

Challenges Faced by English Teachers in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at MTs Swasta Darul Makmur Sungai Cubadak Academic Year 2023/2024

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research is to find out the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at MTs S Darul Makmur Sungai Cubadak in the academic year 2023/2024. The study used qualitative research using the interview method with three English Teachers at MTs S Darul Makmur Sungai Cubadak who implemented Kurikulum Merdeka. The results showed that the interviewed teachers had convincing evidence of the challenges they faced in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka during teaching and learning activities. The form of Kurikulum Merdeka is a new thing for the teachers because they never had access to know and learn during their studies. So that the change of Kurikulum 13 to Kurikulum Merdeka challenges the teachers; almost all the respondents faced challenges in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka, such as challenges in designing teaching modules, challenges in class management, challenges in learning projects, and doing assessments based on Kurikulum Merdeka.

Keywords: Challenges, Kurikulum Merdeka, Teaching

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INTRODUCTION

The global pandemic of COVID-19 has presented the biggest challenges to individuals worldwide. Many aspects in this world have been affected by that pandemic; the educational field is one of them. COVID-19 has changed education not only in students' and teachers' psychology but also in the teaching and learning process. Many educational institutions were compelled to transition to online learning in response to the global pandemic to adjust to the new environment. However, Aswat (2021) highlighted that Learning loss is a phenomenon that emerged as a result of substantial changes to the traditional classroom setting due to the shift to online learning. This phenomenon describes the unfavorable outcomes that students have faced as a result of switching to online instruction. Additionally, the term "learning loss" refers to setbacks of learners' educational progress compared with previous academic years. This situation arises when learners experience barriers or setbacks in their attempts to pick up new skills or knowledge (Kuhfeld et al., 2020; Engzell et al., 2021)

In Indonesia, the nation's pre-existing problems have been made worse by the ongoing epidemic, especially in terms of learning loss. The Program for International Student Assessment

(PISA) conducted research that demonstrated that 70% of children under the age of 15 had difficulties in reading and math, indicating a serious learning crisis (PISA, 2018). This suggests that Indonesia faces a serious educational challenge. Based on that problem, Nadim Makarim, as the Minister of Education and Culture, introduced a model of teaching and learning activities known as Kurikulum Darurat and moved forward into *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This curriculum can be regarded as a streamlined iteration of the existing Kurikulum 2013. Based on the data presented by the Minister, it can be observed that the implementation of Kurikulum Darurat resulted in a reduction of learning loss by a duration of one month. In contrast, the implementation of Kurikulum 2013 led to a reduction of learning loss by a duration of six months. Inspired by this result, the Minister developed the Kurikulum Merdeka curriculum.

The concept of Kurikulum Merdeka (KM), a new curriculum, encounters a variety of educational obstacles. One is teacher preparedness. In order to address the issues of education in light of changing circumstances, self-reflection is essential in KM policy. Teachers must implement curriculum changes when they are prepared to do so (Mulyasa, 2021), and Irdawati (2021) notes that several curriculum modifications make it challenging for educators to create new curricula because of both internal and external considerations. One external factor is that teachers are accustomed to being preoccupied with their own books and those of their students. As a result, they must be imaginative and creative when creating lesson plans. One external factor is that teachers are accustomed to being obsessed with their own and their students' books. As a result, they must be imaginative and inventive when creating lesson plans. Teachers struggle to create integrated teaching modules due to an internal factor: a lack of knowledge of knowledge management (KM) in the concepts and procedures for generating teaching modules.

In addition, Suhardi (2022) reports that teachers face difficulties with the Kurikulum Merdeka. The findings indicate that KM affects teachers' roles and requires that to develop a certain level of self-competence in order to promote learning with KM. Many obstacles come with implementing KM in schools. Teachers who work with KM policies need to be proficient in creating lesson plans that lessen the workload associated with KM. Moreover, Maulida (2022) specifies that before creating instructional modules, teachers must classify students' conditions using psychological and cognitive categories in order to conduct a diagnostic examination. This requirement makes it difficult for teachers to plan lessons based on students' characteristics. Many educators still cannot create effective KM lesson plans.

