

A CLOSER LOOK ON ENGLISH TEACHERS' CHALLENGES AND EXPERIENCES ON IMPLEMENTING EMANCIPATED CURRICULUM IN BOJONEGORO

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Abstract

This study is intended to deeply explore and describe how English teachers implement emancipated curriculum in English teaching and learning and what challenges and strategies are applied in implementing emancipated curriculum, particularly in Bojonegoro regency. This study employs qualitative research. 6 active English teachers took part as research participants in this research. They participated in filling out questionnaires and then followed by interviews to get sufficient data. The data were analyzed qualitatively based on some indicators such as learning objectives, media used, strategies, and challenges. The study reveals that English teachers have been implementing an emancipated curriculum. They have been applying some strategies such as project-based learning and differentiated-based learning. Unfortunately, those were not the maximum yet. They found most of the students were not ready yet to accept and implement an emancipated curriculum. In conclusion, English teachers still have some challenges and obstacles in implementing an emancipated curriculum.

Keywords: challenges, emancipated curriculum, English teachers, English teaching and learning

Introduction

Curriculum essentially has been one of the important components of the education system. It takes time to design and develop into systematic and comprehensive curriculum to be implemented in the education system. A curriculum can relate to all the courses offered at a particular school, or all the courses in a given field of study offered at a school (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2014). Minister of Education and Culture (2013) adds that curriculum can be defined as educational devices and tools that aim to acquire competence of attitudes, knowledge, and skills till the students can be productive, skillful, creative, and innovative (Reskiawan & Idris, 2021). It literally can be understood that curriculum deals with systematic instruments and plans that have been designed and modified

based on some considerations such as needs, situations, and goals. Those considerations aim to improve students' skills, competencies, and attitudes. Consequently, the students can be creative, innovative, and productive.

Due to its importance and goals, curriculum development is required to have a high-quality curriculum, learning outcome, and learning output. Curriculum development refers to an initiative step or reform taken by the government in the education field to seek solutions to several cases or issues in education (Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023). In Indonesia, education undergoes regular renovation and optimization to ensure it remains relevant in comparison to education systems in other countries (Triayomi et al., 2022). Ikbogwe et al (2014) adds that due to the outdated or irrelevant content of the current curriculum in addressing broad issues, curriculum development occurs as a result of curriculum review or reform (Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023). Consequently, the government needs to review, redesign, and develop curriculum due to some considerations. Those considerations can be irrelevance with current knowledge and technology advances, competencies needed, and others.

In Indonesia, curriculum development is managed and supervised by the government. Minister of Education and Art and his team have the authority to design and determine the curriculum implemented in the education system. Periodically, the minister of education and art has implemented changes to the curriculum as a way to enhance the quality of education throughout the country. These changes are essentially important to enhance its relevance regarding technological advances and the modern era. Ellen et al. (2023) reveal that curriculum changes are guided by ongoing analysis, predictions, and feedback from both internal and external sources. However, simply revising the curriculum is not enough. To truly enhance the state of education, Indonesia must also adopt transformative learning, an approach that gives precedence to critical thinking and student-centered learning. Transformative learning stimulates students to interact with and comprehend the world, yielding more profound and substantial learning experiences (Ellen et al., 2023). In other words, some changes are needed to enhance and transform comprehensive curriculum implementation in the education system. Consequently, the curriculum in Indonesia has changed due to some regulations and analysis.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education and Culture announced and launched curriculum 2013. It was implemented in any level of education. Hopefully, It was expected to offer solutions regarding numerous issues and problems in the national education system (Reskiawan & Idris, 2021). Based on some evaluation and analysis, the government evaluated several aspects such as the evaluation and implementation of the 2013 Education Standards, Curriculum, and Assessment Authority's documents. The analysis reveals that the 2013 Curriculum competencies were too broad, difficult to understand, and difficult for teachers to implement. In addition, curriculum 2013 had a lack of flexibility in the curriculum structure, the hours of teaching per week were fixed, and the material was too heavy, so there was not enough time for in-depth learning based on the student's development level. Moreover, teachers are occupied with the demanding task of preparing classroom activities, including a highly detailed and complex lesson plan (RPP). Therefore, curriculum development must be recognized as a crucial factor in shaping the nation's future (Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023). In short, curriculum 2013

has some obstacles and weaknesses, particularly in its implementation and its practice in the education system. Consequently, an adaptive and transformative curriculum should be designed based on some findings.

