

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE IMPACT OF *KURIKULUM MERDEKA* IMPLEMENTATION ON THEIR LEARNING ENGLISH INTEREST

Diana Makrifah¹, Putri Dini Meutia², Ugahara³

English Language Education Department, Universitas Abulyatama, Aceh, Indonesia.

dianammakrifah31@gmail

Abstract: This study aims to determine students' perceptions of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and its impact on interest in learning English. This research was conducted at SMAN 1 Indrapuri, which has implemented the *Kurikulum Merdeka* for four years. This study used a descriptive qualitative method, with data collection through in-depth interviews with eight tenth-grade students selected purposively based on their highest and lowest grades in English. The results showed that most students responded positively to the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. They felt that learning English was more enjoyable, interactive, and less boring, especially due to the varied learning methods, such as group discussions, presentations, the use of video media, quizzes, and project assignments. Some students also experienced improvements in their speaking skills, vocabulary, and confidence in using English. However, some students still experienced difficulties, particularly in understanding the material and speaking up, due to low self confidence. Overall the *Kurikulum Merdeka* had a positive impact on students' interest in learning and improving their English skills, although its success still depended on teacher support, an adaptive approach, and attention to each student's emotional and academic needs.

Keywords: Students' perception, *Kurikulum Merdeka*, learning English interest.

1. Introduction

Education is an essential foundation for shaping students' character and competencies. In Indonesia, curriculum changes are frequently made to adapt to the demands of the times, including technological advancements and global competition (Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021). One of the most recent reforms is the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which emphasizes student-centered learning and flexibility for teachers in selecting teaching materials (Yunaini, 2022). This curriculum integrates Project Based Learning to strengthen the values of the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* (Dwiningrum et al., 2022). It focuses on essential competencies, encourages creativity, and allows the use of varied, contextual, and interactive teaching methods that are expected to improve students' engagement and interest in learning English (Rahmadani & Sulastri, 2023).

This research was conducted at SMAN 1 Indrapuri, a school that has implemented the *Kurikulum Merdeka* for four years. The school was selected because it has a diverse range of students' English proficiency levels, from the highest to the lowest scores, and consistently applies varied learning methods such as group discussions, presentations, and digital media. These factors make it an ideal setting to explore students' perceptions of the impact *Kurikulum Merdeka* on their learning English interest. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to find out students' perceptions of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* on their learning English interest and to find out its effects on enhancing their English skills.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Kurikulum Merdeka*

The *Kurikulum Merdeka* is an educational policy designed to provide students with the freedom to learn and teachers with flexibility in designing lessons (Yunaini, 2022). This curriculum aims to develop essential competencies, foster creativity, and allow schools to

adapt learning materials to the local context. By emphasizing Project Based Learning, students are encouraged to actively search for, process, and present information independently or collaboratively (Dwiningrum et al., 2022). This model is expected to create a more interactive learning atmosphere and make lessons more relevant to students' daily lives.

In addition, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is characterized by simplified content, flexible learning, and a focus on strengthening the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*. These characteristics enable teachers to focus more on in-depth concept mastery rather than merely covering the syllabus (Zainuri, 2023). This differs from previous curriculum that tended to be overloaded with material and demanded uniform academic achievements. Through this approach, students can develop their talents and interests more optimally according to their individual potential (Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021).

2.2 Student Learning Interest

Learning interest is defined as an internal drive that motivates students to actively participate in the learning process (Ahmadi, 2021). It consists of emotional, cognitive, and conative components that together shape students' attitudes toward learning. Emotional components include feelings of enjoyment, enthusiasm, and satisfaction when engaging in learning activities, while cognitive components involve the awareness and understanding of the importance of learning. Conative components refer to the willingness and determination to persist in learning despite challenges. Internal factors such as concentration, curiosity, and motivation play a major role in strengthening this interest, as students who are able to focus and maintain curiosity tend to engage more deeply with the material. Conversely, a lack of interest often results in boredom, procrastination, and minimal engagement in classroom activities (Nurhasanah & Sobandi, 2016).

In addition to internal aspects, external factors also contribute significantly to shaping learning interest. These include teaching methods, the classroom atmosphere, family support, and the broader social environment (Syamsul, 2017). A supportive and engaging learning environment helps students feel more comfortable expressing their ideas and participating in activities. Teachers who employ interactive strategies such as discussions, group work, and media rich lessons can capture students' attention more effectively and sustain their motivation throughout the learning process. Furthermore, a positive classroom climate, where students feel respected and valued, can encourage consistent participation. Therefore, creating a conducive and enjoyable learning environment is not only beneficial but also essential for fostering sustained learning interest among students (Wulan & Meitasari, 2023).

3. Method

The research method used in this research is descriptive qualitative research, which aims to explore the perceptions of tenth-grade students at SMAN 1 Indrapuri regarding the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in English language learning. The sample consisted of eight students who were selected purposively based on their highest and lowest scores in English. Data were collected through semi structured interviews containing five open ended questions, conducted in person over five days, with each interview lasting approximately 10-15 minutes and recorded with the respondents' permission. The interview data were then transcribed and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman technique, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion.

4. Findings

The Implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in English Class

The interview results indicate that most students responded positively to the implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka* in English classes at SMAN 1 Indrapuri. They reported

that the learning process has become more engaging, interactive, and less monotonous. Activities such as group discussions, presentations, creative projects, and the use of media like videos and quizzes were cited as factors that increased their participation and interest. However, a few students expressed neutral or limited enthusiasm, often due to internal factors such as a lack of interest in English or low self confidence in speaking. Nonetheless, they acknowledged that the learning environment under *Kurikulum Merdeka* was more dynamic and inclusive compared to the previous approach.

