



USING ENGLISH DIGITAL LEARNING MEDIA TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULUM MERDEKA

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Abstract

This research aims to find out the role of digital-based learning as a support for English language learning in the Merdeka Curriculum. This research is a type of qualitative research with a literature study approach. The research results show that digital media in elementary school-level English learning makes it easier and faster for teachers to present learning material so that it can be understood by students. Through digital learning media, teachers can hone their teaching skills. Learning that is provided in an innovative and fun way using digital media will be more easily accepted and absorbed by students.

Keywords: Digital Learning Media, Curriculum Merdeka

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is one of the important tools in the learning process which is prepared according to the needs of the field. Curriculum changes in Indonesia are a policy that is motivated by the needs of the world of education in facing current developments. Curriculum changes in Indonesia are a policy that is motivated by the needs of the world of education in facing current developments. Curriculum changes are carried out periodically at all levels of education, from elementary school, middle school, and high school, until university. The Merdeka Curriculum is the newest in Indonesia, which has been issued since the 2021/2022 academic year as a policy of the Minister of Education to improve the previous curriculum, namely the 2013 Curriculum. The implementation of this latest curriculum is carried out by deploying a Driving School Program. In the 2022/2023 academic year, the Government provides the opportunity and authority to all education units to implement the curriculum based on their respective readiness. The Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented in almost 2500 schools registered as driving schools, starting from Kindergarten-B, Elementary Schools and Special Schools class I and IV, Middle Schools and Extraordinary Middle



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Schools Class VII, High Schools and Middle Schools Upper Extraordinary and Class X Vocational High School (Pendidikan et al., 2022).

The curriculum is a guideline for holding teaching and learning activities at every level of education to improve the quality of education. In principle, teachers do not need to be troubled by changes to the curriculum, because educators or teachers are the curriculum itself, which means that an educator or teacher is required to understand and understand the curriculum well, then apply and practice the content in the curriculum well too.

The Merdeka Curriculum offers several benefits, including First, enhancing the Pancasila student profile using a project that develops students' soft skills and character. Second, Learning also concentrates on content that is deep, pertinent, and vital. Thirdly, instruction is adaptable, or customized to meet the needs of each student. In the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, schools and teachers are given the freedom to determine the curriculum and learning methods that suit students' needs and are adapted to students' stages of achievement and development. In the Merdeka curriculum for elementary schools, English is an optional subject, which is taught to improve students' communication skills in foreign languages. This is different from the previous curriculum where English subjects at the elementary school level were only local content subjects.

Students at the elementary school level are students who are in the Critical Period phase, namely the phase when children can learn quickly. (Oktavia et al., 2023) stated, the Critical Period is a very good phase for children to learn foreign languages or English, namely, aged around 2-13 years. The learning characteristics of children, teenagers, and adults are different, and children have moods that can easily change, so they learn according to their moods and desires (Oktavia et al., 2022).

English is a foreign language, so teaching English at the elementary school level is a challenge how to make the lesson interactive and fun, especially with the character and learning behavior of students at a young age, teachers must be able to play their role in conditioning the class and providing the best teaching method. (Pakpahan, 2024)

Even though English is a foreign language in Indonesia, currently, English is included in the Independent Curriculum structure, even though only an elective subject for two hours per week. Not including English as a mandatory subject in the elementary

school curriculum creates deeper linguistic divisions based on socioeconomic class. Learning English at a young age does not mean ignoring the national language. Through the experience of living in a society with linguistic diversity, Indonesians will get used to interacting fluidly and practicing multilingualism comfortably. In the additive paradigm, learning an additional language will strengthen initial language mastery.

English instruction at the elementary school level has to get special attention in the Indonesian education system if the country is to meet global challenges and seize opportunities. To prepare English as a subject that is required for primary schools, the Ministry of Education and Culture is creating the idea of English language education and devising plans for its implementation. Early English instruction will give pupils a solid foundation in the language and equip them to communicate successfully in a world that is becoming more interconnected. In addition, students will find it simpler to obtain the most recent information, which is primarily provided in English.

