CHAPTER I
INTODUCTION

This chapter basically reveals the introduction of this study. It includes the background of the study, problem of the study, objective of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation of the study and definition of key terms.

A. Background of study

Various facets of life have been significantly impacted by the Industrial Revolution 4.0 and civilisation 5.0, which has led to technological disruption and innovation, especially in the field of education. The future of a country depends on how well the next generation is prepared through education, making education a crucial factor that needs special attention. Since the curriculum must be in line with the times, and the past may have been very different from the present, updating the curriculum is one of the ways the government works to consistently improve the quality of education. As a result, the educational landscape must be flexible enough to change.

The Republic of Indonesia's government is obligated to provide education for its citizens as stipulated in the 1945 Constitution. To ensure the holistic development of all Indonesian citizens, Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution mandates the government to establish and manage a national education system that promotes religious and pious values, as well as noble character. The enactment of the National Education System Law No. 20 of 2003 serves as the embodiment of this mandate, offering a legal and philosophical framework for the implementation of *Merdeka* learning policies. This framework emphasizes the freedom of thought, the freedom to innovate, and the freedom to learn independently and creatively, granting both teachers and students the autonomy to engage in learning and lesson preparation [1].

The performance of a country's educational system can be used to measure its progress, but the curriculum that is employed determines the

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[1] Hendri, N. (2020). Merdeka Belajar; Antara Retorika Dan Aplikasi. *E-Tech Jurnal Ilmiah Teknologi Pendidikan*, *8*, 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1007/XXXXXX-XX-0000-00.

success of education overall because it serves as a framework for organizing, carrying out, and assessing learning. The needs of pupils' learning must also be taken into account. As a result, curriculum evaluation is a necessary at all times. The government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, announced the implementation of an emergency curriculum in light of the tremendous effects of the epidemic and the challenges teachers would encounter if they continued to explain classes using the 2013 curriculum. With this curriculum, teachers can trim learning materials and take the information that is most crucial for pupils, which helps them to continue teaching. The government introduced a new curriculum known as the *Merdeka* curriculum through the Ministry of Education and Culture in February 2022, as though taking a lesson from the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. Its main goal, as one of the autonomous learning programs, is to raise the standard of instruction.

A curriculum is a structured teaching design comprising a series of systematically arranged subjects aimed at completing a program for obtaining a diploma. Curriculum development involves the process of planning and creating a curriculum by curriculum developers and encompasses activities to ensure the resulting curriculum serves as teaching materials and references to achieve national education goals.[2].

According to *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) approach is a process, method or way to achieve something. Associated with curriculum development, it means a process, method or method used by curriculum developers to produce a curriculum that will be used as an educational or learning guide. The 'model' is a pattern, example, reference, variety of something that will be produced. Associated with the curriculum development model, it means that it is a pattern, an example of a form of curriculum that will become a reference for the implementation of education or learning.

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[2] Suparlan, *Tanya Jawab Pengembangan Kurikulum dan Materi Pembelajaran*, (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2011), 79.

If the aforementioned approach or model is linked to Curriculum Development, then curriculum development can be described as a "general procedure in the activities of designing, implementing, and evaluating a curriculum." Various stakeholders must participate in this process, including education administrators, curriculum specialists, subject matter experts, teachers, parents, and community leaders. These parties must be continuously involved in curriculum development to ensure it progresses as planned.[3].

According to Suryaman 2020, the curriculum is a very strategic learning instrument for growing and forming personal concepts and behavior about identity awareness[4]. In reality, the effectiveness of instructors is the most important factor in the implementation of every government program, particularly this relatively new autonomous curriculum. According to Nurwiatin (2020:484), the instructors' views and interpretations have some degree of effect on its implementation. The goal of autonomous learning is to provide a comfortable environment for parents, instructors, and students. In order to apply teacher innovation in material delivery to students, it is intended that through this autonomous learning both instructors and students would be Merdeka in thinking[5].

