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## An Analysis of Teacher Obstacles in Teaching English at Vocational High School Regarding the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

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**abstrak**—Kurikulum Merdeka adalah kurikulum yang membebaskan guru untuk memilih metode pembelajaran. Kurikulum Merdeka mendorong guru untuk menjadi fasilitator agar pembelajaran berpusat pada siswa dengan menerapkan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi. Namun, di dalam kelas, guru masih merasa kesulitan dalam menerapkan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi ditambah dengan sulitnya menyesuaikan dengan materi kejuruan siswa. Maka dalam penelitian ini, peneliti akan mencari apa saja hambatan dan bagaimana cara mengatasi hambatan yang dialami dalam mengajar bahasa Inggris oleh guru di SMKN Trucuk. Melalui penelitian ini, guru-guru bahasa Inggris di SMK lain dapat menambah referensi dan bahkan membantu menyelesaikan kendala yang dialami. Penelitian ini bersifat kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara dan dokumentasi dengan guru bahasa Inggris di SMKN Trucuk. Hasil dari penelitian ini adalah selain kesulitan dalam menerapkan pembelajaran berdiferensiasi, guru juga mengalami kesulitan dalam mengatur waktu dimana siswa lebih diprioritaskan untuk belajar keterampilan kejuruan dibandingkan dengan mata pelajaran lain seperti bahasa Inggris.

**Kata kunci**— Hambatan dalam Mengajar Bahasa Inggris, Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan, Kurikulum Merdeka

**Abstract**—Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum that frees teachers to choose teaching methods. Merdeka curriculum encourages teachers to be facilitators so that learning is student-centered by implementing differentiated learning. However, in the classroom, teachers still find it difficult to implement differentiated learning coupled with the difficulty of adjusting to students' vocational materials. So in this study, the researcher will look for what are the barriers and how to overcome the barriers experienced by English teachers in teaching English at SMKN Trucuk. Through this research, English teachers in other vocational schools can add references and even help solve the obstacles experienced. This research was qualitative with a case study approach. The data collected by observation, interview and documentation with English teachers at SMKN Trucuk. The result of this study is that in addition to difficulties in implementing differentiated learning, teachers also have difficulties in managing time where students are prioritized to learn vocational skills compared to other subjects such as English.

**Keywords**— Obstacles in Teaching English, Vocational High School, Merdeka Curriculum

## INTRODUCTION

Merdeka Curriculum is the latest curriculum tool in Indonesia that has been launched by Kemendikbud Ristek RI in February 2022. Merdeka curriculum allows teachers and students to innovate and improve the quality of learning so that the potential of teachers and students can be seen (Fatmasari et al., 2024). Merdeka curriculum contains a set of plans and arrangements related to learning materials, objectives, and content. Merdeka curriculum which is a new curriculum has several characteristics, namely: 1) Profil Pelajar Pancasila as character development and project-based soft skills; 2) Deepening basic competencies such as literacy and numeracy by focusing on essential material; 3) Differentiated learning adjusts the context and local content so that teachers have the opportunity to implement learning flexibly. Based on this, it can be concluded that Merdeka curriculum focuses on essential materials, character development, and learner competencies (Wiguna & Trisnangrat, 2022). Through such characteristics, Merdeka curriculum has been implemented at the primary and secondary education levels, especially in vocational high schools.

Vocational High School (VHS) is school which are prepared the graduates to become experts who can compete internationally. Therefore, students must be able to communicate in English to fulfill the objectives of the VHS (Mulyah & Aminatun, 2020). English learning at VHS is implementing the Merdeka curriculum since 2022 until now. Through this implementation, teachers must understand how the new scheme in Merdeka curriculum. Implementation in teaching English with Merdeka curriculum at VHS have some differences with 2013 curriculum. In the 2013 curriculum, which used to have basic competencies (KD), it has now changed to competency achievements which are written from several paragraph sentences (Rindayati et al., 2022). Afterwards, the curriculum structure which previously consisted of intracurricular and extracurricular activities is now added to the application Profil Pelajar Pancasila. After that, in the 2013 curriculum, lesson hours are arranged weekly while in the Merdeka curriculum they are set annually (Nugroho & Narawaty, 2022). In addition to some changed terms and learning hours, in the 2013 Curriculum, teachers involve a logical methodology for all subjects. Meanwhile, in the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers use a differentiated approach that suits students' capacities. In terms of evaluation in terms of assessment, in the 2013 curriculum, grades are taken from developmental assessments and summative assessments. Meanwhile, in Merdeka curriculum, developmental assessment and summative assessment are reflections to shape students' understanding according to their capacity (Rohimajaya et al., 2022).

