

# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is the introductory part of this study, which includes a discussion of background, problem identification, research limitations, research questions, objectives of the study, significance of the study, and definition of conceptual and operational key terms.

### **1.1 Research Background**

The Merdeka Curriculum, or Independent Curriculum, was implemented in 2022 under the direction of the Indonesian Ministry of Education. As it was implemented in 2022, the evaluation will be held in 2024 to determine education policies after the COVID-19 recovery (Madhakomala et al., 2022). This curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning and authentic learning coupled with implementing the Pancasila Student Profile 21<sup>st</sup> century learning in the learning process. Project-based learning, which in this thesis is shortened to PjBL, is the recommended method for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The curriculum mentioned was designed to provide Merdeka with independence in learning. Thus, teachers have the freedom to design learning according to student needs. In line, Nurani et al. (2022) emphasize that this curriculum has more straightforward and in-depth characteristics in the provision of material by the teacher. Teachers have the freedom to focus on essential material and develop student competencies. Therefore, the learning is more tailored to students' abilities and is not rushed. Moreover, this curriculum is implemented at all levels of Indonesian education; thus, schools gradually switched to this curriculum after the pandemic was over.

However, the ministry allows schools not ready to continue using the 2013 Curriculum (Anggelia et al., 2022).

The Merdeka Curriculum continues the 2013 curriculum, in which the previous curriculum emphasized character development (Zubaedi, 2020). It has been in effect for approximately nine years before the Merdeka Curriculum was finally inaugurated in 2022. This curriculum change is one of the considerations of the impact of learning loss caused by online learning due to COVID-19 (Lestaringrum et al., 2022; Muryanto, 2022). The end of the pandemic caused education to adapt to offline learning; thus, the Merdeka Curriculum became a solution to catch up on delays in the academic process. Further, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes formative assessments compared to summative assessments as it emphasizes the student learning process; thus, assessments are carried out throughout the lesson and emphasize feedback. The process is essential in PjBL, and teachers assess it throughout learning (Vasiliene-Vasiliauskiene et al., 2020). This curriculum emphasizes student-centered, 21<sup>st</sup>-century learning and personality-based Pancasila Student Profiles (Rizki & Fahkrunisa, 2022).

Moreover, this curriculum also emphasizes authentic learning, which emphasizes more flexible literacy and numeracy. Madhakomala et al. (2022) state that the Merdeka Curriculum prioritizes simpler learning material. At this point, teachers have more space to design the learning according to the student's needs. This curriculum gives students the broadest possible way to learn in a flexible way that is not bound by strict rules. In comparison, the previous curriculum required the teacher to succeed in achieving the specified competencies within a certain

period of time. Thus, it was a bit of a catch-up. Also, in Merdeka Curriculum, learners are required to be more innovative and meet the needs of students. As well as related to real word problems. This statement aligns with the needs of 21st-century learning, which emphasizes solving real and critical problems. This learning is also a development of society along with the use of technology (Syahputra, 2018; Rahayu et al., 2022). Mevlevi et al. (2022) mention the essential competency points that students must possess in the 21st century, including critical thinking in problem-solving, collaboration and leadership skills, adaptive skills, initiative, communication skills, information literacy, and curiosity. Thus, in Merdeka Curriculum learning, authentic learning is emphasized along with the implementation of 21st-century learning.

Concerning 21st-century learning, Arsanti et al. (2022) mention that 6C is a crucial component that students must have as an essential competency to compete in their future careers. This competency includes communication, ability to collaborate, creativity in work, critical thinking, computational thinking, and compassion skills (Arsanti et al., 2022; Artama et al., 2023; Inganah et al., 2023; Kembara et al., 2022; Shabrina & Astuti, 2022; Sunarti et al., 2023). In addition, it is also essential to emphasize the integration between 6C and technology as it is part of development in society (Mevlevi et al., 2022; Rahayu et al., 2022; Syahputra, 2018). Related to these demands, PjBL is one of the recommendations for learning methods to solve 6C skills as a demand in the 21st-century. Besides that, PjBL is also a learning recommendation to overcome learning loss, which is recommended in the Merdeka Curriculum (Martati, 2022). This point is also

supported by Rafik et al. (2022), who confirm that PjBL is suitable for meeting the demands of 21st-century learning, especially for emphasizing student creativity. Moreover, Artama et al. (2023) also support that PjBL is recommended to promote the skills needed for this century because it allows students to explore topics more independently, individually, and in groups. PjBL is a learning method that emphasizes process and indirectly trains students' responsibilities and other character values. To conclude, PjBL is recommended as a learning method for the Merdeka Curriculum because it can indirectly implement 6C.

