

## THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING AT MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH (MTs)

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### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs). The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive. This qualitative research collects data through observation, interviews, and documentation studies. The research objects chosen are that who understand and master the issues being studied. The subjects in this study are English teachers at MTs Rambatan, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatera Province. The Miles and Huberman analysis technique is used through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. This study shows that the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of learning. Unlike the 2013 curriculum, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MTs Rambatan prioritizes the comfort of teachers and students by providing freedom to innovate, express, and be creative in determining active learning activities centered on students. This treatment provides implementation in creating effective learning by involving intensive student participation and appreciation so that educational goals can be achieved.

**Keywords:** Merdeka Curriculum, English, Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs).

### INTRODUCTION

In the current education system in Indonesia, the curriculum used is the "Kurikulum Merdeka" or Independent Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum is an educational concept aimed at giving Madrasah greater freedom in designing the curriculum according to local contexts, students' needs, and the development of the times. This is an effort to reduce the uniformity of the national curriculum and provide greater space for Madrasah to adjust learning to local contexts, students' needs, and global developments.

There have been several studies on Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Madrasah (Akhmadi, 2023; Anas et al., 2023; Arifin & Achadi, 2023; Nabila, 2024; Najmudin & Alami, 2023; Nur & Ahmadi, 2023; Suci uswatun hasanah,

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2022; Wahyudi & Ariyani, 2023; Zakiyah & Achadi, 2022). This research is different from existing studies. It discusses the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language learning at Islamic Junior High School or Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs). The English language learning in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) is in phase D.

Within the Merdeka Curriculum's English learning framework, six distinct phases are outlined, denoted as phase A through phase F (Kemendikbud Ristek, 2022). Phase A is dedicated to introducing English and developing oral communication skills. Phase B shifts focus to spoken English while introducing written language, requiring teachers to emphasize the differences between spoken and written English. Phase C, the final stage for elementary-level learners (SD/MI/Package A program), concentrates on both spoken and written English skills. Moving to phase D (SMP/MTs/Program Package B), the emphasis is on advancing spoken English proficiency and honing writing skills. Phases E and F (SMA/MA/Program Package C), aiming for a CEFR B1 level, concentrate on enhancing both spoken and written English language abilities.

In the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs), the regulations governing this are outlined in Minister of Religious Affairs Decree (KMA) 347 of 2022 concerning guidelines for the implementation of the independent curriculum in Madrasah (Kemenag, 2022). Additionally, it is supported by Chief of BSKAP Decree No. 009/H/KR/2022 of 2022 concerning explanations and stages of development of the Pancasila Student Profile.

With the Merdeka Curriculum, it is hoped that every Madrasah will have greater freedom to determine subjects, teaching methods, and assessments that are in line with the characteristics and needs of students in their environment. This is considered important because each region has different characteristics, cultures, and educational needs. The main goal of the Merdeka Curriculum is to improve the quality of education by considering the diversity and specific needs of students. By providing flexibility in designing the curriculum, it is hoped that a more relevant, engaging, and locally realistic learning environment will be created for students. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs).

## **METHOD**

The method used in this research is qualitative descriptive. Qualitative descriptive research is a method used to describe the characteristics, meaning, and properties of a phenomenon or a group of individuals. It aims to provide a comprehensive summary of events or experiences in everyday terms, without the need for complex statistical techniques (A. Kusumastuti and A Mustamil Khoiron, 2019; S Siyoto and M Ali Sodik, 2015; Sholahuddin, 2021; Sugiyono, 2013; Suliswiyadi, 2019; Widodo, 2021). This approach is particularly useful when researcher want to

gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Qualitative descriptive research can provide rich, detailed descriptions that can help inform practice, policy, or further research in a particular field.

The research objects chosen are individuals who understand and master the issues being studied. The subjects in this study are English teachers at MTs Rambatan, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra Province. Data collection in this study uses observation, interviews, and documentation studies. The Miles and Huberman analysis technique is used through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994b, 1994a). This analysis process provides in-depth insights into the research findings and ensures the reliability of this qualitative research results.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The data from this study indicates that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language learning at MTs Rambatan, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra Province was carried out in all learning sessions. This section will describe the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages.

### **1. Planning the Merdeka Curriculum for English Language Teaching at MTs Rambatan, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra Province.**

The activities carried out by teachers for planning English language Teaching at MTs Rambatan include studying the Merdeka Belajar platform, attending socialization events held by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, participating in training sessions organized by the Madrasah Head Working Group (K3MTs) of Tanah Datar Regency, attending training sessions attended by all teachers at MTs Rambatan, and seeking information about the Merdeka Curriculum. After completing these activities to support the improvement of teachers' competencies in mastering the concepts of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers prepare documents that serve as guidelines in planning the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, including the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM), Learning Objective Flow (ATP), and Teaching Modules.

The development of the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM) is based on the education unit curriculum provided by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. In developing the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM), it is necessary to consider several important elements, including the characteristics of the school, the Madrasah's vision, mission, goals, lesson planning, evaluation, and professional development.

