



POTRAIT OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OF SD PATRA MANDIRI 2 PALEMBANG VIEWED FROM KURIKULUM MERDEKA

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in the context of English language instruction at SD Patra Mandiri 2 Palembang, with particular attention to its learner-centered orientation and the pedagogical challenges encountered by educators. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, data were gathered through classroom observations, an in-depth interview with an English teacher, and questionnaires administered to 22 fifth-grade students. The findings indicate that the curriculum is enacted through dynamic and participatory strategies such as educational games, collaborative group discussions, and project-based learning exemplified by activities like the "My Dream House" poster project which foster greater student engagement and promote the integration of multiple language competencies. Despite these pedagogical strengths, teachers face significant hurdles, including inadequate access to technological resources (e.g., multimedia projectors and reliable internet), difficulties in fostering student autonomy, and the labor-intensive nature of evaluating project-based work. While students generally demonstrate enthusiasm and engagement, they also struggle with vocabulary acquisition and oral communication confidence. The study underscores the pressing need for enhanced infrastructural support, sustained professional development for educators, and differentiated instructional strategies to meet the heterogeneous needs of learners.

Keywords: *Kurikulum Merdeka, English teaching, elementary school, student-centered learning, challengesnt.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a cornerstone in shaping the future of a nation, with curriculum development playing a central role in ensuring that educational systems remain responsive to societal changes (Sallis, 2014; Banks, 2019; Chen et al., 2020). In recent years, Indonesia has embarked on a significant educational reform through the introduction of the Kurikulum Merdeka (Independent Curriculum), which represents a paradigm shift from traditional, teacher-centered models to a more student-centered approach. This

curriculum emphasizes creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and learner autonomy competencies deemed essential for navigating the complexities of the 21st century (Saimon et al., 2023; Griffin & Care, 2015; Trilling & Fadel, 2019).

Launched under the broader Merdeka Belajar (Freedom to Learn) initiative by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, Kurikulum Merdeka was designed in response to the educational disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. It seeks to address systemic issues such as rigid standardization, learning loss, and teacher

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dependency by promoting flexible learning pathways, reduced content load, and greater instructional autonomy for teachers (Kemdikbudristek, 2022; Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2022; Shocheb, 2023). Through this reform, students are expected to become more independent and reflective learners, while teachers are encouraged to adopt innovative pedagogical practices that cater to diverse learning needs.

In the context of English language teaching at the elementary level, the Kurikulum Merdeka offers both promising opportunities and notable challenges. While it advocates for active learning strategies such as project-based learning, differentiated instruction, and thematic integration, its implementation is often hindered by practical constraints, including limited access to technology, insufficient training, and varying teacher readiness (Jaya et al., 2025; Jaya et al., 2019; Safitri et al., 2024). These challenges are particularly evident in public schools where infrastructural support and professional development resources may be lacking.

This study investigates the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in English classes at SD Patra Mandiri 2 Palembang, a primary school that has been proactive in embracing the curriculum's principles. Specifically, the research seeks to explore two guiding questions:

- 1) How is the Kurikulum Merdeka implemented in English language teaching at SD Patra Mandiri 2 Palembang?
- 2) What challenges do teachers encounter in its implementation?

By addressing these questions, the study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on curriculum reform in Indonesia. It offers practical insights for educators, school administrators, and policymakers regarding the real-world application of Kurikulum

Merdeka, particularly in the area of English language instruction at the elementary level. The findings are expected to inform efforts to strengthen teacher capacity, improve instructional practices, and enhance student learning outcomes in line with the goals of the new curriculum.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 *The Kurikulum Merdeka Framework*

English language teaching is a dynamic process that involves various methods, techniques, and strategies to support students' language development. According to Rahman (2022), using literary works like poetry in English teaching can improve students' understanding and appreciation of the language. This approach also enriches students' cultural awareness. Additionally, Puspitasari (2020) highlights the importance of concept maps as an innovative method to help students develop critical thinking and understand grammar structures.

Freeman and Anderson (2011) identify several challenges in English teaching, including linguistic and cultural differences that affect students' comprehension. However, project-based and task-based learning can encourage active student participation and the use of English in real-life contexts (Merris et al., 2021; Guo et al., 2020).

