

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Education in Indonesia post the COVID-19 pandemic has undergone a significant change, marked by the implementation of a new curriculum. The educational gap in Indonesia has also led to a learning crisis, exacerbated by learning loss due to the pandemic (Direktorat SMP, 2022). Learning loss defined as a deterioration in students' learning competences, knowledge and skills as a consequence of disturbance in the learning process, particularly because of protracted school closures and inadequate remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2021). UNESCO further noted that learning loss impacts students' academic performance, learning motivation and critical thinking skills, which still affect students' performance in the post-pandemic period. As a consequence, many students nowadays find it difficult to grasp concepts, participate effectively in classroom activities and attain the anticipated learning goals. As mentioned by Haryati (2022), during the COVID-19 outbreak, schools shifted to online learning, resulting in suboptimal learning durations compared to in-person classes. Distance learning (PJJ) received numerous complaints from parents and students due to the heavy workload assigned by teachers, leading to increased stress and boredom among students. In response to these issues, a "Joint Ministerial Decree" (*Surat Keputusan Bersama*) was issued, proposing a curriculum change to better suit the needs of students. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education and Culture

(Kemendikbudristek) implemented a new curriculum known as the Merdeka curriculum, simplifying the learning material by focusing on core/significant subjects and providing references for independent learning (Haryati, 2022).

According to Betthäuser et al. (2023) synthesized evidence from multiple countries that students consistently experienced lower academic achievement post Covid-19. The study concluded that the impact of learning loss remains evident several years after pandemic requires sustained education interventions for learning recovery. Many education systems continue to experience learning gaps after the pandemic. It is caused by the difference of learning readiness due to variations in learning opportunities, access to other learning resources, and home learning environment during school closure (Organisation for Economic Co-operation dan Development (OECD, 2023). It made the classroom have become increasingly heterogeneous which means that teachers require to implement differentiated instruction and adapt learning resources to accommodate the students' needs.

In addition, the statement from Jakubowski et al. (2024) conducted an analysis students in many countries and found that lots of students had not yet recovered to their expected academic performance. The study also emphasized that provide supporting learning resources that include instructional approaches based on students learning levels is an approach to recovery of the education, rather than assuming all students possess the same learning abilities and readiness in a classroom. As students returned to school with the diverse learning abilities, the teachers faced greater challenges in providing learning activities that can provide all the needs of the different learning abilities. Some

students require additional support to achieve the learning goals, while the others were ready for more advanced learning experiences where they can explore something independently. A single textbook cannot provide well and address the varying learning needs found within a classroom. That is the main reason the teachers need supplementary material to support the learning process.

Referring to Kusumawardi et al. (2022), curricula are essentially dynamic and flexible, developed to meet the needs and demands of an increasingly sophisticated era to enhance the quality of human resources that can compete in various aspects of life in the future. This is consistent with Sari et al. (2022), who reported that in 2021, Indonesia adopted a new curriculum known as the "Merdeka" curriculum, replacing the 2013 curriculum. Although implemented since 2021, the Merdeka curriculum will officially become the national curriculum in 2024, with Kemendikbudristek gradually socializing it to all schools in Indonesia. This allows schools and local education authorities to adapt the curriculum to their specific needs (Directorate of Junior High School, 2022).

The Merdeka curriculum is designed for schools ready to undergo significant changes in their teaching processes, while the emergency curriculum adapts the 2013 curriculum and can be used by schools not yet prepared for comprehensive changes (Haryati, 2022). Schools ready for significant changes are designated as pioneer schools (*sekolah penggerak*), serving as examples for others in adapting to the new curriculum (Kusumawardani, 2022). Schools implementing the Merdeka curriculum will

receive support from Kemendikbudristek in its implementation (Nugraha, 2022). Another approach used in the Merdeka curriculum's implementation, known as "high touch," involves educational units or local governments organizing seminars/workshops led by pioneer schools as speakers to disseminate knowledge, practice and insights to other schools related to the Merdeka curriculum.

21st century learning is focused on students-centered learning that can build critical thinking, creativity, teamwork, communication and problem-solving abilities in accordance with the goals of the Merdeka Curriculum. Therefore, it is advised for teacher to use creative learning methods, namely Problem Based Learning (PBL), Project Based Learning (PjBL), and Discovery Learning. These methods are said to be beneficial as they involve students in addressing real-life problems, doing projects and finding out concepts themselves. Moreover, the flexibility of the Merdeka Curriculum enables teachers to mix more than one learning technique based on the peculiarities of the students and the situation in the classroom. The combination of PBL, PjBL, and Discovery learning can provide meaningful learning experiences to enhance students' higher-order thinking skills and learning motivation.

The Merdeka curriculum has been implemented simultaneously since the new academic year in 2023, focusing particularly on 7th-grade students, many schools still face difficulties in its implementation. This is attributed to teachers' limited knowledge in developing teaching modules and assessments. The Merdeka curriculum empowers teachers to develop teaching modules, but

many are not accustomed to this, leading them to rely on textbooks or worksheets provided by schools. This monotonous use of general textbook materials affects the learning experience. Teachers need to develop additional teaching materials tailored to students' learning abilities, whether above or below average.

