

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Research

In recent years, education has moved towards a more comprehensive approach, highlighting the combination of socio-emotional skills with traditional thinking abilities. This shift emphasizes the indispensable role of emotions in learning. Research by Immordino-Yang (2016) highlights that the brain relies on emotions to form memories, process complex ideas, and make meaningful decisions. Emotional engagement plays a vital role in directing attention and fostering meaningful learning experiences, ensuring that students focus on what is relevant and personally significant to them. Emotions are not only central to personal development but also influence how students perceive, process, and retain information (Baron & Misra, 2014). Emotional states can enhance or hinder learning depending on how they interact with attention, motivation, and memory. This demonstrates that emotions are deeply intertwined with the cognitive processes essential for effective education. This change aligns with the aims of the Merdeka Curriculum, which encourages a student-centered, adaptable method to learning in Indonesia, and is closely associated with the Pancasila Student Profile, concentrating on values like critical thinking, teamwork, and character building (Widodo, 2023). These values are also deeply rooted in Indonesian educational philosophy, where education is not only an intellectual process but also a cultural and moral one (Alwasilah, 2014). Despite its acknowledged significance, the inclusion of emotional literacy in classroom activities is still under-explored and inconsistent. As pointed out by Lian (2017) in her research on Reading for Emotion for ICT Tools, even though emotional literacy is vital, its practical use in the curriculum remains limited, with teachers encountering obstacles such as insufficient training and materials. The Merdeka Curriculum offers a special chance to tackle these issues by integrating emotional literacy into the learning

experience, ensuring students are not only academically skilled but also emotionally aware.

The significance of emotional awareness became evident when the education system encountered unusual interruptions, including a drop in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) scores. This drop shows the difficulties students are dealing with, such as inadequate critical thinking skills, poor reading abilities, and trouble handling emotional pressure. Worldwide, education systems are facing major disruptions, with over 1.6 billion students in 190 countries impacted by school closures (UNESCO, 2020). This disruption highlights the immediate need to support students' emotional health alongside their academic success (Alabbasi et al., 2023). In Asia, the drop in PISA scores shows various obstacles in the education system, especially in student literacy and reasoning. Recent frameworks in pedagogy stress the importance of aligning academic demands with the available resources and emotional capacities of students (Martin et al., 2025). This alignment is crucial in post-pandemic classrooms where students' emotional resilience and cognitive readiness vary significantly.

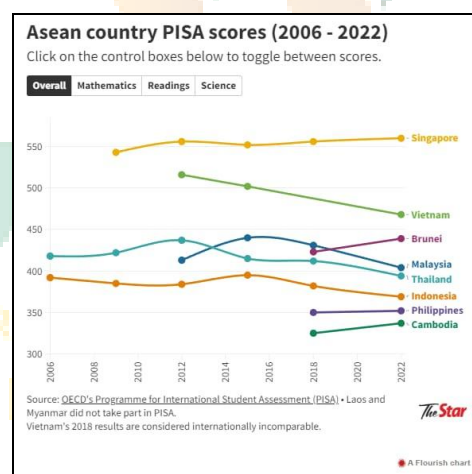


Figure 4 PISA scores in Asean

The graph above shows PISA scores from 2006 to 2022 for ASEAN countries in three areas: reading, math, and science. Overall, Singapore has consistently scored the highest in PISA results for all areas, showing a strong

education system. Singapore stayed above 550 during this time, indicating its stability in keeping high standards. This analysis emphasizes the different performance levels among ASEAN countries and points out the urgent need for policies that enhance academic and emotional literacy to close these education gaps. In Asia, the drop in PISA scores shows various obstacles in the education system, especially in student literacy and reasonisignificance of emotional understanding became clearer when it was found that the education system was encountering unmatched disruptions, like the drop in PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) scores. This drop shows the difficulties students are experiencing, including a shortage of critical thinking skills, strong reading ability, and problems handling emotional pain.

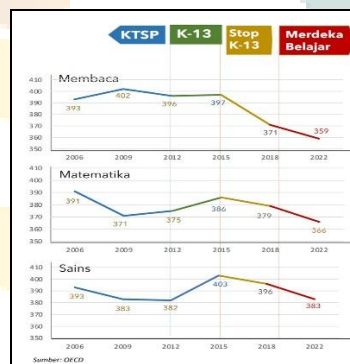


Figure 5 PISA scores in Asean

The graph above shows PISA scores in Indonesia from 2006 to 2022 in three areas: reading, maths, and science. For reading scores dropped from 393 (2006) to 359 (2022), Maths decreased from 391 (2006) to 366 (2022), and Science went down from 393 (2006) to 382 (2022), with major drops happening after 2018, particularly in reading.

The integration of emotional literacy into classroom practices is supported by growing evidence of its benefits. Emotional literacy contributes to managing stress, fostering empathy, and improving critical decision-making skills. Goleman (1995) identifies emotional intelligence as a strong predictor of success, while Sudimantara (2020) highlights its role in enhancing engagement and comprehension in language learning.

Several areas of concern related to emotional literacy in education have been identified in previous studies. First, the integration of emotional literacy into teaching practices remains limited, with few studies addressing how it is implemented across different educational levels in Indonesia. Second, the alignment of emotional literacy with existing resources, such as teacher's guidebooks, has not been thoroughly analyzed. These guidebooks often contain structured activities promoting emotional literacy, yet their practical application in classrooms is underexplored. Third, research lacks a comprehensive examination of the challenges teachers face in balancing emotional and academic objectives. Factors such as resource constraints, diverse student needs, and curriculum demands further complicate the implementation of emotional literacy in classrooms.

This research seeks to bridge the identified gaps by investigating teachers' perceptions and practices related to emotional literacy within the Merdeka Curriculum. It will examine the extent to which emotional literacy is reflected in teacher practices and resources, including teacher's guidebooks. The study will also investigate the challenges teachers face and the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles. By focusing on these aspects, this research contributes to the broader discourse on holistic education in Indonesia, providing actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers. Emotional literacy holds the potential to bridge the gap between low academic performance and socio-emotional learning, ensuring students are prepared for the cognitive and emotional demands of the 21st century. Furthermore, emotional literacy is viewed as a foundational step toward developing emotional intelligence, which is considered a critical competency not only in education but also in professional environments (Choudary, 2010).

The integration of emotional literacy into the Merdeka Curriculum is essential for addressing Indonesia's educational challenges. It supports not only academic achievement but also the development of emotionally intelligent and resilient individuals. By focusing on teachers' practices, available resources, and implementation challenges, this research underscores the

importance of emotional literacy in fostering holistic education and fulfilling the transformative goals of the Merdeka Curriculum.

