THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' PERCEPTION ON MERDEKA CURRICULUM AND THEIR MOTIVATION

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Abstract

Curriculum plays the important role in education including English education. In the other side, motivation is also important for the students in learning English. During the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, there are many obstacles that made students less motivated to learn. This research aims to figure out the correlation between students' perception on Merdeka curriculum and their motivation in learning English. The finding of this research revealed that the correlation coefficient between the two variables was 0.193. It means that there was a very low positive correlation between the students' perception on Merdeka curriculum and their motivation in learning English. The perception of the students could be influenced by several factors such as how a person articulates their understanding of the subject. In the other side, motivation also influenced by several factors such as individual needs and desires (input dimension), the expertise and demeanor of teachers, and the obstacles teachers encounter in school-based assessments (the process dimension).

Keywords: learning motivation, Merdeka curriculum, perception

INTRODUCTION

A curriculum represents the central point of educational choices, actions, and results within a specific context (Budiyanto, 2020). It is not merely a collection of subjects and topics but rather a comprehensive framework that guides the entire educational process. At its core, a curriculum delineates the objectives, content, methods, and assessments employed to facilitate learning experiences for students. It embodies the educational philosophy, values, and goals of an institution or educational system, shaping the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that students acquire throughout their academic journey. Moreover, a curriculum reflects the dynamic interplay between various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, students, parents, and the broader community, as they collaboratively define and refine educational priorities and aspirations. Thus, the curriculum serves as a blueprint for educational excellence, providing direction, coherence, and continuity to the multifaceted enterprise of teaching and learning.

The Merdeka Curriculum was initially introduced by Nadiem Makarim, the Minister of Culture and Education, in 2019 (Shofiyuddin et al., 2023). The Merdeka Curriculum underscores a commitment to equity and diversity, recognizing the unique talents, backgrounds, and aspirations of every learner. By championing learner-centered pedagogies and flexible learning pathways, it seeks to empower students to become active agents of change and lifelong learners in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Thus, the

introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum heralded a new era of educational reform and aspiration, catalyzing conversations and actions towards a more inclusive, dynamic, and future-ready education system in Indonesia.

Merdeka curriculum faced many challenges. One challenge in the implementation is teachers' lack of understanding of the Merdeka curriculum's meaning and purpose. This leads to students feeling bored with classroom learning (Shadri et al., 2023; Zendrato & Agatha, 2023). The students may perceive classroom learning as mundane and disconnected from their interests and aspirations. The disconnect between the curriculum's aspirations and the instructional reality may engender feelings of disengagement and apathy among students, hindering their motivation to actively participate in the learning process.

Motivation is a crucial factor that significantly impacts the success of learning a foreign language (Siregar & Siregar, 2020). It serves as the driving force that propels learners forward, sustaining their commitment and perseverance amidst the challenges inherent in mastering a new linguistic system. Motivation manifests in various forms, ranging from intrinsic desires for personal growth and intellectual stimulation to extrinsic factors such as academic or career-related goals. Regardless of its origin, motivation plays a multifaceted role in shaping learners' attitudes, behaviors, and outcomes in language acquisition.

There were several researches related to Merdeka curriculum. The first research conducted by Rahma et al., (2024). This research employed a qualitative approach. The data sources for this research were five students from class XI during the 2022/2023 academic year. The findings revealed that the Merdeka Curriculum enhanced students' motivation to learn, as it encouraged them to decide on their future preparations. This motivation was further supported by the option to select elective subjects aligned with their interests. The Merdeka Curriculum also challenged students to continually develop and acquire new knowledge to stay current with evolving trends.

The next research on Merdeka curriculum conducted by Maulana & Oktavia, (2023). This study aimed to examine students' perceptions of implementing differentiated learning in English language education. The study population consisted of 235 tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Tilatang Kamang. A sample of 65 students was selected through cluster random sampling. The questionnaire data were analyzed and described using descriptive quantitative methods. The findings indicated that (1) the learning environment was crucial for the successful implementation of differentiated learning strategies in English education, and (2) students learned more effectively when they had the freedom to learn according to their individual learning profiles (learning styles), learning readiness (abilities), and interests. In conclusion, differentiating content, process, product, and learning environment proved to be an effective and enjoyable strategy for students.

Furthermore, Triskia et al., (2023) also conducted a research on Merdeka curriculum. This research aimed to discover teachers' perceptions of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation at SMP IT Fathona OKU Baturaja and SMP IT Tunas Cendikia Baturaja. The study employed a descriptive quantitative research design and used total sampling as the sampling technique. Data were collected using a questionnaire. Analysis of the data revealed that teachers at both schools have a moderate perception of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation. They have a good understanding of the stages of implementation, allowing them to deepen their application. They also comprehend the concept of "merdeka belajar" and recognize the benefits of content reduction for both teachers and students, as well as the

importance of adapting the learning process to the students' characteristics and needs. This positive perception supports the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at both schools. The questionnaire results indicated that teachers at SMP IT Fathona OKU Baturaja and SMP IT Tunas Cendikia Baturaja have a positive perception and good appreciation of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation.