A study entitled *English Language Learning Problems in Elementary Schools*, written by Maili et al, shows that several problems occur in the process of learning English in elementary schools, one of the problems is the methods and models of English learning that are applied by teachers. The English learning methods and models usually presented by teachers are only textbooks and are less varied in that teachers only use one learning method and model. This makes the students not have the enthusiasm to receive English lessons, considering that elementary schools are students with an age range of children, so varied and interactive learning models and methods are needed so that the learning atmosphere becomes more enthusiastic and students become more motivated in English lessons. (Maili & Hestingsih, 2017)

There are many learning media that teachers can use for learning methods, however, the problem is that teachers have not optimized their use of learning media, especially digital learning media, due to the lack of technological skills (technology failure) among teachers at the elementary. This is a problem and challenge in the current era of globalization revolution 4.0.

Artificial intelligence is a revolutionary technology that enables computers to perform tasks typically carried out by humans (Permana & Putri, 2020). The potential of artificial intelligence to enhance the quality of education is immense. This technology can streamline the learning process by facilitating users to explore their abilities and

creativity, fostering independence in learning activities. Presently, there exists a wide array of educational products developed using artificial intelligence, including Canva, Google Classroom, Google Translate, ChatGPT, and numerous others.

Technological sophistication is no longer something new and has had many positive impacts on human activities. One of the positive impacts that we can feel in technological sophistication is the creation of digital-based learning media. Digital-based learning is a type of practical technology-based learning. This media utilizes technology effectively, being able to train skills, abilities, and accuracy in learning more interestingly. First, Google Classroom is a platform designed for classroom learning. This platform can be used by teachers and students. Second, Edmodo. Edmodo is an education network platform based on a Learning Management System (LMS) that will connect teachers' students and even parents to carry out online learning which can be accessed for free. Not only communicating, through this platform, teachers can carry out learning by sharing content in the form of text or video practice questions, up to homework (homework). Third, Socrative. Socrative is almost the same as Edmodo. The bright appearance makes students love Socrative. Teachers can also download the application on Google Play and the i-store. Fourth, Padlet. Padlet can be a place for students to develop their writing skills and the results of their activities can be saved and will become part of the skills assessment for students. Usually, some students are embarrassed to ask questions in class. Padlet then becomes a great tool for students who are embarrassed to ask questions directly. They just type into Padlet, and the teacher can read their questions and answer them directly. Fifth, Acapella Group. This application makes it very easy for English or other foreign language teachers to develop students' listening skills. The teacher types sentences and acapella will synthetically process these sentences into the sound we want. Sixth, Booktrack. This app is really fun. Students can improve their reading skills while listening to music. Assign students to read a book on a book track, they will read while listening to music that matches the book's storyline. We can also assign students to create stories in book tracks and design the music that they like. So apart from reading skills, this application can also be used for writing skills.

The use of digital media provides many benefits, one of which is that it allows students to learn more flexibly because they can learn anywhere and at any time at their

own pace. Digital Learning Media can be used in English lessons as an approach to practicing English language skills and fluency, especially for elementary school children. By using modern and interesting learning media, students will be more interested in learning and will find it easier to follow English lessons, especially to understand vocabulary, writing procedures, and pronunciation.

Cognitively young learners (aged 3-12 years) are ready to acquire language skills. A content-based experiential approach is a possible way to apply them to train their experience-based skills. In many cases, teachers of English for young learners at the elementary level (English for young learners) have limited time to achieve their teaching goals and fulfill certain texts, tests, or other materials. Moreover, low-resource environments can also pose challenges in providing English language lessons to young students. (Imaniah & Nargis, 2017)

The problem raised in this research is the role of digital learning media in English subjects at the elementary school level. This research aims to determine the role of digital-based learning as a support for English language learning in the Merdeka Curriculum.

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this research is a qualitative type with a library or literature study approach. Namely, research is carried out based on the collection of scientific papers, both published and unpublished (Waziana et al., 2022). Literature studies contain theories that are relevant to the research problems and objectives. Review the concepts and theories used based on available literature, especially articles in various scientific journals. This literature approach was chosen because its function is to build concepts or theories that become the basis for studies in research. After all the data has been collected, the next stage is analyzing the data and discussing it so that in the final stage a conclusion can be drawn.

The data collection method employed in this study involves the use of documentation. Specifically, it entails the process of gathering and examining various books and documents, such as scientific journals indexed on Google Scholar, both physical and digital libraries, and other pertinent data sources deemed suitable for study material.

