

## **ENGLISH TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN IMPLEMENTING MERDEKA CURRICULUM: A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH TEACHERS AT SMPN 2 PRAYA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Merdeka curriculum is a new curriculum implemented in Indonesia. In implementing the Merdeka curriculum, teachers use teaching strategies to help students' learning process and provide suitable learning outcomes. This research aims to describe, investigate and analyze the types of strategies used by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka curriculum and to find out the extent of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SMPN 2 PRAYA. The research method used is a qualitative descriptive method. Three English teachers at SMPN 2 PRAYA were selected as samples in this study. The instruments in this research are classroom observations, interviews, and documentation. The data collected was analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion. The results of this research show that English teachers use three strategies in teaching in the classroom. These strategies include learning strategies to improve thinking skills, contextual learning strategies, and cooperative learning strategies. From the results of interviews and teacher observations, the teaching strategies they use depend on the students' conditions in the classroom. The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SMPN 2 PRAYA has been going well, and teachers are continuing to study the Merdeka curriculum in depth.*

*Keywords: teachers' strategies, curriculum, Merdeka curriculum*

### **ABSTRAK**

Kurikulum *Merdeka* merupakan kurikulum yang baru diterapkan di Indonesia, dalam pengimplemtasian kurikulum *Merdeka* guru menggunakan strategi pengajaran unruk membantu proses belajar siswa dan memberikan hasil belajar yang baik. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan, menginvestigasi, dan menganalisis jenis-jenis strategi yang digunakan guru Bahasa Inggris dalam mengimplememtasikan kurikulum *Merdeka* serta untuk mengetahui sejauh mana penerapan kurikulum *Merdeka* di SMPN 2 PRAYA. Metode penelitian yang digunakan adalah metode deskripsi kualitatif. Tiga guru Bahasa Inggris di SMPN 2 PRAYA dipilih sebagai sampel dalam penelitian ini. Instrument dalam penelitian ini adalah observasi kelas, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan reduksi data, display data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan guru Bahasa Inggris menggunakan tiga strategi dalam mengajar di dalam kelas . strategi tersebut antara lain strategi pebelajaran peningkatan kemampuan berfikir, strategi pembelajaran kontekstual, dan strategi pembelajaran kooperatif. Dari hasil wawancara dan observasi guru strategi pengajaran yang mereka gunakan tergantung kondisi siswa pada saat di dalam kelas. Implementasi kurikulum *Merdeka* di SMPN 2 PRAYA sudah berjalan dengan baik dan guru masih terus belajar mendalami kurikulum *Merdeka* ini.

Kata kunci : Strategi Guru, Kurikulum, Merdeka Kurikulum

## A. Introduction

A curriculum is a set of the education system's thoughts, actions, and objectives (Waluyo *et al.*, 2019). The curriculum is an essential part of education. The students will receive a learning design that will help in their successful learning. Law Number 20 of 2003's Article 1 regarding the National Education System states that a curriculum is a set of plans and regulations covering the content, learning resources, and methodologies used as guidance in implementing the teaching and learning process. It shows that the curriculum includes a lesson plan that helps the teacher teach students and help them reach their individual needs.

The curriculum in Indonesia has changed several times; some factors cause this. Curriculum development reflects changes in people's needs, technology, ways of thinking, and market demands (Widodo, 2015). The condition of the world as a whole is changing. Therefore, official and informal education curricula should be modified according to the diverse requirements of the modern world. Curriculum change over time is perceived as a response to global changes and the development of science and technology (Nawawi *et al.*, 2018). The Indonesian government has attempted to apply a new curriculum to improve the latest one. Teachers must comprehend the crucial components of a curriculum.

K-13 is the latest curriculum applied in Indonesia. The Republic of Indonesia's Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has released a new policy introducing the Merdeka curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum has diverse intra-curricular learning where the content will be optimized to give students enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competencies (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum is designed to be more straightforward and flexible for teachers or students. The country witnesses an ongoing learning crisis that fails to improve with each passing year

(Makarim, 2022). The Minister of Education and Culture's rule states that the curriculum's key components are its emphasis on core subjects, its adaptable structure, and its abundance of instructional resources. This curriculum develops into a flexible framework that prioritizes fundamental subjects and encourages students' growth as individuals and learners.