In the middle of 2022, the Ministry of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, launched and announced the transformative curriculum namely the Emancipated curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar*) (Syarochil & Abadi, 2023). Rahayu et al. (2022) explain that an Emancipated curriculum was designed to provide opportunities for students to learn in a peaceful, relaxed, and less stressful and pressure free. The students can develop their natural skills by focusing on the freedom of thought and creative thinking that each student possesses. (Rahayu et al., 2022). Yamin and Sharir (2020) add that an emancipated curriculum (*Kurikulum Merdeka*) can be a flexible solution that can respond to the problem in teaching and learning. The teachers are given the chance and freedom to improve and design learning processes and flexible lesson plans (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020). Aulia (2021) explains that in an emancipated curriculum, teachers just focus on 3 components in designing lesson plans, namely teaching and learning objectives, assessment, and learning process (Aulia, 2021) In other words, the emancipated curriculum offers some flexibility in both for students and teachers in managing and designing teaching and learning process as long as the main goal of learning achieved. Instead of learning outcomes, an emancipated curriculum gains teachers' attention by providing simple and short lesson plans.

During the progress, the emancipated curriculum has been implemented in first class in the schools and the previous students still implement the previous curriculum. Regarding to emancipated curriculum, changes, and several regulations, English language teaching and learning is one of the subjects that had an impact on its implementation. English teachers face new challenges and obstacles in implementing an emancipated curriculum. Obstacles may come from teachers' understanding of the concept of the new curriculum, their preparation, and their readiness to implement new concepts of curriculum in the teaching and learning process. Based on some discussions and interviews, with numerous English teachers in schools that have been implementing emancipated curriculum, they encounter some obstacles such as designing learning materials with students' ability to learn English, their understanding of emancipated curriculum and its implementation in teaching and learning. Then, they got confused about the concept of implementation of an emancipated curriculum and the real condition of students' capability in English. English teachers should accommodate and handle the new concept of curriculum in the teaching and learning process. Automatically, they need to adapt their concept in a short time. Some English teachers were not confident yet due to a lack of experience in implementing an emancipated curriculum. On the other side, English teachers should design lesson plans with two different types of lesson plans because the new curriculum is only implemented in the first class while other classes still implement the curriculum 2013. On the other side, some English teachers can follow the concept of the new curriculum. They got chances to improve their competencies through *Sekolah Penggerak*. They got new insights into implementing teaching and learning with an emancipated curriculum.

Regarding to the explanation above, English teachers also had the same problems in implementing an emancipated curriculum in Bojonegoro Regency. Based on the observation and interviews with several English teachers, most

English teachers faced some obstacles in implementing an emancipated curriculum particularly in formulating learning outcomes and designing appropriate materials. They must implement the new changes and regulations at the first class in each level of education. Indeed, they need to make two types of lesson plans due to the distinctive curriculum implemented in the school.

Some previous research has been done which concerned on implementation of curriculum 2013, the implementation of emancipated curriculum and its problems, and others. Syarochil and Abadi (2023) conducted research that aimed to describe problems and solutions in implementing an emancipated curriculum in language classes. The result reveals teachers found technical problems in implementing an emancipated curriculum due to their lack of preparation for the new curriculum change. The result also found that teachers got stuck with the previous curriculum, lack of preparation especially in textbooks and other learning resources, and had fewer facilities and infrastructure (Syarochil & Abadi, 2023).

Trichayati and Zaim (2023) conducted research that concerned English Teachers' Readiness to implement the '*Merdeka Belajar*' curriculum in teaching English at Junior High School in Padang. The result reveals that English teachers have a level of readiness in level 3. It means that English teachers are ready but they need more improvement. They also have problems and obstacles in formulating learning outcomes and implementing differentiated learning in the process of teaching and learning in the class. In summary, English teachers still have obstacles in implementing an emancipated curriculum as well (Trichayati & Zaim, 2023). Thus, this study is intended to explore English teacher's experience and challenges in implementing an emancipated curriculum in English teaching and learning in some schools in Bojonegoro Regency.

