

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Curriculum is regarded as a core element to direct on the road of teaching and learning in institutions. According to Kamiludin & Suryaman (2017) curriculum is also seen as a set of educational programs that has been prepared and implemented to achieve educational goals in which the components are interrelated and support each other. Moreover, Forey & Cheung (2019) also stated that curriculum is the content of learning to assist the students to achieve and gain the learning experience. In Indonesia, curriculum has been developed every decade due to the society's needs, new insight into the learning process, political issues, and the development of industry and technology (Pajarwati et al, 2021). It is aimed to improve the quality of teaching-learning process and learning design, as well as being determinant Ekawati (2016) stated the development of curriculum considered as determinant for the nation's future.

Last year in 2021, *Kemendikbudristek* launched a new educational system in Indonesia, called *Merdeka Belajar* episode 7. One of its programs is *Sekolah Penggerak* that has been implementing since the school year 2021/2022 for 2.500 schools in 34 provinces and 111 cities (Rahayu et. al, 2021). Program *Sekolah Penggerak* is the newest program in Indonesia and only some schools all over Indonesia are implementing this program. *Sekolah Penggerak* focused on the development of students' learning outcome holistically by creating a profile of

Pancasila students that includes competence and character which starts with well human resources (Kemendikbudristek, 2021). It can be said, Program *Sekolah Penggerak* is a refinement of the previous school transformation program and it will accelerate public/private schools in all school conditions to move 1-2 stages further.

Then, to implement Program *Sekolah Penggerak*, the school has to pass the test that was conducted by *Kemendikbudristek* and the schools implement this curriculum for the school year 2021/2022. Furthermore, Program *Sekolah Penggerak* is one of the methods for school to implement *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum. "*Merdeka Belajar*" is a term used by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture to describe a set of educational policies aimed at modernizing the country's education system. The *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is a key component of these policies and is designed to promote student-centered learning, digital literacy, and the development of 21st-century skills.

Therefore, the Ministry of Education and Culture aimed the *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum is the solution for Indonesian education which has been slow-down for almost 2 years. Then, by implementing this curriculum *Kemdikbudristek* is allowing the school to compile and implement the learning process and develop a curriculum based on the students' need (Rahmadayanti & Hartoyo, 2022). In line with this, Mustaghfiroh (2020) explained *Merdeka Belajar* has the same direction and purpose with John Dewey's concept of progressivism education philosophy. Both of these concepts offer the independence and freedom for the educational institutions to explore the students' potential by adjusting the interest, talents, and

tendencies of students. By using the concept of independence and freedom, the Indonesian minister of education expects the Indonesian education system will be more advanced and more qualified.

However, in *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, there are some modifications in order to develop students' competencies in their phase. The students' remarkably can learn deeply, meaningfully, and enjoyably (Kemdikbudristek, 2021b). The modifications for the courses in elementary school such as (1) social and science are different course, but in *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum they are merged into IPAS, (2) school can use thematic approach or subject-based approach, (3) art and culture should choose between of the some arts, (4) English is included as elective subject and it is taught for 2 lesson hours/week, and (5) project-based learning approach.

In the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum, English is regarded as an elective course in elementary school. In this context, an elective course is a class or subject that school can choose to take from a selection of options, rather than being mandatory or required as part of their curriculum. Elective courses provide students with the flexibility to explore their interests, pursue specialized knowledge, or gain additional skills in a particular area of study. These courses are typically offered alongside core subjects and allow school to personalize their education based on their preferences, talents, and future goals.

However, it is implemented due to some conditions such as English foreign language teacher readiness and school preparation. Besides, an English subject is required to respond to the community's needs and educational demands. However,

the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum for Program *Sekolah Penggerak* is rather rushed although it is guided by the facilitators through workshops by the ministry (Tumanduk, et. al, 2020). Subsequently, according to the preliminary research by Dewi, et. al. (2023) English course is taught by the non-English education background teachers and the teachers have the difficulty in teaching English to young learners.

Interestingly, a number of scholars have studied deeply about the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. (1) Triayomi et al. (2022) have studied the readiness of teachers in implementing *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum at Xaverius 1 Elementary School. Through the research, the researchers found out the readiness of teachers has been carried out well since the competency of the teachers is suitable to the competency indicator standards. The other related research was studied by (2) Supriatna, et. al, (2023) entitled *Implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Elementary Schools: How is Teachers' Perception?* and the researchers found out the teachers have positive attitude towards the implementation of this curriculum and teachers have an essential part for the process and succession on the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum.

On the other hand, (3) Suryani, et al. (2023) researched a research entitled *Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar di Sekolah Penggerak*. In this research, the researchers found out the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar Curriculum* at Program *Sekolah Penggerak* is starting from planning which consists of compiling the Education Unit Operational Curriculum, making teaching modules, then the implementation stage starts with intra-curricular learning, and learning through

strengthening projects Pancasila students profile, and finally from the implementation of the independent curriculum, namely the evaluation which consists of assessment, grade promotion criteria, and graduation criteria.

Referring to what has been done by the previous researchers and departing from the problems mentioned above and remembering that this curriculum is the latest policy from the Ministry of Education and Culture, the researcher concerns the teachers have to prepare themselves to facilitate the English language in teaching. They also have to be able to conduct English teaching effectively in the classroom. To respond this concern and to investigate the teachers' preparation and implementation for the implementation of this regulation, the researcher intended to explore teachers' preparation and implementation on *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum in Program *Sekolah Penggerak*. Moreover, the researcher believes there is still no study related to the preparation and implementation of English course in Elementary School especially at Program *Sekolah Penggerak*. Therefore, considering the gap provided above the researcher believe that this research brings different findings.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the research background, the research problem is extended into several questions as follow:

1. How do English teachers prepare for the inclusion of English courses at Elementary School?

2. How do the English teachers implement English course at Elementary School?

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the research questions, the correspondence purposes of this research are:

1. To explore the English teachers' preparation for the inclusion of English course at Elementary School
2. To discover the English teachers' implementation of English course at Elementary School

1.4 Research Limitations

This study explores the teachers' preparation and implementation on the implementation of English course in the Sekolah *Penggerak* Program. The *Sekolah Penggerak* Program has been implemented by numerous elementary schools in Jambi Province. Thus, the researcher limits the participants into five English teachers in Elementary School at *Sekolah Penggerak* Program.

1.5 The Significance of the Research

This study is expected to give valuable information for the elementary school, English teachers and for future researchers. The details are as follow:

For Elementary Schools

The result of this study might be useful for the school or institution in considering the implementation of an English course.

For English teachers

The result of this study can be a reference in teaching readiness for elementary school teachers in accordance with the Merdeka *Belajar* Curriculum.

For Future Researchers

The result of this study can be a new related literature especially for researchers who are interested in this issue and this will be beneficial since it can be an input or reference to conduct the research related to English in the Sekolah *Penggerak* Program.

1.6 Definition of the Key Terms

In order to clarify and avoid misinterpretation to the key terms used, it is necessary for the researcher to present the definition of key terms. The details are as follow:

English Course: One of the courses in the school stage in Indonesia which is aimed to develop students' foreign language communication competence.

Elective Course: The course that school can choose to take as part of academic program but it is not a mandatory requirement.

Elementary School: The first stage of formal education for the children between five until twelve years old.

Teachers' Readiness: The teachers' condition to respond to certain situations that are faced in the classroom whether it is physical or emotion condition.

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum: The latest curriculum in Indonesia which aims to improve the quality of Indonesian education in a way developing students' competence holistically.

Program Sekolah Penggerak: The education program in Indonesia for selective schools to accelerate the school condition which has slowed down in the past two years.