

An Analysis of Teacher's Perceptions and Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum for Teaching English Reading Skills at SMA Negeri 1 Gowa

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Abstract

This research aimed to find out the perceptions and challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in teaching reading skills. This study used a quantitative descriptive method with data obtained from questionnaires and interviews with three grades of X English teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Gowa. The results of the study showed that teachers had a positive perception of the importance of learning to read, with an average score of 84.33% obtained by respondents. This positive perception was obtained based on the results of the questionnaire, the teachers stated that they agreed with the statements that showed that they understood the importance of learning to read, motivate students, use interesting learning strategies and others. While the teachers' challenges were obtained from the results of the interviews, the challenges faced by teachers include difficulties in integrating technology and difficulties in increasing students' interest in reading. The results of this study are expected to provide insight into the application of the Independent Curriculum in teaching reading.

Keywords: Perception & challenges, Curriculum Merdeka, reading skills.

1. Introduction

The Merdeka Curriculum is one of the government's efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, especially in facing the challenges of the post-Covid-19 pandemic. The curriculum is designed to be more flexible, adaptive, and student-centered, with the aim of developing students' character and competencies holistically. One of the important aspects in the Merdeka Curriculum is learning reading skills, which is a basic skill that is very important for students' learning success.

The importance of learning to read in the Merdeka Curriculum raises questions about how teachers perceptions and face challenges in implementing curriculum Merdeka for teaching reading skills. This study aims to Find out and identify the perceptions and challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum for teaching reading skills.

The research was carried out at SMA Negeri 1 Gowa, the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SMA Negeri 1 Gowa began in 2023. However, it is only applied to grade X as the initial stage in the implementation of this curriculum. The decision to implement this curriculum was taken to provide students with a solid foundation before they proceed to a higher level. This research was conducted in grade X, there were three English teachers who also applied the Merdeka curriculum in their learning. It aims to give students greater opportunities to develop their English language skills creatively and independently. With the implementation of a Merdeka curriculum in grade X English subjects, it is hoped that students can be more involved in the learning process and have the freedom to explore their interests and talents in English.

Therefore, please note that The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum issued as a form of improvement to the 2013 Curriculum which is adapted to post-pandemic conditions in society and students. The Merdeka Curriculum is a flexible curriculum based on character competency and based on creativity which is set by the government starting in 2022/2023. This curriculum is implemented in stages through several driving school programs with certain schools

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ready to implement it independently, either independently learning, independently changing or independently sharing. This curriculum is planned to be implemented in all educational units in the jurisdiction of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia (NKRI) replacing the Emergency Curriculum and also the 2013 Curriculum which are currently used in schools. However, the government does not necessarily require all schools to implement the Merdeka Curriculum, considering the variety of school conditions in Indonesia. Schools are given the freedom to choose a learning curriculum that suits their conditions and readiness. There are at least three curricula that schools can choose from, namely the 2013 Curriculum, Emergency Curriculum, and Merdeka Curriculum (Prototype).

As for the differences between the Merdeka Curriculum and the previous Curriculum, the 2013 Curriculum is a follow-up to the Competency- Based Curriculum (KBK) which was tested in 2004. The KBK (Competency- Based Curriculum) is used as a reference and guideline. for the implementation of education to develop various educational domains (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) at all levels and pathways of education, especially in school education. In the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, competency is defined as the knowledge, skills, and abilities mastered by someone who has become part of themselves so that they can carry out cognitive, affective, and psychomotor behavior as well as possible. This shows that competence includes tasks, skills, attitudes, and appreciation that students must have to be able to carry out learning tasks according to certain types of work. Thus, there is a relationship between the tasks students learn at school and the abilities needed in the world of work. For this reason, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum requires good cooperation between the world of education and the world of work, especially in identifying and analyzing competencies that need to be taught to students in schools.

Furthermore, the Emergency Curriculum is a policy taken by the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture. Research and technology to ease learning difficulties during the pandemic so that there is no learning loss and loss of student motivation. This Emergency Curriculum is intended for all levels of primary and secondary education, starting from early childhood education (PAUD), elementary school, and junior high school, to high school and also vocational schools. The Emergency Curriculum is one option that can be taken by education units implementing distance learning (PJJ) by simplifying the basic competencies in the 2013 Curriculum. This simplification is carried out by reducing the basic competencies in each subject so that students focus on the minimum competencies which are a prerequisite for continuing learning to the next level. It is hoped that the Emergency Curriculum can become a simple and flexible reference or point of reference for teachers in implementing learning in the pandemic era, reduce teachers' teaching burden so that opportunities are opened to develop online learning models and strategies, and can be used as a guide for parents in accompanying their children's learning at home. What is no less important is that students do not lose their right to study (learning loss and loss of motivation) so that they can continue to study and continue their education and can work (especially vocational school graduates) even with very minimal competence. The Emergency Curriculum is a curriculum that is simple, clear, and has priorities as its main characteristics. Simple means that the learning described in this curriculum only contains core material, the minimum that is needed in students' lives.

