



The effect of Merdeka curriculum implementation on students' English learning motivation and interest

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ABSTRACT

Although many researches have examined its application of Merdeka curriculum, Indonesian current curriculum, in teaching practice, little research has examined its psychological impact on students, especially regarding their motivation and interest in learning English. Addressing this gap, this study investigates the impact of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum on the motivation and interest of grade X students from one of the public high schools in Mancak, Serang, Banten, Indonesia. A quantitative survey research design was used using a structured questionnaire distributed to sixty-two students. The questionnaire consisting of twenty close-ended items was based on a four-point Likert scale to measure student motivation and student learning interest. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages. The results showed that students were highly motivated and interested in learning English through the Merdeka curriculum. Students found learning English enjoyable, meaningful, and relevant to their lives. Future studies should include qualitative methods to gain deeper insights and involve schools from different regions to further validate the findings. This study offers empirical insights for educators and policymakers to improve English language learning by implementing a flexible and student-centered approach under the Merdeka curriculum.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: June 21, 2025

Revised: October 27, 2025

Accepted: October 31, 2025

Keywords:

Curriculum implementation;
Merdeka curriculum;
Learning motivation;
Learning interest

To cite this article: Sholihah, L. I., Lucky, S. A., & Gailea, N. (2025). The effect of Merdeka curriculum implementation on students' English learning motivation and interest. *Erudita: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 5(2), 209–225. <https://doi.org/10.28918/erudita.v5i2.12070>

To link to this article: <https://e-journal.uingusdur.ac.id/erudita/article/view/erudita527>



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Introduction

In the midst of rapid education reform, the Indonesian government has made significant efforts to update and modernize the national curriculum. One of these efforts is introducing and implementing the Merdeka curriculum. This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning, differentiated learning, and flexibility in learning. The Merdeka curriculum encourages independence, creativity, and critical thinking among students by giving them

the freedom to learn according to their interests, abilities, and learning styles (Ni'mah et al., 2024). The aim of implementing this curriculum is to bridge the gap between students' academic experiences and the competencies needed in the 21st century.

The Merdeka curriculum represents a major shift from the old, rigid, and standardized approach to a more flexible, tailored, and context-based curriculum. This flexibility not only creates a more inclusive learning environment but also encourages student engagement by giving them the opportunity to study topics that suit their interests, thereby fostering a lifelong love of learning (Harefa et al., 2024). English, as one of the foreign languages taught as a compulsory subject, has also experienced a direct impact from the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. This curriculum provides more opportunities for students to explore English through real-world contexts, projects, and interdisciplinary learning experiences (Latifa et al., 2023; Sampelolo & Kombong, 2022). As a result, it is expected that students' motivation to learn English and their interest in engaging with the subject matter will increase.

Motivation and interest are two major psychological factors that greatly influence the success of the learning process, especially in the context of language acquisition. Motivation drives students to initiate and maintain their efforts in learning, while interest determines the depth of their involvement and willingness to participate. Research shows that students who demonstrate high levels of motivation and interest tend to achieve better academic outcomes, especially in language learning, where intrinsic factors play an important role (Chen, 2022; Supriyoko et al., 2022). Thus, highly motivated and interested learners tend to perform better academically, especially in the context of language learning, where intrinsic factors are very important. Thus, a curriculum that takes into account students' interests is likely to improve their learning outcomes.

At one of the public high schools in Mancak, Banten, Indonesia, the Merdeka curriculum has begun to be implemented for 10th-grade students. In this case, teachers are encouraged to design learning activities that suits students' needs, encourages students' curiosity, and develops their independent learning abilities (Sari & Muamaroh, 2024). This approach also encourages students to take more responsibility for their learning process. This change has had a major impact on classroom dynamics and the teaching strategies applied. However, whether this curriculum change has effectively influenced students' motivation and interest in learning English remains to be seen.

Several researchers have examined the impact of the Merdeka curriculum on students' learning English. For instance, a study by Tandikombong et al. (2025) showed that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum had a high impact on the interest of 5th-grade students in learning English. Then, Watem (2024) revealed that 62.5% of students in the Merdeka curriculum group showed a much higher level of motivation than the 2013 Curriculum at one of the state high schools in Raja Ampat, Papua. In addition, Aryati (2023) assessed that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in teaching English at the International Business and Tourism Institute has had a significant impact. Although many studies have examined the general implementation of the Merdeka curriculum, few have specifically focused on its psychological impact on students, particularly in relation to English language learning. Furthermore, most existing studies tend to concentrate on teaching techniques or teacher preparedness, leaving a gap in understanding how the curriculum affects students' internal learning factors, such as motivation and interest. There is no

empirical data on how tenth grade students perceive and respond to this curriculum in the context of English language education, particularly in rural schools such as one of the state high schools in Mancak.