Hence, some researchers have conducted numerous researches on implementing an emancipated curriculum, but only a few research studies are concerned with English teachers' experience and views on implementing the new curriculum. This study is intended to explore English teachers' experience and views on implementing an emancipated curriculum in English teaching and learning in Bojonegoro Regency.

Method

This study applied qualitative research since it aims to explore English teachers' experiences and challenges in implementing an emancipated curriculum in English teaching and learning in Bojonegoro. Miles et al (2014) argue that qualitative data refers to the source of rich and informed descriptions and explanations of human processes. Through qualitative data, the researchers can gain meaningful and useful information, understand cause-effect, and understand chronological progress. (Wazier et al., 2023). The participants of this research were English teachers who teach English in senior high schools and vocational high schools in several schools in Bojonegoro. They had experience in implementing an emancipated curriculum in their English teaching and learning in their schools. There were 6 English teachers took part in this research as research participants.

To gain and collect the data, the researchers used interview guidelines by providing open-ended questions as a research instrument. the questions were constructed based on several indicators namely the understanding and concept of emancipated curriculum, strategies in implementing emancipated in ELT class, and

the challenges found in implementing emancipated curriculum in ELT class. In analyzing the data, the researchers used transcripts from the interviews and analyzed them to get comprehensive information.

Findings and Discussion

Regarding the research questions in the introduction, this finding uncovers two aspects. The first aspect is how English teachers' experiences and views on implementing an emancipated curriculum in ELT classes. The second aspect is what challenges found by English teachers during the implementation of an emancipated curriculum in ELT classes.

English teachers' experiences and views on implementing emancipated curriculum in ELT class

Based on the data collection and data analysis, 6 English teachers participated in this research as research participants. Based on interviews, English teachers have various answers. Dealing with their experiences and views on implementing emancipated curriculum in ELT class can be summarized as follows:

Q1: What is your understanding of the emancipated curriculum?

P1: "The independent curriculum is a curriculum in which the teacher is given the freedom to choose teaching materials according to the needs of students, then um.. this independent curriculum is intra-curricular learning which contains a variety of content so that students have enough time to strengthen the competencies to be learned. then the independent curriculum is also a curriculum whose focus point is on students so the teacher is not the only source but the teacher is only a facilitator previously we told but now students find out that learning can also be carried out anytime, anywhere, and can be from various source

P2: "Yes, for education in Indonesia, yes, to form competent students, with character, that is, through a transformation from not being able to be able or this learning transformation can also make teachers more flexible in making learning action plans to increase innovation, of course. The basic competencies that have been designed in the form of teaching modules can be seen from the elaboration in lesson plans and syllabus

P3: "Actually, the implementation of an independent curriculum is by its goal of making an independent curriculum, which is to give students the freedom to study anywhere and the teacher is also given the freedom to focus on giving the essential lessons that will be taught to their students. the teacher is also free to give those important lessons as broadly as possible. so not much to learn. so, it still refers to the national education system, only this seems to be streamlined, it is taken according to the learning."

Based on the answers, it can be understood that English teachers understand the concept of an emancipated curriculum. They understand the goal and the concept of an emancipated curriculum well.

Q2: dealing with the implementation of the emancipated curriculum in English teaching and learning, how do you implement an emancipated curriculum, particularly in designing lesson plans and the concept of differentiation learning?

P4: In implementing an emancipated curriculum, we try to make lesson plans on the in-house training that we receive by the existing regulations as much as possible, and as much as possible, we adjust it to the needs of students. Dealing with differentiation, we implement it in our teaching and learning

P5: well, that's what we're referring to. We are already on the teacher's platform teaching there are already many. it depends, we don't have to fix it like that, we just adjust it to the needs of students. because in the independent curriculum, we are also free to make lesson plans

P6: Yes, we have already done it. We designed lesson plans based on learning outcomes that have been formulated by the government that available on the *Merdeka Belajar* platform. Then, dealing with differentiation, we implement it in our English class.

Regarding to the explanation above, it can be summarized that English teachers have implemented differentiation learning in English class. They designed lesson plans based on some available learning outcomes and some regulations that are available in the school.

Q3: How do you implement the emancipated curriculum in English teaching and Learning classes?

P1: I apply the independent curriculum according to the IHT (InHome Training) rules that I received through the training to apply to students. so I can find out the characteristics of my student's learning using what learning style, then the learning adapts to student learning styles, starting from kinaesthetic, visual, or audio. so that learning can run according to the goals and expectations that we currently apply.”

