

Soe English Teachers' Belief and Actions in Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract

This study aimed at exploring Soe English teachers believes and actions in Indonesian Merdeka curriculum. The method used was descriptive qualitative research with in-depth interview on 3 Soe English-teachers as the participants. The data were analyzed qualitatively through transcription, coding, and categorization. The result shows that Soe teachers' action is in line with their belief on Merdeka Curriculum which is formed by their background and the way they believe in curriculum change. As their background, two teachers teach in rural area, the first one has limited school facilities and students with limited ability, while the second one has supportive facilities but the male students are low learners. The former strongly believed in curriculum change due to the adaptation to time change. The latter believed that Merdeka curriculum is great but consideration needs to be taken on schools' ability to adapt to curriculum change. The third teacher teaches in capital city with supporting school facilities and students with various backgrounds which demands him to treat the students differently according to their need. This teacher firstly disagreed but then mentioned about teacher's duty to adapt to curriculum change. Their background and the way they view curriculum change from their belief which influenced their action in implementing Merdeka curriculum. They come to having efforts in improving knowledge on Merdeka curriculum, designing modules, having creative ways of implementing Merdeka curriculum, recognizing what is needed by schools and students to implement Merdeka curriculum, designing assessment, and facing obstacles in Merdeka curriculum implementation.

Keywords: *Soe English teachers' belief, actions, Merdeka curriculum*

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1. Introduction

English is the universal language and the universe changes all the time. Hence teachers' belief has to be dynamic. English teachers are not allowed to always implement what they experience during their previous education, but they need to realize what the students' need. It is not only because English is a lingua franca, but also the curriculum in Indonesia which is usually changed over time. Considering the principles in curriculum merdeka, teachers have to be dynamyc and up to date to match their belief with the curriculum (Herawati, Tjahjono, Qamari, and Wahyuningsih, 2022). Teachers' understanding on the curriculum will result the way they conduct teaching and learning.

As Indonesian teachers, English teachers in Soe face the change of curriculum frequently. The previous curricula which changed several times before Merdeka curriculum were lack of consideration on teachers' beliefs (Puspitasari, Pratolo, and Mahfiana, 2020). Teachers were forced to fulfill Indonesian education standard without taking their real condition into account. The result of this condition is the teachers tend to become passive. Their belief is only to follow the national curriculum instruction without exploring their creativity.

Meanwhile, the success in curriculum implementation mostly depends on teachers'

belief. Since teachers' teaching belief is personally set by teachers themselves, the cultural background of the teachers must be important to take into account. In this case, cultural background does not only mean ethnicity but also habit, way of thinking, environment where the teachers live, and the experience possessed by the teachers (Sampson, 2023).

Recently, the newest curriculum called Merdeka Curriculum was launched and was considered as a curriculum which allows teachers to follow their creativity and innovation in their own classrooms. Teachers are given freedom to create their own classroom atmosphere and teach the students as what they need (Lubis, Fauziati, and Rochsantiningsih, 2023). In this case, Merdeka curriculum is the newest curriculum which takes teachers' beliefs into account.

Unfortunately, teachers who have been formed by the previous curricula to be "YES" teachers, might be surprised and unable to be creative and innovative even on their own classroom. Hence the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka which actually takes teachers beliefs into account is not optimal because of the old paradigm possessed by the teachers. The implementation only succeeds in the schools whose teachers' beliefs are flexible and adaptable to the curriculum change (Zakso, 2022). Besides, it is also successful for the teachers who believe that curriculum changes as the time changes. In relation to the teachers' belief, this research is aimed at exploring Soe English teachers believes represented in their implementation of Indonesian Merdeka curriculum.

Studies on Merdeka curriculum have been conducted recently. Hasim (2020) studies about how Merdeka Curriculum is implemented in universities. Students are free to choose courses they need. Hence it forms free learning culture which does not limit the student but meets their needs. The expected result is that the students will not only be outstanding in academic side but are also skillful.

