

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will cover various elements, including the background of the study, research questions, objectives of the study, statements of the problems, hypotheses of the study, scope and limitations, significance of the study, and definitions of key terms.

A. Background of the Study

Curriculum holds paramount importance in education, serving as a foundational element that guides learning processes and outcomes.¹ It serves as a roadmap that guides students and educators on what to study, when, and how to achieve specific objectives.² According to J. Lloyd Trump and Dalmes F. Miller (as cited in Sa'dullah)³, the curriculum consists of a number of instructional strategies, techniques for evaluating students and the program as a whole, counseling and guidance services, administration and supervision, and various structural elements related to scheduling, room allocation, course selection, and subject-related structures. It comprises a series of educational tasks and experiences designed to assist students in meeting the broader objectives of their education. Curriculum is not just limited to a set of subjects but encompasses various elements like actors, methodology, and programmatic contents, shaping the educational experience comprehensively.⁴

In Indonesia, the education curriculum has undergone significant revisions and realignments to meet the changing needs of a globalized society and to enhance the quality of education in line with international standards.⁵ The aim of these changes is to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia to compete globally,

¹ Diana Riski Sapitri Siregar and Bahrissalim, "Desain Pengembangan Kurikulum," *Jurnal Mahasiswa Pendidikan* 2, no. 2 (October 1, 2022): 146.

² Shashank Kumar, "Curriculum, more than a Journey on a Map," January 21, 2022.

³ A. Sa'dullah, Agus Sulthon Imami, and Abu Khaer, "The Importance of The Role of an Appropriate Curriculum in Education," *Proceeding of International Conference on Education, Society and Humanity* 1, no. 1 (May 30, 2023): 410.

⁴ Jaquelina Lizet Hernández-Cueto et al., "Construction of the concept of Curriculum in educational contexts," *Revista Ciencias de la Educación*, December 31, 2020, 1.

⁵ Chairul Azmi, Hadiyanto Hadiyanto, and Rusdinal Rusdinal, "National Curriculum Education Policy 'Curriculum Merdeka and Its Implementation,'" *International Journal of Educational Dynamics* 6, no. 1 (December 31, 2023): 303.

aligning with the evolving needs of the 21st century and the industrial revolution 5.0.⁶ Curriculum changes in Indonesia have significantly impacted the education realm. These changes have been driven by various factors such as the need to improve education quality, adapt to societal changes, and keep pace with global advancements in science and technology.⁷ The curriculum evolution from the 2013 curriculum to the Merdeka curriculum, known as Merdeka Belajar, reflects a shift towards more student-centered learning approaches, aiming to enhance competencies and critical skills. However, challenges persist, including unpreparedness in implementing new curricula, limited resources, and infrastructural constraints.⁸

The consequences of curriculum adjustments extend throughout all level of the educational realm, impacting educational institutions, teachers, and students. These adjustments are driven by various factors such as the need for students to be prepared for curriculum changes, limited facilities, and the rapid development of science and technology.⁹ The reforms emphasize the shift towards autonomous learning, requiring teachers to adopt new educational strategies and technology integration to actively engage students in the learning process.¹⁰

a. Merdeka Curriculum towards EFL Teachers' Creativity.

The shifts in the Indonesian curriculum, especially Merdeka Curriculum, have indeed resulted some consequences on the creativity of EFL teachers. The curriculum provides them freedom to design subject matter and learning methods that provide to their students' needs.¹¹ Teachers gain more freedom

⁶ Hikmat Hikmat, "The Readiness of Education in Indonesia in Facing the Society Era 5.0," *Jurnal Basicedu* 6, no. 2 (March 5, 2022): 2955.

⁷ Fatimatuzzahroh and Anita Afrianingsih, "Dinamika Perubahan Kurikulum Terhadap Mutu Pendidikan di Indonesia," *Jurnal Kajian Anak (J-Sanak)* 4, no. 01 (December 31, 2022): 20.

