# The Implementation of The *Merdeka* Curriculum in Learning English in Senior High School: Case Study

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**Abstract**

This study aimed to focus on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Learning English in Senior High School. The participants of this study were three English teachers at one of the Senior High School in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. The study used a case study design with descriptive analysis. The instruments to collect data using interviews, observations, and documents. The data were analyzed qualitatively. The findings of this research reveal that teachers used three techniques in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in the classroom such as CERIA, Quiz, and Jigsaw. Furthermore, this research also found materials used were textbooks and e-books sourced from the Ministry of Education and Culture Indonesia. Meanwhile, the learning media used by teachers are handphones and social media platforms such as Google forms, Duolingo, and WhatsApp groups. Teacher evaluations used formative and summative assessment.

**Keywords:** *Implementation, Merdeka Curriculum, Learning English, Case Study*

## Introduction

Mulenga (2018), stated that the definition of curriculum refers to what is taught in schools. The curriculum is a collection of various subjects that are delivered to students. In addition, Munna (2022), stated the concept of curriculum development is different from the role of the curriculum in the learning process. The role of the curriculum in the learning process can be in the form of physical documents such as textbooks, syllabus, guides for teachers or concrete learning materials. Annala et al, (2016) also stated that the curriculum can be seen as a result or process that aims to fulfill the constitutive interests of knowledge. It can be concluded that the curriculum is a document at school that is formulated by schools or educational institutions as design or classroom learning.

According to Fındıkoğlu & İlhan (2016), the most important educational innovation begins with the curriculum. Therefore, educational plans and curricula are interrelated and the beneficial relationship between them helps both flourish (Campbell-Phillips, 2020). Lee (2020), stated the curriculum paradigm and perspective is used for curricular design, implementation, and evaluation. The other research was from Shofiyah, (2018) stated that there are two principles that curriculum development should uphold: 1) a general principle, such educational goal, educational content, teaching and learning method, use of media and technology, and assessment process; and 2) a general concept, adaptable, sustainable, practical, and effective.

Curriculum changes in Indonesia began in 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 2004, 2006, 2013 to 2022 until now (Priantini et al., 2022). According to the decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Mendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia, number 56 of 2022, regarding Guidelines for Implementing the Curriculum in the Order of Recovery Learning, this curriculum was designed to

overcome the learning loss and learning gap that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is supported with research from Hadi et al., (2023) before being approved and implemented in the 2022/2023 school year, the *Merdeka* Curriculum went through three changes. In the 2020/2021 academic year, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Reserch, and Technology (Mendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia, number 719/P/2020, published an Emergency Curriculum in the special conditions of Covid-19. Then it became a Curriculum Prototype in 2500 schools throughout Indonesia. The Curriculum Prototype was then renamed the *Merdeka* Curriculum which began to be implemented in the 2022/2023 academic year (Mendikbudristek of the Republic Indonesia number 56/2022).

Wiguna & Tristaningrat, (2022) stated that *Merdeka* Curriculum places an emphasis on core subjects, character development, and proficiency in students' areas of interest and strength. According to Yamin & Syahrir, (2020) the *Merdeka* Curriculum's objectives actualize the idea of innovative and creative critical thinking, followed by the capacity for cooperation and communication. Indarta et al., (2022) also claimed that the *Merdeka* Curriculum is in line with what society expects from students in terms of 21st-century abilities and their competency to quickly adjust to changing environments. This is because education is tied to social issues. Calacar, (2020) stated that it is crucial that education fosters character development, life time learning habits, cultivates advanced 4C skills (creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration), and prepared students for a variety of careers in light of the advancements seen in the 21st century.

A study by Kamila & RM, (2023) stated the *Merdeka* Curriculum is differentiated learning. In addition, Tomlinson, (2011) stated that differentiated learning is an effort to adapt the learning process in the classroom to meet the individual learning needs of each student. The research results of Saadah et al., (2023) regarding the differentiated learning approach that can be applied to English subjects because it can accommodate students' learning needs by considering students' readiness, interests, profile or learning style. Therefore, teachers develop a CERIA technique, Quiz , and Jigsaw as a form of student-centered and differentiated learning (Mulyani, 2023; Zainuddin & Zumrudiana, 2022; Supeno & Suseno, 2020).

The *Merdeka* Curriculum used modules in the form of textbooks and e-books entitled Work in Progress by Hermawan et al. (2022). In developing teaching modules, most teachers still modify the teaching modules provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture and adapt them to student needs (Nurzen, 2022). According to Rachmah, (2018), researchers used Duolingo and Whatsapp groups as media to remind students and see their progress. Apart from that Elvira, (2023) used Google Forms to evaluate participant learning outcomes.

