

Discrepancy between Regulation and Reality: An Analysis of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English Learning at Elementary School

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
Received: November 2025	<p>Background: English is an important subject to teach at the primary school level because students are in the golden age, a critical period for developing language abilities. In the Merdeka Curriculum, English is provided as an elective subject for two lesson hours per week. However, problems were found at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School, including students' low English proficiency, and the teacher's lack of understanding of Curriculum Merdeka-based learning in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Aim: This research aims to describe the implementation of English learning based on the Curriculum Merdeka at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School. Method: This research used a qualitative descriptive method. The data sources were the principal, the English teacher, and grade IV students of West Kelayan 3 Elementary School. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed descriptively to make conclusions. Result and Discussion: The results of this research indicate that Curriculum Merdeka-based English learning consists the following aspects: (1) teachers prepare the Learning Objective Flow (ATP) and lesson plans adapted from the internet and books; (2) learning implementation consists three stages, introduction, core activities, and closing using lecture method and drill method; (3) Evaluation is conducted at the end of the learning process. The learning tools used include student worksheets developed by the teacher or adapted from books. Remedial activities are provided for students who have not achieved the minimum level of learning mastery. Conclusion: Based on the results of this research and the discussion on the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum-based English Learning in grade IV at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School, it can be concluded that the learning process has been implemented through several systematic stages. In the planning stage, teachers prepare lesson plans obtained from the internet and adapt them to students' needs.</p>
Accepted: November 2025	
Published: December 2025	



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Citation Information: Rahmi, M., Rafiah, H., & Rahimah, N. (2025). Discrepancy between Regulation and Reality: An Analysis of the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in English Learning at Elementary School. *Tunas: Jurnal Pendidikan Guru Sekolah Dasar*, 11(1), 81-85. <https://doi.org/10.33084/tunas.v11i1.12229>

INTRODUCTION

English is essential to mastering the various challenges of this era of globalization. Therefore, one of the goals of English language learning is to help students communicate both orally and in writing (Mika & Mardiana, 2023). According to the EF EPI (English Proficiency Index), Indonesian students' English proficiency in 2021 ranked 80th out of 112 countries. This indicates that Indonesian students' English proficiency remains very low. Yet, English proficiency is essential for competing in the 5.0 era (Pohan et al., 2023). English serves as a medium for navigating the 5.0 era, where everything is in English. English language education is ideally implemented during the Golden Age, or the golden age before the age of 12. This age range is 2-12 years, and this is the optimal time for developing children's language potential (Pamungkas & Amin, 2021). Various curricula and methods have been developed to improve students' English skills. However, the results are still not considered optimal for enabling students to communicate well in this language.

The Merdeka Curriculum began to be implemented in 2022. This curriculum has advantages over the previous curriculum, namely a greater focus on essential material and student development at each stage. Learning in this curriculum is also more in-depth, meaningful, unhurried, and enjoyable. The Merdeka Curriculum is simpler in its material, so teachers can focus more on learning. The Merdeka Curriculum is relatively new, so many teachers are still trying to understand the policy and its implementation in learning (Oktavia et al., 2023). As an elective subject, English learning in the Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in elementary schools for a maximum of two lesson hours (JP) per week or 72 (seventy-two) JP per year (Kemendikbud Republik Indonesia, 2022).

Based on the results of an October 2023 interview with one of the English teachers at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School, students' English skills are still lacking at the school. West Kelayan 3 Elementary School also implements English instruction in line with the Merdeka Curriculum. Still, several problems persist, such as teachers' inability to package lessons

engagingly, leading to learning outcomes that do not always align with the objectives. Based on this, the researcher is interested in delving deeper into English learning within the Merdeka Curriculum implemented at the school and its suitability with the Merdeka Curriculum.