However, in actual classroom settings across Indonesian schools, the implementation of emotional literacy remains limited and inconsistent. While the Merdeka Curriculum promotes holistic education and encourages the development of socio-emotional skills, many teachers are still unfamiliar with emotional literacy concepts or lack confidence in applying them. Emotional elements are often present in guidebooks and official documents, but their practical application depends heavily on individual teacher interpretation, available resources, and school support. As a result, emotional literacy tends to be embedded informally rather than systematically integrated into daily instruction.

1.2 Identification of the issues

In relation to the classroom, there were several key challenges that hindered the integration of emotional literacy into classroom practices during the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum. Firstly - having a still limited understanding of the concept, which makes it difficult for educators to determine how to connect it to language learning and other curriculum components. Another challenge is finding a balance between academic goals and students' socio-emotional needs, which is always difficult in Indonesia as national exam preparation is the top priority. Other important barriers include limited resources and training. Teachers do not have easy access to training programmes and learning materials that support the effective development of emotional literacy, such as lesson plans, reading texts and interactive tools that emphasise emotional learning.

1.3 Delimitations and focus of the study

This study is bounded by specific limitations that are intentionally established to ensure alignment with the research objectives. The scope is confined to investigating senior high school English teachers' perceptions of emotional literacy within the framework of the Merdeka Curriculum.

Participants are restricted to English teachers at the senior secondary level who are actively engaged in instructional practices under this curriculum. Data were gathered through a combination of questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of relevant teaching documents. Interviews and questionnaires focused on exploring teachers' understanding of emotional literacy, strategies implemented in the classroom and challenges faced. Document analysis was limited to the Merdeka Curriculum syllabus and teacher training modules to see the extent to which emotional literacy is integrated in policies and learning materials. The research did not include students, principals or other parties involved in implementing the curriculum, so the main focus was on teachers' experiences and perceptions. The research was further constrained to schools that have adopted the Merdeka Curriculum, which means the findings may not be applicable to educational settings operating under different curriculum frameworks.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on the research phenomenon, the research questions are as follows:

1. How do teachers view the importance of emotional literacy in learning in the Merdeka Curriculum?
2. What are the strategies used by teachers to integrate emotional literacy into learning activities in the Merdeka Curriculum?
3. What challenges do teachers face in teaching emotional literacy in daily learning in the Merdeka Curriculum?

1.5 Aims of the research

As formulated in the research questions, the aims of this research are:

1. To explore teachers' perceptions of emotional literacy within the Merdeka Curriculum and its relevance to classroom practices.
2. To identify strategies teacher's use to integrate emotional literacy, particularly through reading for emotion, in their instructional approaches.
3. To understand the challenges faced by teachers in implementing

emotional literacy in the context of middle school education. To find out the research steps are undertaken in this study.

1.6 Significances of the research

The purpose of this research is to explore the integration of emotional literacy into English language teaching at the secondary level in alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum. Being a newer concept in Indonesian education, this research investigates how emotional literacy is incorporated into teaching and learning, focusing on its theoretical and practical effects.

1. Theoretical Significance

This research adds to the theoretical conversation by improving the understanding of emotional literacy in relation to language education. It emphasizes the link between emotional literacy and language learning, especially how emotional awareness and control can improve skills like communication, critical thinking, and cooperation. By placing emotional literacy within the Merdeka Curriculum, the study broadens current theories by associating emotional literacy with comprehensive education, including character building and social-emotional development. Furthermore, it offers a basis for examining emotional literacy as an essential part of effective teaching methods in modern curricula, opening up possibilities for further research on incorporating socio-emotional skills into other subjects or educational settings.

2. Practical Significance

On a practical level, this research provides real benefits for different stakeholders:

- a. For Students: The results of this study can assist students in improving both their language and emotional abilities. By combining emotional literacy with English language learning, students can grow empathy, emotional control, and self-awareness alongside language skills. These abilities not only enhance academic success but also support personal

relationships, emotional strength, and individual development, which are essential for achievement in both academic and everyday situations.

- b. For Teachers: This research acts as a resource for teachers to create and apply teaching methods that include emotional literacy. It offers insights into forming transformative teaching strategies that extend beyond traditional methods, matching the adaptability and creativity promoted by the Merdeka Curriculum. Educators may utilize these findings to better comprehend the emotional and cognitive needs of their students, enabling the creation of learning environments that are more meaningful, inclusive, and engaging.
- c. For Policymakers and Curriculum Developers: The study emphasizes the challenges and strategies related to merging emotional literacy into the classroom, providing useful suggestions for policy and program creation. By focusing on the emotional aspects of learning, policymakers can develop training programs that furnish teachers with the skills and tools necessary to effectively incorporate emotional literacy. This aligns with the broader objectives of the Merdeka Curriculum, ensuring that emotional and cognitive growth are equally emphasized in education.

1.7 Theoretical foundation

The theoretical basis in a study offers a clear explanation of the theories and important research results that support the variables being explored. The quantity of theoretical elements covered will rely on the scope and intricacy of the research topic. This study will look into 6 linked sub-topics: Merdeka Curriculum, emotional literacy, classroom pedagogy

1.7.1. Merdeka Curriculum

Merdeka curriculum is a curriculum that promotes freedom in education. (Purnawanto A. T., 2022). In this context, the principal has the flexibility to manage their school based on the local situation. Teachers

also have the flexibility to teach important and urgent knowledge using suitable methods and strategies tailored to their students' needs. Students, as the primary focus of education, also have the freedom to fully develop their abilities to achieve the best educational outcomes.

Learning in the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes intracurricular learning that focuses on competence and content to achieve purposeful learning objectives. This approach is designed so that students can explore concepts and develop abilities according to their talents and interests. Teachers are given the flexibility through various teaching tools to adapt learning to student needs. In addition, project learning, also known as co-curricular, is focused on strengthening the Pancasila Student Profile, with dimensions designed to support students' character, creativity and social skills without relying on specific content in each subject (Satria et al., 2022: 36).

The Merdeka Curriculum serves as a transformative approach to education in Indonesia, aiming to tackle 21st-century challenges and prepare students with the competencies needed to thrive in a global context. Rooted in the philosophy of 'freedom to learn,' this curriculum promotes greater flexibility and independence in both teaching practices and student learning experiences. This is reflected in several key principles, including student-centred learning, competency-based assessment, holistic development, integration of real-world applications, and digital readiness. By focusing on these aspects, Merdeka Curriculum creates a balanced learning environment between cognitive, social and emotional, preparing students for the complex challenges of the future.

