

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

[Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan di Indonesia]

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Abstract. *This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English subject at one of the vocational high schools in Sidoarjo as the Centre of Excellence of Vocational High School (SMK PK). The study used the descriptive-qualitative method as the research design, and the data were obtained through observations and semi-structured interviews. The subject of this study was an English teacher for 11th graders, and the data sampling used was purposive random sampling in the 11th grade class, and the data sampling used was purposive random sampling in the 11th- grade class. The present study focused on the following six areas regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum: 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. The study results found that the Merdeka Curriculum at one of the vocational high schools has been widely implemented. However, obstacles arise related to perceptions changing from teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning. All approaches taken in the teaching and learning process of English learning have resulted in a student-centered approach, which is also consistent with the Pancasila Student Profile outcomes. The integration of Pancasila Student Profile orientation and student-centered approach in English learning is intended to produce generations that are self-sufficient, capable of critical, creative, and innovative thinking, quickly sociable, and capable of communicating and collaborating. In addition, the principle of freedom that is upheld in this Merdeka curriculum has been able to encourage students and teachers to maximize teaching and learning processes that are more meaningful.*

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Abstract. *Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris di salah satu SMK di Sidoarjo sebagai Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan Pusat Unggulan (SMK PK). Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif-kualitatif sebagai desain penelitian, dan data diperoleh melalui observasi dan wawancara semi terstruktur. Subjek penelitian ini adalah seorang guru bahasa Inggris untuk siswa kelas 11, dan pengambilan sampel data yang digunakan adalah purposive random sampling di kelas 11. Kajian ini difokuskan pada enam bidang implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka, yaitu: 1) implementasi modul pengajaran, 2) proses belajar mengajar, 3) penggunaan bahan pembelajaran, 4) penggunaan media pembelajaran, 5) pelaksanaan asesmen dan*

evaluasi, serta 6) peluang dan hambatan. Hasil kajian menemukan bahwa Kurikulum Merdeka di salah satu SMK sudah banyak diterapkan. Namun, muncul kendala terkait perubahan persepsi dari pembelajaran yang berpusat pada guru menjadi pembelajaran yang berpusat pada siswa. Semua pendekatan yang dilakukan dalam proses belajar mengajar pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris telah menghasilkan pendekatan yang berpusat pada siswa, yang juga sejalan dengan capaian Profil Pelajar Pancasila. Pengintegrasian orientasi Profil Pelajar Pancasila dan pendekatan yang berpusat pada siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dimaksudkan untuk menghasilkan generasi yang mandiri, mampu berpikir kritis, kreatif, dan inovatif, cepat bergaul, serta mampu berkomunikasi dan berkolaborasi. Selain itu, prinsip kebebasan yang dijunjung dalam kurikulum Merdeka ini telah mampu mendorong siswa dan guru untuk memaksimalkan proses belajar mengajar yang lebih bermakna.

Keywords – Kurikulum Merdeka, Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris, Kebebasan Mengajar dan Belajar, SMK

I. INTRODUCTION

Progressive and massive transformations have been built by societies living in the 21st century. The emergence of these various changes has turned the wheel of human life towards the modern world, which is expected to bring a significant revolution. To cope with this rapidly changing world, one of today's era's most significant necessities is mastering the English language. As English becomes an international language, mastering English can connect us to the global world and benefit our personal and professional lives (Nishanthi, 2018). Additionally, John et al. (2021) stated that language is needed to sort out the latest research and knowledge. Learning English is a significant investment that can open doors to many possibilities, with no exceptions in the workplace. It is indispensable for pre-employment qualification (Durga, 2018). According to what employers said in research by Su-Hie et al. (2017), career growth demands solid English abilities. Many local and multinational enterprises are looking for personnel who can communicate in English to explore a variety of fields and industries, upgrade knowledge, and create international cooperation. Related to these urgencies, the English language has become one of the core subjects in many countries, especially in Indonesia, which can be learned through formal and informal education.

The existence of education alone plays a vital role in a sustainable future that brings opportunities for good quality in human life's aspects. Education is the process and outcome of acquiring systematized knowledge and abilities, a prerequisite for preparing a person for life and employment. Education aims to form an adaptive personality through independence, activity, and creativity (Webb et al., 2018). According to Lysenko & Zharinova (2021), the quality of education, life, and a person are intertwined and interdependent. When education has been seen as the cornerstone of the 21st century, Wrahatnolo & Munoto (2018) argued that all aspects of education, in this case, formal education—from administration, technology, and media to students—are taken into account. As a first stage, a curriculum structure with mandatory subjects is used to develop learning, creativity, technology, and information media skills. 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 needs. Findikoğlu & İlhan (2016) asserted that the most significant innovation in education starts from the curriculum. Therefore, education and curricular plans are intertwined, and their mutually beneficial relationship contributes to the expansion of both of these spheres (Campbell, 2020). According to Lee (2020), the curriculum paradigms and viewpoints become a reference in curriculum design, implementation, and evaluation. They are essential components of curriculum development for subject-based and integrated curricula and life, values, religion, and spiritual education school for children. 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. In 2022–2024, this curriculum has been used as an option in all schools based on readiness. 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. Arifa (2022) identified three primary factors that must be considered to accelerate education recovery: 1) providing the availability of specific regulations; 2) establishing a financial budget that does not place an undue burden on schools, particularly for smaller schools; and 3) supporting the readiness of human resources, as well as facilities and infrastructure, for