From some of the differences between the Merdeka curriculum and the 2013 curriculum, it can be concluded that some things are more simplified. There are already guidelines which help teachers to make learning fun. In teaching English, teachers can determine topics and materials, provide direction, give and receive responses, determine who contributes to teaching and learning activities, provide feedback to students, and so on in teaching. Through this process, students are expected to get effective results (Rohmah, 2017). In addition, teachers should also use technology and help students utilize technology as a form of digital literacy. By

utilizing technology, students will find it easier to gather information and can keep updated on the latest things related to knowledge. To do all this, teachers must have in-depth knowledge of the material and be able to customize teaching methods that are appropriate for students. Through that, teachers can create appropriate syllabus, modules and lesson plans then students can achieve maximum learning outcomes (Muslim & Sumarni, 2023).

Based on the phenomenon above, the researcher is particularly interested in examining the obstacles faced by English teacher and how teacher overcome these obstacles at SMK Negeri Trucuk. SMK Negeri Trucuk is a school that has implemented the Merdeka curriculum for 3 years since February 2022. SMKN Trucuk is a school with five majors. One of the majors is Visual Communication Design which has a vision and mission of being able to communicate with customers using English. Based on pre-interview with the English teacher at SMKN Trucuk there are several obstacles in teaching English with the Merdeka curriculum. One of the obstacles teacher experiences is the practice of differentiated learning, students have difficulty recognizing their way of learning. Teacher faced with challenges that hinder learning, such as difficulties in identifying students' learning styles and students' dependence on translators. In addition, English learning at SMKN Trucuk uses English in general rather than specifically. This is due to the condition of the school, which is in the rural area, therefore it is not possible to teach English specifically.

There are several previous studies, one of which is research by Toyibah et al. (2024). Toyibah et al. describe about challenges and solutions in learning English at VHS in Karanglewas in the implementation of Merdeka curriculum. in this study, researchers looked for difficulties in implementing English learning but focused on learning. While in this study, researchers will look for difficulties in teaching, which means difficulties ranging from planning, implementation, and also evaluation.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research was qualitative research with a case study approach. Cresswell in the Case Study Method in Assyakurrohim et al. (2022) states that a case study is research in which the researcher explores a particular phenomenon (case) in a time and activity (program, event, process, institution or social group) and collects detailed and in-depth information using various data collection procedures over a certain period. The data was collected by using observation, interview, and documentation with English teacher at SMKN Trucuk. This research using non-participant observation, semi-structured interviews and documentation. In order to support the results of the research, the researcher also interviewed the deputy head of the curriculum of SMKN Trucuk. The interview conducted was a semi-structured interview to explore teacher obstacles in teaching by implementing Merdeka Curriculum.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation that have been carried out, it can be analyzed that teachers' obstacles in teaching English at SMK based on the Merdeka Curriculum can be categorized into several main aspects. The first is adjusting to the new paradigm. The teacher cannot use old-fashioned teaching styles and must keep up with changing times. Paradigm related to teacher-centered

learning is changed into student-centered learning. Second, in making lesson plans, teachers must have a plan before giving lessons to students starting from preparation, implementation, and closing (Fitrianingsih, 2017). During preparation, teacher has difficulty breaking down learning outcomes (CP) into learning objectives. Learning outcomes (CP) are the basis for designing the flow of learning objectives that must be made relevant to the needs of vocational students. Therefore, teachers have difficulty in making learning objectives.

The third, schools have limited resources, both teaching materials in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum and learning support infrastructure. The existence of adequate resources and schools will produce good outputs and graduates (Saufi & Hambali, 2019). The unavailability of a language laboratory, textbooks that are not in accordance with vocational majors or the same as school textbooks in general so that teachers have to compile their own teaching materials. In addition, the use of technology is still not optimal, stable internet access, and technology devices are not sufficient to support interactive and technology-based learning.