Meanwhile, the data analysis technique used is content analysis, namely the technique of analyzing by understanding the text. This activity is carried out by reviewing reading sources that are related to the theme being discussed and using documents resulting from previous research as a comparison of data and sources of information. According to (Melfianora, 2019), careful analysis is needed in literature studies. Therefore, the first stage of carrying out this research is determining the theme. At this stage, the researcher made observations on more documents. At this stage, the topic of an interesting theme is the role of digital learning media for young learners in English subjects. The second stage formulates the problem and objectives of the research. This stage is the basis for why a topic needs to be tested. The next stage is the third, namely collecting data and determining the research methods that will be used. The fourth stage is analyzing and compiling the found data. And the final stage is concluding. This final stage is the answer to the research objectives at the conceptual/theoretical level

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Learning English at the elementary school level has an important role in shaping the character of students who can communicate across cultures and between nations, and play an active role as members of the world community. English is currently a basic need for all children in Indonesia, this is caused by 3 things, namely first, English as a communication need, second, English lessons that are in line with the curriculum, and third, equal distribution of learning quality. Apart from being a means of communication between nations, English is also a necessity for wider career opportunities in this era of globalization. The positive impact of using multilingualism in early childhood is greater than the negative impact. Multilingual children have better cognitive development performance than monolingual children. This is of course supported by teacher readiness, teaching methods, and the supporting learning media used (Pransiska, 2018).

Learning media serves as a deliberate tool employed by educators to facilitate students' comprehension of the subject matter covered in class. These resources encompass both tangible and intangible forms, enabling teachers to effectively communicate and engage with students to accomplish educational objectives (Nurfadhillah, 2021).

Digital learning media is a type of media developed by information system technology. By utilizing technology, learning activities will become more interesting, because the applications used for teaching display audio, visual, and animation effects that bring their color to the learning process. Especially in English subjects, which will be very useful for practicing students' vocabulary mastery and speaking skills.

A research article in the journal *Judika*, with the title *English in Primary Schools: Why it is Necessary and Why it is Questionable*. This research states that almost all English teachers want English subjects to be included in the curriculum so that the teaching of these subjects can be carried out more optimally rather than just being a MULOK subject. Foreign language or English lessons will be easy to teach to elementary school children because the age period of 6-13 years is a period of language development in children and children will easily accept new languages because of the process of separating the functions of the left brain and the right brain. So, it is very unfortunate if, during the child's growth and development period, the child's language skills are not developed. Even though at this time children's ability to absorb language is good, to teach English you still have to pay attention to appropriate, varied learning methods and models and the material taught must be appropriate to their age (Maili, 2018).

Learning by involving digital media is very flexible, this media allows students to learn anytime and anywhere. Examples of digital learning applications that are currently popular are Learning House, Our Table, Online Learning Media, Teacher's Room, Smart Class, Zenius, ICANDO, Your School, Kipin School, and many other digital learning applications. There are even some applications that provide free services or were created specifically by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Next is a study entitled "The Use of Smartphone Application for English Vocabulary Teaching Purposes for The Children of Elementary School Age at Klender East Jakarta". Suhendar stated that Smartphones are technological tools that support English language learning, including the use of various features that help develop interactive language skills. Various features in the Smartphone application can be used as English learning tools, such as for listening, speaking, reading skills, vocabulary mastery, and writing skills (Suhendar & Syakir, 2022). In his research, the author used the "Duolingo application" as an English learning medium. This application is a gamification application which means users can learn English by playing games because this

application uses audio-visual methods in learning. Apart from being free, this application has the advantage of having levels from really basic (intermediate) to fluent level.

The development of an English-illustrated dictionary for early childhood using the ADDIE model is a learning media development researched by (Arianti et al., 2021). This research produces an English-illustrated dictionary learning media application for early childhood which is expected to improve children's cognitive abilities early age, both the ability to see, listen, process information, and remember and repeat what is seen and heard. This learning media focuses on learning several English words in several categories, including the categories Animals, Fruit, Food, Means of Transportation, Family, Colors, Shapes, and Objects. Apart from that, this application also provides a Quiz menu to retest children's learning results.

Emma Martina in research entitled "Exploring Pre-Service Teachers' Perspectives on The Use of Digital Learning Media" stated that teachers have concerns about the practice of digital learning media, because there is a low understanding of the use of technology as a learning medium among pre-service teachers, so it must be held training (Emma, 2024).

