

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

The existence of a curriculum is crucial in an education system. Susetyo (2020) defines curriculum as a collection of plans and arrangements that include goals, subjects, and instructional resources in addition to organizational principles for planning educational activities. Therefore, due to the changes in students' needs in each era, the curriculum in Indonesia will always have revisions and innovations.

The Merdeka curriculum has been applied in Indonesia recently. It is a curriculum with diverse intra-curricular learning so that students have enough time to explore and strengthen competencies (Kemdikbud, 2023). According to Mu'aziyah et al. (2023), the Merdeka curriculum has one of its main characteristics, namely project-based learning. It means that through this curriculum, the government tries to equip the youth generation with better skills to survive in the global world. Kemdikbud (2023) says that the Merdeka curriculum was created because 70% of 15-year-old Indonesians did not meet the minimum score for understanding simple text or applying basic math concepts. This is based on data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). This condition was getting worse because of Covid-19. The government then formulated an emergency curriculum to mitigate learning loss. As a result, 31.5% of schools implement this curriculum. The curriculum is projected to reduce the effect of the pandemic by up to 73% in literacy and 86% in numeracy. This curriculum focuses on flexibility in learning and essential content. The effectiveness of that curriculum shows the necessity of the design change and implementation strategy, which are more comprehensive.

One of the learning systems proclaimed in the Merdeka curriculum is differentiated learning. It is an instructional model designed to guide educators to teach their students more effectively than when all students in a classroom are considered essentially alike (Tomlinson, 2021). This curriculum system is aimed at maximizing students' potential uniqueness. The instructions are adjusted based on

students' particular characteristics. Teachers can accommodate student differences in learning style, needs, readiness level, and interest by using differentiated instruction (Sapan & Mede, 2022). Therefore, this differentiated instruction (DI) is believed to be suitable to address learning equity including English.

A mini-survey showed that the implementation of this curriculum has not been comprehensive in all regions of Indonesia. It results from the various levels of readiness among schools, particularly those in urban and rural areas. Saiful and Triyono (2018) mentioned in their study that the issues with rural areas in general and ELT in particular have been shown to persist. These issues include a lack of facilities and supplemental teaching materials, a shortage of instructors, poor teacher quality, extremely limited or even no access to technology for learning, and many others. Maryani et al. (2023) found in their research that a number of elements helped DI be implemented. These elements included creating a safe, cozy, and supportive learning environment for students; having enough teaching materials on hand; taking into account the psychological needs and readiness of the students for learning; and having the school community actively involved both inside and outside the building.

In line with current research (Al-Makahleh et al., 2023; Sapan & Mede, 2022; Yasir et al., 2023), the researcher found that teachers liked the Merdeka curriculum, especially the idea of DI. This is because students enjoy doing tasks that they are more interested in, according to research that was done at junior high schools in the Madiun regency before the study in September 2023.

The researcher also found in the pre-research that the idea of DI in the Merdeka curriculum makes the teachers recognize their students better and have a closer bond with them. The process of teaching using this curriculum is indeed more challenging and time-consuming for teachers since they need to analyze students' characters and preferences before formulating teaching instruments. However, they also stated that DI triggers students to achieve their understanding creatively.

Some prior studies were conducted to investigate DI implementation. One of the examples is Strogilos et al. (2023), entitled "Differentiated instruction for students with SEN in mainstream classrooms: contextual features and types of

curriculum modifications”. This in-depth study looked at how primary school teachers, learning support coordinators (LSTs), and allied educators (learning and behavioral support) (AEDs-LBS) understand the term "DI" and how it is used. It also described the changes they make for students with Special Educational Needs (SEN). The results are strong evidence that limitations in the setting, such as limited class sizes, a common standardized curriculum, and national tests, create big problems that affect how the curriculum is changed to fit those needs. The researcher argued that it is important to take into account the contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of learner-centered education globally.