Moreover, exploring the implementation of Merdeka curriculum in early childhood education, Rakhmawati, Kusdaryani, Suhendri, and Suyati (2022) mentioned that Merdeka curriculum have strengths and weaknesses. It helps children become more enthusiastic and exited to learn. It is more flexible in letting teachers choosing and compiling teaching tools. It also inspires children to learn many skills in various learning processes. Teachers are not limited by target achievement but can postpone discussion so children do not feel judged for being unable to do the discussion. The assessment is specially design for students to reflect on themselves because it meets students' needs. Meanwhile it is mentioned that the weaknesses involve parents' perception of the Merdeka curriculum in which they do not see any improvement on their children learning progress and teachers do not have proper knowledge of technology while it is demanded in Merdeka curriculum.

Oposing the weakness of Merdeka curriculum in relation to children lack of progress, (PISA, 2022) conducted international survey to measure Mathematic, Reading, and Science Literacy and proved that Indonesia's teaching learning result rank increase 5 to 6 ranks compared to PISA survey result in 2018. This increase is the highest achievement since Indonesia joins PISA survey. Moreover, in relation to teachers inability to operate technology, it is not the weakness of Merdeka curriculum. It is the challenge provided by the curriculum for the teachers to improve their technology literacy. Muslimin (2023) states that Merdeka curriculum aims at answering the challenge of advanced technology with sistem pendidikan OBE (Outcome Based Education) system so the learning process focuses on relevant learning outcome. Hence as the praticians of the curriculum, teachers need to be able to answer the challenge.

Jasrial, Syarif and Zainil (2023) mentioned that teachers have positive opinion on Merdeka curriculum. To the teachers participated in the study, this curriculum is well developed, adaptable, flexible, and meets the student's needs in learning English. Moreover, there are supporting aspects such as the goals and objectives, existing learning resources, and

teaching methods that have been developed well by the government. However, some weakness is that they still face some problems such as teaching and learning facilities and knowledge of assessment systems in their schools that are in the rural areas.

Most of the studies find the strengths and weakness of Merdeka curriculum. However, none of them studies how teachers' belief is represented through their implementation of Merdeka Curriculum at school. Therefore, this study attempts to fill the gap by aiming at describing the way teachers' beliefs are represented in the way they implement Merdeka curriculum in their own classrooms.

Teachers' belief which is also called teachers' philosophy means the relation between teachers and the subject matter which is represented by the way teachers view and value the subject matter (Wulandari, 2019). The belief deals with the goal in teaching English and the way to reach the goal. The personal philosophy of teaching is set by thinking firstly about what to achieve in the teaching and learning process. Then they provide the steps of thinking about the way to reach the goal which consists of how to value different component parts in English and how they relate, what is interesting, difficult and less comfortable in English to teach, and what to learn by the students during the teaching and learning process of English (Green and McIntyre, 2011).

2. Method

The study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative method. Three *Soe* English teachers from different Junior High Schools were involved in an in-depth interview as the participants of this study. The data were transcribed, coded, and categorized. The analysis result was presented in findings and discussion.

3. Findings and Discussion

Based on the data analysis, the result is categorized into four categories involving teachers' background, teachers' belief on curriculum change, teachers' belief on *Merdeka* curriculum, and teachers' belief and their actions in the implementation of *Merdeka* curriculum. These categories show how *Soe* teachers' beliefs are formed and influence their implementation of *Merdeka* curriculum. As mentioned by (Wulandari, 2019) about teachers' belief as a philosophy in which teachers view and value a subject matter, these findings and discussion represent *Soe* English teachers view and value the *Merdeka* curriculum.

Teachers' Background

The three participants have a background of teaching English in junior high schools in *Soe*. Based on what is mentioned by (Sampson, 2023) that teachers' background involves habit, way of thinking, environment where the teachers live, and the experience possessed by the teachers then in this finding the teachers background is categorized into school condition (environment) and students they teach (habit and experience).

Of the three participants, two teach in rural areas but with different school conditions and students. The first teacher teaches in rural areas in which the school facilities are not supportive but has started implementing *Merdeka* curriculum.

P1: "We don't have enough facilities for teaching and learning processes. No library, no computer for students, no internet access, no laboratory. We also have lack of classroom. We have only three classroom building for the nine classes. We tried to solve the lack of classroom by building three more classrooms but these classrooms are not feasible for teaching and learning processes since they were made only by palms frond for the wall and the floors were made of soil.

