

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study, research problem, the purpose of the study, the significance of study, scope and limitation, definition of key term

A. Background of the Study

In an effort to upgrade the education quality, the government continuously makes various efforts and thoroughly evaluates the course of the educational process. Education has a meaningful role in the growth of a country (Jabri, 2023). The government is responsible for ensuring that every citizen has equal opportunities and access to education. The government is always striving to refine the education quality by taking strategic and sustainable actions to make education policies more effective in enhancing the education quality in Indonesia.

One of the initiatives in evaluating carried out by the government is through the curriculum. It is considered that the curriculum is one of the main instruments in the relevance of the education system (Luthfiah, 2023). The curriculum is the set of lessons that contains educational plans and programs that will be implemented by educators, students and all elements in school institutions (Kristiawan, 2019). According to Rizaldi & Fatimah (2022), the curriculum is an outline that organizes and directs the system of education in the institution to accomplish the same goals. The curriculum is also considered to be one of the most essential aspects in enhancing the quality of education. The dynamics of changing times and the needs of the elements involved in education such as teachers and students, evaluation of the curriculum is continuously developed in preparing students and adjusting to the rapid global development (Dariyono & Rusman, 2023). In line with Priantini, et al (2022) which emphasizes that the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is designed to facilitate the development of quality education, thereby enabling students to thrive in an ever-changing global environment. Consequently, curriculum evaluation is an ongoing process.

Indonesia has experienced repeated curriculum changes. These changes are not merely a process of adjusting to the times. Rather, it represents a continuous transformation, occurring alongside efforts to improve the quality and quality of education. Therefore, educational evaluation through the curriculum is not merely a tool to measure the quality of education; it also serves as a foundation for continuous improvement, with the goal of achieving better educational standards.

Currently, the last curriculum change made by the government is the 2013 curriculum to the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. This curriculum development is one of the efforts made by the government in developing a better education system (Directorate of Junior High School). The change from the 2013 curriculum to the *Kurikulum Merdeka* represents a significant departure from the past curriculum. This curriculum is a means of responding to the specific dynamics and needs of each educational institution in various regions of Indonesia. It is therefore a responsive effort to meet local needs.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* is arranged to be more flexible and adaptable to needs, focusing on student-centered learning that promotes character development, creativity, critical thinking skills, academic knowledge as well as independent learning and critical thinking (Zidan, 2023). This *Kurikulum Merdeka* has a significant impact among elements of educational institutions, especially teachers. Teachers have the flexibility to create learning concepts pursuant to the needs of students in the classroom and modify teaching strategies according to the needs of the educational environment (Maulana, et al., 2023). This is consistent with the study of Shadri, et al. (2022) which states that the word "Merdeka" in this *Kurikulum Merdeka* means that teachers and students are allowed for flexibility in innovating to create fun, independent and creative learning. Students are free to explore their abilities because the teacher is being employed as a facilitator so the students are able to develop their interests and competence properly. So, the teacher's job is not only to be an

educator but also to be a guide and director during the learning (Sari, et al., 2023).

Based on data reported by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the implementation of this *Kurikulum Merdeka* has started since 2021 in stages. Various elements of educational institutions have implemented this curriculum. One of them is Vocational High School (SMK). When this curriculum was first implemented at Vocational High School, it certainly presented many new dynamics and challenges faced by various parties such as principals and teachers. The managers of this educational institution must really understand the concept underlying the curriculum. In addition, they must adjust the facilities in the school, especially the teachers who will teach the class.

The implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at Vocational High School represents the evaluation of the government's attempts to reform vocational education. In addition to serving as an educational evaluation, the curriculum development applied at Vocational High School is an effort to complement the needs of the labor market (Komarudin & Aziz, 2022). Vocational education in Indonesia is an integral part of the national education system, with the objective of providing students with practical skills relevant to specific fields of work. This is the evidence that vocational education plays a crucial role in preparing graduates for work and entrepreneurship in accordance with their vocational fields (Wagiran, et al., 2017). Therefore, it is paramount importance that the competencies possessed by Vocational High Schools' students align with the competencies required in the business or industrial world (Firdaus & Anriani, 2022).

