



EVALUATION OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN ENGLISH SUBJECTS AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY ON WRITING SKILLS.

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Abstract: The formulation of the problem in this study is The influence of Merdeka Curriculum on students' ability to write in English language learning. The background to this study is the frequent changes in the education curriculum in Indonesia since the 1952 curriculum (Rentjana Pembelajaran Teruai) which replaced the 1947 curriculum (Rentjana Pelajaran) to the current Merdeka Curriculum in accordance with the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Mendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia number 56 of 2022 concerning Guidelines for Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Learning Recovery, this curriculum is designed to overcome learning loss and learning gaps that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this study is to determine the factors of implementing Merdeka Curriculum in teaching English writing skills in junior high schools and to find out the perceptions of teachers and students towards Merdeka Curriculum in teaching English writing skills in junior high schools. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research with a case study method or approach. The theoretical foundation used is the theory of Writing Theory (Hargrove & Potteet (1984: 239). The results of this study obtained eight findings which were divided into two core findings, namely the influencing factors and perceptions of teachers and students regarding the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SMPN 2 Banjaran.

Keywords: Evaluation, Merdeka Curriculum, English Education, Junior High School, Writing.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum changes in Indonesia began in 1947 with the *Renjtana Pelajaran*, evolving through several iterations including the 1952 *Renjtana Pembelajaran Terurai*, 1964 *Renjtana Pendidikan*, and various curriculum updates in subsequent decades, culminating in the 2022 *Merdeka Curriculum*. The *Merdeka Curriculum*, established by the Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Mendikbudristek) of the Republic of Indonesia number 56 of 2022, aims to address learning loss and educational disparities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It represents the latest effort in a long history of curriculum reforms intended to improve educational outcomes and align with contemporary needs.

Curriculum is a fundamental element of the education system, encompassing the structured content and methods through which education is delivered. It includes physical documents like textbooks, syllabi, and teacher guidelines, forming a blueprint for classroom instruction. The Indonesian Ministry of Education is tasked with developing and implementing a national curriculum that meets the diverse needs of its students. The *Merdeka Curriculum* focuses on core subjects, character development, and nurturing students' interests and strengths. Its goals include fostering innovative and creative thinking, critical analysis, and effective communication and collaboration skills. It aligns with societal expectations for students to possess 21st-century competencies, as education is deeply intertwined with social issues and advancements.

All students in Indonesia, from elementary to high school, have experienced curriculum changes, each iteration reflecting shifts in educational priorities and pedagogical strategies. The *Merdeka Curriculum*, implemented in stages since 2022, represents a significant shift towards addressing contemporary educational challenges. It has brought changes to teaching methods across subjects, including English education, emphasizing differentiated learning to cater to individual student needs. English, as an international language, is crucial for students in the globalized era. Writing skills, in particular, are essential for mastering English, though teaching and learning these skills pose several challenges. These include limited grammar proficiency, difficulty in idea development, restricted vocabulary, lack of motivation, time constraints, insufficient teaching materials, and inadequate facilities.

This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in teaching English writing skills at junior high schools. It seeks to identify the factors influencing its implementation and to understand teachers' and students' perceptions of its effectiveness. By doing so, it contributes to the ongoing efforts to refine educational practices and enhance learning outcomes in Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. A case study is research conducted with a focus on a particular case to be observed and analysed in depth until completion. The cases in question can be single or plural, such as individuals or groups. A sharp analysis of various factors related to the case is needed so that accurate conclusions can be obtained (Sutedi, 2009: 61). Case study data is collected from various sources, and the results of this research only apply to the case under study. The research data comes from teachers' and students' perspectives on writing skills in the *Merdeka Curriculum*. According to Creswell (2014), data sources in qualitative research come from various sources such as interviews, observations, documents, audiovisual information, and questionnaires. The data collected came from 3 (three) English teachers and 3 (three) grade 7 students from different classes at SMPN 2 Banjarn.

Data collection in this study uses survey techniques, interviews, and administration of questionnaires to teachers and students who are sampled. The focus was on the evaluation of Merdeka Curriculum in English language learning, particularly in the development of writing skills. In addition, a search for related materials was conducted as part of the qualitative data collection techniques to support this study. Data collection began with observations in three different classes learning English under the Merdeka Curriculum, with writing skills as the main object. Three teachers taught in different classes, and also three students from each teacher. Firstly, the researcher used observation sheets in the classroom during English lessons. Next, interviews were conducted with the three teachers after the classroom research. After that, each teacher was given a questionnaire sheet. For the students, interviews were conducted first, and then a questionnaire sheet related to the material of this study was given. Documentation was also taken as corroboration and evidence in this study, as well as consent forms from each teacher under study. This research is included in a case study analysis based on real phenomena (Creswell, 2012). The aim is to find out the perspectives of teachers and students on the implementation of writing skills in the Merdeka Curriculum. Case studies can use several data collection techniques. Data from classroom observations are the first data to show how writing skills are implemented in the classroom in the Merdeka Curriculum. After knowing the situation, the researcher transcribed audio recordings of interviews with three teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Banjaran and three seventh grade students from different classes. After the interview, the researcher continued the research by distributing questionnaire sheets to each respondent.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the study entitled: Evaluation Of Merdeka Curriculum In English Subjects At Junior High School: A Case Study On Writing Skills. The researcher has found the results of his research in which there are eight findings in this case. This research was conducted at SMPN 2 Banjaran with the object of 3 teachers and three students as research samples. This research focuses on the use of the Merdeka Curriculum specifically in English language learning by grade 7 and grade 8 students. The researcher found the factors causing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 2 Banjaran and investigated the various views and perceptions of teachers and students regarding the implementation of this curriculum.

