

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the study

The growth of the curriculum in Indonesia is dynamic due to the demands and developments of the times. After the proclamation of Indonesian independence, the Indonesian government always tries to evaluate curriculum implementation by making a policy of curriculum changes around thirteen times: 1947, 1952, 1964, 1968, 1973, 1975, 1984, 1994, 1999, 2004, 2006, 2013, and the *Merdeka* Curriculum for right now (Insani, 2019). All those changes are actually applied as a logical consequence of the political system, social, cultural, economic, and scientific and technological development within society. It is a must for the curriculum to be evaluated since it needs to be developed dynamically to all contemporary challenges and innovations (Hasibuan & Agustina, 2023).

Aiming to evaluate the curriculum implementation and to develop it dynamically for the demands and developments of the times, in 2019, the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology tended to change the 2013 Curriculum to the *Merdeka* Curriculum as a National Curriculum in Indonesia which has an aim to perfect the 2013 Curriculum implementation (Firmansyah, 2023) and to raise the education quality (Amanda et al., 2023). In *Merdeka* Curriculum, both teachers and students can make the Curriculum's content design better to strengthen and explore competence more. In this curriculum, the teachers have the flexibility to use various teaching tools so that learning can be adapted to the learning needs and interests of students (Muzharifah et al., 2023). In addition, giving the best and most meaningful learning to the students is the main focus of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Saputra & Hadi, 2022). Indeed, the reform of the 2013 curriculum to the *Merdeka* Curriculum becomes one of the agents of change efforts by our government to improve the quality of the education system in Indonesia.

Taken from Kemendikbudristek (2022) on the website, it states that the basic change of *Merdeka* Curriculum was the result of PISA (Program for International Student Assessment). It shows that 70% of 15-year-old students are below minimum competency in understanding simple reading comprehension or in applying basic mathematical concepts. Moreover, this PISA score has not experienced a significant increase in the last ten to fifteen years. While the COVID 19 pandemic made it worse. To overcome this problem, the Ministry has simplified the curriculum in special conditions, namely the *Merdeka* Curriculum which was used to mitigate learning loss during the pandemic. The results, from 31.5% of schools that used the *Merdeka* curriculum, showed that the use of the *Merdeka* curriculum could reduce the impact of the pandemic by 73% (literacy) and 86% (numeracy). The effectiveness of the curriculum in special conditions increasingly strengthens the importance of changing curriculum design and implementation strategies in a more comprehensive manner. In the recovery of learning loss (pandemic era), schools are given the freedom to determine the curriculum they will choose. Every school can decide whether they can still use the 2013 Curriculum or apply the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Furthermore, Kemendikbud (2024) mentioned that schools which have not implemented the *Merdeka* Curriculum may continue applying the 2013 Curriculum until the 2025/2026 school year and should implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum by at least the 2026/2027 school year.

On the other hand, teachers are frequently forced to implement the new curriculum without understanding its concept or training since they worry that it would upset the balance and have an impact on their roles and responsibilities, whether or not they are directly connected to the teaching and learning process (Abidin et al., 2023). If the teachers' perceptions are not appropriately considered, the challenging situation can be compounded (Mathura, 2019). This matter is becoming worse since the new curriculum implemented without considering teachers' aspirations and opinions. We are concerned that teachers play an essential role in the implementation of the curriculum (Katshuna & Shikalepo, 2023). Since teachers are the primary implementers, they ought to take an active role in analysing

and assessing the new curriculum's learning objectives in order to guide ongoing training for higher-quality learning results. They must to be aware of the crucial roles they play in making sure the new curriculum is implemented successfully.

Several studies of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation have been conducted and proven that the *Merdeka* Kurikulum has had a positive impact on some schools. First, a study by Saputra & Hadi (2022) investigated teachers' perceptions of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, entitled "*Persepsi guru Sekolah Dasar Jakarta Utara dan Kepulauan Seribu tentang kurikulum Merdeka*". Qualitative research was utilized. Data collection methods include interviews, questionnaires, observation, and document examination. The findings show that (1) primary school teachers have a positive perception of *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation, and (2) there are five factors that influence teachers' perception of *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation, namely: teachers' teaching experience, educational background, teachers' training, previous personal experience, and teachers' degree of education. (3) Teachers' perceptions influence how they give the learning process to their students. Based on the findings, it can be inferred that teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the new *Merdeka* Curriculum have a major impact on the primary school teacher's teaching and learning process.

In stark contrast, a study conducted by Muzharifah et al., (2023) entitled "*Persepsi guru terhadap implementasi kurikulum Merdeka di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Walisongo Kranji 01 Kedungwuni*". The goal of this study was to discover the difficulties that the teachers encountered when adopting the *Merdeka* Curriculum at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Walisongo Kranji 01, Kedungwuni District. The participants were students at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Walisongo Kranji 01 and the study's aim is to discover teachers' perceptions of the *Merdeka* Curriculum's implementation at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Walisongo Kranji 01. This study employed a qualitative research method utilizing data collecting techniques, namely observation and interviews. The findings of this study shows that the implementation of the *Merdeka* curriculum remains challenging at Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Walisongo Kranji.

