

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter consists of a theoretical review, a previous study, and a conceptual framework.

A. Theoretical Review

1. *Merdeka* Curriculum

a. The Definition of *Merdeka* Curriculum

The curriculum serves as a guide for educators in implementing the learning process. Curriculum changes must have a strong foundation and cannot be separated from the digital era's development. In 2019, the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, Nadiem Makarim, proposed a curriculum change that was an improvement upon the 2013 Curriculum, known as the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The concept of the *Merdeka* Curriculum emphasizes the importance of independence for learners. This independence includes learners' freedom to access knowledge from both formal and non-formal education. As stated by Malaikosa (2020), each learner has their own expertise, allowing them the freedom to explore and choose fields they are interested in. In the *Merdeka* Curriculum, learners are given the opportunity to develop their potential.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum emphasizes the formation of learners' characters in accordance with the Pancasila student profile. To achieve this goal, the government has designed projects that allow learners to not only acquire knowledge through reading but also through direct experiences. The *Merdeka* Curriculum aims to encourage learners in self-development, including fostering a caring attitude towards the surrounding environment and strengthening self-confidence so that they can easily

adapt to the environment (Usanto, 2022). The *Merdeka* Curriculum is developed to produce a millennial generation capable of quickly understanding the taught material and not solely relying on the ability to recall previously learned information. In addition, the independent curriculum also prioritizes essential subjects and the enhancement of students' competencies in each stage (Puspitasari & Wibawa, 2022).

Based on the opinions of several experts mentioned above, it can be concluded that the *Merdeka* Curriculum is designed to support learners in understanding and recognizing their interests and talents. In the *Merdeka* Curriculum, learners are given the opportunity to focus on the subjects they learn according to their respective developmental stages, making the learning process more profound, meaningful, unhurried, and enjoyable.

b. The Learning Process in *Merdeka* Curriculum

In the *Merdeka* Curriculum, the learning process is organized into two structures: intracurricular activities that refer to the achievement of learning outcomes in each subject, and the Pancasila student profile strengthening project that refers to the competency standards that every learner must achieve. Additionally, the *Merdeka* Curriculum also transforms the learning methods from the classroom to outside-classroom learning, with the aim of providing opportunities for learners and educators to engage in flexible discussions. Through that learning process, it was expected that learners' character would be formed in expressing their opinions and developing their social abilities within society.

In the *Merdeka* Curriculum, learners are given the freedom to develop their abilities, enabling educators to create highly active and productive learning experiences (Makhrus et al., 2022). The learning process in the *Merdeka* Curriculum

is designed to prioritize a pleasant learning atmosphere without burdening both educators and learners excessively. The aim is for the learning process to be more comfortable and efficient, allowing learners to engage in direct discussions with educators, learn outside the classroom, and develop independent, courageous, intelligent, social, cultured, polite, and competitive character traits.

The *Merdeka* Curriculum was introduced in response to technological advancements and the digital era, which demand learners to have more competent skills. In this context, learners become the primary focus and object of the learning process. They are taught how to collaborate effectively with their peers as well as with educators. Educators can organize meaningful learning experiences so that learners can apply the knowledge they acquire in their daily lives and actively participate in their social environment. Therefore, educators need to select learning media that can support the learning process by integrating technology and education to cultivate learners with critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creative abilities.

Based on the expert opinions above, it can be concluded that in the *Merdeka* Curriculum, the learning process is more focused on the content being taught, resulting in a more in-depth learning experience. Additionally, the time allocated for the learning process is longer to develop the competencies and character of learners through independent or group learning, which is relevant to real-life contexts.

c. Teaching English in *Merdeka* Curriculum

The education system in Indonesia has undergone significant changes post the COVID-19 pandemic. Changes have also occurred in the curriculum as part of the efforts to recover learning post-pandemic. One initiative introduced is the *Merdeka* Curriculum, which aims to develop children's interests and talents from an early age,

with a focus on essential content, character development, and student competencies. The *Merdeka* Curriculum provides teachers with the freedom to choose, develop, and organize various learning materials while considering the students' conditions and situations (Laila et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Rahayu (2022) states that the *Merdeka* Curriculum essentially emphasizes essential subjects such as literacy and numeracy skills rather than rote memorization techniques commonly taught to children. The *Merdeka* Curriculum adopts a constructivist approach that combines Piaget and Vygotsky's developmental theories, emphasizing active engagement of children through interactions with their surrounding environment.

