IDENTIFYING GAPS AND NEEDS IN ENGLISH TEACHING PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE KURIKULUM
MERDEKA AT SMPN 6 SENGAH TEMILA

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Keywords	Abstract
	This research aims to identify the gaps and needs in English teaching practices at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila. This research employs a case study design with a qualitative approach. Interviews, observations, and documentation were used to collect data. The findings indicate that the gaps in the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka include teachers' limited understanding and skills in teaching, such as difficulties in applying appropriate methods and utilizing technology in their instruction, low student engagement in learning, lack of resources and facilities, and challenges in conducting effective assessments. The identified needs in English teaching include the need for advanced skills and further training related to the Kurikulum Merdeka, as well as the need for adequate resources, facilities, and infrastructure. This research contributes to teachers, principal, and government by providing insights to enhance the effectiveness of the Kurikulum Merdeka implementation in English teaching at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila.
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INTRODUCTION

The Kurikulum Merdeka is a curriculum that replaces K13. The Kurikulum Merdeka is a program initiated by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, which is presented as a form of total support to improve the school curriculum in Indonesia and realize a sovereign, independent and advanced Indonesia through the creation of Pancasila students who are critical, creative, independent, loyal, dedicated to God Almighty and who have noble morals, work hard together and are globally diverse (Rahmadayanti and Hartoyo, 2022). The Kurikulum Merdeka presents a more flexible and student-centered approach to learning. The Kurikulum Merdeka as proposed by Nurcahyono

and Jaya (2022), is characterized by its simpler, more comprehensive, relevant, and interactive content and structure. Teachers are given the freedom to design student-centered learning. The use of interesting and engaging learning methods and the application of technology in learning. The educational process can be a medium for harmonizing the use of digital media and increasing digital literacy in society by selecting digital learning resources carried out by teachers/lecturers that are appropriate for their students(Rifai, 2023). So teachers must have skills in this regard.

The kurikulum merdeka require teachers in schools to try to adapt to existing changes, especially English teachers. Teachers need to learn to understand how the concept of implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka in schools, making props, making and assessing assessments for students, *etc*. Changes in the curriculum have an impact on teacher teaching in the classroom. Many teachers are still confused about applying the kurikulum merdeka to classroom learning, especially English teachers. Therefore, it is very important to conduct more studies and evaluations to see the effectiveness and accuracy of its implementation (Nurcahyono and Jaya, 2022). According to him, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, judging from the facts in the field, shows that it has not been fully realized because of the problems that come from the change.

At SMPN 6 Sengah Temila, the Kurikulum Merdeka will only be implemented in 2023, precisely at the beginning of the 2023/2024 school year. This happens because this school takes longer to prepare its schools such as preparing teachers, infrastructure, and teaching materials that are by the kurikulum merdeka. This school has only implemented the Kurikulum Merdeka for 2 years. Its implementation is also carried out in stages and has only been applied to grades VII and VIII. In practice, there are a number of challenges experienced by teachers at SMPN 6 Sengah Temenila, especially English teachers. Starting from teachers' knowledge of the curriculum, the availability of learning resources, facilities, and infrastructure to student involvement in the learning process. This challenge is a gap between the principles of implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka and what happens in the field. Therefore, further exploration is needed to see the gaps that arise in order to identify the needs needed by teachers.

It is very important to identify gaps and teaching needs in implementing them so Siregar *et al.,* (2024) analyzed the problems of English teachers in implementing the kurikulum merdeka at SD Negeri 067090 Medan and showed that teachers do not understand the concept of a kurikulum merdeka, they are faced with obstacles in creating teaching modules, analyzing learning outcomes and preparing learning goal flows. Akhmadi, A (2023) studies the application of the kurikulum merdeka in basic Madrasah and shows that the obstacles to the implementation of the kurikulum merdeka include a lack of socialization related to the independent study of the curriculum, teacher competence, facilities and infrastructure. Alimuddin, J (2023) conducted research in elementary schools with the result that SD Negeri Sindangsari 02 the obstacles faced were that there was only a definitive principal in October 2022 and a lack of teachers' understanding of the kurikulum merdeka due to the lack of offline training.

This research is presented to find out what gaps arise in the practice of teaching English for the implementation of an effective kurikulum merdeka in SMPN 6 Sengah Temila and to find out the need for effective English teaching practices in the implementation of the kurikulum merdeka at SMPN 6 Sengah Temenila. By exploring the experience of teachers, this research provides valuable insights in increasing the effectiveness of the implementation of the kurikulum merdeka in English language teaching. By understanding the gaps, needs and aspects that are still lacking from teachers and schools in the implementation of the kurikulum merdeka, this research is expected to provide clearer information about the steps that must be taken to improve the quality of teaching English. This research functions in assessing how effective the implementation of the kurikulum merdeka is. This research also contributes to the formulation of policies that are more targeted in the implementation of the kurikulum merdeka in schools. In addition, it makes a valuable contribution to teachers, principals and the government. To improve the implementation process, good collaboration is needed between teachers, school principals and the government in developing a strategy that is right on target.