English learning in elementary schools cannot be underestimated compared to other subjects; in fact, it plays a strategic role in fostering international relations and developing high-quality human resources. The role and function of schools in positioning English as a subject is certainly crucial (Husna et al., 2025). Based on the opinions above, it can be concluded that some of the objectives of English learning include the following:

- 1) To enable students to communicate in English, both orally and in writing;
- 2) English is important for increasing the nation's competitiveness in the global community.
- 3) To prepare students for higher levels of education;
- 4) To develop students' language competency, as language skills are not limited to Indonesian.

The systematic implementation of English learning requires a series of stages: planning, implementation, and evaluation. This process begins with the development of strategies and materials appropriate to the students' competency levels, and continues with classroom teaching practices that prioritize communicative interaction. This cycle closes with an assessment stage that serves as a measure of language achievement and a parameter for the effectiveness of the instruction provided (Purwowidodo & Zaini, 2023).

A lesson plan is a set of guidelines formulated before the learning process is implemented. This plan includes the formulation of objectives, strategies, and activities to be implemented to ensure efficient and effective learning and achieve learning objectives. The stages of learning planning for the Merdeka Curriculum are:

- 1) Understanding Learning Outcomes (CP), which are the competencies that students must achieve at each phase.
- 2) Formulating Learning Objectives (TP): After understanding CP, teachers can formulate learning objectives, with CP broken down into learning objectives.
- 3) Developing Learning Objectives Flow (ATP): The learning objectives are organized into ATP, a series of logically arranged according to the learning sequence from beginning to end.
- 4) In designing learning, learning planning documents can take the form of Teaching Modules or Learning Implementation Plans (RPP), which teachers use to achieve Learning Outcomes (Lestari et al., 2023).

Learning is the interaction among educators (teachers), students, and learning resources in a learning environment to acquire knowledge or information. The learning process in the Merdeka Curriculum generally begins with opening and preliminary activities, followed by core activities, and then closing activities. These activities can be described as follows.

- 1) Introductory activities can begin with apperception, a term referring to the process of connecting new learning material to students' prior knowledge, experience, and understanding.
- 2) Core activities can be implemented using a variety of learning methods that can help students develop competencies, such as inquiry, project-based, problem-based, and differentiated learning.
- 3) Closing activities can be conducted by summarizing the material or assigning tasks. Delivering learning conclusions plays a crucial role in ensuring students fully understand the material presented and learned. Furthermore, this enables teachers to measure the success of the learning (Siregar & Hatika, 2025).

The next stage is assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum, which is carried out as a form of learning evaluation. Assessment is a process carried out by educators (teachers) to obtain information on the development of the process and outcomes of student learning (Hardiansyah, 2022; Munaroh, 2024). To conduct an assessment, teachers create measuring tools in the form of tests or non-test assessment instruments. Then, teachers can measure by assigning scores to student work. There are three types of assessment in the Merdeka Curriculum: diagnostic assessment (assessment conducted at the beginning before learning begins), formative assessment (conducted throughout the learning process), and summative assessment (conducted at the end of the material scope, such as at the end of the semester) (Pebriani et al., 2025; Rafiah & Agustina, 2025). Assessment instruments in the Merdeka Curriculum can include rubrics, checklists, anecdotal notes, graphs, oral tests, assignments, and portfolios. Based on the Merdeka Curriculum, students who have not yet completed the course will be included in remedial activities, namely activities carried out by teachers to help students improve grades that have not yet been completed according to the specified KKTP (Rosyida et al., 2023).

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive method, with the principal, an English teacher, and six students in grades IV-A and IV-B as subjects. The study was conducted at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School, Banjarmasin City, South Kalimantan.

