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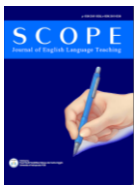

Research Article

Using the Merdeka Curriculum for English Language Instruction

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A B S T R A C T

This research explores the application of the Merdeka Curriculum to the teaching of English at SMAN 1 Cilegon and SMAN 2 Krakatau Steel Cilegon. Using a qualitative descriptive method proposed by Creswell, the study investigates teaching planning, material development, instructional strategies, and student achievement. Data obtained through observation and in- depth interview. The findings reveal essential aspects of the implementation: Firstly, teachers meticulously design lesson plans based on differentiated learning principles. They thoroughly understand Learning Outcomes (CP), formulate corresponding Learning Objectives (TP), and create Learning Objectives Flows (ATP) to establish a logical teaching sequence. This planning aims to create an inclusive and effective learning environment catering to diverse student needs. Secondly, English teaching materials in the Merdeka Curriculum emphasize varied content, including the use of technology and the internet as crucial information sources. Active student engagement is encouraged through diverse media, and teachers adapt strategies for complex materials. Additionally, teachers customize learning materials and employ strategies like Jigsaw and project-based learning to meet students' diverse needs. Both schools prioritize initial and final assessments to gauge prior knowledge and track progress, promoting tailored teaching. Finally, students in both schools show progress, notably in speaking and writing skills, with the Merdeka curriculum. The inclusion of project-based learning, specifically the P5 project, distinguishes the Merdeka curriculum and captivates students. This research has implications about practical Merdeka Curriculum implementation in English instruction, offering guidance for teachers and institutions in optimizing the curriculum for diverse student populations.

INTRODUCTION

Provided that English is now a universal language, learning the language is crucial. Language is a communication tool. (Brown, 2017) It is employed by most societies worldwide. Although English is a foreign language that is spoken in many other countries; it is not considered a second language in Indonesia. In the current English is also referred to as the target language in the Indonesian curriculum, which the teacher in the classroom needs to take into account. Thus, it is intended that the pupils' English-speaking skills will improve.

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Most of people who wish to advance their capability must learn English. In the field of modern science and technology, everyone should be able to communicate in another language, especially English. For Indonesians, English is a foreign language that is challenging to learn. So, it's not as simple as we might imagine to become a professional language teacher, especially when teaching English as a foreign language. Additionally, students must consciously study it. It is why, for a variety of reasons, English is taught in Indonesia in elementary schools through institutions.

Many changes have occurred in various sectors as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak in Indonesia, one of which is the education sector. During the Covid-19 pandemic, there was a special condition that caused different learning losses in the achievement of student competencies. In addition, many national and international studies state that Indonesia has also experienced a learning crisis for a long time.

These studies found that there are not a few students in Indonesia who have difficulty understanding simple reading or applying basic mathematical concepts. These findings also manifest that there is a fairly steep education gap between regions and social groups in Indonesia. In light of these circumstances, the Ministry of Education and Culture is working to restore learning. Creating a "Merdeka Curriculum" is one of the initiatives taken to address the issues that currently exist (Khoirurrijal, Fadriati, Sofia, Anisa Dwi Makrufi, Sunarya Gandi Abdul Muin, Tajeri, Ali Fakhrudin, Hamdan, 2022).

This curriculum focuses on material essentials, character development, and students' competence. All educational levels, including elementary school, junior high school, senior high school, vocational school, and college, can use the Merdeka Curriculum. At elementary school, it is found some changes such English subject (Dewi et al., 2023) Based on this, the latest edition, known as the "Merdeka curriculum," is a concept that gives teachers and students flexibility in choosing the learning system to be employed. In fact, it has been seen thus far that the teaching and learning process uses a curriculum It is customized to the learning context and based on the National Education Standards requirements of each educational unit (Kosasih et al., 2022). Comparing to the previous researches. The novelty of the existing research using the Merdeka Curriculum for English Language Instruction is its unique ability to adapt to diverse educational settings and enhance student engagement through personalized learning approaches.

Students' creativity will be stimulated by the Merdeka Belajar Program since it gives them the freedom to study on their own and explore learning resources beyond predetermined parameters. Students' communication, teamwork, creativity, and critical thinking (4C) skills—all essential for meeting the problems of the twenty-first century— will undoubtedly grow as a result of this. Critical thinking, cooperation, communication, and creativity.