Within this framework, emotional literacy plays a crucial role in the effective implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. It not only contributes to students' holistic growth but also aligns with the core dimensions of the Pancasila Student Profile, including spiritual devotion and moral integrity, appreciation of cultural diversity, and collaborative values. These competencies require deep emotional awareness to enable

students to interact empathetically, build positive relationships, and face social challenges with confidence.

Through the Merdeka Curriculum's flexible approach, emotional literacy can be integrated into intracurricular and co-curricular learning. Teachers have an important role in ensuring that learning is not only academically orientated but also builds students' character and emotional intelligence. By connecting theory to real-world applications, such as through co-curricular projects and the use of digital technology, Merdeka Curriculum strengthens students' capacity to think critically, collaborate and manage their emotions effectively. This approach creates a truly holistic and relevant education for the 21st century.

1.7.2. Emotional Literacy

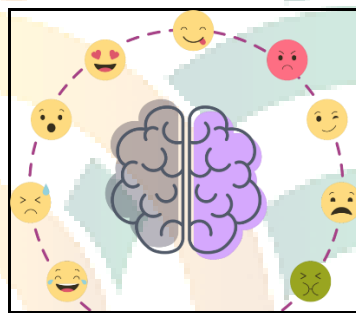


Figure 1.3 Emotional Literacy

Emotions are a vital part of being human and crucial for our survival. They make us both rational and complicated, logical yet sometimes unpredictable. Salovey and Mayer (1990) describe emotions as “structured responses, spanning across various psychological areas, such as the physiological, cognitive, motivational, and experiential systems” (p. 2). These emotional states are mental reactions to internal and/or external triggers that result in psychological, physiological and/or behavioral changes overall (Mishra, 2014).

Emotional literacy is the ability to understand and express emotions well, which includes being aware of one's own feelings, responding empathetically to others, and taking accountability for one's actions

(Janna & Syahril, 2024). In education, emotional literacy is key for fostering a positive school atmosphere, enhancing learning results, improving student behaviour and attendance, and boosting the morale of teachers and students, which all contribute to academic and institutional achievement.

Ania Lian builds on this concept by emphasizing the connection between cognitive and emotional growth, especially in second language education. Her model, Reading for Emotion, illustrates how emotional literacy serves as a bridge between cognitive development and social justice. This approach not only aids in language acquisition but also encourages inclusivity and fairness by fostering cross-cultural and social awareness (Lian, 2024). Together, these perspectives illustrate emotional literacy as a significant element in education, promoting both personal and collective progress, while creating a fairer learning environment.

The podcast Workshop: Advancing Emotional Literacy and Social Equity (Lian, Sudimantara & Baehaqi) highlights a thorough approach in education that enhances students' reading abilities along with their overall academic and social skills. This method incorporates emotional literacy to reach these educational aims. By employing emotion-centered learning, this model cultivates self-awareness and social understanding in students' education, boosting their academic success and their capacity to engage positively with others.

At minute 28:42-29:48, it is stated that emotion-focused analysis helps students grasp the emotional journey of characters and recognize disruptions in the text. This serves as the focus of reflective analysis, enabling students to obtain a more critical insight. At 31:11-32:04, the conversation continues about the significance of reflective dialogue based on emotional disruptions to expand students' perspectives and enhance abstract reasoning skills. Meanwhile, minutes 40:58-43:57 underscore the value of emotional engagement, which refers to students' emotional connection with the text, making learning more impactful. By

engaging emotions, readers can relate more profoundly to texts, leading to significant learning.

The focus on emotional learning involves assisting students in understanding and managing their emotional literacy is seen as a vital skill set that includes emotional and social processes significantly influencing how people interact with themselves and others. Kandemir and Dündar (2008) state that while intelligence is a natural ability, emotional literacy is a skill learned through experiences and education. Emotional literacy includes various abilities, like empathy, self-control, self-drive, building social skills, recognizing emotions, handling feelings, and solving problems. These skills enhance people's academic success, mental well-being, friendships, attitudes toward school, and self-image.

Emotional literacy and emotional intelligence are interconnected; people with higher emotional intelligence usually show greater emotional literacy. While emotional intelligence forms the base for understanding emotions, emotional literacy turns this understanding into practical actions like managing emotions, solving problems, and nurturing supportive relationships (Bozkurt Yükçü & Demircioğlu, 2021). For example, empathy, a natural ability, turns into a useful skill when people learn how to use it effectively in their interactions.

In educational settings, emotional literacy can influence behavior, improving classroom interactions and fostering caring and supportive environments. The modern humanistic approach to education focuses on students' emotional and social health, highlighting the role of schools in promoting emotional literacy through safe and compassionate classroom settings (Nemec & Roffey, 2006; Özbay & Şahin, 1997). Role-playing methods in guidance and counseling services have been found to enhance adolescents' emotional literacy by aiding them in expressing their feelings, understanding others, and developing stronger relationships.

However, these methods have limitations. Research targeted at small

and specific populations, like junior high school students, offers a limited view of emotional literacy's wider effects. Moreover, depending solely on role-playing techniques might not encompass all the possible strategies for improving emotional literacy. Future studies should tackle these issues by including larger, more varied participant groups, such as high school and college students, and examining different intervention strategies. Broadening the focus of such research can assist in creating more thorough and effective guidance and counseling programs, ultimately better preparing students at all educational stages to deal with the complexities of emotional and social issues.

1.7.3. Teachers Perceptions

Teacher perception means how teachers see, evaluate, and make sense of different parts of their job, such as the curriculum, the work atmosphere, students, and education rules. These views are important because they affect teachers' teaching choices, determining how they teach, how they engage with students, and how they adjust to updates in the curriculum or teaching methods.

1.7.3.1 Definition of Teacher

Teachers are important individuals in education whose role is to convey knowledge, advise, and influence the character of students. Teachers serve as guides and resources as well as counselors to help develop the needed independence (Lian, 2014), which is vital in promoting emotional understanding among students. Unlike other studies, teachers don't only deliver information but are also active facilitators of learning who create emotional connections with students to encourage a positive learning environment (Farrell, 2020). In the Independent Curriculum, teachers can modify instruction based on the needs of students. This role demands considerable adaptability, particularly given the variety of students' social,

cultural, and skill backgrounds (Rahman, 2022).