In addition to 6C, PjBL provides good encouragement to support the Pancasila Student Profile which also emphasized in Merdeka Curriculum. Pancasila Student Profile consists of collaboration, faith in God, global diversity, creativity, critical thinking, independence. This point can be seen from previous studies that found that PjBL positively impacted collaborative skills (Ibrahim & Rashid, 2022; Rasyid & Khoirunnisa, 2021). The collaborative skills of the group that received PjBL treatment proved to be better than the group that received conventional learning methods. Further, in groups or individually, PjBL emphasizes student responsibility (Acar, 2013).

Besides being part of the Pancasila Student Profile, collaborative skill is also emphasized in 6C and the demands of 21st-century learning. In addition to collaborative skill, PjBL is also proven to provide an increase in critical thinking, creativity, and student independence in learning (Andini & Rusmini, 2022; Biazus & Mahtari, 2022; Kurnisar et al., 2023; Padmadewi et al., 2023; Putri & Hidayat, 2019; Winarno, 2023). Thus, training in these skills is obtained when students work on

projects where they tend to cooperate and communicate with each other (Mafruudloh & Fitriati, 2020). To conclude, PjBL supports the implementation of Pancasila Student Profile throughout the project implementation.

PjBL has the characteristic of using a project as the main concern. The project in question is gradual, occurring throughout the lesson. PjBL can use a combination of several ideas implemented into a project (Rafik et al., 2022). Thus, this method emphasizes the process and seriousness of students in going through it step by step before finally becoming a product. This method is considered more capable of engaging students than conventional learning methods, emphasizing teacher-centered (Artama et al., 2023; Mevlevi et al., 2022; Vasiliene-Vasiliauskiene et al., 2020). Further, Hamidah et al. (2020) add that projects in PjBL must be done at school, not at home. This project is carried out by students, accompanied by teachers, starting from planning, project execution, and evaluation. PjBL has the characteristic that students must produce a product, which will later be presented.

Further, PjBL is a suitable method for pursuing English learning. Several studies revealed the effectiveness of PjBL in increasing student motivation and learning achievement (Lazic et al., 2021; Mahasneh & Alwan, 2018; Meirawati & Kresnawati, 2023). Further, other studies conducted by Artini et al. (2018); Praba et al. (2018); Wardani et al. (2021) highlighted the improvement of students' speaking and writing skills through the implementation of PjBL. Students showed increasing motivation, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude in English PjBL learning. In line, PjBL also has an impact on better learning achievement. To conclude, PjBL was proven to support students' motivation and English skills.

PjBL is a learning method that was introduced previously, but on its implementation, teacher still have challenges. Previously, this educational method has been widely implemented by teachers in the classroom. Since the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented simultaneously, PjBL implementation has been intensified. However, in its implementation, it only sometimes runs smoothly. PjBL still has challenges in its implementation. In his research, Aldabbus (2018) found that teacher knowledge of PjBL is essential. Aldabbus emphasized that PjBL implementation problems occurred because teachers did not yet have in-depth knowledge about selecting the relevant units to be used in PjBL. In other words, teachers still need help designing PjBL learning. PjBL is considered as a big project and its implementation is complex for the teacher. In addition, a hectic and unsupportive learning schedule is also an obstacle to implementing PjBL for teachers. Thus, this case causes teachers to become less motivated to implement PjBL in learning. Aldabbus added that the cause of the constraints experienced by teachers was that the curriculum at that time had not been appropriately designed for PjBL, so teachers were not obligated to carry out PjBL implementation.

The teachers' limited knowledge about PjBL was also found by Cintang et al. (2018). Their research found that teachers still struggle to implement PjBL in class maximally. In addition, the diversity of student characters is also an obstacle in implementing PjBL. Thus, they emphasized that teachers had problems when students' characteristics varied. This case created a gap when students were in a group. Therefore, not all students can learn optimally during the implementation of the project. In addition, as this research was conducted in 2018, there was no

specific design in the curriculum for PjBL. Thus, they emphasized that teachers needed more work to determine schedules and manage time in implementing PjBL. In line with the related case, Rati and Rediani (2021) also found teacher constraints in PjBL implementation, highlighting that the teachers had difficulties designing PjBL. This case is in line with previous research that was caused by a need for an in-depth understanding of PjBL.

Moreover, Rati and Rediani confirmed that teachers admitted they struggled to plan activities in PjBL. Constraints experienced by teachers in designing PjBL include difficulties in determining overall activities and formats in PjBL, difficulties in selecting suitable materials and tools to be used for PjBL methods, defining types of projects and problems, difficulties in determining match material with PjBL, time allocation, and difficulty in determining the number of students in the group. Thus, this statement is supported by teachers' opinion that they stated they did not understand PjBL in depth. Appropriate and relevant teaching materials are keys to quality learning and education (Arsanti et al., 2022; Hardiana & Aisah, 2021). To conclude, preparation is quite time-consuming for teachers and teachers' lack of knowledge in designing learning projects is an obstacle for teachers in implementing PjBL.

