

MERDEKA CURRICULUM: EXPLORING TEACHERS' STRATEGIES IN IMPLEMENTING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

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Abstract: Teaching strategy is one of the important aspects that make teaching and learning becoming more effective. However, different teaching strategies used by the teachers can influence the skills required by the students. Then, this present study investigated the English teachers' strategies in implementing 21st century skills embedded in the Merdeka Curriculum. Also, the difficulties faced and the solutions offered by the teachers in SMAN 1 Praya, Central Lombok, NTB. This study employed a qualitative research approach and the subjects of this study were four English teachers. The data collection method was used in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation. The data analysis in this research was descriptive qualitative. In analysing the data, this research used coding analysis. Therefore, the findings of this study showed that: The strategies used by the teachers were questioning, group discussion, debate, role play, inquiry-based learning, and project-based learning strategies. The problems faced by the teachers were the different characters of the students, the large number of students in a class, lack of motivation of the students, low teaching strategy mastery by the teachers, crowded classes, limited time of teaching, and lack of learning sources. To solve the problems, the teachers offered some solutions such as being independent teachers in finding the supplementary material, approaching the students who have low motivation in the class, and using games in teaching to make fun learning.

Keywords: Teaching Strategies, Merdeka Curriculum, 21st Century Skills

Introduction

One of the responsibilities of a good teacher is to be a good teacher. Krasnoff (2016) says that a good teacher must have high motivation, good character, self-esteem, and civic responsibility. Additionally, the function of teachers in the class is to help and facilitate the students to be autonomous learners, and respect each, cultural, racial, and religious differences. Related to autonomous learner skills, it can contribute to personal, academic, and professional growth (Killen, 2007). Killen further mentions that the advantages that students can get for being autonomous learners as having self-motivation, ownership of learning, critical thinking skills, adaptability, good time management, lifelong learning, good confidence, and problem-solving skills. Thus, the students are required to be autonomous learner and independent since becoming an independent learner, it can develop both soft skills and hard skills which can be used to gain and obtain knowledge.

Alismail and McGuire (2015) state that in the classroom the teacher must teach the essential skills include academic knowledge, critical thinking, and social skills, which all the necessary skills for success. Besides, there are core competencies that students must master

such as collaboration, digital literacy, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills. Collectively, these competencies are referred to as 21st-century skills (Thornhill-Miller, et al., 2023). They further explain that it is very important for students to master 21st-century skill since 21st-century skills are a group of abilities that can make the student successful in this globalization era. Similarly, Trilling and Fadel (2009) define the 21st century skills becoming three core skills. Firstly, there are life and career skills encompassing qualities like flexibility, adaptability, self-direction, social awareness, accountability, and responsibility. The subsequent skill pertains to learning and innovation. The final skill set involves information, media, or technology proficiency, entailing the capacity to access and utilize information, generate and analyze products, and effectively apply technology. Hence, the 21st skills are essential to be achieved by the students because by mastering the 21st-century skills, the students are expected to succeed in their future careers.

Regarding the 21st century skills, it cannot be separated from the role of curriculum, in Indonesia, the curriculum has changed many times as integrated curriculum, KTSP, K-13 Curriculum, K-13 Curriculum revised, and the existing curriculum is Merdeka curriculum. According to Batubara and Davala (2023), the change of curriculum in Indonesia is not only influenced by educational principles, but also by political, social, and economic factors. Fadilah (2014) adds that some factors influenced the change of curriculum in Indonesia as the evolution of social demands, the new transformative shifts in teaching and learning processes, political consideration, advancements in industry, and technological developments. Besides, designing a curriculum in Indonesia involves adapting it to individual experiences, achieved through the stages of observation, inquiry, logical thinking, and prioritization of attitude, knowledge, and skill components. (Sari, Efit, & Pratolo, 2020). Therefore, one of the main reasons for the change of curriculum in Indonesia is to make a better quality of education, especially the system of education itself.

Concerning achieving 21st century skills, the two curricula that have been implemented in Indonesia are the K-13 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum and both of them focus on the development of the 21st-century skills. According to Sari, Efit, and Pratolo (2020), the main goals of the K-13 Curriculum are to make the learners requiring life skills as individual skills and to be a good citizen in the community. Also, it provides the students with the competencies that make them for being a good humanity. Additionally, in K-13 curriculum, the students are also expected to have the skills that are needed in the 21st century era such as information skills, communication skills, resource-locating skills, and thinking or reasoning skills (Surya, Sayekti, & binti Ali, 2022). In other words, the core competencies in the 2013 curriculum are attitude, skill, and knowledge. As well, it also prepares the students to have great attitudes, skillful, and knowledge.