METHOD

This research used a case study research design with a qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2014), a case study is a research strategy to investigate something carefully by gathering complete information using various data collection procedures. Semi-structured interviews, field notes and documentation were used to collect data. Interviews were conducted on 2 English teachers and the principal. Then observations were conducted in English classes and documentation in the form of teaching modules, photos during interviews and observations in English classes.

The research procedure was carried out through several stages. First, the researcher conducted observations to examine the teaching and learning processes in the class, then interviews with teachers and principals to see the views and experiences of teachers regarding the implementation of the *kurikulum Merdeka*. and taking documentation in the form of photos during interviews and observations in class and asking about the learning modules used by teachers. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify emerging patterns and issues. Thematic analysis is one of the techniques of qualitative research analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2017), thematic analysis is a data analysis technique whose goal is to identify, analyze, and interpret investigative insights into patterns of meaning across any qualitative data set.

RESULT

This section explains the findings from the research that has been conducted. The results show that there are gaps and need in the practice of English teaching at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila that affect the effectiveness of the implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka*. The researcher divided the results into two parts based on the research problems.

1. Gaps in English Teaching in the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka

The findings showed that there was a gap between the implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka* in English teaching and the conceptual framework of its implementation. Many gaps emerged in the teaching of English, particularly at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila. There were some major gaps in the practice of teaching English at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila in the implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka*. First, in terms of teachers' understanding and skills, although teachers had participated in training related to *kurikulum Merdeka*, such as those organized by the education department both online and offline, the implementation in the classroom was still not optimal. Teachers had difficulty selecting the appropriate methods. Even though they had used several approaches aligned with the curriculum and involving students in the learning process such as project-based learning and group discussions these had not fully adapted the lessons to students' needs or utilized technology effectively. This was based on the teachers explained by RM.

"*The challenge I face in implementing a teaching method that aligns with Kurikulum Merdeka is trying to balance the freedom given with the needs of each student. Although I can give students more freedom to learn, sometimes the time and material that must be taught are limited. Besides, not all students can learn independently. Some students still need more assistance, therefore I have to be patient and creative so that students can learn in a way that suits them*".

Then, PH also explained *"The lack of resources, such as the limited availability of only 4 infocus projectors for 13 classes, and the internet connection that is sometimes stable and sometimes not."*

The limited availability of technological facilities became a challenge for teachers in implementing technology-based learning in the classroom. Teachers also stated that the limited time allocated for English learning only three periods per week was an obstacle to delivering material in depth and by the principles of *kurikulum Merdeka*. In addition, a significant gap was the lack of active student participation in learning. Many students were not yet ready to learn independently and were still accustomed to traditional teaching approaches. It was also found that English as a subject was introduced only at the junior high school level, As a result, students had to start learning from the basics. Students tended to be passive during the learning process. This is based on the explanation from the English teacher, RM:

"I found that some students are interested while others are not interested in learning English. Especially when they feel they don't understand the material being taught, they quickly get bored. Only a few students truly enjoy the lesson, and they can be counted on one hand".

Results of observation in PH class *"Most students feel shy to speak English when it's their turn, and many of them have noticeable pronunciation errors."*

The teachers faced difficulties in creating interactive lessons and engaging students. Another factor that worsened the gap was the limited

infrastructure. Teachers mentioned that resources and facilities were still insufficient to meet their needs, such as the lack of projectors, the language laboratory that is not available and an unstable internet connection. This led teachers to rely more on books and conventional methods rather than project-based or technology-based approaches. Learning evaluation also became a challenge, as teachers struggled to carry out formative and summative assessments comprehensively, in line with the standards of *kurikulum Merdeka*. RM explained:

> *"The main challenge in implementing formative and summative assessments is limited time. Besides that, the diversity of students' abilities is also a challenge. Some students grasp the material quickly, while others need more time to understand it. Therefore, I need to adjust the assessments so that students can follow them well. Another challenge is providing effective feedback. I need to ensure that the feedback I give helps students understand their mistakes so they can improve. However, once again, this requires extra time and attention."*

2. Needs in English Teaching in the Implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka

Some findings about teachers' needs in teaching were also identified. These needs To cover the gaps that occur, the findings of this research identified several needs that must be met. English teachers have several needs that must be fulfilled for the teaching and learning process to proceed effectively. This finding highlights teachers' needs, such as the need to understand the concept of implementing kurikulum Merdeka, which emphasizes competency-based and differentiated learning. Teachers are required to implement flexible and student-centered learning. They are also expected to design lessons that align with students' needs. Furthermore, teachers need skills in applying interactive learning approaches/methods, such as project-based learning, and integrating digital technology into teaching. Therefore, follow-up training that is more practical and intensive regarding active learning methods, the use of digital media, and the development of assessments aligned with the learning outcomes of kurikulum Merdeka is necessary. Additionally, enhancing teachers' skills in managing heterogeneous classrooms and facilitating diverse learning is crucial. This is important so that teachers can accommodate the varied learning needs of students and create an inclusive learning environment. Based on the explanation from the English teacher, PH, said.