The Merdeka Curriculum has several main characteristics that are expected to support post-pandemic learning recovery (Kemendikbudristek, 2021), namely as follows.

- a. Project-based learning for the development of soft skills and character which includes faith, piety and noble morals, cooperation, global diversity, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity.
- b. Focus on essential materials that are expected to provide sufficient time for in-depth learning in basic competencies such as literacy and enumeration.
- c. Teachers are free to carry out learning that suits students' abilities (teaching at the right level) and adjust to the local context and content.

According to Nurwiatin, 2022, In Saputra, 2023) the development and changes in the curriculum experienced in Indonesia are mostly influenced by technological and global changes in science, art, and culture that apply to society. Since the enactment of the curriculum in 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004 (KBK), 2006 (KTSP), and 2013, the curriculum has undergone improvements and changes, and Indonesian education has achieved the educational goal of educating the nation's life for a better Indonesia.

Ariga S, (2022) said that in early 2020, Indonesia was hit by Covid- 19, a global pandemic that hit almost all countries in the world. This outbreak is very dangerous and easily transmitted, so all activities, including learning activities, will be carried out at home. The role of parents as learning companions is very important because learning activities are not optimal due to a lack of assistance from teachers. Parents are the first teachers to teach right and wrong in life, character must be instilled from childhood and good normative values must be instilled so that good habits are

transmitted into adulthood. The environment can also influence mindsets, knowledge, behaviors, and relationships. At the time of curriculum implementation, the intensity of activities is planned and then learning activities are implemented.

Continued by Nurwiatin, (2022) learning activities during the coronavirus pandemic decreased dramatically in one day. Furthermore, Decree Number 56/M/2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation was issued. This will contribute to the creation of an Indonesia that is devout, independent, characteristic, well-behaved, religious, and critical. Efforts to restore and improve the curriculum are fully supported for the restoration and improvement of the curriculum implemented in Indonesia through the Merdeka curriculum. After Indonesia was hit by the pandemic, the Merdeka curriculum was introduced to restore the program after the declining quality of students in education. The Merdeka curriculum is a new curriculum that is integrated into educational units. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), which was launched in 2022, plans to establish the Merdeka Curriculum as the National Curriculum.

The Merdeka curriculum aims to explore and nurture students' talents from an early age and focuses on developing students' character, knowledge, behavior, and abilities. The Merdeka curriculum is a project-based learning activity for students. the difference with the previous curriculum is the absence of a block system so that learning is evenly distributed. According to Damayanti & Muhroji, (2022) the Merdeka Curriculum is considered the right curriculum with intellectual freedom in mind. The Ministry of Education and Culture has decided that the Merdeka Curriculum will include modifications to skills-based learning. One of the key elements of this curriculum is project-based learning which aims to promote learning recovery and improve students' soft skills and personalities.

The Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers the freedom to design reading skills learning that suits the needs and characteristics of their students. In the context of learning to read, teachers can adjust teaching methods, reading materials, and evaluation strategies according to students' level of understanding and interest. With the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers can have more freedom to design interesting, relevant and effective learning to improve students' reading skills. Teachers can choose reading materials that suit students' interests, develop interactive learning strategies, and provide the support needed to improve students' reading abilities holistically. With this approach, teachers can provide reading skills learning that is more personalized and tailored to students' individual needs, thereby encouraging learning motivation and improving reading skills.

2. Research Methods

This research uses a quantitative method with a quantitative descriptive research design. This method was chosen to describe teachers' perceptions and challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum for teaching English reading skills at SMA Negeri 1 Gowa. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. A questionnaire consisting of 20 statements was given to three X-grade teachers using a Likert scale. The questionnaire statements were designed to measure teachers' perceptions about various important aspects of reading learning, such as understanding individual student needs, motivating them to read, using engaging learning methods, and others. The questionnaire used in this research has been validated and has good reliability. Subsequently, interviews were conducted face-to-face by preparing five questions. The interview questions were focused on exploring more deeply the challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in reading instruction. The population of this research is all English teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Gowa. The research sample is three English teachers from the X grade.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Result

This section explains, about the perception and challenges of English teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Gowa. The results of this study were obtained from data collected through questionnaires and interviews conducted with three English teachers.

a. Teachers' perceptions based on questionnaire data related to the teaching of reading skills.