The use of supplementary materials is one of the learning aids that can facilitate the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum that provided students activities and project into several learning approaches. The supplementary materials are beneficial as they are specifically developed to promote 21st century learning, combining several learning approaches into a learning source, supplementary products develop unlike traditional text that tend to convey repetitive material, but provide contextual activities, project assignments, problem-solving activities, and discover new things that encourage active students participation. Furthermore, these products are flexible and customizable which is allowing teachers to combine two to three learning methods into single project according to students' abilities and class needs. As a result, supplementary products can help teachers build a more interactive, innovative, and meaningful learning environment. It means the combination of 21st century learning with supplementary product can be a feasible solution to the problem of the learning loss and can increase the quality of education in post-pandemic period.

As we know textbook is the primary learning sources used in schools that help teachers achieve curriculum objectives by providing learning material, activities and assessments. However, students in a classroom have

diverse learning abilities and interest which means the same textbook may not fully meet the need of every students, in this case for fast learners who required more challenging learning experiences. It is aligned with the statement by Tomlinson (2013), textbook cannot completely satisfy the needs of all learners because students differ in learning motivation, cognitive readiness, and learning progress. Textbooks provide a common foundation for learning instruction that generally designed for average students cannot properly address the need of the students, whether more slowly or quickly than their classmates.

Richards (2017) explains that textbook used as the main learning reasource, but should not be considered the only learning source. In this case, teachers are encouraged to adapt, modify, or create supplementary material based on students' characteristics and needs. Supplementary materials aim to enrich classroom instruction by providing learning activities that are more engaging and meaningful for students' abilities. According to Ziernwald et al. (2022) when classroom relies on the textbook only, fast learners may finish the assignment long before the rest of the class. It's caused fast learners may spend their time for waiting others on repeating or similar excercises that give bad impact to their learning motivation and engagement. The main fuction of the supplementary materials as enrichment resources by providing project-based tasks, inquiry activities, and opportunities for independent learning. It is not simply provide students with additional work, but also offer learning experiences that are more complex and meaningful activities based on students' learning abilities (Tomlinson, 2017).

Moreover, the Ministry of Education Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2022) encourages teachers to implement differentiated learning materials that can better accommodate students' learning needs. Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning and recognizes the difference of students' readiness level and interest. Thus, supplementary materials become an effective tool to support the students' needs and require greater learning achievement. This finding indicates that supplementary material can extend beyond the regular textbook as supporting learning source and provide more meaningful learning activities where they can improve their understanding, creativity, and independent learning as the benefit from enrichment activities (Ziernwald et al., 2022). The supplementary material is not aimed to replace the textbook as the main learning resource, but as supporting tools for students in heterogeneous classroom that cannot fully accommodate the diverse needs.

1.2 Problem Identification

Based on the background of the study explained above and the result of preliminary observation, there are some points of the problem faced after the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum that can be identified as follows:

1. The changes of the 2013 curriculum to Merdeka curriculum. This curriculum applied to all junior high school in Buleleng, especially for grade 7. This curriculum made teachers find problems about how to design the materials that relevant with real-life problems which contained appropriate learning strategies, such as problem-based learning, project-based learning and Discovery Learning.

2. There was a mismatch between the ATP and the textbooks used by teachers. Some materials designed based on the ATP for 7th grade occasionally appeared in the textbooks for 8th or 9th grade. It created challenges for teachers, considering that the Merdeka Curriculum contained CP for three years within Phase D which is for all grade in junior high school, and the CP is outlined in the ATP, which used by teachers for instructional activities.
3. The teachers used general textbook that applied to all of the students, although, there are differences of students' learning abilities which they need to distinguish material for students, especially for fast learners.
4. Students who have the ability to learn and understand the material faster than the others easily to feel bored in class and some might be troublemakers because they felt the materials were not challenging for them. Moreover, the fast learners who are not well-facilitated cannot maximize their potential.

1.3 Limitation of the Study

This research conducted with certain limitations, such as this research were developed supplementary material for fast learners of 7th grade students and the supplementary material for odd semester which developed based *Alur Tujuan Pembelajaran* (ATP) or learning objectives flow and *Capaian Pembelajaran* (CP) or learning achievement applied at SMP Negeri 6 Singaraja based on Merdeka curriculum.

1.4 Research Question

1. How was the supplementary material for fast learners in 7th grade developed?
2. How was the quality of English supplementary material for fast learners in 7th grade developed?

1.5 Research Objectives

The learning objectives of this research formulated as follows:

1. To develop supplementary material for fast learners in 7th grade for odd semester.
2. To evaluate the quality of the supplementary material that have been developed based on Merdeka curriculum.

1.6 Significance of the Study

This research is expected to give the benefits which can be classified into two, such as in theoretical and practical. Both of them are explained as follows:

1.6.1 Theoretical Significance

This research is expected to explore and expand the development of supplementary materials according to students' abilities, especially for fast learners which can be used as sources and references for further research in the future in developing Merdeka curriculum materials for another semester, other levels, or other grades.

1.6.2 Practical Significance

1. For students

This research is expected to be able to provide benefits for fast learners to enhance the quality of the learning process and minimize the negative impacts, for both, fast learners and other levels of students during the learning process.

2. For teachers

This research is expected to assist teachers in developing supplementary material that is in accordance with the fast learners' characteristics and needs so that learning materials are not only given in general considering that students' abilities are different.

3. For the other researchers

This research is expected to provide a reference for future research related to the development of supplementary materials for fast learners in 7th grade junior high school developed based on the Merdeka curriculum.