Based on the background and research gaps presented, the purpose of this study is to examine the effect of the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum on the motivation and interest of tenth grade students in learning English at one of the state high schools in Mancak. The main research problem addressed in this study is: Does the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum significantly affect students' motivation and interest in learning English? Thus, the hypothesis proposed is that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum has a significant positive effect on student motivation and interest in learning English. The significance of this study lies in its ability to provide empirical evidence based on data regarding the psychological impact of the Merdeka curriculum on students in the context of a rural high school, thus offering valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers in improving English education in similar settings.

Method

Research design

This study used a quantitative survey research design. The data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including the calculation of the mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage.

Setting and participants

This study used a random sampling technique to select samples from the population. The sample of this study was grade 10 students at one of the state high schools located in a rural area of Mancak, Serang, Banten, Indonesia. Grade 10 students were chosen because they are the first group to experience the full Merdeka curriculum at the high school level. The population consisted of 7 classes with a total of 270 students at the same grade level in the school. To minimize selection bias, all eligible classes were listed, and two classes were randomly selected through a lottery. In this way, each class had an equal chance of being selected as a sample. The selection process was carried out independently, without interference from school staff, to maintain objectivity and fairness. As a result, a total of 62 students from two randomly selected classes participated in this study. The participants consisted of 32 male and 30 female students. The ages of the samples in this study are between 16 and 17 years old. The students were asked to participate in filling out the questionnaire via Google Forms voluntarily. They were informed that their personal data would be kept confidential.

Data collection

Questionnaire data was the only data collection to investigate the effects of implementing the Merdeka curriculum on students' learning motivation and learning interest. This questionnaire consists of 20 closed-ended statements designed to measure two main variables, namely student motivation and learning interest on the effect of implementing the Merdeka curriculum in English learning. The student motivation questionnaire consists of 10

closed-ended statements adapted from (Setyowati, 2025). The student learning interest questionnaire consists of 10 closed statements adapted from (Putri, 2023). The questionnaire utilized a four-point Likert scale, where participants were asked to select their responses by ticking based on their agreement or disagreement with each item. The survey questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms, allowing participants to easily provide their responses online.

Data analysis

Before analyzing the data, the questionnaire instrument was tested for validity and reliability. The questionnaire was adapted from previously validated instruments, ensuring content validity prior to distribution. However, because instrument reliability and validity can vary depending on the sample and context (Creswell, 2014), the statistical tests for validity and reliability were performed after data collection to reconfirm the instrument's suitability for this study. This was done to ensure its accuracy in measuring students' motivation and interest in learning English in implementing the Merdeka curriculum. The validity test was conducted using the Pearson Product-Moment correlation technique with a significance level of 5%. With 62 student respondents, the critical *r*-table value was 0.25. The calculated *r*-values for all 20 items ranged from 0.50 to 0.74, exceeding the *r*-table value ($r\text{-count} > 0.25$), which indicated that all items were valid. The highest validity coefficient was obtained in item B.1 ($r = 0.74$), showing a strong correlation with the total score, while the lowest was found in items A.3 and A.8 ($r = 0.50$), both still meeting the minimum validity criteria. These results confirm that all questionnaire items appropriately measure students' motivation and interest in learning English.

The reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to assess the internal consistency of the instrument. The obtained Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.92, which is categorized as excellent according to the standard interpretation ($\alpha \geq 0.90 =$ excellent reliability). This result indicates that the questionnaire has a high level of internal consistency and is reliable for measuring the constructs of students' motivation and interest.

After confirming that the instrument was valid and reliable, the data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques, including the calculation of the mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage. The mean and standard deviation were used to determine the general tendency and variability of students' responses to each item. These statistical analyses were performed using Microsoft Excel, and the results were interpreted to describe students' motivation and interest in learning English within the context of the Merdeka curriculum implementation.

Results and discussion

This section presents the findings of the study, describing students' motivation and interest in learning English under the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum. The results are organized based on the questionnaire indicators and interpreted through descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage distributions.

