

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The curriculum in education plays a critical role in determining a country's educational progress, from concept to application and practice in the field. A curriculum focused on developing competencies and skills can positively impact learners' educational outcomes, preparing them for the world of work or higher education. Additionally, a curriculum designed to foster learners' critical and creative thinking can better equip them for real-world challenges. A curriculum responsive to future developments can help learners become better prepared to face upcoming challenges. Therefore, developing and implementing an effective curriculum is essential for a quality and relevant education system. However, curriculum reform does not necessarily guarantee ongoing changes in everyday school practices (Lestari et al., 2023). Despite well-intentioned efforts, the implementation of reforms often brings unexpected results and may not always be effectively realized in practical classroom settings (Park & Sung, 2013).

Several studies have focused on the reasons Curriculum reform initiatives are rarely successful (Feldman, 2000). According to Muhammedi, (2016) stated that change synchronization often means joining in changing humans, namely teachers, educational supervisors and educational caregivers. That is why Curriculum changes are considered social change and also called innovation curriculum. Education reform is a government effort to develop education. Because every curriculum reform always demonstrates efforts to improve the field of education. That means a new curriculum has tasks: updating, developing, and improving the current curriculum. However, Curriculum reforms often give rise to problems in society, good schools, and the general community. According to Hapsari (2014) stated, “which become a problem of curriculum change is how it is implemented and reasons behind curriculum change the curriculum reforms taking place more or less has changed the system or the order of learning activities in school. because the curriculum is the area with the most direct influence on educational outcomes.

According to Arifin, (in Muhammedi, 2016) Curriculum can also function as media to achieve goals at once guidelines for the implementation of learning at all types of levels of education.

Indonesia's curriculum has changed over the years in response to the country's political evolution. Since Indonesia became freedom on August 17 1945, the national education curriculum has been revised several times (Hamidah., 2019). However, in the previous Indonesian era curriculum reform, teachers are not involved in the Merdeka curriculum and creative exploration, contributing to the curriculum, or improving their professional image and working conditions. This phenomenon also occurs in many places countries (Bascia, 2018). The latest revision involves the 'freedom of learning' curriculum reform policy, proposed in 2019 and implemented in 2020. Compared with previous reforms, there are changes to teacher autonomy implemented.

The Ministry of Education and Culture's freedom learning Initiative is rooted in the merdeka Curriculum which was developed and implemented in several schools in Indonesia. Merdeka Curriculum is also called Prototype Curriculum. This curriculum is flexible. Apart from that, this curriculum also focuses on essential material, character development, and student competency. One of the characteristics of an merdeka curriculum is that it applies more interactive and collaborative learning methods, as explained by Yani (2023) the merdeka curriculum is also considered more flexible than the previous curriculum. This means that teaching staff, learners, and schools are more freedom in carrying out learning activities at school (Lestari et al., 2023). It can be concluded that in the merdeka curriculum that focuses on student learning, teachers must provide the latest effective learning methods supported by technological developments to support it. Learners are free to innovate and be creative in the classroom with more modern learning tools. Classroom learning needs to involve full cooperation between learners and teachers so that learning objectives are achieved.

The emergence of innovation has brought major changes and opened doors for various fields, including English education (Shi et al., 2023). School education programs play a crucial role in determining educational progress, from

conceptualization to implementation in the field. The curriculum serves as a vital guide, outlining how to deliver quality education through the planning and structuring of content and teaching materials (Sukatin & Pahmi, 2020:78 in Ananda & Hudaidah, 2021).

Teaching English by a teacher not only includes the transmission of knowledge but also involves unique personal challenges, skills, and strategies. According to Emery (2012), one of the most often mentioned problems encountered by English teachers is “overcrowded classes and the effect of such condition can have on teaching and learning”. Teachers' challenges in teaching English are very complex and often reflect the challenges and successes that occur in the classroom. An English teacher is faced with the task of developing a variety of language skills, with a special focus on speaking skills, which are an important component in language learning. In the merdeka curriculum, teachers have their challenges in learning English, especially in speaking skills. In this case, the teacher must be able to create a strategy for learning English.

According to Brown (2005) stated that there are four skills in teaching English, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are integrated skills in teaching English in junior high school which means skills cannot be separated like learners relate to each other. English is one very important aspect that must be owned by learners and English teachers. The utilization of English as a global language has become so inescapable that it is currently perceived to be the world's lingua (Al-Yaseen, 2021). English is a global language that can uphold correspondence with others, particularly with outsiders. English stands out as the most intricate language globally. It serves as the primary means of communication for over 400 million individuals worldwide. English in the ongoing free educational plan, particularly speaking abilities, is important. In the merdeka curriculum, learners are more free to express themselves and the teacher is only a facilitator. But a teacher must also have achievements for learners.

