# TEACHERS' CHALLENGES AND APPROACHES IN ENHANCING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS WITHIN THE MERDEKA CURRICULUM IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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**Abstract**: In an independent curriculum, the teacher acts as a facilitator, guiding students to achieve their learning goals. Therefore, effective learning strategies are essential for supporting student success. This research addresses the issues currently faced at the school, focusing on the strategies employed in teaching English within the Merdeka curriculum at junior high schools, as well as the challenges encountered by English teachers under this curriculum. Three main challenges identified include: students' limited vocabulary, motivating students to engage in learning, and their lack of self-confidence. However, there are several supporting factors that contribute to a successful learning process, such as adequate school facilities and teaching materials. Proper infrastructure, both inside and outside the classroom, plays a crucial role in enhancing the educational experience. Additionally, teaching materials are vital for effective teaching and learning. Educators need resources that provide comprehensive information and are well-prepared to ensure that all competencies are adequately covered.

**Keywords**: Approaches, Challenges, English Skills, Merdeka Curriculum.

## Introduction

Indonesia's education curriculum has evolved significantly since the country gained independence on August 17, 1945, reflecting its political changes over time.[1] Historically, previous curriculum reforms

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[1] D R H Masduki Duryat, *Analisis Kebijakan Pendidikan; Teori Dan Praktiknya Di Indonesia* (Penerbit K-Media, 2022).

did not involve teachers in the processes of creative exploration or contribute to improving their professional status and working conditions, a trend observed in many countries. The latest revision, the 'Merdeka of Learning' curriculum reform policy, was proposed in 2019 and rolled out in 2020. This reform marks a shift by granting teachers greater autonomy.

English teachers are now empowered to interpret the curriculum and are encouraged to actively participate in its development. Students are no longer mere recipients of information; instead, they are seen as co-creators of the curriculum.[2] This shift allows learners to interpret the curriculum freely and promotes a flexible approach to education, enabling them to contribute actively. The implications of this curriculum reform are significant for both learners and teachers, and its successful implementation is crucial to ensure meaningful improvements are realized.[3]

The Merdeka Learning Initiative, developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture, is based on the Merdeka Curriculum, also known as the Prototype Curriculum, which will be implemented in various schools across Indonesia.[4] This curriculum is designed to be flexible, emphasizing essential material, character development, and student competencies. A key feature of the Merdeka Curriculum is its emphasis on interactive and collaborative learning methods.[5] This curriculum offers more flexibility compared to previous models, allowing educators, students, and schools to engage more freely in the learning process.[6] In this student-centered approach, teachers are expected to adopt effective, up-to-date teaching methods enhanced by technological advancements. This enables students to innovate and express their creativity using modern learning tools. Successful

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[2] Dasep Bayu Ahyar and others, 'Desain Sistem Pembelajaran' (PT. Mifandi Mandiri Digital, 2023).

[3] M Pd Suyatno, *Dasar-Dasar Pendidikan* (Bumi Aksara, 2024).

[4] Iwan Usma Wardani, I Wayan Lasmawan, and I Wayan Suastra, 'Guru Dan Tantangan Kurikulum Baru: Analisis Peran Guru Dalam Kebijakan Kurikulum Baru', *Jurnal Darma Agung*, 31.5 (2023), 301–13.

[5] Sintia Dwi and Uswatun Hasanah, 'Independent Curriculum and Strengthening Pancasila Identity in the Young Generation: Kurikulum Merdeka Dan Penguatan Identitas Pancasila Pada Generasi Muda', *The Elementary Journal*, 2.2 (2024).

[6] Lidia Susanti, Eva Handriyantini, and Amir Hamzah, *Guru Kreatif Inovatif Era Merdeka Belajar* (Penerbit Andi, 2023); Muhammad Nur Qolbi and Wati Susiawati, 'Kurikulum Merdeka: Kurikulum Berorientasi Masa Depan', *Mauriduna: Journal of Islamic Studies*, 5.4 (2024), 1262–80.

classroom learning requires active collaboration between students and teachers to achieve educational goals.

