English Teachers’ Challenges in Applying Learning Model of the Implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

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Abstract. This research was conducted to look the learning process in the current Indonesian curriculum namely Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. The objective of this qualitative research is to find out the challenges that are faced by English teachers in implementing Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in the learning process activity. In terms of novelty, the researcher in this study observed the challenges of English teachers in implementing the learning model in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum which is associated with diagnostic assessment, 21st century learning and differentiated instruction. These things are part of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. To reach the result, semi-structured interview was conducted of three English teachers from Sekolah Penggerak junior high school and two English teachers from non-Sekolah Penggerak junior high school. Five English teachers as data sources in the interview with the classification of teachers who have been implementing Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in the learning process. The procedures used in this qualitative research are data reduction, data display, and data verification. The researcher found that English teachers both at Sekolah Penggerak and non-Sekolah Penggerak junior high school faced challenges in learning process such as student’s condition, differentiated instruction adjustment, English as a foreign language position and the need for more preparation in the provision of learning media. This research is expected to be one of the references on how to implement the English learning process and its challenges for curriculum supervisors and to provide information regarding the challenges that are faced by teachers for school to conduct evaluation in the curriculum implementation.

Keywords: Learning process, Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, Challenge, Teaching English, Junior High School
Introduction

Education is one of the essential factors in creating and ensuring the quality of human resource and the development of the nation. The success of education application depends on the curriculum. This is the reason why curriculum becomes the core of education. The changes of curriculum are done according to the developments of era, technology, information, and communication. The curriculum is an educational program designed to prepare young people to contribute and become useful members of society once their education is completed. The curriculum, as an educational program, is always rooted in the nation's culture, based on past and present life, and based on predictions of future life (Maba, 2018).

Other paragraphs are indented. In 2021, the Ministry of Education and Culture has announced the new curriculum named Merdeka Belajar or Merdeka Belajar Curriculum as the new step in creating and transforming the education to realize the excellent of Indonesian human resource that has Pancasila Profil Student. “Merdeka” means ‘independent’ therefore this curriculum has a purpose to create students to be an independent learner. Tohir (2020) states that students are expected to become truly strong and autonomous individuals in Merdeka Belajar Curriculum that is aligned with 21st century learning. The concept is, there is a paradigm change in education so that it becomes more independent with an innovative learning culture (Rohiyatussakinah, 2021).

The implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has been realized since 2021, through Sekolah Penggerak as the 7th episode of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum big program from Ministry of Education and Culture, Research and Technology. Sekolah Penggerak is a pilot project of the curriculum implementation. Merdeka Belajar Curriculum implementation is important in the context of post-covid 19 pandemic learning recovery, where one of the interventions is student-centered learning. (Aprima & Sari, 2022).

Through Buku Saku, Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is defined by the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia as a curriculum with diverse intra-curricular learning where the content would be more ideal so that students have enough time to explore topics and build competency. Teachers have the freedom to select numerous teaching instruments in order to customize learning to learning needs and interests of students. Projects to improve Pancasila student profile accomplishment are produced based on government-specified themes. Because the project is not intended to produce specific learning outcomes, it is unrelated to subject matter. (Kemdikbud, 2022).

Changes in education policy, including curriculum, take time to implement, so the government gives chances for educators and education units to apply the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in accordance with their specific readiness. Just as students learn according to their learning readiness stage, educators and educational units must also learn how to implement the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in accordance with their particular levels of preparation, and gradually gain proficiency in using it (Sudarmiani et al., 2022).

The implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is not carried out simultaneously and massively. The Ministry of Education and Culture establishes regulations to allow educational units to implement curricula based on their level of readiness. Several programs which support this curriculum are Sekolah
Therefore, the researcher in this study intends to find out what are the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing learning in the newly implemented curriculum, namely the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum which is expected to be an evaluation consideration for education units.

**Methods**

This study is designed as a case study. According to Creswell as cited in Habib (2021) stated that a case study is a research approach used to thoroughly analyze something by acquiring complete information through various data collection procedures. A case study is a strategy for researching and studying events or phenomena about something.

