

THE ANALYSIS OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN DEVELOPING READING SKILL OF SEVENTH GRADE IN SMP NEGERI 4 PEMATANG SIANTAR

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in developing reading skills among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pematang Siantar. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through interviews, questionnaires, and documentation involving English teachers and students. The results show that the Merdeka Curriculum provides flexibility for teachers in teaching methods and material selection, fostering student engagement and motivation. However, challenges such as limited reading interest and vocabulary persist. Overall, the curriculum positively impacts students' reading development through contextual and student-centered approaches.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum, Reading Skill, Junior High School, English Education, Qualitative Research.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Background of Research

The Indonesian education system has entered a new era with the introduction of the **Merdeka Curriculum**, a policy designed to provide greater flexibility, autonomy, and contextual relevance in learning. This curriculum emphasizes differentiated instruction and the development of essential competencies such as literacy and numeracy. In the context of English language learning, reading skill is a fundamental component that forms the foundation for other language skills—speaking, listening, and writing. As English continues to be a vital subject taught from junior high school onwards, students are expected to develop not only basic comprehension but also the ability to analyze and reflect critically on texts. However, in practice, many students still encounter significant difficulties in understanding English texts due to limited vocabulary, lack of prior exposure at the elementary level, and ineffective instructional strategies that do not accommodate individual differences in learning pace and style.

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in developing **English reading skills** of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pematang Siantar, a public junior high school that officially began applying the curriculum in the 2022/2023 academic year. Drawing on qualitative data gathered through teacher interviews, student questionnaires, and classroom observations, the research explores how the Merdeka Curriculum is translated into practice, how it impacts student motivation and comprehension, and what challenges educators face in delivering reading instruction. The research is grounded in the belief that a more personalized and student-centered approach to reading can increase student engagement and foster independent learning habits. This paper is expected to contribute to broader discussions on curriculum reform and literacy development in Indonesia, especially in terms of aligning pedagogical innovations with classroom realities.

The Problem of Research

As for the problems contained in the background above, the researcher puts forward the main problem that will be the core of the discussion in this thesis, as follow: “How does the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum in teaching reading skills at SMP Negeri 4 Pematang Siantar?”

The Objective of Research

To analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and evaluate its effectiveness in developing the English reading skills of seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar



II. THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Reading Skill

Reading is a fundamental language skill involving the ability to decode symbols comprehend, and analyze text critically. According to Grabe and Stoller (2020) reading encompasses decoding, comprehension, fluency, and critical thinking. Effective reading allows learners to extract and apply information across academic and real life content.

Several strategies enhance reading skills, including preview, note taking, using context clues, summarizing, and applying critical thinking. These approaches improve engagement and comprehension, especially among language learners. Reading skills also contribute significantly to cognitive development, vocabulary expansion, especially among language learners

Merdeka Curriculum

The Merdeka Curriculum is a flexible and student-centered educational framework introduced in Indonesia to improve learning outcomes post-pandemic. It emphasizes essential competencies, character development, and literacy, while allowing teachers to adapt teaching based on students' needs (Kemdikbudristek, 2022; Makarim, 2021).

In junior high schools, the curriculum encourages differentiated learning and project-based approaches, with a strong focus on literacy. It promotes autonomy in both teaching and learning, aiming to develop 21st-century skills such as critical thinking and collaboration (Kemendikbud, 2021).

Studies show that the Merdeka Curriculum supports deeper student engagement and independence, particularly in reading activities

III. THE METHOD OF RESEARCH

The Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. In this context, the study aimed to explore how the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in the teaching of English reading skills and how it affects students' learning experiences.

The descriptive approach was used to present an accurate, factual, and systematic description of the implementation process. This design allowed the researcher to capture detailed insights from both teachers and students, focusing on their perceptions, challenges, teaching strategies, and the impact of the curriculum on reading skills development.

The study was conducted in a natural setting—SMP Negeri 4 Pematang Siantar—to ensure that the data collected reflected real-world classroom practices and experience

The Location of Research
The location of the will conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Pematangsiantar, Jl. Kartini No.4, Kecamatan Siantar Barat, Pematangsiantar.

Source of the Data

The sources of data in this study consisted of:

1. English Teachers

Three English teachers who taught seventh-grade students and had been trained in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum served as key informants. They provided insights into teaching strategies, curriculum application, and challenges encountered during reading instruction.

2. Seventh-Grade Students (Class VII-3)

One class of seventh-grade students (VII-3) was selected through purposive sampling. These students were actively involved in the English reading program under the Merdeka Curriculum and provided data regarding their experiences, engagement, and perceptions through interviews and questionnaires.

