

## A Comparative Study of Students Motivation in Learning English with Curriculum 2013 and Merdeka Curriculum

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### Abstract

*This study investigates the impact of curriculum design on student motivation in learning English, comparing the Merdeka Curriculum and Curriculum 2013 at SMAN 4 Raja Ampat. A total of 80 students participated, with 40 first-grade students taught under the Merdeka Curriculum and 40 second-grade students taught under Curriculum 2013, selected through random sampling. Motivation levels were assessed using a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire measuring intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test to determine significant differences between the two groups. The findings revealed that students in the Merdeka Curriculum group demonstrated significantly higher motivation levels (Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.40) compared to those in the Curriculum 2013 group (Mean = 3.80, SD = 0.50). A statistically significant difference was observed ( $t = 3.36, p = 0.001$ ), highlighting the Merdeka Curriculum's effectiveness in fostering student motivation through its flexibility and contextual relevance. Additionally, 62.5% of students in the Merdeka Curriculum group exhibited high motivation, compared to only 30% in the Curriculum 2013 group. These results underscore the importance of adopting student-centered and adaptive curricula, particularly in remote and diverse educational settings. The study recommends professional development for teachers to maximize the potential of flexible curricula and further research on their long-term academic impacts.*

**Keywords:** Merdeka Curriculum; Curriculum Comparison; Students Motivation

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### Introduction

Motivation is a fundamental factor in the success of learning a second language, particularly English, which plays a critical role in global communication. In Indonesia, the effectiveness of English education often depends on students' motivation, which is significantly influenced by the curriculum implemented in schools. While extensive research has explored motivation in language learning, there is a noticeable lack of comparative studies examining how different curricula, particularly the Merdeka Curriculum and Curriculum 2013, influence student motivation in remote and resource-limited areas. This study addresses this gap by investigating the impact of these two curricula on students' motivation at SMAN 4 Raja Ampat.

Curriculum 2013, implemented nationwide for nearly a decade, emphasizes competency-based learning with structured lesson plans, standardized assessments, and specific learning outcomes. Although this curriculum has successfully ensured consistency across schools, it has faced criticism for its rigidity, leaving limited room for creativity and adaptability to individual student needs (Santoso & Setiawan, 2022). On the other hand, the recently introduced Merdeka Curriculum seeks to address these shortcomings by promoting flexibility, autonomy, and a student-centered approach. It encourages teachers to tailor lessons to students' interests and local contexts, fostering a more dynamic and personalized learning environment (Simatupang & Siregar, 2023).

The relationship between curriculum design and student motivation is crucial, as effective curricula can significantly enhance intrinsic motivation (personal interest and enjoyment) and extrinsic motivation (influenced by rewards or practical benefits). The

Merdeka Curriculum embeds motivation within its framework by emphasizing independence, creativity, and contextual relevance. For instance, lessons adapted to local issues or cultural practices are likely to resonate more with students in remote areas like Raja Ampat, potentially increasing their interest in learning English (Rahman & Nurdiana, 2022). In contrast, Curriculum 2013's rigid and standardized approach may hinder its ability to address the specific motivational needs of students in unique settings (Puspita & Surya, 2021).

SMAN 4 Raja Ampat, situated in the culturally rich and geographically isolated region of Raja Ampat, presents an ideal case study for exploring the relationship between curriculum design and motivation. Limited resources, restricted exposure to English, and geographical challenges exacerbate the need for innovative and effective educational strategies. In this context, evaluating how the Merdeka Curriculum and Curriculum 2013 address motivational factors provides valuable insights into their suitability for similar remote environments.

Recent studies have highlighted the motivational benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum, noting its potential to improve student engagement by granting teachers greater freedom to innovate and adapt lessons (Simatupang & Siregar, 2023). However, its flexibility also presents challenges, such as inconsistent implementation and varying levels of teacher preparedness. Conversely, while Curriculum 2013 ensures clarity and uniformity, its top-down approach may disengage students by failing to align with their individual learning preferences (Santoso & Setiawan, 2022). This study contributes to this discourse by examining how these curricula influence the motivational dimensions of students at SMAN 4 Raja Ampat.

Understanding the connection between curriculum design and student motivation is essential, as motivated students are more likely to persevere in learning and achieve better outcomes in acquiring English proficiency (Gardner, 2021). By comparing the effects of the Merdeka Curriculum and Curriculum 2013 on students' interest in English, perceived relevance of lessons, and teacher-student interactions, this research aims to identify key motivational drivers and barriers. The findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for improving curriculum strategies in remote areas where effective language education is critical. This study seeks to fill the gap in research on the comparative effects of Curriculum 2013 and the Merdeka Curriculum on student motivation in remote regions. By focusing on SMAN 4 Raja Ampat, this research aims to offer valuable insights for educators and policymakers, ultimately contributing to the development of curricula that enhance motivation and learning outcomes in diverse and challenging educational contexts.

