

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the introduction part, the researcher discusses the six terms of the subchapter of the study. Those are the background of the study, the problem of the study, the objectives of the study, the significance of the study, the scope and limitation of the study, and the definition of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

The continuity of education is never separated from the word "Curriculum" which is the basic stick of its movement. The curriculum is formed not just a mere formality, but becomes the root and purpose of learning (Agrawal et al., 2020) . The curriculum is designed to be carried out outside and inside the classroom as a medium and determining teaching strategies based on students' factors (Cahyono, 2022). The Ministry of Education always makes curriculum changes in Indonesia as guidelines for teachers in developing student education both academically and non-academic (Aulia, 2021). Recently, there have been several curriculum updates in Indonesia. In 2006 the KTSP (Education Unit Level Curriculum) was formed and in 2013 the government changed it to the 2013 Curriculum (K-13), then it was changed back to K-13 revised version, and in February 2022 a new innovation was released, namely *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum (Desianti & Rahayuningsih, 2022).

In the KTSP curriculum, it is not the students who become the center of learning, but the teachers who are more active during the learning process. This is certainly less effective for students. The lesson plans and assessments are listed on the syllabus (Yudhawasthi & Christiani, 2021). In 2013 a new curriculum was formed, namely K-13 because there are differences in perception and understanding that teachers must improve students' competencies and abilities which are packaged strategically. This student-focused learning process certainly makes teachers have to be more creative when showing their performance in class. In the 2013 Curriculum, teachers act as monitors, observers, and assessors of students (Anis & Anwar, 2020). Then there was another curriculum change that was actually not too different from the previous curriculum, namely the 2013

revised version of the curriculum. In this revised version of K-13, additional literacy is added for teachers to direct students to think critically. There is a complemented new innovation, namely HOTS (Higher Order Thinking Skill) (Abidah et al., 2020).

In *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum teachers have to change some of the lesson plans which are different from the previous curriculum. This curriculum in addition to making students the center of learning also teaches local wisdom or culture that exists in the area where the school is located (Sudaryanto et al., 2020). The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum raises a theme that has great power for students who not only know about the lessons at school but also understand the surrounding environment so that students do not forget history (Krishnapatria, 2021). For this reason, in this curriculum, there is a project called the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project or P5 which is given to students are useful for introducing students to local culture, teachers have an active role in building students' sense of nationalism and after executing lesson plans in class (Lhutfi & Mardiani, 2020).

The application of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is expected to assist the government in improving the quality of learning. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Indonesia has implemented this curriculum but the results are still not optimal (Al Lily et al., 2020). This is because learning is done online. The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is here to improve the course of education in Indonesia (Haris et al., 2021). The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum has been implemented at various levels of education, especially in Vocational High Schools. In its application in Vocational High Schools, the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum provides useful material for students when they enter the world of industrial work. The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum gives freedom to students to think and develop their knowledge. In the teaching and learning process, students are not only taught general material, but there are also special activities regarding the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project or P5 (Muid et al., 2022). In this activity the teacher as a facilitator can raise a theme, for example employment which contains motivation and how students get into the world of work after graduating from school.

The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is a new curriculum that is present as a complement to the previous curriculum. The application of this curriculum has a characteristic that is guided by Pancasila. Teaching and learning activities are based on Pancasila values. The teacher as a facilitator can provide simple material so students can receive material quickly and easily. Teachers can also motivate students so they can develop their learning competencies. The learning models in the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum are also diverse and teachers can freely choose which method is appropriate to give to students so they feel comfortable while learning. Teachers can freely carry out learning in class, in the sense that the learning process is carried out according to the needs of students and continues to run in a

Learning models that can be applied by teachers include Inquiry, Problem-Based Learning, and Project-Based Learning (Ingthias et al., 2022). The inquiry learning model is the teacher encouraging students so that they are able to observe and experiment with something around them. This can encourage students to think critically. Problem-Based Learning is a learning model that can help students solve a problem. This method is intended for students so that they are able to solve a problem related to the learning material in school. This is also useful so that they can remember the mistakes their students made and in the end, they will learn from mistakes to improve themselves to be even better. Project-Based Learning is a learning method that requires students to produce a simple project in accordance with the material provided by the teacher. This is intended for students so that they can investigate something and then create projects that can hone their skills.

The application of a new curriculum in a school will make teachers adapt to new things. Based on research from (Mathura, 2019) has found that teachers have difficulty understanding the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*. Several secondary schools, including Vocational High School *Kartanegara* Wates, have implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum as a role for teaching process. This research is to find out the perceptions of teachers on the application of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in the EFL class at Vocational High School. Based on the theoretical

above, the researcher decides to conduct a study entitled “ ***THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MERDEKA BELAJAR CURRICULUM IN EFL CLASS IN VOCATIONAL HIGH SCHOOL KARTANEGARA WATES***”.

B. Research Question

Based on the background of the study, the statement of the research problem as follows:

1. How is the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Vocational High School *Kartanegara Wates*?
2. How do the teachers’ perceive the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in teaching English in Vocational High School *Kartanegara Wates*?
3. How do the students’ perceive the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in EFL class?

C. Objectives of the Study

Considering the problem of the study above, the researcher has an objective of the study:

1. To investigating the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Vocational High School *Kartanegara Wates*.
2. To perceive the teachers’ perceptions in the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in teaching English in Vocational High School *Kartanegara Wates*.
3. To perceive the students’ perceptions in the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in EFL class.

D. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to give a contribution to the teacher, students, and the researcher:

1. For the Teacher

The research finding of this study are expected to be useful for teachers. Teachers can understand the concept of teaching in English classes within the framework of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. Teachers can give their voice about the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. Teachers can obtain direct

information from the findings related to the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Vocational High Schools.