1.7.3.2 Definition of Perception

Perception is defined as how a person comprehends, interprets, and assigns significance to information obtained through the senses and life experiences. Perceptions can also be shaped by the values, culture, and expectations present in an individual's surroundings (Mayer, 2017). In Indonesia, teachers' views on the Merdeka curriculum can differ widely, depending on their comfort with the changes and flexibility that this curriculum provides. Positive views can enhance the success of implementation, while negative views can pose a barrier (Smith, 2021).

1.7.3.3 Definition of Teacher Perception

Teacher perceptions refer to how educators assess and comprehend aspects of their professional duties, including the curriculum, work environment, students, and education policies. These perceptions are essential in influencing daily teaching choices, especially in bringing emotional elements into learning. For example, a case study in secondary schools showed that teachers with favorable views on emotional literacy were more active in integrating it into classroom activities, such as through group discussions or simulations (Cheng, 2019).

Additionally, teachers' perceptions of curriculum changes can greatly affect their willingness to embrace new aspects, including emotional literacy. This viewpoint supports the notion that educators' attitudes significantly shape how they apply curriculum policies, particularly those that involve emotional components of teaching. Positive perceptions often result in creative practices that enhance the learning experience,

connecting curriculum objectives with the emotional needs of students.

So, the interaction between teacher perceptions and emotional literacy is crucial for effectively incorporating these concepts into classroom practices. Teachers who appreciate emotional factors in education are more likely to adapt and innovate, showing that perceptions can either support or obstruct the application of curriculum innovations like emotional literacy.

1.7.4. Reading for Emotions

Reading for Emotion is the skill to comprehend and grasp the emotions present in a text or excerpt. It includes analyzing language, subtleties, and context to identify the feelings conveyed by the author or characters.

1.7.4.1 Definition of Reading

Reading is the cognitive process of decoding written symbols to derive meaning. It involves recognizing words, comprehending their significance, and integrating this understanding into the broader context of a text. Reading is a powerful tool for developing both emotional literacy and reasoning skills. Through carefully selected texts and activities, students can deepen their comprehension and critical thinking abilities. This skill requires both perceptual and cognitive abilities, enabling individuals to construct meaning through interpretation (Grabe & Stoller, 2013). Reading is foundational for learning and communication, allowing access to knowledge and the development of critical thinking skills.

1.7.4.2 Definition of Emotion

Emotion is a multifaceted psychological state comprising subjective feelings, physiological responses, and

behavioral expressions. It is typically triggered by specific stimuli or situations, influencing an individual's thoughts, decisions, and interactions. Emotions can be categorized as basic (e.g., joy, anger) or complex (e.g., guilt, jealousy), with varying intensities and cognitive involvement (Izard, 2010). This dynamic interplay of components makes emotions a core element of human experience.

1.7.4.3 Components of Emotion

Emotions consist of multiple interconnected components:

a. Subjective Experience

Subjective experience refers to the internal and personal perception of the emotional state experienced by an individual. These emotions are quite person-specific with possible influences from culture, life experiences, and situational context. Recent findings have shown that subjective experience of emotions influences psychological wellbeing and indirectly affects social interactions and decision making (Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). A happy person is likely to be more open to other people, while anxious people tend to be more introverted.

b. Physiological Response

Physiological responses involve changes in the body that happen in reaction to feelings, such as a faster heartbeat, shifts in blood pressure, and hormonal changes managed by the autonomic nervous system. Research from Kreibig (2010) indicates that these physiological changes differ based on the emotion felt. For instance, positive feelings like joy can result in muscle relaxation, whereas negative feelings like fear can cause more muscle tension and a quickened heartbeat. Knowing these physiological

responses is crucial for mental health and managing stress.

c. Behavioral Expression

Behavioural expressions are visible signs of feelings, like facial expressions, body language, and voice tone. These expressions act as key social cues in personal interactions. Recent studies have found that understanding others' emotional expressions can enhance empathy and social bonds (Krumhuber et al., 2013). For instance, a smile may show happiness, whereas a frown might show unhappiness or anger. These behavioural expressions influence not only how others react to us, but also how we perceive our own feelings.

d. Cognitive Appraisal

Cognitive appraisal is the process where people assess events and situations to see how they affect their well-being, playing a key role in shaping emotional reactions. According to Lazarus (1991), cognitive appraisal happens in two parts: primary appraisal, where an event is judged as harmful, threatening, or helpful, and secondary appraisal, which looks at the resources or strategies available for dealing with the situation. These steps impact the kind and strength of emotions felt and direct the person's behavior. For example, a tough task may cause excitement if seen as manageable but anxiety if seen as too difficult. This interaction supports emotional strength and adjustable behavior in different situations.

Emotion regulation, as mentioned by Gross (2015), involves the ways people change their emotional feelings and expressions. These methods can be internal, like rethinking a negative event to lessen discomfort, or

external, like comforting a friend to change their emotional state. Gross's "modal model" of emotion shows the link between cognitive appraisal and situational aspects, showing how emotions are adjusted to reach desired results. Good emotion regulation is linked to better mental health, stronger relationships, and improved coping skills in stressful situations.

1.7.4.4 Definition of Reading for Emotions

Reading for emotion highlights the significant role that feelings play in the reading process, stressing how emotions affect understanding and involvement with the text. According to Ania Lian's method of reading for emotion, grasping a book requires more than just knowing vocabulary and grammar; it also involves recognizing the emotional significance embedded in text structures. This method asserts that emotions are essential for understanding both the world and written works. The approach teaches students to focus on the emotional elements of reading by analyzing how removing text changes impact and how writers create sequences to trigger emotions, thereby enhancing their understanding of academic and argumentative writing (Lian, 2021).

Reading for Emotions (RfE) developed by (Lian, 2017) is a learning resource that intends to examine and change texts' emotions to help students improve as (academic) writers and readers. The model provides a framework that encourages students to think critically about the ideas that influence their own writing. The Reading for Emotion model was created based on the observation that the idea of transformative learning is overlooked in genre-based classrooms because students' reactions are more about the teacher's guidance than reflecting on the effects of their actions and beliefs. Reading for

emotions includes stages like focus, disturbance, dialogue, development, resolution, and morale. It may be possible to apply this structure to posters and other non-text-based writings. Without providing specific examples, the author of Disturbance used terms such as research and metafunctions. The author created the feeling of "surprise" in Dialogue. The author of Development created the emotion of "shocked." The author has generated a sense of total surprise and boredom in the Resolution stage unexpectedly. To use the Reading for Emotion model, teachers can organize lessons based on its six steps:

- a. Focus: Spot the main emotional themes in the text.
- b. Disturbance: Examine conflicts or problems and how they affect emotions.
- c. Dialog: Investigate character interactions and the feelings they show.
- d. Development: Monitor how emotions change throughout the story.
- e. Resolution: Look at how emotional journeys finish and what they mean.
- f. Moral: Think about the lessons or values shared and how they relate to the reader's life.