Innovation has significantly transformed various sectors, including education.[7] Educational programs play a crucial role in advancing educational progress, guiding everything from conceptual ideas to practical implementation. Thus, the curriculum serves as a framework for delivering quality education and organizing content and teaching materials.[8]

Learning English requires developing oral communication skills, particularly through public speaking. When learners gain self-confidence, they can become fluent and effective in English. According to several experts, public speaking in English involves a speaker conveying a consistent message to a large audience in a specific context.[9]

The current educational model is known as the Merdeka Curriculum, introduced by the Minister of Education and Technology. This curriculum, part of the Human Resource 'Kurikulum Merdeka' initiative, is designed to be tailored to each school's unique needs. Since 2013, schools have had the option to adopt various educational programs, including emergency responses and the Merdeka curriculum. The Merdeka Learning approach was developed as a response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing learners to choose topics that interest them.[10]

In the Merdeka curriculum, English language instruction emphasizes the development of higher-level skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Teaching strategies refer to the methods employed to facilitate student learning and to set achievable future goals. These strategies help identify various learning approaches, allowing educators

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[7] Adekunle Oke and Fatima Araujo Pereira Fernandes, 'Innovations in Teaching and Learning: Exploring the Perceptions of the Education Sector on the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR)', *Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity*, 6.2 (2020), 31.

[8] Inge Ayudia and others, 'Pengembangan Kurikulum', *PT. Mifandi Mandiri Digital*, 2023; Janet Grant, 'Principles of Curriculum Design', *Understanding Medical Education: Evidence, Theory, and Practice*, 2018, 71–88.

[9] Barbara Tucker and others, 'Exploring Public Speaking', 2019; Restu Mufanti, Rohfin Andria Gestanti, and Elok Putri Nimasari, 'CAN I BE A PUBLIC SPEAKER? Get Ready For Speech 3rd Edition Book' (Penerbit Kalika, 2018); Foluke Fatimayin, 'What Is Communication', *National Open University of Nigeria*, 2018.

[10] Sri Rahmawati, Devi Astuti, and Fadriati Fadriati, 'Peran Guru Dalam Pengembangan Kurikulum Merdeka', *Indo-MathEdu Intellectuals Journal*, 5.3 (2024), 3026–38.

to tailor their methods to specific groups of learners.[11] Teaching English presents unique challenges, and the term "strategy" pertains to the techniques teachers select to deliver content effectively in a particular learning environment, ensuring that educational objectives are met efficiently. In this context, strategies aim to create a conducive environment for teaching, enhancing the learning experience by making it "easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations".[12] Teachers must possess the skills to manage these components effectively so that the material is well understood by all students. Given the diverse skill levels in each classroom, it is essential for educators to employ effective strategies that facilitate the learning process for every student.

According to Brown, speaking is a skill that can be directly and practically observed. However, the accuracy and effectiveness of a test taker's listening abilities often obscure these observations, which can compromise the validity and reliability of oral production assessments.[13] The expert emphasizes that speaking is a skill that should be mastered clearly, suggesting that the evaluation of speaking ability should be conducted fairly and effectively. This highlights that the assessment of speaking proficiency may lack certain competencies, which can affect the information provided.

Some experts notes that speaking skills are crucial for learning a foreign or second language. Among the four fundamental language skills, speaking is considered the most important for mastering a new language.[14] This indicates that achieving fluency in speaking is more significant than merely understanding English, particularly if one is unprepared. The ability to practice and set goals in speaking becomes essential for anyone learning a new language.

This research focuses on the challenges teachers encounter in creating a more effective and engaging learning environment. In the

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[11] Aswadi Jaya and others, 'Analisis Tuntutan Kurikulum Merdeka Dalam Konteks Penerapan Keterampilan Abad 21 Pada Materi Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris', in *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pascasarjana*, 2023, VI, 142–47.