METHOD

This research applied a qualitative descriptive methodology. This present research involved two kind of instruments; observation and interview. In collecting data, researchers involved several aspects to observe including teachers planning, material development, instructional strategies, and students' achievement. In interview, researchers provide several questions related four aspects have already mentioned. This research was conducted in one of the educational institutions, namely SMAN 1 Cilegon, located in Jl. Kyai H. Tubagus Ismail F No.103, Ciwaduk, Kec. Cilegon, Kota Cilegon, Banten 42418. and SMAN 2 Krakatau Steel Cilegon, located in Jl. Bukit Palem, Kotabumi, Kec. Gerogol, Kota Cilegon, Banten 42434. The selections of this research location was based on the consideration that SMAN 1 Cilegon and SMAN 2 Krakatau Steel Cilegon is a school that implements an Merdeka Curriculum, this research was carried out during teaching and learning activites 2023/2024 academic year. The data for this study was collected using a variety of methods by the researchers. Three methods are employed: documentation, interviewing, and observation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher provided the research findings in this part. The description of the data collected make into the research findings. The goal is to provide a response to the first chapter's research problem. Through data collection using school observations and interviews with 2 English teachers at SMAN 1 Cilegon (Mrs. Ambar as the English teacher) and SMAN 2 Krakatau Steel Cilegon (Mrs. Maya as the English teacher).

The researcher conducted a study at SMAN 1 Cilegon from July 24, 2023, to August 4, 2023. Subsequently, from August 5 to August 8, 2023, she recorded the research findings. Following that, she continued at SMAN 2 Krakatau Steel Cilegon from August 9 to August 24, 2023. Finally, from August 5 to August 7, 2023, she resumed recording and documenting the finale research findings.

1. The teacher planning in the implementing in English Instructions of Merdeka Curriculum

In the Merdeka curriculum, a lesson plan is referred to as a teaching module that is systematically prepared, and teachers are free to create this module according to the

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format in the school. Before designing the module, the important thing is The instructor needs to focused. the students' characteristic and their needs so the teaching strategy is focused on students' centered and differentiated learning. There are four stages in formulating a lesson plan, and these stages include understanding learning outcomes or Capaian Pembelajaran (CP), formulating learning objectives or Tujuan Pembelajaran (TP), structuring the learning objectives flow or Alur Tujuan pembelajaran (ATP), and designing the learning instruction (module). Teachers can choose how to create teaching modules based on their individual abilities. Generally, there are three methods:

- Fully developing the learning objectives flow and/or lesson planning,
- Developing the learning objectives flow and/or lesson plans based on the examples provided by the government, using the provided examples.

Figure 1

In the process of teaching English at SMAN 1 Cilegon and SMAN 2 Krakatau Steel, teachers play a pivotal role in designing learning experiences that align with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize flexibility and a focus on tailored learning to meet students' needs. Learning modules serve as an effective tool in implementing this approach, providing clear guidance and structure for differentiated learning processes.

2. Teaching Material in the Implementing in English Instructions of Merdeka Curriculum

Designing English language learning materials in the Merdeka Curriculum involves an approach that focuses on flexibility, inclusivity, and adaptability to students' needs. This approach emphasizes the importance of tailoring the curriculum and teaching methods to accommodate the diverse learning styles and abilities of individual students. It means recognizing that not all students learn at the same pace or in the same way, and as such, the materials should be designed to cater to these differences. Differentiated instruction is a key strategy within the Merdeka Curriculum, allowing educators to customize their teaching to ensure a more productive and welcoming learning environment by attending to each student's specific needs.

In the context of developing teaching materials, my preference lies with using both PowerPoint (PPT) and Canva, which essentially functions as a graphic design tool for creating visually appealing presentations similar to PPT. These tools prove immensely beneficial for educators as they facilitate the creation of well-structured teaching materials. Additionally, by leveraging existing technology, we aim to harness the advantages of digital resources and enhance the overall effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.

Sources of information are readily available in various forms, accessible through online platforms, traditional media outlets, and even personal networks like friends or colleagues. The beauty of these sources lies in their versatility and accessibility, as they can be obtained freely from virtually any location. What is particularly significant is that these sources often touch upon the subject matter being taught, fostering more extensive discussions and varied perspectives.