Teaching English is an integral part of efforts to optimize children's holistic growth and development, particularly in terms of language. The content taught in English language learning should not only focus on developing children's linguistic aspects but should also be maximized to encompass all six aspects of child development, including religious and moral values, cognitive, physical motor, socio-emotional, language, and artistic aspects. Therefore, the development of English literacy becomes crucial, especially as part of the reflection of the *Merdeka* Curriculum (Pingge, 2022).

2. Teaching English to Young Learners

Teaching English to young learners is not as easy as teaching English to adult learners. According to Cameron (2002), these two have significant differences, where teachers need to provide more basic knowledge to young learners. Teaching young learners requires extra attention in the teaching-learning process. It is not as simple as researchers might think; teachers need to have creativity, humor, high enthusiasm, be a friend, and serve as a second parental figure in school for young learners. Cameron

(2003) argues that sustainable growth in teaching English to young learners brings a number of challenges. This indicates that a teacher must understand the characteristics of young learners in order to deliver the material effectively. English involves aspects of spelling, language structure, stress or intonation, and vocabulary. Teachers of young learners used simple and clear strategies so that students could easily receive the conveyed material. The goal of the learning process was for students to understand and memorize the material well.

The importance of teaching English to young learners is increasing. Therefore, the implementation of English for Young Learners as an elective subject in the education system is necessary. Beckman & Klinghammer (2006) state that young learners refer to those aged around 5-10 years old, from kindergarten to Grade 5. This opinion is supported by Scott & Ytreberg (2004), who state that there are differences in the abilities of five-year-olds and ten-year-olds. This indicates that young learners also have a shorter attention span compared to adults. Therefore, short but varied activities in the classroom were more effective than one long activity. However, as they grew older, children's attention span became longer. This also affected the development of their motor skills.

In conducting the learning process, teachers need to have the skills to use simple and clear language that can be easily understood by children. Therefore, teaching English to young learners requires various skills from the teacher, including classroom management, creating a supportive environment for students, knowledge of language, language teaching methods, and language learning strategies.

3. Characteristics of Young Learners

Children and adults have different perceptions of learning a foreign language because they have different characteristics. Children are more enthusiastic than adults. Moreover, they enjoy pleasing their teachers, but they can easily lose interest in carrying out teaching and learning activities in the classroom (Fikroni, 2022).

Rolandas (2018) explains that children have several specific characteristics, so as an English teacher, it is necessary to plan learning activities in order to maximize their effectiveness. Young learners possess motivation, enthusiasm, and high spirits. However, they also face difficulties in using language or expressing their thoughts due to their limited access to broader meanings. As a teacher, the task is to help them develop their abilities in understanding and mastering the given knowledge.

Meanwhile, Scott and Yteberg (2000:1-2) identify the general characteristics of a child as a young learner. The characteristics mentioned are as follows:

- a. They quickly understand the situation rather than understand the language used.
- b. Their understanding comes through hands, eyes, and ears.
- c. They have very logical thinking.
- d. They have concise attention and concentration spans.
- e. They sometimes find it challenging to know what is fact and what is fiction.
- f. They need help deciding for themselves what to study.
- g. They love to play, and learning is fun.
- h. They rarely admit that they do not know something.
- i. They have enthusiasm and high enthusiasm for learning.
- j. They have their world.

Based on the previously mentioned characteristics, the teaching methods used by teachers in the classroom also differ between teaching young learners and adults. As agreed by Cameron (2001), the differences in teaching English to young learners and adults lie in the linguistic, psychological, and social development of the learners. Therefore, teachers need to adapt their thinking about the language being taught and the classroom activities used.

Beverly & Williams (2004) suggests that there are thirteen characteristics of young learners that teachers and parents should know:

- a. They have a short attention span. So, the teacher must create a variety of learning techniques to avoid boredom in students. They provide fun activities such as singing, playing, and other packing materials.
- b. They are very active. They are trying to get them to play games and roles involving them in every part.
- c. They love compliments. Always encourage them and praise them during the learning process. The shortcomings that exist still give praise and motivation again.
- d. They differ in their language experience. Did not discriminate between those with more abilities and those with less knowledge. Treat them as one unit and support them in continuing to learn languages.
- e. They are more shy than older students. Ask them to repeat what the teacher says.
- f. They are imaginative. Use pictures to teach new vocabulary with concrete meanings, allowing them no trouble distinguishing between imagination and the real world.