2. For the Students

The research finding of this study are expected to be useful for students to increase their academic value in EFL class from the application of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum by the teacher.

3. For the Next Researcher

This research is expected to provide new research and information about teacher perceptions in applying the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in EFL class in Vocational High School.

E. Scope and Limitation of the Study

This research is focused on revealing the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in English class at Vocational High School *Kartanegara* Wates. This school was chosen because it has implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum for teaching English, especially in tenth grade. There are seven English teachers at this school. The researcher will appoint a teacher who teaches English in tenth grade to be the respondent. The researcher appointed the teacher because he taught tenth grade using the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. Researcher conducted observation in the class and interviews with teachers and students to find out their perceptions of implementing this curriculum. The researcher interviewed nine tenth-grade students whose class had been observed by the researcher to find out their perceptions of learning English using the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. Researcher conducted interviews with students to obtain more robust data.

F. Definition of Key Terms.

To avoid the misunderstanding of some terms used by the researcher, the key terms are defined as follow:

1. *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is a new curriculum innovation launched by the Minister of Education (*Mendikbud*) as a form of changing the mindset and parenting of teachers in teaching (Rohiyatussakinah, 2021). Teachers are given the freedom to teach students even outside or inside the classroom and can determine

learning outcomes that are tailored to students' abilities (Sihombing, et al., 2021). There are four basic programs from *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, namely the National Standard School Exam (USBN), National Examination (UN), Learning Implementation Plan (RPP), and Zoning of New Student Admission Regulations (PPDB) (Rohmad, 2020). The purpose of this education program is to develop the qualities of students.

2. The Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum

The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum has been implemented in Indonesia to help improve the education system. This curriculum provides a new perspective for the world of education to focus more on what students need. The teacher acts as a facilitator who helps students find what they need during learning and evaluates student projects. Implementation of this curriculum is certainly not easy to implement in schools, because each school has different needs (Irawati, D., et al. (2022). For example, schools in rural and urban areas have different needs. The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is here to meet the needs of schools in accordance with their respective proportions.

The application of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is certainly a new challenge for educators to apply during learning. This is because this new curriculum is used in every school. There are still many schools that have to adapt to the new curriculum. One very effective way to introduce this curriculum to teachers is to conduct training that discusses how to implement the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. By providing training, teachers will get an overview of preparing learning tools and preparing appropriate learning models to be applied to students. Teachers have the opportunity to develop students' potential by applying a learning model that is in accordance with the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, namely Problem-Based Learning. This learning model is very appropriate to be applied by teachers to train students' creativity and critical thinking.

3. Teachers' Perception

According to Afandi., et al. (2022), perception is a word that is closely related to human psychology and has been defined in various ways. In other words, perception is a process within a person that is captured by the senses and accepted

by the individual (Prakoso et al., 2021). Perception places more emphasis on a person's psychology in seeing, hearing, and feeling something that has been captured by the senses. While teacher perception is the process of teachers capturing and receiving information or treatment from an object in the school environment so they can interpret what they have seen and observed.

Perception is a process of receiving an object or event through the five senses that a person feels, giving rise to stimulation, interpretation, and experience (Wahyunengsih, 2018). Perception has dimensions of space and time. The dimensions of space can be said to be wide-narrow, up-down, and high-low. Dimensions of time like young and old, sooner or later. Once a person is stimulated, they begin an organizational process to get the real meaning of the event. In perception, a person begins to understand the characteristics of something through shape, size, color, and texture.

The teacher's perception is an expression of feelings about what has been done when teaching students. Perception is a process in which someone has observed something and then expresses it to implement something. In implementing *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in schools, teachers have different perceptions. Teachers have different perceptions because they have different needs when teaching.

4. Students' Perception

Perception is an expression conveyed by someone when they have received a stimulus or experience of something. Perception is the result of a person's analysis of something. To measure a person's perception, what must be considered is a person's physiological processes, such as what they have seen, felt, and known (Ningsih & Mulyono, 2019). For example, to find out a person's perception, an in-depth interview can be carried out. After the data is obtained, the data can be interpreted.

According to Restu., et al. (2022) there are two fundamental dimensions of perception, physical and psychological. The physical dimension of perception is about the conversion of a stimulus into a usable form, the nature, and function of the human sense organs, the energy characteristics of the stimulus, and the

transmission of the stimulus through the nervous system to the brain. While the psychological dimension of perception is about the beliefs, values, attitudes, needs, and interests of the community.

Students' perceptions are the expressions they feel while participating in learning. Students have differences in how to capture what material is given by the teacher. They can analyze in their own way related to what the material is presented. Students have different perceptions when they perceive their environment, for example when at school they have their own way of responding to the school environment. In terms of implementing the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, they have different perceptions when adapting to the new curriculum.

5. English Subject in Vocational High School

The process of learning English between teachers and students creates interactions to develop students' competencies according to their environment (Sueb, et al., 2020). The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in learning English is to prepare students to enter the world of work using English as an international language that is based on Pancasila (Baharuddin, 2021).

6. Vocational High School

Vocational High School is a formal school in secondary education institutions which aims to equip students with readiness to enter the world of work after graduating from school (Helmy et al., 2021). In Vocational High School, students are professionally prepared based on their majors to become human resources who can compete in the world of work (Tabroni, et al., 2022). Students are provided with theory and training in accordance with the real world of work, then when they graduate from school they are ready and mature to join companies or set up their own businesses. With the Vocational High School, it can become the driving force for the wheels of the economy in Indonesia . Students are prepared to organize and manage a business, which will be useful for them when they are involved in society.