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English Teacher Strategies in Teaching English to Support the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum (MBKM)

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Abstrak
This study aims to describe the strategies used by English teachers in supporting the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at SMA Negeri 13 Makassar. The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum emphasizes flexible and student-centered learning, adapting learning processes to individual student needs.This study uses a descriptive qualitative method. The subjects of the research were two English teaching at SMA Negeri 13 Makassar. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi structured interviews. Data analysis techniques used include data presentation, conclusion drawing, and trigulation to ensure data validity. The resualt showed that English teachers implemented three main strategies in the learning process, namely cooperative learning, differentiated learning, and problem based learning (PBL). Cooperative learning was used to enhance collaboration among students in speaking tasks. Differentiated learning were applied by adjusting the material and method based on students' abilities and learning styles. Meanwhile, PBL was implemented by assigning challenging tasks that required students to solve problems and present solution independently and actively. In conclusion , the strategies used by English teachers align with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, namely meaningful learning , students-centeredneess, and providing space for student potential and learning independence.

keywords: Learning Strategies, English Teachers, Merdeka Curriculum, Cooperative Learning, Differentiation, PBL

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INTRODUCTION

The curriculum serves as the spirit of education that must be evaluated periodically, creatively, and in alignment with the advancement of science, technology, and the competencies required by society and the workforce. Consequently, curriculum reform becomes inevitable. In Indonesia, the *Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi* (SN-Dikti) has been revised three times within six years due to regulatory updates such as Permendikbud No. 49 of 2014, Permendikbud No. 44 of 2015, and Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020, alongside the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy (Suyarman, 2020)

Rapid global changes in various sectors, including education, have triggered a transition from the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) to the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. These global transformations highlighted the urgency for curriculum innovation to stay relevant to modern educational demands (Nasution, 2022) The *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum represents a significant step in transforming Indonesian education, aiming to provide flexibility and autonomy for institutions according to their readiness and conditions. This reform, launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, seeks to build a more adaptive and student-centered education system (Muhsyanur, 2024)

The concept of *Merdeka Belajar* or "Freedom to Learn" emphasizes flexibility and independence in learning, granting teachers and students greater autonomy in the learning process (Kemendikbud, 2020). In this study, the term *Kurikulum Merdeka* is preserved in its original Indonesian form, as the English translation "Independent Learning Curriculum" does not fully capture its contextual meaning and philosophical foundation (Bahri & Daulay, 2024). Unlike many curriculum reforms driven by political changes, the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum aims to improve rather than replace the 2013 Curriculum by addressing its implementation challenges (Yolanda & Wahyuni, 2020).

Previous studies have revealed several difficulties faced by teachers under the 2013 Curriculum, such as challenges in designing lesson plans, implementing science-based learning, and assessing student performance effectively (Firmansyah, 2023) Consequently, the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum was introduced as an educational breakthrough to enhance students' competencies—both soft and hard skills—while preparing them to face future challenges (Prasetiani et al., 2024). This curriculum is designed to be more flexible, focusing on essential learning material ls and encouraging teachers to tailor lessons according to the characteristics and learning needs of their (Schedule et al., 2022; Usanto, 2022)

In implementing *Merdeka Belajar*, teachers play a crucial role in creating an engaging and challenging learning environment that fosters creativity, independence, and active participation. The concept of a teaching strategy, derived from the Greek word *strategos*, refers to a systematic plan to achieve goals effectively (Faizah, 2019). In educational contexts, teaching strategies are

deliberate approaches teachers use to facilitate learning and help students achieve desired learning outcomes (Mardhatillah at al., 2021)

In the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), curriculum changes significantly influence teaching methods and learning outcomes (Suharjati, 2017). The shift from the 2013 Curriculum to the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum presents new challenges for both teachers and students, emphasizing adaptive and student-centered approaches. However, according to the Teacher Education and Training Agency (2019), Indonesian students' English proficiency remains relatively low, partly due to ineffective teaching strategies and difficulties in integrating the new curriculum into classroom practices.