In the context of the Merdeka Curriculum, emotional understanding is a key part of students' growth. The Reading for Emotion model gives a helpful framework that teachers can incorporate into their teaching methods. The model's first phase, Focus, consists of identifying important emotional themes in the text, helping students engage with the material more deeply. This phase encourages students to notice and connect with the emotional content, increasing their comprehension of the text and its effect on their emotional

awareness (Lian, 2020).

The Disturbance and Dialog phases of the model further investigate emotional dynamics by looking at conflicts and character interactions. Teachers can use these phases to assist students in thinking critically about how emotions affect the actions of characters and how conflicts influence the story. These phases are especially helpful for building empathy and emotional intelligence, as students examine the emotional reactions of characters and relate them to real-life situations (Lian, 2021). This approach not only supports emotional understanding but also improves students' comprehension and engagement with texts, allowing them to apply emotional insights in different contexts.

The final stages of the model, Development, Resolution, and Moral, encourage students to observe emotional changes and think about how these journeys reach their end. Teachers can use these stages to help students explore the emotional resolutions of the story, connecting them to their personal experiences. The Merdeka Curriculum highlights reflective thinking and self-control, which are essential for building emotional strength. By including these stages, teachers can motivate students to contemplate the lessons within texts and their meanings for personal and emotional development (Lian, 2020; Sudimantara, 2023).

1.7.5. Classroom Pedagogy

Classroom pedagogy is the main foundation in creating an effective and meaningful learning process. The implementation of classroom pedagogy includes strategies, approaches, and interactions between teachers and learners that aim to increase students' engagement, understanding, and development of social and emotional skills. In the

context of the Merdeka Curriculum, classroom pedagogy has undergone significant changes towards more flexible, contextual, and learner-centred learning (Mongkau & Pangkey, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers the freedom to design adaptive learning and according to the characteristics of each learner. This is reflected in the application of methods such as project-based learning, collaborative learning, and the integration of Pancasila Learner Profile values that emphasise the importance of emotional literacy, empathy, and cooperation (Anwar & Umam, 2023). These strategies support the achievement of 21st century skills that include cognitive, affective and social aspects.

In addition, the blended learning approach is also an integral part of modern classroom pedagogy in the Merdeka Curriculum. This approach combines face-to-face learning with online learning, allowing for more flexible and in-depth interactions. Zheng (2023) argues that blended learning can significantly increase student engagement, especially in the changing learning conditions due to the pandemic, and strengthen academic achievement if designed appropriately. In this context, the pedagogical approach also acts as a means of strengthening emotional literacy through reflective activities, online discussions and experiential learning.

However, the implementation of the ideal classroom pedagogy in Merdeka Curriculum faces a number of challenges. Fajri and Andarwulan (2023) highlight that limited teacher training, lack of understanding of the essence of the new curriculum, and gaps in digital learning facilities are obstacles to implementing pedagogical strategies that support students' emotional development optimally. Therefore, continuous strengthening of teachers' capacity is needed so that each classroom pedagogical strategy can answer students' needs holistically, including in the aspect of emotional literacy.

Thus, classroom pedagogy in the Merdeka Curriculum does not only

focus on academic achievement, but also supports students' character building and social-emotional competence. Teachers are expected to act as facilitators who not only teach, but also guide students in recognising and managing their emotions in a healthy manner, which is the essence of emotional literacy.

1.7.6. Pedagogical Approaches

Strengthening emotional literacy in an educational environment requires the application of a pedagogical approach that is not only oriented towards academic achievement, but also pays attention to the social and emotional development of students in a balanced manner. The Merdeka Curriculum, with its spirit of differentiated and student-centred learning, provides space for the development of emotional competence as an integral part of meaningful and contextual learning (Rosidah & Febrianti, 2023). In this context, the following pedagogical approaches are considered relevant to be implemented.

1. Constructivist Learning

The constructivist approach emphasises the active role of learners in building understanding through direct experience, social interaction, and critical reflection. Students do not only receive information passively, but are involved in the process of exploration and processing of information to form meaning personally (Arisandi, 2023).

In the context of emotional literacy, this approach can be applied through inquiry-based project activities that raise conflicts or emotional challenges from narrative texts, true stories, or certain social situations. For example, students are invited to analyse characters in literary works who face emotional dilemmas and then relate them to personal experiences or contextual issues in society.

Through this strategy, students are encouraged to develop empathy, critical thinking skills, and deeper self-awareness. Learning

becomes more active and meaningful as students are directly involved in the process of forming emotional knowledge and understanding (Lestari & Wahyuni, 2023).

2. Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a strategy that accommodates the diverse needs of learners, both from cognitive and emotional aspects. It adapts materials, methods and evaluation to align with students' diverse learning styles, interests and readiness levels (Putri, 2023).

In practice, teachers can provide materials with different complexities according to students' reading ability. For example, high-ability students can be given literary texts that contain complex emotions, while other students can study simpler texts that still contain emotional values. Group discussions can be used to integrate multiple perspectives and strengthen social-emotional understanding collectively.

Differentiated instruction creates an inclusive and supportive learning environment, allowing each learner to optimally develop their emotional and cognitive potential. It also fosters student confidence and engagement in the learning process (Rachmawati & Widodo, 2023).

3. Reflective Practices

Reflection is an important element in the social-emotional learning process as it encourages learners to recognise, understand and evaluate emotional experiences consciously. Reflective practice allows students to build self-awareness and develop emotion regulation in a sustainable manner (Wardhani, 2022).

Teachers can direct students to write reflective journals containing emotional responses to readings, class discussions, or actual events. In addition, guided discussion sessions can be a platform to express thoughts and feelings in a safe and open environment.

Through reflection activities, students learn to recognise their own emotional patterns, increase empathy for others, and hone their critical thinking and decision-making skills (Fitriyani, 2022).

4. Blended Learning

Blended learning combines face-to-face and online learning methods, providing flexibility in the learning process while strengthening learners' social and emotional experiences (Hidayati, 2023).

