

English teachers' difficulties in the implementation of merdeka curriculum in a remote junior high school

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the difficulties and strategies of English teachers in implementing Merdeka Curriculum in remote junior high schools. This research uses a qualitative method with a qualitative descriptive design. The sample consisted of 2 English teachers at SMP Negeri 06 Tayan Hilir. The sampling technique used was purposive sampling. Data collection in this study used observation and interview techniques. Data analysis in this study was by (1) Data reduction, (2) Data display, and (3) Conclusion. The results of this study indicate that there are five difficulties that English teachers experience in implementing independent curriculum changes in remote junior high schools. These difficulties are, difficulties in accepting changes, difficulties in designing learning plans, difficulties in classroom management and teaching practice, difficulties in internet access, and difficulties in limited facilities. There are two most dominant difficulties, namely difficulties in internet access and difficulties in limited facilities. Then five strategies of English teachers to overcome these difficulties were also found. Suggestions for the government in the field of education, especially English, are expected to provide training in preparing teaching modules for teachers in remote areas, besides providing internet access will greatly assist teachers in accessing the Ruang GTK Platform.

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INTRODUCTION

The education system in Indonesia has changed over the past few decades. One important aspect of these changes is the curriculum for students. The curriculum was in 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, and 2013 curriculum (Kamila & Agus RM, 2023). Curriculum changes are important in modern education to adapt to the needs of better education. However, hasty or poorly considered changes can disrupt the course of education and be detrimental to student learning and progress (Jasrial et al., 2023). Based on the explanation above, it can be concluded that the changes that occur are potential steps in improving the quality of the education system, one of the curricula that has changed is the Merdeka Curriculum.

The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum framework that has been developed into a more flexible curriculum, focusing on essential materials and developing students' competency character (Damayanti & Muhroji, 2022). The creation of the Merdeka Curriculum certainly adapts to the developments that occur from year to year according to the needs of society and the world of education, especially the development of English in schools. English is one of the most important needs in the current era mastery of English can be learned through formal and informal education (Purwanti, 2023). At the formal level, junior high schools currently implement a Merdeka curriculum for learning English. This curriculum has the advantage of emphasizing key concepts and building students' competencies so they may study more thoroughly and purposefully (Oktaviola et al., 2024). In this case, of course, a good implementation of the Merdeka curriculum is needed.

Teachers, principals, and those involved in the implementation of learning in schools should be able to understand what the curriculum is and how it is implemented (Suyanto, 2017). Curriculum implementation is not an easy thing to do, especially for foreign language development, especially English. The curriculum implementation aims to use the same curriculum at the same level in all educational institutions and predict changes in student behavior under the control of implementers (Karakuş, 2021). However, various difficulties will be encountered in the implementation stage (Putri Lestari et al., 2023). In this case, stakeholders must ensure that teachers can implement the curriculum change properly without difficulty. According to Nasution & Indrasari (2024), there are four difficulties experienced by teachers in implementing independent curriculum changes, namely, difficulties with practical classroom implementation, the inability of educators to acquire new techniques of the evolving curriculum is hampered by inadequate facilities, teachers' access to learning is limited by the lack of norms and resources and the difficulty of adapting to change.

In addition to the four difficulties above, it turns out that one of the other factors that can hinder the implementation of curriculum changes is the location of the school. For example, schools located in rural or remote areas. In this case, of course, many aspects need to be considered, such as learning media, internet access, and transportation. Upa & Mbato, (2020) reveal that English teachers experience various geographical challenges, such as student characters, parental demands, limited teaching staff, limited facilities, language barriers, and parents' mindsets about the importance of education. These challenges certainly increase the burden on teachers in implementing the new curriculum, especially for English language development. If teachers experience difficulties in implementing curriculum changes, then English language development in schools will not run effectively.

Based on the researchers' observations, while participating in the teaching campus program, the researchers found many things related to the curriculum changes. The school uses two curriculums, namely Curriculum 13 and Merdeka Curriculum however in the implementation of these curriculum changes, they still seemed confused. They are still confused about the difference between the two curriculums and how teaching methods should be used in the independent curriculum system because their schools still lack supporting learning media.

