

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Research Background

The quality of a national education system depends on its curriculum. An effective curriculum is vital for the teaching process. It has several traits, including adapting to a changing environment, including research-based teaching strategies, promoting cooperation, student-centeredness, and formulating quantifiable goals (Tunnell, 2022). For students to grow up with proper behavior and cognitive abilities, a good curriculum must be meticulously developed. Since creating an effective curriculum is difficult, Indonesia has changed its curriculum several times to raise the standard of education there.

Kurikulum Merdeka (henceforth - Merdeka Curriculum) is the current education curriculum in Indonesia. Several changes have been made to the Merdeka Curriculum, including student-centered learning, the *Platform Merdeka Mengajar* (Independent Teaching Platform), soft skills, and character development through the *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila* or Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5) that makes it different from the previous curriculum. Due to the Merdeka Curriculum's requirement to adopt differentiated learning, all students are given care following their abilities and requirements. This attempts to guarantee that instructors can effectively manage all student needs, learning levels, degrees of knowledge, and learning pace. One of the brand-new components of the Merdeka

Curriculum is the Independent Teaching Platform, a platform that all instructors may use to obtain instructional materials and learning resources, help with student evaluation, undertake independent training, find motivational films, and share their work as an example for other educators. Because all instructors have free access to over 2000 teaching resources through this platform, they are no longer baffled by the uneven distribution of books. Additionally, P5 is a brand-new element to this curriculum that aims to develop students' soft skills, particularly for their future social lives following Pancasila. There are different phases in the Merdeka Curriculum, including Phase A (grades 1 and 2), Phase B (grades 3 and 4), Phase C (grades 5 and 6), Phase D (grades 7, 8, and 9), Phase E (grade 10), and Phase F (grades 11 and 12), with the goal that teachers in the same phase can coordinate and collaborate to find out the achievement of students in the previous class so that it can serve as a reference in planning further learning (Hasanah, 2022). As a result, it is anticipated that the numerous the Merdeka Curriculum adjustments will raise Indonesia's educational standards.

The change in curriculum also affects English lessons, especially in elementary school. Every school has to implement a subject categorized as *Muatan Lokal*, or Local Content if the government stipulates this. District governments control local content for non-formal, basic, and early childhood education; provincial governments set local content for special education and secondary education (Kemendikbudristek, 2024, p. 22). Since the beginning of the English subject applied in Indonesia, this subject has been treated as local

content for elementary schools. The 2013 curriculum removed English from elementary schools, leaving many students lacking the foundational knowledge necessary to follow English lessons at a higher level. English classes have been reintroduced in elementary schools since the introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum. This is in line with Government Regulation No. 12 of 2022 on Curriculum in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education that English subjects return as local content in elementary school until the 2026/2027 academic year and will be compulsory subjects starting from 2027/2028 academic year. Thus, elementary school students (Phases A to C) get the basis of English both in the form of vocabulary and simple sentence construction so that they do not experience difficulties in the next phase (Phases D to F).

Since each curriculum has its own set of policies, it could impact some subjects, including English. Pujiani and Sah (2023) claim that the English subject was eliminated from the 2013 Curriculum for elementary schools because it is important for students to become fluent in their native tongue before learning a foreign language like English. Since many students lacked an introduction to English, this caused many teachers to struggle. English was reinstated as a local subject in elementary schools under the current Merdeka Curriculum, as stated in Regulation No. 12 of 2022 on Curriculum in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education. According to the Independent Teaching Platform, English classes in elementary school begin from Phase A or first grade. Phase or grade advancement is

another policy that sets the current curriculum apart from the previous one. To move on to the next grade under the previous curriculum, students needed to pass the learning objectives. However, in the Merdeka Curriculum, students can move on to the next phase even if they do not meet the learning objectives (Buku Panduan Pembelajaran dan Asesmen, 2022).

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers for the elementary school level or Phase A to C must prepare several things to run the new curriculum properly. Since the absence of English lessons in elementary schools during the 2013 Curriculum, most elementary schools do not have English teachers. This is in line with Government Regulation No. 12 of 2022 on Curriculum in Early Childhood Education, Primary Education, and Secondary Education that regional governments are responsible for supporting the transition process through the provision of English teachers in primary schools during the period when English becomes a compulsory subject in the 2027/2028 academic year. According to the researchers' observations at the study site, it was determined that less than ten schools employed English teachers with relevant educational qualifications. Because elementary school students on that research site are currently learning more than one language – Bahasa Indonesia, Javanese, and now English – adaptation is the first thing that EFL teachers in elementary schools must do, especially finding the right learning method to match the task of the Merdeka Curriculum itself which is to implement differentiated learning.

In addition to preparation for the new changes, teachers' perceptions are also important in addressing curriculum changes. According to Baron and Byrne in Candrawati (2022) stated that three aspects can build a perception, namely 1) cognitive component (perceptual component), which is a component related to a person's knowledge, views, and beliefs about an object. This is also related to how a person perceives an object; 2) Affective component (emotional component), which is a component related to positive or negative feelings, like or dislike an object. Like is related to positive feelings while dislike is the opposite; 3) Conative component (behavior component), which is a component related to behavior or a person's tendency to act towards an object. Those three aspects are needed to know someone's perception. In addition, Walgito (2004) mentioned that three factors cause someone to have a perception: 1) The object of perception, 2) Sensory organs, nerves, and nerve centers, and 3) Attention. Thus, perception from teachers is important because it will help them to overview the actual condition and plan their lessons properly.

As can be seen from the preceding events, the English subject has undergone significant modifications, particularly in elementary schools, as a result of curriculum revisions that have affected everything from instruction to re-implementation. Thus, the researcher is interested in investigating teachers' perception of English teaching practice in elementary schools with the hope that teachers in elementary schools, the government, and also researchers who study the same issue benefit from this study.

B. Research Questions

The most important aspect of planning a research study is developing a research question. According to the research background mentioned above, the research question is stated as follows: “What are teachers’ perceptions of teaching English in elementary schools in the Merdeka Curriculum?”

C. Research Aims

This research is conducted to find out teachers’ perceptions of teaching English in elementary schools in the Merdeka Curriculum.