⁸ Hetty M. Pakpahan et al., "The Effectiveness of Indonesian Education Curriculum Reform on the Quality of Processes in Learning," *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA* 9, no. 1 (2023): 564–69.

⁹ Fatimatuzzahroh and Afrianingsih, "Dinamika Perubahan Kurikulum Terhadap Mutu Pendidikan di Indonesia.", 20.

¹⁰ Yuni Putri Utami and Budyi Suswanto, "The Educational Curriculum Reform in Indonesia: Supporting 'Independent Learning Independent Campus (MBKM),'", ed. J.T. Collins, R.W. Carter, and N. Scott, *SHS Web of Conferences* 149 (2022): 01041; 2.

¹¹ Asfiati Asfiati, "Merdeka Curriculum: Encouraging Creativity and Innovation of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Madrasah," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (December 24, 2023): 683.

and autonomy in lesson planning. This promotes more creativity and innovation in their teaching. As a result, the quality of learning improves, leading to better student outcomes.¹² In terms of teaching methods, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes project-based learning and different learning styles, provides to visual, kinesthetic, and auditory preferences.¹³ This situation truly puts the teachers' creativity to the test.

b. Merdeka Curriculum towards EFL Teachers' Professional Development.

Professional development in Indonesia also has been influenced by the changes of curriculum into Merdeka Curriculum, especially for English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. This curriculum has led to a reexamination of language policies, educational regulations, and teacher competencies, highlighting the need for enhanced teacher professionalism and quality education.¹⁴ A literature review study done by Purwati & Sukirman¹⁵ revealed effective strategies for enhancing teacher competency, such as engaging in training and development programs, promoting collaboration and knowledge-sharing among teachers and integrating technology into the learning process. However, continuous professional development and adaptation to new educational demands are crucial for teachers to effectively navigate and implement evolving curricula.

c. Merdeka Curriculum towards EFL Teachers' Burnout.

Teacher's Burnout regarding of Merdeka curriculum also widespread in the education realm. The process of adjusting the curriculum, along with the pressure to meet evolving educational standards, might significantly contribute to elevate stress levels among educators, potentially resulting in burnout. The study done by Risqi indicated that this curriculum has imposed additional

¹² Nur Putri Khalbi et al., "Dampak Pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Bagi Guru di MTSN 2 Solok Selatan," *Jurnal Riset Sosial Humaniora Dan Pendidikan* 3, no. 1 (March 27, 2024): 30.

¹³ Wulan Ndari et al., "Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and Its Challenges," *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy* 4, no. 3 (June 15, 2023): 112.

¹⁴ Anchieta Ave Avillanova and Paulus Kuswandono, "English Teacher Professional Development in Indonesia: The Challenges and Opportunities," *ENGLISH REVIEW: Journal of English Education* 8, no. 1 (January 12, 2019): 41.

¹⁵ Endang Purwati and Dadang Sukirman, "Teacher Competence Development in Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation: A Literature Study," *Inovasi Kurikulum* 21, no. 1 (February 21, 2024): 41.

energy-draining tasks, including the daily requirement to fill out journals documenting both the teacher's and students' activities. EFL teachers must record every student's issue in a journal each day and then transfer these notes into a computer file for the school's database. Consequently, teachers feel overwhelmed and criticize this process as inefficient, referring to it as a 'double job.'¹⁶ The study conducted by Utami et al. indicates diverse levels of burnout among teachers, with three primary factors contributing to this phenomenon: teaching administration, adapting to technology-based teaching, and managing misbehaving students. In interviews, teachers commonly express stress related to fulfilling the requirements of the current curriculum, which requires extensive administrative tasks.¹⁷

d. Preliminary Survey.

The researcher conducted a preceding survey to ensure that the research is grounded in the real problems currently faced by EFL teachers. This survey also aims to support the statement of the problem. Conducted online through Google Forms, this survey participated by 30 of EFL Teachers. According to the survey results, 76.7% of EFL teachers believe that recent curriculum affected their creativity. These curriculums require them to implement differentiated learning, utilize digital platform engage in project-based learning, and integrate technology into their teaching.

