

The Implementation of The Merdeka Curriculum in English Subject at A Vocational High School in Indonesia

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Introduction

- A good education relies on its curriculum. The curriculum is the constitution of education; it guides an educational system and determines the characteristics of individuals who are to be raised in a society. The decisions made regarding the curriculum provide essential indications about how the whole teaching and learning process will be impacted (Coşkun Yaşar & Aslan, 2021).
- Education procurement is only enough if the curriculum has an innovation that effectively meets society's need. Based on Shofiyah's research (2018), curriculum development is supposed to uphold two principles: 1) a general principle such as relevant, flexible, sustainable, practical, and effective, and 2) a specific principle, including educational purpose, educational content, teaching and learning process the use of media and technology, and evaluation process.
- To address this, Indonesia attempts to provide innovation through the Merdeka Curriculum. 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. Through his speech on February 12th, 2022, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, as Mendikbudristek, said that the Merdeka Curriculum is much more concise, simpler, and more flexible, with a principle to bring a new paradigm concept of “freedom” for both teachers and students.

Introduction

Previous Studies

1) The research formulated to measure the feasibility of the Merdeka curriculum has been conducted by Sutaris (2022), he has found that implementing the Merdeka curriculum can be declared a proper one. It reached as much as 74.79% of the education system's future, and the socialization level reached 99.1% of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum's feasibility level. Besides, 74% of teachers are committed to it, 84.51% of the learning system has feasibility, and 48% of the support of principals, education units, and facilities and infrastructure.

2) In other cases, the inability of lecturers as education parties to integrate ICT into teaching materials, media, and internet-based learning resources is deemed by Restu et al. (2022) to impede the technical implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Medan State University.

3) On the other hand, Zainuri (2022) found that the similar principle between the Pancasila Students Profile in the Merdeka curriculum and the school's principles of monotheism and moral education (e.g., global diversity, cooperation, and independent attitude) enables successful implementation.

Introduction

Gap and Novelty

- This study may be different from others in the way it looks at how the Merdeka curriculum is implemented in English Learning at one of the vocational high schools called a Centre of Excellence of Vocational High School (SMK PK). According to regulation number 22 of 2022 issued by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, SMK PK is expected to become the center for quality improvement and referrals for other vocational high schools (Kemdikbud RI, 2020).
- The researchers also believe that it is necessary to comprehend the theoretical framework of the Merdeka curriculum executed in the direct teaching and learning. Thus, this study is expected to find well-described data on whether the Merdeka Curriculum is appropriately implemented, which would help education stakeholders evaluate it in the future.

Research Question

How is the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in English subject at a vocational high school in Indonesia?

Method

This study was designed by using a descriptive-qualitative method to elaborate on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English learning. According to Lambert & Lambert (2012), qualitative descriptive studies are usually drawn from naturalistic inquiry, which affirms a commitment to studying something in its natural state as far as possible within the setting of the studies arena. This study seeks to broaden the comprehensive understanding of best practices for implementing of the Merdeka Curriculum, which may succeed or fail.

Location

one of the vocational high schools in Sidoarjo, East Java, Indonesia

Research Subject

An English teacher for 11th graders

Research Instruments

- Video recorder
- Audio recorder
- Interview Questions

The Data Sampling

Purposive random sampling in the 11th-grade class

The Data Collection Method

Observation and semi-structured nterview

Research Focus

1. the implementation of the teaching module, 2) the teaching and learning process, 3) the use of learning materials, 4) the use of learning media, 5) the implementation of assessment and evaluation, and 6) the opportunities and obstacles.

Result

1) The Implementation of The Teaching Module

- In the Merdeka curriculum, the form of the lesson plan (RPP) has changed into a teaching Module. Unlike the RPP, this teaching module only requires one paper for one meeting. Several components are listed as indicators in the teaching module. Those are general information (e.g., the identity of the module author, initial competence, the Pancasila Student Profile, facilities and infrastructure, target learners, and the learning model); core parts (e.g., learning objectives, assessment, meaningful understanding, trigger questions, learning activities, and reflection by both students and teachers); attachments (e.g., student worksheets, enrichment, and remedial materials, reading materials for teachers, a glossary, and a reference).
- Since Pancasila Student Profile becomes the primary focus in integrating learning activities, no specific elements must be the target in each meeting. However, the teacher asserted, as their responsibility and commitment, it is free to select the aspect that best meets the learning achievement.
- The teaching and learning process cannot be completed 100% following the teaching module. Nevertheless, on the other side, the simplified teaching module policy reduces the administrative burden on teachers, allowing them to focus more on establishing exciting learning environments in the classroom.

Result

2) Teaching and Learning Process

The teacher implements 3 activities: opening, core, and closing in teaching and learning process.

- Opening : The way the teacher started the learning activity at the beginning influenced students' beliefs about their ability to participate in class.
- Core : the teaching and learning process consistently focuses on student-centered learning, where the teacher always allows students to share ideas and opinions to actualize their interests. The teacher was receptive to any information about the subject that would be discussed, and she tended to direct students to use their thinking ability. However, switching the teaching orientation from teacher-centered into student-centered, the teacher must consider the student's characteristics, backgrounds, and attitudes while teaching, that's why it cannot be implemented 100%.
- A further finding showed that the small-group discussion technique is also applied. This technique indirectly works by making students actively involved in creating creative innovation or solutions by digging up knowledge, processing information, and collaborating to share ideas with fellow friends.
- Besides, teachers also used a scientific method in teaching and learning. The teacher involved students in observing, comprehending, questioning, gathering information, and sharing the acquired knowledge. Then, in this instance, students and teacher collaborated to analyze and categorize what had been learned in this sub-content of the subject to reach a mutually acceptable conclusion. Thus, the outcomes of this approach still correlate with a student-centered approach in which students are expected to have innovative and creative thinking.