[12] Alastair Henry and others, 'Motivational Strategies and the Reframing of English: Activity Design and Challenges for Teachers in Contexts of Extensive Extramural Encounters', *Tesol Quarterly*, 52.2 (2018), 247–73; Thomas S C Farrell and George M Jacobs, *Essentials for Successful English Language Teaching* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020).

[13] H Douglas Brown and Priyanvada Abeywickrama, *Language Assessment: Principles and Classroom Practices* (Pearson, 2019).

[14] Parupalli Srinivas Rao, 'The Importance of Speaking Skills in English Classrooms', *Alford Council of International English & Literature Journal (ACIELJ)*, 2.2 (2019), 6–18; Wilga M Rivers, *Teaching Foreign Language Skills* (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

independent curriculum framework, teachers act as facilitators to help students meet their learning objectives. Thus, implementing effective learning strategies is crucial for achieving educational goals. The urgency of this research stems from the specific issues identified at the school, which will be addressed in subsequent phases. The researcher has selected particular problems based on observations and considerations of the unique challenges teachers face. Throughout the research process, data collection will be conducted to ensure valid findings. The goal is to address the difficulties and strategies teachers use in developing speaking skills within the independent curriculum.

Previous studies[15] have laid the groundwork for this research. The theoretical framework is drawn from Susanto, who categorizes problems into two types: internal and external. Internal issues include insufficient mastery of terminology and usage, while external challenges often stem from a lack of English exposure outside the classroom.[16] This study shares similarities with earlier research focused on teacher challenges and strategies, all of which employed qualitative methodologies.

This research distinguishes itself from previous studies conducted in colleges and universities by concentrating on speaking skills. This unique focus offers a compelling opportunity for researchers to explore the challenges and strategies related to enhancing English speaking skills an area that has been largely overlooked, especially within the context of the Merdeka curriculum. While past research primarily employed qualitative methods, this study diverges from earlier investigations conducted during the COVID-19 era by specifically examining speaking skills. This emphasis creates a fascinating foundation for examining the obstacles and strategies involved in developing English speaking abilities, which have received minimal attention within the Merdeka curriculum framework.

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[15] Edi Sukmojati, Ribahan Ribahan, and Hery Rahmat, 'Strategies and Challenges in Teaching Speaking by English Tutors: A Study in Madani Super Camp English Classes', *JELITA: Journal of Education, Language Innovation, and Applied Linguistics*, 2.2 (2023), 111–21; Bandar Mohammad Saeed Al-Sobhi and Abdul Shakour Preece, 'Teaching English Speaking Skills to the Arab Students in the Saudi School in Kuala Lumpur: Problems and Solutions', *International Journal of Education and Literacy Studies*, 6.1 (2018), 1–11.
[16] H Pendi Susanto, *Best Practices Manajemen Sekolah* (Penerbit Tsaqiva, 2021).

## Literature Review
### Speaking Skills in English Language Learning

Speaking proficiency is one of the main competences in learning English as a foreign language. Brown[17] defines speaking as a productive process that involves the ability to convey messages orally by considering linguistic and social aspects. It demands fluency, accuracy and meaningfulness of communication. This is in line with the main principle of language identity itself which states that language is speech and verbal communication.[18]

According to Richards,[19] teaching speaking skills focuses not only on the pronunciation of words, but also on meaningful interactions in real contexts. Furthermore, in speaking activity, learners learn the activities that involve psychological, physiological, and physical stages.[20] In the context of Indonesian learners, speaking skills are often a challenge due to the lack of exposure to the use of English in everyday life.

The Merdeka Curriculum encourages a contextualised, differentiated and student-centred approach to learning. One of its principles is the development of communication skills through collaborative and project-based activities.[21] This is in line with the communicative approach (Communicative Language Teaching) which emphasises the use of language as a real communication tool.

