

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses (1) background, (2) focus and sub-focus of the research, (3) formulation of the problem, (4) objective of the research, and (5) the significance of the research.

1.1 Background

The curriculum refers to the proposed plan and the learning programs designated for realizing specified educational goals. In other words, it can be defined to include learning materials, methodologies of teaching, and assessment procedures. The etymology of curriculum is derived from Latin, meaning a course or track that would be followed so as to achieve a certain target (*Wikipedia*). As explained by Hamalik, (2008) as cited in Jaya, Mortini, Aprilia, Hayani, Sukma, Nurjanah, and Milyarni, (2024) the curriculum provides a systematic guide for organizing and conducting education. The curriculum encompasses not only the contents to be taught but also how they are taught and evaluated. The term itself comes from the Latin "Curriculae," meaning the path that a student must follow, and that reflects its role as a tool to reach the aims of education.

According to Taba (1962), as cited in Jaya et al. (2024), the curriculum is planned to be experienced by the learners under the guidance of the school for enhancing knowledge and skills. Tyler (2004), as cited in Jaya et al. (2024), further states that in designing a curriculum, one must clearly establish goals,

organize content, create learning experiences, and establish methods of assessment. In simple terms, a curriculum is not just a listing of topics but a kind of guide that navigates the students to achieve their goals of education and development.

The curriculum therefore dictates not just what has to be learned but the manner in which this needs to be learned and evaluated. As a system, the curriculum is purposed to achieve intelligent, knowledgeable, creative, innovative, and responsible students who will be ready for life in society. The curriculum also provides a benchmark to teachers during teaching and evaluation while guiding the school management. Without a curriculum, education will become disorganized and aimless, making it impossible to accomplish the desired results (Lestari, Asbari, and Yani, 2023). The curriculum then becomes a key player as a tool to realize national education targets. It brings about a bridge between national visions and classroom instruction to ensure education serves a constructive purpose in developing an ethical and capable society. Ongoing development of the curriculum is thus necessary to enable harmonization of education with evolving world progress and society needs.

The curriculum has undergone significant changes in each era since Indonesia declared independence to find the needs of the world of education. It starts with the 1947 Curriculum, which focused on moral and civic education as preparation for the younger generation in building the nation. Then, in the New Order era, more emphasis was given to intellectual and technological development through

the 1968 Curriculum to produce a competent workforce. In 2004, the Competency-Based Curriculum (KBK) was introduced to enhance critical thinking, problem-solving, and knowledge application skills. Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP) granted schools autonomy in adapting the curriculum to the needs at the local level in 2006. Much later, the emphasis would fall on character development besides competencies in knowledge, skills, and attitudes through thematic, integrative, and project-based learning in Curriculum 2013 (K-13).

The curriculum development over the decades illustrates Indonesia's attempt to respond to both domestic and global challenges. Each change in the curriculum represented a new philosophy of education, spurred by political change, technological progress, and shifts in societal needs. This active history underscores the importance of flexibility and creativity in educational practice. At the moment, Indonesia's educational system is set up according to the national curriculum framework. The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational standard that the government has put in place to keep up with the advancements in science and technology (Lestari et al, 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum is one such innovative curriculum that has been developed and adopted to bring improvement in the quality of education in Indonesia.

According to Jannah and Sukma (2022), this curriculum would be geared toward developing, and enhancing a student profile relevant to the values of Pancasila's five principles. The Minister of Education, Culture, Research and

Technology (*Kemendikbud*) Nadiem Anwar Makarim, assured that the Merdeka Curriculum lets students discover themselves, explore their interests, and become the major actors in teaching and learning activities. The curriculum would be more flexible and adaptable to the teachers and students adjusting the teaching material to the development and progress of the latter. This kind of flexibility is a welcome relief from previous rigid models and allows teachers to focus more on the general development of students and not merely academic achievement. It also promotes differentiated instruction, where various needs and capabilities of students are determined and addressed. The goal of the Merdeka Curriculum program, according to Saleh (2020) as cited in Reza, Rohmah, and Abdullah (2023), is to investigate how both instructors and students can promote greater levels of learning in the classroom.

English Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum is fitted flexibly into the model of students' communicative competence. The Merdeka Curriculum makes sure learners focus on mastering basic language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing into integrative skills both in daily activities and interactionally. All of this contributes to the development of cultural identity by exposing people to the relevance of cultures both locally and globally. Additionally, teachers can use inquiry-based and project-based learning to create activities that may be relevant to the needs and interests of their students (Jaya et al, 2024). In such a framework, English is not isolated as an in-school subject but as an essential tool of communication. Treating English as a part and parcel of daily life for the students enables them to gain actual language skills to support

their education, social relations, and professionalism.