The fourth is related to student motivation, teaching English in VHS, where students are more focused on vocational material so it is difficult to build student enthusiasm. Teacher must pay attention to student learning motivation to support the achievement of optimal learning outcomes (Hamidah & Oktaviani, 2023). However, teachers must continue to support and motivate students that English is important to learn as a provision in the industrial world later. Due to the lack of motivation to learn, teaching English in the classroom also experienced some difficulties. To learn speaking, students have difficulty pronouncing and understanding English speech so the teacher must provide direct translation. In learning writing, the teacher considers that students lack vocabulary so it is difficult to create original writing. Furthermore, in teaching listening, the school does not have a special language laboratory so the teacher has to make use of makeshift resources. While in reading, students also lack vocab and are difficult to pronounce. This makes it difficult for teachers to teach ideally and ultimately affects student intakes, which still do not include standardized knowledge.

Fifth, teachers experienced some problems in preparing assessments. In the Merdeka curriculum, there are diagnostic, formative and summative assessments. In the diagnostic assessment, which is the benchmark for implementing differentiated learning, teachers have difficulty determining students' learning styles. Because differentiated learning is learning for students to learn according to their learning styles which can be visual, auditory, and kinesthetic, groups will be made according to the abilities and interests of students (Leksono et al., 2024). However, students themselves still have difficulty in determining the learning style that they are capable of and interested in. Therefore, teachers also find it difficult to make appropriate planning and can be less precise in teaching. Furthermore, there is formative assessment, formative assessment aims to inform or provide feedback for teachers and students to enhance the teaching and learning process (Nasution, 2023). Because the Merdeka curriculum is more focused on assessing the process, formative assessment must be done well. However, students often forget about the material that has just been delivered. Next, there is summative assessment, an assessment carried out at the end, teachers face challenges by adjusting the learning objectives at the beginning.

Thus, every time a summative assessment is made, the teacher must reconsider the learning objectives at the beginning.

Sixth, the lack of learning time, because vocational students focus more on skills, English teachers are also lacking in lesson time. There is limited time allocated for English subjects at VHS (Safira & Azzahra, 2022). Duration and time are not right because students are more concerned with skills. Ineffective learning time such as before a break of 1 lesson hour and after a break of 1 lesson hour, because separate tends to cut time for breaks. because the time is cut, the material cannot be conveyed properly. Teaching English by students is less than optimal.

However, in facing these challenges, teachers have a way to deal with them. First, in adjusting to the new paradigm, teachers are given socialization and research, after which teachers must continue to learn to apply innovative ways and adapt to the new curriculum, learning must be student centered. For example, students are asked to find their own material or information via the internet. Second, the difficulty of breaking down the CP to the TP, then the school facilitates MGMPs or school subject teacher meetings. Through this, teachers can harmonize between TP at school.

Third, lack of resources and utilization of technology. Another way to increase student learning motivation is by providing innovative teaching materials (Hasanudin & Fitrianiingsih, 2018). Using technology is the best way to adapt to today's world but to overcome the unavailability of language laboratories, teachers carry out learning in the classroom utilizing students' cell phones. If there are network problems, the initiative teacher provides tethering so that learning runs smoothly. Also, the English textbook at school is the same as the school book at its level so teachers have to compile their own jar material according to students' skills or majors. Teachers must learn to understand student skills and make contextualized material. In teaching speaking, the teacher applies fiftyfifty which does not use full English which later students do not understand the language used. so the teacher gives a translation to the language used in class. Because of the lack of vocab in writing and reading, the teacher allows students to use AI but only to find out. For listening, teachers can utilize youtube and ask students to present the results.

Fifth, in preparing assessments, starting from diagnostic assessments, teachers apply learning by doing. so it is not too rigid on the assessment results at the beginning. applying learning with the same input and different outputs. For example descriptive material, then students are given the freedom to create descriptive text in the form of handwork, posters, videos according to student learning interests. The sixth, because of the inefficient duration, the teacher prioritizes or prioritizes material that has never been obtained at the previous level. if it has been, it will be shortened and add hours to the material that has never been delivered.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation above, there are several obstacles faced by teachers, namely adjusting to the new paradigm, teachers have difficulty translating learning outcomes (CP) into learning objectives, limited resources, both teaching materials in line with the Merdeka Curriculum and infrastructure supporting learning, students

have a lack of learning motivation, difficulty to implement differentiated learning, and lack of proper duration and time for teaching.

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