In the context of emotional literacy, teachers can utilise digital platforms to deliver video-based materials or interactive simulations related to emotion recognition. Meanwhile, face-to-face sessions are focussed on discussion activities, role-play or social simulations to practice emotional and social skills directly.

This learning model increases motivation, enables self-directed learning and provides ample space for interpersonal skills development. The integration of these two modes of learning is also considered effective in supporting emotional literacy in the digital era (Mufidah & Fitria, 2023).

1.7.7. Aesthetic Principles

Aesthetic refers to the perception and appreciation of beauty or artistic qualities in various forms, including art, nature, and design. It involves emotional and sensory engagement, fostering a deeper connection to the experience (Dewey, 1934). Philosophically, aesthetics explores the nature of beauty, taste, and the principles governing artistic creation and evaluation (Beardsley, 1981). This concept underlines the human capacity to find meaning and pleasure in creative expressions. According to Lian, A. et. al (2017), the principles of aesthetics are as follows:

a. Peak shift

Ramachandran and Hirstein (1999) explain how peak shifting

impacts cartoon drawings and caricatures in art. To create a caricature, for example, artists subtract, for instance, Nixon's face from the average of all faces (to see how different Nixon's face is from the others) and then enhance the difference to produce a sketch that "looks more like Nixon than the actual thing" (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999, p. 2018). In other words, Nixon's face's exaggerated difference acts like the thinner rectangle, which is an enhancement of the original.

b. Grouping

Grouping "must be a reward for the organism to motivate finding those connections," according to Ramachandran and Hirstein (1999, p. 21). To create a meaningful image, an example of clustering could be seeing random patches with a visual system that only links some of them. This principle is used in fashion, concerning colors. According to Ramachandran & Hirstein (1999, p. 21), the result is visually pleasing. The brain forms connections between different features that have the same wavelength, which aids in grouping, according to Ramachandran and Hirstein. Even if the features exist in different physical spaces, "Perceptual grouping and "binding" of related features may benefit from their closeness along various feature dimensions in those dimensions."

In summary, humans do not possess neurons or cells that connect to everything on Earth. This is crucial because, when creating learning support, redundancy among systems can be leveraged. Furthermore, the vision module's output, which includes color, space, depth, and motion, is not initially processed by the limbic system. Instead, the opposite happens. The limbic system gets the signal first, showing that the brain assesses the importance of the signal each time instead of just viewing the "whole" image once. The grouping principle suggests that perception is not an immediate calculation. (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999, p. 23)

c. Isolation

Before the signal is enhanced in a specific visual modality, isolation means focusing on that modality, "Because of isolation, outline drawings or sketches are more impactful than color as "art." photographs" (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999, p. 24). Isolating one area allows artists to concentrate more on the source of the information they desire. This effect does not mean that a simple sketch is sufficient to convey something. Instead, neural networks vie for attention, and reducing clutter can aid perception when information is unimportant, allowing artists to highlight a specific modality—"more is better"—as stated by Ramachandran and Hirstein (p. 24). They also mention that to create aesthetic effects, like peak shifts, one must engage in contrast relationships.

d. Contrast

Grouping will create contrast. In other words, contrast is also part of feature extraction before clustering, which requires removing unnecessary information extraction that draws or heightens attention (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999, p. 26). They claim that information "is mainly found in areas that are changing, like edges, so it makes sense that these areas would attract more attention and be more "interesting" than uniform regions" (p. 25). Therefore, perception focuses on those changing areas and sees them as appealing and possibly enjoyable. The image of a nude woman adorned with baroque gold jewelry is more visually attractive than a completely nude woman because there is a clear contrast between the luxurious texture of the jewelry and the smooth texture of bare skin, whether naked or dressed.

e. Symmetry and balance

According to Ramachandran and Hirstein (1999, p. 27), this relates to the layout's correct dimensions and size agreement. In an artistic context, this can be seen, for example, in a kaleidoscope or an

Islamic mosque. According to Hamdani (2012), space differentiates the place and state of each phenomenon compared to other phenomena that are directly affected by symmetry.

f. Perceptual problem-solving or generic viewpoint (familiarity)

According to Ramachandran and Hirstein (1999, p. 27), this principle relates to how most individuals perceive things, although there are various perspectives that can be applied. In essence, people like to see things arranged as they have before. This principle is demonstrated by using a cube as an illustration. Even if most individuals prefer the usual cube view, a flat hexagon with spokes can represent a cube but is never seen as one (p. 28). Nevertheless, "This principle can be bent to create a pleasing outcome instead of following it (p. 30). One instance is a nude artwork by Picasso that shows how the arms cannot share the same lines as the body's lines. According to the principle, "Interpretations that depend on a single viewpoint are disliked by the visual system of perception" (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999, p. 30).

g. Metaphor

One instance of a metaphorical effect is when a tree branch resembles the shape of a woman's body. For instance, "The shapes of the branch align with her curves. Perhaps the tree's fertility symbolizes her youth, as the fruit on the branch imitates the shapes of her stomach and breasts (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999, p. 30). Another example is Shakespeare's depiction of Juliet as "[d]ay that hath sucked the honey from thy breath" which they mention (p. 31). Recognizing similarities or shared references among different entities is crucial to the law of metaphor (p. 31). Limbic activation, which guarantees that rewarding and enjoyable processes occur when various events are relatively linked. Puns, poetry, and visual art exemplify this limbic activation (Ramachandran & Hirstein, 1999, p. 31).

1.8 Previous Studies

Several studies have explored the importance and implementation of emotional literacy in education, offering valuable insights for this research:

Sudimantara (2020): In *Designing 21st Century Language Learning Scenario in Indonesia: A Perspective from Computer-Assisted Language Learning*, this study examined the integration of emotional literacy into language teaching. The findings highlighted the positive impact of emotional literacy on students' communication skills and empathy, suggesting strategies such as reflective discussions and storytelling to enhance socio-emotional development.

Lian (2017): In *Reading for Emotion with ICT Tools*, this study explored the integration of emotional literacy with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools in reading education. The findings emphasized the positive impact of using technology to enhance students' emotional engagement with texts. By incorporating ICT tools, students were better able to analyze and interpret the emotional aspects of texts, leading to improved comprehension and empathy. The study suggests that these tools can be used effectively to develop critical thinking and emotional awareness, which are essential for fostering deeper learning in language education.

