

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Problem

In recent years, education in Indonesia has undergone major reforms, most notable is the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which is designed to meet the changing needs of students in a rapidly changing world. According to (Di et al., 2022), curriculum changes always need to be made and adjusted to the needs and principles. A curriculum that does not meet the demands of the times causes educational failure, according to Plate (Baharullah et al., 2022). Therefore, in order to produce a new curriculum that is expected to match the government's expectations for education, the curriculum must constantly be examined and then modified in response to knowledge, advancement, and market demands. Before the Kurikulum Merdeka was established on December 10, 2019, the Indonesian education system still used the 2013 Curriculum, which emphasized a competency-based approach and the integration of character values in learning (Hartoyo 2022). However, Indonesia's education system faced an unprecedented challenge when the Covid-19 pandemic hit in late 2019. This transition period is characterized by a significant decline in the quality of education due to sudden changes in teaching and learning methods that disrupt the smooth running of the teaching and learning process.

The gap in access to education is widening as some students do not have adequate technological means, such as digital devices and stable internet networks. On the other hand, many students struggle to maintain their focus and motivation in various learning situations, while teachers also experience obstacles in adjusting teaching strategies for online learning. These conditions prompted the birth of Kurikulum Merdeka, which is designed to bring a more relevant and contextualized education system to the needs of students and their learning environment. Teachers are given the freedom to create learning procedures that meet the demands of their students and the local environment thanks to this curriculum. It encourages students to become more self-reliant and actively engaged in the learning process, which should aid in the development of their

critical thinking, creativity, and teamwork abilities. In the regulation of the minister of education, culture, research, and technology of the republic of Indonesia, the Kurikulum Merdeka is expected to provide a foundation of knowledge, skills, and ethics to respond to the realities of the industrial revolution 4.0 and society 5.0. The skills intended are skills that are relevant in the 21st century. The era of the industrial revolution 4.0 and society 5.0 requires an interconnected learning environment that inspires imagination, sparks creativity, and motivates Learners.

The main principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka are flexibility, personalisation, and inclusiveness, where each student is given the opportunity to learn according to their interests and talents (Wijayanti, 2023). Conceptually, the Kurikulum Merdeka is designed to empower students to be more independent in their learning, but the success of this goal depends heavily on the readiness of students and teachers to take on more active and participatory roles in the classroom.

At SMP Swasta Kristen Tomosa 1, the Kurikulum Merdeka is implemented with the hope that students will be actively involved in the learning process, dare to express their opinions, be able to work together effectively, and be able to relate the subject matter to real-life contexts. However, initial observations and discussions with teachers show that although some students are enthusiastic about this new method, others still maintain passive learning habits formed from previous learning patterns. Previously, teachers often served as the primary source of knowledge, guiding and controlling the learning process. In this context, students tended to merely listen, take notes, and complete tasks based on teacher instructions, with limited opportunities for exploration, initiative, and collaboration with peers. This high level of dependence on teachers has the potential to hinder the development of critical thinking skills, creativity, and innovation. This is certainly contrary to the principles of the Kurikulum Merdeka itself. Therefore, this issue prompted research to analyze students' perspectives on the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, with the aim of determining the extent to which this curriculum achieves its intended goals.

In analyzing students' perspectives of the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, there are several important factors that need to be considered. The first factor is how well students comprehend the curriculum, specifically how well they comprehend its goals, organization, and advantages. Students' attitudes and involvement in the learning process might be influenced by a clear knowledge (Zainuddin, 2018). The second factor is the students' readiness and capacity for learning, which includes autonomous abilities like time management, critical thinking, and technological proficiency. Students with autonomous learning abilities are better equipped to adjust to modifications in the educational system that require active engagement, claim (Zimmerman, 2013). Teachers' assistance as facilitators is the third factor. Instructors are responsible for giving students direction, criticism, and encouragement, all of which can boost their desire to continue studying (Hattie, 2018). The fourth factor is student motivation and engagement, which affects their acceptance of novel teaching strategies. This includes both intrinsic and extrinsic incentive. According to (Ryan, 2020), contextualized learning combined with intrinsic motivation can improve students' favorable opinions of project-based learning. Access to educational resources, including teaching materials and technology, is the fifth factor. According to (Ajam et al., 2018), the availability of resources such as textbooks, technology and adequate learning facilities influence students' perspectives of curriculum quality. The final element is the learning environment, which supports children' learning process and is present in both the home and the school. According to Bronfenbrenner (2019), fostering students' academic growth requires a supportive learning environment in both the home and the classroom. By taking those factors into account, research on how students view the Kurikulum Merdeka can offer deep insights into what motivates students' answers, allowing for the development of practical methods to enhance the curriculum's execution.