P2: “We have been implementing the independent curriculum for one year in the tenth grade. actually, because of the new curriculum, we also need to learn continuously in developing learning objectives and the flow of learning objectives to achieve learning outcomes by the independent curriculum system from the government, coupled with heterogeneous students also requiring different handling.

P3: “English is a unique language as well, so to strengthen this ability in the independent curriculum, um... there are six language skills. that is, listening than speaking, reading, viewing then writing and presenting.”

Based on the explanation above, it simply can be understood that in the emancipated curriculum, English teachers have been implementing teaching and learning in line with the emancipated curriculum concept. Teachers designed learning strategies based on students’ characteristics and learning styles. It means teachers do teaching variations in implementing teaching strategies and using media. They tried to make it in line with students’ characteristics in learning.

Q4: “How do you implement character-based English learning in an emancipated curriculum?”

P4: “To apply character education, we can implement it by applying the Pancasila student profile, where in the Pancasila student profile there is faith and piety to the one and only God. so that before we start learning in class, we always pray together.”

P5: “Yes, there are various kinds of characters, in multi-module text, communicative competence is very important. orally, in writing as well as visually, audio visual. then the intercultural competence respects the perspectives, practices, and culture of Indonesia and foreign cultures and expresses introspection so that each individual is independent and responsible. then one more must-have critical and creative reasoning skills”

P6: “ Ummm.. it's character-based, yes, in the independent curriculum itself there is a Pancasila student profile that at the same time forms student character. So, we already have it in every lesson, especially in English, in each teaching module, it has been inserted about the character of the Pancasila student profile. By discussing students, critical reasoning will emerge.

The data shows that implementing an emancipated curriculum deals with students' character-building. In an emancipated curriculum, English teachers are obligated to design students' character-building through various activities such as the Pancasila student profile (P5).

Q5: “Dealing with preparation and understanding emancipated curriculum, have you ever participated in an emancipated curriculum training or workshop before starting to apply English language learning in class?”

P1: “Before this curriculum was implemented, the teachers attended IHT (House Training) when there was a gap in the time for admitting new students to attend training both from the school and outside the school such as online workshops for making teaching materials and so on. so, as a teacher must always be updated to keep up with the times.”

P2: “Yes, I have, this has been held at the school and participated in from outside the school, such as participating in the MGM

P3: “Yes, if the school is holding it, yes, because the curriculum is new so there is socialization. but the details are not yet ripe so that it only seems a formality so we as teachers have to learn more like through the media learning platform, namely the teacher teaches.”

The data reveals that before implementing an emancipated curriculum, English teachers followed and joined workshops and training in preparing for the implementation of an emancipated curriculum in their schools. They got some insights about the concept of emancipated curriculum, differentiation learning, and designing lesson plans based on emancipated curriculum. In summary, English teachers got their preparation by joining training and workshops in implementing emancipated curriculum but some of them feel confused and they need to learn more through media and other platforms. In other words, workshops and training do not guarantee that English teachers fully understand the concept of an emancipated curriculum.

Q6: “What are the strategies applied in implementing the emancipated Curriculum in ELT class?”

P1: Strategy, yes, there are many ways to apply it, there are learning models, right? We adapt them to our needs. whether it is project-based or by inquiry or by the CPL method depending on the needs of students and the material we are working on

P2: there should be a text-based approach which is usually called a genre-based approach, where learning is focused on the texts. well, in this case, it can be done verbally, in writing, in audio, or in multi-modules. approach like that.”

P3: “Indeed my strategy is to continue to try to understand the different situations of students and the independent curriculum itself, there are several phases of the stages. just like in a vocational high school, it's phase F. whereas, in phase F itself, there is someone who directs the course. My strategy is to study a lot and have discussions with other teachers to review one TP before entering class.

P4: “Inquiry use

P5: “Using books published from abroad that are very helpful”

P6: “Looking for creative examples often updates interesting ways of learning, Must understand students in a class (diagnostic test), Differentiate the way of teaching in the classroom, souls class so that students don't feel burdened.”