The Merdeka curriculum was released for several reasons. There has been no significant improvement occurred in the last 15 years. The Programme for International Students Assessment (PISA) results show that up to 70% of 15-year-old students in Indonesia had reading and math skills below the required level. Based on a survey by Advanced Knowledge and Skills for Sustainable in Indonesia (AKSI), due to the significant differences in learning outcomes between regions and socioeconomic classes, the government must design a suitable curriculum for the situation.

There are some differences between the 2013 curriculum and the Merdeka curriculum (Sari *et al.*, 2023):

1. The 2013 curriculum was designed based on the National Education System and National Education Standards goals, while building a Pancasila student profile was added to the Merdeka Curriculum. In the 2013 curriculum, competencies are arranged as an assessment using of Basic Competencies (KD) and Core Competencies. These aspects include social attitudes, spiritual attitudes, knowledge, and skills. At the same time, in the

*Merdeka* curriculum, using learning outcomes (*capaian pembelajaran*) is a learning competence that must be achieved in each phase.

2. The *Merdeka* Curriculum enables flexible scheduling of the learning process based on the requirements and skills of the teacher and the students being instructed. Meanwhile, the 2013 curriculum strongly emphasises learning in the classroom.
3. Assessment, Assessment, in the *Merdeka* curriculum, strengthens the assessment format and the assessment results to carry out design learning tailored to student achievement. Strengthen in carrying out assessments authentic for strengthening the Pancasila learning profile. The independent curriculum has no divisions in assessing attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In this *Merdeka* curriculum, no assessment uses KKM, so there is no KKM in this curriculum.
4. Teaching tools provided. The *Merdeka* curriculum contains textbooks and non-text books such as teaching modules, ATP flow of

learning objectives, examples of projects that support the operational curriculum of educational units, and the Pancasila learning profile.

Teachers are vital in providing an engaging teaching and learning environment (Abu Bakar et al., 2008). Therefore, teachers must be flexible since their jobs frequently change due to the policies in place. The workplace's policies are changing. Therefore, teachers must adapt to new contexts and circumstances (Amin et al., 2022). Teachers increasingly must adapt to new conditions in terms of the way they carry out lessons, evaluate students' learning, and engage with other educators, students, and administrators due to changes in educational policies.

Teachers can achieve national education goals because they are professional educators to increase the standard of education in their country. (Damayanti et al., 2022). In this case, teachers should use appropriate and effective teaching strategies. To help students understand, teachers need to be creative and employ valuable techniques. Teachers must carefully

select the tools within their grasp to further involve students in the learning process. Due to their variety, methods of teaching require the usage of multiple strategies. The teacher might select from various learning strategies to enhance the teaching approach while achieving the intended goals. According to Nilson (2016), the teaching technique is how teachers teach. It makes teaching a student easier for a teacher as easy as accomplishing the study objective. English teachers consider what students will learn, how they will learn it, and how well teachers will be able to follow learning activities in addition to what they will teach and how their students will benefit from it.

The 2013 and Merdeka curricula have different components. Teachers can use specific strategies in implementing *Merdeka*. As stated above, the 2013 curriculum and *the Merdeka* curriculum have differences. Changing the curriculum from K13 is a challenge for teachers (Rizki, 2022). The reality is that *the Merdeka Curriculum* is a new education policy. English teachers in Indonesia must adapt to any regulations and guidelines of the

*Merdeka Curriculum*. The main difficulties faced by the teachers are preparing for the implementation of *the Merdeka Curriculum* (Rizky, 2022). This difficulty is regarding the various administrations of implementing *the Merdeka Curriculum*.

Regarding all the urgency stated above, this research aims to identify the teachers' strategies for implementing *the Merdeka* curriculum. Since there are slight differences between the 2013 and *Merdeka* curricula, and also inform strategies to overcome them, ultimately leading to improved student learning outcomes. As a result, the findings will be crucial information for the government and schools in determining whether *the Merdeka* curriculum has been implemented correctly.