## **Literature Review**

### *Motivation in Language Learning*

Motivation is widely recognized as a critical factor in language learning, influencing the effort students invest, their persistence in overcoming challenges, and ultimately, their success in acquiring a second language. Contemporary studies have categorized motivation into two main types: intrinsic motivation, which arises from internal satisfaction and interest, and extrinsic motivation, which is driven by external rewards or practical outcomes (Gardner, 2021). Research indicates that intrinsically motivated students tend to perform better because they are genuinely interested in the learning process, while extrinsic motivation is often linked to achieving specific goals, such as passing exams or securing career opportunities (Rahman & Nurdiana, 2022). In the context of English learning,

maintaining a balance between these types of motivation is essential to sustain long-term engagement and proficiency.

#### *Curriculum 2013 (Kurikulum 2013)*

Curriculum 2013, implemented as part of Indonesia's national education strategy, emphasizes competency-based learning with a focus on standardized assessments and measurable outcomes. It aims to develop students' knowledge, skills, and character in an integrated manner (Kemdikbud RI, 2022). Studies on this curriculum have shown that its structured approach ensures consistency and clarity in teaching objectives (Kusumaningrum & Raharjo, 2023). However, critics argue that its rigid framework may limit creativity and adaptability, particularly in addressing diverse student needs. For instance, teachers in remote or under-resourced areas may find it challenging to implement the prescribed methods due to limited flexibility. Research has also indicated that students often perceive the lessons as exam-oriented, which can reduce intrinsic motivation and engagement in subjects like English (Santoso & Setiawan, 2022).

#### *Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka)*

The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced more recently, represents a shift towards greater flexibility and student-centered learning. It emphasizes contextual and experiential learning, allowing teachers to adapt the curriculum to their students' interests, cultural backgrounds, and local challenges. Initial studies suggest that the Merdeka Curriculum fosters higher levels of intrinsic motivation by making lessons more relevant and engaging (Simatupang & Siregar, 2023). For example, incorporating local culture or current events into English lessons has been shown to resonate with students, increasing their interest in the subject. However, some educators have expressed concerns about inconsistencies in implementation, as the success of this curriculum heavily depends on teacher readiness and creativity (Azizah & Wijaya, 2022).

#### *Comparative Studies on Curricula and Motivation*

Comparative research on the effects of different curricula on student motivation highlights the strengths and limitations of structured versus flexible frameworks. Structured curricula, like Curriculum 2013, are often praised for providing clear guidelines and standardized assessments, which can be particularly beneficial in urban or resource-rich settings. However, these benefits may not translate well to remote areas, where students' needs and contexts vary significantly (Santoso & Setiawan, 2022). Flexible curricula, like the Merdeka Curriculum, have shown promise in addressing these issues by allowing teachers to customize lessons. Studies in similar educational settings have demonstrated that student motivation improves when lessons are tailored to their interests and experiences, particularly in marginalized or rural communities (Puspita & Surya, 2021).

#### *The Role of Teachers in Shaping Motivation*

Regardless of the curriculum, teachers play a pivotal role in shaping students' motivation. Research highlights the importance of teacher creativity, adaptability, and engagement in creating a positive learning environment (Gardner, 2021). In the Merdeka Curriculum, teachers are given more freedom to design lessons that align with their students' preferences and local contexts (Simatupang & Siregar, 2023). Conversely, in Curriculum 2013, teachers often adhere to standardized lesson plans, which may limit their ability to innovate. This difference underscores the need for professional development programs that equip teachers with the skills to balance curriculum requirements with motivational strategies (Azizah & Wijaya, 2022).

## Methodology

This study employs a comparative research design to analyze the motivation levels of first-grade students taught using the Merdeka Curriculum and second-grade students taught using Curriculum 2013 at SMAN 4 Raja Ampat. A total of 80 students participated in the study, with 40 students randomly selected from each grade level to ensure a balanced representation of both curricula. Random sampling was conducted by assigning each student a number and using a random number generator to select participants. This approach minimizes bias and ensures that the sample reflects the diversity within the student population.

The research instrument used is a motivation questionnaire designed to measure both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The 20-item questionnaire employs a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Intrinsic motivation is measured through items related to personal interest and enjoyment in learning English, such as "I enjoy learning English because it is fun." Extrinsic motivation is assessed through items focusing on external rewards or practical benefits, such as "Learning English is important for passing exams." The questionnaire was adapted from validated tools in prior research and pre-tested with a small group of students to ensure clarity, relevance, and reliability.