In the context of learning English, Barlian, Solekah, and Rahayu, (2022) explain that this curriculum focuses on communicative competence that is more contextual and applicable, with an emphasis on enhancing the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. In the Merdeka Curriculum, the learning of English is oriented toward the provision of language competencies that can be useful in social life and professional contexts. This is a challenge to the teacher, who needs to reshape his teaching methods and develop material that will be highly relevant to the needs and context of the students' lives. While apparently clear, the curriculum already poses considerable challenges for teachers in teaching the English language. Teachers also have to be more innovative and flexible in lesson plans, considering the different aptitudes and cultural backgrounds of pupils.

According to Barlian et al, (2022), one of the biggest challenges is how teachers can create an attractive and effective learning environment without rigid methods. Teachers need to think of strategies that will help students not only learn the rules of the language but also actually use the language in life, which is a more professional skill. As a mentioned by Songbatumis, (2017), Teaching English as a foreign language is a challenge for secondary teachers and students who have little exposure to the language. Lack of exposure makes very few students able to practice and practice English actively in everyday life. This limited exposure also requires instructors to come up with creative ways in replicating real-world communications in the classroom setting so that English learning is made more

effective and substantial for students.

In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, English teachers may face many challenges like the difficulty of switching to more flexible teaching approaches such as project learning and the expected limitations of technology. In addition, adjusting the curriculum became a big problem due to the lack of teaching materials and time pressure.

The study aimed to analyze the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The study examined the particular difficulties that teachers faced with pedagogical, administrative, resource challenges and as well as how these challenges impacted the teaching and learning process. Through an understanding of these barriers in depth, it is hoped that more sustainable and effective solutions can be designed, making it easier to shift to the new curriculum and more effective English language teaching in schools. This research, ultimately, was intended to provide through insights and recommendations to support English teachers to overcome these obstacles and contribute to effectiveness in the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum.

Based on the previous explanation, the researcher decided to conduct research entitled **“The Analysis of Teaching Challenges Faced by English Teachers in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Tanjung Raja”** with the aim to find out various teaching challenges faced by English teachers.

1.2 Focus and Sub-Focus of the Research

1.2.1 Focus of the Research

The researcher analyzed the various challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum for teaching English.

1.2.2 Sub-Focus of the Research

The researcher analyzed the challenges faced by English teachers in adapting teaching methods, resources, and assessments to the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Tanjung Raja.

1.3 Formulation of the Problem

The researcher intended to select the following research problem based on the explanation provided earlier: “What challenge do the teachers of English have in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Tanjung Raja?”

1.4 Objectives of the Research

From the background and problem formulation above, the researcher identified and analyzed the challenges that English teachers faced in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Tanjung Raja.

1.5. The significance of the research

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance of the Research

The research provided a theoretical contribution to the challenges faced by the English teachers during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. It enriched the literature dealing with the education of the English language, in particular, about the Indonesian context of curriculum change. The result of this research was expected to be one of the foundation theories in the development of strategies for teacher adaptations to changes in education policy. In addition, this research is hoped to serve as a reference for future studies on curriculum innovation, teacher professionalism, and pedagogy of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It can also offer theoretical contributions to debates on how curriculum flexibility influences teaching practices and students' achievements in different learning settings.

Thus, the current research opened up new avenues not only for academics but also created opportunities for further research into exploring innovative solutions or approaches necessary for successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

1.5.2 Practical Significance of the Research

The findings of the study were expected to provide valuable insights that would benefit teachers, students, and future researchers in both theoretical and practical aspects.

1. For Teachers

The research enabled teachers to identify the specific challenges in adapting

to the Merdeka Curriculum, helping them acquire strategies, tools, and training to overcome these challenges and improve teaching practices. It also encouraged teachers to create a more flexible and dynamic learning environment to support students' creativity and independence in learning.

2. For students

The research helped students learn how to regulate their learning process and develop their critical thinking skills so that they would have a better chance of achieving more optimal learning outcomes. It also aimed to enhance students' social and cooperation skills during the learning process.

3. For Schools

The research suggested that schools could offer focused training for teachers, improve teaching strategies to meet student needs, address learning disparities for equal opportunities, and enhance management by identifying problems and making informed decisions on policies and strategies.

4. For the Researcher

It was hoped this study would provide the researcher with valuable experience in educational research and a deeper understanding of the teaching challenges faced by an English teacher when implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. This enabled the researcher to make more informed plans when becoming a teacher in the future.

5. For the Future Researchers

The findings of this study are expected to provide a firm foundation for future researchers who wish to study the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum more in-depth, especially in other contexts or levels of schooling. It can be utilized as a reference for comparison with the problems faced by teachers in other regions or under other school circumstances. Moreover, future researchers can further develop the gaps found in this research by creating more holistic frameworks or intervention models that can be more effective in facilitating English teachers in curriculum transition. The research can also be utilized to encourage further research on innovative instructional strategies, assessment models, and technology integration under the Merdeka Curriculum in order to sustain improvement in teaching the English language in Indonesia.