Technological advances are not for us to avoid but we must face them by upgrading our abilities. As teachers of course we need to consider the effectiveness of using technology in the classroom. Using information technology-based learning media will improve students' learning skills and abilities, of course, the use of this media must be under teacher supervision. Therefore, a teacher needs to be proficient in using technology as a learning medium.

Furthermore, research, entitled "The Role of Technology in Supporting English Language Learning in Elementary Schools", by I Putu Andre, states that increasing students' motivation and interest in learning is one of the ultimate goals of technology-based English teaching. Using technology-based learning media can make students practically involved in language learning. Andre further stated that regarding technological developments, experts agreed and believed that in the future, the use of multimedia-based technology in teaching English would be further developed. Barring some problems in the area of multimedia technology it can be used effectively in the classroom with proper computer knowledge on the part of the teacher (Suhardiana, 2019).

The existence of restrictions on the use of technological media as learning media for elementary school students aims to control the use of technology so that it maintains its function and does not allow machines to take over the role of teachers as teachers and educators.

English lessons can officially be taught in elementary schools since the 1994 school year as a local content subject. However, in reality, several schools have programmed English language lessons for students who are in Study Groups and Kindergarten, or what is called Early Childhood Education. English lessons need to be implemented from an early age, because by learning English from an early age, it is easier for children to develop English when they reach adolescence, namely when the child enters elementary school, junior high school, or at a higher level, English is taught by the teacher. will be attached to the memory and difficult to forget (Jazuly, 2016).

Young learners start from PAUD (three years) to elementary school (12 years). Age differences are crucial for determining teaching methods, emphasizing language competence, and addressing cognitive skills (Ikhfi Imaniah, 2017). Hammer (2007) classifies three groups of learners keeping in mind the fact that each learner is unique and the list can only reflect generalizations. (Harmer, 2007)

Table 1. Classification of Student Groups

No	Young Learners	Adolescents	Adult
1.	They respond although they do not understand	Despite their success in language learning, they are seen as problematic students	They can engage with abstract thought /
2.	They learn from everything around them: they learn indirectly rather than directly.	They commit passionately when they are engaged	They have a whole range of (positive or negative) life and learning experiences
3.	They understand mostly when they see, hear, touch, and interact rather than from explanations.	Most of them start to understand the need for learning	They have expectations about the learning process and they have their own patterns of learning
4.	Abstract concepts are difficult to deal with.	Attention span is longer as a result of intellectual development	They are more disciplined than the other age groups and know how to struggle despite boredom
5.	They generally display a curiosity about the world and an enthusiasm for learning a language	They can talk about abstract issues to a certain point	Unlike other groups, they know why they are learning and what they want to have at the end
6.	They like talking about themselves and responding to learning that uses their lives as the main topic	They can use many different ways of studying and practicing language.	They sustain a level of motivation even for a distant goal, which is difficult for the other groups

7.	They love discovering things, making or drawing things, using their imagination, moving from one place to another, solving puzzles	They search for identity and self-esteem; thus, they need to feel good about themselves and valued.	They can be critical of teaching methods or they may feel uncomfortable with unfamiliar methods.
8.	They have a short attention span; they can easily get bored after 5 - 10 minutes	They need teacher and peer approval and are sensitive to criticism of their age group	Older ones worry that their intellectual powers diminish with age.
9.	Teachers should have a rich repertoire of activities to help young children receive information from a variety of sources and plan a range of activities for a given period	Teachers should link teaching to their everyday interests and experiences	They have a longer concentration span to continue an activity than the other groups
10.	Teachers should work with students individually or in groups		Teachers should consider their (positive or negative) learning experiences
11.	Teachers need to be aware of the students' interests to motivate them		
12.	The classroom should be colourful and bright with enough room for different activities.		

Adapted from: Harmer, J. (2007). *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th Ed.). Essex: Pearson Longman.

