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**EFL STUDENTS' READINESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ENGLISH  
COURSE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL:  
A STUDY AT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 119 JAMBI CITY**

**Arani Tri Ananda**

Universitas Jambi

[aranitriananda12@gmail.com](mailto:aranitriananda12@gmail.com)

**Abstract**

This study explored the students' readiness in term of preparation, experience, difficulties, and overcome the difficulties on the implementation of English as course in accordance to *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. This study was a qualitative research with a case study approach. The main data was obtained qualitatively from focus group discussion with 10 grade 4 students. The site of this was at Elementary School 119 Jambi City. The focus group discussion was conducted face-to-face in Indonesian, audio-taped, and directly transcribed. The data analyzed through reading the transcribed transcriptions. Through this research, the researcher found out aside some of the difficulties the students feel ready to learn English as a course at Elementary School 119 Jambi City because of the positive relationship teacher-students, students-students, students-school environment. Then, the students' self-directed learning motivation and supportive environment helped the students in English language learning.

**Keywords:** Readiness, English Course, *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum

## INTRODUCTION

In teaching and learning process, it cannot be separated with the set of rule and plan regarding to the objectives, content, and subject matter as well as the method used as guidelines for learning activities in order to achieve educational goals and it is called curriculum (Roy'yautnisa, 2013). Curriculum used to identify the plan for students for instance to give the plan for the students about what will be taught for them. According to Forey & Cheung (2019) curriculum is the content of learning. The point of curriculum implemented is for the students since it can help the students to achieve and gain the learning experience through the activities and it must lead the students to acquisition their learning experiences.

Indonesia has been changed the curriculum every decade (Setiawan, 2016). The changes of curriculum aimed to improve the quality of teaching-learning process and learning design. Other countries also change their curriculum since the needs and the demands every year are changes. Ekawati (2016) stated the development of curriculum considered as determinant for the nation's future. Recently, in February 2021, *Kemendikbudristek* issued a new curriculum, this curriculum named *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum.

This program develops the concept of freedom where it encourages the educational institutions and students to innovate and develop their creative thinking, this concept accepted by considering the vision and mission of Indonesian Education in the future for the sake of creating quality of human beings who are able to compete in various fields of life. The concept of *Merdeka Belajar* is a response of the needs in the education system in revolution 4.0 era. This Curriculum provides the freedom to the education units and practitioners to design the process and learning material that is relevant and contextual. The curriculum requires the school, principals, and teachers to design their own teaching and learning process. The school have the authorities to choose the learning material or process that suitable for their students' needs and school capability & facility.

In *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, the school requires to have project for 20% from 1080 hours and 72 hours per year to have additional subject in school, for instance English. English course is one the additional subject that can be added for school that has been implementing *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. *Kemendikbudristek* has issued the policy, instrument, and material to support teaching and learning in this curriculum. As additional material, *Kemendikbudristek* also issued the material for English course.

English as additional material has been implemented for almost school in Jambi that used *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum and it is used for grade one and four students. For grade one students, they still learn about the basic knowledge of English like alphabet, numbers, and vocabularies for the things around them. However, for grade four students, they have to learn about the tenses that they even do not know about what is subject, verb, noun, and so on. In fact, grade four students have never been exposed with English before since most of them come from middle to low income family and the school never teaches them English before.

One of the important aspects in learning is the students' readiness. Students readiness is the willingness of the students to respond the learning ability (Bahsan et. al (2018). It related to the psychological readiness of students. According to Widodo et. al (2020) the students readiness categorized into two categorize which are related to the ability to learn and it related to the cognitive, social, linguistic, and certain skills of students to learn well. Several previous researches stated the readiness influences learning outcomes (Jayaningrat et. al, 2017) and it can increase the students' optimism (Rizki, 2013). Therefore, the researcher intends to explore about the students' readiness on the implementation of English as course in *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum.

### **LITERATURE Review**

Students' readiness is the willingness of the students to respond the learning ability (Bahsan et. al (2018). It related to the psychological readiness of students. According to Widodo et. al (2020) the students readiness categorized into two categorize which are related to the ability to learn and it related to the cognitive, social, linguistic, and certain skills of students to learn well.