## **B. Research Method**

In this research, a qualitative descriptive approach, as advanced by Creswell (2009), is adopted to delve into the nuanced impact of the *Merdeka Curriculum* on the landscape of teaching and learning activities at SMPN 2 Praya. The study seeks to not only scrutinize the

outcomes but also to gain insights into the varied strategies employed by English teachers in the practical implementation of the curriculum. The chosen research site, SMPN 2 Praya, is pivotal to this investigation, and English teachers emerge as the central subjects of the study due to their direct engagement with the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

Data collection is multifaceted, encompassing classroom observation, interviews with teachers, and the examination of relevant documentation. The triangulation of these methods ensures a comprehensive and multifaceted understanding of the curriculum's impact. The research instruments employed—interviews, classroom observations, and documentation—are chosen to capture the dynamic aspects of the teaching and learning process.

Moving into the realm of data analysis, a three-fold approach is adopted. Data reduction, as a preliminary step, involves the meticulous pruning of irrelevant information to distill the core themes and patterns. Subsequently, data display unfolds as a structured presentation of the information

gathered. Given the narrative nature of qualitative research, this step is crucial in ensuring that the data is comprehensible and its nuances are preserved without compromising on clarity.

The final step involves drawing conclusions verifying the data's accuracy. Temporary conclusions are formed, which subsequently undergo and verification. This multifaceted approach not only adds depth to the study but also ensures the reliability and validity of the findings. The insights from this research are anticipated to make meaningful contributions to the ongoing discourse surrounding the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, offering valuable perspectives for educators, researchers, and policymakers.

### **C. Findings and Discussion**

#### **Strategies used by Teachers in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum**

In the interview with Mrs Irma (seventh grade teacher,) the teacher explained the teaching strategies employed in the *Merdeka curriculum* notably, there is no specific

predetermined strategy, as the teacher adapts to the unique conditions within the class. The curriculum provides a set of strategies in the Lesson Plans (RPP), offering a guide for teachers to follow. The teacher emphasizes the flexibility to mix these strategies based on the students' current learning conditions.. Based on the observation in seventh grades with Mrs Irma in the classroom, teacher carries out a dialogue and asks the students in the class several questions. The teacher also carries out a discussion of the results of the conversation with the students.

In the interview with Mrs Pahmi (seventh grade teacher), teacher uses different strategies to teach in the Merdeka curriculum. Teacher follows the plans based on the lesson plan but also change things based on how the students are doing. Since the students in seventh grade have different abilities, the teacher adjusts the methods to help everyone, often using discussions during lessons. Based on the observation in the classroom, the teacher relates the topics being studied to everyday life. The teacher provides exercises in class according to the context of daily life, such as the family environment.

In the interview with Mrs Ipasari (eight grade teacher), the teacher

employs discussion or pair-group methods as their teaching strategies in the Merdeka curriculum. The choice depends on the specific class conditions and the material being covered. Teacher often encourage students to have some freedom in learning or working on assignments, promoting group activities during class.. Based on the observation in the classroom, the teacher asked students to make posters containing invitations that were appropriate to the topic being discussed. This is done by teachers so that students can work together with other friends, and students' understanding can increase by doing something together with other students.

Moreover, based on the result of the documentation, it was also found that in the lesson plan, the teachers used some strategies, such as discussion. Based on the observation and interview, teachers used several teaching strategies. Teachers apply strategies that follow students' abilities and the learning objectives in observation sections that found the lesson plans for English teachers who taught seventh grade and did not find the lesson plans for English teachers who taught eighth grade. The guidelines used by English teachers who teach eighth grade are only from the package book provided by the school.

## **The Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum**

Interview and documentation: the found out how the Merdeka curriculum was implemented. According to teachers, implementing the new curriculum in schools requires more extended adaptation because the composition of the old and new curriculum is different. Teachers also gave examples such as the book packages recommended by the government, which still needed to align with children's abilities at school. In reality, teachers are still unable to use these textbooks due to the mismatch in children's ability levels in the classroom. The implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum at SMPN 2 Praya is already underway, but teachers are still learning to understand this curriculum.

In interview with Mrs. Irma, in the school's implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, there is a flexible activity focused on strengthening students' profiles in Pancasila. Teacher confirms that this activity has been carried out, with scheduled times for its execution. This year, the activity is synchronized

for all classes on specific days, whereas in the previous year, it took place every day. Regarding the overall implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in the school, the teachers acknowledge its application since the previous year. However, teachers are continually learning and understanding the Merdeka curriculum, highlighting the need for adaptation among educators. When asked about the significant differences between the Merdeka curriculum and Curriculum 13, the interviewee points out clear distinctions. One notable change is the use of modules in the current Lesson Plans (RPP), covering all the material. Additionally, the implementation of the Pancasila student profile strengthening program is a new and distinctive feature of the Merdeka curriculum. The teacher also highlights that teachers in the Merdeka curriculum are compelled to be more self-reliant in finding curriculum-related materials, as there is no specific training provided for the Merdeka curriculum.

