

## **CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contains the research background, research questions, research objectives, research significance, research scope, conceptual framework, and previous research.

### **A. Research Background**

In the field of education, the curriculum plays an important role in shaping students' learning experiences, which affects the overall quality of education. Sadullah (2023), explains the curriculum is an essential component in actualizing education to achieve educational goals. Without a proper curriculum, attaining the required educational goals and objectives will be difficult. The curriculum included setting goals and formulating learning activities that educate students on the skills, information, attitudes, and values required to perform future work tasks. Meanwhile, according to Hamalik (2010), the curriculum is an educational program provided to students by schools. This program encourages students to carry out learning activities, encouraging their development and growth in accordance with predetermined educational goals. Indonesia's curriculum has seen various adjustments as time and technology have advanced. In recent years, Indonesia's education system has undergone significant changes with introducing the Merdeka Curriculum, an innovative and transformative approach to curriculum development and actualization.

Merdeka Curriculum is defined as a curriculum that has diverse intracurricular learning, and the content is optimized so that students have sufficient time to deepen concepts and strengthen competencies (Kemendikbud, 2022). This curriculum aims to provide a more comprehensive and holistic educational approach focusing on developing Indonesian students' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and character (Risna, 2023). Meanwhile, according to Darmawan and Winataputra (2020), the Merdeka Curriculum aims to strengthen student independence and facilitate student-centered learning by emphasizing empowerment and the development of 21st-century skills.

Makarim (2022) also explained that the Merdeka Curriculum is an independent learning program. In the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers have the autonomy to choose appropriate teaching materials so that teaching can meet students' needs and interests. Changes to the Merdeka Curriculum are expected to overcome this problem with a learning approach that is more oriented towards mastering language competence and active use of language in everyday life. However, the author sees that in actualizing the Merdeka Curriculum, which is still new, teachers must face challenges and opportunities, especially related to the preparation of lesson plans.

English has been taught in Indonesia as a foreign language from primary to higher education. It is considered important as English language skills are thought to increase employment opportunities and enable participation in the global community. According to Renandya and Widodo (2020), English in Indonesia has an important role in supporting socio-economic mobility, especially in urban areas where the need for English skills is higher. English language teaching in Indonesia focuses on developing four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Commonly used approaches include task-based language teaching (TLT) and communicative language teaching (CLT) methods. Yulia et al., (2021) found that the application of TBLT and CLT methods was able to increase student engagement in the classroom and encourage active use of English.

Teachers now play a more central and flexible role in designing and actualizing learning activities. According to Hidayatullah (2021), teachers are required to function as learning designers who do not just comprehend instructional materials but also possess the ability to modify learning methodologies and strategies based on student characteristics and learning environment conditions. The Merdeka Curriculum grants teachers the liberty to either select or create their own teaching materials and assessment techniques deemed most effective for attaining learning objectives. As educators, they are tasked with executing and refining the curriculum within educational institutions according to guidelines established by the government. The autonomy afforded to teachers in curricula development at the institutional level aims to accommodate social, cultural, environmental, and resource constraints as well as student requirements. Teachers must remain

cognizant of both challenges and opportunities inherent in managing contemporary curriculum demands. Regardless of how meticulously the curriculum is crafted, it cannot realize its intended purposes without efficient fulfillment of teacher responsibilities (Gurol, 2004). The actualization of the Merdeka Curriculum prompts teachers to become more inventive and imaginative when structuring the learning process. This involves leveraging multiple forms of media and digital technologies to foster more dynamic and captivating educational experiences. Furthermore, instructors are anticipated to harness various resources particularly information technology to deliver enriched and significant learning encounters tailored specifically for pupils' benefit. Wulandari et al., (2022), highlight this emphasis on utilizing technological advancements effectively during instructional delivery.

