

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of Study

Indonesia education system has experienced multiple curriculum reforms aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning. The most recent reform, the *Merdeka Curriculum* (Independent Curriculum), was introduced to address limitations in previous curricula and to promote a more flexible, student-centered approach. Unlike its predecessors, which emphasized standardized and rigid instructional practices, the *Merdeka Curriculum* allows for differentiated instruction based on students' needs, interests, and developmental levels.

A central aspect of this curriculum is the design and development of learning modules, which act as structured guides for facilitating student learning.¹ In this new framework, teachers are not merely implementers of a fixed syllabus; rather, they are empowered to create, adapt, and organize their own learning materials. This autonomy places teachers at the forefront of curriculum development, especially in designing effective English learning modules that align with both national standards and the diverse needs of learners.

However, the shift from centralized to teacher driven curriculum development introduces new challenges. Teachers who were previously accustomed to pre-packaged lesson plans now face the responsibility of crafting learning experiences from scratch.² This includes selecting appropriate content, sequencing material, integrating 21st-century skills, and ensuring alignment with learning outcomes outlined in the *Merdeka Curriculum*. Designing such modules requires pedagogical creativity, mastery of subject matter, and a clear understanding of student learning profiles.³

SMPN 1 Karang Tanjung has been chosen as the research site for this study because of its early adoption of the *Merdeka Curriculum*, particularly in English

¹ Amna Abdullah, Muhammad Yusuf, and Trisnawaty Junus Buhungo, 'Development of Teaching Module Based on Independent Learning to Optimize Students' Conceptual Knowledge on the Motion Topic', 11.2 (2025), 99–107 <<https://doi.org/10.29303/jppipa.v11i2.10056>>.

² Thato Charlot Mashishi and Sam Ramaila, 'Preservice Teachers' Perceptions, Attitudes, and Challenges of Using Scratch as a Coding Tool to Foster Active Learning in Life Sciences Classrooms', *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 23.9 (2024), 472–97 <<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.23.9.24>>.

³ Fina Nur Oktaviah, Anik Dwiyanti, and Mardiyanto Barumbun, 'Integrated STEM-Based Teaching Modules with the Values of Pancasila Student Profiles in Supporting the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in Primary School', 7.3 (2023), 469–80.

language education. As a Public Junior High School, it offers a relevant context to explore how English teachers navigate the curriculum shift specifically in the design and development of learning modules. Preliminary observations suggest that while teachers are enthusiastic about the increased flexibility, they also face difficulties in creating comprehensive and effective modules that support student learning outcomes.

The researcher observed that while teachers have access to generic modules, there is a lack of localized content that integrates Karang Tanjung's cultural context, making it difficult for students to relate to the lessons.

Given the critical role of teachers in shaping the success of this curriculum through instructional design, this study aims to investigate how English teachers at SMPN 1 Karang Tanjung develop learning modules under the *Merdeka* Curriculum. It focuses on the processes involved in module development, the pedagogical considerations teachers make, and the challenges they face during the design stage. By shedding light on these aspects, this study seeks to contribute to the broader discourse on curriculum reform and provide practical recommendations to support teachers in their role as module designers.

While previous studies have largely focused on the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, including teaching strategies and classroom practices, there is still limited research examining how English teachers develop learning modules within this curriculum framework. This study addresses this gap by focusing specifically on the module design process, highlighting the teachers' pedagogical considerations, creative decisions, and alignment with curriculum goals. Such a focus provides a novel contribution to the field by shifting the lens from implementation to instructional design.

