A Review on the Design and Characteristics of English Language Learning and Teaching in a Standard-Based Curriculum: Kurikulum Merdeka

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ABSTRACT

The research is meant to conduct a review of the design of Kurikulum Merdeka and to reveal the characteristics of the teaching and learning of English based on this curriculum. The descriptive qualitative method was employed in this review. Major designs of language curriculum offered by scholars were identified, analyzed, and synthesized to set the rubrics for analyzing the Kurikulum Merdeka. The Kurikulum Merdeka document especially the introduction part in the learning outcome statements was analyzed based on the rubrics to reveal its design and the teaching and learning characteristics. The analysis of the major English language curriculum design, the pertinent characteristics of the major English language curriculum design, the description of the design of the English language curriculum in Kurikulum Merdeka, and the characteristics of the teaching and learning English based on Kurikulum Merdeka are presented as the result of the research.

Keywords: English Language Teaching; Standard-Based Curriculum; Merdeka Curriculum

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum in the learning and teaching process has crucial roles. Even a school curriculum can be viewed as its beating heart. The term curriculum is used in this context to describe the overall layout or design of a course as well as how the course's material is converted into a framework for instruction and learning that promotes the achievement of the desired learning outcomes (Richards, 2013). Understanding clearly the overall

layout of a curriculum is required since the more clearly teachers comprehend the layout of the curriculum, the more successfully they can prepare, develop lessons, and implement it (McLachlan, Fleer, & Edwards, 2018; Karakuş, 2021). By learning a curriculum design, teachers and practitioners in the education field will understand how courses, including every material in it, must be carried out. Moreover, the achievement of the curriculum's objectives would depend on the teacher's participation in its implementation and understanding of its orientation (Muljani & Lutfiana, 2020).

At the beginning of 2022, the government of Indonesia implemented a new curriculum called Kurikulum Merdeka. As a consequence of the change of the curriculum, the syllabus and lesson plan as curriculum components that must be on the same line with the curriculum is changing too. Adjustment of various curriculum components must ultimately be followed by understanding and the ability to apply them in the learning and teaching process. For example, in English language teaching. The need to understand how Kurikulum Merdeka can be implemented in the process of learning and teaching English is inevitable. It is impossible to evaluate a curriculum's strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures, flaws and insufficient components without actually implementing it (Dzimiri & Marimo, 2015). Ignorance of these characteristics will lead to undesired situations. Schools will find it difficult to determine the final achievement of a series of learning processes, teachers will have difficulty preparing and implementing the learning process, and students will also have difficulty undergoing each learning process. Thus, it is important to understand the design and the characteristics of teaching and learning English based on this curriculum.

Since the government implemented the curriculum, there are seminars, trainings, and workshops held for teachers to introduce and guide them in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. On the other side, several studies have been conducted to investigate the new curriculum called Kurikulum Merdeka. Some of them analyzed how the curriculum was implemented in higher education, and some of the others revealed how teachers and students perceived the curriculum.

Although the curriculum has been implemented by the government since the beginning of the 2022-2023 academic year and there are seminars and training provided by the government and many institutions, teachers and education practitioners still needs more chance to get a better understanding of the Kurikulum Merdeka. Since research is the source of

science, research on the Kurikulum Merdeka is crucial to overcome the problem. It is beneficial for the teacher to have an in-depth understanding of the curriculum to be able to carry out the course well.

Research conducted by Ariestina & Haryanto (2022) identified the learning outcomes and the phases of language curriculum development in Kurikulum Merdeka. On the other side, Arifa (2022) investigated the challenges in the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka. The last, Pratikno, Hermawan, & Arifin (2022) investigated the readiness of human resources for the implementation of the Curriculum.

Unfortunately, although there have been several valuable syntheses of previous studies on the Kurikulum Merdeka, there are areas that require further examination since the numbers of the research are still limited and quite hard to find. For example, there is strong potential to investigate the design and the characteristics of the English language curriculum in Kurikulum Merdeka.

The research on the design and characteristics of the English language program in Kurikulum Merdeka will be beneficial for teachers and education practitioners. Since it is crucial and there has been yet an article specifically discussing the design and characteristics of the English language program in Kurikulum Merdeka, this research attempts to fill the gap.