Preliminary observations during the researcher's teaching practicum (*PPL*) at SMA Negeri 13 Makassar revealed that the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum still faces significant challenges. Teachers encounter difficulties in designing appropriate learning modules, while students struggle to adjust to a more independent learning process. These conditions highlight the need for teachers to adopt effective and flexible teaching strategies that align with the philosophy of *Merdeka Belajar*.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the strategies used by English teachers in supporting the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at SMA Negeri 13 Makassar. This research is expected to provide insights into effective instructional approaches, contribute to the development of curriculum implementation, and help improve students' English proficiency in line with the goals of *Merdeka Belajar*.

METHOD

This research employed a descriptive qualitative design to describe the English teachers' strategies in supporting the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. The study was conducted at SMA Negeri 13 Makassar during the second semester of the 2024/2025 academic year.

The subjects of this study were two English teachers who actively implemented the *Merdeka Belajar* approach in their teaching practices. The data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The instruments used in this research consisted of an observation guide and an interview guide, both developed based on the objectives of the study.

The data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, triangulation of sources and techniques was applied.

This methodological framework was selected to gain a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' strategies and to capture authentic classroom practices in line with the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research revealed that English teachers at SMA Negeri 13 Makassar implemented three main strategies to support the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum: Cooperative Learning, Differentiated Learning, and Problem-Based Learning (PBL). These strategies were designed to promote student-centered learning, enhance engagement, and develop critical thinking and independence among learners.

First, the implementation of Cooperative Learning encouraged active participation and collaboration among students, particularly in speaking activities. Teachers organized students into small groups to perform dialogue practices and short discussions, allowing them to learn from one another. This finding aligns with the results of (Wijaya et al., 2022) who emphasized that cooperative learning improves students' communication skills and teamwork.

Second, teachers applied Differentiated Learning by adjusting materials and teaching methods according to students' abilities, learning styles, and interests. For instance, advanced learners were given more complex assignments, while those who needed additional support received simpler tasks and direct guidance. This approach is consistent with the principle of flexibility emphasized in the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum and with (Firmansyah, 2023) study, which found that differentiation enhances student motivation and reduces learning anxiety.

Third, the use of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) allowed students to solve real-life problems through group discussions and project presentations. Teachers created learning scenarios that encouraged students to think critically, collaborate in groups, and communicate their ideas in English. This strategy not only developed cognitive and social skills but also fostered creativity and independence, as highlighted by (Rahmadhani et al, 2022)

Overall, the findings demonstrated that teachers successfully integrated the core values of *Merdeka Belajar*—autonomy, collaboration, and contextual learning—into their classroom practices. However, several challenges were identified, such as limited facilities, insufficient time for preparation, and students' varying readiness to engage in independent learning. These constraints affected the full implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar* approach.

Despite these challenges, the teachers' strategies proved effective in creating a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment. The results confirmed that applying cooperative, differentiated, and problem-based learning models could improve students' engagement and understanding of English. Compared to previous studies, this research contributes a contextualized view of how English teachers implement the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at the senior high school level, offering practical insights for educators seeking to enhance language learning within the new curriculum framework.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concluded that English teachers at SMA Negeri 13 Makassar applied Cooperative Learning, Differentiated Learning, and Problem-Based Learning (PBL) as the main strategies to support *Merdeka Belajar* implementation. These approaches embody the curriculum's essence—flexible, student-centered, and meaningful learning—while fostering collaboration, creativity, and independence among students.

This research contributes to the current body of knowledge in English language education by providing real evidence of *Merdeka Belajar* application in secondary school contexts. It demonstrates that effective teaching strategies aligned with *Merdeka Belajar* can improve students' engagement and proficiency, even under resource limitations.

However, constraints such as limited facilities, preparation time, and students' varied readiness remain. Continuous professional development and institutional support are necessary to optimize *Merdeka Belajar* implementation.

Future research is recommended to explore the integration of digital learning tools to enhance interaction and motivation. Comparative studies across different educational levels may also provide deeper insights into effective English teaching strategies within the *Merdeka Belajar* framework.

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