

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Research

Education plays a crucial role in preparing human resources to face the highly complex challenges and compete in the 21st century. Therefore, graduates must have high competitiveness to succeed in this competition. Language plays a central role in the intellectual, social, and emotional development of students and is a key determinant of success in learning all fields of study. Language greatly influences one's thinking process, serving as the primary tool for thinking. In the face of dynamically evolving challenges in the 21st century, the teaching of English is highly important as it deals with the global market (Gavran, 2013). Proficiency in English as a foreign language for students cannot be denied as it becomes a vital means of communication in the global arena. English is often used in official communication by many countries worldwide and is widely utilized. Almost every country in the world uses English when communicating. Therefore, as time progresses, the government and educators are united in realizing a generation that can master international language effectively and correctly.

In Indonesia, foreign language learning has a long history. During the colonial period, foreign languages such as Dutch, English, and German were taught in specific schools, particularly to nobility and Dutch children. This practice created a high social difference or respect among the native population during the Dutch colonial era, and this has continued until today. However, as time has progressed, foreign language teaching is no longer exclusive as anyone can now easily learn it, and even English has

started to be introduced to children at an early age. By learning English at an early age, it was believed that children would have basic English language skills. In other words, children would master basic English grammar that was useful for their future education as they continued to pursue higher studies.

The positive development of young learners begins when they are in Elementary School, as this is their golden age. Teaching in Elementary School poses its own challenges for teachers. The characteristics of young learners differ from those of adult learners (Jančiauskas, 2018). They are active, easily bored, have difficulty distinguishing things, have a low level of concentration, and enjoy play in learning. Young learners have their own learning world within the classroom. Therefore, support from competent teachers is crucial to achieve optimal results, as teachers are the most important element in the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

To organize quality teaching programs, there are several supporting factors that need to be considered, such as institutions, teachers, teaching processes, and students. Among these factors, the role of teachers is crucial in the teaching process (Aivazidi & Michalakelis, 2021). Teachers are the most important factor in determining the success of the teaching and learning process. A teacher must be able to implement teaching while considering the students' quality. Moreover, in teaching English in Elementary School, a teacher needs to have professional and pedagogical competencies. Professional competencies include mastery of the English language, licensing, and teaching training, while pedagogical competencies are related to the ability to teach young learners (Lungu, 2015).

In line with the importance of teacher competence in teaching and learning activities, Ashadi & Rice (2016) suggest that the quality of teachers in a country affects

the average income of that country. Therefore, teachers must have the ability to face the evolving challenges of teaching and learning, considering the changes in the education system that occur in each period. The *Merdeka* Curriculum is a follow-up to the refinement of the previous 2013 curriculum. The *Merdeka* Curriculum aims to improve and address learning loss that has occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Merdeka* Curriculum, previously known as the prototype curriculum, is developed as a more flexible curriculum framework that focuses on essential content, as well as the development of students' character and competencies. It has a project-based approach to develop soft skills and character in accordance with the Pancasila learner profile (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Curriculum changes require teachers to engage in careful planning to enhance learning opportunities for students and improve the quality of their teaching. Additionally, changes are needed in organizing classrooms, teaching methods, instructional strategies, as well as the attitudes and characteristics of teachers in managing the teaching and learning process. Teachers play a role as managers of the teaching and learning process, acting as facilitators who strive to create effective learning conditions. This enables a conducive teaching and learning process, optimal development of teaching materials, and improvement in students' ability to understand the subjects and achieve the set educational goals.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum has been implemented in various educational institutions, especially at the Elementary School level in Pacitan. However, in reality, teachers have not been able to create a curriculum-based learning process. This statement is made by researcher based on observation results, indicating that the interest and ability of Elementary School students in receiving English language learning are

still low. This creates a gap between expectations and reality. Several issues are found in English language learning, such as teachers feeling rigid with the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, and teachers lacking specific training for the *Merdeka* Curriculum. Additionally, students perceive English as a difficult subject to understand, as it is crucial for them to learn English. As a result, productive, creative, and innovative students have not yet been fostered in every teaching and learning activity in the classroom.

The issues mentioned can be addressed if teachers' pay attention to teaching strategies, especially when teaching English at the Elementary School level. This is because English provides numerous benefits for students in learning a language used for communication (Cahyati & Madya, 2019). Therefore, the general objective of language learning is to develop students' communication skills so that they can speak English fluently as a preparation for facing the global world, as it is today. To achieve this, teachers need to choose appropriate strategies to be implemented in the teaching and learning process.

One component that determines the success of the English language teaching and learning process is the use of teaching strategies. A good English teacher prepares what is best for their students through specific teaching strategies, especially those that can enhance students' motivation to learn English (Nguyen & Habók, 2021). Furthermore, the appropriate use of English teaching strategies that align with students' characteristics can support the teaching and learning process, leading to the achievement of learning objectives (Mackatiani, 2017). Teaching strategies that result in significant learning and create motivation, interest, and enjoyment for young learners pose a challenge in contemporary education (Juwita, 2019). Thus, it can be said that the

presence of teaching strategies is crucial in determining the success of the teaching and learning process.

From the discussion above, the researcher is interested in conducting an analysis of the strategies used by elementary school teachers in Pacitan Regency to implement English language learning based on the *Merdeka* Curriculum with the title “STUDY OF TEACHING ENGLISH FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PACITAN IN ACADEMIC YEAR 2022/2023”.

B. Identification of the Problem

Based on the background of the problems described above can be identified as follows:

1. Teachers still feel rigid with the presence of the *Merdeka* Curriculum.
2. Teachers who teach lack specific training for the *Merdeka* Curriculum.
3. Students' lag in English language subjects.

C. Problem Limitation

For this research to be more effective, efficient, directed, and can be studied more deeply, it is necessary to limit the problem. In this study, the following are limited:

1. The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum for teaching English in Elementary Schools in Pacitan.
2. The teacher's obstacles in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching English.

D. Problem Statements

1. How is the implementation of *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching English at Elementary Schools in Pacitan?

2. What are the teacher's obstacles to implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching English?

E. Research Objectives

Following the formulation of the problem, the expected objectives of this research are:

1. To find out how the implementation of *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching English at Elementary Schools in Pacitan.
2. To find out the teacher's obstacles to implementing *Merdeka* Curriculum in teaching English.

F. Research Significances

The results of this study are expected to provide the following benefits:

1. Theoretically

This research ommited generate knowledge about how teachers implement the *Merdeka* curriculum in English language learning at the Elementary School level in Pacitan.

2. Practically

- a. For Teachers

Teachers can provide feedback on how the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which has recently been applied at the elementary school level, is progressing. Whether there are difficulties encountered or if it is going according to plan.

b. For Students

Students are expected to experience the benefits of improved learning concepts, resulting in a smooth English language learning process.

c. For Readers

Readers can gain knowledge about the concept of the *Merdeka* Curriculum and its implementation in teaching English.