Recently, the minister of education issued a curriculum named *Merdeka Belajar*. *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum is Competency-based curriculum to support learning recovery by implementing project-based learning (Project Based Learning) to support character development in accordance with the Pancasila Student Profile. Curriculum. This curriculum is one way from the government to develop the quality of Indonesian education. By using this concept, which provides freedom for schools such as principals, teachers, and students to develop the character of students based on Pancasila, it will have a positive impact on students since it is based on their needs, wants, and lacks. *Kemendikbudristek* has issued the policy, instrument, and material to support teaching and learning in this curriculum.

In 2013, the Minister of Education had issued a Decree of Minister of Education and Culture Number 81A of 2013 which stated English is not as the compulsory subject learning, it could be taught as a local content subject or an extracurricular. However, in *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum, *Kemendikbudristek* also issued the material for English course. *Kemendikbudristek* has issued the policy, instrument, and material to support teaching and learning in this curriculum. As additional material, *Kemendikbudristek* also issued the material for English subject.

As the observation of the researcher, this subject is taught by the classroom teachers who do not have English education background. For grade one students, they still learn about the basic knowledge of English like alphabet, numbers, and vocabularies for the things around them. However, for grade four students, they have to learn about the tenses that they even do not know about what is subject, verb, noun, and so on. Related to English learning and teaching, many researchers stated that the Elementary School students needed to learn English started in the young age. There are many reasons stated one of it is because English is a global language and this language use widely all over the nations. The most importantly, Elementary School students are in their golden age and in this age, it makes them easier to learn language. Dealing with age related in language

acquisition, many researchers attracted to conduct the research about Second Language Acquisition. Satienchayakorn (2017) stated that early language learner has Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) which can be said the language learning is doing in a natural way, the language young learner's brain is plasticity and feasibility that can be the factors to learn fast and subconsciously.

## METHOD

In order to answer the research questions qualitative research approach used for this research which aimed to explore the students' readiness in learning English in *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. The data obtained through focus group discussion. The researcher provided several questions in the discussion. The indicators used in this research can be seen in the following table:

Indicator	Question
The students' preparation	Have you ever made any special preparation in learning English before it started?
The students' ability to take part in English course	Are you able to follow English learning well? Are you enjoy in learning English?
The students' English learning	Do you take any English course aside the school?
The students' ability to understand the material	Can you understand the course well?
The students' perception of English course readiness	Do you feel that you are ready to take part in English learning? How do you feel about the teacher?
The students' learning difficulties	What difficulties do you often encounter in English course class?
The students difficulties overcoming	How do you overcome the difficulties?

(Adapted from Widodo *et. al*, 2020)

The site of this research is Elementary School 119 Jambi City which is located on Payo Selincah, Paal Merah, South Jambi. The research subjects involved the grade 4 students of Elementary school 119 Jambi City in the school year 2022 – 2023. The sample of this research is random sampling. In this research, 10 students who were willing to be the participants in focus group discussion.

To obtain the data, the researcher conducted the focus group discussion the participant then the data transcribed into the sheet, labelling the audio, managing the data, and so on which aimed to facilitate the researcher to have the understanding of data. The data analyzed by using some procedures that consist of coding, data reduction, data display, and drawing the conclusion or interpretation.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to explore about the students' readiness on the implementation of English as course in *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. This research was

conducted by conducting focus group discussion with the grade 4 students at Elementary School 119 Jambi City. There are some questions proposed to the participants related to the readiness in learning English. The students were commonly in the age range between 8 -9 years old. It can be said the learners are the young learner. According to Satienchayakorn (2017) early language learner has Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) which can be said the language learning is doing in a natural way, the language young learner's brain is plasticity and feasibility that can be the factors to learn fast and subconsciously.

Based on the focus group discussion, there are several salient themes that emerges in this research were; (1) students preparation, (2) students' ability to take part in course, (3) students English learning, (4) students' ability to understand material, (5) students' perception of taking part in English course, (6) students' learning difficulties, and (7) students' difficulties overcoming.