- g. They love to learn while playing. Young learners learn best when they learn through play. Pack learning materials into a game because games are essential to teaching.
- h. They love to imitate and are skilled at hearing what they have heard.
- i. They respond well to gifts from the teacher.
- j. They need more writing and reading skills, even in their first language.
- k. They care more about themselves than other people.
- l. They need to gain more knowledge about the world.
- m. They enjoy fantasy, imagination, and movement.

As a teacher, it is important to understand the characteristics of children or young learners being taught. Young learners encompass children from the first year of formal schooling (around 5 or 6 years old) up to eleven or twelve years old. They have distinct traits that differentiate them from adult learners, and as a teacher, it is crucial to be aware of and understand these characteristics in order to contribute to improving the quality of their learning. On the other hand, children were more enthusiastic about learning compared to adults. They were more engaged if the learning was done through enjoyable activities or involved them actively. When learning a language, young learners have different characteristics compared to adults. They respond well to language through concrete or visual elements rather than abstract ones. Movement and tangible activities are also needed to stimulate their minds. Therefore, different teaching methods are required to instruct them. As a teacher, it is important to be familiar with various techniques or best practices that can help children learn effectively.

4. Teaching English to Primary School Students

Teaching children in elementary school differs significantly from teaching adults. Differences in characteristics and motivation are the main factors. In elementary school, usually, the primary language used is Bahasa Indonesia, so most elementary school children are not yet familiar with English. Therefore, English instruction in elementary school is limited to introductory levels. English plays a vital role as an international communication language, the language of science, and modern technology used in various fields. Therefore, English becomes a top priority in learning to communicate with the outside world. Achieving this role of English can be done through an effective education system. Education plays a crucial role in enhancing human resources that support the capabilities of the nation and the country (Shahmandy, 2012).

The curriculum is a design in the field of education that plays a crucial role in determining and developing students according to the intended goals (Díaz et al., 2022). One curriculum option that can be implemented in educational institutions in the years 2022/2024 is the *Merdeka* Curriculum. The *Merdeka* Curriculum is an improvement of the 2013 curriculum that was previously used. The goal of the *Merdeka* curriculum is to address and overcome the learning loss caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The *Merdeka* Curriculum, previously known as the prototype curriculum, was developed as a more flexible curriculum framework with a focus on essential content, character development, and student competencies. This curriculum employs a project-based approach for the development of soft skills and character in line with the Pancasila student profile (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022).

The presence of a changing curriculum poses a challenge that educators must face in developing their teaching abilities in the classroom. The education system and policymakers have designed a framework that encompasses key 21st-century skills that every individual should possess. This framework includes four core skills known as the 4Cs: critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity. As expressed by Voogt & Roblin, (2012), critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity are crucial 21st-century skills. These four skills are highly valued in complementing the core subjects in educational programs to prepare the younger generation to become global, knowledgeable, and well-rounded citizens. Thus, it can be concluded that critical thinking and creativity are essential intellectual skills in the 21st century, beneficial in enhancing students' problem-solving abilities and decision-making through effective collaboration and communication. Therefore, both of these skills should be considered significant in the learning process at schools.

Teaching English in Elementary School, which used to be only a local subject, has now become a permanent part of the school curriculum. Teachers who possessed high-level thinking skills were more capable of carefully planning and enhancing learning opportunities for students, thus improving the quality of their teaching. Introducing English to young learners was not an easy task. It requires changes in classroom organization, teaching methods, learning strategies, as well as the attitudes and characteristics of teachers in managing the teaching-learning process. Teachers have a role as managers of the teaching-learning process, acting as facilitators who strive to create effective learning conditions. This allows for the learning process, the development of good teaching materials, and the improvement of students' abilities in listening to lessons and achieving the educational goals they need to reach.

5. The Implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum in Elementary School

The implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the elementary school level prioritizes project-based learning with the goal of realizing the Pancasila student profile. This is also highly relevant to 21st-century learning, where education focuses not only on knowledge but also emphasizes character, literacy, skills, and technology. Learning within the *Merdeka* Curriculum was organized based on subject-based approaches. Planning the schedule becomes easier for teachers as the weekly learning time is based on subjects. This differs from the 2013 curriculum, where it was necessary to consider detailed effective days and effective weeks.