According to (Yuna, 2006), A case study research project consists of numerous steps, as follow:

1) Identify and define questions
2) Select a design and research instrument.
3) Data collection
4) Select a data analysis technique
5) Prepare for case study report

Therefore, this research is to analyze learning model usage at Sekolah Penggerak and non-Sekolah Penggerak junior high school which implement Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.

The information or facts in the data are those that are used to discuss or decide on a research question's response. The participants from which data can be gathered for the purpose of research are the study's source of data (Arikunto, 2010).

The source of data in this research are English teachers from SMPN 1 Plumbon as a Sekolah Penggerak and SMPN 2 Ciwaringin Cirebon who have been implementing Merdeka Belajar Curriculum since 2022. Therefore, the research here also tries to find out the challenges that are faced by English Teachers from both schools.

The primary sources of data in this research are from the observation in English teaching process and interview of English teachers. The teachers here are those who have been implementing Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in teaching English. In addition, this research's secondary sources came from a variety of readings sources in such as journals, articles, essays, research, book and syllabus for English subjects. Thus, the reading sources are related to the research topic being studied by the researcher.

The sources of the data in this research are collected through observational checklist and interview. The researcher chose to collect data through interviews. In qualitative research, interviews are commonly used as a data collection tool. They are commonly used as a research strategy to collect information about participants' experiences, opinions, and beliefs about a particular research question or phenomenon of interest (Lambert and Loiselle, 2007 as cited in Ryan et al., 2009). According to Sandelowski (2002), one-on-one interviews are the most often utilized data collection method in qualitative research. As a result, because this is a qualitative study, the researcher used an interview as an instrument.
The systematic collection of data is known as a data analysis technique, which helps the researcher reach conclusions. The correct data analysis method will make a good conclusion. The researcher uses the Miles and Huberman model to assess qualitative data (Wandi et al., 2013).

a. Data Reduction
The process of selecting or summarizing significant information is known as data reduction. Due to the size of the information obtained in the field, it must be accurately and thoroughly recorded. During the data gathering process, data is reduced; at this point, this will also happen by summarizing and constructing activity divisions (parts). This transformation process continues till the final report for the entire research is ready.

b. Data Display
The process of selecting or summarizing significant information is known as data reduction. Due to the size of the information obtained in the field, it must be accurately and thoroughly recorded. During the data gathering process, data is reduced; at this point, this will also happen by summarizing and constructing activity divisions (parts). This transformation process continues till the final report for the entire research is ready.

c. Conclusion Drawing/Verification
The last step in this data collection is conclusion drawing and verification. From the beginning of data collection, the research compiles and records the challenges experienced in the field in order to reach a conclusion. Typically, first judgments are still speculative and may change during the data collection process. However, the conclusion can be credible if it is supported by valid and consistent evidence.

Results and Discussion

This study analyses the challenges English teachers face in implementing learning model in the learning process of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. The researcher divides into four sections in this chapter, they are: students’ condition adjustment, differentiated instruction adjustment, English as Foreign Language, and Learning Media Provision. The researcher aims to find out the challenges in implementing Learning model faced by English teachers in implementing Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in the classroom. The results of discussion are below:

Students’ Condition

Student conditions such as readiness and mood play an important role in the implementation of learning models. This is because the implementation of the learning model cannot run if it is not supported by good student conditions. This was conveyed by Teachers 1 and 3 from Sekolah Penggerak Junior High School:

[Teacher 1: …what often happens is the student's mood which often changes. Sometimes today's meeting is in a good mood, the next meeting is not. So, I as a teacher must be able to really see the condition of students so that they can be motivated and enthusiastic again in learning.]

[Teacher 3: The challenge is that we have to prepare students' readiness to participate in learning because not all students have an interest in learning]
According to Teacher 1, students' condition and mood can affect the implementation of the learning model. Teacher 1 needs to see the students' condition so that they can be motivated. The condition of students does affect the smooth implementation of learning including learning models because the main success in implementing learning models is students' interest in following and understanding learning. Nasution (1998, p.179) as cited in Darso (2017) argues that the conditions before learning consist of attention, motivation, and the development of readiness. Readiness is a physical and mental ability to learn, as well as expectations of abilities had and background to do something, as well as a person's general condition that makes them ready to respond or answer in a certain way to a circumstance. Besides, Soejanto (1991) in Mulyani (2013, p.1) stated that the readiness of individual students in learning will determine the quality of the process and student learning achievement. The success of students in preparing before taking lessons can determine student success in studying so that it will affect student learning achievement (Verina, 2019).