execution. According to Puspendik Kemdikbud (2021), the Merdeka curriculum positively affects the teaching and learning process and focuses on essential materials for learning objectives. The new paradigm of the learning system is oriented toward the "Pancasila Student Profile". It has a role as a compass to guide all the policies and innovations of the system, including learning activities and assessments that are linked to a sustainable future, lifelong learning, and making connections to the environment and the students' cultures.

Besides, Wiguna & Tristaningrat (2022) uttered that the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes essential materials, character development, and competence in students' interests and talents. This substantial implication encourages the acceleration of innovative learning patterns in the teaching and learning process. Yamin & Syahrir (2020) said that the aims of the Merdeka Curriculum actualize the concept of innovative and creative critical thinking, followed by the ability to collaborate and communicate. Furthermore, because education is linked to social aspects, Indarta et al. (2022) asserted that the Merdeka Curriculum is relevant to the demands of 21st-century skills needs and society, in which students are expected to quickly adapt to a dynamically changing world. Therefore, considering the changes in the 21st century, learning must build knowledge high order 4C skills (creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration), character, and life time learning habits, and prepare students for multiple careers (Calacar, 2020). Moreover, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2020) has set a learning framework for 2030. It must be considered for students' well-being in terms of broadening skills. They include cognitive and meta-cognitive (creative and critical thinking, learning to learn, self-regulation), social and emotional (empathy, self-efficacy, and teamwork), and practical and physical skills (optimizing new information and communication technology devices).

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. Consequently, the freedom of learning needs to bring about independence, flexibility, and improvisation in teaching and learning (Angga & Iskandar, 2022). Students must feel that learning is fun and meaningful and, in the end, makes them feel free to learn continuously. The freedom in the Merdeka Curriculum, defined by Indarta et al. (2022), is the ability to think freely. Mardhiyana & Sejati (2016) added that freedom of thought could have long-lasting benefits. To realize their well-being and freedom, for instance, it must provide pressure-free learning so that students are influenced to acquire knowledge and optimize their experience in the learning process (Zahro & Lutfi, 2021). The Merdeka curriculum will likely become student-centered learning as the focus shifts to students and their needs. This learning technique makes students active participants, while teachers are facilitators, guides, and controllers; they are not the sole sources (Pertiwi et al., 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum contains excellent progressive development goals expected to impact the upcoming era significantly. Regarding its implementation, several studies have recently been undertaken in various scopes. 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. However, a variety of factors can influence the success of a program. Pratikno et al., (2022) claimed the Merdeka curriculum is easy to design, excellent, and relevant. Yet in practice, it requires a more in-depth study since the success of its implementation is dependent on the area, problems, and educational parties' role. 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. 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.

Although previous studies have been conducted, implementing the Merdeka curriculum in English learning at a vocational high school has yet to be studied. Vocational high school is one of the education levels and programs that prepare students for immediate entry into the workforce. Technology studies and the cultivation of the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, and life skills are all integral components of vocational high school education (Wibawanto et al., 2021). 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. This research hypothesizes that

the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum can be seen through teachers' and students' commitment and understanding. 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.

II. METHOD

This study was designed by using a descriptive-qualitative method to elaborate on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English learning, covering: 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. 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 the Merdeka Curriculum, which may succeed or fail. The subject of this study was an English teacher for 11th graders from one of the vocational high schools in Sidoarjo, East Java, Indonesia. The data sampling for this study used purposive random sampling in the 11th-grade class.

The data collection methods used were observation and a semi-structured interview. The observation was conducted, including pre-observation within two days and observation to gain the data within two days. The researcher carried out pre-observation as a guide to identify the school's environment and gather preliminary evidence of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English learning. During the data collection, the researcher used video recording to maintain the reliability of the information. The researchers act as observers who did not participate in teaching and learning activities. Thus, during the observation, the researcher conducted immersive fieldwork related to the teaching-learning activities, including behavior, actions, and interactions between students and teachers in real-time. The interview is used to validate and support the results gained from observation. The interview session was supported by audio recording, and the questions related to the teacher's perspective and feelings while implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. After collecting all the data, the researcher processed it by transcribing the interview, analyzing the data, clearly describing and examining the results in each study's scope and areas, then summarizing the study's results.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

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 as the Ministry of Education, Culture, Technology, and Research standards. These parts 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). However, the teacher can change the components' order based on the needs as long as those components are included.