EFL learners cannot demonstrate their ability to speak English in public because learners are shy and afraid to speak English. Learners think that their accuracy in speaking English is not good and worries people who listen to their

conversation will laugh. Speaking has its level of difficulty for learners, such as the problems that are often faced a lack of vocabulary and grammar, for example. Most learners fail to become fluent speakers because of their limitations poor vocabulary and grammar mastery. All problems will become obstacles for anyone to develop English language skills, especially students' speaking skills. Speaking barriers in English language learners as foreign language learners consist of internal obstacles and external obstacles (Nuraini, 2016:10). Both internal and external obstacles will affect learners' speaking abilities because if learners exist anyone creates obstacles in the learning process, especially mastery of English speaking skills, the learner will find it difficult to use the target language.

In learning English, the ability to speak or public speaking is needed to develop oral communication skills. Learners will be able to learn English fluently and effectively if learners have self-confidence. Public speaking according to several experts, including (Komunikasi et al., 2022) explains that “In the context of English Public Speaking, a speaker delivers a fairly consistent message to a typically large audience within a distinctive setting”.

The model educational program now goes by the name Merdeka Curriculum, which was duly dispatched by the Minister of Education and Technology. The Human Resource 'Kurikulum Merdeka' from Design to Implementation in the School: What Worked and What Not in Indonesian Education educational program to be used in each school's unique training units might still be chosen at this time. 2013 choices about educational programs include emergency and merdeka curriculum. The freedom learning curriculum represents the development and implementation of a crisis educational program launched to address the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding freedom Learning is a process that is used to allow learners to select the things that interest them (Supriyono, 2022).

In the merdeka curriculum, English language teaching focuses on English language skills which include listening, speaking, reading, and writing, at a higher level. According to Sarode (2018), Teaching strategies refer to methods used to help learners learn the contents of the desired course and can develop goals that can be achieved in the future. The teaching strategy identifies the various learning methods

available to enable them to develop appropriate strategies for dealing with identified target groups. Teaching English is not easy. Teaching and learning strategy can be referred to as the method chosen by the teacher to deliver learning material in a manner-specific learning environment so that learning objectives can be achieved effectively and efficiently. About the teaching and learning process, the use of the term strategy is intended as the teacher's efforts to create an environmental system that allows the teaching process to occur. Strategies can make learning “easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (Oxford, 1990). Teachers are required to have the ability to manage all of these components needed so that the teaching materials provided can be well received by learners. With varying skill levels in each class, teachers must use effective strategies that enable learners to learn the material.

According to Brown (2015) states that speaking is a useful skill that can be observed directly and empirically. However, the accuracy and effectiveness of test takers' listening skills often clouds these observations, reducing the validity and reliability of oral production tests. Considering the experts' statement that speaking is an ability that must be mastered thoroughly, the assessment of speaking ability needs to be carried out strictly and effectively. This explanation implies that mastering speaking skills is a challenge because of the interaction of various other skills, which can influence the delivery of information. Rao (2019) also emphasized that speaking skills are the main ability to acquire a foreign or second language. Speaking is seen as the most important skill in mastering a new or second language, of the four basic language skills. This shows that speaking fluently is more important than simply learning English without adequate preparation. Mastery of speaking a foreign language allows individuals to practice effectively, and goals and expectations in speaking can be realized.

Some previous studies have been conducted by Sukmojati *et al.* (2023) entitled “Strategies and Challenges in Teaching Speaking by English Tutors: A Study in Madani Super Camp English Classes” stated that the research aims to find out the types of learning strategies applied by the tutors to overcome the challenges in teaching speaking. The research results show research findings related to the

learning strategies applied by tutors to overcome challenges in teaching speaking skills including direct method, cognitive strategies, drilling and exercise, using communication strategies, questions and answers and using a group discussion. In line with research that has been conducted by Anjaniputra (2013), where this study is aimed at portraying teacher's strategies in teaching speaking to students at secondary level. The result of data analysis showed that teacher strategies in teaching speaking to students at the secondary school level, namely requiring several learning strategies at each learning meeting such as cognitive strategies, group discussions, demonstration strategies, direct method, etc.

The other previous research was conducted by Laila *et al.* (2023), this research explores the challenges and strategies associated with teaching English speaking skills to young learners in Indonesia, focusing on students learning English as a second or foreign language. This research showed that the challenges include were low levels of motivation, mother tongue and lack student vocabulary also posed a significant challenge. It also in other previous research by Mahboob Ahmed Al-Hassaani & Fadhl Mahmood Qaid (2021), where it was revealed that one of the challenges teachers face in teaching English is teaching methods and teaching materials that are less supportive.