Similarly, in facing the need for 21st-century learning, the new curriculum in Indonesia as Merdeka Curriculum is also one of the relevant approaches that can improve 21st-century skills in education (Cristiana, Nitiasih, & Budiarta, 2023). This curriculum emphasizes student empowerment in the learning process. In other words, the Merdeka curriculum gives the students freedom to choose and organize their learning based on their interests, talents, and personal goals. Likewise, Zidan and Qamariah (2023) view the Merdeka curriculum creates a collaborative learning process in which the students are actively involved in decision-making related to learning materials, teaching methods, and assessments. Therefore, the concepts of the Merdeka curriculum are promising in developing 21st century skills because it enables the students to develop critical thinking skills, creativity, initiative, respect, and technology or information skills.

Moreover, the role of the teacher cannot be separated in implementing 21st-century skills because the teacher becomes a mediator between the curriculum and the students (Sari,

Efit, & Pratolo, 2020). It means that the teachers have an important role in successful teaching and learning because a teacher is the one who understands the needs of the students in the school (Rusydi, Subroto, & Sakti, 2023). Therefore, as a professional teacher, he/she needs to update their knowledge, especially in implementing the new curriculum. As well, in the 21st century era, teachers are strongly encouraged to be master in using technology. They must know how to collaborate with the students, keep learning, and be innovative in teaching the students in the 21st-century era.

However, different views, knowledge, experiences, and understandings of the teachers can influence the way they implement the curriculum (Haque & David, 2023). Besides, the teachers also have the choice in determining the strategies to be used in the class since they are the main control and facilitator in the class. According to Killen (2007), teaching strategy is one of the important aspects that need to be considered by teachers because teaching strategy is the procedures used by the teacher in the classroom. In this context, teachers' competencies in applying the strategies become the most important aspect that needs to be considered because the role of the teacher is not only transferring a knowledge but also guiding students through the implemented approaches. As a consequence, diverse teaching strategies used by the teacher can influence the aids required by the students in the class since the teacher has the freedom to use different in the classroom.

Furthermore, teaching English in the 21st century has its problems. These problems exist in various forms and sides in which the problems can be from both student and teacher. The first problem is the crowded class. According to Emery (2012), crowded class can make teaching and learning processes becoming less effective. The second problem is low teaching strategies mastery by the teacher since the tone of the teacher's role in the class is how to retain students' motivation and interest in learning and involving the skills (Ansari, 2014). The third is a lack of teaching training. According to Garton, Copland, and Burns (2011), one of the teaching's problems in the class is the lack of teaching training because the teachers may get merely basic preparation in the supportive theory and practical application, then they encountered struggle for embodying teaching strategies effectively. Last problem is student motivation since the students may have problems understanding English since they have limited exposure to English (Garton, Copland, & Burns, 2011). Therefore, to overcome these problems, the solutions must be proposed. Then, this research wanted to find out the solutions that were faced in implementing the strategies used by the teachers in the classroom.

Recently, some studies were focusing 21st century skills such as (Demina, et al., 2023, Dailo & Dailo, 2022; Surya, Sayekti, & Binti Ali, 2022; Aristiawan & Herman, 2021; and Azhary & Ratmanida, 2021). After reviewing the previous studies, it found that some strategies can be used in implementing 21st century skills. As mentioned by Demina, et al., (2023), the strategy is called project-based learning. This strategy can improve 21st-century learning skills. Other strategies are the teacher's questioning strategy, inquiry-based learning, group discussion, and debate. It can develop student's critical thinking (Surya, Sayekti, & Binti Ali, 2022; Aristiawan & Herman, 2021). Lastly, social media for learning and role play are also can be used to improve the student's information, and technology literacy as well as role play can improve students' life skills. As a result, the studies related to teaching strategies in implementing 21st-century skills have been growing. However, the studies related to implementing 21st century skills embedded Merdeka Curriculum have remained rather understudied. Then, this research attempts to investigate the teaching strategies used by EFL teachers in implementing 21st century skills Merdeka Curriculum. It is also becoming the novelty of this research. Besides, this research also wants to find out the problems faced by the teachers and provide solutions in overcoming the problems faced by the teachers.

Method

The main objective of this research was to explore the strategies used by EFL teacher in implementing 21st century skills embedded in the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia. This research also aimed to investigate the difficulties faced by the EFL teacher in implementing the strategies used as well as offer the solutions to overcoming the problems faced. Then, this research used a qualitative approach, especially a case study. This approach was appropriate in this research since it attempted to investigate a special case in SMAN 1 Praya, Lombok, Indonesia. In other words, this study wants to examine the English teachers' teaching strategies in SMAN 1 Praya.