Students' motivation

To obtain the data, a questionnaire was distributed to students. The items in the questionnaire reflected student motivation in learning English on the impact of implementing the Merdeka curriculum. To more easily understand students' responses, the results of the questionnaire on motivation are divided into four themes: motivation for future and personal goals, enjoyment, perception of the curriculum and teaching method, and satisfaction and achievement.

Motivation for future and personal goals (Item A.1, A.2, and A.3)

The results of the questionnaire on student motivation (motivation for future and personal goals) are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Students' English Learning Motivation in the Context of Merdeka Curriculum

Frequency counts and percentages					
Item	Statements (Motivation for Future and Personal Goals)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A.1	I feel motivated to learn English to achieve my dreams.	3 (4.8%)	1 (1.6%)	41 (66.1%)	17 (27.4%)
A.2	I feel that learning English is important for my future.	-	4 (6.5%)	31 (50%)	27 (43.5%)
A.3	I feel motivated to continue learning English despite facing difficulties.	1 (1.6%)	4 (6.5%)	41 (66.1%)	16 (25.8%)
Average		2.2%	4.8%	60.8%	32.3%

Table 1 shows that the majority of students expressed a positive motivation towards learning English when linked to their future and personal development. Item A.1 (I feel motivated to learn English to achieve my dreams) received a lot of agreement from students. As many as 93.5% (58) students (66.1% agree and 27.4% strongly agree) show positive motivation related to their ambitions. Only a small number (6.4% or 4) of students disagree or strongly disagree. This shows that students consider English as an important skill in realizing their future because currently, English is opening up job opportunities. This aligns with Gardner's (1985) theory of instrumental motivation, which explains that learners are often motivated to learn a second language because of its perceived practical benefits, such as improving job prospects or educational opportunities.

Similar to item 1, Item A.2 reinforces this positive motivation. The statement "I feel that learning English is important for my future" was agreed by 93.5% or 58 students (50% agree and 43.5% strongly agree), and none strongly disagree. This shows that most students are aware of the role of English as a global language that can support their academic and professional success. Furthermore, these results also reflect the aims of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes meaningful learning relevant to students' real-life goals and contexts (Ni'mah et al., 2024).

In Item A.3, the motivation to continue learning despite facing challenges is also high. As many as 91.9% or 57 students respond positively (66.1% agreed and 25.8% strongly agreed), which show that their motivation is not easily giving up on difficulties. Only 8.1% stated that they were doubtful or lacked motivation. This shows that students have a strong determination in learning, especially in difficult subjects.

Based on the average data on the three items, 93.1% show high motivation in learning English for the future. With 60.8% of students agreeing and 32.3% strongly agreeing. This consistently high percentage show that the Merdeka curriculum has succeeded in encouraging students to learn English according to what they need in real life to achieve their future goals. Although the overall response was positive, there were a small number of students who still show disagreement. Although a small number of students still showed disagreement, this may relate to individual differences in self-efficacy or exposure to English learning opportunities. According to Liu (2021), students with lower confidence or limited exposure may require more emotional and instructional support to sustain motivation. Therefore, teachers need to provide continuous guidance and encouragement to ensure that all learners can benefit equally from the curriculum's flexible learning framework.

Enjoyment (Item A.4, A.5, and A.6)

The results of the questionnaire on student motivation (enjoyment) are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Students' English Learning Motivation (Enjoyment) in the Context of Merdeka Curriculum

Frequency counts and percentages					
Item	Statements (Enjoyment)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A.4	I enjoy the process of learning English.	-	2 (3.2%)	47 (75.8%)	13 (21%)
A.5	I enjoy learning English at school.	-	2 (3.2%)	42 (67.7%)	18 (29%)
A.6	I feel interested in the English learning materials.	-	5 (8.1%)	48 (77.4%)	9 (14.5%)
Average		0%	4.8%	73.7%	21.5%

In Table 2, 3 statements measure the level of student enjoyment in learning English. In general, the data show that many students enjoy the process, classroom atmosphere and English learning materials. The statement in item A.4 (I enjoy the process of learning English), received a very positive response from students. 96.8% (60 students) enjoyed the process of learning English. Only 3.2% (2 students) disagree, and none strongly disagree. This shows that current learning methods (such as the use of Quizizz) have succeeded in creating enjoyable learning.

