

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This section, provides the background of the study, reason for choosing the topic, research question, research objective, the significance of the study, research methodology, and definition in terminologies. Each aspect will be explained in detail to provide a comprehensive understand of the context and objective of the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

The education system in Indonesia continues to evolve to keep pace with global developments and needs, particularly regarding curriculum. According to Ananda and Hudaidah (2021), the curriculum is designed as a guideline to improve the quality of education in alignment with modern demands. The Republic of Indonesia Law No. 20 of 2003 Article 1 Paragraph 19 defines the curriculum as a plan encompassing objectives, content, and teaching methods, serving as a guide to achieve specific educational goals. As the core of the education system, the curriculum plays a crucial role in realizing these educational objectives (Siregar et al, 2021). Throughout its history, Indonesia's curriculum has undergone 13 revisions, including in 1952, 1964, 1968, 1975, 1984, 1994, 2004, 2006, and 2013 (Saptohutomo, 2022). In 2022, Indonesia launched its latest curriculum, the Merdeka Curriculum or Merdeka Curriculum as a further step to improve the quality of education.

On February 11, 2022, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek) launched the Merdeka Curriculum and the Merdeka Mengajar platform during the 15th episode of the Merdeka Belajar program (Dikjen Dikti, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum designed to provide freedom to schools, educators, and students in determining a learning process that better suits the needs and characteristics of the learners. The Merdeka Curriculum offers teachers flexibility in teaching according to students' needs, focusing on character education through intramural, extracurricular, co-curricular activities, and the development of school culture (Minsih et al., 2023). Pertiwi and Pusparini (2021) state that the

Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers greater autonomy in selecting teaching techniques and approaches that align with students' needs.

The changes brought by the Merdeka Curriculum have a significant impact on English teachers. As highlighted in the research by Ainiyah et al (2023) is on the “EFL Teachers’ Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum” the findings show that teachers face difficulties in understanding the curriculum due to the lack of adequate guidebooks. Additionally, Mardhatilah (2024) identifies the challenges of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum from two aspects: internal and external. Internal challenges include classroom management, workload, motivation, limited resources, professional development, and technology adaptation. External challenges include educational policies, socio-economic conditions, parental involvement, and the surrounding environment. This finding is also supported by (Fahrani et al., 2023; Fauzie, 2024; Fitra and Tiarina, 2023).

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia faces various issues involving school principals, curriculum representatives, and teachers. A study conducted by Susanti et al. (2023) revealed that the issues in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum stem from the government, particularly related to the suboptimal guidance and support in its execution. Additionally, the problems faced by teachers include limited abilities to utilize the Merdeka Mengajar platform and technology to study and understand the Merdeka Curriculum. These findings are also supported by studies from Purbadianti et al. (2024), Madani (2024), Windayanti et al. (2023), and Siregar et al. (2024).

During the challenges and issues faced in the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers' beliefs about the changes play a crucial role in the success of its implementation. Teachers, as those directly involved in the learning process and classroom management, have a central role in adapting to this new curriculum. Bandura (1997: 31) explains that *self-efficacy* refers to an individual's belief in their ability to plan and execute the necessary steps to achieve specific goals. In this context, teachers' belief in their ability to implement the Merdeka Curriculum is a determining factor in ensuring that the changes are effectively carried out in the

classroom. Teachers who have confidence in their abilities are more likely to embrace change, be more creative in designing lessons, and better equipped to overcome challenges during the implementation process. Therefore, strengthening teachers' self-efficacy in implementing this curriculum is essential to achieving better educational outcomes.

A previous studies have explored teachers' beliefs. For instance, Musanna (2016) discussed the reformulation of teachers' beliefs. Gilakjani and Sabouri (2017) examined teachers' beliefs in English language teaching in Canada, while Uysal and Bardakci (2014) highlighted grammar teaching practices in Turkey. Ningsih and Fata (2015) investigated teachers' beliefs related to the teaching profession in Aceh, whereas Karimzadeh and Langaroudi (2019) analyzed the relationship between pedagogical beliefs and student engagement in Iran. Rohmah et al. (2024) studied teachers' self-efficacy in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum. Other studies have focused on teachers' beliefs regarding formative assessment (Hidayat et al., 2019), the use of technology to support independent learning (Martha et al., 2021), and teachers' self-efficacy in classroom management (Rahmadani & Kurniawati, 2021). Research on pre-service teachers has also been conducted, such as Pusparini et al. (2021), who examined their beliefs in teaching, and Lukman et al. (2024), who explored pronunciation teaching. These studies demonstrate the breadth of research on *teachers' beliefs*. However, research focusing specifically on English teachers' beliefs in implementing differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum is still limited.