Based on the classification of student groups above, learning English using digital media has a huge influence on student learning activities, student communication skills, and learning in the classroom will become livelier because the presentation of the material is interesting and not monotonous. Learning media using digital technology will stimulate students' motor development because they will learn from high curiosity, learn and understand the material from what they see, namely interesting pictures, and learn from English audio that they hear directly via digital media. This is following the results of research by Denny Riska (2012) with the title *Development of English Learning Media for Grade 1 Students at State Elementary School 15 Sragen*, stating that computer technology can not only be used by adults but also by students who sit in Grade 1 elementary school is also worthy of being introduced to computer technology (Novitasari, 2012). The introduction of technology in children's education at an early age is very necessary because at that stage the teaching system will influence children's behavior and thinking patterns. A child's curiosity will arise if they discover something new and there is a tendency to want to try it, that's when a child needs proper guidance.

The use of digital media in English subjects allows students to be able to learn independently because the system facilitates learning, so that students can study for a

longer time, and can study anywhere and at any time that teachers at school will be greatly helped because after finishing class hours at school, students can repeat the lesson material at home or anywhere.

Decree of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Number 56/M/2022 Regarding guidelines for Curriculum Implementation in the Context of Learning Development & Learning Recovery (2022), Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Anwar Makarim formulated several new policies. Conceptually, this independent curriculum provides freedom for institutions and students to carry out their learning process. The current implementation of the Merdeka curriculum focuses on essential content so that students have enough time to explore material concepts and competencies. This is by the function of digital learning media which will help students to improve their competence with the help of technology.

The Merdeka Curriculum is a varied intracurricular learning curriculum and students are given more space to optimally explore their concepts and competencies (Muin et al., 2022). An independent curriculum that has the emergence of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project. In learning, students not only need knowledge in the form of material but also skills (Agustina et al., 2022). According to (Alimuddin, 2023), the Pancasila Student Profile in the Merdeka Curriculum has 6 dimensions, namely 1. Faith, Devotion to God Almighty, and Noble Morals, 2. Global Diversity, 3. Mutual Cooperation, 4. Independence, 5. Critical Reasoning, 6. Creative.

In line with the Government's commitment to developing every dimension of the Pancasila student profile which includes global diversity, strengthening English language education is a priority in the Merdeka Curriculum. In the view of modern learning, students and teachers are the subjects of learning. In this case, students are no longer considered as learning objects, and teachers are no longer considered as sources of information, but both collaborate in the teaching and learning interaction process in the classroom to achieve the set goals. Teaching English from an early age with careful planning will encourage strengthening the foundations of English. Based on research, teaching English at the elementary school level has great benefits, including building confidence in using English, and building global awareness, and intercultural competence.

Teachers have a very important role both in curriculum development and in its implementation. Learning designs that are no longer teacher-centered and utilize various learning media will motivate students to be active and trained to develop critical thinking skills (Heryahya et al., 2022).

Readiness is a guarantee of results in implementing curriculum planning, including learning that will be carried out in class (Wahyudi et al., 2023). Therefore, a teacher must prepare everything that will be done as well as possible. Likewise, in implementing the independent curriculum, a teacher must have good preparation so that the results are as expected. Apart from that, to achieve success in implementing good teaching and learning activities, teachers need to prepare systematic learning designs from the curriculum used in schools (Azizah & Witri, 2021). Indications of the low quality of learning in the classroom are influenced by the teacher's poor readiness (Wote & Sabarua, 2020). Therefore, teachers need to make efforts to prepare learning plans well so that the quality of learning as a basic principle in education is good.

CONCLUSION

The use of technology in learning activities needs to be sought by teachers according to the capabilities of each school so that educational goals can be achieved. The most important benefit of digital media is increasing student learning motivation. Motivation is the main impetus in the learning process. Without motivation, there are no learning activities. In the educational context, teachers give students the freedom to determine how they learn. Teachers must personalize learning methods and give students more opportunities to seek learning resources outside of school activities. Teachers can utilize this technology to create personalized English learning experiences for students, provide immediate feedback on students' English skills, and assist teachers with administrative tasks.

The role of digital media in English lessons at the elementary school level is to make it easier and faster for teachers to present learning material so that students can understand. With the help of digital learning media teachers can easily convey material. Learning material will be easy for students to remember and easy to express again. Students can review lesson material anywhere and at any time after school. This digital learning media makes learning more interesting and allows students to be more involved

in the learning process. Apart from that, digital learning media can also help students acquire the technological skills needed for the future. By using digital learning media, teachers can hone their teaching skills so that the methods used in class are not boring. Lessons that are given in an innovative and fun way using digital media will be more easily accepted and absorbed by students.

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