The results of the study show that the three teachers have a good understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, but still need advanced training. They also feel that schools need to provide better support in providing resources and facilities. This research highlights the importance of support from schools in helping teachers implement the Merdeka Curriculum effectively. Schools need to provide adequate resources, structured training, and an environment

conducive to learning. Teachers also need to develop more effective learning strategies and continue to develop professional competencies through training and professional development that focuses on the Merdeka Curriculum and learning reading skills.

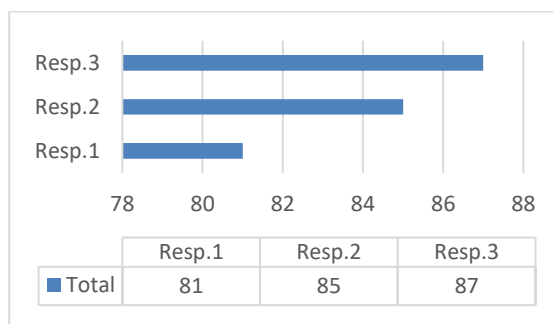


Figure 1. Total Score of Respondents

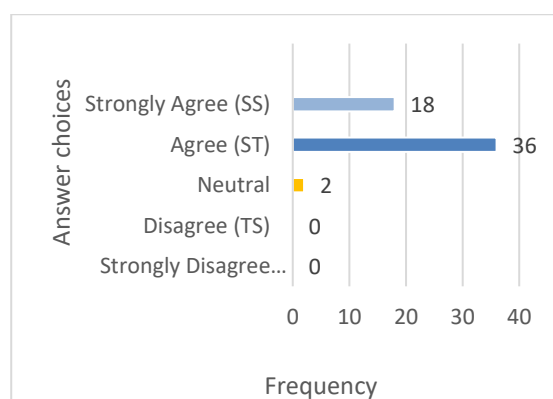


Figure 2. Frequency of Responden Answer to statement Items 1-20

Based on the data on Figure 1 and 2, the researcher can conclude that the results from the 3 respondents show that each respondent obtained scores of 81%, 85%, and 87%. This indicates that the respondents have a positive perception of the importance of various aspects of reading learning, with an average score of 84.33%. The scores of 81%, 85%, and 87% were obtained from the total scores obtained from the 3 respondents. Each respondent answered 20 statements in the questionnaire using a Likert scale, which has scores ranging from 1 to 5. Thus, the maximum total score that each respondent could obtain is 100 (20 statements x 5 scores). The total score obtained by respondent 1 is 81%, respondent 2 is 85%, and respondent 3 is 87%. This shows that teachers have a positive perception of the importance of reading learning. This positive perception is evident from the respondents' answers, which generally agree based on the statements given in the questionnaire. Such as statements that ask about the importance of understanding students' individual needs, motivating them to read, using engaging learning methods, providing constructive feedback, creating a supportive learning environment, and providing appropriate reading materials.

b. Teacher’s Perceptions on Interviews related to the challenges teachers face in implementing the Merdeka curriculum in teaching reading skills.

The results of interviews conducted with three English teacher respondents in SMA Negeri 1 Gowa, class X with five questions to understand the challenges faced in teaching reading skills

Overall, the interview data shows that teachers face various challenges in teaching reading skills, especially in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. These challenges include a lack of training on the Merdeka Curriculum, difficulties in integrating technology, and the need to adapt learning materials and strategies to the individual needs of students. The teachers also emphasized the importance of increasing students' interest in reading activities and finding more creative and interesting ways to motivate them. Support from schools in providing adequate resources, facilities, and training is urgently needed to help teachers overcome these challenges and improve the quality of reading learning in schools.

Based on the results of the data obtained above, overall, the data shows that teachers have a positive perception of the importance of various aspects of reading learning. They realize the importance of understanding students' individual needs, motivating them to read, using engaging learning methods, providing constructive feedback, creating a supportive learning environment, and providing appropriate reading materials. However, the data also reveals some of the challenges teachers face in implementing best practices for learning to read. The challenges include the lack of Independent Curriculum training, difficulties in integrating technology in learning because teachers usually only use projectors and tv during the learning process, the need to adjust learning materials and strategies to the needs of each student, and difficulties in increasing students' interest in reading activities.