Furthermore, 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.

Teacher:

In the past, it was known as an RPP, and every teacher was required to create it independently. So yes, we make it ourselves. For the teaching modules in the Merdeka curriculum, we will get the learning achievement from the government first and describe the learning achievement as the learning objectives. Then, we make a flow of learning goals from these learning objectives, and after that, we create the whole teaching module.

In all subjects, regardless of the curriculum, there must be an opening, a core, and a closing activity. No matter what curriculum we take or any technique. First of all, pray, check attendance, and so on. Then say "hi," and ask how they are doing. Then we just started learning. When we finish the lesson, we say, "Okay,

we'll meet again,....," there is no difference between the steps of learning activities in the new and previous curricula. Opening, core, closing—whatever the curriculum is, the teaching steps are all the same.

Even though the steps during the implementation Merdeka curriculum in the teaching and learning process can be appropriately conducted by the teacher, there are variations in how the teacher implements the teaching modules. During the initial observation, the teacher could properly implement each sequence in the teaching module. But on the second observation, the researcher discovered a slight variation in how the teacher applied the teaching module, notably the addition of activities not outlined in the teaching module. This additional activity consists of giving games, or what is known as "quizzes," as ice-breakers. The reason was that the teacher wanted to alter the learning atmosphere to make it more enjoyable for students and prevent them from becoming bored. At the same time, they are engaged in learning activities. In this case, modifications must be made to account for the student's characteristics and the classroom environment. Therefore, 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.

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

The main idea to analyze the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation can be illustrated through the teaching and learning process: opening, core, and closing activities. Based on the observation, in the opening activities, the teacher initiated a conversation with students, such as inquiring about their understanding of previous materials, learning obstacles, and feelings. It was conducted to create an interactive learning environment and build mutual trust between teacher and students which affects students' involvement in the following core activity. The way the teacher started the learning activity at the beginning influenced students' beliefs about their ability to participate in class.

Regarding the core activities, this study has found that 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. Indarta et al. (2022) added that the competency values of free-thinking way include critical thinking, creative thinking, and problem-solving. When students were initiatively willing to participate in learning activities, the learning environment appeared favorable rather than intimidating. However, the teacher must consider the student's characteristics, backgrounds, and attitudes while teaching.

Teacher:

So far, we have been more teacher-centered; what I do is the same, but I will go into a student-centered process. For now, I have to understand the students' condition. For example, when I use problem-based learning, I give them a problem, they discuss it, and then I just let them do whatever they want; then I can only control, yet can't force them. We look at the characteristics of students as well. Maybe if we are in Japan or other countries that are used to student-centered orientation, their education from childhood has indeed been adapted to it. Actually, I don't have a problem with something like that, but because we are in a transition period, I don't think I can apply student-centered learning 100%. Because I also have to look at the condition of the students I teach, with their various backgrounds, characteristics, and attitudes, I can't apply it 100% yet.

Likewise, 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. Peer teaching occurred during this process, which not only assisted students who were hesitant to express their opinions or even their difficulties but also fostered excellent communication practices. According to Indarta et al. (2022), the ability to communicate and collaborate are parts of action competency. The teacher asserted that this technique brings solutions for passiveness issues among students.

Teacher:

....in every lesson, I always make these groups. So, I'm not the only one discussing topics with students; I don't want to. I want students to be active, too; they are discussing with each other no matter what they are discussing, but I still control it. So then, if they discuss with friends, I think it sets them free; that's good, so maybe later ideas will quickly come up.

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. As a foundation, this approach appropriately designs the way of thinking. Thus, the outcomes of this approach still correlate with a student-centered approach in which students are expected to have innovative and creative thinking.

Undoubtedly, these methods are interconnected with the principle of student-centered learning. Moreover, problem-based learning, project-based learning, and active learning methods are also implemented by the teacher occasionally. In this regard, teacher's freedom to apply whatever method, technique, and approach they want in learning activities means that the Merdeka curriculum has been greatly implemented related to their competencies, to focus on essential learning materials, and to focus on creating a meaningful learning environment. Pertiwi et al. (2022), further, 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. This is what the Ministry of Education and Culture is trying to promote: that learning in school should be fun so that students are motivated to learn based on their interests and talents, and this will encourage them to be lifelong learners even after they finish their formal education. Thus, what the Minister of Education, Culture Research, and Technology support in this curriculum facilitates reversible changes to the learning system.