And the third study conducted by Tsalsabilla and Oktavia (2024) entitled “*English Teachers’ Perception on Assessment Changes in the Merdeka Curriculum at SMAN 7 Padang*” which aims to learn more about how English teachers at SMAN 7 Padang perceive the evaluation adjustments made to the *Merdeka* curriculum. Mixed techniques are used in this study to gather, examine, and combine quantitative and qualitative data into a single investigation. The finding of the data indicates that English teachers see the evaluation modifications in the *Merdeka* curriculum favorably. According to the research findings, the diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments included in the *Merdeka* curriculum are useful tools for teachers to identify, track, and gauge their students' proficiency and comprehension of the subject matter. This allows teachers to assess each student's unique challenges. Teachers still face a number of challenges despite the numerous advantages, such as the need for government support to address the lack of access to computers and stable internet networks for accessing materials and lesson plans.

The *Merdeka* curriculum implementation is conceivably diverse at each level of schooling. A great deal of research has been done at the primary school level. However, the teachers’ perceptions of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation at Senior High School (SHS) level were considered inadequate. It is important to know how teachers at the SHS level feel about the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation using narrative inquiry for exploring teachers’ perceptions instead of other qualitative methods as in the previous studies. This current study is crucial since there are two main differences between this implementation and the 2013 curriculum implementation and other education levels while teachers at the SHS level do not understand about them (Dirjen GTK Kemendikbud RI, 2022): (1) There are no longer majors at the SHS level. It means that science, social studies, and language majors will be abolished. Students are allowed to choose elective group subjects while sitting in grades XI and XII. In 2013 curriculum, science subjects were separated into three, namely physics, chemistry, and biology. However, in the *Merdeka* Curriculum, science subjects are not separated into more specific subjects. The same thing also applies to social

studies subjects. Giving students the freedom to choose elective subjects in grades XI and XII is a form of freedom for students to study certain subjects according to their respective talent, interest, and academic potential. Apart from that, the choice of elective subjects must also take into account the orientation of the major that the student will choose when he/she continues his or her education at university. (2) The *Merdeka* curriculum introduces the formation of students' character through a project to strengthen *Rahmatan Lil 'Alamiin* and *Pancasila* student profiles, known as P5RA (in *Madrasah*). P5RA is a project-based co-curricular activity that is designed separately from intra-curricular activities. P5RA is the core part of the *Merdeka* curriculum structure, which aims to observe and solve problems on students' daily basis. So, the outcome of this learning will affect how the students behave when they interact with society. And the last difference is about the assessment changes namely the diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments included in the *Merdeka* curriculum. Those assessments are used by the teachers to evaluate their students' proficiency and comprehension of the subject matter (Tsalsabilla & Oktavia, 2024). Indeed, teachers at the SHS level must understand deeply and tend to accommodate those changes. Therefore, this research is essential to be conducted.

## **1.2 The Research questions**

1. What are teachers' perceptions of applying *Merdeka* Curriculum in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades of SHS in MAN 3 Jombang?
2. What factors possibly impact the teachers' perceptions?

### 1.3 The Objectives of the research

1. To find out teachers' perceptions of applying *Merdeka* Curriculum in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades of SHS in MAN 3 Jombang.
2. To find several factors that will possibly impact the teachers' perception of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation.

### 1.4 The Significance of the study

**Theoretical aspect.** Following the background of this study, the researcher expects that this study can provide valuable information for gaining an understanding on the *Merdeka* Curriculum for its concept. This will hopefully enrich knowledge regarding curriculum designs in a particular context.

**Practical aspect.**

**For SHS teacher** This study will hopefully enrich the teachers' understanding of the *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation. By understanding their perceptions, they may further realize that changing and adapting are continuous processes that require time and training. Teachers' profession requires them to always upgrade to the current demands and changes.

**For Principal** This study will impact the principal's policy related to the teachers' opinion of *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation. The principals will consider several factors that may affect the teachers' perceptions. They will improve the teachers' understanding of the *Merdeka* Curriculum's concept and training. The principal will hopefully support the teachers' need or readiness to implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum in the school area.

**For the government** Thus, this study's findings can increase policymakers' awareness about improving the readiness of teachers to implement this curriculum.

### 1.5 The Scope and limitations

This study focused only on teachers' perceptions of *Merdeka* Curriculum implementation. However, it was only conducted in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades of SHS in MAN 3 Jombang, especially in English classroom instructions since creating

classroom rules and procedures assists teachers in maintaining class routines and student expectations for classwork and behavior.

### **1.6 The Definition of the key term**

**Teachers' perceptions:** Teachers' perception is teachers' opinion in selecting, organizing, and interpreting the input information and existing experiences of the *Merdeka Curriculum* implementation.

***Merdeka Curriculum:*** The *Merdeka Curriculum* is a curriculum that includes a variety of intra-curricular learning opportunities. The content will be optimized so that students have enough time to explore concepts and strengthen their competence. Teachers have the freedom to select various teaching tools in order to tailor learning to students' learning needs and interests (Muzharifah et al., 2023).

