

**CONCEPTUAL STUDY: SOLE TEACHING STRATEGY FOR
ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN THE
“MERDEKA BELAJAR” CONCEPT FOR HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS**

*(A Library Research Approach to understand the concept of SOLE and its
compatibility in the Merdeka Belajar Concept)*

A FINAL PROJECT

**Presented as a Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements to Obtain the *Sarjana*
Pendidikan Degree in English Language Education**



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APPROVAL

A Sarjana Pendidikan Final Project on

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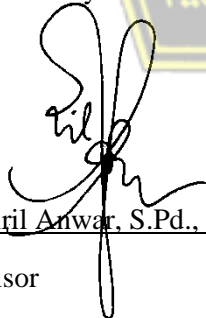
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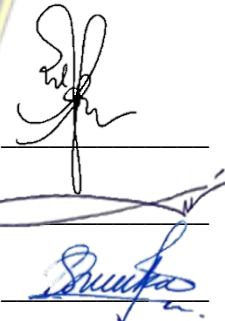
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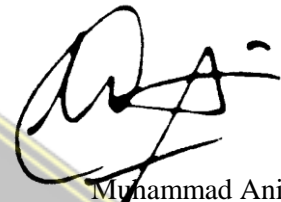


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I hereby declare that undergraduate final project I wrote does not contain the works or part of the works of other people except those were cited in the quotation and the references as a scientific paper should. If my statement is not valid in the future, I absolutely agree to accept an academic sanction in the form of revocation of my paper and my degree obtained from that paper.

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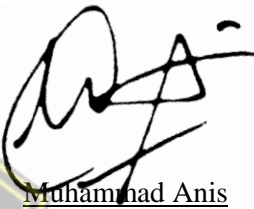
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Muhammad Anis

MOTTO

"Indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my living and my dying are for Allah,
Lord of the worlds."

– Q.S. Al-An'am: 162 –

"For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. So
when you have finished [your duties], then stand up [for worship]. And to your
Lord direct [your] longing."

– Q.S. Al-Inshirah: 5-8 –

*"Pertanyaan 'apa cita-citamu?' sering kita ajukan ke anak, tetapi kita lupa saat
gurunya tidak punya cita-cita, bagaimana anak bisa meraih bintang nan jauh di
sana?"*

– Najelaa Shihab –

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but
those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn."

– Alvin Toffler (Toffler, 1970) –

UNISSULA

جامعة نيسابور الإسلامية

DEDICATION

This final project is dedicated to all of my beloved people which has supported
and motivated me in completing this final project and for those who are involved
in creating me into who I am right now.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Chapter I presents the introduction of the study which consists of the Background of the Study, Reasons for Choosing the Topic, Objective of the study, The Significance of the Study, the Definition of Key Terms, the Limitation of the Study, and the Organization of the Research Report.

1.1 Background of the Study

The problem with today's education system is that it has already been standardized, rigid, and it has not been effectively in preparing individuals for the competencies of the future nor the current status quo. Big companies such as Cisco, Intel and Microsoft are concerned with the graduates that are entering the workforce with the skills that did not prepare them for employment in the digital age (Patrick Griffin & Care, 2015). Moreover, modern artificial intelligence has become extremely sophisticated that it has already automated the manufacturing industry and now it is slowly taking over the services industry (Autor & Salomons, 2018; Bartodziej, 2017; Frey & Osborne, 2013). It is a matter of time where labor work or even services could be replaced by algorithms. In addition to that, Andrew Wycoff (the director of OECD's directorate for science, technology and innovation) and Karine Perset (Economist in OECD's digital economy policy division) has stated in a report from the Pew Research Center (2018) that in less than twelve years from now, disruptions are happening in every sectors of all major industries due to automation. To be able to constantly develop and evolve the way we perform will help anticipate the problems and disruptions that will arise in the future. Therefore,

identifying the skills of the future is pertinent for people to sustain in the present and the future. Researchers defined the skills for the future as the 21st Century Skills. These skills comprises of the life and career skills; information, media and technology skills; and the learning and innovation skills. These skills are defined, identified and formulated from a collective result of surveys conducted by various organizations in companies and institutions to find out the demand of skills that are needed for the future (Dede, 2009; Patrick Griffin, Care, & McGaw, 2012; Larson & Miller, 2011; Rotherham & Willingham, 2010; Silva, 2009).

From the explanation above, the mismatch between the work and life condition with the education taught in schools are not relevant to this time and thus it is costing the efficiency of time and energy for companies or individuals to adapt to the current status quo. Therefore, there is an urgency to improve the quality of education to be able to cater the needs and demand of the current industry as well as the future. With the exponential pace of innovation in sciences and technology, and if what the students are learning is obsolete, it may not help them to develop and keep up with the current times quickly. And thus, there will be a generation that is left behind in the development of the industry. This could pose a major threat towards a nation's economic development that there will be many young generations who are unable to have a role nor the capabilities to cope with the current times and to realize their dream and passion for the future. This is related to Mitra's (2014) statement that it is the development of the needs in the industries that changes the way of schooling. Therefore new teaching strategies should be formulated to get the students to anticipate for the real-life experience in the present

time as well as the future. This study is based upon the concern of the education system that could jeopardize the future generations and create future economic and social problems in Indonesia. In order to tackle this problem, mitigation and anticipation is paramount to reduce the negative impacts and to deduce plans on tackling possible future problems. Therefore, Indonesia made a new initiative to tackle on the issue of the future and present employment as well as problems that might arise in the future by fixing the mindset of the teachers and the schools through the *Merdeka Belajar* concept in Indonesia's education system.

The practice of *Merdeka Belajar* by Najelaa Shihab and the Teachers Learning Community (*Komunitas Guru Belajar*) has claimed to increase students' motivation in learning (Shihab & *Komunitas Guru Belajar*, 2017). The implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* can be useful in the English Language Teaching (ELT) as a means of an approach to improve the students' motivation in learning the English Language. Therefore, the author wishes to highlight the *Merdeka Belajar* Concept advocated by Najelaa Shihab – as the conceiver of this idea in an educator's perspective – to be brought into a conceptual study on how this concept could be implemented into the SOLE teaching strategy in English Language Teaching (ELT) for high school students in Indonesia.

The problem with ELT in Indonesia is that it is not proliferating enough to keep up with the speed of globalization and the development of economy, sciences and technology worldwide. English as a *lingua franca* has enforced many nations to adopt English as their second or foreign language to gain ease of access to international relations. The foreign language policy in Indonesia decided to make

English as a Foreign Language and therefore it is rarely seen in the spectrum of the society. Government officials therefore operate in *Bahasa Indonesia* for national official meetings or operations and their regional vernaculars for regional operations. Meanwhile, English is used as a medium for international communication. Unlike the countries that adopt the English as their second language, where English is applied for official and institutional capacity (Lauder, 2008). As this application of English as a foreign language in Indonesia is the preferred language approach of communication, it is natural to perceive that it is not being used on a regular daily basis. There are also cultural construct that hampers the learning of the English Language within the society which have engraved into the learners mind. The Indonesian society glorifies *Bahasa Indonesia* more than other languages which slowly diminishes their motivation in learning the English Language. There are also notions where learning the English Language would slowly erase their cultural identity (Lauder, 2008).

Here, the author suggests an alternative solution in tackling the problem of English language education in Indonesia to prepare the students for the present and the future. Specifically in suggesting a different approach to English Language Teaching (ELT) through the Self-Organized Learning Environment (SOLE) Teaching Strategy for Indonesian students. The concept of SOLE has successfully been experimented in India for years by the developer of this idea, Sugata Mitra, and has ensued in positive results in academic achievements, English Pronunciation, Education objectives and self-organizing behavior (Mitra, Kulkarni, & Stanfield,

2016). This then led Sugata Mitra to be entitled as the Innovator of Education and the TED Prize Winner (TED, 2013).

1.2 Reasons for Choosing the Topic

The reasons underlying the researcher to conduct the research of this topic are as follows:

1. The researcher is intrigued with the idea of the SOLE Teaching Strategy and the opportunities that this SOLE Teaching Strategy could offer in improving the quality of education in Indonesia.
2. The problems of ELT in Indonesia still need more work and experimentations as well as ideas and concepts to improve the quality of teaching and learning of the English Language.
3. The perceptions and popularity of *Merdeka Belajar* has moved the researcher to further understand this concept and to erase misconceptions in the society.
4. The researcher is very keen in knowing on how education would represent in the future.

1.3 Research Question

The purpose of the study is to find out the answers of the following questions:

1. What is SOLE teaching strategy in accordance with the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*?
2. How is SOLE teaching strategy applied in the English Language Teaching and Learning for high school students?