This research aims to investigate the design of Kurikulum Merdeka and reveal the characteristics of teaching and learning English based on this curriculum. The descriptive qualitative method was employed in this research to answer the research questions formulated as follows: 1) What are the major designs of the English language curriculum? 2) What are the pertinent learning and teaching characteristics based on each major English language curriculum design? 3) How is the design of English teaching and learning based on Kurikulum Merdeka? 4) How are the characteristics of English teaching and learning based on Kurikulum Merdeka?

Major designs of language curriculum offered by scholars were identified, analyzed, and synthesized to set the rubrics for analyzing the Kurikulum Merdeka. The Kurikulum Merdeka document, especially the introduction part in the learning outcome statements, was analyzed based on the rubrics to reveal its design and teaching and learning characteristics.

To determine the design and the characteristics, this research examined the description of the English language learning and teaching based on Kurikulum Merdeka that was documented in the secondary data sources,, namely The Copy of the Decree of the Head of the Standards,

Curriculum, and Educational Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 033/H/KR/2022 concerning The Changes on the Decree of the Head of the Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 008/H/KR/2022 concerning Learning Achievements in Early Childhood Education, Basic Education Levels, and Education Levels Intermediate in the Kurikulum Merdeka.

This research conducted employed descriptive qualitative methodology and constructed through the following chapters: 1) Introduction, 2) Method, 3) Findings & Discussion, 4) Conclusion.

METHOD

Since this research aims to conduct a review of the English language curriculum design based on Kurikulum Merdeka and to reveal the design and the characteristics of teaching and learning English based on this curriculum, the descriptive qualitative method was employed in this research to answer the research problems which are:

1. What are the major designs of the English language curriculum?
2. What are the pertinent learning and teaching characteristics based on each major English language curriculum design?
3. How is the design of English teaching and learning based on Kurikulum Merdeka?
4. What are the characteristics of English teaching and learning based on Kurikulum Merdeka?

The research data was gained from the secondary data source, namely The Copy of the Decree of the Head of the Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 033/H/KR/2022 concerning The Changes on the Decree of the Head of the Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 008/H/KR/2022 concerning Learning Achievements in Early Childhood Education, Basic Education Levels, and Education Levels Intermediate in the Kurikulum Merdeka which contains the learning outcomes of all school subjects. The introduction part in the learning outcome statements of the Kurikulum Merdeka identified, analyzed, and synthesized by the researcher to describe the characteristics of English teaching and learning based on Kurikulum Merdeka. The human instrument was the primary instrument in this study. In this qualitative study, the researchers' roles include planning, collecting data, analyzing data, and reporting the findings. The analysis of the learning outcome statements in Kurikulum Merdeka is based on the rubrics to reveal its

teaching and learning characteristics. The analysis and interpretation of qualitative data involve six interconnected phases. Specifically, Creswell (2012) outlines six steps: 1) Prepare and Organize the Data for Analysis, 2) Investigate and code the data, 3) Code to Build Themes and Description, 4) Represent and Report Qualitative Findings, 5) Interpret the Results, and 6) Validate the Findings' Accuracy.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Major English Language Curriculum Designs

Major designs of language curriculum offered by scholars were identified, analyzed, and synthesized to reveal the designs and the example of the design and to set the rubrics for analyzing the design of English language learning and teaching. Table 1 below shows major English curriculum designs, examples of the designs, and the proponents of each English language curriculum design.

Table 1:
Major English Language Curriculum Designs

Major Designs	Product-Based	Content-Based	Process-Based	Competency-Based	Standard-Based	Proponents
Examples of the designs	• Analytic Syllabus • Synthetic Syllabus • Grammatical syllabus • Functional-Notional Syllabus	• Topical Syllabus • Content-Based Syllabus	• Procedural Syllabus • Task-Based Syllabus			David Nunan
	• Linguistics-based syllabus • Structural syllabus • Notional / Functional syllabus	• Content-based syllabus	• Process syllabus • Task-based syllabus	• Combination syllabus		Patricia A. Porter
	• Functional syllabus • Grammatical Syllabus • Lexical Syllabus • Notional syllabus	• Topical / Content-based syllabus	• Situational syllabus • Task-based syllabus	• Competency-based Syllabus • Skill-based syllabus		Jack C. Richards
					• CEFR	Council of Europe