> *"Refresher training, for example on the understanding of Kurikulum Merdeka whether students are truly given complete freedom to learn independently or if they need deeper teaching and continuous guidance".*

Then RM said *"Although there has been training, I feel there are still some aspects that need further clarification, especially regarding how we manage the classroom and conduct assessments that align with Kurikulum Merdeka. So, I think it is still necessary."* RM also explained that *"Further training to integrate technology into English teaching is very necessary. Once again, technology helps us in the teaching process".*

Another need is adequate support for facilities and infrastructure. The school requires additional resources such as projectors, computer equipment, stable internet access, and dedicated spaces for language learning. Support from the school, particularly the principal, is also essential in terms of budget allocation policies, academic supervision, and motivation for teachers. Furthermore, student participation in learning needs to be improved through more contextual and engaging approaches. Teachers also need to participate in MGMP activities, especially the MGMP for teachers who teach English. In these forums, English teachers can engage in discussions, and solve problems related to teaching English. This explanation is based on the statement from M, the principal, who said.

"Participating in activities such as the English MGMP. There, they are in the same group, specifically for SMP 6 Sengah Temila. Therefore, my hope is that if they participate, they will share experiences with other teachers and schools on how to improve English teaching, both in skills and lessons".

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings presented, the researcher divides them into two parts:

1. The Gaps in English Teaching in the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka

A gap refers to a mismatch between what has been established and inappropriate practices. The gap in *kurikulum Merdeka* refers to the disparity between the ideal objectives of *kurikulum Merdeka* and the reality of its implementation, particularly in the learning process. In the context of implementing *kurikulum Merdeka*, its application in Indonesia has not been entirely successful, especially in schools located far from urban areas, such as SMPN 6 Sengah Temila, where it has only been implemented for two years. This gap arises due to several factors, such as inadequate resources and infrastructure. According to Mulyasa (2003), educational facilities are tools and equipment that are directly used to support the educational process, especially teaching and learning activities, such as buildings, classrooms, desks, and chairs, as well as teaching aids and media such as dictionaries, books, and learning materials. It has been found that English teachers lack essential resources such as technological tools, unstable internet connections, and teaching materials.

In addition, another gap also appears, such as the gap between teachers' understanding and skills and their application in the classroom. Teachers understand the concept of *kurikulum Merdeka*, but challenges arise in its implementation in the classroom, such as being hindered by students who are not ready to learn according to the *kurikulum Merdeka* and time limitations. Teachers at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila mentioned that the teaching time for English in the *kurikulum Merdeka* is only 3 hours per week, and this is insufficient. The limited student involvement in learning also hinders the learning process in line with *kurikulum Merdeka*. Student involvement in English language learning is a significant challenge that requires innovative solutions (Masita, E, 2024). Most students are passive during the learning process, and many remain silent when asked. The teacher stated that only a few students enjoy the lessons, and this might

occur because the teacher mentioned that English is only studied in junior high school, so most students need to adapt to learning English.

In the *kurikulum Merdeka*, teachers are required to use interactive teaching methods to engage students. Therefore, teachers' knowledge and skills in teaching significantly influence the learning process in the classroom (Masita, E, 2024). Several teaching methods have been used by English teachers at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila that align with the concept of *kurikulum Merdeka*, such as project-based learning, group discussion methods, and role-playing, but teachers are still confused about which teaching method is most appropriate. Despite this, teachers have tried to create an enjoyable learning atmosphere and capture students' attention by adding icebreakers to their teaching, but the varying abilities of the students remain a challenge. The teacher mentioned that students lack confidence when speaking English, and English is a foreign language that is difficult for most students. Therefore, Setyaningsih and Indriani (2018) emphasize the need for a more interactive and inclusive learning approach.

An appropriate evaluation is also a gap in English language teaching. In the *kurikulum Merdeka*, the main focus is not only on the final result but emphasizes more on the learning process and student development. Teachers at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila explained that in the evaluation process, they focus more on the outcome than on the learning process that students have gone through. Teachers realize that the learning process is important, but due to time limitations, they focus more on the result. Nevertheless, teachers still pay attention to the process by giving some assignments during the lessons. The challenge is that students sometimes focus more on the final grade. Therefore, teachers realize the need to better align the learning objectives. Another challenge in the evaluation process is the challenge of implementing formative and summative assessments. These challenges include the varying abilities of students to understand the material and the challenge of providing effective feedback. Teachers are still uncertain about how to give feedback to students that can help them understand their mistakes and improve.