1.4 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to find out the idea and innovation behind *Merdeka Belajar* and its relevance with the SOLE Teaching Strategy for English Language Teaching and Learning in the “*Merdeka Belajar*” Concept for High School Students. The objective of the study are as follow:

1. To explain the definition of the SOLE Teaching Strategy in accordance with the concept of *Merdeka Belajar*.
2. To explain how the SOLE Teaching Strategy can be applied in the English Language Teaching and Learning context for high school students.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Discussions about new concepts and ideas on education and pedagogy could help bring teachers or educators the opportunity to improve their approach on education and how they could experiment different ideas or teaching approaches to suit the education needs in the dynamic society. The result of the study will hopefully be beneficial to:

1. Researchers

The result of the study could serve as an information to benefit future research on *Merdeka Belajar* and SOLE Teaching Strategy, especially in Indonesia, as a reflection towards the education system to improve its education ecosystem and research.

2. Teachers

The result of this study could serve as an information for the teachers about *Merdeka Belajar* and SOLE by understanding its concept and background as a reflection towards alternative teaching approaches that are available and feasible to be implemented in their ELT.

3. Students

The result of this study could serve as an information for the students to better understand *Merdeka Belajar* and SOLE for their academic purposes.

4. Readers

The result of this study could serve as an information which the readers need to educate themselves and understand the perspectives of SOLE and *Merdeka Belajar* as well as the problems of ELT in Indonesia.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

There are several key terms to be defined in this study such as:

1. SOLE (Self-Organized Learning Environment)

Self-Organized Learning Environment is a program conceptualized by Sugata Mitra to support self-directed education. SOLE was first conceptualized following the success of Sugata Mitra's Hole-in-the-Wall (HITW) experiments. His experiments demonstrated that groups of children are able to learn to navigate computers and the internet by themselves. Upon Sugata Mitra's startling conclusion that groups of children, with access to the internet, can learn almost anything by

themselves, research since then has continued to support this idea (Mitra, 2012).

2. *Merdeka Belajar*

Merdeka Belajar or Freedom in Learning or Freedom to Learn is a concept where an individual is free to learn without any external entities inhibiting their willingness to learn. The main idea of *Merdeka Belajar* is to allow teachers and students to learn together without any interventions of outside entities where the learners are free to learn and the teachers have the freedom to teach to accommodate the different personalities and abilities of the children (Rogers, 1969; Shihab & *Komunitas Guru Belajar*, 2017).

3. ELT (English Language Teaching)

English Language Teaching is an activity or an industry of teaching English Language to those whose English is of a foreign/second /additional language, whereas the professional organization that supports and advocates for ELT calls itself *Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages* (TESOL) (Cenoz & Gorter, 2013; Cummins & Davison, 2007; Khansir, 2013).

1.7 Limitation of the Study

Following the popularity of the discussion on *Merdeka Belajar* in Indonesia as well as its controversial issues surrounding it, there has been negative perceptions regarding this concept in the society and its way of penetration into the current education system. People often generalize *Merdeka Belajar* as an educational

policy enforced by the newly appointed Minister of Education and Culture (MOEC), Nadiem Makarim, on 2019. However, the figure who coined the term *Merdeka Belajar* was Najeela Shihab since 2014 and has written a book on *Merdeka Belajar* entitled '*Merdeka Belajar di Ruang Kelas*' on 2017. This final project will be discussing the latter *Merdeka Belajar* as a concept that could facilitate the SOLE Teaching Strategy in ELT (English Language Teaching).

1.8 Organization of the Study

This final project is systematically organized into five different chapters, with each chapters explaining different points as follows:

1. Chapter I provides the introduction that consists of these matters; the Background of the Study, the Reasons for Choosing the Topic, the Research Question, the Objective of the Study, the Significance of the Study, the Definition of Key Terms, the Limitation of the Study, and the Organization of the Study.
2. Chapter II discusses about the Reviews of the Related Literature that deals with several points which contain foundational theories underlying the study, mainly on *Merdeka Belajar*, SOLE and ELT in Indonesia.
3. Chapter III contains the Research Method that is needed in conducting the research, which deals with the Types of Data, Data Organizing, and Analyzing the Data.
4. Chapter IV contains the Research Findings. It consists of the Findings and the Discussion.

5. Chapter V is the last chapter. It consists of the Conclusion and the Suggestion.



CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Chapter II discusses the Review of the Related Literature which consists of the elaboration of several points underlying this study, which are; the Concept of *Merdeka Belajar*, Self-Organized Learning Environment (SOLE), English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, and Motivation in Language Learning.

2.1 English as a Lingua Franca

Since the twentieth century, English has become a global language and an undisputed *lingua franca*. Internationally, English has become the most important second language around the world. It is being used in many areas of interaction, such as in economy and technology; in arts and science; in tourism and sports. English has organically penetrated the global society and has naturally become an important means of international communication (Bieswanger, 2008). Therefore English Language education plays a huge role in the creation of young people who are open-minded and able to communicate in this globalized era.

It was since the 1919 that the English Language has officially become the *lingua franca* for international relations after the defeat of France and its allies in the First World War. Before this, diplomacy was intermediated through the French language. However, the Treaty of *Versailles* was written in both English and French which paved the way for English to be officially used as the language of diplomacy in international relations. Since then, after the Second World War in 1945, the United Nations was formed and chose English and French – the two working

languages – as the *lingua franca* as a means of communication between nations. Nevertheless, English was a much more preferred language as its popularity and use was much more massive in comparison to the French language. The British Imperial influence and the rising power of the United States of America, in economic and military power, in the 19th and the 20th century has been the foundation for the widely preferred use of English as the second or foreign language in other countries while carving the road towards globalization (Genç & Bada, 2010).

Nowadays, this globalized era has pushed some countries to implement English as their Second Language in their daily conversation. In Asia, for example, has several countries that has made English as their Second Language, such as; Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, and India. While in Africa, the countries that has made the same change were; South Africa, Botswana, Gambia, Ghana, Cameroon, Kenya, and many others (Lauder, 2008). Even though English is spoken in almost every countries, there are a variety of forms of English that is spoken in the society of different backgrounds, nationality and ethnicity. It may be the accent, word pronunciation, or either the word forms. Despite that, the most popular varieties of English are British, American and Australian (Bieswanger, 2008; Prayogi, 2019). However, the implementation of the English Language in Indonesia is still scarce and rarely observed in the society. This is because Indonesia's language policy implements the English Language as a Foreign Language. Which means that only a minority of the citizens are able to communicate in English and it is not commonly used for daily conversation (Prayogi, 2019).

2.2 English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia

The English Language has been taught in Indonesia since 1914 when the Junior High Schools were first established (Lauder, 2008). During those times, the language that proliferate were the Dutch Language. Lauder (2008) explained that even after the establishment of Senior High Schools in 1918, the literacy rate in Indonesia was a mere 6.4% in the 1930's. In 1940, there were only 37 Senior High Schools in the entire country. Furthermore, only the privileged class and the Dutch children were allowed to attend these schools. The privileged class of Indonesians that received this education from schools grew up knowing Dutch and perhaps a few English, because English was never taught to be used as a medium of communication. Moreover, during the Second World War, the Japanese prohibited the teaching of English with other languages and pushed the Japanese language into the country (Lauder, 2008).

After the defeat of Japan and the return of the Dutch, they attempted to continue with the curriculum they had previously used before the war. As a result, the school system experienced a major disruption during the war and in the four years of turmoil that followed. The political maneuver that enforces the colonized people to use the colonial language has caused restlessness in the Indonesian society and created a more determined and idealistic generation – with a quest for self-expression – who had struggled through the war years and proclaimed *Bahasa Indonesia* as the national language in the proclamation of *Sumpah Pemuda* in 1928, as well as their Independence in 1945. Since then, the language policy in Indonesia is highly influenced from the past experiences of the colonization era, which leads

to where currently English takes place in the third of the three main categories of the language role in the functioning system of the nation and in education; (1) *Bahasa Indonesia*, (2) the regional vernaculars, and (3) foreign languages (Lauder, 2008; Mappiasse & Bin Sihes, 2014).

After the independence of Indonesia, English was formally made as the “first foreign language” in Indonesia in a teacher trainer conference of 1955 upon the statement given by Mr. Wachendorff, as the first head of the *Central Inspectorate of English Language Instruction* in the Ministry of Education (Alwasilah, 2013; Lauder, 2008). This automatically erases the status of the Dutch Language as the spoken foreign language in Indonesia as it has been indoctrinate during the colonial times. In spite of that, the Dutch language was no longer a taught subject in schools since the declaration of the Indonesian Independence in 1945. The cause may be sentimental, but it was also due to the urgency of the English language as the *lingua franca* in most countries. It was because of the British Imperial massive expansion and their liberty to give the local people to earn an education, which made the English Language to be widely used in the Commonwealth countries. Furthermore, the development of technology, sciences and economy were flourishing in the Great Britain which sparked the first industrial revolution (Genç & Bada, 2010; More, 2000).

Today, English has become the main mode of communication for international affairs. The development of technology and sciences has been using English as the intermediate language to share knowledge and to produce journal articles or papers and to do business transactions internationally (Alwasilah, 2013;

Cromer, 1991; Genç & Bada, 2010). Moreover, these past knowledge that were conversed in English are becoming the main reference for modern research that has been scaffolded along the years. Therefore the crystallization of this modern civilization was built upon the English language around the world, even though it may be a collective result of the contribution of different nations (Cromer, 1991). This forces other countries to adapt English language in their Education curriculum to be globally competitive and contributive in the development of their economy, sciences and technology.

