

THE STUDENTS' INTEREST IN LEARNING ENGLISH: A STUDY IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MERDEKA CURRICULUM

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Abstract

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum aims to provide a more flexible and student-centered learning approach, encouraging greater engagement in various subjects, including English. The purpose of this study was to find out the level of interest of students in learning English in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Public Elementary School of Makale . This study is a descriptive quantitative method. The sample of this research was the fifth-grade students of Public Elementary School of Makale. The researcher used a cluster sampling technique to choose the sample of this research. The researcher chose class 1.A as the sample of this research, consisting of 23 students. The instruments used for data collection were observation and a questionnaire. Based on the results of data analysis, it was found that the fifth-grade students of Public Elementary School of Makale have an interest in learning English. This can be seen from the data obtained from statements 1-20, which showed that the average student answer score was 81%, falling into the high criteria. Based on the results of data analysis, the researcher concludes that the fifth-grade students of Public Elementary School of Makale have a high interest in learning English.

Key Words: *Merdeka Curriculum, implementation, Interest, English Learning*

INTRODUCTION

Education is an important foundation for the progress of a country because with education a country will achieve progress, both in increasing human resources and managing natural resources. Teachers must be able to adapt their teaching and learning methods to the needs of their students according to their subject matter and learning environment. This is because national education, as stated in Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, aims to improve the quality of life and the dignity of the Indonesian people. Everything is set up in accordance with a set of rules known as the curriculum, which serves as the basis for implementing the process of learning (Khoirurrijal, Makrufi, and Gandhi 2022),(Ibad 2024) . To support the success of a

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curriculum applied in the world of education, the curriculum that has been implemented needs to be reviewed and developed into a new curriculum. The purpose of developing an educational curriculum is to increase competitiveness, as well as add several national and international insights so students can later become the next generation of a strong nation and able to compete with international education (Sa'dullah, Imami, and Khaer 2023). Therefore, a well-designed curriculum should not only focus on academic achievement but also on fostering critical thinking, creativity, and adaptability to prepare students for global challenges.

Along with the development of increasingly modern times, of course, a curriculum is needed that can follow the development of science and technology so that it can support the progress of human resources (HR) and the country (Campbel 2020). Therefore, this Merdeka Curriculum recommends teaching English starting to be taught from the elementary level. Three primary factors are driving this: curriculum alignment, learning quality parity, and English as a necessary language for all Indonesian pupils. This is consistent with the government's pledge to advance the Pancasila student program in all its facets, including its emphasis on global diversity.

In the previous curriculum, namely the 2013 curriculum, there was confusion about the competencies that must be achieved by students at the junior high school level. Without English language education at the elementary level, students are expected to achieve intermediate-level competence without learning a solid foundation (Agustin and Sugiyono 2019). Therefore, to overcome the gap in the achievement of this competency, the Merdeka curriculum is here to provide a solution, namely providing basic level English education at the elementary level. Teaching English early with good planning will encourage the strengthening of the foundation of English. research shows that teaching English at the elementary school level has many benefits such as fostering confidence in English, building global awareness and intercultural competence and opening students' insights about cultural differences to foster tolerance.

The Merdeka Curriculum is a new curriculum adjustment method implemented in several schools. This curriculum aims to foster students' interest in learning by aligning educational content with their needs, ultimately enhancing the quality of learning. Interest plays a crucial role in learning. According to Slameto (2010) and Anisah & Qamariah (2023), interest is a persistent tendency to focus on and remember activities that bring enjoyment. When students engage in activities they find interesting, they pay closer attention and experience a sense of pleasure, which positively impacts their learning process.

Learning itself is the process of acquiring knowledge over a period, leading to personal growth and change. A strong interest in a subject enhances learning outcomes. Conversely, if the learning material does not align with students' interests, they may struggle to engage fully. However, when students recognize learning as a tool to achieve meaningful goals and perceive the benefits of their learning experiences, they are more likely to develop a genuine interest in their studies. English language learning education would be carried out in elementary schools, starting with the Merdeka Curriculum taught in education units (Anindito Aditomo 2023), (Wilson and Nurkhamidah 2023). Currently, several schools had implemented the Merdeka Curriculum and Public Elementary School of Makale had implemented this curriculum in the 2022/2023 school year. The novelty of this research lies in its exploration of students' interest

