a new curriculum that prioritizes creativity and innovation. Teachers demonstrate a willingness to design responsive learning tailored to student needs, fostering a dynamic and interactive environment. However, challenges arise especially in this area. Lack of understanding by teachers and parents regarding the Independent Curriculum, especially Independent Learning.

Recognizing that parental support is important, a lack of understanding was identified as a potential barrier to achieving curriculum targets. Differences in assessment approaches, particularly in project-based learning, pose significant barriers that require deeper understanding and additional training. While teachers effectively implement formative and authentic assessments, addressing challenges related to understanding the Merdeka Curriculum, especially Merdeka Belajar, is important to achieve curriculum goals.

The previous research above discusses the implementation and role of parents as well as the implementation of the independent curriculum so that it runs effectively. However, in this research, the researcher wants to know the implementation of the curriculum and the problems faced by teachers in implementing the independent curriculum. Researchers also took different places. This research was conducted at SMA N 7 Halmahera Selatan.

III. Research Method

The research design was used as a framework to identify solutions to research problems. In this study, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative approach. According to (Creswell, 2014), a qualitative approach is a way to understand social or human problems by gathering detailed views from informants and presenting them in a natural setting.

The setting of this research is SMA NEGERI 7 HALSEL for the 2024/2025 academic year. The subject of this research is an English teacher who teaches class X students at SMA N 7 HALSEL.

The researcher used several techniques to collect data for this study. The techniques used are observation, interview, and documentation. The researcher used some steps to analyze the data according to (Matthew B. Miles, 2014), they are: data reduction, data display, Drawing Conclusions, and Verification.

IV. Result

The following are the results of the observation and interview with the English teacher at SMA N 7 Halmahera Selatan.

The observation result showed that The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has shown several positive developments in schools. One of the most notable changes is the shift towards student-centered learning. Teachers are observed incorporating more project-based and inquiry-based learning approaches, which has led to improved student engagement and participation. The flexibility offered by the curriculum allows educators to design lessons that are more relevant to students' needs and local contexts. Additionally, there is a stronger emphasis on character education through the integration of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* into daily learning activities. Teachers have also begun using formative assessments more frequently to monitor student progress and provide meaningful feedback.

Despite these strengths, several challenges have also been identified during the observation. Many teachers, particularly in rural or less-resourced areas, are not yet fully prepared to implement the curriculum effectively. A lack of training and understanding of differentiated instruction makes it difficult for them to meet the diverse learning needs of their students. Limited access to facilities, learning materials, and digital tools further hampers the effective delivery of the curriculum. In addition, some teachers feel burdened by the administrative demands of preparing learning modules and assessments. Another challenge is the low level of parental understanding and involvement, which can hinder support for students at home. Followed are the results of the interview conducted with the English teacher:

Table 2. Interviews Results

No	QUESTION	ANSWER	
		TEACHER 1	TEACHER 2
1.	Is the implementation of the <i>Merdeka</i> curriculum based on the goals of the national education system and national education standards?	The implementation of this curriculum certainly refers to national education standards, starting from assessment. This is in order to realize national education goals.	To realize national education goals, of course, the implementation of the independent curriculum in this school already refers to national education standards.
2.	How is the application of <i>Pancasila</i> student profiles in learning?	This is included in learning at school because they always maintain the facilities at school. We always teach how to respect teachers and all our friends at school. Don't make fun of friends who have limitations. Participate in group work assignments.	To implement the <i>Pancasila</i> student profile, maintain a clean school environment, pray before starting lessons, prioritize equality, and also respect existing differences.
3.	Why are learning outcomes arranged per phase?	The learning outcomes per stage are very good because students have sufficient time to master the competencies. And also provides opportunities for students to learn according to their learning needs and interests.	The learning outcomes per phase are quite effective because they give students more time to master the learning outcomes that have been set.
4.	Is there a <i>learning objective</i> in the <i>Merdeka</i> curriculum?	For the flow of learning objectives and teaching modules, teachers create their own according to the format	In SMA N 7, teachers make their own according to the format available at the school because there are

		available at the school because there are competency standards. Even though the government has provided ready-to-use Teaching Modules, we still use the Teaching Modules independently. in a format provided by the school and by the characteristics and needs of students.	competency standards. In a format provided by the school and by the characteristics and needs of students.
5.	How much is the allocation of lesson hours for the <i>Merdeka</i> curriculum?	The allocation of lesson hours in the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum is determined every year according to the conditions of the educational unit.	The allocation of lesson hours in the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum is determined every year.
6.	How is the process of differentiated learning in the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum?	This curriculum emphasizes differentiated learning so that learning material is more varied according to students' understanding.	So that learning is more varied according to students' understanding at SMA 7. This curriculum emphasizes differentiated learning.
7.	Does assessment in the <i>Merdeka</i> curriculum strengthen formative assessment?	Here the emphasis is on formative assessment. So that teachers can provide information to students about their progress so that they can make improvements while the learning process is still ongoing	Here the emphasis is on formative assessment.
8.	Is there an attitude, social, and spiritual assessment?	In the Independent Curriculum, there is no separate assessment of attitudes, knowledge, or skills as in the 2013 curriculum	In the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum, all assessments are combined into one so there is no separate assessment.
9.	What is learning using textbooks?	We have been provided with textbooks for studying. However, sometimes in presenting the material, I use more varied media, and if the material in the textbook feels incomplete I will take references from various other sources.	Here, textbooks are provided for studying. However, sometimes when presenting material I look for various references to be more creative and varied and learn.