Result

3) The Use of Learning Materials

In preparing learning material, the teacher has the freedom and authority to select the source of learning materials. The result of the interviews showed that the teacher used the Internet to find trustworthy websites and textbooks so they could give students suitable learning materials. Whereas students also have the opportunity to select the source of learning materials that would assist their learning activities; yet, in this instance, the Internet appeared to be the source of choice for them.

4) The Use of Learning Media

This study found that no set standard for how teachers should use the various media types. Based on the observation, the teacher used media such as Bluetooth speakers to support listening activities; picture series made using PPT and shared through students' mobile phones, WhatsApp application, and general conventional media such as paper and whiteboards. In the teacher's perception, media effectively involves students during learning activities. Nonetheless, the teacher is still required to maximize the best use of media in any given situation even though it lacks facility.

Result

5) The Implementation of Assessment and Evaluation

- The finding from this study is that the teacher could vary the assessment process, including freedom in choosing the types of assessment, the technique, the timing of the assessment, the components, and defining criteria for achievement of learning objectives. The assessment could be obtained either through observation, performance, orally, or in writing.
- Assessment Models: Diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, summative assessment, and college assessment (if the students prefer to ask their friends during learning activities).
- In terms of the evaluation process, it consists of teacher's reflections outlined in the teaching module. The teacher's reflection is reflected in the continuity of student assessment results.

Table 1. Example Questions for Reflection in Evaluation

| No. | Questions for Reflection |
|-----|--|
| 1. | Are there any obstacles to learning activities? |
| 2. | Are all students active in learning activities? |
| 3. | What difficulties can students identify in learning activities? |
| 4. | Can students who experience difficulties when doing activities overcome them properly? |
| 5. | What is the average level of student engagement in this learning activity? |
| 6. | Can all students be considered complete in the implementation of learning? |
| 7. | What strategies are used so that all students can complete the competency? |

Source: English teacher's teaching module

Result

6) The Opportunities and Obstacles

- The new strategy in the Merdeka Curriculum fosters the development of a "freedom" mindset among students and teachers to alter the stale, outmoded education system and the lack of communication between students and teachers. All approaches and techniques for student-centered learning can work as intermediates to eliminate the frequent passivity among students.
- The student-centered outcomes align with the orientation of the six elements in the Pancasila Student Profile. It has been seen by the teacher as a constructive goal to strengthen students' character.
- This curriculum as a favorable opportunity since it cultivates students' creativity. Changing the system at the beginning will experience many obstacles in its implementation. Both teachers and students, as well as all other stakeholders in education, must adapt and realize that change must be accompanied by the belief that something good requires a process.
- The teacher also disclosed that the obstacles to be overcome emerge not only from her way of teaching but that the lack of student confidence is also quite challenging for teachers to transform teacher-centered practices into student-centered ones. This situation impeded the process of student-oriented activities. Having the awareness and courage to speak and express opinions needs to be cultivated in the classroom because student's confidence is the main thing in carrying out this educational orientation.

Discussion

In the Merdeka curriculum, there are two learning orientation, those are student-centered and Pancasila student profile. There are six elements of Pancasila Students Profile characters must become the focus: Faith and Fear Of God Almighty, Global Diversity, Independence, Creativity, Mutual Cooperation, and Critical Reasoning (Puspendik Kemdikbud, 2021). According to Laila et al. (2022), Pancasila Students Profile aims to help students build a positive attitude, become acquainted with the culture, and adapt as students following the noble values of Pancasila. The development of this character in Indonesia is required to make Pancasila more than just a symbol but lived as an identity and personality in individuals. Since Pancasila Students Profile becomes the primary focus in integrating learning activities, no specific elements must be the target in each meeting. However, the teacher asserted, as their responsibility and commitment, it is free to select the aspect that best meets the learning achievement.

Whereas, the student-centered orientation aims to make the process of learning can be more fun. Teacher are allowed to use any kind of learning media, learning material, and learning methods to create fun learning environment. This also in line with Pertiwi et al. (2022) stated that the variety of learning methods is the most significant factor, which, when used appropriately and in accordance with the requirements of learning materials, will produce a "fun" learning environment for students.

Important Research Findings

One of Sidoarjo's vocational high schools has implemented the Merdeka curriculum for English learning, which emphasizes teachers' and students' independence in the student-centered learning process. In line with this, several applied learning methods involve active interaction between teachers, students, and other students. The teacher believes that the government's support of freedom in the teaching and learning process is beneficial and can improve education. However, implementation offers numerous challenges, such as considering student characteristics, attitudes, and background.

Benefits of Research

All the concepts of Merdeka curriculum provided encourage creativity and innovative thinking, which align with the skills needed in the future. The outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum cannot be measured instantly; it requires a lengthy process and the commitment of all parties in the education industry to execute it properly. Thus, through this study, it is expected to be understood more by education stakeholders and all parties about the current curriculum that is implemented in one of Vocational High Schools, so that the curriculum can be evaluated and improved in the future.

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