It is extremely important that teachers actively participate in and use this curriculum, especially those who specialize in English education. As mentioned earlier, the Kurikulum Merdeka places great emphasis of helping students improve their skills in line with the Pancasila student profile. English teachers who have embraced the Kurikulum Merdeka must ensure that their students' academic pursuits integrate the moral precepts of Pancasila. Moreover, in MTs S

Darul Makmur also has the *Rahmatan lil 'Alamin* P5 project. The primary goals of the Pancasila Students Profile are to uphold the nation's high moral standards and values, prepare people to become global citizens, model social fairness, and acquire 21st-century skills (Nugrohadhi & Anwar, 2022; Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2022). Besides, teachers should consider the suitability of instructional materials for *Capaian Pembelajaran* (CP), *Tujuan Pembelajaran* (TP), and *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* (ATP) when delivering instruction to students.

Zulaiha (2022) stated that the Kurikulum Merdeka poses a significant challenge for teachers in schools that have recently adopted it. This challenge lies in correctly identifying the Core Principles (CP) provided by the central authority and then transferring them into Teaching Plans (TP) and Assessment Tools and Practices (ATP). This means there are a lot of things that teachers must be prepared for and master many things to create an acceptable teaching and learning process.

There are many studies have been conducted related to the challenges in Kurikulum Merdeka faced by teacher such as teachers' difficulties in understanding the Curriculum (Aulia, 2021; Pertiwi & Pusparini, 2021; Marlina, 2022, Salim, et al., 2022) difficulties in understanding CP, TP, and ATP conducted by (Damayanti & Muhroji, 2022; Marlina, 2022; Rindayati, et al., 2022; Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023; Zulaiha et al., 2022) challenges in creating the instructional module (Effendi, et al., 2023, Mustika, 2022) challenges in teacher readiness (Correos & Huelma, 2022; Nurzen, 2022; Solikhah & Purnomo, 2022; Yuhastina, et al., 2020; Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023). Previous studies have shown that teachers in general face these challenges. The present study identifies the specific problems faced by English teachers in second-language contexts.

METHOD

To complete this study, the researcher used a qualitative method. Qualitative research is a study that looks into and comprehends what people or groups believe to be a social or human problem. It also explores participant information, with the end product being words (Creswell, 2012). This research includes 3 English teachers as informants who teach English in MTs S Darul Makmur Sungai Cubadak and apply Kurikulum Merdeka. The purpose of the research is to describe the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at MTs S Darul Makmur Sungai Cubadak in Academic Year 2023/2024. In obtain the data, the researcher used observation and interviews.

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's quantitative data analysis technique in three steps: condensation of Data, Information Display, and drawing and verifying conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

First of all, English teachers need to adjust to the new approach introduced by Kurikulum Merdeka. These changes include a deep understanding of the mandated core competencies, as well as adjustments to learning methods to achieve these goals. In this case, it takes time and effort to get used to the changes and integrate them into daily learning practices. Teachers say they still do not get much information and training related to the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, while teachers were not taught about the use and development of the Kurikulum Merdeka during their studies. Although many platforms offer knowledge and information on Kurikulum Merdeka, teachers still feel that direct learning is easier.

A deep understanding of core competencies is essential in guiding the learning process. English teachers must have a strong understanding of the competency standards and indicators mandated by the Merdeka Curriculum. This requires an in-depth analysis of each element of the curriculum, so that teaching can be directed according to the desired learning focus. Teachers said that the terms used in Kurikulum Merdeka are different, such as the term KI becoming CP and so on. So that sometimes we are confused in preparing learning plans.

Integrating technology is another challenge English teachers face. The Merdeka curriculum encourages the use of technology as a learning tool, requiring teachers to master not only learning materials but also digital tools and resources. Selecting and integrating technology effectively to enhance English language learning requires customization and enhancement of digital skills. According to teachers, the challenges in the use of technology are not a problem for the teachers, but the problem comes from the students' side. Sometimes students who live in a dormitory do not have access to technology such as smartphones and so on.