2.2 *Stages of Reading Development*

Teaching English at the elementary level plays a crucial role in building students' language foundation. According to Cameron (2021), introducing English early can improve children's vocabulary, pronunciation, and cognitive skills. Meisani and Purnawarman (2019) adds that the main goal of

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English teaching in elementary schools is not only language instruction but also fostering a positive attitude toward language learning.

However, challenges such as a lack of trained teachers and varying student abilities often hinder the learning process (Linder & Falk-Ross, 2024). Solutions include adaptive learning approaches and communicative methods to enhance students' language skills (Fattah et al., 2023). Interactive activities like games, songs, and stories have also proven effective in increasing student engagement (Nurkilah, 2021:61).

2.3 Concept of Kurikulum Merdeka

The Merdeka Curriculum is an innovative educational framework in Indonesia designed to create flexible, student-centered learning. According to the Kemendikbud RI (2022), this curriculum emphasizes competency-based and differentiated learning, allowing students to learn at their own pace and interests. Tomlinson (2021) supports this approach, stating that personalized learning can boost creativity and critical thinking.

Nikmah et al. (2023) add that the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the use of technology and project-based learning to increase student engagement. However, its implementation faces challenges such as insufficient teacher training and unprepared infrastructure (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023).

2.4 Implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in English Teaching

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English teaching aims to create more dynamic and relevant learning. Vioreza et al. (2023) state that this curriculum encourages teachers to integrate language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) through creative methods like project-based learning.

However, Tricahyati and Zaim (2023) identifies obstacles such as teachers' lack of understanding of the new curriculum and limited resources. Despite this, research by Bhwana (2023) shows that the Merdeka Curriculum successfully improves students' motivation and communication skills through contextual learning approaches.

3. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to capture the realities of English teaching under the Kurikulum Merdeka. Data were collected through:

1. Classroom Observations: 5th-grade English lessons were observed, focusing on teaching methods, student engagement, and curriculum alignment.
2. Interviews: An in-depth interview with the English teacher, Mr. Jimmy Ivon, S.Pd., explored preparation, challenges, and strategies.
3. Questionnaires: 22 students provided feedback on their learning experiences and perceptions.

Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model (data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing), with triangulation to ensure validity.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**4.1 Result of Observation**

Based on classroom observations, English teaching in the fifth grade at SD Patra Mandiri 2 follows the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The teacher used active and student-centered methods, such as games, group discussions, and project-based learning. For example, students made a poster called

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"My Dream House." The teacher also used videos, pictures, and learning apps like Wordwall to make lessons more interesting.

The teacher integrated all four English skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Students listened to audio dialogues, read short texts, introduced themselves in English, and wrote short descriptions. The teacher encouraged student participation by asking open-ended questions and allowing students to express their ideas. The learning atmosphere was fun, interactive, and inclusive.

4.2 Result of Interview

The interview with the English teacher, Mr. Jimmy, revealed that he prepared lessons based on the Learning Outcomes (CP) of the Kurikulum Merdeka. He modified the government's open modules to match students' needs and interests. He also involved students in choosing learning themes.

Project-based learning was used regularly, and students participated in both individual and group activities. The teacher used varied methods, such as interactive games, videos, and songs. Differentiated instruction was applied by adjusting the difficulty of assignments according to student levels.

However, several challenges were mentioned. Students were not used to independent learning. There were also infrastructure limitations, such as a lack of projectors and internet access. Project assessments were also time-consuming. The teacher received some training, but he expressed a need for more teaching materials and continuous support.

4.3 Result of Questionnaire

The student questionnaire showed that most students liked learning English. They were motivated because they wanted to speak English in the future

and communicate with foreigners. However, some students had difficulties, especially with speaking and vocabulary.

Many students said they enjoyed group work, creative activities, and games. They preferred interactive learning methods, such as storytelling, videos, and role-playing. However, they also noted that technology and project-based learning were not used often enough. Students hoped for more speaking practice and outdoor activities.