In addition, the technique in gathering the data in this study were face-to-face interviews, classroom observation, and document analysis. It means that this study finds out the participants' views and experiences. To get in-depth data, this research also used observation as the technique in data collection. According to Cresswell (2012), an observation can be used to investigate the participant's behaviour directly. Then, in this research, a direct observation into the classes was done which focuses on the strategies used by the teachers in implementing 21st-century skills. Besides, the document analysis was also done by the researcher to confirm whether the activities that are written in the lesson plan are the same as the reality in the classroom. Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and it can be in the form of printed or electronic documents (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011). Therefore, the instruments in this research were interview guidelines, observation checklists, and lesson plans.

Moreover, the subjects in this study were all of English teachers in SMAN 1 Praya. In selecting the samples, the researcher used a non-random sampling technique as purposive sampling and a group of English teachers of Senior High School in Lombok as SMAN 1 Praya, Central Lombok, NTB was chosen as the participants. Also, they must have experience in applying Merdeka Curriculum. There were four English teachers there and this research used the initial names for the participants.

In analysing the data, a descriptive analysis approach as coding was employed in this research. The researcher transcribed the recorded interviews and generated a transcript for analysis. As Creswell (2012) states transcription is the method employed to convert audio recordings into textual data. Coding analysis involves assigning labels or names to segments of text, representing ideas or informational components. In this research, thematic analysis is used to answering the research questions and the observation result was based on the rating scales of observation.

Finding and Discussion

The findings of this research are divided into three categories such as the strategies, problems and the solutions offered by the teacher. Thus, the findings of this research are as follows:

a. Teaching Strategies

In the 21st century, key skills are categorized into learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills. In SMAN 1 Praya, Project-Based Learning (PBL) is one of the strategies used by teachers to enhance students' creativity. Additionally, teachers encourage students to upload their assignments to YouTube, promoting media literacy and technology skills. Through these activities, students develop both creativity and technological proficiency, which are essential in 21st-century skills

"I typically assign projects to encourage students' activity. For instance, in grade 12, when we cover the topic of news, I have them to create a video project, which they then submit by uploading it to YouTube"(P1).

Similarly, the other teachers also used this strategy in improving the students' creativity, media literacy, and technology skills. As P2, P3, and P4 said:

".....Additionally, the project encourages students to be more active, as it allows them to enhance their activity by producing something " (P2).

"Yes, I have. When we cover the topic of advertisements, I ask them to create an advertisement video. I believe that through this activity, they can learn about technology and boost their activity" (P3).

"Yes, one example is the project where I teach about advertisements. I give them a week to create an advertisement, and then they submit it on YouTube" (P4).

Thus, one of the strategies that can be implemented in 21st century skills is Project-Based Learning (PBL) since this strategy can sharpen the students' creativity, media literacy, and technology skills. Hence, it is in line with Demina, et al., (2023), project-based learning can improve 21st century learning skills because giving the students a project, it can improve their creativity.

Additionally, the participant also mentioned that one of the differences between the Merdeka Curriculum and K-13 Curriculum is in the Merdeka Curriculum must integrate TPACK. Then, the participant as P1 said that she used two strategies in improving the student's critical thinking, collaboration, and social skills. The strategies were inquiry-based learning and role play. Surya, Sayekti, and Binti Ali (2022) agreed that inquiry-based learning can improve student's critical thinking since by using this strategy the students are the centre of the learning and the teachers are only the facilitators.

"Sometimes, I use inquiry-based learning to encourage students to be more active than I am as a teacher. I act as a facilitator while they learn. For example, when performing a drama, I only provide the topic, and they create the concept on their own, which promotes deeper thinking and critical thinking" (P1).

Similarly, P4 also used a role play to develop students' critical thinking, but she believed that this strategy did not only improve students' critical thinking, but also improved students' collaboration and social skills as P4 mentioned:

"I trust them to divide tasks or form groups, allowing them to observe phenomena such as natural events, plants, animals, or historical sites. This helps develop their critical thinking. Afterward, they work together to create a report, acting as presenters, and submit it through video, which enhances their collaboration and their social skill" (P4.).

According to Azhari and Ratmanida (2021), a role play can be a choice as a strategy that can improve student's critical thinking, collaboration, and social skills.

However, the other teachers as P2 and P3 used different strategies to improve critical thinking skills. The strategies were debate and questioning strategies. They believed that using debate and giving the students questions related to the topic, can enhance their critical thinking. Other strategies are the teacher's questioning strategy, inquiry-based learning, group discussion, and debate. It can develop student's critical thinking (Surya, Sayekti, & Binti Ali, 2022; Aristiawan & Herman, 2021).