However, in practice, teachers face challenges such as time constraints, low student confidence, and lack of supporting facilities. Therefore, innovative approaches such as role play, presentations and technology utilisation are needed to create a communicative learning environment and support the improvement of speaking skills.

### Merdeka Curiculum in Developing Speaking Skills

Many people have the misconception that curriculum only includes the subjects learnt by students at school, along with the

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17 Brown and Abeywickrama.
18 Muh Sabilar Rosyad, 'Bringing Innovation In Learning Arabic Speaking Skills For Students Of Madrasah Diniyah: Hand Puppet Media As A Model', *PROSIDING KONIPBSA: Konferensi Nasional Inovasi Pembelajaran Bahasa Dan Sastra Arab*, 4.1 (2024).
19 Jack C Richards, *Communicative Language Teaching Today* (SEAMEO Regional Language Centre Singapore, 2005).
20 Tri Pujiati, 'OPTIMIZE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) APPROACH FOR NON-ENGLISH LEARNERS'SPEAKING SKILL', *JALIE; Journal of Applied Linguistics and Islamic Education*, 8.02 (2024), 215–38.
21 Kemendikbudristek, *Panduan Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka* (Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi., 2022).

textbooks distributed to them at the beginning of the school year. However, some people justify this definition, but categorise it as an old concept that is no longer relevant to the development and challenges of language learning in this postmodern era.[22]

The Merdeka Curriculum is a transformation of the education curriculum in Indonesia that emphasises student-centred, flexible learning, and is oriented towards strengthening essential competencies and character through the profile of Pancasila Students.[23] In the context of English language learning, this approach provides space for contextualised development of language skills, including speaking skills.

The Merdeka Curriculum encourages student-centred learning, where students actively build knowledge through authentic learning experiences. This supports the development of speaking skills through meaningful communication activities, such as discussions, presentations, and collaborative projects. In addition, flexibility in the choice of materials and methods allows teachers to adapt learning to the needs and ability levels of students.

However, the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum also presents challenges for teachers, especially in designing effective speaking activities that actively involve students. Teachers need to have creativity, pedagogical understanding, and resource support to manage a communicative and competency-oriented classroom.[24]

Thus, understanding the principles and objectives of Merdeka Curriculum is key for teachers in designing the right approach to optimally improve students' speaking skills.

**Method**

This study will employ descriptive qualitative research. Descriptive research aims to systematically and carefully understand the characteristics and circumstances of specific populations in order to address current challenges they face. It involves gathering data or information that can be organized, described, and analyzed.[25] Sugiyono

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[22] Muhammad Sabilar Rosyad, Farid Qomaruddin, and Muhammad Farih, 'Kurikulum Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Untuk Penutur Asing: Ragam Konsep Dan Desain Silabus', *TADRIS AL-ARABIYAT: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Pendidikan Bahasa Arab*, 4.1 (2024), 67–89 <https://doi.org/10.30739/arabiyat.v4i1.2713>.

[23] Kemendikbudristek.

[24] D Sukmawati, 'Tantangan Guru Dalam Menerapkan Kurikulum Merdeka Pada Pembelajaran Berbasis Kompetensi', *Jurnal Inovasi Pendidikan*, 9.1 (2023), 45–53.

[25] Sarah J Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (John Wiley & Sons, 2024).

notes that qualitative researchers serve as the primary instruments, determining the research focus, selecting informants as data sources, collecting data, evaluating its quality, analyzing it, interpreting findings, and drawing conclusions.[26] The study utilized interviews as its primary data collection method. Data analysis was performed through reduction and data display techniques. The research aimed to gain in-depth insights into the perspectives and challenges faced by English teachers when implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The subjects of the study were English teachers, selected to ensure a range of experiences and viewpoints. Participant observation was also conducted, where the researcher closely listened to teachers discussing the Merdeka Curriculum, complemented by note-taking. Additionally, direct observations of English teaching sessions were carried out to understand how the Merdeka Curriculum is applied in practice. The data collected reflect the viewpoints and challenges encountered by English teachers implementing the curriculum. The respondents included English teachers from Junior High Schools who were actively engaged in applying the Merdeka Curriculum. After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed it and employed various analysis methods, such as data reduction, classification by type, validation, and interpretation. Overall, the study offers a comprehensive overview of the field, capturing the practical experiences of teachers and their direct engagement with the teaching process.