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka in English language instruction at the elementary level generally aligns with the curriculum's core principle of student-centered learning. Teachers incorporate a variety of engaging activities such as group discussions, educational games, and project-based tasks which have proven effective in enhancing student motivation, active participation, and overall engagement in the classroom. The use of multimedia tools and contextualized learning materials further supports students' interest in learning English, while differentiated instruction allows teachers to accommodate diverse learning styles and abilities. This reflects the emphasis of the Kurikulum Merdeka on meaningful and flexible learning experiences (Kemendikbud RI, 2022).

Teachers in this study also demonstrated a willingness to innovate and modify lesson plans to better suit the needs of their learners, fostering a more creative and collaborative classroom environment. These practices are consistent with research suggesting that teacher autonomy and responsiveness are key to successful curriculum implementation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Alwadaeen & Piller, 2022; Jaya et al., 2019a; Putri et al., 2023).

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Nonetheless, several challenges hinder the optimal execution of the curriculum. Limited school infrastructure, such as the lack of reliable internet access and multimedia equipment, remains a significant barrier. Additionally, the transition to student-centered methodologies demands more extensive teacher training and professional development areas that many educators feel are currently insufficient (Boudah, 2018). The time-intensive nature of authentic assessments, such as evaluating project-based learning outcomes, also places additional burdens on teachers.

From the student perspective, while there is general enthusiasm for the more interactive learning approach, some learners experience difficulty in adapting to these new methods. In particular, low confidence in speaking English and challenges with vocabulary retention are recurring issues. These findings echo previous studies indicating that young language learners often struggle with oral production, especially when instruction shifts from rote memorization to communicative and participatory approaches (Elder & Paul, 2020; Reilly & Ward, 2019; Meisani & Purnawarman, 2019).

In summary, the Kurikulum Merdeka presents valuable opportunities for transforming English language education by promoting learner autonomy, critical thinking, and active engagement. However, to fully realize its potential, it is essential to strengthen systemic support including the provision of adequate learning infrastructure, sustained teacher training programs, and access to high-quality instructional resources. Without these foundational supports, the risk remains that the curriculum's intended outcomes may not be fully achieved across diverse educational settings (OECD, 2022).

5. CONCLUSION**POTRAIT OF ENGLISH TEACHING IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL OF SD PATRA MANDIRI 2 PALEMBANG VIEWED FROM KURIKULUM MERDEKA**

The findings of this study indicate that integrating local content into reading instruction significantly enhances the learning experience of fifth-grade students at SD Negeri 1 Mengulak. By embedding culturally relevant themes such as traditional foods, familiar places, and local customs into reading materials, students demonstrated increased interest, motivation, and engagement. This relevance to their daily lives created a more comfortable and meaningful learning environment, fostering greater confidence and participation in reading activities.

Students found it easier to comprehend texts that aligned with their lived experiences, which, in turn, facilitated better retention and improved their ability to articulate what they had read. The incorporation of familiar topics enabled learners to connect prior knowledge with new information, a key principle in effective literacy development. Moreover, students displayed noticeable progress in vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, and oral fluency.

The teacher's role was instrumental in this process. By utilizing supportive tools such as visual aids, realia, and supplementary texts that matched the students' background knowledge, the teacher helped bridge gaps in understanding and made lessons more accessible. Both students and the teacher expressed that reading with local content not only made learning more enjoyable but also encouraged more active participation and discussion in class.

While some challenges remained particularly with regard to decoding complex vocabulary and interpreting longer texts the overall outcomes support the pedagogical value of localizing reading materials. Furthermore, the study highlights the need for collaborative support from teachers, parents, and school stakeholders to optimize students' reading development.

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Future studies are encouraged to explore the long-term impact of localized reading instruction on students' literacy development across various grade levels and regions. Comparative research involving different cultural settings could provide broader insights into how local content affects reading proficiency and learner identity. Additionally, experimental or mixed-method designs could be employed to measure the effectiveness of specific teaching strategies or interventions using local texts. Further investigation into the role of teacher training in developing and implementing culturally responsive reading materials would also be valuable in advancing inclusive and context-aware literacy education in Indonesia and beyond.

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