

THE CHALLENGES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN TEACHING SPEAKING

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze and obtain information about teachers' challenges during the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in teaching English at Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School and how teachers can overcome these problems. This research method is a qualitative descriptive method, and data is obtained through observation and semi-structured interviews. The subject of this research was an 11th-grade English teacher. The results of this study found that the Merdeka Curriculum at Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School had been implemented, and several challenges were found. Teachers believe that the Merdeka curriculum influences students' speaking abilities because teachers can modify teaching methods according to students' needs. Successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can be achieved if teachers can overcome existing challenges. Teacher creativity in teaching, teacher motivation toward students, and institutional support enable teachers to overcome every challenge during the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in the speaking teaching process.
Keywords: *teaching challenge, Merdeka curriculum, speaking*

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is closely related to the development of science, information, and technology. The influence of the uncontrolled development of globalization requires some people to have language skills, namely English language skills (Nur Hidayah, 2021). English is the first language in the world that has an important role in several fields of activity. English, the first language of the world, is referred to as the first global lingua franca and is used extensively in mass media, international telecommunications, trade, diplomacy, and scientific publishing (Sofyan, 2021). Related to the importance of mastering foreign languages, especially English, a philosopher from Germany named Johann Wolfgang Von stated, "Those who know nothing about foreign languages, they have nothing about their own" (Kemampuan & Inggris, 2016). Due to the designation of English as an international language, in Indonesia, English is the most prioritized foreign language to be studied as a modern communication tool. Even though it is not used in daily conversation, English is used in several places in Indonesia, such as foreign company offices and educational institutions (Boy Jon et al., 2021).

The widespread use of English throughout the world has had a significant impact on humanity, one of which is in the field of education. In this era of globalization, the existence of subjects that can hone foreign language skills is expected to prepare students to face global competition (Kurnaedi & Muslih, 2023). Learning English is expected to make students skilled in communicating orally and in writing. Speaking is one of the skills that students need to acquire to effectively communicate ideas. Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning, creating and obtaining information (Khairita et al., 2023). When someone shares their thoughts, we can hear them out, conclude, and decide how we want to respond. The improvement of speaking abilities is linked to the growth of language skills. The more often someone practices their speaking, the better their language skills will be (Sari & Lestari, 2019). Therefore, speaking English is an ability that students should master as a life skill.

Learning a language is closely related to learning communication. Language is a means of verbal communication, where the main aim of oral communication is so that the interlocutor can understand the information from the speaker (Thariq et al., 2021). In learning English, one of the skills that students must master is speaking. Students must speak correctly to easily convey ideas or messages to other people. Speaking ability can also be a measure of a student's ability to pronounce English vocabulary, language structures, and so on. In the language teaching process, speaking skills are an important part of the curriculum (Sujinem, 2023).

The Ministry of Education and Culture is trying to achieve this target in various ways. The main approach taken by the Ministry of National Education, which is believed to be a solution to the problem of teaching English as a foreign language is to change the curriculum (Suharjati, 2010). One of the things that influences the process of learning English in class is the type of curriculum that is applied (Boy Jon et al., 2021). The government is trying its best to adjust the curriculum to the needs of students in this era of globalization. However, the results were not as expected because in practice there were still challenges and obstacles, especially in learning English (Damayanti et al., 2022). In Indonesia, this curriculum has been implemented many times. For example, in 2013, the 2013 curriculum was implemented and now the Merdeka curriculum is new. On December 10, 2019, Nadiem Makarim, Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, established the Merdeka Curriculum as a refinement of the 2013 Curriculum (Rahayu, Rosita, Rahayuningsih, 2021).

