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Merdeka Curriciulum: Teachers' Perception About the Implementation in Teaching English at SMKN 1 Polewali

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to shed light on how is the teachers" perception on the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Teaching English at SMKN 1 Polewali. This research is a qualitative research approach with a phenomenology descriptive design. The researcher using observation, interview and documentation to collect the dataBased on the observation and interview that have been done, the researcher found that the teachers" perceptions reveal broad and narrow views. While appreciating curriculum flexibility for tailored learning and recognizing positive outcomes like increased student creativity and participation, some express concerns about limitations and administrative burdens. The teachers" reveal their perception about how the merdeka curriculum giving teachers flexibility in teaching, enhancing students creativity, utilizing student-centred teaching method, seamless technology integration and emphasize the importance of reflection process in learning, In conclusion, the Merdeka Curriculum positively impacts the learning environment at SMK 1 Polewali, fostering dynamism and responsiveness to student needs. Ongoing efforts to understand and address varied teacher perceptions are crucial for optimizing curriculum benefits and ensuring equitable outcomes for all stakeholders in the learning process. the findings of this study provide a foundation for the development of targeted teacher professional development programmes. These programmes can address key challenges identified in the study, such as adapting to curriculum updates, integrating technology and managing administrative burdens. When teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and support, they can face these challenges more effectively, which will ultimately improve the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Teachers, Perception

INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental necessity for all individuals and plays a crucial role in the survival and progress of a nation and state. It cultivates competent human resources capable of navigating the challenges and competition in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution 4.0, where

technological literacy and critical reasoning skills are increasingly vital. According to (Ahmadi, 2014), education can be viewed from two perspectives: as a process and as an outcome. As a process, it is defined as the interaction between humans and their environment. On the other hand, education leads to behavioural changes, indicating its ability to evolve alongside trends and changing times. It adapts to the needs of both the environment and individuals.

Education in Indonesia has made several adjustments to the current situation. In 2021, the government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, launched a prototype curriculum. This curriculum will be further refined in 2022 to become the Merdeka Curriculum, also known as "Kurikulum Merdeka".The launch of this curriculum is in response to the education crisis andlearning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, this curriculum will be widely used as the standard curriculum in schools. According to (Susetyo et al., 2022) learning loss refers to the decline in knowledge and skills in academic development that occurs when education is interrupted.

Along with the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum by the Ministry of Education and Culture, teachers have varying positive and negative perceptions. However, the Merdeka Curriculum represents freedom for teachers and students to innovate and create during the learning process. This concept is a response to the needs of the education system during the era of the Industrial Revolution. Moreover, the Merdeka Curriculum promotes freedom of thought. Teachers determine the freedom of thought, whereas in independent learning, both teachers and students are considered active participants in the learning process. This means that students do not see teachers as the sole source of truth. Instead, teachers and students collaborate as motivators and work together to seek the truth.

Teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can vary significantly, given the differences compared to previous curricula. According to Leavitt's theory (Nurdin, 2016), teacher perceptions can be categorized into two perspectives: narrow and broad perceptions. The narrow perspective views perception as solely visual, emphasizing how individuals perceive things. The broad perspective interprets perception as the way individuals view and interpret things. Many individuals recognize that the world, as perceived, may only sometimes align with reality. Therefore, adopting a comprehensive approach to perception is essential, which goes beyond mere visual observation and emphasizes understanding and interpretation.

Teachers' diverse perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum reflect their varying interpretations and understandings of its implementation and potential impact. Understanding these perceptions is crucial for developing effective strategies and support systems to address

teachers' concerns and optimize the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

Examining the Merdeka Curriculum in education, this research aims to find out the teachers' perceptions about the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in Teaching English at SMKN 1 Polewali.

Review Of Literature

Merdeka Curriculum

Merdeka Belajar is a policy introduced by Nadiem Makarim as the Minister of Education and Culture. Makarim in (Sholeh et al., 2023) says, "Merdeka belajar is the freedom of thought, the autonomy given to the education element that aims to give room to the students to develop their potential." The Merdeka Curriculum that contains Merdeka Belajar is one of the initiatives of Nadiem Makarim, who wants to create a happy and enjoyable learning atmosphere. The goal of Merdeka Belajar is for teachers, students, and parents to experience an enjoyable atmosphere. Merdeka belajar, according to the Minister of Education, is based on the desire to improve the quality of education, not just to produce students who are skilled in memorizing but also to have sharp analytical skills, reasoning, and comprehensive understanding in learning to develop themselves and their abilities.