Based on the above findings, teachers who face mood and condition changes from students may not have implemented diagnostic assessments before teaching begins. Diagnostic assessment itself has an important role in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum which focuses learning to suit the needs and characteristics of students. According to a book of Kemendikbudristek (2022) entitled Panduan Pembelajaran dan Asesmen Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Pendidikan Dasar, dan Menengah, teachers in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum are expected to strengthen assessment at the beginning of learning which is used to design learning in accordance with the readiness of students. In this statement, teachers are expected to carry out assessments to determine the readiness of students, in this case diagnostic assessments can play a role. Diagnostic assessments that can be used to determine students' own conditions are non-cognitive diagnostic assessments that aim to measure the psychological aspects and emotional conditions of learners before starting learning. This non-cognitive diagnostic assessment emphasizes more on the psychological and emotional well-being of learners. Teachers should be able to ask and create questions that help them get comprehensive and in-depth enough information (Mutiani et al., 2020 as cited in Maut, 2022).

**Differentiated Instruction Adjustment**

One of the new things that is promoted in the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is differentiated instruction. This type of learning is also recommended by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture to be implemented in learning. It is intended that learning can be followed by students who have differences in learning styles. However, although differentiated instruction is not new, for most teachers, differentiated learning is a new thing in learning. Therefore, this learning is a challenge in implementing the learning model in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This was expressed by Teacher 2 from Sekolah Penggerak Junior High School:

https://jirep.org/index.php/jirep/index
Differentiated instruction is a teaching and learning process in which students learn subject matter based on their distinctive skills, preferences, and needs so that they do not become discouraged or feel like failures during their learning experience (Tomlinson, 2017 as cited in Kristiani et al., 2021). Differentiated instruction itself was initiated by Carol Tomlinson.

In differentiated instruction, teachers must realize that there are different approaches to learning a subject when differentiation is applied. The content, process and product parts of differentiated instruction are the three things that teachers must implement. The teacher plans and organizes the materials, activities, tasks to be done at school or at home and a final evaluation adapted to the students' readiness, interests and preferences (Purba et al., (2021) as cited in Gusteti & Neviyarni, 2022).

In relation to the learning model, Wahyuni (2022) stated that To increase student learning results, differentiated instruction can be combined with other learning models such as Problem-Based Learning and Project-Based Learning that are customized for students' learning styles. Based on the responses from TSP 2, the adjustment of differentiated instruction in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is a challenge for teachers including English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in learning. Based on the statements above, challenges can occur because teachers need more preparation in implementing the learning model with a differentiated approach.

**English as Foreign Language**

English in Indonesia has a position as a foreign language, which is why English is difficult for most students in Indonesia to understand. Therefore, this is a challenge for English teachers in teaching English. This was felt by Teacher 1 from a non-Sekolah Penggerak junior high school as follows:

[Teacher 1: One of the challenges is because English is still a foreign language for students which results in low enthusiasm for learning.]

Johnson (2008) as cited in Widagdo (2021) states that English as a foreign language refers to learning English in nations where English is not widely spoken. EFL, in other words, is the teaching of English language skills to students who do not live in a non-English speaking setting.

Related to English as a Foreign Language is a challenge, Akbari (2015) said that the main obstacle to learning English is a lack of an environment in which they can become acquainted with the original language. In other words, there is no active role of English outside the classroom. As a result of this, students feel no immediate need to learn English. In addition, there is a notable lack of interest and motivation among EFL students in many non-English-speaking countries. Students having no desire to learn English is the most common challenge faced by English teachers (Widagdo, 2021).

Based on some statements above, it can be concluded that English as a foreign language can indeed be a challenge in implementing English learning, including applying learning models to it. In implementing learning models, teachers are not
only required to be able to motivate students in following the learning models but also to make them interested in learning English.