Table 1 above shows that various English language curriculum designs have been suggested by scholars such as Nunan (1988), Porter (2000), Richards (2001), and Council of Europe (2001). Nunan (1988) explained that while product-based focuses on the knowledge and skills that learners should gain as a result of instructions, process-based focuses on the learning experiences. On the other side, content-based concentrates on the materials (e.g. set of topics) that have been selected and structured as the foundation for the course (Porter, 2000). Then, Richards (2001) explained that a competency-based curriculum places an emphasis on performance concerning particular tasks and offers a useful framework for designing courses and teaching materials. The last is standard-based which focuses on the intended performance (described in a set of descriptors) as the requirements or standards that must be demonstrated by the language learners to classify them at a certain level. Based on Beacco et al (2018), the Common European Framework of Reference for Language, which is proposed by the Council of Europe (2001), is the perfect example of a reference for a standard-based curriculum. Although scholars appear to use different terminology, they essentially fall under the same general curriculum design.

Furthermore, Richards (2013) divided curriculum development into three different approaches: forward design, central design, and backward design to distinguish the three different development processes. Richards (2013) illustrated the three different processes as follows:
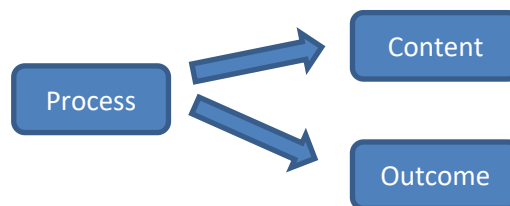
Figure 1: The Forward Design Process

Content → Process → Outcome

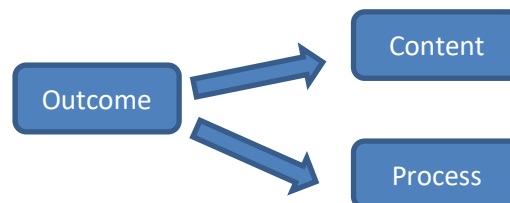Figure 2: The Central Design Process

Process → Content
Process → Outcome

Figure 3: The Backward Design Process

Outcome → Content
Outcome → Process

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From the illustrations above, we can see how Richards (2013) differentiates curriculum from the issue addressed as the starting point of curriculum development. Forward design refers to the curriculum that places content as starting point of development. Central design refers to the curriculum that places process as the starting point of the development and addresses the content and the outcome. The last, Backward design refers to the curriculum that places the outcome as the starting point of the development then the content and the process addressed later.

English Language Learning Characteristics Based on the Major Designs

In a product-based curriculum, related to Nunan (1988), the focus is on the knowledge and skills that learners should gain as a result of instruction. The design which is categorized as a product-based place emphasizes the end product or outcomes of learning (Nunan, 1988). Since the starting point of the curriculum design is the outcomes, Richards (2013) classified a product-based curriculum as a backward design. The grammatical syllabus also known as the structural syllabus proposed by Richards (2001) which is organized around grammatical items is one of the examples of a product-based curriculum. The set of grammatical structures that must be taught as well as the ideal teaching sequence are specified in the grammatical syllabus. Richards (2001) explained that the following principles have been used or suggested as a basis for developing grammatical syllabuses, they are simplicity and centrality, frequency of occurrence, and learnability.