According to Salsabilla, et. al. (2024) in the Merdeka Curriculum, lesson plans or *Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* (RPP) have been replaced by "Teaching module" or in Bahasa known as *Modul Ajar* (MA). Teaching modules are a new language in the Merdeka Curriculum which is the same as *Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran* (RPP) in the 2013 curriculum which are formatted and varied. According to Salsabilla, et al. (2024), there are four criteria that must be met by the teaching module, namely essential, interesting, meaningful, challenging, relevant, contextual, and sustainable. The development of a teaching module aims to provide teaching tools that can guide teachers in carrying out learning. Teaching modules contain learning objectives, activity steps, and assessments for specific units or topics in the curriculum. This change gives teachers the flexibility to plan and actualize learning more comprehensively, allowing them to specify the learning process according to the needs and interests of individual students. Teaching modules are designed for use at various levels of education, from early childhood education to secondary school. They are part of the government's efforts to provide a more enjoyable and less stressful learning experience for students. Educators are free to choose or revise teaching modules provided by the government to suit student characteristics or develop their own teaching modules according to student

characteristics. The differences between the teaching module Merdeka Curriculum and lesson plans (RPP) 2013 curriculum according to Kemendikbud (2022) are:

**Table 1. 1 The differences between RPP and MA**

<b>Rencana Pelaksanaa Pembelajaran (RPP)</b>	<b>Modul Ajar (MA)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning objectives (one of the objectives in the learning objectives flow)</li> <li>- Learning steps or activities. Usually for one or more meetings</li> <li>- Learning assessment: Assessment plan for the beginning of learning and assessment plan for the end of learning to check the achievement of learning objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Learning objectives (one of the objects in the learning objectives flow).</li> <li>- Learning steps or activities. Usually for one learning objective that is achieved in one or more meetings.</li> <li>- Assessment plan for the beginning of the lesson that is accomplished in one or more meetings.</li> <li>- An assessment plan at the end of the class is used to evaluate whether the learning objectives have been achieved, as well as to assess tools and techniques.</li> <li>- The teaching materials used include worksheets, activity sheets, videos, or passages from websites that students need to study.</li> </ul>

Other researchers have conducted similar research with a different focus. The first research conducted by Suryanto et al. (2023) aimed to describe the actualization of the Merdeka Curriculum and its challenges at SD Muhammadiyah Warungboto School in Yogyakarta. The second research is from Rohmah, et al (2023). The purpose of this research is to find out how well the independent learning curriculum functions in the learning process and the obstacles and solutions that may be found to actualize a Merdeka Curriculum in the learning process. The third research from Wilson, et al. (2023) analyzed the actualization of the Merdeka Curriculum in grade X English lessons at SMA Negeri 85 West Jakarta. The difference between the research and previous research is that this research was conducted for teachers at Junior High School in Bandung. Meanwhile, the focus of this research is on the challenges and opportunities of

using the Merdeka Curriculum in actualizing lesson plans and the teaching and learning process. Therefore, this study is titled “***The Actualization of the Merdeka Curriculum in the English Lesson Plan Components: Challenges and Opportunities, (A Case Study at the Eighth-Grade Junior High School in Bandung.)***”

### **B. Research Questions**

This study is divided into two questions:

1. How do teachers actualize the Merdeka Curriculum in the components of lesson plans (*Modul Ajar*) for English education in the eighth grade of Junior High School in Bandung?
2. What are the challenges and opportunities for teachers while actualizing the Merdeka Curriculum in the lesson plan for English teaching in the eighth grade of Junior High School in Bandung?

### **C. Research Purposes**

Based on the research questions previously described, this research aims to:

1. To know how teachers actualize the Merdeka Curriculum in the components of lesson plans (*Modul Ajar*) for English education in the eighth grade of Junior High School in Bandung
2. To know the challenges and opportunities for teachers while actualizing the Merdeka Curriculum in the lesson plan for English teaching at the eighth grade of Junior High School in Bandung.

### **D. Research Significances**

The research would be useful practically and theoretically.

1. Theoretical significances

Theoretically, this research is expected to provide a better understanding for teachers and the Minister of Education regarding the actualization of the Merdeka Curriculum in lesson plans, as well as the challenges and opportunities associated with preparing English teaching module using the Merdeka Curriculum.

2. Practical significance

Practically, this research helps teachers understand the challenges and

opportunities in developing English lesson plans using the Merdeka Curriculum, so they can build appropriate and successful learning strategies. Furthermore, the study's findings assist the Minister of Education in better understanding the Merdeka Curriculum's application in English language learning, allowing it to promote policy and curriculum development that is more aligned with national education goals.