In addition, Item A.5 also show the same results. There are 96.7% (or 60 students) who feel that learning English at school is fun. In this question, no one strongly disagree, and only 3.2% (or 2 students) disagree. This indicates that the learning environment at school supports a positive learning experience. This aligns with Jing and Wei (2023), who found that emotional

states such as enjoyment and comfort enhance students' willingness to participate and sustain their motivation in English learning. In Item A.6, students still showed positive statements. 91.9% state that they felt interested in the English learning materials, with 77.4% agreeing and 14.5% strongly agreeing. However, 8.1% of students disagree, which is higher than A.4 and A.5. This shows that although the majority of students are interested in the materials, some may feel less involved or less interested so that the learning materials can be improved to be more relevant and interesting for all students.

Based on the average data from the three items, 95.2% of students give a positive response, with 73.3% agreeing and 21.5% strongly agreeing. Meanwhile, only 4.8% of students disagree, and none strongly disagree. This shows that the majority of students feel they have a fun and interesting experience learning English with Merdeka curriculum. Consistent positive responses from students indicate that students enjoy the learning process and are interested in the materials and methods presented by the teacher in class. Nazim et al. (2023) showed that a student-focused pedagogical approach had a positive impact on EFL students' motivation, and students who engaged in this kind of pedagogy tended to have better attitudes towards their learning process. An effective learning environment also motivates students through enjoyment. However, more attention should be given to students who are less involved, by introducing more varied learning methods and accepting student reflection for material development. Therefore, learning can become more fun and effective.

Perception of the Curriculum and Teaching Method (Item A.7 and A.8)

The results of the questionnaire on student motivation (perception of the curriculum and teaching method) are shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Student Perception of the Curriculum and Teaching Method in the Context of Merdeka Curriculum

Frequency counts and percentages					
Item	Statements (perception of the curriculum and teaching method)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A.7	The curriculum I follow provides positive encouragement for my learning motivation.	-	4 (6.5%)	45 (72.6%)	13 (21%)
A.8	I feel satisfied with the English teaching methods used.	-	5 (8.1%)	45 (72.6%)	12 (19.4%)
Average		0%	7.3%	72.6%	20.2%

Table 3 presents data on students' perceptions of the curriculum and teaching methods in English classes under the Merdeka curriculum. Overall, the majority of students give positive responses, indicating satisfaction with the curriculum and teaching methods. The average result shows that 92.8% show a positive response, with 72.6% of students agreeing and 20.2% strongly agreeing on both statements (A.7 and A.8). On the other hand, only 7.3% of students disagree, and no students choose to strongly disagree on the statement. These

findings indicate that the Merdeka curriculum and learning methods are effective in increasing students' motivation and engagement in English learning in the classroom. In line with this, Zhang and Hu (2025) stated that teacher support significantly influences student engagement. This suggests that effective teaching strategies tailored to students' needs can increase their motivation. However, to achieve greater impact, there needs to be an improvement in the learning methods so that all student's needs can be met and can be ensured consistent engagement in learning English.

Satisfaction and achievement (Item A.9 and A.10)

The results of the questionnaire on student motivation (satisfaction and achievement) are shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Students' English Learning Motivation (Satisfaction and Achievement) in the Context of Merdeka Curriculum

Frequency counts and percentages					
Item	Statements (Satisfaction and achievement)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
A.9	I feel happy when I succeed in understanding English lessons.	-	1 (1.6%)	30 (48.4%)	31 (50%)
A.10	I feel proud when I can use English fluently.	-	3 (4.8%)	27 (43.5%)	32 (51.6%)
Average		0%	3.2%	46%	50.8%

Table 4 presents student' responses on satisfaction and achievement when learning English with the Merdeka curriculum. The data show that feelings of joy and pride play an important role in increasing students' motivation in learning English. Based on the average value of items A.9 and A.10, 96.8% of students give a positive response, with 46% of students agreeing and 50.8% strongly agreeing. In Table 4, no students state that they strongly disagreed and only 3.2% of students state that they disagreed. This shows that there is a significant relationship between emotional satisfaction and success in learning English. Dewaele et al. (2023) found that positive emotional experiences, such as feelings of joy and confidence, can significantly increase students' motivation to learn a foreign language. Their research shows that these positive emotions play a crucial role in increasing motivation and have a direct impact on student learning outcomes.