In this case, EFL can be a challenge for English teachers perhaps because the teacher does not link English learning with the development of 21st century skills that must be present in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. The 21st century is popular for bringing changes, namely the rapid development of Science and Technology (IPTEK) which results in a change in the learning paradigm characterized by changes in curriculum, media, and technology. Good learning media interprets abstract concepts to be easily understood (Rahayu et al., 2022).

21st century learning itself must be adapted to the progress and demands of the times. School development must also change the learning from teacher-centered learning approach to student-centered learning. This is because today's students must adjust to 21st century skills in preparation for their future (Mar et al., 2022). Steven (2011) as cited in Purwaningtyas (2017) stated that in 21st century learning, teachers can apply learning methods that integrate technology to make language learning content and processes more informative, accessible, and involve students to be active. Thus, in facing this challenge, teachers need to link English learning with 21st century learning so that students can be more familiar with English which is positioned as EFL so that it does not become foreign to students.

Learning Media Provision

In implementing the learning model, learning media has an important role so that learning can be carried out more meaningfully and fun. The determination of learning media must be in line with the chosen learning model and the characteristics of the students in the class. This is a challenge for English teachers in implementing the learning model as expressed by Teacher 2 from a non-Sekolah Penggerak junior high school as follows:

[Teacher 2: The challenge is probably preparing teaching materials and providing learning media when we have found the suitable learning model with the material. We also asked to be creative and become up to date with the development of learning]

Media in short means the material component and the tool component in the learning system. In a wider meaning, media means the most effective use of all system components and learning resources to achieve particular learning goals (Miifah, 2013). The definition of Media is also conveyed by Taufik Syastra (2015) as cited in Tafonao (2018) that learning media is everything in the form of both physical and technical in the learning process that can help teachers to make it easier to convey learning materials that can help teachers in delivering subject matter to students so as to facilitate the achievement of learning objectives that have been formulated.

The utilization of teaching media essentially aims to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of teaching. With the help of the media, students are expected to use as many of their sensory organs as possible to observe, hear, feel, absorb, live to have knowledge and skills as a result of learning. (Umar, 2014). Rowntree suggests six media functions, namely: 1) arouse learning motivation, 2) repeat
what has been learned, 3) provide learning stimulus, 4) activate student responses, 5) provide immediate feedback and 6) promote harmonious training.

In the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, teachers are required to be creative and innovative by involving various learning media that encourage students to be active and interactive in the learning process. Teachers must also be facilitators to form students who think critically, creatively and skillfully communicate and collaborate. Teachers not only rely on students' independence in learning, but also have to prepare some appropriate learning media in this Merdeka Belajar Curriculum (Putri et al., 2022).

With some of the above statements, it can be concluded that the provision of learning media in the application of learning models is very important in order to realize interesting learning for students. This is a challenge for teachers to be able to choose learning media that is in accordance with the characteristics and needs of students.

**Conclusion**

English teachers from the Sekolah Penggerak and non-Sekolah Penggerak junior high schools in implementing the learning model in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. There are 4 things that become challenges for teachers in implementing learning with learning models. The first challenge is the condition of students who are not always in good condition so it can make the implementation of the learning model difficult to run. In this case, teachers need to use ways to get students interested and motivated in following a series of lessons. Then, the second challenge is the adjustment of differentiated learning which requires teachers to create learning sequences that suit the needs and interests of different students. Third, the position of English as a foreign language is also a challenge for teachers because most students still do not know English fully. The fourth challenge found in the research is the provision of learning media that must be in accordance with the material and the needs of students which makes teachers have to prepare relevant learning media. Despite the valuable results of this study, this small-scale qualitative research also has shortcomings. This study is only to find out the challenges of English teachers in implementing learning models. For further research, it is expected to also discuss the efforts that teachers do in solving the challenges to produce more complete and significant research.

This research certainly has several shortcomings in a number of aspects, such as the limited methods and obtaining data instrument. Researcher also only focused to the challenges of learning process conducted by English teacher while it is also needed to find out what solution they do to solve the challenges and problems.

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