Based on the previous researches, it could be concluded that the researches were about students and teachers' perception on Merdeka curriculum. It is important to investigate the correlation between students' perception on Merdeka curriculum and their motivation to learn English. Related to the objective of this research, the researchers formulated a research question: Is there a positive correlation between students' perception on Merdeka curriculum and their motivation in learning English?

To begin with, a curriculum can be characterized as a blueprint devised to accomplish specific objectives. Additionally, it can be construed in a broader sense as encompassing the entirety of a learner's educational encounters. Moreover, a curriculum can be delineated as an academic discipline replete with its own fundamental tenets, areas of expertise, scholarly inquiry, theoretical frameworks, guiding principles, and practitioners. Lastly, a curriculum can be understood in relation to its content or subject matter (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia represents a novel approach within the educational framework, encompassing innovations in both pedagogy and learning outcomes. This autonomous curriculum aims to foster character development in students by facilitating informal, self-directed, and enjoyable learning experiences that nurture their innate abilities. Through the Merdeka Curriculum, students are empowered to autonomously devise and implement learning strategies tailored to their individual needs and contexts. Drawing upon the Pancasila students' profile, which underscores values such as faithfulness, devotion to a higher power, nobility, global awareness, collaboration, independence, critical thinking, and creativity, this project-based curriculum prioritizes the cultivation of soft skills and character traits. Emphasizing key concepts while allowing for flexible implementation, the Merdeka Curriculum seeks to instill in students the qualities necessary for success in an ever-evolving world (Fauzan et al., 2023).

Motivation is an aspect of human behavior that involves complex emotional processes, which shape how individuals act within society (Alcívar et al., 2021). These complex emotional dynamics influence not only individual behavior but also interactions within social and professional contexts. Motivated individuals tend to exhibit proactive behaviors, contributing positively to group dynamics, workplace productivity, and community engagement. Conversely, a lack of motivation can lead to apathy, reduced participation, and diminished overall performance.

Motivation is also described as an internal drive that compels a person to take actions aimed at achieving goals and success; thus, motivation is essential for accomplishment (Thohir, 2017).

Furthermore, Motivation is defined as the drive or effort to accomplish something (Christianto & Karin, 2019). It is a fundamental psychological construct that influences the direction, intensity, and persistence of behavior. Motivation can stem from intrinsic factors, such as personal satisfaction, curiosity, and a sense of achievement, or extrinsic factors, like rewards, recognition, and external pressures. This drive is essential for initiating and sustaining actions, especially in challenging situations where persistence is required.

Related to context of learning, learning motivation is a mental force that drives the learning process (Daud, 2012). It encompasses a complex interplay of internal factors, such as personal goals, interests, values, and beliefs, as well as external influences, including social interactions, feedback, and environmental conditions. When individuals are motivated to learn, they exhibit greater levels of enthusiasm, effort, and resilience in acquiring new knowledge and skills. This intrinsic drive fosters a positive attitude towards learning, leading to increased concentration, retention, and overall academic performance.

METHOD

This research was a quantitative research. The researchers used correlational design. The X variable of this research was students' perception on Merdeka curriculum and the Y variable was students' motivation in learning English. The population of this research was the tenth grade students of SMAN 1 Sawahlunto registered in 2024/2025 academic year. The population consisted of four classes (XE.1, XE.2, XE.3, XE.4). Furthermore, the sample of this research was chosen by simple random sampling and the sample was 29 students.

In collecting the data of students' perception on Merdeka curriculum, the researchers adapted a questionnaire from Sutrisno et al., (2023). In the other side, an adapted questionnaire from Miraycle et al., (2022) was used to collect the data about students' motivation in learning English. The questionnaire was used a Likert scale as proposed by Joshi et al., (2015). A Likert scale is a psychometric scale commonly used in surveys and questionnaires to measure attitudes, opinions, or perceptions. The researcher scored the questionnaire based on the Likert scale as follow:

Table 1.Score Categories of Likert Scale

Categories	Score
Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Undecided	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

In analyzing the data, the researchers used SPSS software to find the descriptive statistic and the correlation between the two variables.