Based on the results of previous research conducted by (Rahma et al., 2024) about student Perspectives of the implementation of the merdeka kurikulum said that the Kurikulum Merdeka is flexible and able to increase student motivation and help students develop student interests and talents from existing

policies. Students find it helpful in preparing knowledge for students' future. The use of the Kurikulum Merdeka also provides challenges for students to keep up with the times, which are all technology-based.

Previous research on the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka have generally focused more on students' positive perceptions, such as freedom of learning, increased creativity, and ease of understanding the material. Although these findings are important, these studies tend not to discuss in depth the challenges or obstacles faced by students in adapting to this curriculum. There are still few studies that specifically explore the obstacles students experience and their expectations for more engaging and meaningful learning. This situation creates a research gap in comprehensively understanding students' perceptions, not only in terms of what is working well but also in terms of what still needs to be improved from the students' perspective.

Understanding students' perspectives, especially regarding the challenges they face and their expectations, is crucial to the success of educational reform. If teachers and policymakers are aware of students' honest views, they can design more targeted strategies and support. For example, by identifying areas of difficulty faced by students, teachers can adjust their teaching methods, and by understanding students' preferences, teachers can create more relevant and enjoyable learning activities. Therefore, researching the perspectives and expectations of students at SMP Swasta Kristen Tomosa 1 regarding the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka is expected to provide valuable insights, both for improving teaching practices at the school and for broader curriculum development.

For this reason, the researcher conducted a study entitled “**Analysis of Students' Perspectives of the Kurikulum Merdeka Implementation at SMP Swasta Kristen Tomosa 1**”, to explore more deeply their perspectives of the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka.

1.2 Focus of the Research

Based on the background, this study focuses on analysing the perspectives of students at SMP Swasta Kristen Tomosa 1 towards the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. This research aims to understand how this curriculum is

perceived by students, including the benefits and challenges they experience during its implementation. Particular attention is paid to factors that influence these perspectives, such as students' understanding of the curriculum, their readiness for independent learning, their level of motivation and engagement. By narrowing the focus on these aspects, this study seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of how well Kurikulum Merdeka aligns with its intended goals and its impact on student development.

1.3 Formulation of the Problem

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka, this research formulated some key questions that aimed to explore students' perspectives and experiences. These questions served as a guide to identify strengths and challenges associated with the curriculum, ensuring that the analyses were thorough and impactful. The problems formulated include:

1. What are the perspectives of students at SMP Swasta Kristen Tomosa 1 towards the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka?
2. What are the students' expectations for more engaging and meaningful learning experiences?

1.4 Objective of the Research

This research was designed to address the key issues identified in the problem formulation. By focussing on students' perspectives and the challenges they face, the study aimed to provide valuable insights into the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The specific objectives were as follows:

1. To analyse the perspectives of students at SMP Swasta Kristen Tomosa 1 regarding the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka.
2. To identify students' expectations for learning experiences that are engaging, meaningful, and relevant to their needs.

1.5 Significance of the Research

This research holds significance both theoretically and practically:

1. Theoretically:
 - a. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on curriculum implementation by providing insights into students' perspectives of the

Kurikulum Merdeka. It enhances the understanding of how curriculum changes impact students' learning experiences and outcomes.

- b. The findings can be used as a reference for future studies exploring curriculum implementation, particularly in the context of junior high schools and the unique challenges faced by students in adapting to new educational frameworks.

2. Practically

- a. For schools and educators, this research provides valuable information about the benefits and challenges associated with the Kurikulum Merdeka, enabling them to make informed decisions to enhance teaching methods and address students' needs effectively.
- b. Policymakers can utilize the insights from this study to refine the implementation strategies of the Kurikulum Merdeka, ensuring it aligns with the intended goals and addresses on-ground challenges.
- c. The findings offer practical recommendations for improving student engagement, motivation, and adaptation to the curriculum, ultimately supporting better educational outcomes.