Some researchers raised the topic of curriculum changes (Sakkir et al, 2021; Matmoah et al, 2023; and Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023). Previous research on the

implementation of curriculum change had focused on challenges in designing learning after curriculum change, challenges faced by teachers in teaching English on curriculum change, and teacher readiness in implementing curriculum change in schools but at the junior high school level and achievable areas such as urban areas. In this study, the researchers conducted research on the implementation of curriculum changes that focused on schools located in remote areas.

Based on the researchers' observation, the novelty of the researchers' research is the place or location. Where researchers conduct research in remote places, in schools that still need attention to learning media, internet access, and transportation in implementation curriculum change. In addition, through this research, it is also important to ensure that the implementation of curriculum change in schools can go well, especially for English teachers in developing learning in remote schools. By knowing the difficulties of English teachers in handling the implementation of curriculum change in schools, the information can help in strategizing to find the right solutions to improve the effectiveness of English teaching in environments that still have limited resources and accessibility, so that the quality of education in these schools can be improved.

Based on the explanation above, through this research, the researchers wants to identify the difficulties English teachers experience towards the implementation of curriculum changes in remote schools entitled "*The English Teachers' Difficulties in the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in a Remote Junior High School: SMP Negeri 06 Tayan Hilir*" is relevant and important to conduct because it can provide insight into the difficulties faced by English teachers in implementing the changing curriculum.

METHOD

In this study, the researchers used qualitative methods, namely descriptive qualitative to achieve research objectives. Descriptive qualitative research is a research method that utilizes qualitative data, is described descriptively, and is often use to analyze events, phenomena, or social circumstances (Iasha et al., 2023). The researchers chose a descriptive qualitative method because the research wanted to dig deeper into what difficulties English teachers face in implementing curriculum changes in remote junior high schools, and what strategies English teachers use to overcome these difficulties which described descriptive. To determine the subject of this study, the researchers used purposive sampling. The characteristics of the research subjects are teachers who teach English at the school, even though they are not from English education. To gain data, the researchers involve two English teachers in Public Junior High School. The researchers used two data collection techniques, namely, observation, and interviews. In the data collection process, the researchers made observations first. The researchers made observation to see and find the difficulties of teachers in general at the school. Then after making observation, the researchers conduct interviews with English teachers to find out more about the difficulties experienced.

RESULT

In this section, the researchers describe the results of observations and interviews

to find out the difficulties and strategies of English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum Changes in Remote Junior High Schools at SMPN 06 Tayan Hilir. The researchers describe the results of observations first, and then researchers describes the results of interviews. The results of these observations and interviews described in the form of a brief description. The following is an explanation of the research findings:

English teachers' difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on the observations, the researchers found that there were three difficulties faced by English teachers based on the specified aspects: difficulties in accepting changes, challenges in designing lessons, and difficulties in classroom management and practice. In addition, the researchers also found that the most important difficulty was internet access and limited facilities. After the researchers made direct observations when English teachers taught in class 8A and 8B, then the researchers conducted direct interviews with two English teachers. The following is a description of the results of the interviews that have been conducted:

Difficulty in accepting changes.

From the results of interviews that the researchers conducted with, the first difficulty experienced by English teachers in implementing changes in the Merdeka Curriculum is difficulty in accepting changes. This was explained by the English teacher:

Excerpt 1:

Teacher: *"When I first heard the Merdeka Curriculum, I immediately thought that this seemed more difficult, the name alone was „Merdeka“. When there is a change there must be something new. Then also apart from us, there needs to be facilities that support the implementation of this curriculum. Here, the facilities are still minimal, not too complete, to access information through social media to study the independent curriculum is quite difficult because internet access is not good."*

Then to accept this curriculum change, it also needs adjustment in terms of the location of the school, especially if the location is still difficult to reach.

Excerpt 2:

Teacher: *"In general, for the existence of the location of the school is also one of the factors that influence accepting changes in the Merdeka Curriculum, such as this school, the location is still difficult to reach, especially when it rains. Difficulties in transportation (roads) and internet networks if there are meetings, or developments regarding the independent curriculum we usually miss information."*

From the results of interviews that the researchers conducted with S2 (OA), the first difficulty experienced by English language teachers in implementing changes in the Merdeka Curriculum is accepting changes. Where in this Merdeka curriculum, teachers are required to know and have a Ruang GTK Platform account to understand the performance of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Excerpt 3:

Teacher: *“Of course, there are difficulties experienced when there is a curriculum change. The frequent curriculum transitions require quite a long adjustment for me to really understand. In the other hand more, in this Merdeka Curriculum, we teachers are required to have me Ruang GTK Platform.”*

Another difficulty also arises in relation to the location of the school, which is still difficult to reach in terms of network and transportation. Where in the process of understanding the implementation of changes in the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers need to receive training, and webinars.