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According to Priantini et al., (2022) The Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) offers several advantages that become characteristic of learning in this curriculum. Firstly, it emphasizes simplicity and depth in learning, focusing on essential knowledge and developing students' abilities according to their phases. This means the learning process is timely and becomes more enjoyable. Secondly, the curriculum promotes greater independence, as students can choose subjects based on their interests and aspirations. Teachers can adjust their teaching methods based on students' achievements and development. Schools also gain autonomy in curriculum development and management, aligning with the characteristics of their students and institutions. Lastly, the Merdeka Curriculum promotes relevance and interactivity in learning. It encourages project-based learning and allows students to actively explore and address real-life issues, fostering critical

thinking, care, and complex problem-solving skills in line with the Pancasila Student Character and Competency Profile.

Teachers Perception

Perception is the direct observation of a stimulus. In order to have a complete understanding of perception, it is necessary to address issues such as what the function of perception is, how it may be expressed as an input-output algorithm, and how it materializes as brain activity (Hoffman, 2016). Perception is how an individual receives information through their senses. In addition, Oxford defines it as the act of becoming aware of things through the senses. Meanwhile, Longman describes it as the ability to recognize and interpret sensory information through sight, hearing, touch, etc (Kurniati, 2019). From those explanations, it can be inferred that perception refers to forming opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and judgments about things in one's surroundings.

A teacher's perception is how a person selects, organizes, and interprets input information to create a meaningful picture of the world (Isthofiyani et al., 2014). This perception will depend not only on physical stimuli but also on the relationship between the stimulus and the surrounding field and the person's condition. Perception about the environment is how individuals organize and interpret their sensory impressions to give meaning to their surroundings.

Perception is an individual's ability to view something being questioned. Essentially, an individual can only possess perception by their attitude (Hidayat, 2021). Based on (Leavitt's in (Nurdin, 2016)teacher perception has two views, which are as follows;

1) Narrow view: The narrow view defines perception as sight, how a person sees something.
2) Broad view: The broad view defines perception as how a person views or interprets something. Most individuals realize that the world as seen is not always the same as reality, so unlike the narrow approach, it is not just about seeing something but more about understanding it.

Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that teacher perception means analyzing how we integrate our experiences of things around the individual with existing sensations or concepts and subsequently recognizing the object.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The type of this study was a qualitative research approach with phenomenology descriptive design. Qualitative approach was a research procedure that generated descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from individuals and observed behaviors. After the data has been

collected, the next stage was data analysis. (Cresswell, 2012) also stated that qualitative research involved exploring a problem and developing a comprehensive understanding of a critical phenomenon.

Data Resource

In data collection, the researcher needed to include data from valid sources. As stated by (Arikunto et al., 2015), good data was obtained from appropriate and accurate sources. This study collected data from teachers who have implemented the Merdeka Curriculum in their teaching. The researcher utilized purposive sampling to include homogeneous sampling to recruit teachers who can participate in this research.

Lopez & Whitehead (2013) explained purposive sampling as a sampling strategy that was frequently employed, where participants were selected based on predetermined criteria that were relevant to a specific research question. In this study, the researcher selected three categories of teachers as participants for data collection. The first category consisted of teachers who have participated in the Guru Penggerak program. The second category was the teacher who have joined the PPG Program while the third category was the teacher who have not joined both of the program above. The researcher gained insights into implementing the Merdeka Curriculum by selecting these three categories. Based on this category, the researcher chose six teacher as the data resource.

Research Instrument

To collect the data the researche use observation, interview and documentation. (Sandu, 2015) stated that the most effective way to use the observation method was to supplement it with observation forms or checklists as instruments. The interview was a purposeful conversation between two parties: the interviewer who asked the questions and the interviewee who provided answers to those questions (Moleong, 2018). According to (Sudaryono, 2017) documentation aimed to obtain data directly from the research site, which included relevant books, regulations, activity reports, photographs, and relevant data films. The researcher digitally recorded the conversation during the interview between the researcher and the participants using an audio or tape recorder.

Technique of Analyzing Data

The data analysis technique involved examining the data to derive an explanation for a particular phenomenon. The data in this study included interview transcripts and was accompanied by audio recordings. According to Miles and Huberman (Saleh, 2017) qualitative data analysis consisted of three procedures for analyzing and interpreting the data after collecting it they are data reduction, data display, and verivying conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

In this study, researchers used an interview process to confirm the results of observations and see teachers' opinion regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Based on the results of interviews conducted by the researcher, teachers showed various perceptions to the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in learning. The aspects asked in the interview process are flexibility in teaching, encouraging creativity in learning, utilizing student-centered learning, seamless technology integration, reflection process is needed, adding administrative workload, limitations in the implementation process, challenges in technology integration and the last is split learner focus. Researcher chose six teachers as respondents for this research. The following is an explanation of the responses found;