In line with the previous studies, an initial interview was conducted with an English teacher at SMPN 4 Singaraja to determine the teacher's opinion regarding implementing PjBL in English language learning in the Merdeka Curriculum. Moreover, according to Merdeka Curriculum directions, the teacher implemented P5 as a project outside the subject in the class, in one semester students can carry

out 2-3 projects. Meanwhile, teachers only sometimes use projects specific to English subjects in learning. The project presented in P5 is general and is not tied to any one subject; in this case, the theme has been provided. Related to the implementation of the project, the teacher mentioned her unreadiness in PjBL because the Merdeka Curriculum has only been implemented since 2022; teachers still need to have a definite idea regarding the implementation of the project under the English materials.

Moreover, teacher mentioned that she placed more emphasis on discovery learning and have yet to implement PjBL, even though it is recommended in the curriculum. She felt she needed ideas for developing PjBL, especially when she needed clarification about implementing PjBL at the junior high school level. *“Projects are recommended to be implemented in the class. The Merdeka Curriculum frees up teachers to design learning, but this actually makes us more confused. We need more project activity references that can be used in class.”*

Further, the teacher expressed her doubts in implementing PjBL, especially for students who are still beginning to learn English. *“I'm confused about implementing projects for junior high school level, especially grade seven. Most students don't understand English, so I have difficulty designing suitable activities for them, the material in the book sometimes too difficult and do not emphasize the vocabulary exercise.”* She also added that in implementing PjBL, the teacher needs extra time, especially for project preparation before implementation. Thus, teacher's unpreparedness to determine project learning activities and preparation becomes a factor for teachers to consider when implementing classroom projects.



According to the explanation above, implementing the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes the Pancasila Student Profile also 21st-century learning, which encourages 6C. Thus, PjBL is a recommended learning method because it can facilitate these demands. Thus, even though this method is recommended and effective in learning, several previous studies have proven that teachers still had problems with PjBL in its implementation. One of the obstacles the teacher experienced was in the designing or planning stage, which is the initial stage of implementing PjBL. Teachers admitted that they need more in-depth knowledge, making it easier to design learning with PjBL. Thus, previous studies have tended to highlight teachers' obstacles in designing PjBL for the previous curriculum (2013 Curriculum).

Further, even though there are difficulties for teachers in the planning stage when implementing PjBL, there is a lack of evidence regarding research designing PjBL activities book for the Merdeka Curriculum. This curriculum was implemented in 2022. Thus, the recent implementation of this curriculum has resulted in little research highlighting the Merdeka Curriculum and PjBL. Therefore, as there is less evidence of research on designing PjBL in the recent curriculum, this study developed a research and development (RnD) study that focused on creating appropriate activities for the PjBL learning method under the Merdeka Curriculum. The activities designed for the curriculum are primarily directed at the English subject. Further, this study emphasizes 6C skills and the Pancasila Student Profile in the activities that were developed.

## 1.2 Research Problem Identification

COVID-19 has impacted the education sector, causing learning loss and obstructing the academic process. To overcome the learning loss, the Merdeka Curriculum was implemented with student-centered characteristics and simpler learning for the teacher to conduct in the class. Further, 21st-century learning, namely 6C and the Pancasila Student Profile, are also emphasized in this curriculum. The previous studies showed teachers needed help implementing PjBL, especially in stage planning. This stage is crucial for designing meaningful PjBL learning, as it can influence the quality of learning.

Further, the planning stage of PjBL seemed challenging for the teachers. Teachers mentioned that they had not been optimal in designing PjBL in learning and needed to understand its topics and activities in PjBL well. One reason is that teachers are still required to gain in-depth knowledge of PjBL. To support this, several studies have proven that the teachers felt the challenge in the planning stage of PjBL. The teachers argued that they still had problems determining the type of project and activities that should be used in PjBL learning.

Moreover, deciding on the materials, activities, and tools are confusing. In addition, the essential problem is also one of the considerations; they argued that it was challenging to determine the indispensable problem for starting PjBL. Thus, designing learning that suits the format and characteristics of PjBL, as well as teachers' difficulties in determining relevant steps and activities. In addition, determining the number of groups and the ideal time allocation is also a challenge for teachers in planning lessons with PjBL. Thus, it can be seen that the teachers do

not yet have maximum experience in the PjBL planning stage. This stage is the beginning and essential step to start PjBL. Moreover, teachers felt these challenges were likely due to a lack of in-depth knowledge of PjBL. Thus, developing a PjBL activities book that runs under the Merdeka Curriculum will assist the teachers in learning.