Next, the planning involves preparing the Learning Objective Flow (ATP) to establish the learning objectives from the beginning to the end of each phase D of English Language Learning Achievement (CP) at the end of each phase. The

Learning Objectives (TP) for English are arranged chronologically based on the sequence of learning taught at each meeting. The steps taken in forming the Learning Objective Flow (ATP) are to dissect the existing Learning Achievement (CP) documents in the standard body, curriculum, and educational assessment, and then breakdown the Learning Achievement (CP) into competencies applied in learning according to the needs of the students. After that, based on the created Learning Objective Flow (ATP), teachers design learning activities and assessments that are applied.

Based on interviews and field observations, English teachers at MTs Rambatan do not independently develop the Learning Objective Flow (ATP), but instead use and modify example teaching modules provided by the government on the Merdeka Mengajar Platform (PMM) of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek). In planning English language learning at MTs Rambatan, teachers also develop teaching modules as a form of teaching aids used as the main source of teaching to achieve Learning Achievement (CP). The teaching module is one of the learning tools used as a guide with the aim of achieving the set goals. The teaching module not only contains learning objectives but is also equipped with the media used, including the assessment instruments.

## 2. Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English Language Learning at MTs Rambatan, Tanah Datar Regency, West Sumatra Province.

The implementation of English language learning at MTs Rambatan refers to the teaching modules prepared by teachers. The observation results show that the English teaching process in the classroom is carried out in three stages: introduction activities, Core activities, and assessment activities. The stages of the teaching process are in accordance with the teaching module documents prepared by the English language teachers.

### a. Introduction Activities

Based on field observations and interviews during English teaching, in the introduction activities, teachers prepare students as the initial step. This preparation includes greetings, prayers, checking student attendance, and providing motivation. Furthermore, teachers conduct a flashback by asking stimulus questions. These questions aim to test students' understanding of the previously learned material. Teachers also convey the learning objectives and benefits of learning about the topic to be taught. Additionally, teachers explain the topic and learning material that will be covered by the students. During the introduction activities, teachers also prepare everything related to the learning process. This includes providing learning resources and

creating a comfortable learning environment for students. Teachers explain the outline of the material to be learned and the learning steps.

Based on the data obtained, teachers in the English language subject also include diagnostic assessments in their teaching modules, and this is applied at the beginning of the learning process. Teachers use various assessment instruments such as written/oral tests, skill assessments, or observations. The application of diagnostic assessment before learning has its own urgency. By using diagnostic assessments, teachers can determine the level of students' readiness to learn.

At the beginning of the academic year, especially during the Madrasah Student Introduction Period (Matsama), teachers conduct diagnostic assessments. This aims to gather information about students' preferences in learning, their expectations of learning, talents and interests, as well as other questions. Through this diagnostic assessment, teachers seek to understand students' abilities and weaknesses, and to identify their needs in order to adjust the teaching methods used.

b. Core Activities

In the core activities, the teacher explains the competencies to be learned and connects them with the material previously learned by the students. Students are also actively involved in understanding, interpreting, and providing examples related to the material, as well as engaging in problem-solving processes. They are motivated and guided to observe, read, and write back related information. Students are provided with visual aids and relevant reading materials related to the material. The teacher provides examples that relate the material to real-life situations so that students can easily understand it and achieve the learning objectives. The teacher and students draw conclusions about what they have learned. Then, students are given the opportunity to ask questions about things they do not yet understand.

Based on field observations and interviews, teachers explain the competencies to be learned using various methods, combining lecture methods with other methods such as point-counterpoint, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), and question-and-answer methods, according to the students' conditions, providing differential learning treatment or different treatment to students with different learning styles and connecting them with the previous material. At this stage, the teacher explains the material to the students and gives them the opportunity to ask questions.

During the learning process, there are also activities related to the implementation of the Strengthening Project for Pancasila Student Profiles (P5) and the Rahmatan Lil'alamin Student Profile (PPRA), which are character targets that must be mastered after the learning process. Based on the Strengthening Project Guidelines for Pancasila Student Profiles in Primary and Secondary Education Levels (SD/MI, SMP/MTs, SMA/MA), published by the Curriculum and Assessment Standards Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (Kemendikbudristek RI), the Pancasila Student Profile is the embodiment of Indonesian students who are lifelong learners who are competent, have character, and behave according to the values of Pancasila.