According to Efrisko in Butarbutar 2020 the government gives each school autonomy over the curriculum they employ; what matters is how each school responds to this policy by putting it into practice in line with the objectives it wants to accomplish[6]. There are still numerous attempts at constraint, which is the issue with education. Because they are still subject to legally binding restrictions, educators and learners have not felt free

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[3] Nana Syaodih Sukmadinata, Pengembangan Kurikulum; Teori dan Praktik, (Bandung: Remaja Rosda Karya, 2007), 155.
[4] Suryaman, M. (2020). *Prosiding Seminar Daring Nasional: Pengembangan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia*. https://ejournal.unib.ac.id/index.php/semiba/issue/view/956/Tersediadi:https://ejournal.unib.ac.id/index.php/semiba/issue/view/956/.
[5] Nurwiatin, N. 2022. Pengaruh Pengembangan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Dan Kesiapan Kepala Sekolah Terhadap Penyesuaian Pembelajaran Di Sekolah. *Jurnal Pendidikan, Sains dan Teknologi*. Vol. 9, No. 2.
[6] Butarbutar, poltak efrisko. (2020). Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. *Https://Www.Kompasiana.Com/Poltakbutarbutar8687/5e6b5006097f36798e4ca*.

enough to choose the course of their learning and teaching policies. The outcomes of Sherly's review of the literature in The school curriculum, learning transformation of national education management, management transformation of regional education, and school autonomy must all be transformed in order to accomplish the *Merdeka Belajar* program[7].

To implement the Merdeka curriculum effectively, teachers need to comprehend the *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* (ATP), Modul Ajar (MA), Project Modules, and the process of evaluating student progress[8]. This underscores the pivotal role teachers play in realizing national education objectives through their teaching and educational efforts, emphasizing the importance of focusing on the teacher's professional development in terms of morality, adherence to rules, professionalism, and competence.

Educational institutions, particularly school principals, also play a significant role in supporting the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum. In this curriculum, students assume the role of learning centers, referred to as Student Centers. Recognizing students as the essence of education, they become the primary focus during the learning process, requiring facilitators—such as teachers, principals, and staff—to nurture and develop their talents, interests, and potential, particularly in the field of English.

The Merdeka Learning Curriculum program can significantly advance educational progress if implemented effectively. This program has the potential to enhance the quality of Indonesian education and, by extension, the overall quality of the Indonesian populace. However, the success of this initiative largely depends on teachers, who are the cornerstone of education. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the extent to which teachers have embraced and implemented these programs. The success of

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[7] Sherly, Dharma Edy, & Sihombing Humiras. (2020). MERDEKA BELAJAR: KAJIAN LITERATUR. *Konferensi Nasional Pendidikan*, 183–190. https://urbangreen.co.id/proceeding/index.php/library/article/view/33/33.
[8] Nurhidayat, A., Prasetiyo, A. T., Haezer, C. E., & Pamungkas, A. D. (2022). *Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Pada Pembelajaran PJOK Di SMA Negeri 3 Sidoarjo.*

this endeavor heavily relies on the role of teachers, aligning with Ramayulis' perspective :

"The term 'teacher' is synonymous with 'educator.' Qualified educational personnel encompass various roles such as teachers, lecturers, counselors, tutors, instructors, and facilitators. As professionals, teachers are primarily responsible for educating, instructing, guiding, directing, training, as well as assessing and evaluating students in early childhood education within the formal education system, covering primary and secondary education levels."[9].

Teachers are a very important key to formal education in general for students, educators are often good role models. So a teacher must have appropriate attitudes and skills for the overall development of students.

The curriculum is a forum that will determine the direction of education. The success or failure of an education really depends on the curriculum used. As Prof. Dr. Omar Mohammad Al-Toumy Al-Syaibani also views "the curriculum as the core of the educational process and the paths through which it first goes to achieve its goals"[10].

The Merdeka Curriculum presents an opportunity to revitalize the education system by fostering essential competencies and making learning activities more enjoyable. It is a competency-based curriculum that emphasizes the development of soft skills and character. In this curriculum, both teachers and students are given full autonomy in the learning process. Ramayulis states, "the Merdeka learning curriculum offers a chance for teachers and students to innovate and attain freedom in improving the quality of education[11]". She suggests that when teachers are granted the freedom to choose the most suitable learning approaches, they can introduce distinctive and targeted innovations.

As stated by Nadiem Makarim, the benefits of an *Merdeka* curriculum simply include 3 elements: Simple, Flexible and Relevant. First,

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[9] Ramayulis. 2012. Profesi Dan Etika Keguruan. Padang : Rineka Cipta
[10] Omar Muhammad Al-Toumy Al-Syaibany, Falsafah Pendidikan Islam, (Jakarta: Bulan Bintang, 2014), hal. 477.
[11] Ramayulis. 2012. Profesi Dan Etika Keguruan. Padang : Rineka Cipta

it is simpler and deeper, namely focusing on essential material and developing student competencies in each phase. The learning process becomes more in-depth, meaningful, less rushed, and more fun. Achievement standards are also much simpler, and provide time for teachers to study concepts in more depth.