No brick wall and ceramic floor or cement floor. The floor looks dirty and when it rains, the floor will be muddy."

The students come from a lack of English background and are even unable to read and write. However, they are diligent.

P1: "The students are diligent, but most of them do not have enough background knowledge or basic knowledge to learn Junior high school learning materials. They also passed elementary school with lack ability. Some of them can't read and write."

In spite of the limitation, this teacher has belief that success comes from doing the very best.

P1: "Even though we have lack of facilities, I try to do my best as a teacher. The school implements the new curriculum, the Merdeka curriculum."

Meanwhile the other teacher who also teaches in a rural area considers learning in such a place is comfortable because it is safe and lowers distraction from traffic flow. This teacher prefers a calmer atmosphere in learning.

P3: "My school is strategically located between three even four supporting primary schools and also a bit far from the main road which ensures student's safety and lower distraction from traffic flow."

Even though the school is in a rural area, the facilities support the learning process.

P3: "We have two English teachers who are also assisted with sufficient facilities like speakers, chrome-books, tablets, LCD projector, electricity, books and dictionaries, and even internet connection."

She believes that the facilities truly help her in teaching and her role is important in determining the success of teaching and learning.

P3: "These are helpful since we only have 80 minutes per meeting as regulated by the government. How my classes go depends on my preparation, classroom management; sometimes unexpected situations may occur which affect the reach of learning objectives".

The students are good learners but they need more encouragement to use the available resources. Male students are threatened by peer pressure and unhealthy environmental influence so they have low learning improvement.

P3: "They are good learners with little awareness of available resources and need for the learning. Students who were good in early year especially males change slowly due to peer pressure and unhealthy environmental influence."

The other one teaches in the center of the capital city of *Timor Tengah Selatan* regency. The school is supportive with the complete facilities so they implement *Merdeka Curriculum* in grade V11.

P2: "The school facility is really supporting teachers and students because laboratory for biology, lab for computers and internet connection are available and both teachers and students have permission to access them freely."

Since the school where he teaches is a Catholic school, the management is conducted by Father (Romo) as the headmaster and Bruder (Frater). The students come from various backgrounds and comprehension which demands the teacher to treat them differently.

P2: My students are unique because they didn't come from the same background of knowledge and comprehension. Thus, some of them can learn easily by the explanation but some of them need teacher to explain more than twice. But, they are great.

Teachers' Belief on Curriculum Change

Experiencing curriculum change in Indonesia, these teachers have their own beliefs on it. curriculum. The agreement is categorized into strong belief, belief with critics, and changed belief. The first type of belief that is strong is seen from the answer that the Merdeka curriculum is needed due to the change of time.

P1: "I think it is good. The change of the curriculum must be done for the time changes."

Belief with critics is seen from the answer Merdeka curriculum is great but consideration needs to be taken on schools ability to adapt to curriculum change.

P3: "In my opinion, Curriculum that is being implemented right now (Merdeka curriculum) is great but the stakeholders who have responsibility for arranging it should do like interview, observation in order to arrange the curriculum in which suitable for all schools in Indonesia. For example, we are still learning to understand about K13 curriculum but when it almost 80% the new curriculum appeared. It becomes problem for school which should implement new system, teacher should learn the syntax of new curriculum and students should learn something from many references book with different lesson."

How this teacher's response actually has been mentioned by (Puspitasari, Prato, and Mahfiana, 2020) that in the previous curriculum change, less consideration on teachers' belief is taken. Changed belief is seen from the answer that disagreed at first but agreed at the end because no matter how many times the curriculum changes, it's the teachers' duty to adapt. Moreover, the curriculum fits the participants' working style that is working with digital.

P2: "I disagreed at first as I just started working so I was learning about the former curriculum when the latter was released. However, it doesn't take long for me to realize that no matter what the curriculum is, teachers are capable to adjust themselves and curriculum to meet our students' needs. This new curriculum also fits my working style more with digitalization."