Based on the data displayed above, it can be analyzed that implementation of an emancipated curriculum is not easy, particularly in English teaching and learning classes. English teachers have their own experience in implementing emancipated curriculum. The data shows that emancipated curricula have been introduced by the government and then it was followed up by conducting workshops and training for teachers to introduce the new concept of curriculum in the education system. It means English teachers got numerous insights about the concept of an emancipated curriculum, how to design teaching and learning in an emancipated curriculum, and how to do students' assessments in an emancipated curriculum.

Dealing with strategies implemented in EFL class, English teachers used various strategies. They applied various strategies such as project-based learning, inquiry learning, and selecting appropriate books and materials for teaching and learning.

In short, English teachers got an understanding of the concept of emancipated curriculum particularly in English teaching and learning. They designed lesson plans based on some regulations in the emancipated curriculum. Even, they learn more about how to implement an emancipated curriculum through the *Merdeka Belajar* platform. They can find various types of learning phases, lesson plans, and some materials. In other words, English teachers have good experience in implementing emancipated curricula, particularly in English teaching and learning. Theoretically, they got training and workshops before implementing an emancipated curriculum in their class. They learn and discuss with colleagues and they explore deeply in *Merdeka Belajar* Platform. Practically, English teachers recognize and design lesson plans based on learning outcomes and regulations in an emancipated curriculum. They need to design an appropriate lesson plan by providing students with character buildings and Profile Pancasila Students (P5).

Regarding the finding above, it can be inferred that English teachers have prepared themselves in line with the regulation of emancipated curriculum. Compared with the previous research, this finding is in line with research done by Sudimantara (2023). This research investigated emancipated curriculum development in middle school. The finding reveals that in designing plans, English teachers focus on critical and creative thinking, and develop their learning materials

to enhance students' cognitive ability. While, in the other side, English teachers have not developed digital media yet. Consequently, the traditional learning approach is still dominant, particularly in the assessment and learning process (Ellen et al., 2023). Thus, it can be inferred that in implementing an emancipated curriculum, English teachers have preparation before implementing it in the classroom.

Challenges faced English teachers in implementing emancipated curriculum in ELT class

Dealing with challenges faced by English teachers in implementing emancipated curriculum in ELT classes, the researchers interviewed to gain deep information. Based on the interview, some information was found as follows:

Q1: What are the challenges in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum particularly in ELT class?

P1: "There are no obstacles in learning, sometimes there are obstacles but due to other causes, namely being late and often not entering."

P2: "Sometimes I forget that the learning achievement is there but I forget not to give it because of time constraints. Sometimes it is also constrained because in vocational high school, sometimes from the workshop, so if they enter the class during learning it becomes a bit difficult. Maybe the students become bored more often and are not ready to accept learning."

P3: "Challenges or obstacles, yes, usually students are given time to look for material by browsing using their cell phones, so if students don't supervise it, they often abuse it. such as gaming and others. So, we have to go around to monitor that students are using smartphones for learning media."

P4: "Yes, of course, there must be obstacles, for this the obstacle is in preparing the IKM (implementation of the independent curriculum) it must take more time to adapt to different majors in vocational high schools."

Based on the data above, it can be inferred that English teachers encounter some challenges and obstacles in implementing an emancipated curriculum. The challenges commonly come from the time allocated for preparing materials and media. It means in designing materials and media, English teachers need more time to prepare them well. As a result, it takes much time to do it. Compared with the previous curriculum, the emancipated curriculum has a distinction, particularly in the teaching and learning process. In an emancipated curriculum, differentiation learning is taken into account. It means teachers should conduct diagnostic tests at the beginning of the teaching and learning process. it aims to know and analyze students' abilities.

Conclusion

Emancipated curriculum or *Kurikulum Merdeka* is a new curriculum that is improved and revised from the previous curriculum. Based on some regulations, an emancipated curriculum has been implemented in every level of school in Indonesia. Regarding its implementation, English teachers have new experiences in implementing emancipated in English teaching and learning classes. Theoretically, English teachers mostly know and understand the concept of emancipated learning. They got some workshops and training before implementing the new curriculum.

The government provides numerous workshops, orientations, and digital platforms as media to help teachers learn and understand the emancipated curriculum. Practically, English teachers got some practical easiness in designing lesson plans because it is different from the previous ones. In other words, English teachers got some positive experience in implementing an emancipated curriculum. On the other side, they encounter some challenges and obstacles such as time allocated. They need more time to prepare and design teaching material and media for the learning process.

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