Additionally, the curriculum is also connected to teachers' professional development, with 80% of EFL teachers frequently participating in training or professional development programs related to the Merdeka Curriculum. These mandatory programs include training sessions, teacher professional education, and *Guru Penggerak*. However, implementing this curriculum often demands intensive adjustments from teachers, such as developing learning materials at the start of the semester. According to 60% of

¹⁶ M. Ainur Rizqi, "Stress and Resilience Among EFL Teachers: An Interview Study of an Indonesian Junior High School Teacher," *TEFLIN Journal* 28, no. 1 (March 31, 2017): 30.

¹⁷ A. A. Istri Dewi Adhi Utami, Ni Nyoman Asri Sidaryanti, and Kadek Wirahyuni, "Burnout Among EFL Teachers in Indonesia: Levels and Factors," *The Art of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TATEFL)* 5, no. 1 (May 31, 2024): 69.

EFL teachers, this curriculum contributes to burnout, potentially increasing their workload and stress.

The explanation provided above makes it clear that the primary focus of this study is on the multifaceted contribution of the Merdeka Curriculum on EFL teachers, particularly in terms of their creativity, professional development, and burnout levels. Employing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) as the analytical framework, this study aims to explore the interplay of Merdeka Curriculum, teacher creativity, professional development, and teacher burnout among EFL teachers.

B. Research Questions

Throughout the research process, research questions serve as the foundation upon which methodology, data collection methods, and result interpretation are built.¹⁸ A well-formulated research question is crucial for the success and credibility of a study.¹⁹ There are complex aspects the researcher aims to explore in this study, and the use of a quantitative approach makes it necessary to have specific research questions to address these complexities comprehensively. Therefore, the researcher formulates the following Major and Minor Research Questions:

Major Research Questions:

1. How does the Merdeka Curriculum contribute to teacher creativity, professional development and burnout among EFL Teachers?

Minor Research Questions:

- 1.1. To what extent does the Merdeka Curriculum contribute to teacher creativity?
- 1.2. To what extent does the Merdeka Curriculum contribute to professional development?
- 1.3. To what extent does the Merdeka Curriculum contribute to teacher burnout?
- 1.4. To what extent does teacher creativity contribute to teacher burnout?

¹⁸ Azizur Rahman et al., "Understanding of Research Question as a Significant Feature of Scientific Study.," *Annals of Ayurvedic Medicine* 11, no. 2 (July 9, 2022): 160.

¹⁹ Aimee Grant, "10: Writing Research Questions and Your Methods Chapter," 2022, 127.

- 1.5. To what extent does professional development contribute to teacher burnout?
2. Is there any significant relationship between indicators of Merdeka Curriculum, teacher creativity, professional development, and teacher burnout among EFL Teachers?
3. Is there any direct effect of Merdeka Curriculum on teacher creativity, professional development, and teacher burnout among EFL teachers?
4. Is there any indirect effect of Merdeka Curriculum on teacher creativity, professional development, and teacher burnout among EFL teachers?
5. How well does the proposed model fit the data on curriculum changes, creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL teachers?

C. Objectives of the Study

This study looks into the challenges EFL teachers face under the Merdeka Curriculum and how these challenges contribute to their experiences. Based on this, the study has the following objectives:

Major Objectives:

1. To examine how the changes in the Merdeka Curriculum contribute to teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL Teachers.

Minor Objectives:

1. To explore whether Merdeka Curriculum contribute to teacher creativity.
2. To assess whether Merdeka Curriculum contribute to professional development.
3. To analyze whether Merdeka Curriculum contribute to Teacher Burnout.
4. To explore whether teacher creativity contribute to teacher burnout.
5. To evaluate whether professional development contribute to teacher burnout.
2. To investigate whether there is any significant relationship between indicators of Merdeka Curriculum, teacher creativity, professional development, and teacher burnout among EFL Teachers among EFL teachers.
3. To analyze the direct effects of Merdeka Curriculum on teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL teachers.