For example, Hazlinda (2024), in their study "*Exploring English Teachers' Pedagogical Strategy in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 3 Pekanbaru*", focus on discovery learning and differentiated instruction during classroom teaching. In contrast, the present study concentrates solely on how teachers prepare the learning materials that enable such instruction.⁴

Similarly, Maharani (2024) in "*The Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in Teaching English: A Case Study at a Junior High School in Pekanbaru*" addresses

⁴ Nur Hazlinda, 'Exploring English Teachers' pedagogical Strategy In Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka At Mtsn 3 Pekanbaru (Doctoral Dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim).' (UIN SUSKA RIAU, 2024) <repository.uin-suska.ac.id>.

factors influencing curriculum success from an implementation standpoint. My research instead provides a deeper exploration of the design stage how English learning modules are constructed before being used in classrooms.⁵

Ramadhani's study (2023), "*Exploring Challenges of Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Teaching English at SMK Migas Bumi Melayu Riau Pekanbaru*", highlights teachers' difficulties in customizing subject-specific content in vocational settings. While relevant, my study shifts the lens toward basic education and examines how junior high school teachers manage the content, structure, and sequencing of English modules in the design process.⁶

In short, this research fills a critical gap by focusing not on how the curriculum is taught, but on how it is shaped by analyzing the role of teachers in the design and development of English learning modules under the *Merdeka Curriculum*. This study is expected to bridge the divide between curriculum policy and actual instructional planning, ensuring that the goals of the *Merdeka Curriculum* are reflected in well-designed, contextually relevant learning materials.

To conduct this research, the study will employ observations, teacher interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis to gain insights into how modules are planned and developed. While the study will not assess classroom implementation, it may consider teachers' reflections on whether their designs are meeting intended learning goals. Future research may expand to multi-site comparisons, long-term outcomes, or the integration of digital resources in the module design process. Ultimately, findings from this study can inform teacher training programs, curriculum development policies, and instructional material design in the *Merdeka Curriculum* context.

B. Identification of Problem

From the research background above, the identification of the problems is as follow:

1. Limited involvement and capacity of English teachers in designing and adapting learning modules under the *Merdeka Curriculum*.

⁵ Adilda Maharani, 'The Implementation Of Kurikulum Merdeka In Teaching English: A Case Study At A Junior High School In Pekanbaru (Doctoral Dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau).' (UIN SUSKA RIAU, 2024) <repository.uin-suska.ac.id>.

⁶ Dyah Azzahra Nur Ramadhani, 'Exploring Challenges Of Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum In Teaching English At Smk Migas Bumi Melayu Riau Pekanbaru (Doctoral Dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau).', 2024 <repository.uin-suska.ac.id>.

2. Challenges in aligning designed modules with curriculum objectives and students' diverse learning needs.
3. Insufficient support, guidance, and access to resources for teachers during the development of English learning modules.

C. Scope and Limitation Problem

This study focuses on examining the roles of English teachers in designing and developing learning modules within the framework of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at SMPN 1 Karang Tanjung. Specifically, it explores the processes, considerations, and challenges faced by teachers in constructing these modules and aligning them with curriculum objectives and student needs. The research delves into how English teachers plan, design, and structure learning materials that reflect the pedagogical principles of the curriculum.

However, the study is limited to English teachers at SMPN 1 Karang Tanjung and does not investigate students' perceptions or classroom implementation. In addition, findings may not be generalizable to schools with significantly different educational contexts, resources, or institutional support.

D. Formulation of problem

Considering the insights outlined in the research background, as well as the identification and scope of the problem, the research problem can be formulated as follows:

1. What are the roles of teacher at SMPN 1 Karang Tanjung to develop English learning modules in the *Merdeka* Curriculum?
2. What challenges do they face in developing these modules to align with the objectives of the *Merdeka* Curriculum?
3. How do the designed modules reflect the principles and goals of the *Merdeka* Curriculum?

E. Objective of Study

1. To describe the role of English teachers at SMPN 1 Karang Tanjung in developing English learning modules within the framework of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

2. To identify the challenges encountered by teachers in the process of developing English learning modules that align with the curriculum principles and learning objectives.
3. To analyze the extent to which the designed modules reflect the principles and goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

F. Significance of Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This study contributes to the academic discourse on English language instruction and curriculum development by examining the role of teachers in designing English learning modules under the *Merdeka* Curriculum. It offers insights into how teacher agency, pedagogical design, and curriculum alignment interact in shaping instructional materials, thus enriching the theoretical foundation for future studies on curriculum innovation.

