

CHAPTER I

Introduction

This section covers several components of the research, including: Background of study, Scope and limitation of the study, Research Question, Purpose of the study, and Significance of study.

A. Background of Study

Educators must be familiar with current curriculum policies to effectively perform their main duties as educators. Therefore, this study examines how teachers perceive the new curriculum at the vocational high school level. This *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is considered more accessible and comprehensive, as it focuses on only the essentials and develops students' competencies in phases; in terms of teaching, teachers will provide instruction according to each student's level of achievement (KEMENDIKBUD, 2021). Based on the *Merdeka* curriculum concept, teachers are given the freedom and actualization to apply the national curriculum to their school's resources in teaching and learning activities (Prakoso et al., 2021). This concept is not much different from the concept possessed by the previous curriculum, namely the 2013 curriculum, which also provides an excellent opportunity for teachers to expert in finding resources (Maba, 2017). Considering that the *Merdeka* curriculum is a simplified version of the 2013 curriculum. It is not surprising that there are not many differences between the two. So, the teacher's perception of this curriculum is fascinating to study further. For this reason, a teacher's understanding of this curriculum needs to be investigated to determine how far their understanding extends.

The previous curriculum was the 2013 curriculum; it was designed to give teachers an excellent opportunity to explore a wide range of material (Maba, 2017). The 2013 curriculum allows teachers to develop the material being taught. On the other hand, in the *Merdeka* curriculum students are given the freedom to explore learning materials from various sources to implement the local wisdom-based learning process and optimize school resources (Prakoso et al., 2021). This is considered appropriate because the

Merdeka curriculum is viewed as curriculum that gives teachers the freedom to explore the best way to learn. Furthermore, learning freedom permits the teacher to experiment more with learning strategies. And for its students, this policy provides an opportunity to add experience, insight, and knowledge to this program. They can learn outside their scope (De Vega & Nur, 2022). In other words, students now have greater freedom regarding their learning resources and the teacher's material is no longer the only basis for learning.

According to Pertiwi & Pusparini (2021), there are several teachers know little about the concept of the simplification lessons plan in *Merdeka* Curriculum. They claim that they do not understand what the real fundamental of this curriculum is. The teachers give no explanations to clarify their answer because this policy is still new and not many researchers have done thorough research.

Perception of *Merdeka* Curriculum on Junior High School Based on Aulia (2021) Find the results that most of the teachers agreed with the simplification of the components in the lesson plan because according to them not all components should be included in the lesson plan. With the new policy they welcome and are happy because it can save time in preparing lesson plans so they can pay more attention to teaching practices and evaluate students. Then, they also added that this new policy makes lesson plans more flexible because teachers can easily compose them without spending a lot of time. In addition, it can be adapted to the learning needs of teachers teaching in the classroom as well as the conditions and needs of students. They prefer to draft lesson plans freely.

Also in General High School or *SMA* according to research subject by Prakoso (2021) The policy of independent learning is considered to be one of the right mechanisms to implement the learning process based on local wisdom and optimize the

resources owned by the school. Freedom to learn gives teachers the freedom to explore the best strategies for learning.

Therefore, the study will examine more deeply the perception of the *Merdeka* curriculum from the point of view of vocational school teachers about their understanding according to the new curriculum, also their perceptions of what they feel in the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum, such as the changes they feel in this curriculum and the extent of their knowledge of this curriculum by collecting data by interviews. The researcher chooses Vocational High School teachers as the subject of research, because the study that examines the perception of Independent Learning from the point of view of vocational high school teachers is still limited.

B. Scope and limitation of The Study

Based on the background above, there are the scoop and limitation of this study:

1. This scope of this study focusses on EFL vocational high school teachers' perception.
2. The limitation of this study is will discuss the component of implementation of *Merdeka* Curriculum such as curriculum structure, system block learning, and teaching material or *Modul Ajar*.

C. Research Question

1. How is the vocational high school teachers' perception of *Merdeka* Curriculum structure?
2. How is the vocational high school teachers' perception of the block learning system set out in this curriculum?
3. How is the vocational high school teachers' perception of learning modules used in the independent curriculum?

D. Purpose of Study

Based on the research background, of course, this study aims to find out the perception of *Merdeka* curriculum's according to vocational high school teachers. And also want to know the extent of their understanding of the policy of educators in Indonesia considering that this policy is very important because it is a benchmark for the sustainability of teaching and learning activities, the obstacles they face, then whether they are ready with this *Merdeka* Curriculum.

E. Significances of Study

This study was created to educate readers in useful to give understanding the existing perceptions of the independent curriculum. The following contribution are suggested:

1. For Vocational High School Teachers, this study is expected to give some different understandings of the components in implementation *merdeka* curriculum from different perceptions.
2. To Prospective Teacher, the finding of this research expected to give some information and understanding about *merdeka* curriculum especially in teaching modules or *modul ajar* and also regarding learning using the block system which might be useful for their readiness when going through their profession.
3. For Student majoring in education, this study are expected to give some an overview of how the *merdeka* curriculum. and is expected to be useful for their activities when carrying out the school field introduction program
4. And to researchers this research is expected to be useful research and can be used as a mold for further research.

F. Definition of the Key Term

Curriculum: The curriculum is a policy that guides the workings of a program in the field of education.

Merdeka Curriculum: *Merdeka Curriculum* is the new policy of education to guides the education activity in Indonesia.

Teacher Perception: Teachers' perceptions are thoughts formed by their background knowledge and life experiences that influence their professional behavior.

Merdeka curriculum structure: In the structure of the *Merdeka* curriculum there are two main groups which are divided into 2 main groups, namely the General Group and the Vocational Group, and *Profil Pelajar Pancasila*.

Block learning system: Block learning is the process of dividing your lesson schedule according to accumulated hours in syllabus (curriculum).

Modul Ajar: *Modul Ajar* in *Merdeka* curriculum are learning tools prepared by teachers to plan learning activities.