Scheduling in the *Merdeka* Curriculum is relatively simple, but teachers also need to consider several factors, especially in the implementation of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project (P5). This project involves interdisciplinary project-based or practical learning, where students engage in understanding the subject matter and solving problems directly. In the schedule planning, P5 should be included as a mandatory component, with implementation options that can be done at the end of lessons, per week, or per period.

There are three options for the implementation of the *Merdeka* Curriculum at the elementary school level, namely:

1. *Mandiri Belajar* Category, where schools or educational units still use the Simplified Curriculum 2013 (K13), also known as the Emergency Curriculum, by implementing some parts and principles of the *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum.
2. *Mandiri Berubah* Category, where starting from the academic year 2022/2023, educational units begin to use the *Merdeka* curriculum with reference to the learning materials prepared by the *Merdeka Mengajar* Platform (PMM) according

to the respective education levels. For the elementary school level, the learning materials are available for Grade I and Grade IV.

3. *Mandiri Berbagi* Category, where schools implement the *Merdeka* Curriculum and independently develop some learning materials for Grade I and Grade IV of elementary school starting from the academic year 2022/2023.

6. Teaching Method

Teaching methods are the strategies employed by teachers to create a truly enjoyable and supportive learning environment, facilitating the smooth learning process and the achievement of satisfactory learning outcomes for students (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020). Therefore, teaching methods are the ways in which teachers establish a relationship with students during the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. The appropriateness of teaching methods in the teaching and learning process is crucial because each method has its own characteristics that yield satisfactory results only when applied in suitable teaching strategies. Thus, educators are required to choose the most appropriate method after determining the topic of the instructional material in the learning objectives. Therefore, the design and implementation of a teaching strategy must be based on adequate knowledge, understanding, and skills in using teaching methods. The use of learning methods here is also one of the factors that influence students' learning achievements.

According to Sudjana (2003), a good teaching and learning process should alternately use various teaching methods. The teacher's task is to choose suitable methods to create a good and correct teaching and learning process. Teaching methods can function optimally if supported by adequate facilities or tools. The accuracy of

teaching methods depends on the objectives, content of the teaching and learning process, and teaching and learning activities.

According to Nana Sudjana (2005), several teaching methods that teachers often use include the following:

a. Preaching Method

The Preaching Method is the presentation of lessons by the teacher by giving verbal explanations to students. The lecture method is the most popular and is widely used by teachers. Besides being easy to present, it also only requires a few media.

b. Question and Answer Method

The question-and-answer method is a way of presenting lessons in the teaching and learning process through two-way transactions or two-way traffic from the teacher to the students or from the students to the teacher so that answers to material certainly are obtained through the oral answers of the teacher or students.

c. Discussion Method

The discussion method is a process of interaction between two or more individuals involved, exchanging experiences and information and solving problems; it can also happen that everything is active; no one is passive as a listener.

d. Recitation Method

The Recitation Method is a method of teaching and learning interaction characterized by assignments from the teacher to be carried out by students at school or home individually or in groups.

e. Group Work Method

Group Work Method is a way of teaching where students in the class are seen as a group or divided into several groups consisting of several students; they work together in solving problems or carrying out specific tasks to be discussed in the group.

f. Demonstration Method

The demonstration method is a way of teaching in which an instrument or a team of teachers demonstrates/shows a process.

g. Experimental Method

An Experimental Method or experiment is a way of teaching where students conduct experiments on something, observe the process, and write down the experiment results. Then the results of the observations are conveyed to the class and evaluated by the teacher.

h. Simulation Method

The Simulation Method is a way of teaching by using an imitation to describe the actual situation to understand the nature of a particular concept, principle, or skill.

i. Inquiry Method

The inquiry method presents lessons that allow students to find information with or without the help of a teacher that involves students in mental processes in the framework of their discovery.

j. Unit Teaching Method.

The Unit Teaching Method is teaching that directs the activities of students to solve a problem that was formulated together beforehand. This method presents lessons that start from a problem and then discuss it from various related aspects to make the solution meaningful overall.

