

Teachers' Teaching Strategies in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum at Elementary School

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Abstract

The Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) features diverse intracurricular learning, giving students time to master concepts and skills. Teachers freely select learning tools tailored to students' needs and interests, using technology for creative methods. Effective strategies include varied methods, media, and games to boost English learning engagement. Creative teachers design fun, innovative activities. This study, Teachers' Teaching Strategies in Implementing Merdeka Curriculum at Elementary School, analyzes English teachers' strategies and reasons for their use under Kurikulum Merdeka at Khairu Ummah 'Aisyiyah Creative Elementary School, Cilegon. Subjects were grades 1–6 English teachers. Using descriptive qualitative methods, data came from interviews and questionnaires. Findings show teachers employed Project-Based Learning, Inquiry Strategy, Problem-Based Learning Strategy, and Group Learning and Discussion Strategy. These make students active, collaborative, and knowledge-sharing in learning.

Keywords: English Teacher, Merdeka Curriculum, Teaching Strategies



INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian education system has undergone numerous curriculum changes since 1947 until the end of 2022, reflecting the nation's continuous efforts to improve educational quality and relevance (Aslan & Hajiri, 2025; Bahri et al., 2024; Jannah, 2023). Curriculum changes and development in Indonesia are considered crucial in determining the future of students and the nation's competitiveness. It is hoped that the curriculum can be implemented effectively to produce a bright future for the nation. Curriculum changes and development must receive attention from various stakeholders, including both the government and educational staff (Amalia & Asyari, 2023). These changes involve not only the direction and goals of education but also the learning experiences obtained by students.

The Merdeka Curriculum was developed as a more adaptive curriculum framework as part of a learning reform initiative, with a focus on essential material and developing students' character and competencies (Khoirurrijal et al., 2022). The implementation process of the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes diverse learning approaches, allowing content to be delivered more optimally so that students have adequate time to deepen concepts and strengthen competencies. This curriculum grants teachers greater autonomy to design more creative and innovative teaching methods—representing a significant shift from previous curriculum models that were more prescriptive in nature.

In the context of English language education, teachers face unique challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. English language instruction requires specific pedagogical approaches that differ from other subject areas due to its nature as a foreign language for Indonesian students. Teaching strategies in language education are defined as lesson plans that include structure, student behavior, teaching objectives, and an outline of tactics for implementing the strategy (Surayati, 2022). English teachers must employ multiple strategies in teaching, such as applying various methods, media, and games to maintain

students' interest in learning the language. Teachers can adapt their approach to accommodate students' diverse learning styles while considering students' needs in the teaching and learning process. With this approach, teachers are able to provide more engaging and relevant learning experiences (Istiantika et al., 2023). As educators, teachers not only make the material more meaningful for students but also increase student involvement in the learning process through the strategic use of various learning media and technology as digital resources—including online learning websites, applications for language learning, and social media platforms.

Previous research has explored various aspects of teaching strategies in different contexts. Bagus et al. (2020) investigated teaching and learning strategies practiced by language teachers to actively engage their students in learning, finding that interactive and student-centered approaches significantly improve engagement. Putri et al. (2019) examined teacher functions in the classroom through a literature review, emphasizing the evolving role of teachers from knowledge transmitters to learning facilitators. Keiler (2018) studied teachers' roles and identities in student-centered classrooms, highlighting the importance of adaptive teaching approaches. Sit (2017) explored inclusive teaching strategies for discipline-based English studies, focusing on enhancing language attainment and classroom interaction in multicultural learning environments. These studies collectively underscore the importance of strategic, adaptive, and inclusive teaching approaches in modern education.

However, research gaps persist in understanding how English teachers specifically implement teaching strategies within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level. Most existing studies focus on general teaching strategies or examine curriculum implementation without specifically addressing English language instruction. Furthermore, limited research explores the rationale behind teachers' selection of specific strategies in the context of this new curriculum framework. Given that the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, critical thinking, and competency development, it is crucial to understand how English teachers translate these principles into practical teaching strategies.

The urgency of this research is underscored by current educational data showing varying levels of success in Merdeka Curriculum implementation across schools in Indonesia. According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, while many schools have adopted the curriculum, challenges remain in effective implementation—particularly in language instruction. Understanding successful teaching strategies employed by English teachers can provide valuable insights for broader curriculum implementation and professional development programs.