"We usually begin with a video, as the learning process now integrates technology. I also ask them questions related to the topic and connect it to their daily lives. For example, when teaching explanation texts, we show them examples and have them identify the differences, which encourages creative thinking and helps them produce their own work" (P2).

"I often incorporate debates when discussing a short story. After we go over story, I have the students complete reading comprehension exercises and analysis, as this helps sharpen their critical thinking" (P3).

The last skill is life skills. P4 believed that group discussions can foster students' life skills, as students are required to interact and collaborate with their peers, promoting the development of these skills. This aligns with the findings of Aristiawan and Herman (2021). Who also concluded that group discussions are the most effective strategy for enhancing students' 21st-century life skills.

"Yes, through group discussions, students can develop initiative, flexibility, and collaboration while working on their group tasks. Additionally, with a designated leader in each group, they will also enhance their leadership skills (P4.)."

In conclusion, some strategies used by the English teachers in SMAN 1 Praya. The strategies were project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, role play, debate, questioning, and group discussion strategies. These strategies were used by the teachers to improve students' 21st century skills as project-based learning were used to improve students' creativity, media literacy, and technology skills. Inquiry-based learning, group discussion, and role-play were used to improve 21st century learning. Lastly, debate and questioning strategies were used to make the students have critical thinking.

b. Teachers' Problems

In implementing the strategies, all the English teachers in SMAN 1 Praya also encountered some problems. One of the problems mentioned by P1 and P4 was the different character of the students. They explained that in the class, the students have different characters. It was a problem since it made the teachers hard to manage the class. In addition, P1 also added that lack of teaching training and a big number of students were also the problems because it was hard to manage big classes and the teachers also have low teaching strategies because of low teaching training. According to Emery (2012), one of the difficulties faced by English teachers is crowded class which makes teaching and learning activities less effective and Garton, Copland, and Burns (2011) also mention one teaching problem in the class is lack of teaching training because the teachers may get merely basic preparation in the supportive theory and practical application, then they encountered struggle for embodying teaching strategies effectively.

Furthermore, P2 stated that another problem that the teacher faced in the class was the lack of motivation of the students and it made the students not enthusiastic to follow the learning process. It is in line with Garton, Copland, and Burns (2011). They state that student motivation is one of the common problems faced by both teachers and students since the students may have problems understanding English because they have very limited exposures. However, the teacher as P4 said that crowded classes were not a problem for her, but the problems faced were limited time of teaching in the class and learning sources.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the problems faced by the English teachers in implementing 21st century skills embedded in Merdeka Curriculum were a different character of the students, lack of teaching training provided by the government, big number of students in the classroom, lack of motivation of the students, limited time of teaching, and lack of learning sources.

c. The solutions to overcome the problems

Regarding overcoming the problems, all the participants in this research were also offered some solutions to solve the problems. The teachers of P1 and P3 said that being an independent teacher was the solution to overcome the problems of a lack of teaching sources of material provided by the school. They explained that being independent in searching for supplementary material to support the material provided in the textbook was the best way to overcome the problem of lack of learning sources. The other solution offered by P2 in overcoming the problems of the students who have a lack of motivation was approaching the students personally. P2 believed that by approaching the students one by one and asking them about their problems in learning. Then, it will make the students feel respected by the teachers. The last solution was offered by P4. She said that using the game or make an ice-breaking was effective in teaching a big number of the students in the class.

Conclusion

As the main objectives of this research are to find out the teachers' strategies in SMAN 1 Praya in order to implement 21st century skills under the Merdeka curriculum, the problems and solutions offered by the teachers to overcome the problems. Hence, after conducting the interview, document analysis, and observation in SMAN 1 Praya, it was found that the strategies employed by English teachers included teacher questioning, group discussions, debates, role-play, inquiry-based learning, and project-based learning. These strategies helped students to

develop various skills such as learning skills, literacy skills, and life skills as well as critical thinking, creativity and collaboration.

Additionally, this research highlighted the challenges faced by EFL teachers in implementing 21st-century skills as a part of Merdeka curriculum, particularly for English teachers at SMAN 1 Praya. The findings indicated that teachers encountered difficulties due to the diverse characteristics of their students, large class sizes, student apathy, limited mastery of teaching strategies, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient teaching time, and lack of learning resources. In order to address these challenges, teachers suggested several solutions, including becoming more independent in sourcing supplementary materials, engaging with students who exhibit low motivation, and incorporating games into lessons to create a more enjoyable learning experience.

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