With feelings of happiness and pride that arise from themselves. These data support the idea that affective factors, such as satisfaction from achievement, are strong drivers of student motivation to continue learning. These factors ensure that student motivation to continue learning English in the context of the Merdeka curriculum continues to increase. When students can speak English fluently or understand the material being taught, they not only feel happy but also proud. Positive feelings like this help students stay enthusiastic and diligent in learning. Although not all students feel it, the results of the responses show that the Merdeka curriculum is effective in building motivation through successful learning experiences. Furthermore, the findings reinforce the idea that the Merdeka curriculum not only supports cognitive engagement but also nurtures students' emotional well-being and

confidence, which in turn sustain their motivation to learn English. This aligns with Rintaningrum et al.(2023), who found that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum strengthens students' enthusiasm and motivation in learning English through a more independent and meaningful learning approach.

Based on the data from Tables 1 to 4, it can be reported that students consistently show high learning motivation in various aspects, such as future and personal goals, enjoyment of learning, views on the curriculum and teaching methods, and a sense of satisfaction and achievement. Students agree that learning English is important for their future and remain enthusiastic about it despite many difficulties. They also feel happy learning English at school, are interested in the material, and are satisfied with the teaching method. Feelings such as happiness and pride when they succeed also make them more motivated. These findings indicate that the Merdeka curriculum not only supports students' cognitive engagement but also their feelings and enthusiasm in learning English, thus creating a positive learning experience and building self-confidence.

Student learning interest

10 Items in this questionnaire reflect students' learning interest in English using the Merdeka curriculum. To make it easier to understand the percentage results of students' responses, the questionnaire is divided into four themes: enjoyment and emotional interest in learning English, perceived relevance and personal value, engagement and participation, and teacher support and learning style alignment.

Enjoyment and emotional interest in learning English (Item B.1, B.2, and B.3)

The results of the questionnaire on student learning interest (enjoyment and emotional interest in learning English) are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Students' English Learning Interest (Enjoyment and Emotional Interest in Learning English) in Merdeka curriculum

Frequency counts and percentages					
Item	Statements (enjoyment and emotional interest in learning English)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
B.1	I enjoy doing English exercises, both individually and in group projects.	-	6 (9.7%)	45 (72.6%)	11 (17.7%)
B.2	I feel enthusiastic and excited to participate in English learning activities that are designed according to my needs and characteristics.	-	7 (11.3%)	43 (69.4%)	12 (19.4%)
B.3	I enjoy English lessons because I feel that the teacher who teaches in my class is fun and not boring when teaching in class.	-	2 (3.2%)	37 (59.7%)	23 (37.1%)
Average		0%	8.1%	67.2%	24.7%

Based on the data in Table 5, Item B.3 looks the most prominent among the other themes. 96.8% or 60 students give a positive response (59.7% agreed and 37.1% strongly agreed) to the statement that having an interesting and fun teacher makes them more interested in learning English. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that positive teacher-student interactions and motivating classroom environments significantly influence student engagement and academic achievement (Sahid, 2024). Item B.1 also received great support, with 90.3% or 56 students enjoying English practice both individually and in group projects (72.6% agreed and 17.7% strongly agree). This aligns with findings that suggest collaborative learning significantly boosts student interest and motivation (Cheng et al., 2022). When students participate in group projects, they experience a sense of community and shared responsibility, which can enhance their overall learning motivation. Likewise, 88.8% or 55 students gave a positive response to Item B.2, with 69.4% agreeing and 19.4% strongly agreeing. This illustrates that the majority of students enjoy English learning activities that are tailored to their needs.

Based on the average data in this theme, it can be concluded that students feel interested and happy learning English because they get interesting learning experiences that suit their needs. The average percentage result of students who agree with the statement is 67.2%, while 24.7% strongly agree, a total of 91.9% of students show a positive response in this category. On the other hand, only about 8.1% of students disagree, and none strongly disagree in giving a response. This states that the rejection of this theme is very low. Overall, these results confirm that an emotional learning environment (such as fun and relevant teaching methods) has a big role in helping students be more interested and enthusiastic in learning English.