Meanwhile, in a process-based curriculum, the focus is on the learning experiences (Nunan, 1988). Ornstein & Hunkins (2018) asserted that in a curriculum that is designed to be centered on the learning experience, the emphasis is on the activity rather than on teaching or learning. It is in line with Breen's (1984) explanation, as reported in Brumfit (1948), that a process-based curriculum offers a framework for selecting various methods, tasks, and activities for the class. On the same line, Candlin (1984) as cited in Porter (2000) explained that a process syllabus is an outline of problem-solving activities designed to foster the identification of values, the negotiation of meanings, and the student's capacity to provide comprehensible input. Richards (2013) categorized a process-based curriculum as a central design since it addressed the implementation of the curriculum as the starting point. The teacher's and student's role in a process-based curriculum is explained by Ornstein & Hunkins (2018) who stated that the role of teachers is to create an engaging learning environment in which students can explore, interact with knowledge, and observe how others learn and behave. Meanwhile, the students on the other hand, essentially create their learning; they build and revise their knowledge through active participation and direct instruction. Task-based learning is one of the examples of a process-based curriculum. Richards (2001) explained that task-based learning is "organized around tasks that

students will complete in the target language". The tasks proposed as the curriculum basis are pedagogical tasks and real-world tasks. The pedagogical tasks include jigsaw tasks, information-gap tasks, problem-solving tasks, decision-making tasks, and opinion exchange tasks. Meanwhile, real-world tasks such as finding a solution to a puzzle, reading a map and giving directions, or reading a set of instructions and assembling a toy (Richards, 2001).

Another major English language curriculum design is the content-based curriculum. In a content-based curriculum, the focus is on the materials (e.g. set of topics) that has been selected and structured as the foundation for the course (Porter, 2000). Richards (2001) also has a similar view of content-based curriculum. Content-based curriculum, in his point of view, is organized around themes, topics, or other units of content. Furthermore, content is the starting point of the curriculum design in his explanation. Therefore, in Richards's (2013) perspective, a content-based curriculum is classified as a forward design. Brinton, Snow, & Wesche (1989) and Mohan (1986), as cited in Richards (2001), claimed that the advantages of courses based on content-based syllabuses are: 1) they facilitate comprehension; 2) content makes linguistic form more meaningful; 3) content serves as the best basis for teaching the skill areas; 4) they address students' needs; 5) they motivate learners; 6) they allow for integration of the four skills; and 7) they allow for the use of authentic materials.

Richards (2001) described a competency-based curriculum as a curriculum that is designed "based on a specification of the competencies learners are expected to master concerning specific situations and activities". It is in line with the statement that a competency-based curriculum is a design of curriculum that outlines performance that demonstrated language mastery related to specific tasks in real life (Grognet & Crandal, 1982; Auerbach, 1986). In Competency-Based Language Teaching, the central of program planning is on the competencies (Schneck, 1978; Grognet & Crandal, 1982; Richards, 2001). Based on Richards (2013), a competency-based curriculum is classified as a backward curriculum design. Schenk (1978) as cited in Richards (2013) stated that the characteristics of competency-based curriculum are outcome-based, adaptive to the changing needs of students, teachers, or community. It is further stated that the collection of learning outcomes was generated by examining the tasks that students would encounter in their everyday lives.

Another type of backward curriculum design is the standard-based curriculum. In a standard-based curriculum, the focus is on the intended performance (described in a set of descriptors) as the requirements or standards that must be demonstrated by the language learners to classify them at a certain level (Beacco et al, 2018). Based on Beacco et al (2018), the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) which is a framework designed by the Council of Europe is the perfect reference for

a standard-based curriculum. CEFR is classified as a backward curriculum design (Richards, 2013). With a broader objective of developing language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe, the CEFR is intended to provide a 'common basis for explicit description of objectives, content and methods of the study of modern languages.' From the lowest level (A1) to the highest level (C2), CEFR breaks down six levels of proficiency into three broad categories, outlining the skills that students at each level should be able to perform in the areas of reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Basic users are classified into A1 and A2 levels. Independent users are classified into B1 and B2 levels. Proficient users are classified into C1 and C2 levels (Richards, 2013). Furthermore, Richards (2013) explained that there are no details provided regarding the process or input. It is the responsibility of the teacher or course designer to determine how the objectives can be met and to create instructional strategies, materials, and content that are appropriate for the teaching environment.