Research conducted by Prancisca et al., (2023) The *Merdeka* Curriculum evaluation or assessment system at one of the Senior High School in Sungai Kakap, Indonesia used a formative and summative assessment system. Formative assessment are on going, classroom-based evaluations designed to measured students' progress, identify their strengths and weeknesses, and inform instruction. Formative assessment involves evaluating both teachers' and students' actions with the aim of directly tracking and enhancing the ongoing progress of student learning. In contrast, summative assessment relies on numerical grades or scores to determine a student's overall performance and make decisions based on that performance.

Based on research conducted by Tricahyati & Zaim, (2023) it was found that there were several obstacles faced by English teachers in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum. In implementing the lesson plans, the English teacher found problems in

formulating learning outcomes. When applying the *Merdeka* Curriculum within the classroom, a challenge arised in accommodating differentiated learning, which tailors instruction based on the individual characteristics and students competencies.

Therefore, in order to obtain more detailed information, the researcher conducted a case study research on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Learning English at one of the senior high schools in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia.

## Method

This study took place at one of the Senior High School in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia. The participants were three teachers who graduated from English Education. Furthermore, AM has been teaching for three years, WL has been teaching for six years, and SH has been teaching for eight years. The study used a case study design with descriptive analysis. The instruments to collect data using observations, interviews and documents of teaching module and textbooks. Classroom observation was done in order to get information around the implementation process of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in classroom learning. The interview used Indonesia to get more detail data. All the data from interview were transcribed and translated into English for the purpose of data analysis in the finding. The document were taken from three teachers' teaching modules and textbooks from official website of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. All the data obtained from observations, interviews, and documents were analyzed qualitatively.

## Results

Based on direct class observations and interviews with three English teachers, it was found that the techniques used by the teachers are CERIA (Choose, Explore, Resume, Inform, Apply). The technique is to carried out a simple survey to **choose** the material to be studied. The survey was carried out at the first meeting with Google form. The teacher then explores the selected material based on student choices. This aims to created meaningful and student-centered interactions. When teaching narrative texts about legends, students **explore** social functions, text structure, and linguistic characteristics. These statements below based on the following data taken from interviews:

*AM: "In today's class, I used the CERIA technique (Choose, Explore, Resume, Inform, Apply). A survey was conducted to select learning materials at the first meeting with Google form. Then I invite students to explore the material. Previously, the selected material was a narrative text about a legend. Students explored its social function, text structure, and linguistic characteristics contained in the story."*

The next step is to **summarize** learning material that is important for developing writing skills. Students are trained to compile material summaries using appropriate language and exchange the completed summaries with their friends. After that, **inform** the summary results which can be done via the WhatsApp group. The final step is **applying** the learning material. This step is to enrich what students have understood by asking them to answer questions in the form of a quiz. This process helps students think critically and develop critical thinking skills. The data below are taken from interviews.

*AM: "After that I ask students to summarize the material and exchange their summaries with classmates. The best summary is then presented in class, and students are encouraged to comment on their learning material at the end of the lesson. Then I gave a quiz to enrich their understanding."*

Furthermore, beside AM, another teacher known as WL, he used the Quizz using the Duolingo application in implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum. Duolingo is a game application that aids students in vocabulary learning. The teacher did a survey to determine the readiness of students to apply this learning technique. All class XI students have a handphone, although some borrowed their parents' phones for home learning. The teacher introduced the Duolingo application and asked students to install it on their handphones. The statement supported by the result of interview below.

WL: *"Before applying the application, I conducted a survey to assess the readiness of class XI students to use the Quizz technique using the Duolingo application. All students had a handphone, with some borrowing their parents' devices.Then I explained about the Duolingo application and helped students install it."*

In applying duolingo, students were divided into two groups based on their level of proficiency. Group 1 was for students at levels 1-5, while Group 2 was for students at levels 6-10. Each group received two sheets of paper containing the lyrics of different song with words differentiated based on their level. The teacher then instructed students to discuss the song lyrics using dictionary books, avoiding digital dictionaries or translator applications. Students wrote difficult words on separate sheets and collected all students' cellphones on the teacher's desk. The data below are taken from interviews.

WL: *"Students were divided into two groups based on their level. Goup 1 for level 1-5 and group 2 for level 6-10. The learning material was explained to the students, and they were given two sheets of paper containing song lyrics with different level of vocabulary. A group discussion was held with students translating the lyrics and writing the meanings on separate sheets. Students were allowed to look up the meanings in the dictionary."*

After the discussion, the teacher asked group representatives to present the results of the discussion in front of the class. Before ending the lesson, the teacher made the difficult words homework for the students. The data is below.

WL: *"After the discussion, group representatives presented the results and I made the difficult words homework for the students."*

Furthermore, beside WL, another teacher known as SH, she used the Jigsaw technique in implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum. The teacher used the Jigsaw technique to teach students in small groups. Each group consists of five people. Before learning begins, icebreaking is carried out to create an enthusiastic atmosphere. The main learning material is then presented by teacher and students are divided into six groups. The six students who were dominant in English were then assigned to form a team of experts who were given 10 minutes to master the material. It is supported from the interview as following.