A curriculum based on interests and talents is the Merdeka curriculum. The Merdeka curriculum places a high value on creativity and intellectual freedom. Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum that deepens the competence of teachers and students to innovate and develop quality independent learning (Maulinda, 2022). Independence in the sense that every student and educator is given the freedom to access knowledge obtained from formal and non-formal education. The success of the learning process in class, especially speaking learning, cannot be separated from the influence of cognitive factors such as language talent and intelligence, and affective factors such as attitude and motivation (Kusuma & Adnyani, 2016). Not only that, but appropriate language learning strategies are also important to improve language skills for the better. Teaching English is not easy. The skill levels in each class are different, meaning teachers must be able to choose and use effective strategies so that students can learn the material well (Schedule et al., 2022). Therefore, teacher involvement is very important in the curriculum development process to align curriculum content with the needs of students in the classroom (Rindayati et al., 2022). There are significant differences between the K-13 curriculum and the Merdeka curriculum, so teachers face various challenges and obstacles in the learning process, especially in learning English.

Talking about the curriculum which is believed to be one of the things that influences the process of learning to speak English, the author has carried out pre-observations at one of the Sidoarjo vocational schools, namely Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School. The school has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and teachers have received training related to the Merdeka Curriculum. During pre-observation, the author found several challenges experienced by 11th-grade English teachers when implementing the Merdeka curriculum in the process of learning to speak English. According to Demir, teaching English as a foreign language presents three

main challenges for English teachers: institutional, teacher, and student-related difficulties (Hasanah & Utami, 2020).

Problems related to students arise because one of the reasons is that students subjectively think English is difficult. In teacher-related, the most challenging problem is implementing learning according to the plan or teaching module and curriculum. Meanwhile, those related to institutions refer to the technological support, facilities, and infrastructure provided by the school.

If researchers trace several previous articles that were used as references by the author, the researchers find several previous authors who studied this matter. However, every research carried out must have its uniqueness, characteristics, and differences. These differences and uniqueness can come from the problems, the research methods used, or even the research location. This study focuses on the challenges English teachers at Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School encountered when implementing the Merdeka curriculum for the 11th grade in the process of teaching English speaking, as well as the teacher's methods or actions to overcome these.

METHODOLOGY

This research approach used a qualitative approach. Bogdan and Taylor explain that qualitative research is one of the procedural activities in research (including speaking, writing, or individual behavior) that is observed to produce descriptive data (Robert & Brown, 2004). This type of research is descriptive research. This research took place at the Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School. The subject of this research was an 11th-grade English teacher at the school. This teacher has implemented the Merdeka curriculum in the English language learning process in class 11 and has also participated in the "Workshop on Preparing Teaching Modules (Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum)" which was held on August 10 2023 for all teachers at Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School.

The main data sources in qualitative are words and actions, the rest is additional data such as documents and others. Primary and secondary data sources were the sources of information used in this study. Primary data is data obtained from interviews when research is carried out directly in the field (Diana & Rofiki, 2020). Secondary data is a data source used as comparison material or to strengthen field data. Secondary data sources for this research are teaching modules, audio recordings, and documentation.

The data collected was through observation and interviews. In the observation session, the author acted as an observer who did not participate in English learning. The author prepared an observation checklist as an observation guide. Some of the things that the author will focus on in observation are the teacher's process in preparing teaching modules, the materials and resources the teacher chooses in the speaking learning process, the teacher's strategy in teaching, the teacher's way of overcoming each challenge in teaching speaking, the students' attitudes or responses during learning and the learning environment student. To ensure the accuracy of the data gathered by observation, the author employed video records.

The interview guide used was "semi-structured". The researcher asked structured or prepared questions, then one by one asked questions about the teacher's opinion regarding the influence of the Merdeka curriculum on students' English language skills, Difficulties faced by students in learning to speak English, teacher challenges in preparing teaching modules, teacher challenges when implementing speaking teaching modules. which has been prepared, what are the obstacles and institutional support for teaching speaking in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, and how teachers overcome the challenges they face from both students and institutions will be deepened to obtain further information.

Interviews are used to validate and support the results obtained during observations. Apart from asking questions related to the challenges of implementing the Merdeka curriculum in the English language teaching process, the interview session was also supported by audio recordings.