Excerpt 4:

Teacher: *“The existence of location is also one of the causes of difficulty accepting change. Then what I have faced so far is also related to internet access. From myself, I still lack training, indeed there are a lot of trainings and webinars that are held outside the school but because of the network constraints, I missed it. Then also the exposure to the Merdeka Curriculum through this training, in my opinion, is still lacking to support the implementation of the independent curriculum, because the material provided is sometimes not easy to practice in the field.”*

Difficulties in designing learning.

The second difficulty in implementing curriculum changes experienced by English teachers is the difficulty in designing lessons. To design lessons, teachers must be able to adjust to the independent curriculum.

Excerpt 5:

Teacher: *“In designing this learning, we also need time, not just like that. I also have other activities, not just focusing on that. There is the most difficult thing in designing lessons in my opinion, namely making lessons that are appropriate and interesting for students. In one class, there are not only one or two students but more than that, each student also has a different character, so how can we design lessons that can embrace them. Then back to the facilities, the learning design also needs to adjust to that. If I usually teach without using a lesson plan, I am guided by the package book (student worksheet).”*

Difficulties in classroom management and teaching practice.

The third difficulty that English teachers experience in implementing the Merdeka curriculum changes is the difficulty of classroom management and teaching practices. This was explained by the English teacher:

Excerpt 6:

Teacher: *“In managing this class is not an easy thing, we are faced with many students who have different characters and ways of thinking. To make them focus on learning is difficult. They sometimes like to chat with their friends next to them, especially if they don't understand, they start to get bored. Moreover, English is a difficult foreign language. Sometimes I want to make*

learning different if I usually explain the material to them using a book, then let them learn by watching films or asking them to watch videos of people explaining. But there are no tools like that here. So, we are clever in using the available facilities."

Based on the results of the interviews above, it can be concluded that both English teachers experienced the same three difficulties, namely difficulties in accepting changes, difficulties in designing lessons, difficulties in management and teaching practices. In addition, the researchers also found other difficulties and the most dominant is the difficulty of internet access and limited facilities.

English teachers' strategies in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on the results of interviews regarding the difficulties of English teachers in implementing changes in the Merdeka curriculum, the researchers then interviewed teachers regarding the strategies they used to overcome these difficulties. This interview is in accordance with four aspects, namely, asking questions related to the material being taught, making learning methods tailored to students' abilities, preparing lesson plans, and implementing discussion methods to facilitate the learning process. The following are the results of interviews regarding English teacher strategies:

Asking questions related to the material being taught.

The strategy used by English teachers to accept and adjust the changes in the Merdeka Curriculum is to ask questions related to the material being taught.

Excerpt 7:

Teacher: *"After finishing explaining the material, I always give students the opportunity to ask questions. But sometimes these students are rarely and embarrassed to ask. So if they don't ask, I ask them questions. If they can answer my questions, it means they already understand, even if they can't answer I can explain the material again."*

Another strategy used by English teachers at SMPN 06 Tayan hilir to accept and adjust the changes in the Merdeka Curriculum is to participate in technician guidance through the Ruang GTK Platform.

Excerpt 8:

Teacher: *"To adjust and accept this curriculum change, we can only follow directions we teachers are given technical guidance through the Ruang GTK Platform. Sometimes I also quite often participate in training or webinars because at the end of each semester it is mandatory to participate in webinars. If I more often participate in webinars through the Ruang GTK platform, and to find out and learn about the Merdeka Curriculum, I usually look for webinars organised by government agencies on YouTube by myself. Because the internet network at school does not support it, I usually access or take webinars in a place that has a good internet network."*

The strategy used by English teachers to accept changes in the Merdeka Curriculum is to ask questions related to the material that has been taught.

Excerpt 9:

Teacher: *"Sometimes it's not just us who are confused about the implementation of this independent curriculum change, but students too. In the learning process, students are often confused and it is also difficult to remember learning. Asked to ask questions, sometimes no one wants to, to ensure that students do not experience confusion, I give them questions when the lesson is over. Students who can answer can come out who can't, I tell them to go back to their seats to find the answer. If I haven't found the answer, sometimes I help while giving directions."*

Then for the teacher's own understanding, the strategy used by English teachers to accept changes in the Merdeka Curriculum is to be open to change.