The Strengthening Project for Pancasila Student Profiles (P5) is a project-based extracurricular activity designed to strengthen efforts to achieve competencies and characters according to the Pancasila Student Profile developed based on the Graduation Competency Standards (SKL). Its implementation is flexible in terms of content, activities, and time, and can be designed separately or integrated with intracurricular learning. Within the scope of madrasahs under the Ministry of Religious Affairs, there is an addition, namely the Rahmatan Lil'Alamin Student Profile. This project can be implemented concurrently and integrated with the Strengthening Project for Pancasila Student Profiles (P5), which becomes P5 PPRA. During field observations and interviews, in English language teaching at MTs Rambatan, these dimensions and values have been applied. In English language teaching, the Pancasila Student Profile as a character target that students must have is applied through the content/material and teaching methods.

c. Assessment Activities

In the assessment activities, the teacher asks students to summarize their learning and conduct assessment. Assessment is a tool used by teachers to measure the level of understanding of the material. English language teachers at MTs Rambatan assess to measure the extent to which students have learned. They conduct formative assessments during the learning process. These assessments are used to measure students' understanding and the achievement of learning objectives. In formative assessment, teachers measure students' knowledge and skills using oral/written test instruments. For the implementation of summative assessment at MTs Rambatan, it includes Mid-Semester Summative (STS), End-Semester Summative (SAS), and End-Year Summative (SAT) assessments using Computer Based Tests (CBT) conducted online in the classroom.

Summative assessment aims to provide a comprehensive overview of students' achievements and to make evaluative decisions regarding their progress in the English language subject. In the learning process, before the lesson is concluded, the teacher provides material or reading material for the students for the next meeting. This allows students to read, study, and prepare for the next meeting. The lesson concludes with a prayer together and ends with a greeting to conclude the learning session

Based on the description above, the English language learning process is conducted in three stages: pre-teaching activities, whilst-teaching activities, and assessment activities. The learning process is student-centered, optimizing the active role of students in learning. The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum can be carried out according to the existing conditions by providing teachers with the freedom to innovate and create in developing learning activities according to the situation, needs, or conditions of the students. This is in line with the main characteristic of Merdeka Belajar-based learning, which is a more flexible learning and assessment process. After the researcher conducted an analysis, it was found that not all learning processes were in accordance with the lesson plans. Some methods were not implemented, and there were developments by adding methods or materials, or reducing materials as planned according to the time and conditions. This discrepancy is caused by several factors, including limited time in preparing lesson plans, teachers' unpreparedness in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, the lack of available learning media, and the diverse characteristics and conditions of students.

3. Evaluation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in English Lessons at MTs Rambatan, Tanah Datar District, West Sumatra Province.

Evaluation in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English lessons is the final part of the learning system. Evaluation aims not only to assess the success of students in the learning process but also to provide feedback to teachers regarding their teaching performance. Evaluation provides an overview of students' understanding, skills, and their ability to apply what they have learned. Additionally, evaluation allows teachers to understand the effectiveness of the teaching methods, strategies, and learning resources used, as well as to identify areas for improvement. Through evaluation, we can identify weaknesses in the use of various learning components. Evaluation of the Merdeka curriculum plays a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of the learning process, providing constructive feedback, and aiding in continuous improvement.

Evaluation in English learning includes formative and summative assessments. Formative assessment aims to provide information and feedback to students and is used by teachers to monitor the learning progress of students. Meanwhile, summative assessment is conducted by English teachers using various forms of assessment, such as oral tests, performance/projects in the form of project assignments and group presentations, as well as written tests.

In this study, it was found that the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at MTs Rambatan has been quite successful. In English learning, the Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran (ATP) or Learning Objective Flow has been used as a series of learning objectives to achieve the expected competencies in learning. In the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, various diverse learning methods are used according to the teaching material, including lecture methods, Focus Group Discussions (FGD), discovery learning, Project-Based Learning (PjBL), Problem-Based Learning (PBL), and Inquiry Learning.

Special attention to the professionalism of English teachers at the Tsanawiyah level is important. In this position, an educator must have special skills in delivering learning material. Therefore, an educator needs the ability to plan, implement, and evaluate learning effectively. In terms of facilities, they are still relatively limited as LCD projectors are not yet available in all classrooms. However, there are several other supporting facilities that are adequate, such as computer rooms, prayer rooms, libraries, and wifi connections. This facilitates the process of delivering learning material and searching for related information. After the researcher conducted an analysis, it was found that the management of curriculum implementation needs to be improved in several aspects, such as setting implementation targets, providing educational facilities, training, implementation, mentoring, as well as evaluating their successes and failures. Because learning in the context of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum is not only about transferring materials but also needs to emphasize essential content by encouraging students to develop a culture of literacy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at MTs Rambatan is quite successful. The Merdeka Curriculum in English lessons at MTs Rambatan is implemented by 1) studying the Merdeka platform, participating in socialization held by the Ministry of Religious Affairs, attending training from the Working Group of Madrasah Principals (K3MTs) in Tanah Datar District, then participating in training attended by all teachers at MTs Rambatan, and seeking information about the Merdeka curriculum; 2) preparing learning

materials such as the Madrasah Operational Curriculum (KOM), Learning Objective Flow (ATP), and teaching modules; 3) conducting English language learning in three stages, namely pre-teaching activities, whilst-teaching activities, and assessment activities as outlined in the prepared English teacher modules; 4) evaluating the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in English lessons by conducting diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments. The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in the planning, implementation, and evaluation stages of learning.

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