Perceived relevance and personal value (Item B.4 and B.5)

The results of the questionnaire on student learning interest (perceived relevance and personal value) are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Students' English Learning Interest (Perceived Relevance and Personal Value) in Merdeka Curriculum

Frequency counts and percentages					
Item	Statements (Perceived relevance and personal value)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
B.4	I keep doing English assignments even though the questions are difficult because I want to develop according to my interests and abilities.	-	3 (4.8%)	33 (53.2%)	26 (41.9%)
B.5	Learning English will make my career easier in the future.	-	1 (1.6%)	35 (56.5%)	26 (41.9%)
Average		0%	3.2%	54.8%	41.9%

Table 6 highlights that students' interest in learning English arises because they are aware that it is important for their future careers and self-development. Item B.5 shows that almost all students 98.4% or 61 students believe that English will be useful for their future career, and only 1.6% or 1 student disagree. Research shows that English language proficiency is strongly linked to better job opportunities and career success. This underscores the importance of English language education in the school curriculum (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023; Irsyad et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Item B.4 also received a strong response, with 95.1% or 59 (53.2% agree and 41.9% strongly agree) students remaining enthusiastic about completing English assignments despite facing difficulties. Only a small portion (4.8%) disagree with this Item, and no students strongly disagreed.

The average percentage of students who agreed was 54.8%, while those who strongly agreed reached 41.9%, with a total of 96.7% of students indicating that they were interested in learning English, which would be useful for themselves in the future. Only 3.2% of students disagreed, and none strongly disagreed with the statement. These results show that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum has succeeded in linking English learning with students' ideals and self-development. The suitability of the subject matter and personal goals makes students more interested and motivated.

Engagement and participation (Item B.6, B.7 and B.8)

The results of the questionnaire on student learning interest (engagement and participation) are shown in Table 7.

Table 7

Students' English Learning Interest (Engagement and Participation) in Merdeka Curriculum

Frequency counts and percentages					
Item	Statements (Engagement and participation)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
B.6	I focus and concentrate on following English lessons.	-	6 (9.7%)	46 (74.2%)	10 (16.1%)
B.7	I listen and pay attention when the English teacher explains the material in front of the class.	1 (1.6%)	-	40 (64.5%)	21 (33.9%)
B.8	I actively participate in answering questions given by the teacher during English lessons.	1 (1.6%)	12 (19.4%)	42 (67.7%)	7 (11.3%)
Average		1.1%	9.7%	68.8%	20.4%

Based on Table 7, the data show the level of students' involvement and active participation in learning English. Item B.6 shows high involvement in students, the majority of students 90.3% (56 students), with 74.2% of students agreeing and 16.1% strongly agreeing. They focus and concentrate during English learning. This high percentage shows that a fun learning environment successfully supports students to always pay attention. Meanwhile, Item B.7 reveals that 98.4% (61 students) listen and pay attention to the teacher's explanation, with 64.5% agreeing and 33.9% strongly agreeing. This illustrates that students

have a sense of trust in the teacher and feel that the teaching method is clear and interesting. Research has shown that a good relationship between teachers and students, accompanied by the use of effective teaching strategies, can increase students' attention and learning motivation (Orfan, 2020; Xie, 2022).

However, Item B.8 shows a relatively lower level of active participation than the previous 2 items. 79% (49 students) gave a positive response (67.7% agreed and 11.3% strongly agreed) that they actively answered questions given by the teacher. Although the results are still positive, this item has the highest number of disagreements of 19.4% among the three. The percentage of strongly disagreeing is 1.6%. This indicates that students who pay good attention, do not all feel comfortable speaking during class discussions because they are embarrassed or lack confidence. Factors such as embarrassment or a lack of confidence in speaking can hinder participation; therefore, fostering an inclusive and supportive classroom environment is essential to encourage all students to participate without fear (Laoli, 2021; Wibowo et al., 2020).

As seen from the average result, 68.8% of students agree and 20.4% strongly agree with all Items. Almost most of the students (89.2%) showed activeness in class. Only 9.7% disagree and 1.1% strongly disagree. This finding shows that although the level of student participation is already high, it still needs the effort to encourage more students to dare to speak and get involved in the lesson without fear and create a more friendly learning atmosphere.

Teacher support and learning style alignment (Item B.9 and B.10)

The results of the questionnaire on student learning interests (teacher support and learning style alignment) are shown in Table 8.