English Language Learning Design in Merdeka Curriculum

In the introduction part of the English language curriculum in the Kurikulum Merdeka document, published by the Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022), it is stated that the English language learning in Kurikulum Merdeka focuses on strengthening language skills based on learning outcomes that refer to the Common European Framework of Reference for Language: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEFR) equivalent to level B1. Then it is followed by the specification of the intended learning outcomes. It is also found that the development of students' language proficiency in Kurikulum Merdeka is divided into several phases. They are described as follows:

Table 2:
Student's Language Proficiency Development Phases

Phase A	:	Focused on introducing English and spoken English language skills.
Phase B	:	Focused on spoken English skills. On the other side, students are introduced to the written form.
Phase C	:	Focused on written and spoken language skills. It is the end of the Elementary level.
Phase D	:	Focused on the development of spoken and written language competencies.
Phase E & F	:	Focused on the development of spoken and written language competencies which B1 Level of CEFR is the target.
Advance Phase	:	The advance phase, right above Phase F, focused on the development of advanced spoken and written competencies. The text types in this phase of learning are narrative, exposition, and discussion.

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It showed that the Indonesia Government addressed the outcome as the starting point of the curriculum design. Therefore, the English language curriculum design based on Kurikulum Merdeka is classified as a backward curriculum in Richards's (2013) perspective. Furthermore, from the attempt to use CEFR as the standard in this curriculum, we can classify the English language curriculum design in Kurikulum Merdeka as a standard-based curriculum. McKay (2000), as cited in Richards (2013), explained that from the employment of the standards in language curriculum design, students will be able to gain knowledge and comprehension of how texts relate to their contexts, how they make use of cultural references, how texts' purposes and structures relate to one another, and how texts' linguistic features relate to one another. Teachers are required to have broad and in-depth knowledge of languages and teaching methods to formulate syllabus and learning plans so that the desired learning outcomes can be achieved by students. A teacher's insufficiency of knowledge and expertise will lead students to not achieve the desired learning outcomes. Richards (2013) stated that it is a problematic issue in using the framework.

English Language Learning Characteristics in Merdeka Curriculum

Another characteristic of the English language curriculum in Kurikulum Merdeka is the employment of a genre-based approach. It is stated by the Standards, Curriculum, and Educational Assessment Agency of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2022) that "the approach used in general English language learning is a text-based approach (genre-based approach), where learning is focused on text in various modes, whether oral, written, visual, audio, or multimodal". The term Genre-Based Approach, according to Richards (2006), also known as text-based instruction, involves mastering various texts that are utilized in certain contexts in particular ways. Students learn English by mastering text types such as descriptive, narrative, recount, procedure, and so forth. The stages of the genre-based approach in this curriculum include Building Knowledge of the Field (BKOF), Modelling of the Text (MOT), Joint Construction of the Text (JCOT), and Independent Construction of the Text (ICOT). Through this approach, students will get a lot of chances to interact with kinds of text. Teachers might incorporate ICT, as suggested by the government, to present the learning materials to the students. It fosters students' digital literacy and information literacy which are the demands twenty-first century. But, since Indonesia is so vast and the facts show that not all schools are ready for ICT Based learning, new problems will arise. Starting from the unpreparedness of schools to implement the new curriculum and its approach, uneven student achievement, and various other difficulties that will be faced by students, teachers, and schools. It will always be easy for teachers and schools to provide printed materials, but readiness to provide multimodal learning materials is at different levels.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified the major English language curriculum designs and their characteristics as proposed by the proponents to explore English language curriculum design and the characteristics of English language learning and teaching based on Kurikulum Merdeka. The results of this study indicate that the English language curriculum in Kurikulum Merdeka, which refers to CEFR, is a standard-based curriculum that addresses the outcome as the starting point of the development, with the content and the process addressed later by the teacher or course designer. The teacher engages students to learn English through various text types that are presented in various modes and provide a lot of opportunities for the students to interact with the text in various ways. Teachers should facilitate the advancement of their technological literacy so they can more effectively navigate digital information. Teachers are required to have broad and in-depth knowledge of languages and teaching methods to formulate syllabus and learning plans so that the desired learning outcomes can be achieved by students. Teachers' insufficiency of knowledge and expertise will lead students to not achieve the desired learning outcomes. These findings have significant implications for our understanding of how English language learning and teaching must be carried out by teachers in Kurikulum Merdeka. Further research might focus on the exploration of the learning materials, teaching methodologies, and assessments that can be incorporated into this curriculum.

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