The teachers' belief is in line with Herawati, Tjahjono, Qamari, and Wahyuningsih, (2022) who mentioned about the demand on teachers to be up to date in coping with the change of curriculum as the time changes.

Meanwhile the impact of curriculum change is categorized into the impact of curriculum change on education and the impact of curriculum change on the teachers' schools. The teachers' belief on the impact of curriculum change on education is categorized into positive belief and relative belief. Positive belief on the impact of curriculum change is seen on the answer curriculum change brings positive impact on education because of the bright philosophy of learning freedom.

P1: "I think the curriculum change has positive impact on education because it comes with a bright philosophy that the students are free to learn. The learning process must be purposed to make students free to learn happily. Students centered learning is a must for this curriculum and let the students develop their interests, talents, knowledge and skills. Teacher can create differentiated learning according to students' needs."

The relative belief is seen on the answer curriculum change is relatively positive or negative depending on the school, the teacher, and the students.

P3: The first, based on my perspective negative or positive is relative because it depends on the school, teachers and students. Hence even though the curriculum has arranged well by considering all aspects and the minister said that it will bring positive impact but the teachers do

not master it well because there is no workshop for teacher about the curriculum then it will bring negative effect. The second, every substitution of education minister the curriculum also changed and of course it brings negative impact for teacher in (small village/place)”

The teachers' belief on the impact of curriculum change on their school is positive. The positive belief on the impact of curriculum change on the teachers' school is categorized into positive impact on students and on teachers. It is seen on the answer curriculum change have positive impacts on English teaching in the school because it allows the students to study freely and fun because the material fulfill their needs. Moreover the teachers are challenged to learn a lot due to adaptation to the change from K13 to Merdeka curriculum.

P1:” Yes. This curriculum change has positive impact on English teaching in my school for the reason that the teacher can facilitate the students to learn freely. The students enjoy and are happy to study because they study the thing they like (The learning materials are made based on students' needs.”

P3: “Yes, it does because last year I taught students in grade IX with K13 curriculum but this year I teach grade VII with Merdeka curriculum and the administrations, learning devices should be re-arranged because there are some points in K13 that are not as same as Merdeka curriculum. The positive thing is I learn a lot about Merdeka curriculum.”

Teachers' Belief on Merdeka Curriculum

Teachers' belief on Merdeka Curriculum is categorized into comprehension and teaching principles. To the teachers Merdeka curriculum is designed to provide freedom for teachers' creativity and students' enjoyment with high attention on good character and behavior based on Pancasila values through P5.

P1: “Merdeka Curriculum gives chance to the teacher to be free in creating teaching and learning processes that suit students' needs and their learning environment. All the learning activities must be comfortable and pleasant for students so they can developed their skills, knowledge and interests happily, and the students will not only have knowledge and skills but also will have good character and behavior based on values in Pancasila”

P2: “It gives students space to learn and explore in their own level not their grade. It demands teacher to pay more attention to students' characteristics and learning styles as basic data to facilitate meaningful learning. Beside their cognitive skill, their affective domain is developed through P5”

P3: “My understanding of Merdeka curriculum is if in the previous curriculum our assessments are competence, skill and attitude but in this curriculum students' character becomes one of the most important focuses like P5 program. Then, there are some components in K13 curriculum that didn't occur in Merdeka curriculum like lesson plan, silabus, and etc.”

Moreover, the teachers also comprehend how the government and their school principal's intervene to help them understanding Merdeka Curriculum. The government provides Merdeka Mengajar platform for modules, books, and materials to help teachers preparing their class.

P1: “We can download modules, books and materials that available in Platform Merdeka Mengajar (PMM)”

Moreover, trainings, webinars, and workshops are also provided by the government and the principals let the teachers join all the activities included holding In House Training to help them master Merdeka curriculum.

P1: "The government let the teachers learn about the curriculum using application called platform Merdeka Mengajar, and the school held on house training about the curriculum"

P2: "They provide information of trainings, webinars and workshops related to this. My principal allows me to use school facilities and gives me permit to join any activities to improve my understanding as long as they don't affect my teaching responsibility" P3: "For school effort every new semester we followed In house training to learn about the curriculum"

The teachers also comprehend the objectives of Merdeka curriculum and consider the objectives good because it aims at resulting Pancasila students with good character, skill, and knowledge through a learning process which prioritizes students' needs and environment.