Furlan & Della (2024): In *Teachers' Views of an Emotional Education Program: A Qualitative Study*, this study examined how teachers perceive an emotional education program designed to improve students' emotional intelligence. The research, published in *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, utilized qualitative methods to understand how teachers assess the program's success in fostering emotional growth in students. The results showed that teachers felt the program aided students in managing their emotions and enhancing their relationships with others. However, teachers also pointed out difficulties in applying emotional education due to insufficient resources and a lack of training. This study indicates that even though emotional education programs are seen positively, additional support and professional growth for educators are necessary for effective implementation.

Although these studies provide foundational knowledge, they lack specific

focus on secondary school English teachers' perceptions and strategies within the Merdeka Curriculum. This research aims to address this gap by examining how emotional literacy is understood and applied in the context of English language teaching in Indonesian secondary schools.

1.9 Frame of thought

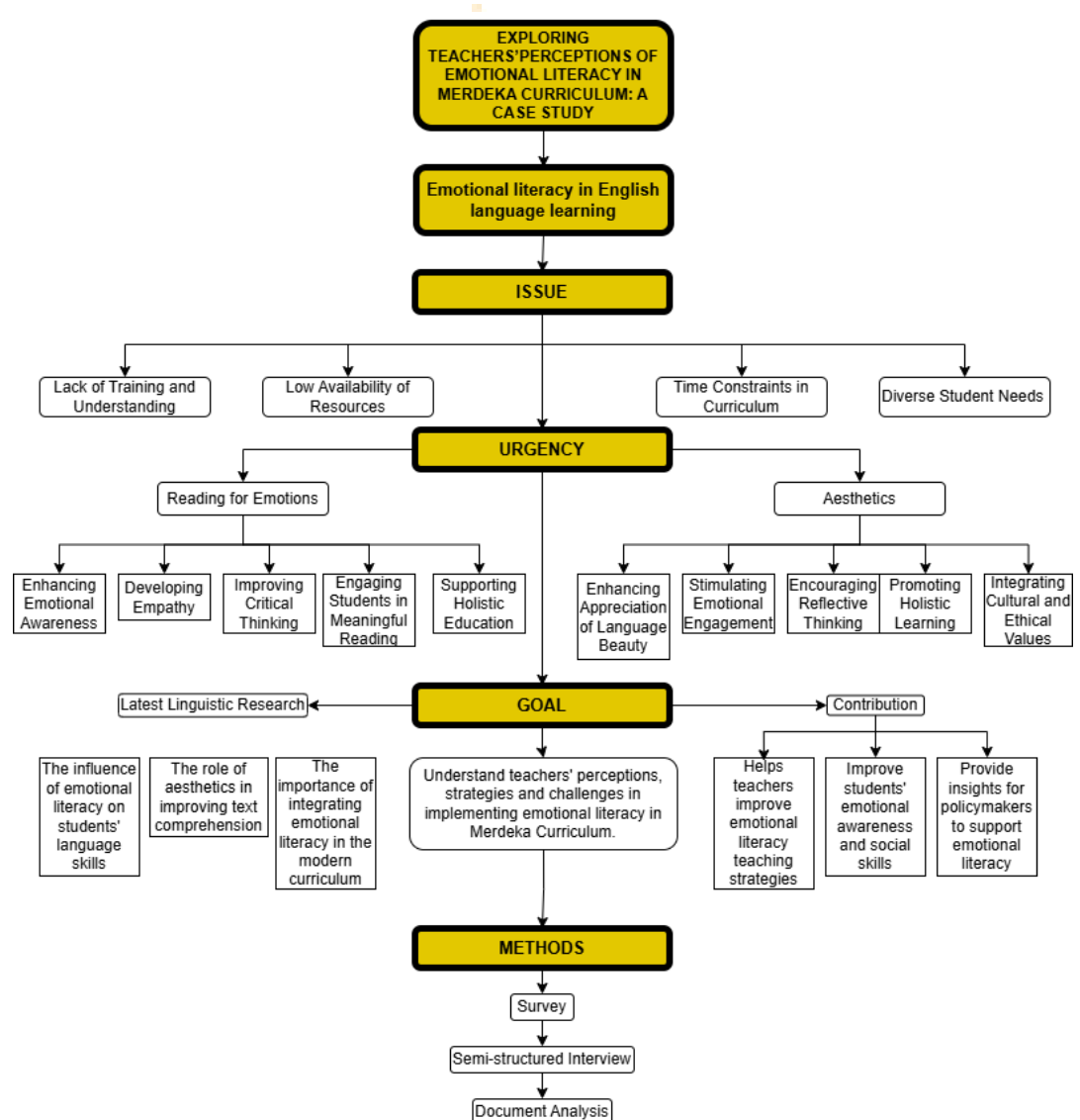


Figure 6 Frame of Thought

1.10 Research Methods

1.10.1. Research Design

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design.

The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore in-depth meanings, contexts and nuances related to the phenomenon of emotional literacy in English language learning at the junior secondary level. The case study was chosen as the research design because it allows researchers to conduct an in-depth investigation of teachers' experiences, views, and practices in a specific context, namely the implementation of emotional literacy in the Merdeka Curriculum in the two schools that served as research locations.

Case studies provide space for researchers to gain a comprehensive and holistic understanding of how emotional literacy is implemented in the classroom, the challenges teachers face, and the strategies used to overcome these obstacles. This approach also allows the use of various data sources that complement each other, so that the research results become more valid and accountable.

1.10.2. Research Overview

This study was conducted in two formal education institutions located in Cirebon City, namely a public junior high school (SMPN) and a state Islamic junior secondary school (Madrasah Tsanawiyah Negeri/MTsN). These schools were selected based on several considerations, including their good accreditation status, active implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, and commitment to the integration of emotional literacy within English language teaching.

The junior high school is known for its long-standing reputation in providing quality education. It has adequate facilities such as comfortable classrooms, computer laboratories, and libraries, creating a conducive learning environment. The school actively supports innovation in English teaching and character education aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum.

The MTsN, similarly, is a well-established institution with sufficient facilities, including instructional spaces, computer access, library resources, and extracurricular areas. It emphasizes a balanced development of students'

academic and character competencies, and encourages the application of emotional literacy in classroom learning.

1.10.3. Research Subjects

This research involved two English teachers as primary respondents, each representing one of the selected schools. The selection of participants was based on their direct involvement in English language instruction and their experience in applying the Merdeka Curriculum.

1.10.4. Respondent Profile

The first respondent is a female English teacher from the public junior high school. She has over fifteen years of teaching experience and holds a bachelor's degree in English Education from a private university. The second respondent is a female English teacher from the MTsN with approximately four years of teaching experience and an academic background in English Literature from a public university.