Table 8

Students' English Learning Interest (Teacher Support and Learning Style Alignment) in Merdeka Curriculum

Frequency counts and percentages					
Item	Statements (Teacher support and learning style alignment)	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
B.9	I can understand English material well because the teacher's explanation is clear and adjusted to my learning style.	-	9 (14.5%)	43 (69.4%)	10 (16.1%)
B.10	I always try to complete the English assignments given, both in writing and through learning projects.	-	-	47 (75.8%)	15 (24.2%)
Average		0%	7.3%	72.6%	20.2%

Table 8 shows that teacher support and teaching methods that are in accordance with students' needs help increase their interest in learning English. Item B.10 shows the most positive response, with 100% of students agreeing (75.8%) and strongly agreeing (24.2%). They always try to complete English assignments, both written and projects. This result

shows that when students feel supported and the assignment is useful, they become more enthusiastic and consistent in learning. Research has shown that supportive learning environments significantly enhance student motivation and commitment to tasks (Lestari & Kamariah, 2023; Tambunan et al., 2024).

However, Item B.9 presented slightly lower results. As many as 85.5% (53 students) give a positive response, with 69.4% agreeing and 16.1% strongly agreeing with the statement that a good understanding of the material is supported by the teacher's explanation that is easy to understand and clear. There are 14.5% of students who disagree. This may be because they feel that they still have difficulties because their learning methods are different and have not been fully considered in class.

The average shows that 72.6% of students agree and 20.2% strongly agree so 92.8% of students show a positive perception of teacher support and teaching methods. Most students feel supported by their teachers and consider the teaching methods to suit their needs, so they are more interested and active in learning. Only 7.3% of students disagree, and none strongly disagree. These results indicate that it is important for teachers to try more varied teaching methods so that all students can learn and understand the material well. This is supported by findings that indicate enriching teaching practices, focusing on student-centered methodologies, can greatly bolster student motivation and comprehension (Hardianti & Murtafi'ah, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). Based on the data analysis of Tables 5 to 8, it can be concluded that students consistently show high interest in learning English in all four themes: enjoyment and emotional interest in learning English, perceived relevance and personal value, engagement and participation, and teacher support and learning style alignment.

The highest positive response was found in the theme of perceived relevance and personal value, with 96.7% of students realizing that English is important for their self-development and future careers. Enjoyment and emotional interest in learning English also received a positive response from students (91.9%), indicating that learning in a fun and student-centered way can greatly increase their interest. In terms of engagement and participation, 89.2% of students respond positively, although the slightly lower participation rate indicates the need to encourage more active class engagement. Finally, 92.8% of students acknowledge that clear teacher support and appropriate methods played an important role in their understanding and motivation. Overall, the findings highlight that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum has effectively fostered interest in learning English through a fun, meaningful, and student-centered approach.

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum has had a positive influence on students' motivation and interest in learning English at one of the state high schools in Mancak, Banten, Indonesia. Students show strong motivation, especially in terms of future goals, emotional involvement, and satisfaction with their learning achievements. This is evidenced by the majority of students who agree that learning English is important for their personal development and future careers. The student-centered curriculum approach, with an emphasis on varied and free learning, makes learning English more enjoyable and meaningful. However, the study also found areas for improvement,

especially in encouraging students to be more active participants in class. Some students were still hesitant to speak or answer questions during English lessons. This indicates the need for strategies that build students' confidence and reduce anxiety during classroom interactions. In addition, differences in students' learning styles indicate the importance of using a variety of teaching methods so that all students can be actively involved. Although the findings of this study are positive, there are some limitations that need to be considered. The use of self-administered questionnaires by students may introduce bias, and the results are only applicable to a specific group of students in one educational setting.

Based on these results, this study suggests that teachers need to continue to implement and even improve the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum by using strategies that are student-centered and tailored to their individual needs. Classroom activities that encourage students to express themselves, work together, and connect lessons to real life need to be emphasized more so that their interest and motivation are maintained. Schools are also advised to provide training to teachers so that they can try various teaching methods, especially those that can encourage students to be more active and dare to voice their opinions. In addition, creating a supportive classroom atmosphere and making students feel safe to be involved is very important so that learning outcomes can be maximized. Future research should add qualitative data such as interviews or classroom observations to better understand students' motivational and emotional responses. Examining the long-term development of students' interests and motivations, especially when supported by technology and flexible teaching in the Merdeka curriculum, could provide deeper insights.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to the participants and colleagues who contributed to this study. Additionally, we appreciate the reviewers for their valuable feedback and contributions in enhancing the quality of this work.

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