The data collected consisted of responses from respondents or informants, as well as the actions observed. The data collection techniques used in this study were observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations of English learning activities in class IV-A and IV-B, as well as teacher learning materials, were conducted to gather information on the implementation of English learning in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School. Interviews regarding the planning, implementation, and evaluation of English instruction based on the Merdeka Curriculum in grades IV-A and IV-B were

conducted with the principal, the English teacher, and students in grades IV-A and IV-B at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School. Subsequent questions were adjusted based on the informants' answers (Rafiah & Aulia, 2021). This study also used documentation techniques to collect data related to the implementation of English learning activities in fourth grade at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School. The data analysis technique used the Miles and Huberman qualitative data analysis model. After the data were collected, they were reduced and presented to conclude. Data validity was assessed through source and technical triangulation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

According to observations, in English lesson planning, teachers did not create their own Lesson Plan or Learning Objectives Flow (ATP). While the Merdeka Curriculum requires planning to begin by understanding the CP, then formulating the TP and ATP, and finally designing the lesson by determining the learning objectives, this approach was not followed in the English lesson in the fourth grade at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School. Teachers also did not provide a semester program (Prosem) or an annual program (Prota). Interviews revealed that teachers only used learning modules from the internet and those available in the Student Enrichment Book. Although teachers did not create any, this does not mean they were not modified during the lesson to meet student needs. According to Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 56/M/2022, if teachers use government-provided learning modules and/or create learning modules that reference them, they may use them as learning planning documents, with components consisting of at least objectives, steps, and assessments.

Based on observations of in-class learning, before carrying out the lesson, teachers first prepare learning materials from teaching resources, including Teacher's Books, Student Enrichment Books (often referred to as LKS by teachers), and library books. Besides books, learning resources are also available online, such as on video-sharing platforms like YouTube. In line with what was stated by (Ikawati (2024), learning resources can include textbooks, modules, realia, models, markets, banks, and markets. Learning in the classroom is also implemented through lecture and drill methods. Based on the research results discussed above, it can be concluded that the English learning plan for grade IV at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School is not fully in accordance with the Merdeka Curriculum. This is evident from the documentation: teachers prepare teaching modules from the internet, which they then adjust to student needs. The ATP used is also derived from the Student Enrichment book. Teachers also do not prepare Semester Programs (Prosem) and Annual Programs (Prota) at all.

Discussion

English learning in fourth grade is conducted for two lesson hours per week. This aligns with Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 56/M/2022 concerning Curriculum Implementation, which states that English is taught for a maximum of two (2) JPs per week or seventy-two (72) JPs per year as an elective subject. The learning process consists of introductory, core, and closing activities.

a. Introduction Activities

The teacher begins the introduction activities by greeting students in English, such as "how are you?" or "good morning." The teacher then checks student attendance and readiness for learning. Afterward, the students pray together. This prayer activity aligns with the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile reinforcement in the Merdeka Curriculum, which is included in the curriculum structure for elementary and secondary education, alongside intra-curricular learning, as outlined in Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology No. 262/M/2022. According to Decree of the Head of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency Number 009/H/KR/2022, the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile are: 1) faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble character; 2) independence; 3) cooperation; 4) global diversity; 5) critical reasoning; and 6) creativity. During prayer, the dimensions that are referred to are faith, devotion to God Almighty, and noble character. Before entering the core learning activities, teachers conduct apperception by inviting students to recall previous learning material. According to Zainuri et al. (2021), perception is an activity often used by teachers at the beginning of lessons to help students connect previously learned or newly learned concepts with the concepts/material to be taught. Based on observations in grades IV-A and IV-B, teachers immediately begin core activities without conveying learning objectives.

b. Core Activities

According to research findings, core learning activities begin with the teacher delivering the material through the lecture method, which involves oral narration or verbal communication (Wirabumi, 2020). However, this method has drawbacks, including leaving both students and teachers with less room to develop creativity. However, in accordance with the implementation of one of the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile in the Merdeka Curriculum, namely creativity, students and teachers are required to develop their creativity, as explained in the Decree of the Head of the Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Agency Number 009/H/KR/2022. In addition to the lecture method, teachers also use the drill method in implementing the lesson. The teacher records a narrative or some dialogue in English and then reads it aloud. Afterward, the teacher invites students to read after her. At this stage, the teacher encourages students by saying "repeat after me," prompting them to reread the

sentences, phrases, or words the teacher has spoken. The teacher also writes down the meanings of unfamiliar words to help them learn vocabulary.