B. Previous Study

Table 2.1. Previous Study

NO	AUTHORS AND PUBLISHER	TITLES	SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCES
1	Erisa Kurniati (2001)	Policy and Implementation of English Learning for Elementary Schools in Indonesia	<p>This research used a descriptive qualitative method. Based on the results of the research conducted at SDN Jambi, many things still need improvement in developing the 2013 Curriculum, especially concerning the elimination of English subjects as local content. This deletion resulted in an unclear position of English at the primary level, leading to differences in the content of lessons from one school to another.</p> <p>Similarity: Both the research conducted by Erisa Kurniati and the author's research used descriptive qualitative methods, and both studies focused on elementary school teachers.</p> <p>Difference: The distinction lies in the sample and population studied.</p>
2	Fransiska Faberta Kencana Sari (2023)	The New Paradigm of Merdeka Curriculum: Implementation of Pancasila Education Subject in Elementary School	<p>This research aims to analyze the intervention process carried out by schools to implement the Pancasila Education subject within the Independent Curriculum. The research was conducted using a qualitative design with a case study approach. The subjects of this study were the first batch of school teachers who implemented the Independent Curriculum. The implementation results cover eight aspects: diagnostic assessment, differentiated learning, discussion and collaboration, character building, learning projects, learning resources based on</p>

NO	AUTHORS AND PUBLISHER	TITLES	SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCES
			<p>information and communication technology, and formative and summative assessments. This study concludes that the implementation of the Pancasila Education Subject has followed the standard process of the New Paradigm Independent Curriculum.</p> <p>Similarity: The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Elementary Schools.</p> <p>Difference: Fransiska's research focused on the Pancasila Education subject, while the author's research focused on the English subject.</p>
3	Ria Puji Lestari (2019)	The English Teaching Strategies for Young Learners in an International Primary School in Surakarta	<p>This research investigates English teaching strategies applied in teaching planning, teaching implementation, and teaching assessment. Regarding the findings of this study, there are four strategies for planning learning, namely curriculum, documents, teacher professional development, and student seating arrangements. Meanwhile, in the implementation of teaching, there are sixteen strategies: icebreaking, memory recall, brainstorming, discussions, games, listening and reading, listening and matching, drawing and writing, writing paragraphs, filling in the blanks, vocabulary writing, closing materials, English police, reading time, English camps, and assembly. Additionally, there are five strategies for teaching assessment: daily tests, vocabulary assessments, midterm exams, final</p>

NO	AUTHORS AND PUBLISHER	TITLES	SIMILARITY AND DIFFERENCES
			<p>semester exams, and International Development Tests.</p> <p>Similarity: The strategies for teaching English to young learners and the methods used.</p> <p>Difference: The difference lies in the sample and population.</p>
4	Puji Sri Rahayu (2017)	The Implementation of School-Based English Curriculum in Elementary School Level (A Case Study at Sdn Kebun Bunga 06 Banjarmasin).	<p>This research was conducted to determine the implementation of KTSP in teaching English, which can be observed from the syllabus, lesson plans used by teachers, their application in class, and the challenges teachers face in implementing them. The study results show that Kebun Bunga Elementary School has implemented this approach. This can be seen from the preparation, training, and evaluation. The challenge English teachers face here is that students are diverse, and the time allocation for English could be improved.</p> <p>Similarity: The research shares the same goal, which is to understand the implementation of English learning at the elementary school level.</p> <p>Difference: The context of the curriculum under study. Puji Sri Rahayu's research is related to the implementation of the KTSP curriculum, while the research conducted by the author is related to the implementation of the Merdeka Learning curriculum.</p>
5	Ellya Rakhmawati (2022)	Teacher's Perception in Exploring the Merdek Curriculum for	This study aims to analyze the teacher's role in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education at the kindergarten level. The research follows a qualitative approach

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		Early Childhood Education	with a qualitative phenomenological study design, and data is collected using questionnaires and documentation. The data analysis technique employed is descriptive qualitative analysis. The study found that teachers allowed students to determine learning themes as part of the learning materials. Additionally, teachers create lesson plans for their daily routines and learning modules. The teachers organize activities based on the learning modules. Similarity: The instruments and methods used are the same. Difference: The subject of the research.

Based on the above research, this study has similarities and differences with the five previous studies. The similarities are that all five studies focus on the implementation of English language learning in primary schools. The differences between this study and the previous five studies include the methods used, the population and sample, and the subject matter. From the results of previous research, it can be concluded that the role of teachers in implementing English language learning requires high-level thinking skills. The changing curriculum in each period demands that teachers be able to plan quality teaching and learning activities. This is crucial in preparing human resources to face many complex challenges and compete in the 21st century.