**Results and Discussion**

The findings indicate that teachers face three main challenges: students' limited vocabulary, low motivation to learn, and a lack of self-confidence among students. These issues have been effectively addressed by introducing vocabulary instruction starting in seventh grade, motivating students during lessons, and employing group discussion strategies to enhance peer interaction. However, teaching often encounters unexpected obstacles. By providing motivation, it is hoped that students will become more engaged in their studies.

Additionally, certain factors contribute to a successful learning environment, including adequate school facilities and teaching materials. Both classroom and outdoor facilities play a crucial role in the educational process. Essential classroom items—such as chairs, desks, blackboards, and bookshelves—must be well-maintained to

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[26] Sugiyono Sugiyono, 'Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, R&D', *Bandung: Alfabeta*, 1.11 (2016).

ensure a smooth, safe, and comfortable learning experience. Teaching materials are also vital, as they support the educational activities of both teachers and students. Effective materials should be comprehensive, well-prepared, and designed to cover the necessary competencies in detail.

## The Approaches Used to Enhance Students' Speaking skills within the Merdeka Curriculum

This research presents two observational results focused on strategies for developing learners' speaking skills within the Merdeka curriculum. The researcher conducted observations in two classes, seventh and eighth grade, involving two English teachers. The observations took place on different days and times: the first on Friday, March 1, 2024, and the second on Wednesday, March 6, 2024.

The teacher's strategy consists of a planned series of actions that educators implement during lessons, utilizing various methods and resources to support learning objectives. These strategies are crafted to achieve specific educational outcomes and are valuable not only in classroom settings but also in real-world contexts. Effective teaching strategies are crucial as they significantly influence the success of the learning process. It is essential for these strategies to be engaging and capture students' interest. Additionally, students can enhance their understanding by using contextual clues and inferring meanings to navigate unfamiliar content.[27]

Teacher strategies for developing speaking skills are crucial in helping students overcome their challenges in this area. The primary goal of teaching speaking is to enable students to effectively express themselves in the target language and engage in basic interactive skills.[28] To teach speaking skills effectively, educators have a variety of strategies at their disposal. Teaching strategies refer to the different methods employed by teachers during the teaching and learning process. To ensure successful outcomes, particularly in speaking instruction, teachers must take several factors into account. As stated by[29] identify four key factors: (1) the students being taught, (2) the

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[27] Aini Shifana Savitri and others, 'Peran Strategi Pembelajaran Terhadap Motivasi Belajar Siswa', *Jurnal Pendidikan Sosiologi Dan Humaniora*, 13.2 (2022), 505–11.

[28] Hayat Ahmad Kashmiri, 'Communication Challenges: Saudi EFL Speaking Skills and Strategies to Overcome Speaking Difficulties', *Arab World English Journal (December 2020) Theses ID*, 2020, 1–61.

[29] Ni Made Ratminingsih, *Metode Dan Strategi Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris-Rajawali Pers* (PT. RajaGrafindo Persada, 2021).

specific vocabulary selected for instruction, (3) the instructional objectives for teaching that vocabulary, and (4) the teaching strategies used. For the 2023-2024 academic year, the teacher at SMP Simanjaya Lamongan is considering these factors, particularly the strategies implemented to enhance students' speaking skills.

Research findings indicate that teachers employ a variety of strategies for teaching speaking skills. One key approach is the Direct Method, where the teacher communicates solely in English without translating into the students' native language. This method focuses on fostering effective communication in the target language. To maintain student engagement and prevent boredom, teachers use various techniques to capture interest. To ensure clarity and avoid misunderstandings, they incorporate gestures, visuals, and charts. Recognizing that students may struggle with confidence or make errors, teachers provide immediate corrections to help them learn and improve. Essentially, the Direct Method emphasizes the exclusive use of English in the classroom, relying on visual aids and demonstrations to convey meaning when students encounter unfamiliar vocabulary.