Hence, it becomes apparent from the interview that material sources are ubiquitous, transcending physical boundaries, and not solely reliant on educators within the confines of a school. This broad spectrum of accessible knowledge empowers both students and educators to explore and engage with diverse resources, enriching the learning experience. The teachers at SMA 1 Cilegon and SMA 2 KS Cilegon share the practice of using the internet as a source of educational content. Both SMA 1 Cilegon students and SMA 2 KS Cilegon students actively engage in English-language learning activities. If the content is covered over the course of multiple meetings, teachers at SMA 1 Cilegon and SMA 2 KS Cilegon develop various strategies and procedures. The limitations placed on the teachers by the available teaching resources reveal the contrasts between the two schools. Since there are so many resources on the internet, SMA 1 Cilegon has no issues. Teachers from SMA 2 KS Cilegon are experiencing issues with the internet network.

Both schools recognize the importance of differentiated learning to cater to the unique needs of their students. While SMA 1 Cilegon employs a variety of strategies such as Jigsaw, problem-based, and project-based, SMA 2 KS Cilegon also implements differentiated learning with providing both complex texts for advanced readers and simplified versions for students who need extra support.

3. The teacher strategies in the implementing in English instructions of Merdeka Curriculum

The method of instruction is a critical aspect of the learning process, and it plays a central role in the concept of differentiated learning in Merdeka Curriculum.

For example, Mrs. Ambar (2 August, 2023) mentions using diverse strategies like jigsaw puzzles and problem-based

learning, showcasing the flexibility needed for differentiated instruction. Additionally, observations reveal that teachers employ a range of techniques, including in-depth teaching, technology integration (such as creating PowerPoint presentations), and other strategies tailored to their students' needs. This adaptability aligns with the principles of differentiated learning, where educators customize their approaches to cater to individual student requirements and learning styles.

One of the core principles of differentiated learning in English education is the customization of learning materials. Teachers adapt textbooks, reading materials, and other resources to align with students' diverse proficiency levels. For instance, if a high school English class consists of students with varying language skills, teachers may provide different versions of the same text, allowing advanced students to tackle more challenging content while offering simplified versions for those who require additional assistance.

The teachers use various learning strategy with differentiated learning in high school English education. It is a dynamic and responsive approach that acknowledges the unique attributes of every student. By customizing learning materials, employing varied instructional strategies, and adapting assessments, teachers can create an inclusive and engaging environment that fosters academic growth and success. The insights from interviews with experienced English educators reaffirm the practicality and effectiveness of differentiated learning in ensuring that all students have the opportunity to thrive in their English language studies. Ultimately, it is an approach that paves the way for a more equitable and enriched educational experience.

Furthermore, the findings also shed light on the students' active engagement in the course of learning. While a few students participated enthusiastically, others engaged in side conversations when the teacher explained the subject. This divergence in student behavior underscores the importance of differentiation, as teachers must navigate varying levels of student readiness, interests, and abilities to ensure that the information they impart is comprehensible to all.

Related to differentiated learning, Sari et al. states that this learning approach can be integrated with several learning models such as problem-based learning, project-based learning, as well as the flipped classroom and focuses on student learning styles (Sari et al., 2021). This diversity in teaching approaches reflects their commitment to providing effective and personalized education.

4. The student's English achievement in class XI SMAN 1 Cilegon and SMAN 2 Krakatau Steel Cilegon

When students participate in learning, they are directly involved both physically and mentally, which results in them gaining knowledge. Quizzes are frequently given by teachers as a means of assessment at the conclusion of activities; perhaps not too many, but enough to allow teachers to check or monitor whether or not pupils have understood the material. Although at first it must be noted down, students at SMAN 1 Cilegon are generally improving in their writing and speaking skills. If they are given an example, they will develop quickly, especially if they are allowed to use mobile phones. They will be more enthusiastic because it fits with their world.

They were not just been depending on the teacher's materials; they have also been searching the internet for more information. Because they still lack verbal confidence, SMAN 2 Krakatau Steel Cilegon pupils are gravitating more and more toward writing, which is reading in nature. To find out how successfully the student is studying English, the teacher gives a quiz.