Excerpt 10:

Teacher: *"To reduce the difficulty in accepting the changes that I do is open to change. Where we cannot avoid the change. It is not easy and may be classified as slow but slowly you can adjust."*

Prepare lesson plans.

English teachers apparently did not use strategies to prepare lesson plans in overcoming difficulties in classroom management and practice related to the implementation of curriculum changes. Teachers are only guided and use Student Worksheets (LKS) when teaching practice in class.

Excerpt 11:

Teacher: *"To carry out teaching practice in class I only use the LKS book. But in delivering the material, it's back to me how to make students understand. I combine it with learning methods that they can accept."*

The second teacher is also the same, not using the strategy of preparing lesson plans when managing classes related to the implementation of changes in the Merdeka curriculum. The teacher only uses the LK book.

Excerpt 12:

Teacher: *"When teaching, I am only guided by the existing Student Worksheet (LKS) book. Because it is also complete from material to assignments. Mostly if there is material that is lacking then I add it."*

Asking questions related to the material being taught.

The second strategy that English teachers use to overcome difficulties in classroom management and teaching practice is to make learning methods according to students' abilities. Here the teacher sees students quickly understand learning using what methods.

Excerpt 13:

Teacher: *"Well, to make my students actively involved during the teaching process, I make learning methods that are in accordance with the abilities of students, I connect lessons with things they enjoy. If in class 8A they quickly grasp through games, maybe because the concept is while playing, so they like it."*

English teachers also apply strategies to make learning methods in accordance with students' abilities.

Excerpt 14:

Teacher: *"In teaching, we must make sure students understand. We adjust our methods to their ability so learning is easier. If students learn better by singing, we turn the material into songs. This helps them remember, and sometimes they keep singing even during breaks. We use available materials like textbooks and LKS. If something is not available, we adjust. I use textbooks and LKS as guides and choose methods that help students understand."*

The next strategy that teachers use to overcome difficulties in classroom management and teaching practice is to create learning methods according to students' abilities.

Excerpt 15:

Teacher: *"To make students understand the material taught, we must know their abilities. Then try to create a learning method that suits their abilities, for example, they quickly understand if they learn with the lecture method and then give a game, so we apply it. If we choose a method that is contrary to the students' abilities, it is not only them who have difficulties, we as teachers are also difficult to convey the material."*

Applying the discussion method and making concepts relevant to daily life to facilitate the learning process.

English teachers apply discussion methods in classroom management and teaching practices related to the implementation of Merdeka curriculum changes. Teachers also apply learning strategies to make learning concepts relevant to everyday life.

Excerpt 16:

Teacher: *"I agree with using the discussion method in class. I often ask students to work in groups so they can be more active. When they discuss with friends, they are usually less shy. But I still need to monitor them so they stay on topic. I also adjust the lesson to their daily lives. When I explain, I relate it to things around them. For example, when teaching recount text, I use examples from their experiences, like joining class meeting activities or 17 August competitions."*

English teachers apply the discussion method in learning; besides that, teachers also make learning concepts according to the environment.

Excerpt 17:

Teacher: *"I think learning through discussion is effective as long as it is supervised, but maybe in this discussion we have to give assignments so that students don't talk about other things outside of learning. Then connect learning with the concept of everyday life. That way they will find it easy to understand the learning. For example, when explaining we include phenomena that they have experienced."*

Based on the results of the interviews above, it can be concluded that both English teachers used five strategies in implementing curriculum change. These strategies are, asking questions related to the material being taught, applying the discussion method and making concepts relevant to daily life to facilitate the learning process, being open to change, and participating in training through the Ruang GTK Platform

DISCUSSION

In this section, the researchers discussed the research findings regarding the difficulties and strategies of English teachers in implementing changes in the Merdeka Curriculum in Remote Junior High Schools, at SMN 06 Tayan Hilir. The discussion of the findings of this study is used to answer the questions in his research.

English teachers' difficulties in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum

Based on the researchers' findings, English teachers at SMPN 06 Tayan Hilir found that there were five difficulties in implementing Merdeka Curriculum changes. These difficulties are difficulties in accepting changes, difficulties in designing lessons, difficulties in classroom management and teaching practice, difficulties in accessing the internet, and difficulties in facilities.