Holistically, the implication of the historical explanation above is already apparent regarding the foreign language position in Indonesia. English is the first foreign language in Indonesia and it is the most crucial language to acquire global knowledge and current information about the world. Therefore, Alwasilah (2013) stated that the study or learning of English has been enforced by the Indonesian law in 1989 Chapter IX Section 39 which mentions English as a compulsory subject to be taught since Grade 7 at a lower secondary level. Moreover, in the Primary level of education, English is allowed to be taught as a local content subject from Grade 4 which was enforced in the Government Regulation No. 060/U/1993 on 25th February 1993. In addition to that, English was also enforced in the Indonesian Law on Education in 1989, Chapter XI, Section 42, in Paragraph 2 which stated that English can be used as a medium of instruction to develop knowledge of a particular subject or vocational skill (Alwasilah, 2013). Therefore, the implication of English Language Teaching in Indonesia that has been enforced in the Indonesian Law as a compulsory subject in Foreign Language shows how crucial English Language is

to a nation. By learning the English Language, it could give a nation the leverage to improve its Economic and Education sector, and at the same time improve its competitiveness at a global scale. However, ELT in EFL context in Indonesia is still not experiencing significant improvement.

The process of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia is not expecting significant improvement except for the fact that only major cities in Indonesia are experiencing the luxury in having a better quality education on English learning and more opportunities to use the English Language. Even with a better quality education on English Learning, the students who are able to acquire and use the English language are still scarce. This is due to the factors of the education and the cultural construct that are engraved into the learner's mind that *Bahasa Indonesia* is the best language (Lauder, 2008). According to Sulistiyo (2015), some of the significant problems in EFL teaching in Indonesia are low teacher competence, low student motivation and low student competence to be able to communicate and use the English Language. This affects the learners' effort to acquire the language after learning the English Language in class. Lauder (2008) has also stated that the setbacks in the development of the English Language in Indonesia are because of the language schizophrenic society, which also influence educational policy makers. The notion of the society that one day learning the English language would slowly erase the cultural identity of Indonesia has caused many educational policy makers to not allow textbooks on EFL from abroad, and rather promote local English textbooks from local writers. Even though those

rejected textbooks from abroad for learning EFL are well-written, widely-used, widely-tested, and from major publishers abroad (Lauder, 2008).

2.3 Self-Organized Learning Environment (SOLE)

Learning is no longer seen solely as a process of the transfer of knowledge from a teacher to the students. Learning is making experience while personally constructing meaning through interactions. It is the teachers who helps the students to learn by providing necessary knowledge, facilities and conditions that support them in order to build concepts and understanding of the topic independently and actively (Esteban & Peart, 2014).

SOLE is a concept which was developed by Sugata Mitra and the researchers at the SOLE Centre in Newcastle University. This concept was initially based upon Sugata Mitra's Hole-in-the-Wall project where he experimented the impact of a free-to-use computer, connected to the internet, which is embedded into a wall in a village with a height where it will be convenient to use by 8-13 year olds. In this experiment, which was conducted for more than 5 years in India, native Indian children are able to operate a computer, which operates in English, in a short amount of time whilst learning the English language. This experiment was conducted in the rural villages of India which resulted in a significant improvement on the children's academic achievement. Some of the results of the following research are from several different studies quoted by Mitra et al., (2005).

The teacher's role as a facilitator will only observe and supervises the students in the learning process. The students are encouraged to work together to

answer questions using the internet. During the process, the students will be preoccupied by self-discovery, sharing their knowledge in a community, and spontaneity in what Mitra (2012) explained as 'learning in the edge of chaos'.

The introduction of SOLE in India's rural villages improved the comprehension of the children's English language. The children explored the device provided by Sugata Mitra in his Hole-in-the-Wall project as a mystery device that performs magnificent tricks which intrigued the student's curiosity. The students were also trying to control the chaotic learning environment where all of the children wanted to try the little device while trying to solve the question given by Mitra (2014) himself. This type of engagement proved to be effective to activate the learning mode of the students through this project.

Upon these significant improvement, there is a possibility to implement the SOLE concept in Indonesia to shift its teaching paradigm from a teacher-centered learning towards a student-centered learning effectively. Since modern day technology is becoming more accessible, it would benefit the children of the rural areas in Indonesia to positively explore the encyclopedia of knowledge from the internet in a regulated manner that is facilitated by a teacher. The process of teaching and learning in this SOLE concept can be applied as a teaching approach to commodify the theoretical knowledge into a learning experience in the field of English Language Teaching. Through this approach, the learners will be immersed into the problem at hand with access to the sea of information in the internet - that is relevant to the subject - to solve that problem. Thus, the learners are directly engaged and exposed towards resources in English and try to break the language

barrier. This can increase the children's immersive engagement in technologies as a learning media for their investment in the future.

It has been a norm in assuming that children needs major guidance from an adult. However, today there has been a paradigm shift in learning. Learning is no longer seen solely as a process of the transfer of knowledge from a teacher to the students. It is much more than that. Learning is making experience while personally constructing meaning through interactions (Esteban & Peart, 2014; Panjwani, 2017; Sholichah, 2019). Nevertheless, it is the teachers who helps the students to learn by providing necessary knowledge, facilities and conditions that support them in order to build concepts and understanding of the topic independently and actively. Sugata Mitra has proven that children can teach themselves through his Hole-in-the-Wall project in India, which was presented in the 2013 TED Talk (Mitra, 2013). From his Hole-in-the-Wall (HITW) project, he formulated the Self-Organized Learning Environment (SOLE) concept which is integrated in his dream of building a School in the Cloud. His SOLE concept has given him the title as the Innovator of Education and the TED Prize winner (TED, 2013). This then inspired teachers around the globe to create their own SOLE sessions in their respective countries or districts as part of the teachers of the School in the Cloud project. The School in the Cloud is a learning and teaching platform that acts like an online school. This platform was launched at the 2014 TED conference with an objective to help accelerate the SOLE research globally to teachers or educators and share their teaching and learning experiences together.

SOLE is a concept which was developed by Sugata Mitra and the researchers at the SOLE Centre in Newcastle University. This concept was initially based upon Sugata Mitra's Hole-in-the-Wall (HITW) project where he experimented the impact of a free-to-use computer, connected to the internet, which is embedded into a wall in a village with a height where it will be convenient to use by 8-13 year olds. In this experiment, which was conducted for more than 5 years in India, native Indian children are able to operate a computer, which operates in English, in a short amount of time whilst learning the English language. This experiment was conducted in the rural villages of India which resulted in a significant improvement on the children's academic achievement. Some of the results of the following research are from several different studies quoted by Mitra et al. (2016) regarding the 'Hole-in-the-Wall' (HITW) experiment. The result of the first research was done by Mitra & Rana (2001) – and later on experimented by DeBoer (2009) – who found out that children can learn to use computers and the internet independently, regardless of the children's language and origins. Secondly, the results of the research by Inamdar & Kulkarni (2007) proved that children can achieve their educational objectives independently related to standard school examination in computer science and mathematics; improvement in English pronunciations (Mitra, James, Inamdar, & Dixon, 2003); and increase in school performance (Dangwal, Sharma, & Hazarika, 2014). Thirdly, children are able to show self-organizing behavior as a result of learning in a minimally invasive environment (Dangwal & Kapur, 2008). And finally, children can show understanding related to advanced content of knowledge that is far beyond the

expectations for groups of children aged from 8-13 years old (Inamdar, 2004; Mitra, 2012).

SOLE with its highly influenced Constructivism approach, this learning and teaching concept of letting the learners to take steer of their learning process gives them the ability to make meaning of the subject on their own. The teacher's role as a facilitator will only observe and supervises the students in the learning process. The students are encouraged to work together to answer questions using the internet. During the process, the students will be preoccupied by self-discovery, sharing their knowledge in a community, and spontaneity in what Sugata Mitra explained as 'learning in the edge of chaos' (Mitra, 2012). The introduction of SOLE in India's rural villages improved the comprehension of the children's English language. The children explored the contraption provided by Sugata Mitra in his Hole-in-the-Wall (HITW) project as a mystery device that performs magnificent tricks which intrigued the student's curiosity. In doing so, the students were also trying to control the chaotic learning environment where all of the children wanted to try the little contraption while trying to solve the question given by Mitra himself (Mitra, 2014). This type of engagement proved to be effective to activate the learning mode of the students through this project.

Upon the significant improvement, there is a possibility to implement the SOLE concept in Indonesia to shift its teaching paradigm from a teacher-centered learning towards a student-centered learning effectively. Since modern day technology is becoming more accessible, it would benefit the children of the rural areas in Indonesia to positively explore the encyclopedia of knowledge from the

internet in a regulated manner that is facilitated by a teacher. The process of teaching and learning in this SOLE concept can be applied as a teaching approach to commodify the theoretical knowledge into a learning experience in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). Through this approach, the learners will be immersed into the problem at hand with access to the sea of information in the internet – that is relevant to the subject – to solve that problem. Thus, the learners are directly engaged and exposed towards resources in English and try to break the language barrier. Moreover, this can increase the children's immersive engagement in technologies as a learning media for their investment in the future.