In addition, prospective graduates prepared through vocational education must be equipped with various skills according to industry needs so that they will more easily adapt to the needs of the world of work (Yahya, et al., 2017; Nashiroh, et al., 2017). In this case, teachers are given the freedom to choose learning strategies and methods according to student needs (Pertiwi and Pusparini, 2021). This is consistent with the

findings of Widiyono & Irfana (2021), who posit that the objective of implementing a *Kurikulum Merdeka* is to facilitate the fullest possible realization of the potential of teachers and students in accordance with the specific circumstances of each educational institution (school).

Through the learning content of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in vocational high schools is a good practice that leads to high quality education (Kamila & Agus RM, 2023). The implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in vocational high school provides the concept of contextual learning, thus school managers (principals or teachers) are given the freedom to design learning according to the needs of students in each department that students choose. In addition, the project-based approach, which is the pillar of this *Kurikulum Merdeka*, provides active learning opportunities and is also able to improve students' practical skills (Putri, 2023). According to Suryadi as the Secretary of the Directorate General of Vocational Education, through the implementation of this *Kurikulum Merdeka*, it is expected to be able to provide graduates with superior competence and relevance to industry needs.

Since 2022, many researchers have been utilizing this *Kurikulum Merdeka* as a research object. The discussion in the previous *Kurikulum Merdeka* research was about how the planning and stages of implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Annafiah, 2023) and analyzing whether the implementation went well or not (Sukma, 2023). In addition, other research also discussed how the progress and impact after implementing this curriculum and what challenges were faced (Oktavia, 2023). Meanwhile, the research conducted by Sari (2024) explored the learning strategies and what media are used by the teachers (Sari, 2024). In Amiruddin's (2023) study, it was analyzed how this curriculum relates to students' activities and what learning styles are used by students.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* has an important role in its implementation for educational institutions. Apart from being a guideline for teachers in preparing the lessons, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has

contributed to the development of educational policies that are responsive to the needs of learners, integrating cultural diversity or inclusiveness, and creating student-centered learning (Warta, et. al., 2023; Tuerah & Tuerah, 2023). According to the Ministry of Education and Culture, the important role of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is reflected in how students are able to collaborate and participate well in the learning process. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* requires teachers to be more creative and involve student participation in a practical and student-centered learning process. Certainly, it can be implemented in the use of teaching methods during the learning process. Thus, based on the explanation above and reviewing at the results of previous research, an important aspect that needs to be further considered is how students are involved through the use of teaching methods during the learning process. Teaching methods used have a role in stimulating student participation and attention (Heilporn, et al., 2021). Especially in Vocational High School, students who choose to continue their education at this institution are those who like practical learning. Along with the opinion of Clarke and Winch, (2007:9) which states that in Vocational High School, the learning design should include practical skills and techniques that support the field of expertise being studied. This learning is managed through practical activities or activities. This activity trains students' abilities to be competent in their field of expertise (Hermanto, 2023).

In fact, pre-interview conducted by the researcher at SMKS YP 17-01 Lumajang resulted that before the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, the English teacher at this school only taught using the lecture method. The teacher only explained theoretically, without giving practical assignments, as a result the students were not directly involved during the learning process. This is due to the absence of administrative demands that show practical student results. So there is no evidence that states how student involvement during learning. This causes the learning carried out to be teacher-centered and does not involve students in any activities during the learning process. However, with the implementation of the

Kurikulum Merdeka at SMKS YP 17-01 Lumajang, this educational institution has experienced quite dynamic and significant changes, especially in the use of teaching methods that must consider elements of students' engagements. This is due to the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* offers a student-centered learning concept.