This research data analysis used descriptive analysis. In this analysis, the data was interpreted descriptively and expressed narratively. From the data collected and compiled, data analysis was then carried out using qualitative descriptive analysis, namely presenting a description of the data obtained during data collection. In this research, the data analysis used is the Miles and Huberman model (1992), namely (1) data reduction and (2) data presentation (Campbell et al., 2011).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Based on the results of observations, one of the 11th-grade English teachers at the Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School, who was the subject of this research, had planned and prepared the teaching of speaking skills following the Merdeka curriculum. This is characterized by teachers analyzing students' conditions and needs before creating teaching modules. By analyzing the conditions and needs of students, teachers can overcome challenges or obstacles while preparing speaking teaching modules.

There are many teaching strategies that teachers use to improve students' speaking skills. That is very important because the skill level in each class is different, so teachers must be able to choose and use effective strategies so that students can learn the material well (Schedule et al., 2022). Apart from using appropriate learning materials and resources for teaching speaking, teachers are also very innovative in the teaching process. Teachers make the teaching and learning process in class very interesting because they not only use books but also use other media such as songs and videos.

Even though sometimes students are not actively involved in practicing speaking English, teachers always try to facilitate every learning activity that involves students being active in speaking English, such as asking questions in English, singing along with songs in English, and watching videos in English.

A supportive learning environment and teachers who make good use of existing technology and resources to develop students' speaking skills, enable teachers to overcome challenges or obstacles in implementing the Merdeka curriculum in teaching speaking. Based on the results of classroom observations, the teacher has tried his best to use existing technology. This is indicated by the teacher having made several videos

on YouTube about learning English so that students are also able to make good use of existing technology and resources.

Based on the results of research at the Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School, several things were found related to the challenges in teaching English speaking in the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum and how teachers overcome these challenges. According to one of the 11th-grade English teachers who was the subject of this research, the following results were obtained;

1. The Challenges Faced by the Teacher in Teaching Speaking in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum

According to the results of an interview with one of the 11th-grade English teachers, the Merdeka curriculum has been implemented in all classes at Muhamamdiyah 1 Taman Vocational School.

The teacher believes that the Merdeka curriculum influences students' English-speaking abilities. Because with this curriculum, teachers can adapt to students' needs. Teachers also have modules as a guide in teaching. Because the needs of students in each class or each department have different needs, teachers consider that the Merdeka curriculum makes it easier for teachers to modify and adapt their teaching methods according to students' needs. This follows the definition of the Merdeka curriculum, namely a curriculum that provides opportunities for teachers and students to innovate and develop the quality of learning independently (Maulinda, 2022).

The results of observations in class when students make presentations using English, the teacher chooses different presentation materials or themes according to the students' majors. The teacher believes that selecting presentation materials that suit students' majors will enable them to improve their speaking skills. They will implement and convey their knowledge or major background in English.

The challenges faced by the teacher during the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in teaching English speaking are multifaceted, encompassing issues related to module preparation, student participation, and institutional support. In preparing teaching modules, the teacher needs to align the content with the student-centered approach emphasized by the curriculum, which can be time-consuming and complex. Challenges from students include a lack of confidence and hesitation to speak English, which often require additional motivational efforts and innovative teaching methods to overcome. Institutional challenges, such as the unavailability of a dedicated language laboratory, also pose obstacles, necessitating the creative use of alternative resources and infrastructure. Despite these difficulties, the teacher strives to ensure the learning process remains engaging, effective, and aligned with the curriculum's objectives.

Because English is not their mother tongue, some students feel embarrassed and lack confidence when speaking English. The teacher believes that the student can understand their material. However, because they are shy and lack self-confidence, they are often less active or even silent during the learning process. Not only that, the teacher also said that the students did not master vocab so they had difficulty practicing speaking in English.