2.4 Review of the Previous Studies

Studies on SOLE in Indonesia are still scarce and they have only been in its early stages of research. There are only a few attainable records of the SOLE research in Indonesia. The only records of SOLE research in Indonesia that are attainable online were from UNNES conducted by Sholichah (2019) in her thesis and a journal article from Anis & Anwar (2020). However, SOLE research has already been conducted for more than 15 years in other parts of the world. The initial SOLE research was first conducted in India with the Hole-in-the-Wall (HITW) experiment by Professor Sugata Mitra and his colleague, Vivek Rana, since 1999 (Mitra & Rana, 2001). However, it was since 1988 that Sugata Mitra proposed the Hole-in-the-Wall (HITW) experiment in an annual conference of the All India Association for Educational Research (Mitra, 2012). The notion that children are unable to comprehend the complexity of the computer operations was inherent

during those times, and children who were able to operate computers are considered geniuses with talent.

2.5.1. The Hole-in-the-Wall Experiment

This Hole-in-the-Wall (HITW) experiment piqued Mitra's interest and continued researching until he found out the formula of the children's successes in learning with the computers. He found out that children's curiosity drives motivation and could cater learning and understanding in almost any knowledge from the intermediate level to a more complex level, in an environment with minimum adult intervention, with accessibility to the Internet (Mitra, 2000; Mitra et al., 2016; Mitra & Rana, 2001). Mitra (2000) then named this model as the Minimally Invasive Education, which later on gave birth to the SOLE (Self-Organized Learning Environment) System in teaching and learning.

Since the initial phase of conducting several research in the HITW experiments, the researchers conducted the experiment by leaving a computer kiosk (a computer embedded in a wall) at a designated place and invited children to use the computer for several months, unsupervised. The children would later on be tested to see the results after having being exposed to the internet and freedom to access the computer. In a span of about 5 years after the experiments have been carried out, the researchers discovered the following findings: Firstly, children can learn to use computers and the internet by themselves, regardless of their background, habitat and the native language that they speak (DeBoer, 2009; Mitra, 2005; Mitra et al., 2005). Secondly, children are able to achieve the school's educational objectives by themselves in standard school examinations in computer

science and mathematics (Inamdar & Kulkarni, 2007), improve their English pronunciation (Mitra et al., 2003), and improve their overall school achievements (Dangwal et al., 2014; Dangwal & Thounaojam, 2011). Thirdly, children are able to display a self-organizing behavior from the result of learning in a ‘minimally invasive’ environment (Dangwal & Kapur, 2008) and understood contents that were beyond the years expected for their age group (Inamdar, 2004; Mitra, 2012).

Mitra & Dangwal (2010) tested groups of native Tamil speaking children in the rural village of Kalikuppam (Southern India) to see if they could grasp the basic concepts of molecular biology on their own in English. The materials were downloaded into the computer kiosk and the experimental subjects were 34 randomly picked children (from the rural village) of the age 10-14 years (grade 5, 6, 7 or 8), while the control group were school children from the urban elites of the same age as the experimental group. After pre and post testing, the researchers concluded that children from rural areas with poor sanitation and low quality education (experimental group) could reach the levels of education of that children in the urban elites with a higher quality education and better living conditions (control group) if they were given the leverage and freedom to learn in a minimally invasive environment with computers and encouragements from the mediators (grandmother’s method) (Mitra & Dangwal, 2010).

2.5.2. Self-Organized Learning

Upon these achievements, Mitra & Crawley (2014) continued the experiment to test the effectiveness of the SOLE system in a classroom context. The results are similar to previous studies and children enjoyed the ‘SOLE Sessions’

even though it could get chaotic and loud with the discussions (Mitra & Crawley, 2014). More researchers are then fascinated to research the SOLE system in hopes to discover potential results to improve teaching and learning in schools of the 21st century. Especially with the huge disadvantage that most graduates experience after getting an education. The transition towards the 4th Industrial Revolution has led many graduates to be unemployed and many employers experiencing dissatisfaction towards millennials entering the workforce (Anderson, 2014; Griffin & Care, 2015). The demand of the 21st century skills has pushed some researchers to test the SOLE system to verify its effectiveness and its relevance in different nations and in teaching and learning of different subjects or contexts.

Weisblat, Stiles, & McClellan (2019) has researched the effectiveness of SOLE in a classroom context since 2017. The research was based upon the literature study on SOLE and its disruptive-innovative traits which offers a promising way to engage the 21st century learners (Weisblat & McClellan, 2017). Weisblat et al. (2019) studied the implementation and effects of SOLE on students and teachers in five schools and one STEM-focused after school program. Over 500 SOLE groups in about 100 classrooms were tested and observed. The teachers were invited in a focus group discussion regarding the SOLE method and its implementations in different contexts. The teachers were surveyed and the school administrators were interviewed to identify their perspective on the implementation of SOLE. After 2 years of experiments, students were becoming more critical and they were able to create their own SOLE questions in a non-SOLE lesson when they are struck with a problem.

During the researcher's observations, student's participation in learning has become more intensive with 90% of students speaking at least once during a five-minute observation period. The researchers' observations indicated that the students, after having SOLE sessions, have a greater ability to go deeper into a topic, elicit peer interest, build upon previous knowledge, exhibit self-reflection, and engage in individual and collective meta-cognition. On the other hand, the teachers initially face contradictions where they are wrestling with the habit of exerting more control in the classroom. However, they started to be able to let go after having seen what SOLE has done and witnessed the ability of the students to take control of their learning with enthusiasm as well as improvements in academics, social, and self-management skills (Weisblat et al., 2019).

The researchers concluded that technology challenges can present hurdles in the 21st-century classroom for SOLE. Sometimes the reliance on technology can result in a failed SOLE session. Secondly, helping students learn to navigate appropriate sites is a critical skill that teachers must learn in preparation for SOLE activities. Finally, SOLE is most effective when used in a metered dose, such as once a week. Other innovative techniques, such as flipped classrooms and personalized learning, would complement this approach (Weisblat et al., 2019).

The recent study of SOLE in Indonesia is a thesis from Sholichah (2019) to identify the behaviors of the students in how they complete their classwork or tasks in the SOLE learning environment. Sholichah (2019) applied a qualitative research method with a case study approach where the researcher collects data, take meaning, and gain an understanding of the case that is being studied. The researcher started

the research with the problem formulation. During this stage, the researcher review the study that will be researched, observe and carry out deeper exploration, and explore problems that exist in the current study. The next stage of the research was to formulate research objectives. Formulating the research objectives is needed to clarify the research framework, namely about what will be the target of the research.

The purpose of Sholichah's (2019) study was to describe and analyze the completion of students' tasks during the self-organized learning environment (SOLE) material of the human respiratory system in grade 8-H at the State Junior High School 9 Semarang. After that, the researcher conducted a literature review to identify the methods used to resolve the research problem, as well as collecting strong references for the researcher to be applied in the current research method. Data and information on the teaching and learning activities and task completion using the SOLE learning method were collected through interviews, observation and documentation (Sholichah, 2019).

After the data is obtained, the next step is to carry out the analysis process. The analysis aims to transform the research data into information that can be used to draw conclusions. The data from the research results are in the form of interview transcripts, observations, field notes and documentation of the implementation of learning using the SOLE learning method. The data that has been analyzed will then be concluded. The result that can be concluded from the study is that (1) the students can find their own conclusions based on observations; (2) the students are able to build their own knowledge and investigations through group discussions and studying the learning resources. Independent discoveries made by these students

can be categorized as discovery learning that is important in the K-13 Curriculum (Sholichah, 2019).

From Sholichah's thesis, we can understand that SOLE can be experimented and implemented into Indonesia's K-13 curriculum. In the era of Merdeka Belajar Policy, where Schools are given the freedom to design their own curriculum as a decentralized education system by the government, it has become more apparent to experiment this SOLE Teaching and Learning method as an opportunity to improve the quality of the school graduates. Moreover, being exposed to English through SOLE can push the learners to be proactive in applying the language. Hence, creating an English speaking environment among the students and erasing the language barriers that inhibits second language input (exposure) (Khan, 2012). An environment where the students are free to actively use the language to solve the problem or question at hand.

The more recent study of SOLE is from an article by Anis & Anwar (2020) where they discussed the relevance of Merdeka Belajar and SOLE in building a strong character for students to be able to learn optimally. The article also explained how Merdeka Belajar and SOLE could help build a strong character in students like high self-confidence, independence, freedom in learning and responsiveness to their surrounding environment. These traits of a strong character in students are very essential in acquiring knowledge since these traits are found in high achieving students (Lymperis, 2019).