Diversification of teaching methods is also a crucial aspect. English teachers need to find diverse teaching methods to meet students' different learning needs. This involves creativity in structuring learning activities in order to motivate students and create a dynamic learning atmosphere.

Ability-based assessment is a major focus in the Merdeka Curriculum. English teachers are faced with the challenge of developing assessments that can assess students' abilities in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Assessments that are in line with the Merdeka Curriculum approach require creativity in designing tasks and exams that reflect students' true abilities. In addition, significant challenges arise in meeting students' diverse needs presents significant challenges. English teachers must be able to create learning that can be tailored to students' individual needs and interests. This involves a deep understanding of students' characteristics and learning styles.

In the face of these challenges, parental involvement is an important element. English teachers need to communicate with parents to explain changes in learning approaches, gain their support, and build synergy between school and home.

Based on the statements of 3 English teachers as informants in this study, the researcher found several challenges faced by English teachers in implementing Kurikulum Merdeka during the teaching and learning process in MTs S Darul Makmur Sungai Cubadak. Based on the findings that the researcher collected, the challenges can be classified as follows:

1. Challenges in designing the teaching model

The Kurikulum Merdeka presented obstacles for student instructors when creating their lesson plans. This is because this instructional module is different from the previous one. The findings are supported by Maulida's (2022) results, which show that teachers are still unable to fully produce teaching modules because a large number of teachers are still unfamiliar with the methods involved in assembling and creating teaching modules for this curriculum. Student teachers cannot build ATP (flow of learning objectives) from TP because they do not know how to translate CP into learning objectives.

Student instructors have few resources to resort to while creating teaching modules based on the Kurikulum Merdeka. The results aligned with the findings of Damawisware et al. (2022), which showed that the challenges faced by student instructors while creating lesson plans are reflected in their inability to locate resources and modify classroom supplies, media, and infrastructure.

2. Challenges in class management

Student teachers encountered difficulties implementing differentiated learning because they lacked prior knowledge of Kurikulum Merdeka. The variety of students also challenged the implementation of varied learning, in addition to the student teachers' knowledge and abilities. Discrepancies among pupils in the class can be attributed to their learning methods, reasoning abilities, and comprehension levels.

Selecting the right assessment and learning model proved difficult for student instructors. Moreover, the restrictions placed on the use of learning models by teachers that support varied instruction were difficult to overcome. Finding reference sources with examples of varied instruction proved difficult for student instructors. Student instructors are also faced with the difficulty of limited school-owned facilities and infrastructure.

Educators must use differentiated learning in accordance with Kurikulum Merdeka. Differentiation is a great and ideal notion, but it can be difficult for teachers to come up with original teaching strategies. Students' potential is developed through that learning in accordance with their requirements, traits, and accomplishment level. However, in order for students to grasp that idea, the instructor must work hard to become a trustworthy facilitator. Student teachers must

understand the diverse qualities of the children. Learning design depends on the student teacher's understanding of the conditions surrounding student diversity. Thus, at the start of the learning process, student teachers must create diagnostic and formative tests based on the current level of variety of these students.

In determine student diversity, student teachers conduct a diagnostic assessment. Formative evaluation establishes students' achievement levels at the outset of learning. Student teachers must use multiple sources, media, and methods. Multiple learning outcomes for students—including those with visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles—can be accommodated by utilizing a variety of techniques, media, and learning materials. Thus, as inexperienced teachers, student teachers face many challenges.

Time management and allocation are the most common responses to the question regarding the difficulties instructors have when adopting Kurikulum Merdeka. They pointed out that: "It is difficult for teachers to maximize learning, considering the various activity elements that need to be covered, such as reading, listening, speaking, writing, and others, because they only receive two teaching hours per week." If teaching is not necessary for at least thirty hours a week, then the hours are excessive. Late afternoon commutes are challenging for students, particularly in the highland area with erratic weather. "Teachers' attention is diverted from teaching in the classroom by the volume of administrative tasks that take up their time." "Inadequate distribution of educational hours."