Based on the results of the interview, the explanation from the 2 teachers concerned that the independent curriculum at SMA N 7 South Halmahera was following national education standards because this curriculum policy of course refers to national education standards, starting from assessment. This is in order to realize national education goals.

In the implementation of the Pancasila Education profile, has been implemented in its way, based on the results of interviews with the 2 teachers concerned, both of whom had almost the same answer. According to them, this is included in learning at school because they always

maintain the facilities at school. We always teach how to respect teachers and all our friends at school. Don't make fun of friends who have disabilities or participate in group work assignments.

In the interview results above, it is also clear that learning outcomes are arranged at every stage. So the teachers can adapt learning to the conditions and characteristics of students because according to the 2 teachers concerned, the learning outcomes per stage are very good. After all, students have sufficient time to master the competencies. And also provides opportunities for students to learn according to their learning needs and interests.

For the flow of learning objectives based on the results of interviews between 2 teachers who answered, SMA N 7 South Halmahera created a Flow of Learning Objectives and Teaching Modules from the school format. Therefore, teachers do not directly use all the teaching tools provided by the government, but adopt and develop them according to the needs and conditions of students in the field.

Based on the interview, it is evident that the allocation of lesson hours in the Merdeka (Independent) Curriculum is designed to be flexible and is regulated on an annual basis. This flexibility allows teachers to manage and adjust the distribution of lesson time according to the needs and characteristics of their students in the field. Rather than being bound by a rigid schedule, educators are given the autonomy to allocate more time to subjects or activities that require deeper exploration, enabling a more responsive and student-centered learning experience.

In the implementation, researchers saw many differences from the implementation of the previous curriculum. Based on the results of the interviews, the learning process is now carried out differently so that students understand and are ready to learn.

The 2 teachers also said that at SMA N 7 South Halmahera the emphasis is on formative assessment. Teachers can provide information to students regarding their progress so that they can make improvements while the learning process is still ongoing.

The assessment is also different from the previous curriculum. Based on the results of interviews, it was said that in the Independent Curriculum, there is no separate assessment of attitudes, knowledge, and skills as in the 2013 Curriculum.

In the learning process, the teachers also use more varied methods to eliminate each student's boredom. This can be seen from the results of the interviews with the 2 teachers that they have been provided with textbooks for studying. However, sometimes in presenting the material, they use more varied media, and if the material in the textbook feels incomplete they will take references from various other sources.

V. Discussion

Implementation of the English Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 7 Halmahera Selatan

Based on the interview results with two English teachers at SMA Negeri 7 Halmahera Selatan, the implementation of the English Merdeka Curriculum is almost fully aligned with national education standards. Teachers have effectively applied creative and innovative teaching strategies to ensure that students remain engaged and comfortable in their learning. The curriculum also encourages students to embrace the Pancasila Student Profile, fostering not only language skills but also values such as discipline, cooperation, and respect.

Furthermore, teachers integrate positive school habits, including maintaining cleanliness, discouraging insults among students, and promoting respect for teachers and peers. These aspects contribute to a supportive and structured learning environment, where students can develop both academically and socially.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Despite the successful implementation of the Merdeka English Curriculum, teachers at SMA Negeri 7 Halmahera Selatan still face several challenges. One of the main difficulties is adapting to new teaching approaches, as the shift to a student-centered learning model requires continuous innovation and modification of lesson plans, which can be time-consuming. Additionally, limited resources, such as digital tools and interactive learning materials, pose a challenge in delivering engaging and effective lessons. Another issue is student readiness, as some learners struggle with the independent learning approach promoted by the curriculum, requiring extra guidance and support from teachers. Furthermore, professional development remains a key concern, as teachers need ongoing training and workshops to enhance their skills and effectively implement the curriculum. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure the successful application of the Merdeka Curriculum and improve overall learning outcomes.

VI. Conclusion

The research findings indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka English Curriculum at SMA Negeri 7 Halmahera Selatan is mostly in line with national education standards. Teachers have successfully applied creative and innovative teaching strategies, making the learning process more engaging and comfortable for students. Additionally, the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile has helped shape students' character, discipline, and social values, contributing to a positive learning environment.

However, despite its success, several challenges remain, including teacher adaptation to new teaching methods, limited resources, student readiness, and the need for continuous professional development. To maximize the effectiveness of the curriculum, it is essential to provide adequate training, learning materials, and support systems for teachers and students. With proper improvements and ongoing support, the Merdeka English Curriculum can further enhance the quality of English language education and help students develop both academically and personally.

Overall, the English Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 7 Halmahera Selatan has been implemented well, following national education standards and fostering a positive learning environment. However, challenges such as teacher adaptation, resource limitations, student readiness, and professional development need to be addressed to further improve the curriculum's effectiveness.

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