1) Flexibility in Teaching

Based on the results of the interviews that have been conducted, it can be seen that five teachers have similar opinions by expressing a positive response to the flexibility brought by the independent curriculum regulations. However, there was one teacher who had a different opinion stating that flexibility in teaching was more pronounced when using the previous curriculum. Teachers assess that this curriculum provides freedom in designing learning without being too tied to curriculum targets. They highlight the freedom in adapting learning to students' learning styles and designing learning with minimal components, such as objectives, learning steps, and evaluation. In conclusion, the Merdeka curriculum supports freedom and flexibility in teaching

2) Boosting Creativity in Learning

Four teachers seemed to have similar agreement on the aspect of developing student creativity in learning using the independent curriculum while one teacher stated that student creativity in the classroom depended on the role of the teacher and one other teacher also had a different opinion stating that student creativity did not develop significantly when learning using the independent curriculum. We can infer that while the Merdeka curriculum can give students a platform to express their creativity, the impact also hinges on the teaching style of the instructor. Approaches that support freedom and create an atmosphere that supports creativity seem to

contribute to increasing student creativity.

3) Utilizing Student-centered teaching method

Based on the interview with the teachers, the researcher found that three out of six teachers giving a positive respon on this aspect. Three of the six teachers stated that students' activeness in the classroom depends on how the teacher teaches in the classroom, while the other three teachers agreed that the teaching system in the Merdeka curriculum makes students participate more actively in the learning process. Based on the findings, it is evident that three educators attribute increased student involvement to teaching practices that prioritize identifying the individual needs of each student and reducing teacher power.

On the other hand, there are positive things about the Merdeka curriculum and emphasize its active involvement strategies, such as talks and small groups. One teacher highlights the role of the teacher regardless of the curriculum, while another highlights the difficulties in sustaining students' interest when using different teaching strategies, such watching videos. To summarize, there are differences in viewpoints regarding the variables that affect student involvement, which include curriculum approaches, teaching strategies, and teacher involvement.

4) Seamless Technology Integration

Based on the results of interviews that have been conducted, it can be seen that teachers have the same opinion regarding the use of technology in classroom learning. Teachers gave positive responses indicating that technology makes it easier for teachers and students to explore knowledge of the material being taught. This is also related to the nature of today which is very close to the role of technology but the is one teacher highlighted how the lack of facilities could be an inhibiting factor in integrating technology in learning

5) Reflection Process is Necessary

From the data that had been found, it shows that the teachers agree that the reflection process is very important in learning, especially in the context of the Merdeka curriculum. Previously, they may have paid little attention to reflection, but since it is emphasized in the Merdeka curriculum, they recognize its benefits. Reflection is considered a tool for evaluating learning processes, identifying impacts, and planning improvements. Teachers also highlight the importance of post-learning evaluation to design the next learning direction. Overall, reflection is not only a routine activity but also a basis for continuous improvement in learning according to the principles of the Merdeka curriculum.

6) Increase Administrative Workload

Based on the interview, two of the six teachers agreed to the question stating this narrow perception. four teachers have the same opinion regarding their disagreement with questions that lead to the teacher's opinion regarding the implementation of the independent curriculum whether the independent curriculum regulations can increase the administrative burden for teachers. while the other two teachers feel the impact of the independent curriculum which increases the administrative burden for teachers which shows that they agree with the statement

7) Limitation in Implementation Process

Based from the data found shows that majority of teachers, based on their answers, expressed disagreement with this narrow view. Most of them stated that the Merdeka curriculum actually made learning flexible and without limitations. One teacher stated that the perception of being "limited" refers to being bound by many rules that must be implemented. However, the opinion of the majority of teachers is more inclined to the view that the Merdeka curriculum actually provides greater flexibility in learning. Overall, the interviews showed differences in views among the teachers, with the majority supporting the idea that the Merdeka curriculum provides the freedom and flexibility needed in learning.

8) Challenges in Technology Integration

It appears that all teachers experience challenges in the process of integrating technology in learning. The challenges that are often highlighted are the limitations of teachers in operating technological devices, apart from that they can also come from technical needs where the facilities and infrastructure used are not adequate for integrating technology evenly in all classes taught. The main challenges in using technology in Merdeka curriculum learning involve limited internet access in class, limited understanding and mastery of technology by teachers and students, as well as technical difficulties such as using applications. Efforts are needed to improve technological infrastructure and provide training to teachers to overcome the obstacles.