The novelty of this research lies in its focused examination of the Merdeka Curriculum within the Merdeka Curriculum framework at the elementary school level, exploring both the implementation methods and the pedagogical reasoning behind strategy selection. This dual focus provides a comprehensive understanding of teaching practices in this new educational context.

Effective English learning plays a crucial role in preparing Indonesia's young generation to compete globally. In the era of globalization, English language proficiency is a key asset in communicating effectively at the international level. Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum integrated with diverse teaching strategies in English learning can enhance the quality of education in Indonesia. This approach not only develops students' language skills but also

instills a deeper understanding of cultural diversity and global knowledge, preparing them to face future challenges and opportunities.

Based on these considerations, this research aims to: (1) analyze how teaching strategies used by English teachers are implemented in the classroom within the Merdeka Curriculum framework at SD Kreatif Khairu Ummah 'Aisyiyah Cilegon; and (2) evaluate the reasons why English teachers select and employ specific teaching strategies in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Through addressing these objectives, this study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge on effective English language instruction in the Indonesian elementary education context and provide practical insights for teachers and policymakers.

METHOD

The researcher employed a descriptive qualitative research method to explore and describe the teaching strategies used by English teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. Qualitative research is particularly appropriate for this study as it aims to explore, describe, and explain how teachers implement teaching strategies and why they choose specific approaches in their classroom practice. This methodological approach aligns with Leavy's (2017) assertion that qualitative research enables researchers to collect rich data with detailed descriptions and examples through methods such as focus group interviews. The descriptive qualitative design allows for in-depth exploration of teachers' experiences, perspectives, and decision-making processes regarding teaching strategy implementation.

The research was conducted at SD Kreatif Khairu Ummah 'Aisyiyah Cilegon, a private Islamic elementary school located in Cilegon City, Banten Province, Indonesia. This school was selected as the research site because it has been implementing the Merdeka Curriculum since its early adoption phase and employs dedicated English teachers for each grade level, providing a comprehensive view of strategy implementation across different grade levels.

The research participants consisted of six English teachers who teach grades one through six at the school. The selection of participants employed purposive sampling technique, which involves selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study (Leavy, 2017). The sampling criteria included: (1) English teachers who are currently teaching at SD Kreatif Khairu Ummah 'Aisyiyah Cilegon; (2) teachers who have been implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in their English instruction; and (3) teachers who are willing to participate in the research and share their experiences. This purposive sampling approach ensures that participants possess relevant knowledge and experience to address the research objectives.

Data collection employed two primary techniques: interviews and questionnaires. The interview technique was utilized as the main data-gathering instrument, as interviews are commonly used by social scientists to expand their understanding of how humans perceive their social worlds and how they act within them (Philipps & Mrowczynski, 2021). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all six English teachers to gather in-depth information about the implementation of teaching strategies in their classrooms. The interview questions were designed to elicit detailed responses about the types of strategies employed, the implementation process, challenges faced, and the rationale behind strategy selection. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted in a comfortable setting to encourage open and honest responses.