In addition, the DI is easier to implement in classrooms, even though a classroom has diverse students’ characteristics. "A case study on teaching English with differentiated instructions at a junior high school in Taiwan" by Halim et al. (2023) looked into how DI was used in Taiwan in terms of content, process, and product, and how it helped students from different backgrounds learn. The outcome demonstrates the applicability of differentiated education in mixed-ability classrooms in terms of topic, procedure, and final product, as well as how varied children benefit from such training. It can also enhance the student’s engagement during the lesson in the classroom.

Last but not least, Argyropoulou and Zafiri (2021) conducted a study entitled “Improving the writing skills of EFL high school learners through alternative methods of assessment and differentiated instruction”. This action research investigates the use of DI to improve learners’ written work, with a focus on the assessment of learners’ work using alternative methods. The research proved the learner’s willingness to participate in instruction, which deviated from traditional teaching practices.

Meanwhile, those previous studies do not describe the DI implementation at the junior high school level in urban villages in Indonesia. The implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in the area is still relatively new and not comprehensive due to limited facilities and the readiness of school institutions. They do not involve students in village areas that initially had different conditions from other areas. Hence, the researcher is going to conduct research focusing on the DI

implementation in teaching English in urban village areas in Madiun. The novelty of this research is in the context of DI implementation, which focuses on the schools in regencies with various facility limitations. This research is to examine in detail the activities of how the DI is implemented in teaching English and analyze factors that cause difficulties in its implementation, especially in urban villages.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How is differentiated instruction (DI) implemented in teaching English at junior high schools in urban villages in Madiun?
2. What obstacles emerge when implementing DI in English classes at junior high schools in urban villages in Madiun?

1.3. The Objectives of the Research

1. To find out how differentiated instruction (DI) is implemented in teaching English at junior high schools in urban villages in Madiun.
2. To find out some obstacles that emerge when implementing DI in English classes at junior high schools in urban villages in Madiun.

1.4. The Significance of the Study

Theoretical aspects. It is expected that this research can contribute to scientific references on teaching implementation at the junior high school level in urban villages.

To gain an understanding of the DI implementation in teaching English at junior high schools in urban villages. It will provide insight into teaching urban village students with their limitations in terms of infrastructure and resources.

Practical aspects. It will help teachers in urban villages to understand the deeper meaning of the Merdeka curriculum implementation and to create better improvements in teaching. Moreover, it will help our government analyze education development in urban villages for future policies.

Thus, this study's results can increase policymakers' awareness about innovative teaching in English classes for junior high schools in urban villages. Considering the results of this study, it is expected that policymakers can take more concrete steps to help encourage urban village schools to keep up with teaching and learning progress.

1.5. The Scope and Limitations

This study focuses only on how the DI process of the Merdeka curriculum is implemented in teaching English and analyzes factors that cause difficulties in its implementation. However, it was conducted at three junior high schools in Madiun regency, which is outside the metropolitan area. It will not cover all schools because not all of them apply the Merdeka curriculum. So, the result of this study cannot be generalized to a broader context.

1.6. The Definition of the Key Term

Differentiated Instruction of the Merdeka Curriculum: It is one of the learning systems proclaimed in the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum with diverse intra-curricular learning where the content will be more optimal, so that students have enough time to explore and strengthen competencies (Kemdikbud, 2023). DI is an instructional model designed to guide educators of learners at all grade levels to teach their students more effectively than when those educators plan and teach as though all students in a classroom are essentially alike (Tomlinson, 2021).

Urban Village in Indonesia: The term "urban village" is one of the classifications of villages in Indonesia. This word refers to a legal community unit with its own boundaries that can control and handle government business, local community interests based on community initiatives, rights of origin, and/or traditional rights that are respected and recognized by the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia. An urban village is different from a rural village in population density per km², percentage of agricultural families, and access to urban facilities (BPS, 2020; UU Nomor 6 Tahun 2014 Tentang Desa, 2014).