### **E. Research Scope**

This research focused on the actualization of the Merdeka Curriculum in English language lesson planning for grade VIII students at junior high schools (SMP) in Bandung. Specifically, this study aims to examine how teachers actualize the components of the Merdeka Curriculum into teaching module. The analysis included important aspects in the preparation of the teaching module, such as module identity, learning objectives, basic competencies, and meaningful learning approaches that are in accordance with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum. In addition, this study examines the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers when actualizing the Merdeka Curriculum into eighth-grade English lesson plans.

### **F. Conceptual Framework**

The curriculum included everything that teaches lessons, whether planned or not. According to Beauchamp (1968), is a written document that contains the subject matter taught to students through various subjects, a selection of disciplines, and the formulation of everyday problems. A Merdeka Curriculum is defined as a curriculum that utilizes a variety of learning approaches outside the classroom so that students have sufficient time to learn concepts and strengthen their abilities (Kemendikbud, 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum has a lesson plan framework that included the formulation of learning objectives, learning steps, and assessment (Purba et al., 2021). The lesson plans in the Merdeka Curriculum are in accordance with the standard framework for the learning process, which consists of formulating the learning objectives of a learning unit, formulating how to achieve learning objectives, and how to assess the achievement of learning objectives. According

to Baderan and Indrajit (2020), the Merdeka Curriculum concept offers freedom to schools, teachers, and students to think independently, create, and innovate with full responsibility.

Kasihani (2001) states that English is the first foreign language that is considered important for establishing relationships with other countries, accessing information, and developing science, technology, and art. English is a tool for communicating orally and in writing, quoted from the Ministry of National Education in *Kemendiknas* No. 22 of 2006. Understanding and expressing information, thoughts, and feelings using language is part of the growth of technology, science, and culture. The Merdeka Curriculum is shorter, easier to use, and more flexible to help recover the learning lag caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. (Makarim, 2022)

A lesson plan according to Munif Chatib (2011) is a plan that teachers make before teaching. In general, a lesson plan contains a learning strategy. In a learning strategy, there are two patterns of cooperation, namely teachers teaching and students learning.

According to Suprawoto (2009), a module as a learning tool that is systematically arranged in written or printed form. The module included learning materials, methods, learning objectives, instructions for self-instructional activities, and learning aids for students. Lesson plans are similar to modules, but differ in several ways. The learning module is the same as the Lesson Plan (RPP), but the difference is that it is equipped with various learning materials, student activity sheets, and assessments to check whether the learning objectives are achieved or not by students.

## **G. Previous Studies**

The first study was conducted by Hadiat (2023), focusing on the perceptions of English teachers in private junior high schools regarding the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum. This study also examined how teachers actualize these curricula in the classroom. The findings revealed that teachers view both the 2013 and Merdeka Curriculum as beneficial to their teaching practices, yielding excellent outcomes. However, most teachers are more proficient in incorporating

the 2013 Curriculum into the teaching process, suggesting that further efforts are needed to enhance the actualization of the Merdeka Curriculum.

The second study by Sari (2023), explored the actualization of the Merdeka Curriculum in the English teaching and learning process. Conducted in a seventh-grade class at an integrated Islamic school in Surakarta, the research demonstrated that the Merdeka Curriculum had been effectively actualized in English instruction. The data and insights gathered from this study accurately reflect current educational practices and contribute to further improvements in the system.

The third study by Susilowati (2022), investigated the role of the Merdeka Curriculum in shaping student character through Islamic religious education. The study identified several challenges, including a lack of understanding of the "Merdeka Belajar" concept and the persistence of outdated teaching methods like the lecture approach. Teachers also faced technical difficulties, such as creating effective teaching module, mismatches between learning platforms and curriculum content, and challenges in conducting assessments during the evaluation phase.

There are several differences between this research and previous research. This research focuses on the actualization of the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in preparing English lesson plans for eighth-grade students in junior high schools. In addition, this study also examines the challenges and opportunities faced by teachers in the process of preparing lesson plans. Methodologically, this research used a qualitative case study approach, using interviews and document analysis to collect data.