The teacher uses a whiteboard and a mobile phone to display learning videos to students alternately. The teacher never uses other learning media, such as the school-provided LCD projector. The teacher also sometimes prints pictures or puzzles to share with students. The teacher has never conducted English lessons outside of the classroom.

The teacher also uses ice-breaking activities to refocus students' attention, as they often become noisy during class. This aligns with the statement by Makhmudovna (2022), who argues that ice-breaking can be used to relieve student tension and restore classroom atmosphere. The teacher also uses the skill of asking students questions about the material being taught, and when students ask questions, the teacher provides clear answers. However, when students successfully answer the questions, the teacher provides no reinforcement, such as words of appreciation or rewards; instead, the teacher validates the correctness of the student's answer. Assignments are given at the end of the core learning activities after the teacher has explained the material and provided examples.

c. Closing Activities

The closing activity in English learning involves the teacher reviewing students' understanding, inviting them to recall the material, and providing conclusions. The teacher concludes the lesson with a greeting. The implementation of English learning based on the Merdeka Curriculum in fourth grade at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School is not fully aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum. This is evident in the core learning activities, where the methods used have not yet provided students with space to develop their creativity in accordance with one of the dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile, namely the creative dimension.

Learning evaluation is conducted by giving students assignments at the end of the lesson. According to Aini & Basith (2024), the Merdeka Curriculum includes an evaluation method, often referred to as assessment, and the evaluation conducted at the end of the lesson is called summative assessment. Teachers' assessments are based not only on students' knowledge but also on their attitudes and skills. This is due to several reasons, including the presence of a student with special needs in class IV-A. The learning evaluation instrument is a written test consisting of questions from the Student Enrichment Book and questions adapted from the textbook created by the English teacher.

The teacher assigns questions from the student enrichment book. Assignments are given at the end of the lesson after the teacher has explained and provided examples of the learning material. The teacher guides students who are struggling with the assigned tasks by providing clear directions and occasionally checking in with them.

Students' daily learning outcomes vary; if a student has not met the completion criteria, the teacher will implement

remedial classes and repeat the material that caused the failure. Based on the observations on the first-semester English report card, it appears that all student scores have met the criteria. This means that although some students admitted to having low daily scores, teachers also conducted assessments beyond student knowledge. The Merdeka Curriculum-based English teacher's book and the Student Enrichment book also include assessments on the Pancasila Student Profile. Still, observations indicate that these assessments, and their direct implementation, cover only a few dimensions. In classroom implementation, only the dimensions of faith, devotion to God Almighty, noble character, and independence are addressed. This is certainly not as expected, as it is hoped that all six dimensions can develop simultaneously so that students can fully achieve the Pancasila Student Profile (Annisa et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Based on the research and discussion on English language learning within the Merdeka Curriculum in fourth grade at West Kelayan 3 Elementary School, it was concluded that, in lesson planning, teachers prepared teaching modules obtained online, although these were adapted to student needs. The ATP (Learning Objective Flow) used was also derived from the Student Enrichment textbook. Teachers also did not prepare a Semester Program (Prosem) or an Annual Program (Prota).

The implementation of English language learning in class consisted of an introduction, a core, and a closing activity. The introduction activities began with greetings, checking students' attendance and readiness, and inviting them to pray together. The core activities were conducted using lecture and drill methods, with assignments given at the end. In the closing activities, the teacher reviewed students' understanding, encouraged them to recall the learning material, and provided conclusions. The teacher concluded the lesson with a greeting. Summative evaluation was conducted at the end of the lesson. The tools used included written tests consisting of questions created independently or adapted from the teacher's textbook and the Student Enrichment textbook. The teacher provided remedial classes for students who did not meet the completion criteria.

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