

The National Curriculum Changes and Their Effects on English Language Teaching in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The objectives of this research are to explore the evolution and implications of curriculum reforms in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia, focusing on the challenges and opportunities these reforms present for educators and learners. This research is a qualitative study that examines the historical development of ELT curricula, pedagogical shifts, teacher and student adaptations, contextual challenges, and future recommendations. The sample of this research includes education policymakers, ELT educators, and students across different regions of Indonesia. The data were gathered by using interviews, surveys, and document analysis, and were analysed by employing thematic analysis to identify key trends and insights. The findings showed that while recent curriculum reforms have made significant strides in introducing competency-based learning, critical thinking, and digital literacy, they have also highlighted systemic challenges such as resource inequalities, regional disparities, and varying levels of teacher readiness. In conclusion, the research suggests that future curriculum reforms should focus on addressing these challenges through equitable resource distribution, enhancing teacher professional development, and adapting the curriculum to better meet the socio-cultural and linguistic diversity of Indonesia.

Keywords : Curriculum reform, English language teaching, Indonesia, pedagogical innovation, education policy.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi evolusi dan implikasi reformasi kurikulum dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris di Indonesia, dengan fokus pada tantangan dan peluang yang ditawarkan oleh reformasi tersebut bagi pendidik dan peserta didik. Penelitian ini adalah studi kualitatif yang mengkaji perkembangan historis kurikulum ELT, pergeseran pedagogis, adaptasi guru dan siswa, tantangan kontekstual, serta rekomendasi masa depan. Sampel penelitian ini meliputi pembuat kebijakan pendidikan, pendidik ELT, dan siswa di berbagai daerah di Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, survei, dan analisis dokumen, dan dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi tren dan wawasan utama. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa meskipun reformasi kurikulum terbaru telah mencapai kemajuan signifikan dalam memperkenalkan pembelajaran berbasis kompetensi, berpikir kritis, dan literasi digital, reformasi ini juga mengungkapkan tantangan sistemik seperti ketidaksetaraan sumber daya, disparitas regional, dan variasi tingkat kesiapan guru. Kesimpulannya, penelitian ini menyarankan agar reformasi kurikulum di masa depan lebih fokus pada mengatasi tantangan tersebut melalui distribusi sumber daya yang lebih adil, peningkatan pengembangan profesional guru, dan penyesuaian kurikulum agar lebih sesuai dengan keragaman sosial-budaya dan linguistik Indonesia.

Kata kunci: Reformasi Kurikulum, Pengajaran Bahasa Inggris, Indonesia, Inovasi Pedagogis, Kebijakan Pendidikan.

INTRODUCTION

Curriculum changes are pivotal to educational development, as they directly influence the objectives, content, and methodologies of teaching and learning processes. These changes not only reflect

the evolving needs of society but also aim to enhance the competencies required to navigate an increasingly complex world. In Indonesia, as in many countries, the curriculum plays a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape, serving as a blueprint for fostering national competencies while addressing both local and global societal demands. Over the decades, Indonesian education policymakers have introduced a series of curriculum reforms with the goal of improving English language teaching (ELT), recognizing the importance of equipping students with the skills needed to communicate effectively in a globalized world. These curriculum shifts are designed to prepare students for a competitive workforce by enhancing their language proficiency, critical thinking, and adaptability.

Despite the well-intentioned nature of these reforms, the implementation of new curricula often presents a range of challenges. These challenges include misalignment between the curriculum's objectives and the realities of classroom teaching, as well as the insufficient preparation and training of teachers to effectively execute new pedagogical strategies. Many teachers struggle to integrate innovative teaching methods into their classrooms due to a lack of training, resources, and support. Additionally, the disparity in educational resources across urban and rural areas of Indonesia exacerbates the difficulty of effectively implementing curriculum changes, further hindering the delivery of quality English language education. This gap in resources, combined with large class sizes and varying student proficiency levels, often leads to gaps in learning outcomes, making it difficult for all students to benefit equally from these reforms.