2.5.3. SOLE and ELT

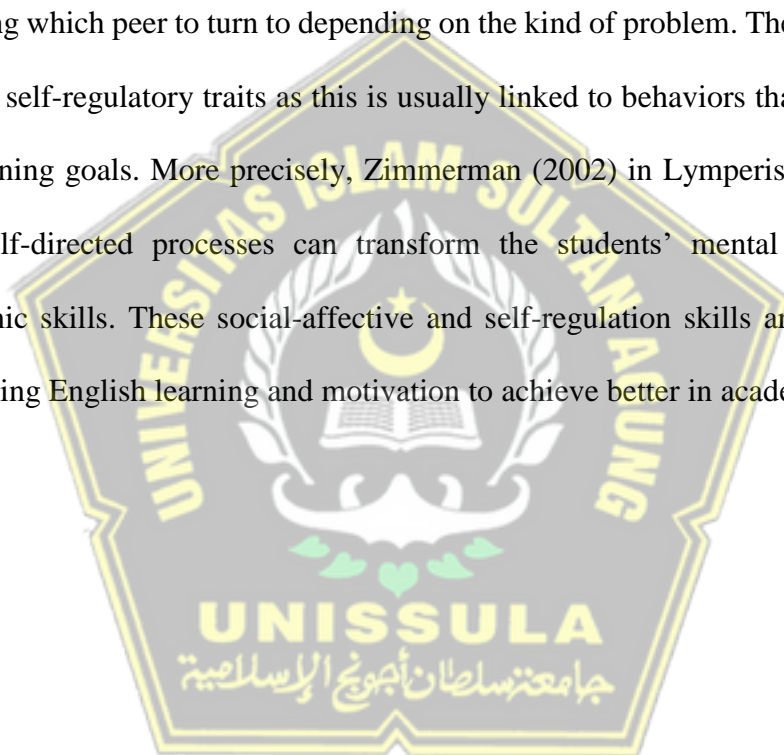
Stanfield & Unlu (2016) has researched the SOLE System and its relevance with ELT in a pilot study conducted at the International House in London. The aim of this pilot study was to verify if SOLE could cater the development of the 21st century skills and to identify if there are any potentials in SOLE to help adults to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The research was a response towards negative sentiments and criticisms upon Sugata Mitra's keynote speech in the IATEFL (International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language) conference in Harrogate on April 2014. The SOLE research in EFL focus-context has not been done before and this has caused several dissatisfaction in the audience at the conference. The pilot study conducted in the International House in London was the first to focus on ELT in the EFL context by using SOLE teaching method (Stanfield & Unlu, 2016). The test subjects were 18 adult volunteers who are living and working in London with a pre-intermediate level of English proficiency (A2) according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) benchmark. The result of the pilot study was that the adults with low English competency were able to improve their pronunciation and English fluency because of the SOLE environment. The findings of this pilot study also identified that the students were less anxious when they were carrying out the SOLE session with minimum supervision. Although there are several developments in the field of ELT in EFL context with the SOLE method, there are still holes and in need for further research to identify what causes the process of learning and its succession in improving confidence and fluency over a period of time, as well as looking into the potential

of peer assessment within the SOLE environment (Stanfield & Unlu, 2016). Stanfield & Unlu (2016) also suggested that there should be further research on the impacts of SOLE on the teachers practice in the classroom and their attitudes to teaching in general.

Lymperis (2019) conducted a research on SOLE to test its appropriateness and effectiveness on the EFL context as an alternative pedagogical approach. After witnessing SOLE as a new learning model that still have more room for research and improvements as well as potentially effectual, Lymperis (2019) offered SOLE as an alternative solution to the declining number of teachers due to the severe sovereign debt crisis since 2010. According to Lymperis (2019), there has been no systematic quantitative evaluation in SOLE research in EFL context. Therefore, Lymperis (2019) researched its effectiveness and appropriateness through a quasi-experimental method where a pre-test and post-test are conducted and measured it in the three language skills pertaining to the study (listening, Speaking and Writing) over a period of three months (one school term) with accordance to the CEFR benchmark. Lymperis (2019) also involved observational data from video recordings and live sessions with a total amount of 64 hours.

The researcher used purposive sampling where approximately 34 primary school students (Years 1-6) in villages or rural areas in Greece in which English is not currently taught due to the lack of teachers and English as its non-medium of instruction. The schools in the rural areas where the research is conducted has also been through the process of selection where technological equipment used to conduct the research is available, as well as the low number of teachers teaching

English in the school. The research findings concluded that the students were able to show self-evaluation and self-improvement where such competencies have often been linked with a high sense of self-efficacy and academic success. During the research observations, there are often instances where the students develop social-affective skills where the students are more proactive in help-seeking as they progress through the program since the beginning of the intervention, including knowing which peer to turn to depending on the kind of problem. The students also exhibit self-regulatory traits as this is usually linked to behaviors that are oriented to attaining goals. More precisely, Zimmerman (2002) in Lymperis (2019) stated that self-directed processes can transform the students' mental abilities into academic skills. These social-affective and self-regulation skills are pertinent in improving English learning and motivation to achieve better in academics.



CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHOD

Research method is the method used in a research to collect, arrange, classify, analyze and interpret the data to solve the problem. The research method in this study is divided into three parts: types of the data, data organizing and analyzing the data. This research discusses these methodologies as follows.

3.1 Research Design

The research design of this study uses a qualitative approach, by emphasizing the comparative analysis of the inference process and the analysis of the dynamics of the relationship of the observed phenomena using scientific logic. Qualitative research is an approach that produces descriptive data in the form of written words from the subject being observed that are not translated into terms used in quantitative research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

The qualitative research method, as a research design, has ten indicators/characteristics (Raco, 2010).

1. The data source is a normal situation or natural setting.
2. Highly descriptive.
3. Concerned with processes and products, therefore it pays more attention to how things happen/develop.
4. Searching for the meaning behind behaviors or actions in order to understand the problem or situation.
5. Prioritizing direct or first-hand data.

6. Accentuate contextual details.
7. Prioritizing emic perspective.
8. Participation without intrusion/intervention.
9. Inductive
10. Flexible

Creswell (2014) in Maula (2020) used Denzin and Lincoln's definition of the qualitative research approach. According to them, qualitative research is a naturalistic interpretive approach to the world. This shows that qualitative researchers will study objects in their natural environment, trying to understand or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings given by society to the researcher.

According to Burns (2000) in Maula (2020), in terms of assumptions and purpose of a qualitative research approach, it can be explained through the following table:

<i>Approach</i>	<i>Assumptions</i>	<i>Purpose</i>
<i>Qualitative</i>	<i>Reality socially constructed</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
	<i>Events viewed from informant's perspective</i>	<i>Understanding the perspectives of others</i>
	<i>Dynamic quality of life</i>	

Table 1. Assumption and Purpose of a Qualitative Research

The table above explains that qualitative research approach are assumed to be inclined towards a subjective point of view where the reality is socially constructed and events are viewed from the informant's perspective. However, the

purpose of the qualitative research is to understand different point of views and perspective of others.

3.2 Type of the Research

The type of research in this study is qualitative because the data are presented descriptively. The research method used in this study is the library research method. This research aims to uncover the concept of Merdeka Belajar from Najeela Shihab's book and its compatibility with the SOLE concept in teaching and learning EFL to Indonesian High School Students.

Library research is a series of activities relating to methods of collecting literature data, reading and taking notes and processing only library collection materials without requiring field research (Khatibah, 2011). Ideally, a professional research uses a combination of library research and field research or both with an emphasis on either one. However, in examining the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* and SOLE, the author believes that it is more relevant to use the library research method. There are at least three reasons; first, because the research problem can only be answered through library research and vice versa, it is nearly impossible to expect the data from field research. Second, literature study is needed as a separate stage, namely during preliminary research to understand more deeply about a new phenomenon that is developing in the field or in the society. Third, the library data remains reliable to answer the research problems.

This research aims to understand the underlying suitability of different concepts on the teaching and learning context of EFL towards Indonesian high

school students indirectly. Since concepts are generally a result of man ordering his experience (cognitive grouping) and an extremely important element of human learning, concepts are needed in order to design an experiment or as an initial discussion for advancements or dynamics of a study (Spitzer, 1975).

This research will present scientific reasoning from the result of the literature study and the result of the researcher's thought regarding the problem or topic of study. This research is supported by data obtained from library resources in the form of research journals, theses, research reports, textbooks, papers, seminar reports, scientific discussions, and so on. The library materials are discussed critically and deeply in order to support the discussion of the *Merdeka Belajar* concept and its suitability in the SOLE teaching and learning strategy in the EFL context for Indonesian high school students.

3.3 Data Source

3.3.1 Data

Data are facts and statistics that are collected and grouped together for reference or analysis. Data are also characteristics or information that are collected through observation (OECD, 2007). Data is the plural form of datum, derived from the Latin language which means 'something that is given'. In everyday use, data is a statement that is accepted for what it is as a result of measurement or observation of a variable which can be in the form of numbers, words, or images. However, in academic terms, data are treated as units of information.