in learning English within the newly implemented Merdeka Curriculum at the elementary school level, specifically Public Elementary School of Makale . Unlike previous studies that have broadly discussed curriculum changes, this study provides a focused analysis of students' engagement and interest in learning English under this new framework, which was only introduced in the odd semester of the 2023/2024 school year. By examining student interest in a curriculum that only recently integrated English language learning, this research offers fresh insights into the early-stage effectiveness and reception of the Merdeka Curriculum in elementary education. In connection with this, related to English language learning in the Merdeka Curriculum which is new to students at the elementary school level, especially Public Elementary School of Makale , which only implemented English language learning in the odd semester of the 2023/2024 school year. Therefore, based on this phenomenon, the researcher is interested in knowing "Students' Interest in Learning English: A Study of the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum Public Elementary School of Makale ".

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach with a survey-based method using questionnaires to assess students' interest in learning English under the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum Public Elementary School of Makale. The questionnaire was designed based on established theories of learning interest and student engagement. It consists of 20 statements covering four key indicators: (1) students' enjoyment of learning English, (2) students' attention to lessons and teachers, (3) students' enthusiasm for learning English, and (4) students' active participation in learning activities. The questionnaire responses were measured using a Likert scale, and the results were categorized into five levels: Very High, High, Medium, Low, and Very Low. The data collection process involved administering the questionnaire to 23 fifth-grade students Public Elementary School of Makale. The students' responses were then scored and classified according to predefined percentage ranges. The data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical analysis, where the total and mean scores were calculated to determine the overall level of student interest. The percentage formula used to find the data. Additionally, observational data were collected during the learning process to support the questionnaire findings. Observations indicated that students demonstrated high enthusiasm, actively participated in lessons, paid close attention to teachers, and completed assigned tasks with dedication. The presence of engaging teachers also contributed positively to students' interest levels. Through this methodological approach, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' interest in learning English within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum and its impact on their engagement and learning experience.

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FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The researcher describes the students' result of data collection was obtained through questionnaires formulated based on theories and filled in by respondents as bellow:

Tabel 4.1 Results of student questionnaire scores		
R	Student Answer	Category
	Score	
s1	60	High
s2	70	Very High
s3	79	Very High
s4	61	High
s5	64	High
s6	56	High
s7	66	High
s8	67	High
s9	52	Medium
s10	74	Very High
s11	52	Medium
s12	80	Very High
s13	61	High
s14	69	Very High
s15	77	Very High
s16	69	Very High
s17	74	Very High
s18	75	Very High
s19	69	Very High
s20	46	Medium
s21	68	Very High
s22	54	Medium
s23	50	Medium
Total	1493	

Tabel 4.1 shows the average value of the questionnaire result regarding students' interest in learning English. It is clear that the average value of students is in the high category, namely very high, as a result of the fact that almost all students are happy when learning English. From 23 students, the highest score was 80 in the very high category, and the lowest score was 46 in the medium category, with a total score of 1493. The researcher conclude that the percentage of the students' score is 81% which is classified as high category. It means students' interest learning English is high.

There were 11 students who obtained scores of 85-100 with very high criteria, 7 students who obtained 65-84 with high criteria, and 5 students who obtained 55-64 with medium criteria. None of the students fall into the low and very low criteria. Thus, to find out the classification of students can be seen in table 4.2.

Tabel 4.2 The percentage of questionnaire answers

Criteria	Score	Frequency	Percentage
Very High	85-100	11	47,8%
High	65-84	7	30,4%
Medium	55-64	5	21,7%
Low	40-54	0	0%
Very Low	0-39	0	0%
Total		23	100%

From the table 4.2 above, it shows that out of 23 students, there are 11 students or 47.8% as very high, 7 students or 30,4% as high and 5 students or 21,7% as medium. It means the highest percentage of students score is 47,8 % with the very high category. This happens because almost all students are enthusiasm in Learning English, like students active in class, doing the tasks given by the teacher earnestly and paying attention to the teacher's explanations.