9) Split Learner Focus

In this indicator, researcher try to find out how teachers view the independent curriculum which directs teachers to use various methods in learning that suit students' needs. Researcher is trying to find out teachers' perception views by finding out whether this method can divide students' focus. From the results of the interviews, it appeared that two of the six teachers interviewed agreed that learning with an independent curriculum divided students' focus. Based from the data found, two out of six teachers who were asked about their opinions on how the

Merdeka curriculum affected students' ability to focus agreed that it caused students to become distracted. The excessive variance in differentiated learning, which results in split attention and complicates consistent learning assessment, mutual distractions from various learning style tasks cause students' focus to become less concentrated

Discussion

The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum at SMKN 1 Polewali has given rise to various perceptions among teachers. Perception is a process undertaken by individuals to organize and interpret their sensory impressions in order to provide meaning to their environment (Simbolon, 2007). In this study the researcher intends to find out teachers' perception about the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum based on how teachers view the implementation of this curriculum learning.

Based on the research that has been conducted, it appears that teachers give a positive response to the flexibility in teaching aspect, which means that teachers view that learning in the Merdeka curriculum provides freedom for teachers to plan and implement the learning that will be carried out. This is in accordance with the results found by Hadi et al., (2023) that stated teachers responded enthusiastically in implementing this curriculum because one of the principles of flexibility is to provide space for teachers to provide learning according to students' conditions and on the side of students.

Apart from that, regarding the aspect of limitation the learning process, it appears that more teachers do not agree that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum limits teachers' space in the learning process. On the other hand, teachers feel happy and free to explore with the flexibility provided by the independent curriculum. Sulistyani & Mulyono, (2022) stated that The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka (IKM) as a school curriculum can simplify learning and create a comfortable, safe, and joyful learning environment for teachers and students.

In the aspect of increasing creativity and students' participation in learning, the teacher also gave a positive response stating their agreement that learning using an independent curriculum helps the learning process so that it can increase students' creativity in the classroom and also make students more active. The Merdeka Curriculum can also improve students' creative abilities and student participation in class. This curriculum provides wider space for students to develop their creativity in expressing innovative ideas and solutions (Syahbana et al., 2024).

In addition, increasing students creativity and their active participation certainly cannot occur without the role of the Teacher as a facilitator to provide innovative learning strategies so that they can support increasing student creativity. One strategy that can be implemented by

teachers is to implement differentiated learning. As stated by Bendriyanti et al., (2021) that the use of the differentiation learning model is something that really helps students carry out effective, creative and fun learning, so that it can increase students' interest in learning.

In the splitting learner focus aspect, when teachers were asked if diversified learning techniques could disrupt students' focus, only two of them agreed, based on the findings detailed in the findings section. The other four teachers thought that this method did not disturb students' focus but instead made them more focused because they were taught according to their own learning preferences. This is in line with the findings of (Septyana et al., 2023) who found that providing a differentiated learning approach that is structured based on students' interests, profiles and teaching styles can improve learners' understanding and learning outcomes.

In relation to the above, teachers were also asked about their perceptions of the independent curriculum regarding the additional administrative burden. From the results obtained, it can be seen that only two teachers gave positive responses to this question. This indicates that the majority of teachers do not feel that learning administration has improved with the implementation of the independent curriculum. This is in line with the intention of simplifying the RPP, which is expected to be able to reduce the administrative burden on teachers but does not necessarily encourage teachers to increase their competence. One of the fundamental things that needs to be worked on is the need for a paradigm shift, so that teachers have the enthusiasm to learn and continually develop their own competencies and are ready to educate every student (Manalu, 2022).

The teachers in SMKN 1 Polewali are familiar with the use of technology in teaching and learning activity, the use of technology in learning makes it easier for teachers to provide material and direct students to access information more freely. The use of technology and the application of innovation in education can change the way learning occurs, enrich the student experience, and improve learning outcomes. Educational transformation integrates technology in teaching and learning. Based on Rambung (2023) stated that technology can be an important tool in supporting independent learning. Online learning platforms, digital resources, and collaborative tools can help students and teachers access information and learn independently.

With the integration of technology in learning, teachers face the challenge of continuing to develop themselves so that they can be fluent in using technological devices so they can use them in classroom learning. Apart from that, school support to provide facilities and infrastructure is also very much needed. An independent curriculum that focuses on technology requires adequate access to technological infrastructure and devices, inequality in access to technology can cause gaps

in learning (Rambung et al., 2023).

The implementation of the independent curriculum introduces the division of assessment into formative assessment and summative assessment. Based on Kurka in (Budiono & Hatip, 2023) assessment in the new paradigm, education can focus on implementing formative assessments compared to summative assessments. The results of the formative assessment can be used as a basis for implementing subsequent learning improvements.