3.3.2 Types of Data

The data collected in this study are in the form of words, phrases, sentences, or quotations from different resources. In this research, there are 2 data sources in which the researcher used to refer to. That is the Primary Data and the Secondary Data. The Primary Data are the data obtained directly from the original source of information either in the form of a book or literature containing scientific knowledge or new understanding of known facts. Meanwhile, the secondary data are data sources that cannot provide direct information to the data collectors. Secondary data are additional data that supports the primary data sources (Harahap, 2014; Salim & Syahrums, 2012). The data sources collected that are related to the study are as follows:

1. Primary Data

- a. Shihab, N., & Komunitas Guru Belajar. (2017). *Merdeka Belajar di Ruang Kelas*. Tangerang Selatan: Literati & Kampus Guru Cikal.
- b. Mitra, S. (2012). *Beyond the Hole in the Wall: Discover the Power of Self-Organized Learning Kindle Edition*. TED Books.

2. Secondary Data

- a. The secondary data which involve the supporting data will be taken from books, e-books, e-journals, and sites that are related to the study.

3.4 The Data Collection Technique

The aims of this study is to become a reference for both proposal writing and final project. The researcher will try to organize the data as well as possible based on an appropriate research method. In collecting the data, there are several steps used as follows:

a. Reading the literary resources

The primary data resources were closely read for several times to gain a holistic understanding on the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* and SOLE as well as to get a deep understanding about the related topic of the study.

b. Identifying the data

After reading the primary data resources, the next step in collecting the data was identifying the data which was related to the topic. In this step, the identified data could be in the form of words, phrases, sentences, or quotations from the data resources.

c. Classifying the data

Classifying the data is a grouping process based on the problem formulation. It is a process in grouping the data based on the questions being raised. The data must be classified in order to ease the writer to answer the research questions. There are two research questions to be answered in this study. The writer classified the data based on the research question/problem formulation.

d. Reducing the data

The last step in the data collecting method is reducing the data. The data which do not have any correlation with the objective of the study are not used nor analyzed.

3.5 Analyzing the Data

The data will be analyzed using a technique in order to obtain a clear analysis of the study and to obtain a clear report of the data. The data analysis technique used in this study is the descriptive analysis technique. Descriptive analysis technique is a technique of analysis by describing every single detail of the object of the study in order to acquire a detailed analysis that is needed in this study (Elliott & Timulak, 2005; Miles et al., 2014; Octavianti, 2017).

The application in using this technique is by analyzing, explaining, and interpreting all of the data in the appendix in the form of description. Moreover, this study will report the results of the analysis by describing and explaining together with the related quotations from related resources. The complete analysis will be reported in chapter IV as the result of the study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the study on the SOLE Teaching Strategy for English Language Teaching and Learning in the Merdeka Belajar Concept. This chapter contains subchapters which become the answer of the problem formulation stated in chapter one.

4.1 SOLE Teaching Strategy

Learning is no longer seen solely as a process of the transfer of knowledge from a teacher to the students. Learning is making experience while personally constructing meaning through interactions. It is the teachers who helps the students to learn by providing necessary knowledge, facilities and conditions that support them in order to build concepts and understanding of the topic independently and actively (Esteban & Peart, 2014).

SOLE is a concept which was developed by Sugata Mitra and the researchers at the SOLE Centre in Newcastle University. This concept was initially based upon Sugata Mitra's Hole-in-the-Wall project where he experimented the impact of a free-to-use computer, connected to the internet, which is embedded into a wall in a village with a height where it will be convenient to use by 8-13 year olds. In this experiment, which was conducted for more than 5 years in India, native Indian children are able to operate a computer, which operates in English, in a short amount of time whilst learning the English language. This experiment was conducted in the rural villages of India which resulted in a significant improvement

on the children's academic achievement. Some of the results of the following research are from several different studies quoted by Mitra et al., (2005).

The teacher's role as a facilitator will only observe and supervises the students in the learning process. The students are encouraged to work together to answer questions using the internet. During the process, the students will be preoccupied by self-discovery, sharing their knowledge in a community, and spontaneity in what Mitra (2012) explained as 'learning in the edge of chaos'.

The introduction of SOLE in India's rural villages improved the comprehension of the children's English language. The children explored the device provided by Sugata Mitra in his Hole-in-the-Wall project as a mystery device that performs magnificent tricks which intrigued the student's curiosity. The students were also trying to control the chaotic learning environment where all of the children wanted to try the little device while trying to solve the question given by Mitra (2014) himself. This type of engagement proved to be effective to activate the learning mode of the students through this project.

Upon these significant improvement, there is a possibility to implement the SOLE concept in Indonesia to shift its teaching paradigm from a teacher-centered learning towards a student-centered learning effectively. Since modern day technology is becoming more accessible, it would benefit the children of the rural areas in Indonesia to positively explore the encyclopedia of knowledge from the internet in a regulated manner that is facilitated by a teacher. The process of teaching and learning in this SOLE concept can be applied as a teaching approach

to commodify the theoretical knowledge into a learning experience in the field of English Language Teaching. Through this approach, the learners will be immersed into the problem at hand with access to the sea of information in the internet - that is relevant to the subject - to solve that problem. Thus, the learners are directly engaged and exposed towards resources in English and try to break the language barrier. This can increase the children's immersive engagement in technologies as a learning media for their investment in the future.

4.2 Merdeka Belajar

Merdeka Belajar is a concept that needs to be tread carefully in order to direct the discussion objectively. Recent issues of the *Merdeka Belajar* topic in Indonesia are heating up an argument that this concept is not fit to be implemented in Indonesia based on the public views on the execution of the new education policy, which is the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar* by the new appointed Minister of Education and Culture (MOEC), Nadiem Makarim. However, the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* is not a very recent phenomenon. Najelaa Shihab has coined this term earlier in 2017 along with the publication of her book '*Merdeka Belajar di Ruang Kelas*'. This book was also co-authored by the members of the Teachers Learning Community (*Komunitas Guru Belajar*) that Najelaa Shihab has founded on 2014. Unexpectedly, this concept of *Merdeka Belajar* has some connection with what has Ki Hajar Dewantara envisioned in his concept of *Taman Siswa* since around the 1920's (Abidah et al., 2020). Much later on, prominent education researchers and psychologists such as John Dewey, Maria Montessori and Carl Rogers has somewhat advocated the idea of self-directed learning (Gerstein, 2018).

In this case, *Merdeka Belajar*. However, we will be discussing more on Carl Rogers and Ki Hajar Dewantara to explain the basis of the *Merdeka Belajar* Concept. Upon the complexity of the views on this *Merdeka Belajar* concept, the authors will discuss this concept into two parts: (1) the general concept and philosophy of *Merdeka Belajar*; (2) the emergence of *Merdeka Belajar* in Indonesia.

4.2.1 The General Concept and Philosophy of Merdeka Belajar

Merdeka Belajar is a term to describe a condition or a state where a learner or a person to be fully independent with his/her own initiative to learn without being shackled by any external or internal entities inhibiting their willingness to learn (Abidah et al., 2020). *Merdeka Belajar* literally means, Freedom of Learning. The main idea behind freedom of learning is to give the learners the freedom to learn without any force or factors that could hamper their motivation to learn. Their motivation to learn derives from their freedom of choice to learn. Which means, the condition for the learning process to happen is the learners' consent in acquiring the knowledge. This consent could not exist without the internal motivation that drives the learners to learn or acquire any knowledge. This concept of *Merdeka Belajar* or Freedom of Learning is similar to what Carl Rogers has conceptualized in his book "Freedom to Learn: A View of What Education Might Be" that was published in 1969. In that book, the experiment involving "work contracts" with the 6th grade students – that was experimented by Barbara J. Shiel – is similar, in a sense, asking for the consent of the students to learn. In this work contract experiment, the students were given the freedom to choose on how they were going to plan their learning for every subject. They were free to learn or work on their project at their

own pace. This experiment also involved sequential learning, especially in math, to master any skills needed before proceeding to a next level of learning. When the learners were ready to move on, they have the freedom to do so. The learners set their own pace and began at their own level. Hence, they could go on as far as they were self-motivated to go (Miller, 1970; Rogers, 1969; Weibell, 2011). Carl Rogers (1969) – as he has observed this project – further described how the seeds of motivation in learning germinated the creative minds of the children which has branched their way of creativity to different areas of subject. But most importantly, Rogers (1969) described how this manifested initiative and self-responsibility behavior among the children.

The experiment of the work contract that was initiated by Barbara J. Shiel did not only bring her a closer relationship towards her students, it also create a more independent and enthusiastic children who are very keen in learning. The way she directs or facilitate her students is actually teaching them ‘how to learn’ and not only ‘what to learn’. The students were taught on how to construct their own foundation of knowledge (Gerstein, 2018; Rogers, 1969; Weibell, 2011). Rogers (1969) accounted that Barbara J. Shiel has encouraged her students to perform self-evaluation to evaluate their learning process. This self-evaluation is a way where students can be proud of their own achievements during the learning process and it will encourage them to do better if they have made any mistakes. The children’s process of learning and self-evaluation would also encourage them to do more as they have made new discoveries. This evaluation can be done as many times as they want to. This is also a way for the students to contemplate on their milestone of

their process in learning. The teacher will also discuss with the students on the result of their self-evaluation (Rogers, 1969). This then brings us towards the Constructivists theory, which was shaped by John Dewey, where it is the learners that makes meaning towards their own experience to understand or to learn something (Henson, 2003). This constructivism approach are encouraging the students to take charge of their learning as well as implementing self-evaluation or self-reflection. Self-evaluation and self-criticism in freedom to learn is the basic principle to facilitate the learning process towards independence, creativity and reliance of the learners, whereas evaluation by others is of the secondary importance (Weibell, 2011). Interestingly, Rogers (1969) accounted that if self-evaluation is promoted, then there will be no cheating since there will be no need of cheating to achieve success. Moreover, this will create a perspective in the students that making mistakes is part of the learning process and that will only encourage them to perform better.