However, it is different from previous research by Yusuf & Zuraini (2016), This preliminary study aims to describe the challenges that the teachers face in teaching English speaking to their students in Aceh. This research showed that that the challenges faced by teachers include lack of student discipline, additional workload, lack of technical teaching skills, and difficulties in teaching class classroom control and management.

In all the previous research above, most of the previous research only refers to teacher challenges and strategies and none of them uses the latest curriculum, namely the merdeka curriculum. Therefore, this research uses qualitative research methodology and uses teachers as research objects to find out what challenges and strategies are often used, especially in building speaking skills in junior high schools. This research is expected to be stronger research, because researchers use teachers as research objects who in fact are direct informants. Apart from that, there

is no research above (Sukmojati (2023), Anjaniputra (2013), Laila (2023), Mahboob Ahmed Al-Hassaani & Fadhl Mahmood Qaid (2021), Yusuf & Zuraini (2016)) uses a merdeka curriculum. Therefore, in this research, researchers are making it the latest where researchers will currently use a merdeka curriculum. As a result, researchers found that there were 5 challenges faced by teachers, namely the methods used by teachers, mother tongue, motivation, lack of vocabulary and learning materials. And to overcome these challenges teachers use several strategies such as cooperative learning, cognitive strategies, drills and drills, using communication strategies and using question and answer relationships (QAR).

1.2. Research Questions

In this research, researcher has two research questions that will be identified and answered to be found, the following are the questions:

1. What are the challenges faced by the teachers in building learners' speaking skills during the Merdeka Curriculum?
2. How are the strategies implemented by the teachers to build learners' speaking skills during the Merdeka Curriculum?

1.3. Research Objectives

Some of the objectives to be achieved in this study include:

1. To analyze the challenges that teachers face in building learners' speaking skills during the Merdeka curriculum.
2. To describe the strategies used by teachers in developing learners' speaking skills during the Merdeka curriculum.

1.4. Scope and Limits of the Research

This research explores teachers' challenges and strategies, particularly in the realm of developing English-speaking skills within the merdeka curriculum. The primary focus of this study is on the Challenges and strategies employed by teachers to enhance English language proficiency in the merdeka curriculum. Throughout this investigation, the researcher will not delve into topics such as teaching motivation or skills development beyond speaking.

The subject of this study is centered around the challenges and strategies of teachers engaged in merdeka curriculum instruction. The participants in this

research are 7 and 8th-grade learners from one junior high school in Bojonegoro for the academic year 2023/2024. Additionally, the study aims to identify and analyze the strategies employed by educators in the English learning process, particularly in the context of spoken English at the junior high school level.

1.5. Significance of the Research

The significance of the examination lies in its impact on achieving the research goals. Generally, research significance comprises scientific significance aimed at advancing knowledge and theoretical and practical significance, which involves assisting in solving problems within the object under study. It has two major significances there are practical and theoretical significances:

1. Theoretical Significance

Theoretically this research can provide information about a teachers' Challenges and strategies in building English speaking skills in the merdeka curriculum for knowledge.

2. Practical Significance

For learners, this research is expected to provide input or suggestions regarding strategies or conceptual descriptions from learners for an educator who teaches especially English lessons.

For teachers of English subjects, this research is expected to be used as an evaluation and input in the learning process using the merdeka curriculum, especially to build learners' speaking skills at school.

As a researcher, conducting this research can find out what a teacher's Challenges are and the strategies used in building speaking skills in the current merdeka curriculum. Aside from that, specialists can likewise figure out the difficulties confronted and how to conquer these difficulties looked at by English educators as a wellspring of information in this exploration.

For future researcher, it is hoped that this research can serve as information for future researcher and add to the findings of previous studies in merdeka curriculum strategies that emphasize speaking skills and English language learning challenges.

For readers this examination can add data to the subjective unmistakable exploration of educators' encounters and what methodologies are utilized in building speaking abilities in the ongoing autonomous educational plan at the middle school level. Aside from that, peruses can figure out the cycles looked at by analysts in getting information and can add knowledge to this field.

1.6. Definition of Key Terms

Some definitions are offered to help make the key terms used in this study more understandable.

Strategy: A strategy is a plan or set of steps to achieve specific goals, involving decisions on resource allocation and adapting to changing conditions.

Challenges: Challenges are difficulties or tasks that require effort and skill to overcome.

Speaking Skills: Speaking abilities refer to learners' capacity to articulate and express ideas in English, effectively and precisely, through oral communication.

Merdeka Curriculum: The Merdeka curriculum is an educational framework that emphasizes flexibility and autonomy in learning.



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