Based on the previous studies we have reviewed, there is limited research specifically exploring English teachers' beliefs in implementing differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level. Therefore, our study aims to fill this gap by examining English teachers' beliefs in implementing differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum at junior high school. This research is expected to provide new insights and enrich the existing literature regarding the success of the Merdeka Curriculum at the junior high school level.

1.2 Reasons for Choosing the Topic

The reasons the researcher choose the topic English Teachers' Beliefs in Implementing Differentiated Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum at Junior High Schools in Garut are as follows:

1. Differentiated learning is an important aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum, and teachers' beliefs play a significant role in determining how it is implemented in classrooms.
2. The Merdeka Curriculum is relatively new, and there is still limited research on how English teachers perceive and apply differentiated learning, especially at the junior high school level.

1.3 Research Question

Based on the background of the research that has been presented, this study will focus on the following question:

- How do English Teachers' Beliefs in Implementing Differentiated Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum at Junior High School?

1.4 Research Objectives

Based on the previously mentioned research question, this study aims to explore English Teachers' Beliefs in Implementing Differentiated Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum at Junior High School.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

The results of this study are expected to be enhance the understanding of teachers' beliefs in implementing differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum, both in theoretical and practical terms, as explained below:

1.5.1 Theoretical Significance:

This study contributes to the development of knowledge related to teacher' beliefs, specifically in differentiated learning within the Merdeka Curriculum. It offers insights into how teachers' perspectives, beliefs, and attitudes influence the application of new educational reforms. The findings may enrich existing

educational theories on curriculum implementation, teacher cognition, and how teachers adapt to changes in their teaching practices based on their beliefs about the curriculum.

1.5.2 Practical Significance:

This study provides valuable information for educators, policymakers, and school administrators in Garut, and potentially in other regions, regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. Understanding teachers' beliefs can help improve professional development programs, guide curriculum training, and support teachers in adjusting their practices to enhance the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in junior high schools. This study also offers practical recommendations to improve the alignment between teachers' beliefs and the curriculum's objectives, which can lead to more effective teaching and better student learning outcomes.

1.6 Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative approach to examine English Teachers' Beliefs in Implementing differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach allows the researcher to gain in-depth insights into the perspectives and experiences faced by English Teachers. This is also supported by the opinion of Creswell (2012) that qualitative research is an inquiry-based method for exploring and comprehending a central phenomenon.

1.6.1 Research Instrument

Data collection in this study was carried out through semi-structured interviews with the participants. This method was chosen because it allows the researcher to obtain in-depth information regarding English teachers' beliefs at junior high schools about the implementation of differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum through direct interaction between the interviewer and the respondents.

1.6.2 Research Participant

This research will be conducted at Junior High School in Garut. The participants in this study are three English teachers currently teaching at the selected junior high school. These teachers were chosen because they have direct experience in implementing differentiated learning in the Merdeka Curriculum based on several important factors. The teacher has applied differentiated learning in the classroom, and the school has already implemented the Merdeka Curriculum, making it an ideal location to examine English Teachers' Beliefs in Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum.

1.7 The Definition of Terminologies

Based on the title of this study, the researchers provide the following definitions of key terminologies to ensure a clear understanding of the concepts and ideas explored throughout the research.

1. Beliefs

According to Bandura (1986), beliefs are an integral part of social cognitive theory, influencing how individuals perceive their abilities (self-efficacy) to perform specific actions and achieve desired outcomes. These beliefs shape individuals' motivation, thought processes, and actions when facing challenges or tasks.

2. Teacher's Belief

According to Bandura (1986), teachers' beliefs are closely related to self-efficacy, which refers to their confidence in managing classrooms, teaching effectively, and influencing student learning. These beliefs significantly impact teachers' motivation, perseverance, and teaching strategies.

3. Merdeka Curriculum

According to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (2021) the Merdeka Curriculum is a curriculum that provides a variety of intracurricular learning with an emphasis on deepening concepts and

strengthening students' competencies. Teachers are given the flexibility to select teaching tools so that the learning process can be adapted to students' needs and interest

4. Differentiated Learning

According to Tomlinson (2014, as cited in irawan, 2025) explained that differentiated learning is a teaching approach that adjusts the learning process according to students' readiness, interests, and learning styles.