In conclusion, whether it has to do with managing or allocating time, teachers face great difficulty when putting the curriculum into practice. Some teachers struggle because they do not have enough instructional hours to cover every necessary English component for their pupils. In contrast, others deal with overly long teaching hours that interfere with students' commute times. When it comes to time management, a lot of instructors find it difficult to strike a balance between their administrative and instructional duties, like designing learning modules and making resources that are specifically tailored to the needs of different student populations. Kurikulum Merdeka's new administrative requirements take up a large amount of instructors' time.

3. Challenges in learning project

Kurikulum Merdeka includes project-based learning as of key feature. All schools must use the Pancasila student profile, or P5. After that, it becomes difficult for teachers to apply Kurikulum Merdeka, in which the instructor creates a project for the class to finish. Students are also difficult for teachers to manage. Although this endeavor is a crucial component of learning under Kurikulum Merdeka, many students still choose not to attend class. This curriculum is a great way for students with a strong desire to learn and a good level of comprehension to explore many professions and gain a wide range of experiences and knowledge.

However, this program will feel burdensome to kids who lack motivation. Cross-subject assignments will make students uneasy, and they might not even want to do them. Implementation in classrooms has been less successful and less useful because many students do not pay attention to their assignments. Furthermore, because student teachers implement project-based learning in the classroom in accordance with its principles rather than just their subject matter, they must have broad perspectives in addition to subject-specific knowledge.

The student teacher still cannot fully understand the P5. Student teachers occasionally do not teach in accordance with the subject matter when teaching a project.

Like the challenge that was previously mentioned, this problem does not represent the teacher's skill level. Rather, the lack of sufficient resources and support facilities hinders teachers from carrying out the program. They pointed out that: "limited printed materials available in school, especially for English", "lack of learning resources/books to support the teaching and learning process", "lack of LCD facilities in the classroom and WiFi access for students", "Teachers also have difficulty of finding a variety of learning resources"

The responses that educators submitted in response to the open-ended question indicated that a significant proportion of schools still struggle with a lack of technical resources and instructional materials, which makes it more difficult for them to fulfill the curriculum's requirements. In addition, the curriculum requires teachers to demonstrate independence in their teaching strategies, creating an extra challenge in finding relevant materials that meet students' needs and align with the subject matter. Effective implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka requires careful evaluation and balancing of multiple aspects. These factors are important in determining the curriculum's effectiveness.

4. Challenges in Assessment

The problem with the Kurikulum Merdeka formative and summative assessments is that each item must have value because speaking, listening, and reading are all required. Formative and summative assessments created by student teachers are included in the one-week teaching modules in the Kurikulum Merdeka. Therefore, any material that is processed will include a large number of values. Formative assessment is a daily value that is reported to pupils every two months.

Therefore, processing a large amount of data is a hurdle. Additionally, student teachers lack comprehension of Kurikulum Merdeka formative assessment procedures. Assessments that are formative, summative, and diagnostic are unfamiliar to student instructors. Before commencing any new lesson plan, the instructor should do an assessment. The teacher paradigm, which states that they only require a preliminary assessment at the start of the school year, is to blame for this. The outcomes apply to the entire academic year.

The second challenge is pondering how to help pupils identify their own strengths and areas in which they still need to grow. Because the instructor has not been able to recognize, interpret, and wrap up the application of the learned material, the teacher still has not thought about this. Furthermore, the teacher is not accustomed to doing this at the end of each lesson. The third obstacle is conducting a formative evaluation of every assessment currently in use. Teachers lack the knowledge necessary to conduct formative assessments.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research conducted above, the challenges faced by English teachers in MTs S Darul Makmur consist of challenges in designing teaching models, class management, challenges in learning projects, and assessment. Moreover, it is hoped that teachers can overcome that challenges to ensure learning goals can be achieved.

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