### **1.3 Research Limitation**

The focus of this study is to design project-based learning activities for teaching English conducted in a public junior high school. The limitation of the research involved a public school chosen as “*Sekolah Penggerak*” which has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. The focus of activities that will be developed is in English subject, which emphasizes the PjBL learning method as one of the recommendations in the recent curriculum. In developing the activities, the technique used is ADDIE by Kurt (2018). The activities developed are obtained from the syllabus. The issues developed focus on the first semester of the academic year. Thus, this study will focus on grade 7, especially at SMPN 4 Singaraja, which grade has implemented the Merdeka Curriculum. Since this study is a part of more extensive research, it will be carried out up to the Develop Stage of ADDIE, and the step for implementation and assessing its effectiveness will be conducted next year.

### **1.4 Research Question**

Based on the formulation above, there are three research questions in this study:

1. What are the specifications of PjBL activities needed for teaching English for grade 7 students at SMPN 4 Singaraja to support the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum?
2. How is the prototype of PjBL activities designed to support Merdeka Curriculum for teaching English at SMPN 4 Singaraja?
3. What is the quality of the developed prototype of PjBL activities for teaching English at SMPN 4 Singaraja?

### **1.5 Research Objectives**

There are three research objectives aimed in this research:

1. To describe the specifications of PjBL activities needed for teaching English for grade 7 students at SMPN 4 Singaraja to support the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum.
2. To describe the prototype of PjBL activities designed to support Merdeka Curriculum for teaching English at SMPN 4 Singaraja.
3. To analyze the quality of the developed prototype of PjBL activities for teaching English at SMPN 4 Singaraja.

### **1.6 Significances of the Study**

Two significances aimed in this study, especially theoretically and practically:

#### **1.6.1 Theoretically**

Theoretically, this study provides the implementation of developing a PjBL activities book for English language learning with the insertion of the Pancasila Student Profile and 6C under the Merdeka Curriculum. This study

also highlights the need for developing PjBL activities book for learning English under the Merdeka Curriculum.

### **1.6.2 Practically**

a. For teachers

This study provides a product for teachers in the form of activities from materials that are implemented with PjBL and adapted to the current curriculum (Merdeka Curriculum). Thus, that teachers have insight and products to use in class in learning English.

b. For the English Teacher Education Institution

This study provides insight regarding the development of PjBL products in learning English in the Merdeka Curriculum.

c. For the Government

The government may use this study as an insight into needs analysis and activities that can be developed in the Merdeka Curriculum, especially in the PjBL learning method. In addition, the government can use this study as an overview of policies towards the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum.

d. For Other Researchers

This study can be used by other researchers as an insight into the development of PjBL activities book in the Merdeka Curriculum. Further that in the future there can be more development research that could help teachers in developing PjBL activities in English in the Merdeka Curriculum.

## **1.7 Definition of Key Terms**

### **1.7.1 Conceptual Definition**

#### **a. Merdeka Curriculum**

Merdeka Curriculum is a developed version of of 2013 curriculum to anticipate the learning loss and decline in the academic process contained in the Ministerial Decree no 262/M/2022, the initial implementation emphasized in "*sekolah penggerak*" (Shadri et al., 2023). This curriculum emphasizes learning freedom, 21st-century learning, 6C, and the Pancasila Student Profile (Rosita, et al., 2022).

#### **b. Project-Based Learning**

PjBL is a learning that raises a project along the learning topic. Padmadewi et al. (2023) emphasize that PjBL begins with essential questions, provoking students to develop it into a project that provides inquiry experiences and challenges critical thinking, collaboration, communication, decision-making, and creativity.

#### **c. Activities Development**

According to Mota et al. (2014) designing learning activities means arranging the scenarios used throughout the lesson including the delivery of material, the learning methods (pedagogy), and technological involvement. Hamidah et al. (2020) state that in implementing PjBL activities there are eight steps taken including determining topic, pre-communicative activities, fundamental questions, designing plan, designing timeline, project execution, presentation, and evaluation.

## **1.7.2 Operational Definition**

### **a. Merdeka Curriculum**

Operationally, the Merdeka curriculum is the curriculum for handling learning loss, which in learning English provides students with the opportunity to have authentic and flexibility in learning, as well as emphasizing Pancasila Student Profile, 6C so that language learning is carried out contextually by emphasizing natural language learning.

### **b. Project-Based Learning**

Operationally, PjBL in English language learning provides inquiry experiences that begin with foundation questions and emphasize critical thinking, creativity, and communication skills. This method involves active collaboration between students and teachers in working on a project, giving students more opportunities to speak English.

### **c. Activities Development**

In the context of English learning, activities development is used to design the activities from the pre-activity to evaluation activity. In project learning, the activities in question are related to determining topics, pre-communicative activities, designing plans and timelines, project execution, presentation and evaluation.