Data collection occurred during school hours in a controlled environment to maintain uniform conditions and minimize external distractions. The responses were analyzed using SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize motivation levels for each group. An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in motivation levels between the two groups. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained to protect their identities and responses. These ethical measures ensure the integrity of the research process and respect for participants' rights.

## Result

This study investigated the differences in student motivation between first-grade students taught using the Merdeka Curriculum and second-grade students taught using Curriculum 2013 at SMAN 4 Raja Ampat. Motivation levels were measured using a 20-item Likert-scale questionnaire, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and an independent samples t-test. The results provide insights into how curriculum design impacts intrinsic and extrinsic motivation among students in a remote educational context.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

The analysis revealed a notable difference in the motivation levels of the two groups. First-grade students taught using the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrated higher average motivation scores (Mean = 4.20, SD = 0.40) compared to second-grade students taught using Curriculum 2013 (Mean = 3.80, SD = 0.50). This difference reflects the positive impact of the Merdeka Curriculum's flexible and student-centered approach on engagement and motivation.

### *Motivation Categories*

To further understand the distribution of motivation levels, students were categorized into "High Motivation" and "Low Motivation" based on a threshold score of 4.0. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Motivation Level**

Grade Level	High Motivation (%)	Low Motivation (%)
Merdeka Curriculum	62.5	37.5
Curriculum 2013	30	70

The data indicate that 62.5% of students taught under the Merdeka Curriculum exhibited high motivation, compared to only 30% of students under Curriculum 2013. Conversely, 70% of students in the Curriculum 2013 group were categorized as having low motivation, compared to 37.5% in the Merdeka Curriculum group. These findings highlight the significant motivational advantage provided by the Merdeka Curriculum.

### *Inferential Statistics*

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether the observed differences in motivation scores were statistically significant. The results are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. T-test**

t-statistic	p-value
3.36	0.001

The t-test results confirm a statistically significant difference in motivation levels between the two groups ( $t = 3.36, p < 0.05$ ). The p-value of 0.001 indicates that the Merdeka Curriculum is associated with significantly higher motivation levels compared to Curriculum 2013.

The findings of this study strongly align with the research objectives, which sought to compare the motivational impacts of the Merdeka Curriculum and Curriculum 2013 on students in a remote context. The higher mean motivation score and greater percentage of highly motivated students in the Merdeka Curriculum group reflect the curriculum's success in fostering both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. This supports the study's goal of demonstrating how the flexibility and contextual adaptability of the Merdeka Curriculum address the specific needs of students in Raja Ampat.

Furthermore, the results provide evidence that the Merdeka Curriculum not only engages students more effectively but also aligns with contemporary theories of motivation, which emphasize the importance of autonomy, relevance, and active participation in learning. By contrast, the Curriculum 2013 group's lower motivation scores highlight the challenges of a rigid and uniform approach, suggesting that it may not adequately address the diverse motivational drivers required in remote and culturally distinct regions.

These findings emphasize the critical role of curriculum design in shaping student motivation, as the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates a stronger capacity to integrate students' cultural and contextual realities into the learning process. The results directly respond to the study's objective of identifying motivational barriers and drivers, underscoring the importance of student-centered approaches in enhancing learning outcomes. Additionally, the statistical significance of the findings reinforces the reliability of the observed differences, offering concrete evidence for policymakers and educators to prioritize curricula that adapt to local contexts. In short, the results provide a clear answer to the study's research question: the Merdeka Curriculum is more effective in fostering motivation among students, particularly in remote areas like Raja Ampat. This insight has important implications for future curriculum development and educational strategies aimed at improving student engagement and motivation in similar settings.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study reveal significant differences in student motivation between students taught using the Merdeka Curriculum and those taught using Curriculum 2013. First-grade students under the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrated higher motivation levels, as evidenced by their higher mean scores (4.20) compared to second-grade students under Curriculum 2013 (3.80). This finding underscores the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in fostering both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, likely due to its flexibility, contextual relevance, and emphasis on student-centred learning.

The Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers to adapt lessons to students' interests, cultural backgrounds, and real-world applications, aligning with contemporary educational theories that prioritize personalized and meaningful learning experiences. This adaptability is especially significant in a culturally rich region like Raja Ampat, where local traditions and environmental themes can be integrated into lessons to resonate with students' lived experiences. For instance, English lessons incorporating discussions about marine biodiversity or local cultural practices may not only enhance students' engagement but also instill a sense of relevance and pride in their heritage. This aligns with findings by Simatupang and Siregar (2023), who observed that incorporating local and cultural contexts into teaching significantly enhances student motivation. Conversely, the rigidity of Curriculum 2013, with its standardized assessments and predetermined content, limits opportunities for contextualization, which may explain the lower motivation levels observed in the second-grade students.