2. The Needs in English Teaching in the Implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka

A need refers to something that must be fulfilled. The need for English language teaching in the effective implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka* refers to everything required by English teachers to carry out the teaching process by the principles and concepts of *kurikulum Merdeka* optimally. Its implementation naturally depends on the readiness of all components and elements of education, one of which is the role of the teacher (Nofrianni *et al.,* 2023). Teachers must be able to facilitate students during the learning process to ensure educational goals are achieved (Hafis *et al.,* 2018). To achieve this, the needs of teachers in teaching must be fulfilled. The needs of teachers in teaching English at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila cover several aspects, such as the need for resources and facilities available to support the teaching process. If resources and facilities are inadequate, how will the implementation process be conducted effectively? Teachers need resources such as varied and interactive teaching materials to adapt to student needs.

Supportive facilities are also necessary in the teaching process, such as projectors. Teachers at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila need technological tools, such as projectors, to support their teaching and present engaging learning materials, as well as a stable internet connection to ensure the smooth functioning of these technological tools. Equally important, teachers also need a language lab dedicated to English learning to further enhance English language teaching.

In addition to the need for resources and infrastructure, other needs such as the need for skills and continuous training to enhance their professionalism in teaching are also required. Teachers need skills in classroom management. To have these skills, teachers are expected to apply teaching methods that engage students and motivate them to be active in learning English. Teachers face challenges in adapting methods that align with *kurikulum Merdeka*. These challenges often lead to teachers feeling confused about which teaching method to use, causing the implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka* to not proceed well and even result in conflicts (Hartawati & Karim, 2024).

Skills in applying technology in teaching are also essential to present more engaging materials and not just rely on conventional media such as books and blackboards. Through technology, teachers can display visual materials and images that capture students' attention. Therefore, to support this, teachers need training that can enhance their skills in utilizing technology in their teaching. The principal of SMPN 6 Sengah Temila stated that the training needed for English teachers includes training like MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran). Through MGMP, teachers can share and gain teaching experiences. If the needs of the teachers are well fulfilled, the implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka* in English language teaching can be achieved successfully. This is supported by the statement that teachers must be able to become mentors, facilitators, and provide information to their students to motivate them to become active, creative, and innovative learners (Astiti et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

Overall, the research titled "Identifying Gaps and Needs in English Teaching Practices for Effective Implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila" aims to identify the gaps and needs experienced by teachers in implementing the Kurikulum Merdeka. This reseach presents several gaps and needs in English teaching at SMPN 6 SENGAH TEMILA. The implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka* in Indonesia had not been fully carried out. This was due to several challenges faced by teachers, particularly in schools located in remote areas. This study thoroughly examined the application of *kurikulum Merdeka* in teaching English at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila. One of the primary challenges identified was the gap between the conceptual framework of *kurikulum Merdeka* and its practical application.

The research findings indicated that the main gap existed between the ideal expectations of Kurikulum Merdeka and its actual implementation. This included the teachers' understanding and their teaching practices in the

classroom, which impacted its optimal implementation, as students were not yet prepared for independent learning, as required by Kurikulum Merdeka. Furthermore, limited resources and infrastructure hindered the effective application of *kurikulum Merdeka* in English teaching. Additionally, the integration of interactive teaching methods and technology in the classroom posed further challenges. Evaluation also emerged as a significant gap, as teachers struggled to conduct effective assessments to gauge students' abilities and align with the curriculum's standards.

Furthermore, the researcher emphasized the critical role of teachers in addressing the gaps in the implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka*. Teachers are expected not only to understand the concept of the curriculum but also to be able to apply it effectively in their teaching practices. Teachers should be able to develop innovative and creative teaching methods to create an interactive and conducive learning environment that motivates students. Additionally, teachers are required to integrate technology into their classrooms. Therefore, support from school principals and the government plays a crucial role in ensuring the success of its implementation.

Overall, this study stresses the importance of collaborative efforts from various parties to ensure the effectiveness of the implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka* at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila. This includes enhancing teachers' understanding and skills, providing adequate resources and infrastructure, fostering continuous professional development for teachers, and, equally important, support from schools, the government, and other educational stakeholders. By addressing the existing gaps and meeting the needs, it is expected that the implementation of *kurikulum Merdeka* can be fully optimized to improve the quality of English teaching at SMPN 6 Sengah Temila.

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