The national education system is always based on the national curriculum. Along with the development of the curriculum from time to time, this shows that the implementation of education is dynamic. Therefore, of course many components in the curriculum also experience changes and developments along with the development of the curriculum from time to time such as in the Merdeka curriculum(Kamal 2023) .The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a new curriculum that aims to improve the education system and quality that aims to attract significant interest(Cahyani, Artini, and Santosa 2024), (Asrifan et al. 2023). Interest in learning is an attitude of obedience to learning activities, both regarding planning a study schedule and the initiative to make these efforts seriously (Nurhasanah and Sobandi 2016). Some other researchers had conducted the research about the implementation Merdeka Curriculum. The Independent Curriculum offers a more flexible and holistic approach to education, in addition the Independent Curriculum also promotes the development of students' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills in today's democratic learning environment

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(Aprila, Riswanto, and Martina 2024). In the Learning Module in the Independent Curriculum, it is designed with the aim of providing freedom to students in the process of creating learning in the classroom that suits the students' needs (Rindayati, Arjihan Desita Putri, and Damariswara 2022). This shows that interest is the tendency of one's soul towards an object, usually accompanied by a feeling of pleasure, because it will feel there is interest in that object. The English learning process which is said to be still very new for students Public Elementary School of Makale can run well so that students are very enthusiastic in following the learning process. At the time of learning most students are very enthusiastic, paying attention to the teacher's explanation and taking notes when learning English. Fun teachers do greatly influence learning activities in the classroom. There was a significance toward pupils' positive attitudes on their learning achievements during the implementation Merdeka curriculum (Sitohang, Tarigan, and Ginting 2023).

Based on the analysis of data that has been explained previously and associated with previous theories and the results of questionnaires that have been filled out by students, the results of the total number of 20 statements of learning interest indicators submitted to 23 grade V students show that the total score obtained is 1.493 and the maximum total score is 1.840. The learning interest of grade V students is then expressed into percentages with the formula % of learning interest equal to the total score obtained divided by the maximum score then multiplied by 100%. The calculation results show that the percentage of student interest in learning, which is 81%, is classified as high learning interest criteria.

Based on observations made in grade V of Public Elementary School of Makale, students' interest in learning English subjects can be categorized as high. This can be seen during the learning process in class, students are very enthusiastic in participating in English language learning. Fun teachers also make students more excited about learning. Teachers apply cooperative learning so that English learning is not so difficult and boring for students.

From the exposure of data and research findings that have been described by researcher to find out the students interest learning english from abservation and four indicators used such as, feeling of pleasure toward learning English by 84%, students attention to learning and teacher by 80%, students interest in learning English by 76% and s tudents attention when participating in learning by 84%. From the data obtained, total score students interest learning English in four indicators such us 1.493. The students interest learning English from the 4 indicators show in table 4.1 above is include in the High Category. This can be seen of the mean score of the students' interest learning English in the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum Public Elementary School of Makale which is 81%.

CONCLUSION.

Based on the results in Table 4.1 regarding students' questionnaire scores, it can be concluded that among the 23 participating students, the majority demonstrated a high interest in learning English. A total of 11 students (47.8%) fell into the very high category with scores ranging from 85 to 100, 7 students (30.4%) were classified in the high category with scores between 65 and 84, and 5 students (21.7%) were in the medium category with scores from 55 to 64. No students were classified as low or very low. The total score reached 1,493 out of a maximum score of

1,840, indicating that the average student interest level is categorized as high, with a percentage of 81%. This data suggests that most students enjoy learning English, as reflected in their active participation in class, attentiveness to the teacher, and diligence in completing assigned tasks.

Based on the results in Table 4.2 regarding the percentage of questionnaire responses, it is evident that students' interest in learning English consists of four key indicators: enjoyment of learning English at 84%, students' attention to lessons and the teacher at 80%, students' enthusiasm for learning English at 76%, and students' active participation in learning activities at 84%. These findings further reinforce that students' interest in learning English within the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is classified as high. Additionally, classroom observations indicated that students were highly enthusiastic about the learning process, paid close attention to the teacher's explanations, and actively took notes during English lessons. The presence of engaging teachers and interactive teaching methods also contributed significantly to the high level of student interest. Thus, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Public Elementary School of Makale has successfully fostered a supportive learning environment and increased students' motivation to learn English.

Furthermore, the findings from classroom observations support these results, revealing that students actively participate in learning activities, pay attention to teachers, and complete their assignments with enthusiasm. The high levels of enjoyment (84%), attentiveness (80%), enthusiasm (76%), and participation (84%) reflect a positive learning environment. The presence of engaging teachers and cooperative learning strategies played a crucial role in enhancing students' motivation and involvement in the learning process. In conclusion, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has effectively fostered student interest in learning English in Public Elementary School of Makale. The curriculum's flexible and student-centered approach has contributed to a dynamic learning atmosphere, encouraging students to be more engaged and motivated in their English studies.

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