THE USE OF LEARNING MATERIALS

Learning materials are the primary source both for the teacher and students. 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. They also recognize that the potential to acquire educational information is vast, and this curriculum has no restrictions. Although this freedom encourages the creation of a creative space for both of them that is not limited to specific books, the chance to use technology and access the Internet to improve learning activities is also essential. OECD (2020) illustrated that the ability to optimize new information must be set as a learning framework for 2030 and the 21st-century skills required.

THE USE OF LEARNING MEDIA

This study found 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. The claims of Arifa (2022) must be considered as evidence that education recovery needs facilities. In this case, the Merdeka Curriculum has emerged as an education recovery purpose to bring freedom of learning. The availability of good media alone could support the great implementation of the curriculum.

Teacher:

I use PPT, so when I made PPT yesterday and shared it via smartphone. Actually, I wanted a slide to be shown at the front because in each class, there is only one mobile (intelligent projector control via smartphone), and some cannot be used, and I don't mind sharing it via smartphone only; it's still my media, so students can see and hear what they should. I also brought a Bluetooth speaker for listening because I thought that listening was something I did not have to do in the lab, so I brought it. So, regardless of what I use, the students can learn with any media, no matter how simple it is.

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. There are three types of assessment in English learning that are upheld in the Merdeka curriculum standard: diagnostic assessment (assessment as learning), formative assessment (assessment as learning), and summative assessment (assessment of learning).

From the interview, the teacher conveyed that every learning material can use all of these assessments, but he/she did not. She usually uses diagnostic assessment in his/her learning material focused on non-cognitive and likely to know students' characters. In reconnecting to the Merdeka curriculum, the teacher is expected to apply formative rather than summative assessment. Even though the assessment mostly used diagnostic assessment, in the

procedure text learning material, the teacher also applied formative assessment by focusing on knowledge with the components of participation in discussion and understanding material; yet, the teacher also conducted summative assessment occasionally. On the other hand, colleagues' assessment is conditionally used by the teacher if the students prefer to ask their friends during learning activities.

Teacher:

So, ideally, every material has a diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment. But I am not always consistent like that, and I still do diagnostic assessments for every learning material. So, when I talked to the students, they had already done a diagnostic assessment. In summative assessment, I sometimes take tests or quizzes. My quiz isn't very long; about 15-20 minutes is enough. There aren't too many questions about the material I teach.

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

Those ideas above could come from the teacher's feelings and thoughts or the students' opinions. Her questions to students may have contributed to the validation of her perception of teaching and learning activities as a source to evaluate the entire teaching and learning process.

Teacher:

It's free for reflection, right? In essence, basically, as a teacher, I have to know if my students don't understand what I'm explaining, so I have to start from my thoughts and make questions based on that. "Is it good or not? Is my way of teaching wrong?" So, I don't go that way too much; like this day, I had less control, which means tomorrow I have to get focus on that. Sometimes I ask my students, "Did I explain it quickly?" If the answer is "no, ma'am," or "yes, ma'am," I say, "Next time, please remind me, okay?" So, like that, we are more aware of ourselves, and we see what students are like.

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. Pertiwi et al. (2022) explained that a student-centered learning strategy's implication necessitates active student participation, while the teacher's role is that of a facilitator. It will break down the barriers between students and teachers and alter the perception that the teacher is the only source of knowledge transmission.

Teacher:

The concept is good, I say it's good, but why? because it's not an old concept. It's more student-centered and gives students more freedom or space to be more creative. But the implementation also requires a process because we have just switched from the 2013 curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum.

Moreover, the teacher mentioned that 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.

Teacher:

If the Merdeka Curriculum leads in a positive direction, yes, all the goals are to advance. I don't know what the research done by governance is like, but basically, every curriculum leads to a positive direction. According to the concept of student-centered, students can be more independent and creative. Moreover, P5

(Program to strengthen Pancasila Students Profile) is emphasized in this curriculum, so those values are worthwhile.

In addition, the teacher considered 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.

Teacher:

The transition period is difficult, but it goes smoothly later. From the beginning, English was 4 hours, then in the 2013 curriculum, it became 2-3 hours; that was a lot of demonstrations back then. There is a process, and starting something is always tricky. But when it's going towards, you're going used to it. We can't apply this curriculum 100%; we're still working towards it.

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. Therefore, the teacher considered it her responsibility to motivate and boost students' confidence by letting go of their worries. Despite it, if a generation has the attributes of having confidence, updating their knowledge, being open-minded, and attempting new things, then this is unquestionably the case, and a country is always capable of adapting to any global change.

VII. CONCLUSION

To sum up, 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 backgrounds. However, all the concepts 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.

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Conflict of Interest Statement:

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.