This then brings us towards a conclusion that freedom in learning can create a more responsible and accountable behavior in children that could be capable of self-discipline. If freedom of learning is fulfilled, there would be a possibility of an independent school or a free school that is free from authoritarian control or boundaries that controls the children's interest with definite scoring systems and exclusiveness of intelligent groups among their peers. Hence, an independent school or a free school can be inclusive towards every student, and teachers are able to be creative in educating their students with passion and enthusiasm where the children are driven by their internal motivation to learn and the teachers are driven

by their passion to teach, learn, develop, and anticipate new discoveries of their students' process in learning. With freedom in learning, the teachers and students will become 'independent learners' capable of 'independent learning' in an 'independent school' free from antagonizing regulations and politics that hampers creativity and forced interest in the process of learning.

After reading Razzak's (2020) study on Paulo Freire's critical and dialogic pedagogy, there is a connection between Najeela Shihab's *Merdeka Belajar*, Carl Roger's Freedom to Learn and Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy. *Merdeka Belajar* has an approximately similar concept to what Paulo Freire has envisioned in a free school. Razzak (2020) has pointed out one of Freire's main premises of his Critical Pedagogy concept on man and freedom. He says:

"... people are fully human when they are free, meaning when they can choose out of their own will and can express themselves. The opposite of this state is what Freire considers as oppression and dehumanization. Oppression is a tense relationship between two parties: the oppressor and the oppressed and Freire originally took tension between them from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's master versus slave dialectic."

The implication of the text above is explaining Freire's opposition against oppression and objective exploitation of another human. Razzak (2020) then further explained Freire's reference on students that if they are dehumanized, they are in an oppressive state where they conformed and bonded with the 'culture of silence'. In this state of silence which has been cultured into the students (the oppressed), by the teachers (the oppressor), will create fear of embracing opportunities at freedom, due to always having the shadow of the oppressor being casted upon them. Being deprived of freedom will reap the student's inability in creativity and causing them to make constructs of reality which will not be according to how they see or

understand inside their heads. In other words, the students are afraid of mistakes and making mistakes, because they are afraid of the figure of the oppressor (the teacher) where they have to follow their guidelines imposed upon them. The students are afraid to replace the image imposed by the oppressor with something as unfamiliar as liberty and responsibility that comes upon it (Razzak, 2020). Teachers as well experience this when they are imposed with difficult regulations and demands from the government or the school to have a multiple role in education as well as administration and business. In response to this, Professor Brookfield, in Brookfield, Rudolph, & Zhiwei (2019), has stated that teachers are within institutional constraints. This response was based on Freire's statement that teachers are in the system but they are not of the system. Therefore, frequently teachers are testing their students not to help the students but to help the employing or sponsoring agency. Otherwise, if testing is not to help the employing agency, then testing would not be standardized and treated as a grading system for products while the failed products are disposed of or sold for cheap. Professor Brookfield further stressed on the educator's responsibility towards the students and the problem faced by educators, he says in Brookfield et al., (2019):

“An educator's responsibility is to the student, not to the employing agency, and an educator's responsibility is to understand the internal dynamics of learning, and having that be the logic that drives your actions. Rather than the logic of institutional need. And we're often caught in between the two.”

Apart from that, teachers are also experiencing constant fear in losing their freedom and power to be in control and to oppress. Therefore, what Freire has proposed is through dialogue in the teaching and learning context through what he called as 'problem-posing education' (Razzak, 2020). This is what the two-way

communication in a student-centered learning environment would look like in a free school. An environment where the students are in control of their learning and the teachers as their facilitators, building an understanding between their roles as the students or learners who are in charge of what they will learn and the teachers will provide the knowledge and needs as their facilitators and learners who will always develop their quality of knowledge and teaching. In order to realize this, the teachers and the students have to confront the reality surrounding themselves in their learning environment and acting upon it in the way one chooses, meaning in a way that represents one's own subjectivity. This type of freedom is what pushes students to be describing content, defining and personalizing problems, asking questions, and discussing problems and the alternative solutions of those problems. Both the teachers and the students should be involved in listening, naming reality, and experiencing transformation by which they are in a state of critical consciousness and are empowered (Razzak, 2020). In this kind of state is what in a Freirean term is called as "*conscientization*" where the teacher and the students are both in a state of critically aware of their realities, attitudes, and beliefs and also have a greater capacity to make transformations in them. This state is what truly means to have freedom and democracy on the education process where the students are bonded with the teacher. Hence, the teacher and the students are both respectable to each other and are able to maintain a good relationship through understanding each of their realities. This kind of relationship will liquidate their communication and will facilitate the curiosity of the students where they could no longer hesitate to ask and experiment.

Much earlier, Ki Hajar Dewantara has already conceptualized what seems to be *Merdeka Belajar* through his education concept of *Taman Siswa* School. In his *Taman Siswa* education concept, there are five principles that has become its basic foundation, which are: Natural Destiny (*Kodrat Alam*), Freedom (*Kemerdekaan*), Cultural Bases (*Kebudayaan*), Nationality (*Kebangsaan*), and Humanity (*Kemanusiaan*). These five principles are what Ki Hajar Dewantara conceptualized as *Panca Dharma* which has become the principles that has been adopted from the seven foundations of the 1922 Establishment Charter of *Taman Siswa* (Dewantara, 1967; Towaf, 2016; Yanuarti, 2017). This *Panca Dharma* was also formulated to be used and adjusted based upon Ki Hajar Dewantara's 'Among System' which gave birth to the three principles that were also part of his motto for *Taman Siswa*, namely: *Ing Ngarso Sung Tuladha* ((for those) in front should set an example), *Ing Madya Mangun Karso* ((for those) in the middle should raise the spirit), and *Tut Wuri Handayani* ((for those) behind should give encouragement). The *Among System* is a system where teachers are the caregivers or facilitators (*Pamong*) of their students who are also their foster children (*Momongan*) (Dewantara, 1967; Towaf, 2016). *Among* means upbringing or care and protection by their *Pamong* through joy and sorrow by giving freedom to their *Momongan* to freely express themselves according to their wishes. However, even though the children are given freedom to act as they wish in the *Among System*, the *Pamong* are responsible to guide the children to the right path in learning.

From the explanation above, it is clear that there is a similarity in Ki Hajar Dewantara's *Among System* with Carl Roger's Freedom to Learn, Barbara J. Shiel's

work contract experiment, and Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy. All these concepts are similarly to what we can call as '*Merdeka Belajar*', because they all have something in common, which is giving freedom to the teachers to teach and allowing the learners to learn and grow together. However, the *Merdeka Belajar* which was conceptualized by Najeela Shihab would have a different approach to education when compared to the previous concepts or ideas of '*Merdeka Belajar*'.

4.2.2 The Emergence of Merdeka Belajar in Indonesia

The progression of Indonesia's education system is very dynamic. Almost every new appointed minister of education would tend to reform the education curriculum and bring new ideas and policies towards the education system, while its pattern remains stagnant (Shihab & *Komunitas Guru Belajar*, 2017). It is mostly a top-down approach towards the education institutions, from the primary years up to the university education. Any government's policy on education obliged schools to comply with the regulations and practices that are imposed upon them in order to be nationally recognized. The reason as to why the government are dictating how education institutions should work in every single detail is to reach the national goal in education (Republik Indonesia, 1989). This top-down approach in enforcing regulations, strict policies and instructions to reach the national standard of learning has forced the teachers to rush the learning process of their students. Students that gets left behind are then unmotivated to learn as this rushed learning process are making learning less enjoyable (Shihab & *Komunitas Guru Belajar*, 2017). However, recently the education system in Indonesia are experiencing a liberation

towards this top-down approach by the government's own initiative through its *Merdeka Belajar* Education Policy.

The concept of *Merdeka Belajar* was initially pioneered by Najelaa Shihab along with the establishment of the Teachers Learning Community (*Komunitas Guru Belajar*) since 2014 and she officially launched her book “*Merdeka Belajar di Ruang Kelas*” on 2017, which was also co-authored by her members of the Teachers Learning Community (*Komunitas Guru Belajar*). The idea of *Merdeka Belajar* was later on popularized by Indonesia's new Minister of Education and Culture (MOEC), Nadiem Makarim, on 2019 to be implemented into Indonesia's education system as a new national education policy. This *Merdeka Belajar* Education Policy by Nadiem Makarim revolves around 4 pillars that are foundational for the breakthrough of the “*Merdeka Belajar*” Concept, which are; the replacement of National Standard School Examinations (USBN) with the decentralized individual school assessment, the termination of National Examinations (UN), the simplification of the Lesson Plan (RPP), and the Zoning Regulations for New Students Acceptance (PPDB) (*Kemendikbud & Tohir, 2019*).