To evaluate whether students are actively or passively involved, it can be seen from how the teacher teaches and delivers the material or what is called the teaching method. The importance of choosing the right teaching method cannot be doubted. Teachers must be able to use effective teaching methods so that students can be actively involved and collaborate to create a pleasant learning environment and students can freely express their ideas. According to Octavia, et al., (2023) teachers who are creative in creating learning are the main component in engaging students in learning. In addition, effectiveness in learning is judged by how the teacher is able to encourage students' engagements (Ni'mah, et al., 2024).

Therefore, considering the phenomenon that occurred at SMKS YP 17-01 Lumajang, the researcher is interested in conducting research to analyze the use of teaching methods used in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and how students are involved in the learning process when teachers use these teaching methods at SMKS YP 17-01 Lumajang.

B. Research Problem:

1. What are the teaching methods used in implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at SMKS YP 17-01 Lumajang in learning English?
2. How are students engaged in English learning with the use of teaching methods?
3. How do the teaching methods encourage students' engagements?

C. The Purpose of the Study

1. To identify the teaching methods used by the teacher in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in English language learning at SMKS YP 17-01 Lumajang
2. To analyze students' engagements in English learning through the used of various teaching methods.

3. To identify the strategies used in the teaching method that contribute to encourage students' engagements

D. The Significance of Study

1. Theoretically: this research contributes to the literature or academic studies regarding the understanding of the use of teaching methods in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in the context of students' engagements. Thus, this research may provide new insights that can be used as guidelines in improving teaching practices to be more effective.
2. Practically:
 - a. For teachers: this research can be used as a practical guideline for teachers in choosing teaching methods to be used in increasing students' engagements. In addition, the teachers can make this research as material for evaluation and development in designing lessons, thus encouraging the teachers to be more innovative and creative.
 - b. For learners: through the use of effective teaching methods as an effort to increase students' engagements, it is expected students can be actively involved during the learning process and experience learning that is relevant to their needs. In addition, they are able to improve their skill competencies in accordance with their vocational fields.
 - c. For further researchers: this research presents an empirical basis for further research on teaching methods and students' engagements in the context of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Through the results of the research, it can be used as a reference in further examining aspects in the context of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* to be developed later.

E. Scope and Limitation of Study

This research focused on the analysis of students' engagements through the use of teaching methods in English language learning at SMKS YP 17-01 Lumajang in the implementation of the *Kurikulum*

Merdeka. This research identified what teaching methods were used by the teacher in the school and observe how the impact on students' engagements in behavioral, emotional and cognitive aspects.

F. Definition of Key Term

1. Teaching Method

Teaching methods are ways used by the teacher in delivering material and organizing the learning process. The selection of methods applied by the teacher will have an impact on how effective learning will be carried out. In addition, the teaching method used by the teacher must be able to encourage student activity predominantly, thus students will be actively involved in learning. Therefore, through the use of the appropriate method, it is expected to be able to improve students' understanding cognitively and develop students' competence practically.

2. *Kurikulum Merdeka*

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* is a curriculum that focuses on developing the potential of students. The potential is not only in academic competence, but also in skill competence. Learning must be student-centered is the main point in the concept of implementing an *Kurikulum Merdeka*. In implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, teachers are given flexibility and freedom to choose learning designs according to students' interests and needs. Through this concept, schools' officials such as principals and teachers have more opportunities to adjust the learning process in accordance with the development of business and industry. Therefore, the school is able to ensure that the graduates of vocational high school students are graduates who are able to adapt according to the development of competencies and skills needed according to their expertise.

3. Students' engagements

Students' engagements are the active participation of students in the learning process. The engagement includes three aspects, namely the behavioral engagement aspect. In this aspect, students are able to

complete the tasks given by the teacher properly, ask the incomprehensible material and contribute to the discussion. It can be concluded that behavioral engagement is the student's participation in academic tasks in the learning process. The second aspect is the emotional aspect. This aspect shows the attitude of students' interest in learning. Whether students feel happy, bored or even not interested in learning, it is included in emotional engagement. The last aspect is the cognitive aspect. In this cognitive aspect, it is about effective methods carried out by the students that show the participation of the students in an effort to understand the material delivered by the teacher.