Secondly, the *Merdeka* curriculum is more liberating as it grants various freedoms to students, teachers, and schools. For students, high school no longer imposes specialization programs, enabling them to select subjects aligned with their interests, talents, and aspirations. Consequently, students are not categorized into science or social studies majors. Teachers enjoy the freedom to adapt their teaching approaches based on students' levels of achievement and development. Previously, teachers were compelled to advance through material content without considering students who might be struggling with the material. Additionally, schools are empowered to formulate and administer curricula and learning experiences tailored to the distinctive characteristics of each educational unit, students, and the school itself.

Thirdly, it is more pertinent and engaging, as education is conducted through diverse project-based activities that offer extensive opportunities for students to actively delve into real-world issues. This approach supports the cultivation of character and competence in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile. The Minister of Education and Research and Technology emphasized that these diverse skills are essential for students as they conclude their education, enabling them to collaborate effectively in group settings, generate meaningful work, think creatively, and develop their character interactively.

The initiation of research on the challenges faced by English teachers in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum is driven by the goal of enhancing student learning outcomes. The effective implementation of the curriculum is crucial for achieving positive results in student learning. When teachers encounter difficulties in carrying out the curriculum, it diminishes the likelihood of students reaching the intended learning objectives.

Investigating the challenges faced by teachers serves the purpose of pinpointing obstacles to effective curriculum implementation and provides insights into strategies to overcome these challenges, ultimately leading to improved student learning outcomes[12]. Additionally, such research has the potential to guide policy and decision-making at various levels, including schools, districts, and the national level. By identifying factors that hinder successful curriculum implementation, policymakers and education leaders can formulate strategies to support teachers and enhance overall educational outcomes.

There exist various perceptions among teachers regarding the implementation of the *Merdeka* learning curriculum, considering the distinctions from previous synchronization. Drawing on Leavitt's theory as quoted by Nurdin, it suggests that a teacher's perception can be viewed in both a narrow and broad sense. In a narrow context, perception is defined as observing—how an individual sees something. In a broader sense, it is defined as how an individual comprehends or interprets something. Recognizing that the world as perceived may not always align with reality, the broader approach involves not merely observing something but understanding it[13].

A person's perception of something will influence their behaviour towards the object or event they experience. Therefore, a good teacher's perception will certainly have a positive influence on his or her teaching motivation. Most teachers are willing to work harder if they do not encounter obstacles in realizing what is expected.

The introduction of the Merdeka curriculum by the Minister of Education and Culture has generated diverse perceptions among teachers, encompassing both positive and negative viewpoints. However, the Merdeka curriculum embodies a form of freedom granted to teachers and students, promoting innovation and creativity in the learning process. This approach addresses the evolving needs of the education system in the

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[12] Rizky, RA.et al. *Evaluation of Implementation of Independent Curriculum*. Journal of Curriculum and Pedagogic Studies. Vol. 1 No. 4, June 2022, page.32-41.
[13] Nurdin, S. & Adrianto. (2016). *Kurikulum dan Pembelajaran*. Depok: PT Rajagrafindo Persada.

industrial revolution era. Moreover, the Merdeka learning curriculum embraces freedom of thought, a concept determined by the teacher. Within this framework, teachers and students are active participants in the learning system. This means that teachers are not merely conveyors of truth to students; instead, they collaborate with students to explore and discover the truth together[14].

Therefore, despite the diversity of teachers' perceptions, it is imperative for teachers to exhibit creativity in guiding and directing students in alignment with the principles of *Merdeka* learning. The *Merdeka* learning concept transcends the confines of the curriculum, necessitating both students and teachers to be innovative in acquiring knowledge. This approach fosters the genuine development of students towards independence.

The desire for changes in the paradigm of educators in building curriculum, producing learning, and assessing it is impacted by the *Merdeka* learning policy, which becomes a learning reform. Learning is far more flexible when there is freedom to choose the subject, method, and setting for instruction. Based on this background, this research raised the title "UNFOLDING ENGLISH TEACHERS' VOICES ON CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES IN IMPLEMENTING *MERDEKA* CURRICULUM"

B. Research Problem

This research is intended to find out the perspective of junior high school English teachers in revealing their stories about the challenges and strategies in the *Merdeka* curriculum, as follows :

1. What are the Challenges of junior high school English teachers in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum ?
2. What are the Strategies of junior high school English teachers in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum ?