The importance of teaching modules for guiding teachers during teaching cannot be separated from several challenges when preparing them. The teacher stated that the challenge in preparing teaching modules is that each learning achievement has a different teaching module so it takes quite a long time to prepare the teaching module. However, the results are not as expected because when implementing the Merdeka curriculum in learning to speak English, teachers are still faced with several challenges (Damayanti et al., 2022). When implementing the teaching modules that have been prepared, sometimes some students are not ready to receive learning or carry out the assignments given.

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum also requires institutional support. At Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School provides sufficient support and convenience for implementing the Merdeka curriculum in learning to speak English. This is demonstrated by the availability of several facilities and infrastructure that are quite good for learning to speak English. Based on the results of observations and interviews, Muhammadiyah 1 Taman Vocational School does not yet have a language laboratory. So if students are learning English, they remain in class by utilizing other facilities and infrastructure such as speakers, projectors, or others.

2. How To Overcome The Challenges Of Teaching Speaking In Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum

Just understanding English-speaking material is not enough to enable students to practice it. It requires mastery of vocabulary and self-confidence to practice speaking in English.

The success of the learning process in class, especially speaking learning, cannot be separated from the influence of cognitive factors such as language talent and intelligence, and affective factors such as attitude and motivation (Kusuma & Adnyani, 2016). Therefore, teachers will always try to speak English when learning in class. If it is felt that the students do not understand what the teacher is saying, the teacher will repeat it in Indonesian. This method is believed to be able to improve vocabulary and motivate students to be more confident when speaking English.

Based on interviews with the teacher, the challenges in designing English-speaking teaching modules according to the Merdeka Curriculum can be addressed through a student-centered approach. The teacher explained that speaking materials could be derived from students' experiences and majors, making the content relevant and engaging. This approach allows students to actively contribute to the learning process while enabling the teacher to tailor the modules to meet their specific needs. As a result, the learning becomes contextual, and students are motivated to build their confidence in using English.

The teacher also highlighted the importance of motivation in implementing the speaking modules. In practice, students often lack confidence when speaking English. To address this, the teacher strives to create a supportive environment where students feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of making mistakes. Motivational strategies include interactive discussions, encouraging students to share their

experiences, and revisiting previously learned material. These efforts not only help students become more confident but also foster active class participation.

In addition to the student-centered approach, the teacher creatively addresses the limitations of available facilities, such as the lack of a dedicated language laboratory. By utilizing other laboratories and existing infrastructure like projectors and speakers, the teacher ensures effective learning. Digital tools, including English films and YouTube videos, are also integrated into the teaching process. Students watch, analyze, and discuss the content of these videos or retell the stories in front of the class. This method enhances their speaking skills and introduces variety into the learning process.

Moreover, the teacher incorporates creative activities, such as singing English songs, to help students practice their pronunciation. These activities are designed to make learning more enjoyable and encourage active participation. The songs are selected to align with the learning themes, enriching students' vocabulary while keeping the sessions fun and interactive. Through these varied approaches, the teacher successfully creates engaging and effective lessons, overcoming challenges and achieving the desired learning outcomes of the Merdeka Curriculum.

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation outlined above regarding the challenges in teaching speaking in implementing the Merdeka curriculum, several things can be concluded and derived from 2 research questions about what challenges teachers face in the process of teaching speaking in implementing the Merdeka curriculum and how teachers overcome these challenges. First, students' lack of self-confidence and lack of mastery of vocabulary make students less actively involved or even silent in the process of learning to speak. The lack of a language laboratory is also one of the challenges faced by teachers. Because there is no language laboratory available, sometimes teachers use other laboratories for English language learning.

Second, teachers will always try to provide the best to meet the needs of students. Teachers often provide motivation and facilitate students to be active in speaking English. Teachers will also make classes more interesting by utilizing existing technology. Showing films and singing English songs is a form of teacher effort to make learning more interesting. The unavailability of a language laboratory is not the reason why speaking teaching is hampered in implementing the Merdeka curriculum. Apart from using other laboratories for learning English, institutional support through other facilities and infrastructure such as wifi, speakers, and projectors in each class allows teachers to overcome these challenges.

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