The questionnaire served as a complementary data collection tool, consisting of a series of questions designed to gather systematic information from all respondents (Ranganathan & Caduff, 2024). The questionnaire included both closed-ended and open-ended questions covering topics such as: teaching strategy preferences, frequency of strategy use, perceived effectiveness of different strategies, alignment with Merdeka Curriculum principles, and factors influencing strategy selection. The questionnaire was distributed to all six participants after the initial interviews to triangulate and validate the interview data.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, involving several stages: (1) familiarization with the data through repeated reading of interview transcripts and questionnaire responses; (2) generating initial codes to identify key concepts and patterns; (3) searching for themes by grouping codes into broader categories; (4) reviewing themes to ensure they accurately represent the data; (5) defining and naming themes to capture their essence; and (6) producing the final analysis by selecting compelling examples and relating the findings to the research questions and existing literature. This systematic approach ensures rigor and trustworthiness in the qualitative analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview results complemented the observational data. During the interview to the six English teacher, the teachers explained that the strategies employed in English classrooms are: In the first, third, and sixth grade of English teachers used Project-Based Learning (PJBL) strategy, second grade English teachers used Inquiry strategy, fourth grade English teachers used Problem Based Learning strategy, and fifth grade English teachers used Group learning and Discussion strategy. Based on several reasons from six English teachers used the strategies such as: For teachers who use Project-Based Learning (PJBL) strategy, the reason for using this method is because: 1. The students are given activities where they have to create works, through this activity it can encourage students to show creativity, because to achieve learning goals that are in accordance with students' abilities. 2. The students are more interested in this strategy than doing assignments and the teacher lecturing in front of them. 3. The project based learning strategy is easy to apply for students. For teacher who used Inquiry strategy, the reason is: because it gives students the opportunity to develop thinking, critical and creative abilities. For teacher who used Problem Based Learning strategy, the reason is because it triggers children to tell stories freely. For teacher who used group learning and discussion, the reason is the students can apply Pancasila values into everyday life not only during learning and trigger students to be active and participate during learning when using group learning strategies.

Based questionnaire results complemented the observational data, on the implement Project-Based Learning (PJBL) strategy in class one, encouraging student communication, finding out appropriate learning techniques, creating a happy atmosphere, triggering student motivation. To implement Project-Based Learning (PJBL) strategy in class three, collaborative learning strategy, children are divided into teams and we give questions and the children discuss, work together as a team to solve the problems. And the project-based strategy is to invite children to go directly into making a product, in this way children are able to apply the knowledge they have. To implement Project-Based Learning (PJBL) strategy in class six, implementing the several strategies such as follow the strategy steps. To implement inquiry strategy in class two, using observation, question and answer, then discussion. To implement

Problem Based learning in class four, implementing the story telling and games strategies to the students in the classroom using discussion with students. To implement group learning and discussion in class five, making a learning lesson plan first, as well as carrying out evaluations.

In the process of teaching, the teachers always prepared the teaching modules before their taught English in the classroom. The teacher has a different answer, there are some teachers who use modules from the government, there are teachers who make their own learning modules, and there are also the teachers who make their own teaching modules and use teaching modules from the government. The Teachers use various interesting learning media for students. Each teacher uses different learning media. There are teachers who use learning media such as image media, properties, story books, in focus, visual or audiovisual media, video, and flashcards. Learning in the classroom does not always use textbooks, so that students do not feel bored and fed up when learning English. When learning in class, teachers always use the best methods, strategies and teaching modules for students. Because every teacher definitely wants the best for students.

Several teaching strategies used by teachers, there are several advantages of the teaching strategies used: is that children easily understand the lessons delivered by the teacher in classroom. it is easier for children to grasp the material being taught. is that the strategy of collaborating with games triggers children to want to learn in class and is not boring. The students always want to learn using games. more easily understand the material and can participate actively in learning. Teaching strategies used by teachers, there are has several disadvantages of the teaching strategies used: is that the media required is inadequate. Sometimes there are students who lack focus, it takes quite a long time. There are children who still depend on their friends so they are passive in the learning process. It requires more intensive preparation, longer learning time, difficulty in managing the class because the teacher must be able to monitor and guide all students in their group.

From the six English teachers answers, can conclude the strategies used by English teacher in the classroom are: project based learning, inquiry, problem based learning, group learning and discussion. First, third, and sixth grade of English teachers used Project-Based Learning (PJBL) strategy, second grade English teachers used Inquiry strategy, fourth grade English teachers used Problem Based Learning strategy, and fifth grade English teachers used Group learning and Discussion strategy.

The researcher will analyze how the teachers implemented of several strategies in teaching English in the classroom. In first grade, English teacher applied the Project Based Learning (PJBL) strategy by encouraging student communication, looking for appropriate learning techniques for students, creating a happy atmosphere for students, and teachers triggering student motivation. In the third grade, English teacher applied the Project Based Learning (PJBL) strategy by providing collaborative learning for students, students are divided into several teams and the teacher asks questions and students discuss to solve problems. The teacher implements the project based learning strategy by inviting students to be directly involved in making a product, in this way students are able to apply the knowledge they have. In sixth grade, English teacher applied the Project Based Learning (PJBL) strategy by implementing the several strategies such as follow the strategy steps. According to (Ismuwardani et al., 2019) Project Based Learning (PJBL) strategy also provide students

become creative students because in the learning process will produce a project that has been set at the beginning of lesson.