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[14] Kemendikbud, Merdeka Belajar : Pokok-Pokok Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar, Jakarta: Makalah Rapat Koordinasi Kepala Dinas Pendidikan Seluruh Indonesia 2019.

C. Research Objectives

The research objectives are in accordance with the formulated research problems. Therefore, the researcher construct the purposes of the study as follows :

1. To know the challenges of implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* from teachers' perspectives

2. To know the strategies of implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* from teachers' perspectives.

D. Benefits of Research

1. Theoretically Significances

It is hoped that the results of this research will increase insight into teacher perceptions in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum.

2. Practical significances

This research has practical benefits for other research in developing insight regarding the perceptions of teachers in the field of English studies in implementing the *Merdeka* curriculum in public and private junior high schools in the city of Kediri, East Java.

    a. For Author/Researcher

This research benefits the researchers by enabling them to identify the differences between respondents regarding English teachers' perceptions of implementing the Merdeka learning curriculum in public and private junior high schools in Kediri.

    b. For institution

This research is valuable for educational institutions and schools in understanding the perceptions of English language teachers regarding the implementation of the Merdeka learning curriculum in public and private junior high schools in Kediri.

    c. For teacher.

This research is valuable for educational institutions and schools in understanding the perceptions of English language teachers regarding the implementation of the Merdeka learning curriculum in public and private junior high schools in Kediri.

    d. For Reader

This research is beneficial for readers as it provides insights into the perceptions of English language teachers regarding the implementation of the Merdeka learning curriculum in public and private junior high schools across the city of Kediri.

e. Scope of study

The scope of the study is restricted to the implementation of the curriculum for autonomous learning, particularly the human resource approach used to raise student accomplishment.

E. Definition of key terms

1. Curriculum

According to Richards, the term "curriculum" is employed to denote the comprehensive plan or structure for a course, encompassing how the course content is organized into a framework for teaching and learning to attain desired educational outcomes. In essence, the curriculum serves as a reference or guide used by educators to conduct learning activities with the aim of achieving specific goals. It provides a direction for the teaching and learning process in educating students[15].

2. Merdeka curriculum

The *Merdeka* Curriculum is characterized by a variety of intracurricular learning activities, allowing students ample time for exploration and the enhancement of competencies to optimize content. Teachers are granted flexibility in choosing diverse teaching tools, enabling customization of learning to cater to students' needs and interests[16]. In the context of this research, the *Merdeka* Curriculum refers to the new national curriculum introduced in Indonesia, officially implemented by English teachers in the country since 2021.

3. Perspectives

Kreitner and Kinichi posit that perception is a cognitive process facilitating the interpretation and comprehension of our surroundings, with

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[15] Richards, J. C. (2013). Curriculum Approaches in Language Teaching: Forward, Central and Backward Design. 1(44), 5–33.
[16] Keputusan Kemendikbudristek Nomor 56'. 'Keputusan Kemendikbudristek Nomor 56', https://jdih.kemdikbud.go.id/sjdih/siperpu/dokumen/salinan/salinan_20220215_093900_S alinan Kepmendikbudristek No.56 ttg Pedoman Penerapan Kurikulum.pdf.

the recognition of objects being a crucial function within this process. It serves as a cognitive mechanism for understanding and interpreting the environment, emphasizing that individuals need to acquaint themselves with objects to engage effectively with their surroundings[17].

4. Challenges

In the context of the Independent Curriculum are the difficulties and obstacles faced in its implementation. These challenges can include ensuring students understand complex concepts, the need for familiarization in implementing the curriculum, building student character, and the difficulty of English teachers in understanding and implementing the curriculum[18].

5. Strategy

Strategy is a holistic systemic approach related to ideas, planning and implementation of an activity in a specific time period. In a good strategy, there is team work synergy, the concept of identification of supporting factors is in accordance with the principles of logical implementation of ideas, efficiency in managing funds, and there is a strategy to achieve efficient goals[19].

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[17] R, Kreitner dan Kinicki, Perilaku Organisasi, (Jakarta: Salemba Empat, 2007), hal.207.

[18] Yatim, Heriyati, Nurachmy Sahnir, and Amirullah Abduh. 2023. "Analysis of Habituation in Implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Art Education in Schools." *Jurnal Pemikiran Ilmiah Dan Pendidikan Administrasi Perkantoran* 10, no. 1: 111–26. http://ojs.unm.ac.id/index.php/administrare/index.

[19] Fandi Tjiptono, *Strategi Pemasaran*, Cet. Ke-II (Yogyakarta: Andi,2000), hlm 17.