2. Practical Significance

This study holds practical value for multiple stakeholders:

a. For Teachers

This study provides English teachers with insights into effective strategies for developing learning modules that align with the *Merdeka* Curriculum. It identifies key challenges and offers evidence-based recommendations to enhance instructional quality and teacher capacity.

b. For Schools and Educational Institutions

Schools and education administrators may use the findings to design more targeted professional development programs, support systems, and policies that empower teachers in instructional material development and curriculum adaptation.

c. For Future Researchers

This study serves as a foundation for further academic inquiry into teacher roles, instructional material development, and curriculum policy. Future research may expand on this study by exploring student outcomes, cross-school comparisons, or digital innovation in module development.

G. Previous Study

A number of previous studies have addressed the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in English language education; however, very few have specifically focused on the development of English learning modules by teachers, which is the primary concern of this research.

Hazlinda (2024), in their study titled "*Exploring English Teachers' Pedagogical Strategy in Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka at MTsN 3 Pekanbaru*," investigated the teaching strategies adopted by English teachers. Their focus was on classroom instruction, such as discovery learning, project-based learning, and the use of digital tools. In contrast, my study does not explore teaching methods or classroom strategies. Rather, it focuses on the teachers' active involvement in designing and developing English learning modules, which serve as instructional materials aligned with the *Merdeka* Curriculum.⁷

Maharani (2024), in her study "*The Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka in Teaching English: A Case Study at a Junior High School in Pekanbaru*," examined factors influencing curriculum adoption, such as teacher qualifications and resource availability. While her study discusses broad curriculum implementation issues, my research is more specific and technical, exploring how teachers conceptualize, write, adapt, and evaluate English learning modules based on the curriculum's demands.⁸

Ramadhani (2024) studied "*Challenges of Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in Teaching English at SMK Migas Bumi Melayu Riau Pekanbaru*." Her research revealed implementation issues in a vocational high school setting, particularly the difficulty of aligning curriculum objectives with vocational content. While both studies examine challenges, my research is limited to a Junior High School context and focuses on the technical and pedagogical process of module development, including alignment with learning objectives, instructional design, and classroom applicability.⁹

In conclusion, while prior studies have addressed the general implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum or examined teaching strategies in the classroom, this study is distinct in focusing on the process, challenges, and effectiveness of teacher-developed English learning modules. It aims to fill a gap in the literature by highlighting teachers'

⁷ Nur Hazlinda, 'Exploring English Teachers' pedagogical Strategy In Implementing Kurikulum Merdeka At Mtsn 3 Pekanbaru (Doctoral Dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim).' (UIN SUSKA RIAU, 2024) <repository.uin-suska.ac.id>.

⁸ Adilda Maharani, 'The Implementation Of Kurikulum Merdeka In Teaching English: A Case Study At A Junior High School In Pekanbaru (Doctoral Dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau).' (UIN SUSKA RIAU, 2024) <repository.uin-suska.ac.id>.

⁹ Dyah Azzahra Nur Ramadhani, 'Exploring Challenges Of Implementing The Merdeka Curriculum In Teaching English At Smk Migas Bumi Melayu Riau Pekanbaru (Doctoral Dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri Sultan Syarif Kasim Riau).', 2024 <repository.uin-suska.ac.id>.

roles as curriculum developers, particularly in the context of a public junior high school implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum.

H. Organization of Writing

This study is structured into five chapters, each covering essential aspects of the research:

Chapter I is Introduction. This chapter outlines the Background of the Research, Identification of the Problem, Scope and Limitation of the Problem, Formulation of the Problem, Objectives of the Study, Significance of the Study, and Writing Organization.

Chapter II is Theoretical Framework. This section provides a theoretical foundation for the study, covering: *Merdeka* Curriculum (Concept and principles), The Role of Teachers in Developing Learning Modules, Challenges in Developing and Implementing Modules, Effectiveness of Modules in English Language Learning.

Chapter III is Research Methodology. This chapter describes the Research Design, Research Instruments, Research Location, Participants, Data Collection Techniques, and Data Analysis Techniques.

Chapter IV is Research Findings and Discussion.

Chapter V is Conclusion and Recommendations.