In second grade, English teacher applied the inquiry strategy by using observation, question and answer, then discussion. According to (Wahyuni Putri et al., 2021), the teacher used six inquiry strategy procedures such as: stimulation, problem statement, data collection, data processing, verification, and generalization. In fourth grade, English teacher applied the Problem Based Learning (PBL) strategy by using storytelling and games to the students in the classroom and using discussion with the students. According to (Othman & Shah, 2013) the teacher facilitates the process by putting the students in groups, scheduling presentations and preparing evaluation forms for the students to evaluate themselves and their peers, in addition to teacher evaluation. In fifth grade, English teacher applied the group learning and discussion strategy by making a learning lesson plan first, as well as carrying out evaluations. According to (Rosadi et al., 2020) students can share their knowledge and opinions by completing and discussing exercises.

From the six English teachers answer, can conclude and evaluate English teachers' reasons of using certain strategies for teaching English in implementing Merdeka Curriculum. Based on several reasons for English teachers such as: For teachers who use Project-Based Learning (PJBL) strategy, the reason for using this method is because: 1. The students are given activities where they have to create works, through this activity it can encourage students to show creativity, because to achieve learning goals that are in accordance with students' abilities. 2. The students are more interested in this strategy than doing assignments and the teacher lecturing in front of them. 3. The project based learning strategy is easy to apply for students. According to (Turyati et al., 2020), Project Based Learning (PJBL) can improve the problem-solving skill to the complex problem by involving the students to make observations, to hold discussion, and to create some works to clarify the lesson materials.

For teacher who used Inquiry strategy, the reason is: because it gives students the opportunity to develop thinking, critical and creative abilities. According to (Setiani, 2023), inquiry strategy has been proven to be very effective in improving learning outcomes, critical thinking skills, and student learning motivation in elementary schools. For teacher who used Problem Based Learning strategy, the reason is because it triggers children to tell stories freely. According to (Ghani et al., 2021), Problem Based Learning is a pedagogical approach that makes use of the principles of collaboration in small group learning, Problem Based Learning use a systematic approach, starting with a real-life problem scenario to make learning integrated with practice as students work together and learn. For teacher who used group learning and discussion, the reason is the students can apply Pancasila values into everyday life not only during learning and trigger students to be active and participate during learning when using group learning strategies. According to (Fadlul et al., 2023), group discussions with the goal of enabling students to solve problems related to the topic as well as problems that they encounter in everyday life.

Based on my evaluation, the teachers reason used the strategies because in teaching and learning in the classroom must use strategies that are appropriate to the student's grade. So, that the students feel comfortable and enthusiastic about learning English in the classroom. The teachers utilized a variety of strategies to fulfil the needs of students with different learning styles. Each learner learns in a unique way, whether visually, auditorily, kinesthetically, or a

mix of these. The strategy utilized by teacher varies depending on the learning objectives. Some strategies are more effective at attaining specific goals, such as comprehending fundamental concepts, honing analytical skills, or encouraging critical thinking. A multitude of strategy can help students become more motivated and engaged. Using multiple strategy can make learning more engaging and relevant to pupils, increasing their motivation to study.

CONCLUSION

The English teacher at SD Kreatif Khairu Ummah 'Aisyiyah Cilegon implements diverse strategies within the Merdeka Curriculum framework to enhance classroom engagement. For Project-Based Learning (PjBL), she fosters communication, motivation, and collaboration by dividing students into teams to solve problems and create products, applying knowledge practically. Inquiry Strategy in grade two involves observation, questioning, and discussion; Problem-Based Learning in grade four integrates storytelling, games, and student discussions; while Group Learning and Discussion in grade five starts with lesson planning and evaluations. Teachers select these strategies to match students' grade levels, promoting active participation, collaborative knowledge-sharing, and deeper learning. Future Research Suggestion: Future studies could quantitatively assess the impact of these strategies on elementary students' English proficiency and long-term retention using pre- and post-tests across multiple schools.

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