The definition above places the reflection process as part of formative assessment. From the findings described, the teacher at SMKN 1 Polewali carried out reflection as part of the assessment to see whether the learning went well and also to make improvements in subsequent learning. For teachers, learning reflection is useful for reviewing a group or class to describe the situation or conditions of a class, and teachers can find out the potential of each individual and student in the class. That way, teachers can increase continuous and tiered evaluation activities (Jannah, 2023).

The results of this study are expected to provide a theoretical understanding of how Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in the context of vocational education at SMKN 1 Polewali. By highlighting teachers' experiences and their navigation of the curriculum's complexities, this research adds valuable insights to the broader discourse on curriculum development and implementation. The study offers a nuanced understanding of how teachers engage with a curriculum designed for flexibility and responsiveness to student needs, thereby contributing to the theoretical framework surrounding educational practice.

At the practical level, the implications of this study extend to teachers, school administrators, and stakeholders. First off, the knowledge acquired can serve as a useful manual for improving the Merdeka Curriculum to better address the unique requirements and difficulties that instructors at SMKN 1 Polewali encounter. By incorporating practical recommendations based on teachers' experiences, the curriculum can be refined to foster a more effective and responsive learning environment.

In addition, the findings of this study provide a foundation for the development of targeted teacher professional development programmes. These programmes can address key challenges identified in the study, such as adapting to curriculum updates, integrating technology and managing administrative burdens. When teachers are equipped with the necessary skills and support, they can face these challenges more effectively, which will ultimately improve the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. School leaders can also benefit from the practical recommendations derived from this research. Insights into effective resource allocation and the

development of a supportive school culture can assist school leaders in creating an environment conducive to successful curriculum implementation. Consequently, this enhances the general quality of instruction and learning procedures in educational institutions.

In addition, policymakers can utilise the findings of this study to make informed decisions regarding curriculum implementation, teacher training and resource allocation. By aligning policies with the practical insights gained from this research, policymakers can contribute to the development of more effective educational strategies that support the objectives of Merdeka Curriculum. In summary, this research not only enriches theoretical discussions but also offers practical insights that have the potential to positively impact curriculum development, teacher training, school leadership practices and education policy.

CONCLUSION

Overall, SMKN 1 Polewali teachers' opinions about the Independent Curriculum's implementation exhibit a mix of broad and limited perspectives. Instructors view curricular flexibility as a good way to organize and carry out instruction that meets the needs of each student, giving them autonomy over the learning process. Positive results of this program include increased student participation and creativity, which show an inclusive perspective on many facets of learning.

However, there is also a narrow view regarding this curriculum. Even though the majority of teachers do not feel that the curriculum limits space in the learning process, some teachers still have a narrow view of feeling that there are limitations. Likewise with administrative burden, although some teachers do not feel the administrative burden has increased, the majority of teachers do not see an increase in administrative burden as an impact of curriculum implementation.

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards set by Universitas Negeri Makassar and the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki for research involving human participants. All participants were informed about the study's objectives, procedures, benefits, and their voluntary rights before the data collection process began. Written and/or digital informed consent was obtained from all teacher participants at SMKN 1 Polewali.

Participants were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. No sensitive or personally identifiable data were collected, and participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. The research received ethical approval from the English Education Department, Universitas Negeri Makassar.

The authors affirm that the study upholds academic integrity, respects participants' rights, and contributes responsibly to advancing understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language teaching. No external or financial factors influenced the design, analysis, or reporting of this study.

CRediT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

- **Nurul Masyithah NR:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing – original draft.
- **Maemuna Muhayyang:** Formal analysis, Data curation, Validation, Writing – review & editing.
- **Nur Aeni:** Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Correspondence.
- **Akhtem A.** Dzhelilov: Visualization, Theoretical framework, International collaboration, Editing – final version.

All authors have read and approved the final manuscript. The authors jointly contributed to the interpretation of data, discussion of results, and refinement of the final publication**.**

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest concerning the publication of this article. None of the authors have any financial, institutional, or personal relationships that could

have influenced the outcomes or interpretations presented in this paper. All analyses and conclusions were conducted independently and are based solely on academic and scientific considerations.

DATA AVAILABILITY

All data supporting the findings of this research are included within the published article. Due to confidentiality agreements with the teacher participants and institutional policies of SMKN 1 Polewali, raw interview transcripts and institutional documents are not publicly shared. However, anonymized datasets, coding schemes, and interview guidelines used in the study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author (nur_aeni@unm.ac.id) for academic and non-commercial purposes.

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