P1: To create students who have good knowledge, behavior and skills by holding learning process that suits students' needs and their learning environment. The Objectives are good because nowadays most students pass the school with good knowledge but no skills and have bad behavior. Teacher used to teach students without paying attention to students' needs, but the curriculum makes the teachers must hold differentiated learning to suits the student's needs so they can be students who have knowledge, skills and also be a good human"

P2: "Student centered learning to meet expected learning objectives and ultimately literate and numerate students with noble values. They are good as students learn to be open minded and intelligent people accompanied by good emotional skills" P3: "The goal is by implementing Merdeka curriculum students don't only have competence academically but also have good character to describe them as Pancasila students. It is good because students will be more active in training their ability in competence and also their character"

Teachers' belief on the Merdeka curriculum is also seen on how their principles are related to it. They consider their principles in implementing the curriculum. Some principles that match the curriculum are mentioned by the teachers as the consideration of students' not teachers' needs in the learning process and meaningful and fun learning with orientation on intelligence as well as good character.

P1: The learning process is purpose to suit students' needs, not teacher needs. P2: Learning should be meaningful and fun; no homework; intelligence supported with good characters is a must; know and be yourself.

The teachers also mention their principles that do not match the Merdeka Curriculum such as fast pace learning and numerous chapters in semester 1 for grade 7 students' books.

P2: Fast pace learning, I prefer things to go fast

P3: To many chapters in 1 semester for grade seven based on fact in Students book there are 7 chapters

Teachers Belief and Their Actions in the Implementation of Merdeka Curriculum

How teachers belief which is represented in their actions in implementing Merdeka curriculum can be seen from their efforts to improve their knowledge on Merdeka curriculum, their constraints in designing modules, their ways of implementing Merdeka Curriculum, their recognition on what is needed by their schools and their students to implement Merdeka Curriculum, how they conduct assessment, and the obstacles they meet during the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. The teachers' efforts to improve their knowledge of the Merdeka Curriculum are joining workshop, seminar, and In House training and study independently through the Merdeka Mengajar platform and read references. They also share and discuss with teachers who have better understanding on the issue.

P1: "I joined workshop, seminar, and In House training. I also learn about the curriculum using

'Platform Merdeka mengajar' an application made by Education ministry and available on google play store."

P2: "I joined workshops, webinars, also independent training in PMM, an application provided by the ministry to help teacher improve their knowledge of Merdeka curriculum. When I get stuck, I ask teachers whom I find have better understanding on this new curriculum"

P3: "Learning independently, discuss with my friends and read a lot."

Meanwhile, in relation to designing modules, the teachers do not have any problems because they do it based on students' needs and those who need help can adopt or adapt the available modules from PMM platform.

P1: "No, because I can design the modules without any doubt since I design the modules based on students' needs"

P2: "No. As suggested by our supervisor, our type of curriculum implementation allows us to adopt available modules. If I find the content difficult to be absorbed by our students then we may adapt".

P3: "Actually, for the first time I didn't know how start for arranging it especially for the module but I join PMM platform and there are some examples of it".

Then the teachers' belief is also seen in the way they implement Merdeka curriculum. One teacher differently creates the learning process based on students' needs.

P1: "I create differentiated learning process based on students' needs."

The other teacher conducts the learning process based on the type of implementation chosen by her school that is Merdeka Belajar. So, she combines both K13 and Merdeka curriculum.

P2: "There are three types of Merdeka curriculum implementation. They're Merdeka Belajar, Berubah and Berbagi. My school is in the basic one, Merdeka Belajar, so I combine both K-13 and Merdeka curriculum. For instance, I use core and basic competencies (KI-KD) of K-13 but asses the students using KurMer assessments."

The other teacher prefers preparing the teaching devices to help him in the learning process.

P3: "For the curriculum the thing that becomes my choice to create is the administration/learning devices when it's done I can start to implement it in the classroom with the students."