To determine the strength of the coefficient correlation (r), the researchers used some criteria as suggested by Malik & Chusni, (2018):

Table 2. Coefficient Correlation Criteria

0.80-1.00	=	Very high
0.60-0.80	=	High
0.40-0.60	=	Sufficient
0.20-0.40	=	Low
0.00-0.20	=	Very low

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The researchers collected the data from the students and analyzed them by using SPSS software. The result can be seen in the table below:

Table 3. Decriptive Statistic of Students' Perception and Students' Motivation

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Students' Perception	29	28.00	50.00	40.4138	5.76019
Students' Motivation	29	35.00	50.00	43.6207	4.31289
Valid N (listwise)	29				

Based on the table 1, the maximum score of students' perception on Merdeka curriculum was 50 and the minimum score was 28. The mean score of the students' perception was 40.41 and the standard deviation was 5.76. in the other side, the maximum score of the students' motivation in learning English was 50 and the minimum score was 35. The mean score was 43.62 and the standard deviation was 4.31.

The researcher also analysed the correlation between students' perception on Merdeka curriculum and their motivation in learning English by using SPSS software. The detail of the result can be seen in the table below:

Table 4. Correlation of Students' Perception and Students' Motivation

Correlations		Students' Perception	Students' Motivation
Students' Perception	Pearson Correlation	1	.193
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.315
	N	29	29
Students' Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.193	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.315	
	N	29	29

Based on the table 3, there was a very low positive correlation between students' perception on Merdeka curriculum and their motivation in learning English. The total r from the table 2 was. According to Wahyuning, (2021), If the correlation coefficient (r_{xy}) exceeds the critical value (r_{table}), it suggests a notable link between X and Y variable. Conversely, if r_{xy} is equal to or lower than r_{table}, it indicates a lack of correlation between X and Y variable. Based on the table 3, the r (0.193) was smaller than r table (0.381) at 5% significance.

Based on the calculation of the correlation coefficient, there was a very low positive correlation between students' perception on Merdeka curriculum and their motivation in learning English. It means that when the students' perception goes up a little, the students' motivation also goes up a little.

Students' perception is influenced by several factors. Perception, whether positive or negative, inevitably impact an individual's behavior. How a person articulates their understanding of the subject also plays a crucial role in shaping whether the perception leans

towards positivity or negativity (Lindawati et al., 2022). If someone perceives a task as challenging yet rewarding, they are likely to approach it with enthusiasm and determination. Conversely, if they view the same task as tedious and unrewarding, their motivation and effort may diminish. This internal interpretation is closely tied to how individuals articulate their understanding of the subject. Clear and confident articulation often reflects a positive perception, indicating that the person feels knowledgeable and comfortable with the topic.

Students' motivation is also usually influenced by several factors. Factors such as their individual needs and desires (input dimension), the expertise and demeanor of teachers, and the obstacles teachers encounter in school-based assessments (the process dimension) are believed to impact students' motivation to learn (Ghazali et al., 2022). The obstacles teachers encounter in school-based assessments can also impact student motivation. When teachers are burdened with unrealistic assessment expectations, limited resources, or rigid administrative constraints, it can affect the quality and fairness of evaluations. This can lead to student frustration and demotivation, especially if they perceive assessments as biased or unreflective of their actual abilities. Therefore, addressing these multifaceted factors is essential to fostering a motivated and dynamic learning environment.

Furthermore, Education and career are two additional factors that influence students' motivation to learn English (Bismayanti et al., 2024). In the context of education, proficiency in English often opens doors to a wider array of academic resources, including textbooks, research articles, and lectures that are predominantly in English. This access to comprehensive educational material can enhance a student's understanding of their field of study and increase their academic performance, thereby motivating them to master the language. In today's globalized job market, English is often the lingua franca of international business, technology, science, and many other industries. Proficiency in English can significantly enhance employability, providing students with a competitive edge in the job market. It can open up opportunities for higher-paying jobs, career advancement, and the ability to work in multinational companies or abroad.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This research figured out that there was a very low positive correlation between students' perception on Merdeka curriculum and their motivation in learning English. This suggests that while there is some alignment between students' views on the Merdeka curriculum and their enthusiasm for learning English, the connection is not particularly strong. Further analysis may delve into the nuanced aspects of both the curriculum and students' motivational drivers to better understand the nature of this correlation. Additionally, exploring potential contributing factors that may enhance or diminish this correlation could provide valuable insights for educational practitioners and policymakers aiming to optimize student engagement and achievement in English language learning within the context of the Merdeka curriculum.

For future researchers, it would be beneficial to explore how specific elements of the Merdeka Curriculum—such as its focus on student autonomy, flexibility, and personalized learning—affect students' intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Future studies could analyze how students' understanding and perception of these curriculum principles correlate with their engagement, goal-setting behaviors, and overall academic performance. Additionally, comparing student motivation across different educational levels or regions could provide

insights into how the Merdeka Curriculum is received in diverse contexts. Researchers could also investigate the role of teacher facilitation and classroom environment in shaping both perception and motivation.

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