3. Documents and Learning Materials

Supporting data were obtained from curriculum documents, lesson plans, teaching modules, and student worksheets, which helped in analyzing the structure and content of reading instruction under the Merdeka Curriculum.



The Technique of Collecting Data

To obtain comprehensive and valid data, the following techniques were employed:

1. Observation
Classroom observations were conducted during English reading lessons to document teaching practices, student engagement, and classroom interaction under the Merdeka Curriculum.
2. Interviews
Semi-structured interviews were carried out with English teachers and selected students. Teacher interviews explored instructional strategies, curriculum application, and challenges. Student interviews captured learning experiences, reading habits, and perceptions of the new curriculum.
3. Questionnaires
Questionnaires were distributed to the students of class VII-3 to gather quantitative data on their attitudes, reading interest, and experiences with English reading activities.
4. Document Analysis
Relevant documents such as the Merdeka Curriculum guide, lesson plans, reading materials, and students' reading assignments were analyzed to understand how reading instruction was designed and implemented

The Technique of Analyzing Data

The data analysis in this study employed a qualitative thematic analysis approach, supported by basic descriptive statistics for questionnaire data. The steps included:

1. Transcription
Interview data were transcribed verbatim to accurately capture participants' responses.
2. Data Reduction and Coding
Relevant information from interviews, observations, and documents was selected and coded. Similar responses were grouped into categories representing recurring patterns.
3. Theme Development
The categorized data were then interpreted into major themes that aligned with the research objectives, such as curriculum flexibility, student engagement, instructional methods, and reading skill outcomes.
4. Interpretation
The themes were interpreted based on the theoretical framework and compared with findings from previous research. Quotations from teachers and students were included to support the analysis.
5. Descriptive Statistical Analysis
Questionnaire results were processed using simple statistical techniques (frequencies, percentages, and averages) to describe students' perceptions and reading performance.

IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data Analysis

The data analysis focused on exploring how the Merdeka Curriculum influences reading skill development among seventh-grade students. Data were obtained through interviews, questionnaires, and observations involving both teachers and students.

Teacher Data Analysis

Interviews with three English teachers revealed that they had been implementing the Merdeka Curriculum since the 2022/2023 academic year. Teachers emphasized the curriculum's flexibility, which allowed them to adapt materials and methods to students' needs. Common strategies included storytelling, group discussions, and the use of digital media. However, challenges such as students' low reading interest and limited vocabulary were frequently mentioned. Questionnaire data from teachers supported these findings, with 100% agreeing that the curriculum allowed them to apply varied and student-centered approaches. On a Likert scale, the curriculum was rated highly for effectiveness and adaptability.

Student Data Analysis

Student interviews and questionnaires indicated generally positive perceptions. Most students enjoyed reading lessons and felt more confident due to interactive learning methods. Nevertheless, some students still found it difficult to understand texts with complex vocabulary. Reading scores from



28 students averaged 82.64, indicating satisfactory reading performance overall. Questionnaire results showed that:

78% of students agreed or strongly agreed that reading lessons were enjoyable.

100% reported improved confidence in reading under the Merdeka Curriculum.

54% wanted more variation in learning activities beyond reading.

Thematic Findings

From both teacher and student responses, the following themes emerged:

Curriculum Flexibility: Enables personalized and engaging instruction.

Student Engagement: Increased interest and confidence, though independent reading motivation remains a challenge. Instructional Challenges: Teachers face gaps in student abilities and lack of resources.

Assessment Practices: Reading assessments are varied, using both traditional tests and project-based evaluations.

V. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIO

Conclusion

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at SMP Negeri 4 Pematang Siantar has shown a positive impact on the development of reading skills among seventh-grade students. Teachers benefited from the curriculum's flexibility, allowing them to apply varied and student-centered teaching strategies. Students demonstrated increased interest, confidence, and engagement in reading activities, supported by relevant and interactive materials. However, challenges such as limited vocabulary, low reading interest, and uneven reading proficiency among students remain. Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum provides a supportive framework for literacy development when accompanied by adequate resources and teacher readiness.

Suggestion

1. For Teachers:

Continue to innovate with engaging, differentiated reading strategies. Integrate digital and culturally relevant texts to enhance interest and comprehension. Apply formative assessments to address individual student needs.

2. For Schools and Policymakers:

Provide adequate training and resources to support curriculum implementation. Enrich school libraries and ensure access to diverse reading materials. Foster collaboration among teachers, parents, and stakeholders to build a strong reading culture.

3. For Future Researchers:

Conduct classroom-based observations to gain deeper insight into teaching practices. Explore the curriculum's impact on other language skills such as writing or speaking. Compare implementation outcomes across different schools or education levels.

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