The Ease or Difficulty of Learning English through *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Most students stated that learning English became easier after the curriculum was implemented. Methods such as video-based learning, peer discussions, and Project Based Learning provided gradual and contextual learning experiences. These approaches helped students better comprehend the material, especially for those who previously struggled or lacked confidence. Even students with initially low interest in English reported improved comfort and understanding due to the interactive and student-centered learning environment.

The Enhancement of English Skills through *Kurikulum Merdeka*

The curriculum positively impacted students' English skills, particularly in speaking, vocabulary, and listening. Flexible and varied teaching methods such as video analysis, group work, and collaborative projects enabled students to build their language proficiency step by step. These methods facilitated a shift from rote memorization to practical application in real contexts. Improvement was noted even among less confident students, largely due to the supportive role of the teachers who provided gradual explanations and fostered a discussion-friendly classroom environment.

Challenges and Motivation in Project Based Learning

While Project Based Learning under *Kurikulum Merdeka* presented new challenges, it also served as a strong motivator for students. Tasks required higher levels of collaboration, creativity, and responsibility. Most students found that working in groups made these challenges more manageable and enjoyable. Students felt a sense of accomplishment and pride after completing their projects, which encouraged them to become more engaged even if they initially lacked confidence or English skills. Although a few students preferred individual tasks, they still recognized the value of group projects in enhancing their communication and teamwork abilities.

The Influence of Media and Teaching Methods on Students' Enthusiasm

Teaching media and instructional strategies played a crucial role in boosting students' enthusiasm for English. Teachers were given the freedom to tailor lessons using videos, quizzes, games, and group activities resulting in a more dynamic and student friendly environment. All students agreed that varied and interactive methods helped maintain their attention and interest. Even those with low motivation or limited support outside of school responded positively when the materials were presented through engaging media and collaborative learning techniques

5. Discussion

Students' Perceptions of the Implementation of *Kurikulum Merdeka*

Students' perceptions of the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* at SMAN 1 Indrapuri show a significant increase in interest in learning English. Student centered, interactive, and contextual learning methods such as group discussions, presentations, creative assignments, and the use of digital media such as videos and quizzes have been proven to increase student engagement (Wulan & Meitasari, 2023). The flexibility of the curriculum facilitates various approaches that suit students' learning needs. However, some students

experience limited interest due to internal factors such as low self confidence and learning style incompatibility, making a supportive and empathetic approach important to motivate students (Rambe & Suganda, 2023). This curriculum has succeeded in creating a more dynamic and inclusive learning environment.

The Effects of *Kurikulum Merdeka* on Students' English Skills

In addition to increasing interest, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* has a positive impact on the development of students' English skills, especially in speaking, vocabulary, and listening. Varied and flexible learning methods, including Project Based Learning, help students practice the language in real-life situations and develop social and problem-solving skills (Oktavia et al., 2023). Psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence remain obstacles for some students, making the role of teachers very important in creating a safe learning environment that supports student progress.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* in English language learning at SMAN 1 Indrapuri has had a positive impact on students' interest in learning and improvement of their English language skills. Varied and student centered learning methods, such as group discussions, presentations, video media, quizzes, and project assignments, make the learning process more enjoyable, interactive, and less monotonous. However, the success of this curriculum implementation is highly dependent on teacher support, an adaptive approach to students' emotional and academic needs, and consistency in applying learning methods that actively involve students. Some students still experience difficulties, especially in terms of confidence and understanding of the material, so special attention is needed to support their development.

The recommendations proposed are the need for continuous training for teachers to develop interactive learning methods, the use of varied learning media, and a differentiated approach that adapts to the character and abilities of individual students. Thus, the *Kurikulum Merdeka* can be optimized to improve English learning achievement and interest more evenly.

Reference

- [1] Ananda A, Hudaiah. Perkembangan Kurikulum Pendidikan Indonesia dari Masa ke Masa. *Jurnal Pendidikan Sejarah dan Kajian Sejarah*. 2021;3(2):102-8.
- [2] Yunaini. Inovasi guru dalam penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka. *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan*. 2022;4(3):80-9.
- [3] Dwiningrum NR, Widagda MEP, Aditya AW. Profil pelajar Pancasila pada Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar. *Jurnal Pendidikan*. 2022;2:232-41.
- [4] Rahmadani S, Sulastri R. Penerapan Model Project-Based Learning dalam Kurikulum Merdeka untuk Meningkatkan Kemandirian Belajar Siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan Matematika*. 2023;7(1):101-8.
- [5] Zainuri A. Manajemen Kurikulum Merdeka. Jakarta: Penerbit Buku Literasiologi; 2023
- [6] Ahmadi A. Psikologi Pendidikan. *Jurnal Psikologi Islam*. 2021;5(2):141-53.
- [7] Nurhasanah N, Sobandi A. Pengaruh Minat Belajar terhadap Hasil Belajar Siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan*. 2016;4(2):6-12.
- [8] Syamsul S. Peran Guru dalam Meningkatkan Minat Belajar Siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*. 2017;4(1):33-41.
- [9] Wulan RK, Meitasari A. Minat belajar siswa dalam pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris berbasis Kurikulum Merdeka. *Jurnal Bahasa dan Sastra*. 2023;5(1):22-30.
- [10] Rambe F, Suganda D. Pendekatan guru dalam meningkatkan motivasi belajar siswa. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*. 2023;12(3):230-41.
- [11] Oktavia D, Habibah N, Balti L, Kurniawan R. Kurikulum Merdeka dan Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di Sekolah Dasar: Need Analysis Study. *Jurnal Muara Pendidikan*. 2023;8(1):257-65.