Implementation involves applying regulatory values across various activities, particularly in the context of the Merdeka Curriculum in education. This curriculum emphasizes the necessity for teaching practices to embody its core values. It empowers both teachers and students in the learning process, promoting a student-centered approach where students take on a more active role. Teachers are encouraged to act as facilitators, providing initial material, guiding implementation, and conducting assessments and projects throughout the educational journey.

The Merdeka Curriculum marks a significant transformation in Indonesia's educational landscape, designed to promote a more comprehensive and adaptable approach to learning. This curriculum represents a critical component of the nation's ongoing educational reforms, with the primary objective of equipping students with the necessary skills and competencies to thrive in the 21st century.[30] Unlike traditional education systems, which primarily emphasize memorization and standardized testing, the Merdeka Curriculum is centered on nurturing critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving abilities by adopting a student-focused, interactive teaching method. The framework for the Merdeka Curriculum's implementation is defined by the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture

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[30] H E Mulyasa, *Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka* (Jakarta: Bumi Aksara, 2023).

Number 56 of 2022, which outlines its role in addressing learning recovery. This new curriculum, known as the 'Merdeka Curriculum,' is designed to integrate into the existing educational framework, blending innovative policies and strategies with core elements retained from the 2013 Curriculum. This article delves into the shift from the previous 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum, providing an analysis of the underlying reasons for this transition and the evolution of educational reform in Indonesia.[31]

When applied to English Language Teaching (ELT), the Merdeka Curriculum brings forth both opportunities and challenges. As English continues to serve as a global lingua franca, its significance in the Indonesian education system has been steadily increasing, particularly as Indonesia becomes more integrated into the global community. The Merdeka Curriculum encourages a shift in the way English is taught, promoting a methodology that goes beyond the mere acquisition of language skills. Instead, it positions English as a vital tool for broader educational enrichment and personal growth.[32] This philosophy reinforces the importance of research into effective ELT strategies within the Merdeka Curriculum framework, offering valuable insights into how English teaching can evolve in response to the needs of a rapidly changing global environment. Although there is a growing body of research on the broader implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, much of this research tends to focus on general outcomes such as successes, challenges, and obstacles across different subject areas, rather than offering a detailed exploration of ELT-specific strategies.

Nevertheless, there is a significant gap in comprehensive studies that focus specifically on the English language aspect of the curriculum, particularly in lower secondary schools. This gap needs to be addressed, as the successful implementation of any curriculum involves a multitude of factors that require careful and in-depth investigation. To fill this gap, the present research aims to examine the strategies employed in teaching English within the context of the Merdeka Curriculum at junior high schools. By focusing on this area, the study intends to offer a fresh perspective on the existing body of research related to the Independent Curriculum. This will contribute to a deeper understanding of how the Merdeka Curriculum is applied in English

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[31] Mulyasa; Qolbi and Susiawati.

[32] Ina Wahyu Priyanti Ningsih, Ahmad Ahmad Tauchid, and Nanin Verina Widya Putri, 'English Teachers' Challenges and Method in Building Learners' Speaking Skills During Merdeka Curriculum in Junior High School', *English Education and Literature Journal (E-Jou)*, 4.02 (2024), 229–40.

language education, shedding light on the practical aspects and challenges involved in its implementation at the secondary school level. By doing so, this study hopes to expand the current discourse on curriculum reform and provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers working within the Merdeka framework.

## Challenges in Developing Learners' Speaking Skills Under the Merdeka Curriculum

Through thematic analysis of interview data, the researcher identified three strategies employed by English teachers at SMP Simanjaya Lamongan to enhance students' speaking skills in a multilingual context. These strategies include fostering communication between teachers and students, encouraging interaction among students, and integrating Islamic values into speaking activities.