In the interview with Mrs. Pahmi, overall implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in our school, it's underway, but there are still some

areas that need improve. This is because teachers are adapting to the new curriculum, and they are still deepening their knowledge about it. Teacher also adds, there's a flexible activity in the Merdeka curriculum that strengthens students' understanding of Pancasila and the students are really enthusiastic about it. The activity is scheduled, and there are specific themes for the students to work on. The implementation is going well because there are modules that guide the teachers during the activity, making it easier for them to direct the students. In the interview teacher also add significant differences between the Merdeka curriculum and Curriculum 13, one noticeable change is in the Lesson Plans (RPP) used in the Merdeka curriculum, which incorporates modules covering all the material. The most significant difference is the implementation of the Pancasila student profile strengthening program. This is a new aspect of the Merdeka curriculum and sets it apart from Curriculum 13. However, teacher mostly used materials given by the school and education department because she thinks it is more helpful. Even though the app has useful stuff, the teacher

prefers the extra materials from school and education authorities.

In the interview section with Mrs. Ipasari, Implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in the school, it began last year, and I personally started teaching with it this semester. Since it's relatively new, both in the school and for teacher, the implementation is considered good, but there's room for improvement. The Merdeka curriculum has only been in place for two years, and being new to it, I'm still learning and trying to understand it better. In our school, the Pancasila student profile strengthening activity in the Merdeka curriculum is up and running. Students are given projects with specific themes, and this activity has a set schedule, making it more organized. This semester, the theme is about local wisdom in Lombok. The significant differences between the Merdeka curriculum and Curriculum 13, the clear distinction lies in the curriculum structure. Another notable difference is the Pancasila student profile strengthening activity, which is a unique and new component of the Merdeka curriculum. This activity is seen as beneficial for developing students' skills through the projects

assigned to them. Regarding the Merdeka curriculum app provided to teachers, the teacher has downloaded it but hasn't used it much yet. Teacher expresses an intention to explore and use it as a future reference for teaching, recognizing its potential as a valuable tool to deepen their understanding of the new curriculum.

Teachers are also still deepening this *Merdeka* curriculum because this curriculum is still new and has only been running for two years at SMPN 2 PRAYA. The teacher also said that the school had implemented what the curriculum wanted, but the results could have been more optimal. Teachers have also understood the concepts of the independent curriculum through the independent curriculum platform and received material about the curriculum from the education department through school supervisors.

In the interview section, teachers mention that the flexibility desired in the *Merdeka* curriculum has been implemented in this school, such as implementing the Pancasila student profile, which is carried out on a scheduled basis. However, in

implementation, students are given the freedom to explore the themes that have been given. Based on interviews with teachers, the implementation of the Pancasila student profile has been carried out at SMPN 2 PRAYA. This semester, the theme given is local wisdom in Lombok. Through the documentation, found a module for Pancasila student's profiles also there is module as a guide for teachers in carrying out Pancasila student profile activities.

### **Discussion**

Based on the findings found, teachers use several types of strategies in teaching and implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in schools. However, from the results of observations in class when teaching with the results of teacher interviews, some results go in different directions. Some teachers fit into observation class interviews, and some do not. Based on the results of interviews with teachers, they determine or choose teaching strategies according to class conditions and students' needs during learning activities in the classroom. The findings align with statements by Nilson (2016) that the teaching

technique is how the teachers choose to teach. Teachers can determine what strategies to use in teaching based on the class conditions and their students' abilities.

The results of observation and documentation through lesson plan. The teacher who taught in seventh grade carries out a dialogue and asks the students in the class several questions. The teacher also carries out a discussion of the results of the conversation with the students. The strategy that this teacher uses is a learning strategy to improve students' thinking abilities. The findings in line with statements by Fatimah (2023) that learning strategy to improve thinking ability is the strategy built in a dialogical and questioning atmosphere to answer continuously. This strategy allows teachers and students to have long discussions on the topic being discussed. Teachers who teach in seventh grade also use contextual teaching strategies. Based on information and the results of observations in the classroom, the teacher relates the topics being studied to everyday life. The teacher provides exercises in class according to the context of daily life, such as the family environment. Following the

statement from Fatimah (2023), contextual teaching strategy is the strategy that links learning material to the world context, the reality that students face every day both in the family environment, society, nature, and the world work so that students can make connections between the knowledge he has and its application in everyday life.