First, English teachers have difficulties accepting changes in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum change. This difficulty occurs due to limited facilities, location, and unstable internet access to access information and the Ruang GTK Platform. This is in accordance with the statement of Ramopoly & Baka, (2023) that the lack of an internet network, limited facilities, facilities and infrastructure are also obstacles in implementing the independent curriculum. Then the lack of training is also a very influential cause in accepting changes in the independent curriculum. This statement is in accordance with Maulida, (2023) the lack of training as a cause of teachers' difficulty accepting change and as a recommendation for the success of curriculum change. Teachers also have difficulty accepting changes due to the incompatibility of the theory conveyed in training with what is practiced in the real world. This is in line with the opinion of (Basalama, 2010) in-service teachers also reported that training sessions often emphasized theory and were not aligned with their practical needs.

The second difficulty experienced by English teachers at SMPN 06 Tayan Hilir in implementing Merdeka Curriculum changes is difficulties in designing lessons. It was found that English teachers do not use teaching modules to teach, teachers only use student worksheet books in teaching. This is in line with previous research

which found that teachers' difficulties in implementing curriculum changes have not been able to design lessons well (Nasution & Indrasari, 2024). This difficulty occurs because it is caused by the first limited time to design learning, where in designing this learning cannot be rushed, the teacher must be careful so that the learning design is in accordance with the objectives to be achieved. The second cause is the limited facilities that support teachers in the learning process. This is in line with the statement of (Basalama, 2010) teachers experience difficulties in designing learning from inadequate facilities and resources, ranging from lab materials, the internet, and audio-visual aids, which hinder effective teaching, to gaps in teacher welfare.

The third difficulty experienced by English teachers at SMPN 06 Tayan Hilir in implementing changes to the Merdeka Curriculum is difficulty in classroom management and teaching practice. This difficulty is caused by first, the limited time allocation for delivering material due to the large number of students with different abilities in understanding the material. This follows the statement (Basalama, 2010), that the limited time allocation available makes it difficult for teachers to fulfill what must be achieved in the learning process plus students' different grasping power in understanding learning materials makes it difficult to manage classes and implement independent curriculum changes. Then the different student characters are also the cause of teachers' difficulties in designing learning, where teachers are confused about finding methods that can actively embrace their students during the learning process. (Nasution & Indrasari, 2024) also stated the same thing, namely that students have different characters, making it difficult for teachers to determine how lesson plans are suitable for students. Classroom management and implementation of independent curriculum changes.

The fourth difficulty is the difficulties of internet access. This difficulty is caused by the existence of school locations that do not have evenly distributed internet access. This is in line with Lin, (2024) the difference in digital access and uneven internet access is also an obstacle faced by teachers in implementing independent learning.

The fifth difficulty is the difficulty of limited facilities. Where the school still has limited facilities that support the learning process in implementing curriculum changes. This is in line with Maulida, (2023) not a few schools that do not have adequate facilities or teachers and students with limited access experience difficulties, differences in facilities, infrastructure and ease of access to technology are difficulties that teachers sometimes face.

Based on the results of the discussion of the difficulties of English teachers above, the researchers found that the researchers' findings were similar to the results of previous studies by Tanjung & Amalia, (2023); Jasrial et al., (2023); Malaikosa & Sahayu, (2019) in the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum changes. The same difficulties are difficulties in designing lesson plans, classroom management and teaching practices as well as limited facilities. However, the researchers' findings also have differences with the findings of previous researchers, namely the difficulty of accepting changes and internet access. This is due to the existence of school locations that are still in remote areas. The most dominant difficulties experienced by English teachers at SMPN 06 Tayan Hili are difficulties with internet access and difficulties with facilities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, English teachers encounter several challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly due to limited facilities, unstable internet access, and the remote location of the school. Teachers also face difficulties in designing lesson plans and managing classrooms with diverse student abilities and limited instructional time. In practice, teachers tend to rely on student worksheets rather than fully developed teaching modules. To address these challenges, teachers apply several strategies, such as asking questions to identify students' learning difficulties, adapting teaching methods to students' abilities, implementing discussion-based learning, connecting learning materials with students' everyday life, being open to curriculum changes, and participating in training through the Ruang GTK Platform. However, limited internet access and insufficient school facilities remain the most dominant barriers to the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in remote schools.

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