Therefore, it can be inferred from the interview that SMAN 1 Cilegon and SMAN 2 KS Cilegon students' achievements increased similarly after adopting the Merdeka curriculum to study English, notably in the area of writing.

Features which differentiate the 2013 curriculum different from the Merdeka curriculum. Based on interviews, the English instructor at SMA 1 Cilegon and SMAN 2 KS Cilegon stated that the 2013 curriculum differs from the Merdeka Curriculum in that it includes projects.

The timing is significant because P5 has 1 Lesson Hour (JP) with a 20–30% inclusion. Previously, we would have had P5 every Thursday at initially, but as boredom and exhaustion set in, we would have switched to 2 weeks at the beginning and 2 weeks at the end. Teachers can also take a break and appear to be less bored, suggesting that they are more structured than before.

Different themes will be provided for this project. They are interested in the Merdeka curriculum since there will be an exhibition relating to the school and outside parties at the conclusion. The project is what makes a difference. In order it can be inferred from the interview that the existence of P5, also known as the Project to Strengthen the Profile of Pancasila, is what makes the 2013 curriculum stand out from the Merdeka curriculum.

One striking similarity between the two schools is the overall positive transformation experienced by students, particularly in the realm of writing, after the adoption of the Merdeka Curriculum. Both schools have chosen

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quizzes as a means to evaluate and track student development.

However, a notable difference emerges between the two institutions. At SMAN 1 Cilegon, students appear to have made significant strides in speaking, indicating a well-rounded improvement. Meanwhile, at SMAN 2 KS Cilegon, while reading and writing skills have seen improvement, students still grapple with confidence issues when it comes to speaking. This distinction underscores the uniqueness of each school's journey in adjusting to the Merdeka Curriculum and showing the many educational paths taken by their pupils.

Previous research by Dewi et al. (2023) and Kosasih et al. (2022) emphasize the curriculum's flexibility and its focus on student-centered learning, which aligns with the results observed in this reseacrch. By integrating these external justifications, the strengthens the argument that the Merdeka Curriculum enhances English language instruction by fostering greater autonomy and contextual relevance in teaching practices. The implications of the research suggest that adopting the Merdeka Curriculum can improve student engagement and learning outcomes while allowing for a more individualized approach to teaching English, ultimately contributing to a more effective and holistic educational experience.

CONCLUSION

The authors draw the following conclusions from their study analysis of the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in English instruction:

To design lesson plans (teaching modules) based on differentiated learning, teachers meticulously understand the Learning Outcomes (CP), formulate Learning Objectives (TP) that correspond to these CPs, and construct Learning Objectives Flows (ATP) to establish a logical sequence for teaching. By meticulously planning and organizing their lessons, these teachers aim to create a conducive and effective learning environment that caters to the diverse needs and expectations of their students.

The English language teaching materials in the Merdeka Curriculum at both SMA 1 Cilegon and SMA 2 KS Cilegon emphasize various material, especially the use of technology and the internet as essential sources of content. Active student engagement is encouraged through various media, and teachers employ different strategies when dealing with complex or detailed materials that may require multiple sessions.

Strategy used by English teachers in Merdeka Curriculum is related to the implementation of differentiated learning by customizing learning materials and instructional strategies (such as Jigsaw, problem-based, and project-based) to cater to the diverse needs of students. Additionally, teachers at both schools emphasize initial and final assessments to gauge students' prior knowledge and measure their progress, fostering a tailored approach to teaching. Students in both SMAN 1 Cilegon and SMAN 2 Krakatau Steel Cilegon have seen progress in their English language abilities with the Merdeka curriculum, particularly in speaking and writing. Furthermore, the inclusion of project-based learning, particularly the P5 project, sets the Merdeka curriculum apart from the 2013 curriculum, making it distinctive and captivating for student.

However, several limitations must be acknowledged, including the study’s relatively small sample size and its focus on a specific demographic, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the research primarily examines short- term outcomes, without delving deeply into the long- term effects of the Merdeka Curriculum on students' language proficiency. To build on this work, future research could explore the curriculum’s broader implementation across diverse educational settings and regions, investigate its impact on various learner groups, and assess the challenges teachers face in adapting to this framework. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how the Merdeka Curriculum influences students’ English language development over time. By addressing these areas, future research can contribute to refining the curriculum’s application and maximizing its effectiveness in English language teaching.

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