C. Conceptual Framework

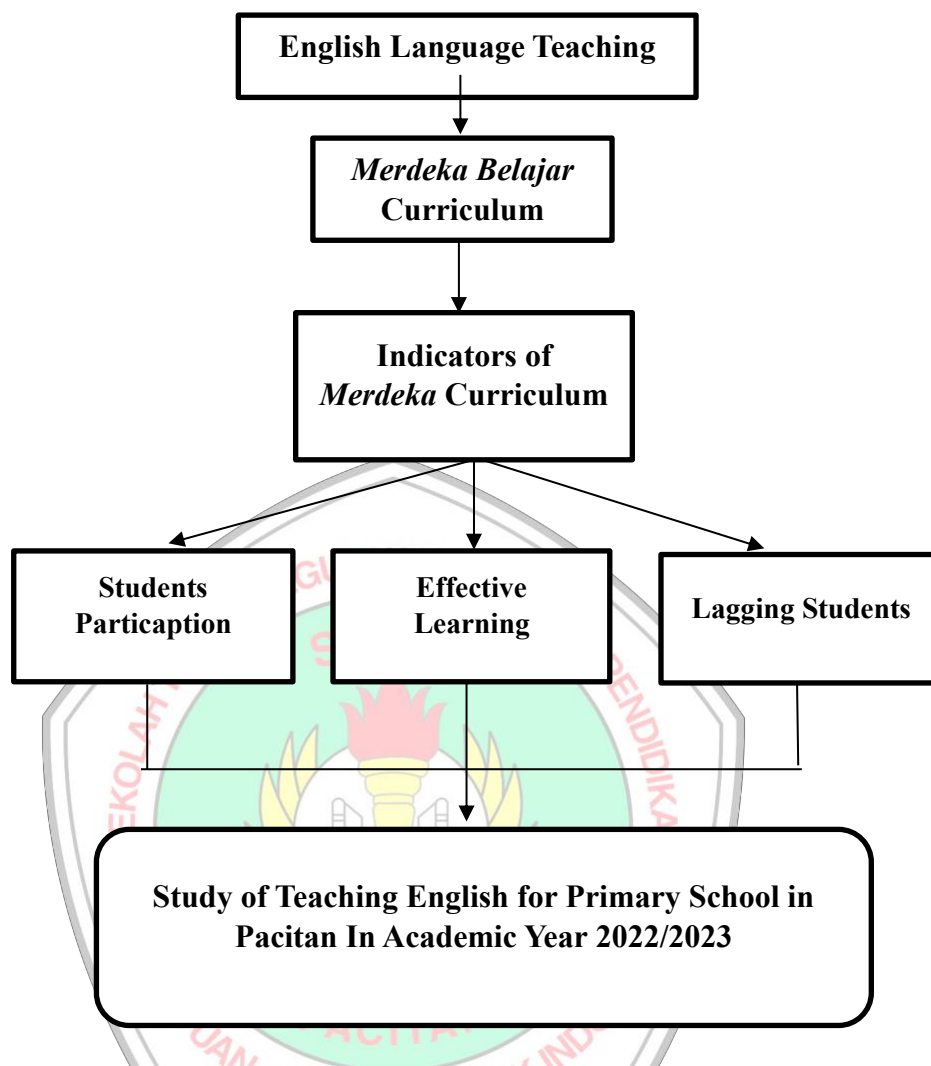


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework of the Research

Merdeka Curriculum is a policy issued by the Minister of Education and Culture (Kemdikbud), Nadiem Anwar Makarim, with the aim of improving the quality of human resources. As a new policy, it is important for teachers and students to understand the concept of the *Merdeka Curriculum* itself.

Understanding the *Merdeka Curriculum* policy is important for teachers and students. In the *Merdeka Curriculum*, freedom of thought and enjoyable learning is emphasized. The enjoyable learning process prevents students and teachers from feeling bored because there is communication between learners and educators. The

learning process not only focuses on the role of the teacher but also encourages students to actively ask questions, answer, speak in public, and have freedom in learning English according to their interests.

In such an approach, learners were encouraged to develop critical thinking and character formation. However, in implementing the *Merdeka* Curriculum, it was important to pay attention if difficulties arose, if it did not go according to plan, or if other constraints were encountered. Therefore, proper implementation by teachers was necessary to ensure the smooth running of this *Merdeka* Curriculum.