4. To explore the indirect effects of Merdeka Curriculum on teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL teachers.
5. To validate how well the proposed model fits the data related to curriculum changes, teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout.

D. Hypotheses of the Study

Stolen K. describe a hypothesis as an educated guess or assertion made during the research process, representing a suggestion believed to be potentially correct or fruitful for further investigation.²⁰ In this study, the researcher is testing two different ideas. The first one, called the "null hypothesis," says that there's no connection between the things we're looking at. The other one, called the "alternative hypothesis," says that there is a connection between these things. So, for this research:

Major Hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1:

- (Ha) : Merdeka Curriculum contribute to teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL Teachers.
- (H₀) : Merdeka Curriculum do not contribute to teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL Teachers.

Hypothesis 2:

- (Ha) : There is a significant relationship between indicators of Merdeka Curriculum, teacher creativity, professional development, and teacher burnout among EFL Teachers.
- (H₀) : There is no significant relationship between indicators of Merdeka Curriculum, teacher creativity, professional development, and teacher burnout among EFL Teachers.

Hypothesis 3:

- (Ha) : There is a significant direct effect between Merdeka Curriculum towards teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL Teachers.
- (H₀) : There is no significant direct effect between Merdeka Curriculum towards teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL Teachers.

²⁰ Ketil Stølen, "Hypotheses," in *Technology Research Explained: Design of Software, Architectures, Methods, and Technology in General*, ed. Ketil Stølen (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2023), 59.

Hypothesis 4:

- (Ha) : There is a significant indirect effect between Merdeka Curriculum towards teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL Teachers.
- (H₀) : There is no significant indirect effect between Merdeka Curriculum towards teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL Teachers.

Hypothesis 5:

- (Ha) : The proposed structural equation model fits the data well on curriculum changes, teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL teachers.
- (H₀) : The proposed structural equation model does not fit the data well on curriculum changes, teacher creativity, professional development, and burnout among EFL teachers.

Minor Hypotheses:

- H1 : Merdeka Curriculum contribute to Teacher Creativity.
- H₀₁ : Merdeka Curriculum do not contribute to Teacher Creativity.
- H2 : Merdeka Curriculum contribute to Professional Development.
- H₀₂ : Merdeka Curriculum do not contribute to Professional Development.
- H3 : Merdeka Curriculum contribute to Teacher Burnout
- H₀₃ : Merdeka Curriculum do not contribute to Teacher Burnout
- H4 : Teacher Creativity contribute to Teacher Burnout
- H₀₄ : Teacher Creativity does not contribute to Teacher Burnout.
- H5 : Professional Development contribute to Teacher Burnout.
- H₀₅ : Professional Development does not contribute to Teacher Burnout.

E. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform educational policymakers, administrators, and practitioners about the implications and evaluation of curriculum changes on EFL teaching practices and teacher well-being. By highlighting the challenges faced by EFL teachers in due to recent curriculum changes, the research offers valuable insights into areas that require attention and support.

For teachers, this research gives them useful information about how changes in the curriculum affect their work. It helps them understand things like how to stay creative, manage their workload, and deal with stress. Knowing the

importance of professional development can also encourage them to seek out professional development programs that help them teach better. With this knowledge, teachers can ask for support and resources that make their job easier and more fulfilling. In short, this research helps teachers improve their teaching and feel better about their work.

For future researchers, the results of this study can serve as a useful foundation for investigating similar topics in new and different ways. In summary, this research creates opportunities for further exploration and contributes to improving education for all.

F. Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers in Indonesia, specifically examining the effects of the recently implemented Merdeka Curriculum. It explores how curriculum changes influence teachers' creativity, professional development, and potential burnout. The participants of this study are limited to EFL teachers who are active members of the MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran) professional teacher group. Teachers in MGMP are generally more informed and engaged with the latest curriculum implementations, making them relevant sources for this research. Data were collected via surveys from various regions in Indonesia during the period of January to March 2025.

This study is limited to EFL teachers who are members of MGMP, as they are more likely to be involved in and informed about the latest curriculum developments. Therefore, the findings may not fully represent teachers outside this professional group.

G. Definition of Key Terms

1. Merdeka Curriculum Changes

Curriculum change refers to the process of modifying educational programs to adapt to evolving societal needs, technological advancements, and pedagogical strategies. It involves revising curriculum components, such as

content, teaching methods, and assessment techniques, to enhance the quality and relevance of education.²¹

2. Teacher Creativity

Teacher creativity refers to the ability of educators to generate new ideas, modify existing ones, and implement innovative approaches in teaching to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. It involves creating a stimulating learning environment through various methods, strategies, and tools to assist students' interest and motivation.²²

3. Professional development

Teachers' professional development, addressing Merdeka Curriculum Changes, emphasize the significance of enhancing teachers' abilities through various training programs.²³ Furthermore, the involvement of teachers in personal and professional development activities is essential for improving their quality, quantity, and professionalism, ultimately contributing to the transformation of education.²⁴ Overall, continuous professional development is essential for teachers to comprehend and effectively implement the Merdeka Curriculum.

4. Teacher Burnout

Teacher burnout is a prevalent issue characterized by physical and psychological fatigue related to work.²⁵ Burnout as explained by Maslach and Leiter as cited in Copeland-Joseph is a syndrome characterized by psychological processes that lead to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization,

²¹ Camille Kandiko Howson and Martyn Kingsbury, "Curriculum Change as Transformational Learning," *Teaching in Higher Education* 28, no. 8 (2023), 1849.

²² Marie-Hélène Massie, Isabelle Capron Puozzo, and Marc Boutet, "Teacher Creativity: When Professional Coherence Supports Beautiful Risks," *Journal of Intelligence* 10, no. 3 (2022): 62.

²³ Dita Virgiyanti, Indria Kusuma Dewi, and Rizki Zuliani, "Peningkatan Kompetensi Guru Dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka (IKM) Melalui in House Training (IHT) Di SDIT Darul Ulum," *ANWARUL* 3, no. 4 (July 1, 2023): 751.

²⁴ Fransiskus Sili, "Merdeka Belajar Dan Kesiapan Profesionalisme Guru Agama Katolik di Kota Manado, Sulawesi Utara," *VOCAT: Jurnal Pendidikan Katolik* 2, no. 1 (June 29, 2022): 25.

²⁵ Azanaw Asega Belay et al., "Work-Related Burnout among Public Secondary School Teachers Is Significantly Influenced by the Psychosocial Work Factors: A Cross-Sectional Study from Ethiopia," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (July 3, 2023), 02.

and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment in the workplace.²⁶ Teacher burnout is caused by several factors, including high job demands, job stress, job dissatisfaction, low role clarity, and student demotivation.²⁷ Additionally, cognitive appraisal, organizational justice, administrative tasks, students' misbehavior, and parental impact are key aspects influencing teacher well-being and burnout.²⁸

²⁶Carla Copeland-Joseph, "A Study of Teacher Burnout in Private Seventh-Day Adventist and Public Schools in Trinidad/Tobago and Michigan, USA," *Dissertations*, January 1, 2022, 15.

²⁷ Mariana Floricica Călin and Antonia Seucea, "Effects of Burnout on the Socio-Professional Activity of Teachers," *International Journal of Legal and Social Order* 1, no. 1 (2022), 379.

²⁸ Saira Hossain and Nazmin Sultana, "Burnout in Secondary School Teachers: The Contribution of the Work Environment," *International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies* 9, no. 4 (October 20, 2022): 1368.