Through the focus group discussion, the researcher tried to find out the perspective from the teacher. In academic year 2021/2022, the students had not used *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum but their curriculum was 2013 Curriculum. However, according to *Permendikbudristek* No. 56 Tahun 2022 as the guidelines, in academic year 2022/2023, the students have to use *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. In the previous curriculum, the students had not learnt English course but in this academic year, they start to have an English course. Therefore, it means the students have been learning English for almost 6 months. They have been learning about the tenses.

The students had already known that they would learn English at grade 4 but as their confession, some of them had a preparation but some of the students did not have any special preparation in learning English. One of the students stated "*Saya ada belajar Bahasa Inggris sebelumnya menggunakan aplikasi Duolingo*" (I studied English before by using *Duolingo* application), "*Saya juga bu, saya belajar menggunakan aplikasi Ruangguru*" (Me too Miss, I studied by using *Ruangguru* application), "*Saya belajar mandiri bu di rumah*" (I studied by myself at home Miss). The students have anticipated of English course before started to learn it in the classroom.

The preparation of English course is because of the students have the self-motivation and initiative to learn by themselves then actively controlling their learning process (Khodabandehlou, et. al, 2012). The students prefer to self-study by using application or source from internet than to learn English in English course. However, in the preparation learning the students found out some difficulties in understanding the materials as stated by the students "*Tapi kalo belajar sendiri kadang bingung Bu buat memahami materinya*" (But, in self-learning, sometimes I confuse to comprehend the material Miss).

The feeling of pleasure and displeasure of learning English is also the essential thing to know since the students have been through almost six months of learning so the have their own personal experiences in the process of learning. Most of students have positive respond on English learning since they feel happy, enjoy, intriguing, and confuse to learn English. "*Saya sebenarnya senang Bu selama belajar Bahasa Inggris, tapi kadang saya ngerasa bingung Bu*" (I'm actually happy Miss while learning English, but

sometimes I feel confused Miss), one of the students stated the enjoyable of learning English but sometimes it is confusing for them. The confusion is because of the lack of English knowledge like the student said “*Bingung karena apa ya bu, mungkin karena kurang tau Bahasa Inggris aja bu*” (What confuse do I face ya Miss? Maybe because of I don’t know English Miss).

The quality of teacher also the important things factor in English learning since the qualified teacher will determine the education quality (Hidayat, et. al, 2021). The majority of students responded positively toward English teacher. The students reflected that they had no problem about the teacher since the study experience with the students enjoyable and they do not have any pressure in the learning activities. One student responded “*Saya ngerasa belajar Bahasa Inggris sama gurunya enak-enak aja bu, soalnya kadang belajarnya diluar kelas, kadang ada gamenya*” (I feel learning English with the teacher is good Miss, because sometimes learning is at outside the classroom, sometimes we play game together). However, one of the students reported that “*Kadang bosan juga Bu, kalo belajar dikelas tu, kami suka ngantuk Bu*” (Sometimes it’s boring Miss when studying in the class, we are sleepy Miss”. The statement above indicated that the students feel enjoyable learning with the teacher but one of the students thought classroom learning with the teacher sometimes makes them sleepy because the teacher explains too much.

However, the students found themselves understand some of the material that explained by the teacher but as stated by one of the students “*Bu, saya ngerasa kalo materinya kesulitan bu, kenapa tidak belajar a,b,c aja di bukunya bu?*” (Miss, I feel the materials are difficult, why don’t we just learn a,b,c in the book, Miss?”. The students still found the difficulties in learning English, students stated “*Iya bu, agak sulit karena sebelumnya belum pernah belajar dari kelas 1 terus tiba-tiba dikelas 4 ada bahasa Inggris*” (Yes Miss, it is quite difficult because we had never been learning English since grade one but suddenly in grade four there is English course) most of the students stated it because they have never been learning English since grade one therefore the faced the difficulties in basic English.