SH: *"In class XII, I used the jigsaw technique to divide students into 6 groups with 5 students in each group. An icebreaker was used to create an enthusiastic atmosphere. Then I explained the main material to the student. The best English skills were assigned to an expert team, who were given 10 minutes to master the material." (SH)*

After the expert team has mastered the material, they return to their respective groups and presented the material to the other members. After each group finished, they were given 30 minutes to prepare material based on the expert's presentation. The teacher then asked students open questions. The data below are taken from interviews.

*SH: "After 10 minutes of mastery, the team returned to their groups and delivered the material to the other members. After 30 minutes, each group prepared the material based on the expert's submission. Then I I asked the students open questions."*

This study found materials used in teaching english using *Merdeka* Curriculum were textbooks and e-book modules sourced from the Ministry of Education and Culture. This study also found that the learning media used by the three teachers were handphones, social media platforms such as Google forms, Duolingo and Whatsapp groups.

In evaluations, teachers applied formative and summative assessments to report student learning outcomes. The emphasis in formative assessment is carried out during the learning process as a continuous cycle. Meanwhile, teachers carried out summative assessments after students complete a test or activity that functions as a final assessment. Summative assessment focused more on providing grades to students. This finding is also supported from the results of interview as following:

*AM: "For student evaluation, I design formative and summative assessments in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum. In formative assessments, I usually often ask questions related to the material in the middle of learning. Meanwhile, for summative assessments I give them at the end of the learning session."*

*WL: "I use formative assessment at the beginning of learning activities in class to start the material. I usually ask students about general knowledge that is still related to the material. Meanwhile, for summative assessment I usually give it at the end of the material as a student grade."*

*SH: "In evaluations I usually carry out formative assessments with direct question and answer discussions with students. Then for summative assessments I give them questions that students have to work on after each learning session."*

The findings of this study are in line with the research conducted by (Mulyani, 2023; Zainudin & Zamrudiana, 2022; Supeno & Suseno, (2020) who found that teachers used CERIA, Quiz, and Jigsaw techniques as a form of student-centered and differentiated learning. This related to  Kurniawan et al. (2023) discussed Student Center Learning (SCL) as a paradigm emphasized in the learning approach in the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Then Tomlinson, (2011) stated that differentiated learning is an effort to adapt the learning process in the classroom to meet the individual learning needs of each student. In addition, Saadah et al., (2023) stated that the differentiated learning approach can be applied to English subjects because it can accommodate students' learning needs by considering students' readiness, interests, profile or learning style.

This finding is also supported by research by Nurzila, (2022) that teachers can independently access independent teaching platforms, digital test books and teaching tools as well as documents related to the *Merdeka* Curriculum on the official government website https://www.kemdikbud.go.id/. Meanwhile, this finding also stated that teachers used official text books and e-books from the site https://static.buku.kemdikbud.go.id/ as modules by Hermawan et al. (2020). However, according to Nurzen, (2022) teachers are given the freedom to modify the module according to student needs. Meanwhile, the media used by teachers are digital media platforms such as Duolingo, Whatsapp, and Google Platform (Rachmah, 2018; Elvira, 2023). Research conducted by Prancisca et al., (2023) stated that *Merdeka* Curriculum used a formative and summative assessment system. This is in accordance with the results of research where teachers use formative and summative assessments as student evaluations.

On the other hand, teachers found obstacles in implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Senior High School. Teachers find it difficult to implement differentiated learning which divides students based on their language competency. This finding is in line with research by Tricahyati & Zaim, (2023) in its application in the classroom teachers discovered new practices, namely differentiated learning. Teachers need to analyzed students' characteristics, learning styles and competencies. Gray, (2020) also reports that differential learning is designed to encourage student self-organization. Herwina, (2021) stated that this is difficult to do because of the large number of students and limited class hours. The solution that can be done is to conducted a survey to find out student interests. This finding is in line with findings by Robbins & Judge, (2012) stated that motivation is a process that takes into account the intensity, direction and persistence of an individual's efforts to achieve goals.

Teachers also had difficulty in preparing creative and innovative teaching modules. This is because the teaching modules in the *Merdeka* Curriculum give students freedom in the process of creating learning that suits the students (Rindayati et al., 2022). The solution that can be done is to used creative learning media that matches the components in the module to student needs. This finding is in line with the findings by Laila et al., (2022) student freedom is related to the development of components in teaching modules that are adapted to the environmental context and students' learning needs.

## Conclusion

The researchers found that teachers used three techniques in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in the classroom such as CERIA, Quiz, and Jigsaw. Furthermore, this research also found teachers used material with textbooks and e-books sourced from the Ministry of Education and Culture Indonesia. Meanwhile, the learning media used by teachers are handphones and social media platforms such as Google forms, Duolingo, and WhatsApp groups. Besides that, teacher evaluations used formative and summative. However, teachers have obstacles in implementation differentiated learning for students. Teachers also have difficulty creating creative and innovative teaching modules. Besides that, solutions were found for all obstacles by conducting surveys and using creative media.

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