These findings also align with motivational theories that emphasize the importance of autonomy and relevance in learning. By fostering intrinsic motivation, the Merdeka Curriculum empowers students to take greater ownership of their learning. Rahman and Nurdiana (2022) similarly highlighted that contextually relevant teaching strategies significantly improve intrinsic motivation, particularly in rural areas where resources and external stimuli are limited. The inclusion of cultural and environmental themes in lessons not only addresses students' immediate interests but also promotes long-term engagement with learning.

The statistically significant difference in motivation levels ( $t = 3.36$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) underscores the importance of curriculum design in shaping educational outcomes. While both curricula aim to enhance student learning, the Merdeka Curriculum appears better suited to address the diverse needs of students in remote and culturally distinct settings like SMAN 4 Raja Ampat. Gardner's (2021) framework on motivation supports this finding, emphasizing that learners are more motivated when they perceive the content as meaningful and connected to their real-life contexts.

Another critical insight from this study is the role of teacher training and preparedness in maximizing the potential of the Merdeka Curriculum. While this curriculum provides teachers with greater flexibility, its success relies on their ability to design and deliver lessons that balance autonomy with structured learning objectives. As Puspita and Surya (2021) noted, student-centered approaches are most effective when implemented by teachers who are well-equipped to create engaging and relevant learning experiences. To achieve this, professional development programs, as suggested by Azizah and Wijaya (2022), are essential for equipping teachers with the skills needed to navigate the demands of a flexible curriculum, particularly in under-resourced settings.

The findings also have significant implications for policymakers. The success of the Merdeka Curriculum in fostering higher motivation suggests that curriculum development efforts should prioritize flexibility, cultural adaptability, and relevance to local contexts. Policymakers should consider expanding the use of the Merdeka Curriculum to other

remote areas while providing targeted support for teacher training and resource allocation. By doing so, they can create a more inclusive and effective education system that addresses the unique challenges of remote regions like Raja Ampat.

In conclusion, the findings of this study emphasize the critical role of curriculum design in fostering student motivation. The Merdeka Curriculum demonstrates significant advantages over Curriculum 2013, particularly in promoting intrinsic motivation and engagement through its adaptability to cultural and contextual realities. These results underscore the importance of designing curricula that align with students' lived experiences, making learning both meaningful and enjoyable. Future research could explore the long-term academic impacts of these curricula and examine strategies for scaling the Merdeka Curriculum to other remote and culturally diverse settings.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the significant impact of curriculum design on student motivation in learning English, particularly in a remote and culturally diverse context like SMAN 4 Raja Ampat. The findings reveal that first-grade students taught under the Merdeka Curriculum demonstrated significantly higher motivation levels compared to second-grade students taught under Curriculum 2013. With a mean score of 4.20, students in the Merdeka Curriculum group exhibited greater intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, while those in the Curriculum 2013 group, with a mean score of 3.80, faced challenges in sustaining engagement. The statistically significant difference ( $t = 3.36$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) underscores the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum in fostering student-centered learning and creating meaningful, contextualized educational experiences. These findings emphasize the importance of flexibility and relevance in curriculum design. The Merdeka Curriculum's ability to adapt lessons to students' interests, cultural backgrounds, and real-world applications not only enhances motivation but also aligns with contemporary pedagogical approaches that prioritize active and personalized learning. Conversely, the rigid structure of Curriculum 2013, while beneficial for standardization, may limit creativity and fail to meet the diverse needs of students in remote areas.

To apply these findings in teaching practices, educators should consider incorporating local cultural elements and real-world issues into English lessons to make learning more meaningful and engaging for students. Fostering autonomy by involving students in lesson planning or choosing activities aligned with their interests can also enhance engagement. Interactive and flexible teaching methods, such as project-based learning or role-playing, should be prioritized to encourage creativity and active participation. Additionally, teachers need regular professional development programs to strengthen their ability to design and implement contextually relevant and flexible lesson plans. For policymakers, these results underline the need to prioritize curricula that empower teachers with the tools and training to tailor education to students' needs. Investments in teacher training and resources are essential to ensure successful implementation of adaptive learning approaches.

While this study highlights the immediate motivational benefits of the Merdeka Curriculum, future research should investigate its long-term effects on students' academic performance, language proficiency, and lifelong learning outcomes. Comparative studies in other remote or under-resourced areas would provide a broader understanding of the scalability and adaptability of the Merdeka Curriculum. Additionally, exploring the role of teacher preparedness and support mechanisms in implementing flexible curricula will be crucial for ensuring their effectiveness in diverse educational contexts. By focusing on motivation as a cornerstone of effective learning, this study provides a foundation for future innovations in curriculum design and teacher training. Aligning curricula with students'

cultural and contextual realities can foster a more inclusive and engaging educational system, equipping students for success in both academic and personal spheres.

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