Both teachers are civil servants and have attended various teacher training programs and seminars related to pedagogy, character education, and curriculum development. Their professional experiences and educational backgrounds contribute to diverse teaching styles and perspectives on the integration of emotional literacy in English instruction.

These contrasting profiles in terms of teaching experience and institutional context provide rich, comparative insights into how emotional literacy is understood and practiced in different educational settings under the Merdeka Curriculum framework.

1.10.5. Data Sources and Types

This research collected two main types of data, namely primary data and secondary data.

a. Primary data

Primary data was obtained directly from the two main respondent English teachers through survey instruments and semi-structured

interviews. The survey was used to collect quantitative data on teachers' views on emotional literacy, teaching strategies implemented and challenges faced. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore teachers' experiences, perceptions and practices in integrating emotional literacy in English language learning.

b. Secondary Data

Secondary data was obtained through document analysis of the English teaching modules used by the two teachers. This document analysis aims to see the extent to which emotional literacy has been integrated in learning components such as learning objectives, materials, activities, media, and assessment. This secondary data serves as a complement and reinforcement of the findings from the primary data.

1.10.6. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was conducted using three complementary techniques: a qualitative survey, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The combination of these methods allowed for data triangulation and enriched the validity of findings in line with the nature of qualitative inquiry.

a. Qualitative Survey

The survey was conducted by distributing a structured questionnaire to two English teachers who participated as respondents. While the questionnaire employed a Likert scale with closed-ended items, it was used not for statistical analysis but to gain initial insight into the teachers' perceptions of emotional literacy. The survey explored their general views, instructional strategies, and the challenges they encountered when integrating emotional literacy into classroom practice. This instrument functioned as a supporting tool to identify emerging patterns that would later inform the development of interview questions and guide deeper qualitative exploration.

In the context of this qualitative research, the survey served as

an exploratory technique. Its purpose was to supplement and triangulate the more detailed data obtained through interviews and document analysis, rather than to produce quantifiable generalizations. Although surveys are commonly associated with quantitative studies, in this research they were used qualitatively to gather initial insights, serving as a complementary tool to deepen the understanding gained through interviews and document analysis.

b. Semi-Structured Interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with both teacher participants to obtain rich, detailed, and contextualized information. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility in exploring respondents' experiences, strategies, and reflections while maintaining a consistent thematic focus. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim for in-depth thematic analysis.

c. Document Analysis of Teaching Modules

Teaching module documents used by both teachers were collected and analyzed to assess how emotional literacy was embedded in their instructional plans. This analysis focused on several key elements, including learning objectives, materials, instructional activities, media used, and the assessment components. The findings from the document analysis provided an additional layer of evidence to evaluate the extent to which emotional literacy was supported within formal teaching instruments.

1.10.7. Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in this study refers to the qualitative data analysis model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of three main stages, namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing and verification.

a. Data reduction

At this stage, data obtained from surveys, interviews and document analysis were selected, focused and simplified to make them easier to understand and analyse. Irrelevant or insignificant data were set aside, while important data were organised in the form of summaries, thematic categories and codes that facilitated the identification of patterns and main themes. This data reduction process was carried out continuously and critically to maintain the focus of the research.

b. Data Display

After data reduction, the selected data were displayed systematically to facilitate further analysis and interpretation. In this qualitative study, data display refers to the organized arrangement of information in the form of narrative descriptions, thematic tables, and excerpts that support pattern recognition and thematic categorization.

Interview transcripts were displayed through thematic matrices and direct quotations that reflected key issues related to teachers' perceptions, strategies, and challenges in integrating emotional literacy. The results of document analysis were presented through summary tables that outlined relevant elements such as instructional objectives, materials, media, and emotional content found in teaching modules.

Although a survey was used, its results were not analyzed statistically. Instead, survey responses were displayed in descriptive tables and simple bar graphs to reveal general trends that complemented the qualitative findings. These displays functioned as supporting elements for triangulation, not as primary evidence for

quantitative generalization.

This structured display of qualitative data helped the researcher to identify emerging patterns and relationships among themes, and to draw more grounded and coherent conclusions from the various sources of data.

c. Conclusion Drawing and Verification

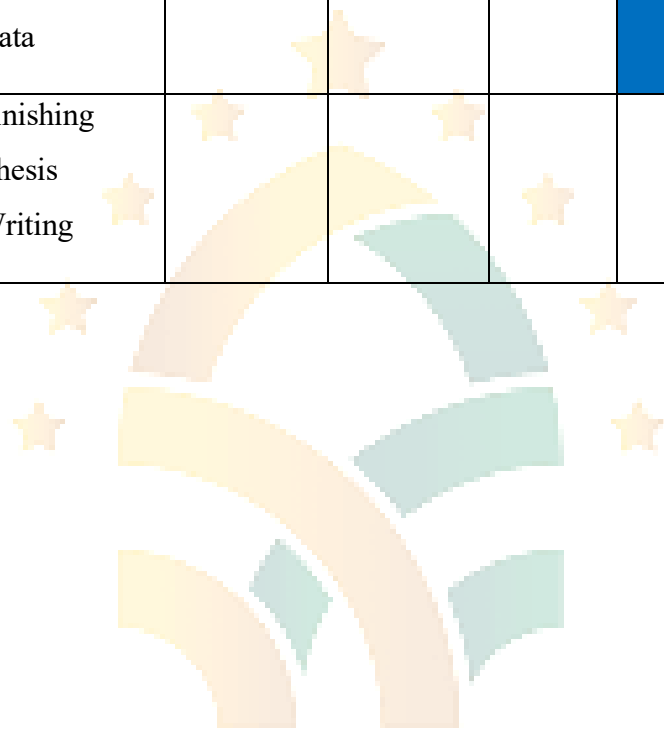
Conclusions are drawn based on patterns and themes that emerge from the data that has been presented. This process involved in-depth interpretation and critical reflection on the research findings. Verification was conducted through triangulation of data from all three data collection instruments to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings. This triangulation allows researchers to compare and confirm the consistency of data from various sources, so that the research results become more credible and can be scientifically accounted for and unbiased.

1.11 Research Timeline

Here, the researcher divides the times to ensure timely completion of this research:

No	Activities	Time Allocations				
		January	February	March	April	May-June
1.	Applying Proposal					
2.	Proposal Seminar					

4.	Conducting Research					
5.	Collecting Data					
6.	Analyzing Data					
7.	Finishing Thesis Writing					



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