Then, the common difficulties faced by students in learning English are tenses, verb, noun, and subjects. The students are using book entitled “Student’s Book: My Next Words for Elementary School”, in this book the students require to learn the tenses and vocabularies about the things around them. There are three units in this book that requires the student to learn tenses which are simple present tense, present continuous, and simple past tense. To learn about the tenses, the students have to know about the subject, the differentiation between noun and verb, and the time to use the tense. However, the students found the difficulties in using to be (is, am, are) as the students reflected “*Itu nah Bu, yang to be to be tu, susah tu Bu*” (That’s it, Miss, that’s to be to be, it’s difficult, Miss) and “*Yang to be itu kami bingung Bu kalo ujian, kapan gunain is/am/are nya*” (The to be makes me confuse during the exam Miss, when do we use is/am/are”. On the other hand, another student said “*Kalo kami bu bingungnya ketika penggunaan e/es, itu kapan sih?*” (For me, I confuse about the used of e/es Miss, when do we use it Miss?”, the inflection of e/es in simple present tense made the students puzzled in making the sentence.

Subsequently, the differentiation of verb and noun also became the difficulties of the students.

Above all, the students tried to overcome the difficulties in English learning. The common way to overcome the difficulty is self-learning. Two students reflected “*Saya belajar sendiri sih bu, lewat internet kan sekarang bisa*” (I learn by myself by using internet Miss, now we can use it) and “*Iya bu, saya juga gunain aplikasi juga*” (Yes Miss, me too, I use application to learn too). The students that have high motivation tried to learn by themselves. Then, other students tried to ask the teacher or discuss with their friend about the confusing material and some others prefer not doing anything to overcome the difficulties since they know the teacher will review the material once a month. After the difficulties faced, the students still feel ready to learn English because of the self-motivation and supportive environment.

In short, the data from focus group discussion indicated the students have their own ways in stating their readiness in learning English. In term of readiness the researcher tried to find out the students’ preparation, experience, difficulties, and overcome the difficulties. The students had never had a formal English lesson before the class. The preparation that students did was in term of self-learning. In self-learning, students learn by themselves by using the applications or any other sources in the internet. According to Turan & Koc (2018) the self-learning impacted to the readiness of the students in learning, especially to enhance their critical thinking. Then, the students feel pleased to learn English but some students highlighted the confusion since the lack of basic English understanding.

In term of teacher’s quality, the students reflected their experience with the teacher. The teacher has their own ways to teach the students. The teaching process is not only happening in the classroom but also in the outside of classroom. The environment of learning made the students easily engage with the teacher since the teacher included outside and inside classroom activities. As stated by Agrawal and Thakur (2014) that the environment of school was the result of teacher-students’ relationship and teachers’ teaching. The study by Hidayat et. al (2021) also highlighted the competency of teacher was needed to improve the comfortability of students in the academic atmosphere. Therefore, the atmosphere of learning and process in this study is enjoyable for the students because of the teacher’s quality. However, some of the students are still unenjoyable in learning with the teacher by lecturing style.

In terms of students understanding and difficulties, the finding showed the students generally understand the material but they found some difficulties in learning since they had never been learned English before grade 4. The difficulties are commonly in term of understanding tenses, verb, noun, and subjects. Moreover, the use of to be and the inflection of s/es made the students confuse and difficult to learn English since the unfamiliarity of structure in English. However, the difficulties tried to be overcome by the students. The students tried to learn by themselves, discuss about the unfamiliarity material with friend and teacher, or wait for the teacher to reexplain about the material. The re-explanation of material has the similar result of the finding by Ramadani & Dafit

(2022), the initiation of teacher to re-explain the material helps the elementary school students to overcome the difficulties in learning.

## CONCLUSION

Implementing the course, it should be based on the students' readiness. Students readiness is the willingness of the students to respond the learning ability. The grade four students at elementary school 119 has been learning English for almost six months. The intention of this research was to explore about the students' readiness on the implementation of English as course in *Merdeka Belajar* Curriculum. In this study there are several salient themes that emerges in this research were; (1) students preparation, (2) students' ability to take part in course, (3) students English learning, (4) students' ability to understand material, (5) students' perception of taking part in English course, (6) students' learning difficulties, and (7) students' difficulties overcoming. Based on the salient theme of this study, the researcher found out even though the students faced some difficulties in learning English but the students still feel ready to learn English because they have the motivation to learn and the supportive environment.

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