First languages often differ significantly from English regarding grammar, pronunciation, and spelling, which contributes to students' difficulties in mastering English. Many students struggle to communicate effectively and may not grasp every word's meaning. To address these challenges, teachers can implement various teaching methods and strategies to facilitate learning. It is crucial for English teachers to understand students' language proficiency levels so they can determine the appropriate amount of English to use during lessons. According to,[33] simple conversations are effective for training students in communication. Conversations can help practice speaking skills and illustrate language use, often featuring dialogues designed to teach simplified grammar and vocabulary. Thus, utilizing simple conversations is an effective strategy for improving students' speaking abilities.

As noted by experts, the teacher's role extends beyond creating a welcoming and supportive classroom environment; it also involves providing opportunities for all students to engage in speaking through conversation.[34] Simple conversations are vital for establishing communication between teachers and students, aligning with the objective of using English for everyday communication. Additionally, teachers employ question-and-answer techniques and the direct

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[33] Emmanuel Ayedoun, Yuki Hayashi, and Kazuhisa Seta, 'Adding Communicative and Affective Strategies to an Embodied Conversational Agent to Enhance Second Language Learners' Willingness to Communicate', *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*, 29 (2019), 29–57.
[34] Leslie S Keiler, 'Teachers' Roles and Identities in Student-Centered Classrooms', *International Journal of STEM Education*, 5 (2018), 1–20.

method to facilitate understanding. At SMP Simanjaya Lamongan, communication occurs in four languages: Indonesian, English, Arabic, and polite Javanese. This multilingual approach not only helps students become proficient in speaking but also encourages respectful and courteous communication.

The interview results highlight three main challenges teachers face: students' limited vocabulary, difficulties in motivating students to learn, and a lack of self-confidence among students. These challenges have been addressed effectively through several strategies, including introducing vocabulary in the seventh grade, providing motivational support during lessons, and using group discussions to foster peer interaction. However, teaching often involves unforeseen obstacles. By motivating students, the goal is to encourage more active participation in their studies.

Motivation plays a crucial role in the learning process. When students are highly motivated, they are more likely to achieve favorable outcomes. Motivation stems from both personal and social experiences, driving individuals to pursue goals. As noted by Seven motivation encompasses attitudes and emotional responses that can significantly influence learners, particularly regarding their effort in acquiring a new language. It can be both a product of the learning experience and a catalyst for it. Moreover, motivation is dynamic, fluctuating depending on the learning context.[35]

Effective learning is also supported by adequate school facilities and teaching materials. Both infrastructure and resources are essential for enhancing the educational experience. Classrooms must be equipped with proper furniture, such as desks, chairs, blackboards, and bookshelves, to create a conducive environment for learning [36]. Teaching materials are vital for facilitating educational activities; they should be comprehensive and tailored to meet the needs of both educators and students. According to Tomlinson, teaching materials should present complete information to assist in the learning process.[37] Which means that effective teaching materials must meet various conditions, including cognitive appropriateness, cost-effectiveness, availability, and quality.

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[35] Mehmet Ali Seven, 'Motivation in Language Learning and Teaching.', *African Educational Research Journal*, 8 (2020), 62–71.

[36] Gary R Morrison and others, *Designing Effective Instruction* (John Wiley & Sons, 2019).

[37] Brian Tomlinson, *Developing Materials for Language Teaching* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023).

**Conclusion**

    This research addresses the largely unexamined aspects of English language learning within the curriculum, particularly in junior high schools. This gap is noteworthy, as implementing the curriculum involves various elements that require in-depth exploration. The primary objective of this study is to elucidate the strategies employed in specialized English language instruction under the Merdeka curriculum in junior high schools. By doing so, this research aims to offer a fresh perspective on existing research related to the Independent Curriculum, enhancing our comprehension of its application in English language education.

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