The teachers also have their own way to keep implementing Merdeka Curriculum even though the school facility is less supportive. Lubis, Fauziati, and Rochsantiningsih, (2023) state about the freedom given to teachers through the Merdeka curriculum and it is proven by these Soe teachers. The first teacher believes that the teacher's creativity is the main point. So, when school facility does not support him, he can prepare the facilities he needs using the surrounding environment.

P1: "The teacher should be able to be creative in creating the learning process to be enjoyable and make students happy so their learning needs will be fulfilled. Lack of facilities is not a main reason to not hold the Merdeka curriculum. I have to facilitate the students to learn by using student learning environments and I have also to be creative in preparing learning media and strategy"

The other teacher builds cooperation with other classes so the class with limited facility can use the facility available in other classes.

P2: "Yes, we have almost all facilities needed for the implementation. However, our 2 classrooms of 7th grade have problem with their electric power so we have to switch with other classes when we want to use AVA in learning process".

This teacher also provides simple media from the surroundings, game, projects, and outdoor learning when the school facility is less supportive.

P2: "Create simple aid from easily found materials around us; play games related to topic being learned; design and do projects with students; outdoor learning (on certain topics)"

The other teacher prepares several plans. Hence, when plan A does not work, he may use another plan.

P3: "There are many ways to Rome" As teachers we should have plan A, B, C and etc in order to make our students understand".

In conducting the assessment the teachers seem to have the same belief that is following the assessment procedures from *Merdeka* curriculum to monitor the students' progress from the beginning, during, to the end of the course. The assessment consists of diagnostic assessment, formative assessment, and summative assessment.

P1: "I conduct diagnostic assessment in beginning of the semester the I will conduct formative assesment during the learning processes and at last I will conduct Summative assesment at the end of the learning processes (the end of semester)".

P2: "We have diagnostic assessment as the academic year starts, formative assessment during learning process, and summative assessment by the end of a topic".

The teachers believe that *Merdeka* curriculum works in making the students enjoy the learning process and reach the learning goal. They prove it by mentioning that the presence becomes better, students' behavior are good, learning goals are reached, students get more interested, excited, and enjoy the learning, and higher test scores.

P1: "The students presence are increased to be better than the old curriculum, learning goals are reached, Students behaviour are good."

P2: "High interest, higher score in midterm and final assessment compared to grade 9" P3: "For example, when learning about introducing others and I applied projects they should find at least 5 students from different grade like grade VII, VIII and IX and take some information from them, they are really excited to do it. After that, P5 project In which they have to make like histography about amanuban tribe they really enjoy it."

Finally, the teachers also face obstacles in implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum such as the less cooperation among teachers, parents, and school principal, how to decide the appropriate learning to meet the students' various needs, limited time, and ability to provide guidance to students with various needs.

P1: "All teachers, parents and the school principle must corporate in implementing this curriculum".

P2: "Deciding the most appropriate learning approach that meets students' needs and learning styles as well as ensure that differentiated learning takes place". P3: "Time and guidance"

4. Conclusion and suggestion

Some teachers' belief on *Merdeka* Curriculum is formed by their background, that is the condition of the school where they teach and the students they teach. The belief is also formed based on how they believe in the curriculum change as they experience curriculum change in Indonesia several times. The beliefs on curriculum change are categorized into agreement on *Merdeka* curriculum and the impact of *Merdeka* curriculum. The background and the way they view curriculum change form teachers' belief on *Merdeka* curriculum and the way they implement it in their teaching and learning. Teachers' belief on *Merdeka* Curriculum is categorized into comprehension and teaching principles. These beliefs are represented in the way the teachers implement *Merdeka* curriculum. It can be seen from their efforts to improve their knowledge on *Merdeka* curriculum, their constraints in designing modules, their ways of implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum, their recognition on what is needed by their schools and their students to implement *Merdeka* Curriculum, how they conduct assessment, and the obstacles they meet during the implementation of *Merdeka* Curriculum. Since this study only focuses on exploring *Soe* teachers' belief and the way the belief is represented in the implementation of *Merdeka* curriculum qualitatively, further research may fill the gap by providing evaluation research on how *Merdeka* curriculum is implemented in a larger area using quantitative approach.

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