3.2. Discussions

This study aims to identify the perceptions of English teachers of grade X of SMA Negeri 1 Gowa regarding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, especially in learning reading skills, and to identify the challenges they face in its implementation.

a. Teachers' Perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum Related to Teaching Reading Skills

Based on the results of the research, show a positive perception, this can be seen from the results of the respondent questionnaire with an average of their answers agreeing with the statements given. They understand the main aspects of reading instruction emphasized by the Merdeka curriculum, such as:

- a. Individual Learning: Teachers recognize the importance of adapting learning to meet the needs and learning styles of each student. This is in line with the student-centered approach recommended by the Merdeka Curriculum.
- b. Project-Based Learning: Curriculum Merdeka promotes project-based learning, where students learn actively and are directly involved in solving real-world problems.
- c. Motivational Strategy: Teachers understand the importance of fostering reading interest and motivating students to engage with texts. They recognize the need to create a stimulating and supportive learning environment to encourage reading activities.
- d. Technology Utilization: Curriculum Merdeka encourages the use of technology in the learning process. Technology can be used to enrich learning materials, enhance interaction between teachers and students, and facilitate the assessment process.
- e. Interesting Teaching Methods: Teachers recognize the need to use a variety of interesting teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles and enhance student understanding.
- f. Constructive Feedback: Teachers recognize the importance of providing regular, constructive feedback to students, helping them identify areas for improvement and develop reading skills.
- g. Appropriate Reading Materials: Teachers understand the need to select reading materials that are appropriate to students' reading levels, interests, and learning goals.

This finding is supported by previous research by Safitri & Kusumaningtyas (2023), who found that teachers in Indonesia generally have a positive perception of the Merdeka Curriculum, acknowledging its emphasis on student-centered learning practices and engaging teaching methods. Similarly, Fitri W. A. (2024) found that teachers in secondary schools in Indonesia have a good understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum and the importance of understanding students' individual needs in learning. Furthermore, Widyaningsih, Y. (2023) highlighted the positive impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on students' learning motivation and reading skills. Shadri, R. et.al., (2023) explored teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian elementary schools. Their findings showed that teachers generally viewed the curriculum positively, especially its emphasis on student-centered learning and the development of critical thinking skills. Then, Waruwu, D. (2024) examined the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on student engagement in Indonesian secondary schools. They found that the curriculum's focus on project-based learning and student-led activities positively influenced student engagement and motivation.

b. Challenges Faced by Teachers in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Despite the positive perception, the study also identified significant challenges teachers face in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum to teach English reading. These challenges include:

- a. **Difficulty Integrating Technology:** Teachers have difficulties finding the right resources and methods to use technology effectively to improve students' reading skills, in the learning process teachers only use projectors. This highlights the need for greater support in technology integration and professional development. Previous research by Reza, F. et.al (2023) also showed that teachers in Indonesia face challenges in integrating technology into learning, especially in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. This finding emphasizes the importance of adequate training and resources to support teachers in overcoming the challenges of technology integration in learning.
- b. **Adapting Teaching Materials and Strategies:** Teachers find it difficult to adapt teaching materials and strategies to the diverse needs and learning styles of students. This emphasizes the importance of providing resources and training for teachers to implement differentiated learning effectively.

A study by Damayanti & Muhorji (2018) also highlighted the challenges faced by teachers in adapting teaching materials and strategies to students' individual needs. The results of this study indicate the need for a more differentiated and personalized approach to learning, especially in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. Ndari, W., & Mahmudah, F. N. (2023) investigated teachers' challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesian secondary schools. Their study found that teachers faced issues of inadequate resources, inadequate training, and lack of support from school administrators. Additionally, Halawa, M. (2024) examined the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum on teachers' workload and stress levels. Their findings revealed that teachers experienced increased workload and stress due to the curriculum's emphasis on student-centered learning and project-based activities.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussion that has been presented in the previous chapter, the researcher concludes as follows:

- a. The results and discussion support the conclusion that English teachers of grade X at SMA Negeri 1 Gowa have a positive perception of the Independent Curriculum. They understand and support the main principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, such as student-centered learning, project-based learning, and the use of interesting learning methods.
- b. The challenges faced by teachers in implementing the Independent Curriculum for teaching reading skills are the difficulties in integrating technology. Teachers also face challenges in adapting teaching materials and learning strategies to the diverse needs and learning styles of students.

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