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 2 Banjaran has been significantly influenced by the previous use of the 2013 Curriculum. The transition is not uniform across grades 7, 8, and 9, resulting in varied levels of adoption. The new curriculum encourages teachers to develop suitable learning strategies and emphasizes the use of technology to enhance learning experiences. This shift has increased student engagement, allowing them to explore their interests and talents more freely. The transition to the Merdeka Curriculum has brought significant changes, particularly in English teaching. Teachers had to adapt by understanding students' preferences and employing effective methods. Although most students were prepared for the transition, external factors still impacted the learning process. The curriculum aims to develop students' abilities in processing and understanding information through reading and writing, aligning with its broader educational goals. Technological integration has been crucial in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, with tools like projectors, laptops, and cellphones playing a key role. However, their use is still limited and tailored to specific needs. This finding aligns with other research highlighting the positive impact of educational technology in supporting the curriculum's goals. The effective use of technology is essential for maximizing the benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Various teaching methods have been employed to train students' English writing skills under the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum supports student-centered learning methods such as Active Learning and Project-Based Learning, creating an enjoyable and intellectually stimulating classroom environment. These methods, emphasized since the 2013 Curriculum, continue to be core aspects of the Merdeka Curriculum, promoting a more engaging and effective learning experience. The Merdeka Curriculum's differentiated learning model considers individuality, comprehensive learning, and the specific needs and interests of students. Teachers are encouraged to identify different abilities and choose appropriate teaching strategies. This model aims to provide diverse learning activities and assessments, allowing students to learn and assess themselves in ways that suit their preferences, fostering a more personalized and effective educational experience. Teacher and student perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum are mixed. Some teachers appreciate the flexibility and creativity it allows, while others prefer the familiarity of the previous curriculum. Similarly, students have varied opinions, with some favoring the new approach and others preferring the older system. These varied perceptions highlight the need for ongoing support and training to ensure a smoother transition and greater acceptance of the new curriculum. One major challenge in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum has been its phased introduction across different school levels, creating inconsistencies. This is particularly problematic because elementary schools do not use the Merdeka Curriculum, causing difficulties in seamless progression and adaptation for both teachers and students. Addressing these inconsistencies is crucial for the successful implementation of the curriculum. Resource and infrastructure constraints have also posed challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The limited availability of technological tools and reliance on resources from the previous curriculum, such as book packages from the 2013 Curriculum, have hindered progress. The competition for technological tools among teachers highlights the need for better resource allocation and infrastructure development to support the new curriculum effectively.

The findings reveal a complex interplay of factors affecting the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching at SMPN 2 Banjaran. The transition from the 2013 Curriculum has brought about significant changes, with a particular emphasis on technology and student-centered learning approaches. Teachers are required to be more creative and adaptive, developing strategies that cater to the diverse needs and interests of their students. This adaptability is essential for fostering a more engaging and effective learning environment. Students' readiness and involvement are critical for the success of the new curriculum. While many students have adapted well, external factors and resource constraints continue to impact the learning process. The integration of technology, although beneficial, needs to be expanded and better supported to ensure its effectiveness. Ensuring that students have access to the necessary technological tools and resources is essential for maximizing the benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum. The differentiated learning model of the Merdeka Curriculum offers a promising approach to addressing the individual needs of students. However, the phased implementation across different educational levels has created challenges, highlighting the need for more consistent and comprehensive planning. Addressing these challenges is crucial for ensuring that all students can benefit from the curriculum's innovative approaches to learning and assessment. Teacher and student perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum are varied, reflecting the diverse experiences and challenges encountered during its implementation. This underscores the importance of ongoing support, training, and resource allocation to facilitate a smoother transition and greater acceptance of the new system. Providing teachers with the necessary resources and training will help them adapt to the new curriculum more effectively.

In conclusion, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 2 Banjaran presents both opportunities and challenges. By addressing the identified issues and leveraging the strengths of the new curriculum, educators can enhance the quality of English language teaching and foster a more engaging and effective learning environment. Ensuring that all stakeholders are adequately supported will be key to the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

CONCLUSION

In the study entitled "Evaluation of Merdeka Curriculum in English Lessons at Junior High School through a Case Study Approach: Writing Skills", the researcher used descriptive qualitative research methods. The research findings show that language ability consists of four aspects of skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This research aims to find out the factors that influence the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in teaching English writing skills and the perceptions of teachers and students towards the curriculum.

According to Poteet (cited by Hargrove and Poteet, 1984), writing is the visual depiction of thoughts, feelings, and ideas using language symbols for communication or recording. Megawati (2019) states that speaking and writing are productive skills, while reading and listening are receptive skills. Abbas (2006) added that writing skill is the ability to express ideas, opinions, and feelings through written language. However, students often experience difficulties in language skills, especially writing, due to the lack of teaching creativity and effective learning techniques.

In teaching English writing in junior high school, the challenges faced include low grammar skills, difficulty developing ideas, limited vocabulary, lack of motivation, limited time, source materials, and teaching facilities. These challenges affect the quality of student writing and the effectiveness of learning.

The implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at SMPN 2 Banjaran is influenced by various factors, such as curriculum changes, teacher readiness and student involvement, school facilities, availability of teaching materials, use of technology, and methods and development of learning materials. These factors affect teachers' and students' perceptions of the curriculum, which have an impact on various elements of education, including teachers, students, schools, parents, the economy, and the government. These different views affect the sustainability of the Merdeka Curriculum that is being implemented, so an evaluation by MoEC is necessary.

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