On the other hand, the *Merdeka Belajar* Concept by Najelaa Shihab and the Teachers Learning Community (*Komunitas Guru Belajar*) are initially more towards the bottom-up approach, outreaching community of teachers and empowering them to be accepting of their vulnerabilities and motivating them to learn as well as innovate teaching practices that are more suited towards the learning style of their own students. The implication of the concept of *Merdeka Belajar* is very versatile as it focuses on innovation and peer-to-peer sharing of their teaching

practices among teachers. However, this versatility cannot compromise the three principles that are essential for the *Merdeka Belajar* Concept – that was brought by Najelaa Shihab and the Teachers Learning Community – which are; Commitment, Independence (*Mandiri*) and Reflection. These three essential principles in the *Merdeka Belajar* concept are the key for teachers in unlocking the student's enthusiasm and desire to learn by giving them the freedom and the courage to dream as well as inspiring them to have the freedom to explore the world (Shihab & *Komunitas Guru Belajar*, 2017).

Here we can understand that there is a different view of perspective on the *Merdeka Belajar* concept between Najelaa Shihab and Nadiem Makarim. The *Merdeka Belajar* Concept that was pioneered by Najelaa Shihab and the Teachers Learning Community is more towards the emancipation of teachers to be freed of the strict regulation of the government, while the *Merdeka Belajar* which was advocated by Nadiem Makarim is more towards educational policy to empower educators and teachers the freedom to teach as how they deem fit for their school and their students. Even though there are differences in perspective on the *Merdeka Belajar* Concept between these two public figures, their ideas are complimentary to one another. There are still possibilities in how the *Merdeka Belajar* Educational Policy would develop in the future as this Policy is the highlight program of the current MOEC. In regards to the *Merdeka Belajar* concept by Najeela Shihab, this concept also keeps developing as its principle is mainly freedom, versatility and innovation in the teaching style for teachers. However, the *Merdeka Belajar* that was conceptualized by Najeela Shihab has a much longer history compared to the

Merdeka Belajar Education Policy. Even though freedom and innovation is advocated in Najeela Shihab's concept of *Merdeka Belajar*, the three essential principles of her *Merdeka Belajar* concept (Commitment, Independence, and Reflection) could not be compromised.

4.3 Motivation in Language Learning

Language is an integral part of growth and experience as well as an essential means of communication. Gardner (2007) often associate the growth and experience in acquiring a language with motivation. He believes that motivation is inherent in language learning and an essential element in language acquisition. Although, according to Krashen (1981), there are differences in language learning and language acquisition, Gardner (2007) view these definitions as a process where learning and acquisition are the same but of different stages. It means that language acquisition requires language learning. In order to acquire a language, a learner ought to learn the components of the language before getting into its context, because language acquisition is making the language part of the self by understanding the contexts of the language. In order to do that, it requires 'input' where it can be sought out through learning. Nevertheless, motivation plays a significant role in acquiring a language. It is through motivation that a learner could jump from learning a language to acquiring a language (Al Rifai, 2010; Gardner, 2007).

In the theory of Second Language Acquisition, language input is essential to achieve proficiency and competence in the targeted Second Language (Ellis, 1989; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Krashen, 1981, 1982). Khan (2012) stated that second

language acquisition/learning will improve drastically if the learners experience more second language input. He defined second language input as second language 'exposure'. From his observations, he found out that learners in Pakistan who experience more second-language 'exposure' in a conducive environment would commit less number of errors and mistakes in production or outcomes. Khan (2012) disclosed that despite Pakistan being an English Second-Language speaking country, there are still learners who are not accustomed in Second English Language. There are still schools that hampers the English input or exposure towards their students which in turn does not help their students to improve or acquire English as their second language. No matter how well the English language exposure is in an environment, English Second-language Acquisition could not be achieved if there is no willingness or motivation to learn nor exposure towards the second language. Krashen (1981) explains this phenomenon as the Affective Filter hypothesis where there are parameters of the affect that influence a learner's ability in absorbing the language input. The parameters of the affect that affects a learner's language input are their levels of motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety (Krashen, 1982).

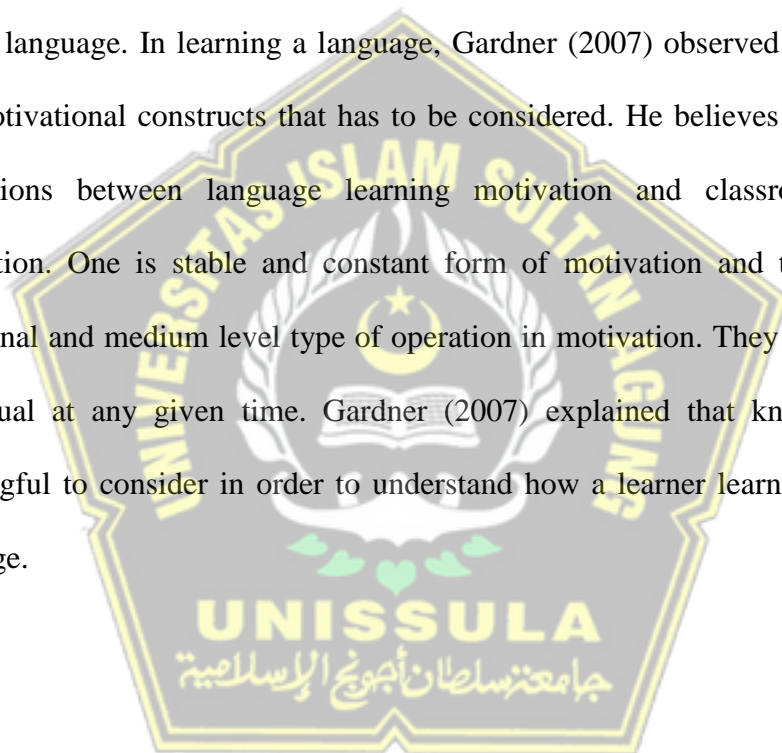
According to W. E. Lambert (1955; 1956a, b, c) in Gardner (2007), learning vocabulary is the most basic foundation for language learning. In his research, he found out that learners need to experience the learning phase before acquiring the language. He named these phases as clusters which are the Vocabulary Cluster and the Cultural Cluster. From here, Gardner (2007) expanded Lambert's findings and formulated a four-stage model of second language acquisition and development.

Gardner (2007) explained the process of language acquisition into four distinctive stages where he explained how the process of learning and acquisition takes place and how it correlates in language learning motivation and classroom learning motivation.

The stages of language acquisition, according to Gardner (2007), is Elemental, Consolidation, Conscious Expression, and Automaticity and Thought. The first phase is the Elemental stage where a learner is learning the basics of the language such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciations, etc. (similar to Lambert's term as the Vocabulary Cluster). In this stage, a learner learns new words, putting the words together, mispronounces some words and corrects them later, etc.... A pattern in which is found in how toddlers acquire language in their early years. The next stage is the Consolidation phase, a process where a learner starts to form some sort of familiarity with the language where they start to recognize that language is a system where some elements are correct and others are incorrect, develop rules for pluralization, sentence structure, and the understanding of idioms, etc. This pattern can be seen in second language students where they start to recognize and familiarize that some words and sentences are relatable to their native language. The third stage is the Conscious Expression where a learner can use the language consciously with a great deal of effort. Here, the learners are able to articulate their thoughts and ideas in their second language, but there can be found some speech-hesitations such as um, er, uh, where the learner is actively searching for the right words of form of expression. The fourth stage is the Automaticity and Thought, a stage where thought and language merge and communication in the second

language becomes automatic in most contexts. This stage represents Lambert's cultural cluster, a phase where language and the self becomes interconnected. A phase where a learner no longer thinks about the language, but thinks in the language (Gardner, 2007).

The stages above can be easily phased through motivation. A transition that depends on the levels of motivation and the learners own initiative to learn the second language. In learning a language, Gardner (2007) observed that there are two motivational constructs that has to be considered. He believes that there are distinctions between language learning motivation and classroom learning motivation. One is stable and constant form of motivation and the other is a situational and medium level type of operation in motivation. They operate on an individual at any given time. Gardner (2007) explained that knowing this is meaningful to consider in order to understand how a learner learns or acquire a language.



CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In this chapter, there are two points that will be explained, they are the conclusion and suggestion from the study.

5.1 Conclusion

The versatility of Merdeka Belajar that has been conceptualized by Najeela Shihab has potential in accommodating the SOLE Teaching Strategy. Since both concept accommodates the idea of Constructivism, therefore it will have the potential to create a new teaching paradigm that is suitable for accommodating the 21st century skills. In terms of English Language Teaching, Merdeka Belajar and SOLE has the potential to incite motivation into the learners and drive them to apply the English Language into the SOLE Sessions.

5.2 Suggestion

Since this is just a conceptual study, therefore further research must be conducted in order to test its effectiveness. This concept is still new and therefore there are room for improvement and adjustment. For instance, determining the SOLE Questions suitable for ELT and a more suitable SOLE Session for ELT.

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