According to the result of observation from eighth-grade teachers, the teacher also asks students to do something together or in groups. Based on the results of observations in the classroom, the teacher asked students to make posters containing invitations that were appropriate to the topic being discussed. This is done by teachers so that students can work together with other friends, and students' understanding can increase by doing something together with other students. The strategy used by this teacher is a cooperative teaching strategy. Following the statement from Fatimah (2023), working together among fellow group students increase motivation, productivity, and learning gains. However, teachers who taught in eighth grade did not have a lesson plan as a guideline in

the teaching-learning process. Based on interviews, teachers only use textbooks as a guide when teaching in class. However, the lesson plan is essential in teaching and learning activities in the classroom as a teacher's guide in teaching and determining teaching strategies.

The implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum at SMPN 2 PRAYA has been running for two years since 2022. Based on the results of interviews with teachers about how the *Merdeka* curriculum was implemented at SMPN 2 PRAYA, they explained that the *Merdeka* curriculum at SMPN 2 PRAYA has been running but has not been maximized because this curriculum is a new curriculum and teachers need adaptation in implementing it in schools. The teacher also said that the reality conditions in the field were sometimes different, so teachers needed to adapt to the student's existing conditions.

In this *Merdeka* curriculum, several new things must be implemented, such as applying the Pancasila student profile. Implementation of the Pancasila student profile is already underway at

SMPN 2 PRAYA. The implementation of the Pancasila student profile is carried out under the module created by the school's curriculum team. The implementation of the Pancasila student profile is carried out on a scheduled but flexible basis, and students can freely be creative according to their abilities through this activity. Based on government regulations, this Pancasila student profile aims to strengthen efforts to achieve the Pancasila Student Competency Standards Graduate. There are six characteristics that compose up a Pancasila student profile are 1) faith, reverence for the Almighty, and noble character; 2) independence; 3) teamwork; 4) global diversity; 5) critical thinking; and 6) creativity. Local wisdom is the theme of Pancasila students' profile in SMPN 2 PRAYA; as the outcome of these projects, students can be more creative.

In interviews with teachers, some teachers are still trying to understand the situation and learn how this curriculum works. In this *Merdeka* curriculum, teachers must find out about the curriculum independently, which is different from the previous curriculum. This finding

aligns with the statement by Rizky (2022), changing the curriculum from K13 is a challenge for teachers. Teachers are provided with training to strengthen the curriculum. Material about the curriculum can be accessed through platforms provided by the government and material sourced from the education department.

#### **D. Conclusion**

This research aimed to investigate the strategies employed by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka curriculum at SMPN 2 PRAYA. The findings reveal that teachers utilize various strategies in their teaching, influenced by factors such as class conditions and students' needs. The Merdeka curriculum has been implemented at SMPN 2 PRAYA for two years, with teachers facing challenges in adapting to this curriculum. The implementation of the Pancasila student profile is underway, aiming to strengthen efforts to achieve the Pancasila Student Competency Standards Graduate. However, it was observed that teachers still learning about the Merdeka curriculum, indicating a need for ongoing training

and support. Despite the availability of various teaching strategies recommended by Fatimah et al. (2023), this research found that not all strategies were consistently applied by teachers. Three main strategies—learning strategy to improve thinking ability, cooperative teaching strategy, and contextual teaching strategy—were identified in the classroom. The flexibility in strategy application is influenced by factors such as student conditions and the specific content being taught.

In conclusion, the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SMPN 2 PRAYA is a dynamic process, with teachers adapting to new strategies and facing challenges in fully grasping the curriculum. The findings noted the importance of continuous training, clear guidelines, and the development of a comprehensive understanding of the curriculum to enhance teaching practices. As the Merdeka curriculum evolves, ongoing support and resources, including government-provided applications, play a crucial role in assisting teachers in developing a deeper understanding and effective

implementation of this independent curriculum.

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