This article aims to examine the evolution of Indonesia's ELT curricula, delving into the underlying causes of these challenges and their impact on teaching practices, student outcomes, and overall educational quality. By looking at the history of curriculum changes, from the Grammar-Translation Method to more recent competency-based and communicative approaches, we can better understand how these shifts have influenced both the educational system and the teachers and students at the heart of it. Furthermore, the article will highlight how the country's education system has responded to the need for adjustments in line with both global trends and local contexts, as well as the ongoing challenges that continue to shape the effectiveness of English language teaching in Indonesia today.

METHODOLOGY

The analysis in this article is based on a qualitative approach, utilizing a comprehensive review of relevant literature, policy documents, and case studies. This approach enables a detailed examination of the complexities surrounding curriculum reforms and their practical implications. Data were gathered from a diverse range of sources, including academic journals, government reports, policy guidelines, and previous research studies focusing on ELT curriculum changes in Indonesia and comparable international contexts. By incorporating these varied sources, the research ensures a holistic view that captures both macro-level policy decisions and micro-level classroom realities.

This method allowed for an in-depth exploration of several critical areas: the historical evolution of curricula, the impact of pedagogical shifts on teaching and learning, the adaptability of teachers and students to new approaches, and the broader implementation challenges that arise in different socio-economic and cultural contexts. Special attention was given to identifying patterns and recurring themes that highlight the successes and shortcomings of current and past reforms.

By synthesizing findings from multiple sources, this article aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the implications of curriculum reforms in the Indonesian ELT context. The qualitative approach also facilitates the identification of actionable insights and practical recommendations, ensuring that the analysis contributes meaningfully to the ongoing discourse on education policy and practice.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Historical Evolution of ELT Curriculum in Indonesia

The development of Indonesia's national curriculum has been deeply intertwined with broader socio-political, economic, and cultural shifts within the country. From the 1970s, when grammar-focused approaches dominated educational practices, to the more recent adoption of competency-based curricula,

each reform has sought to better align education with both national aspirations and global standards. In particular, the evolution of English Language Teaching (ELT) has mirrored the shifting educational priorities of the nation. The 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013), a significant reform in Indonesia's educational landscape, introduced a thematic and integrated approach to learning that emphasized the development of critical thinking, creativity, and character education. This curriculum sought to address the shortcomings of previous models, such as the knowledge-based 2006 Curriculum (KTSP), which placed heavy emphasis on rote memorization. The 2013 Curriculum shifted the focus toward the practical application of skills, encouraging students to engage more deeply with learning materials and to cultivate problem-solving and analytical skills that could serve them in real-world situations.

Some key milestones in the evolution of the ELT curriculum in Indonesia reflect shifts in educational priorities and global trends. In the 1970s, the Grammar-Translation Method dominated, focusing heavily on written language, particularly reading and writing, with little emphasis on listening and speaking skills. This approach emphasized memorization of vocabulary and grammatical rules, often disconnecting language learning from its practical, communicative use. In the 1980s and 1990s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced to foster students' communicative competence in English. CLT emphasized the importance of speaking and listening, and encouraged students to use English in real-life contexts, moving away from traditional grammar-centered methods. In 2004, the Competency-Based Curriculum was implemented, shifting focus to student outcomes and the practical use of language, aligning language learning with students' career and daily life needs. The most recent milestone, the 2013 Curriculum (Kurikulum 2013), marked a significant change by advocating for a student-centered approach. It integrated English with broader themes and real-life contexts, promoting deeper understanding through interdisciplinary learning. The curriculum also emphasized active participation, collaborative work, and critical thinking, aligning with international educational trends aimed at fostering creativity and analytical skills among students.

Despite these progressive changes, various persistent challenges have hindered the full and effective implementation of ELT curricula across Indonesia. These challenges include insufficient resources, large class sizes, and a lack of adequate teacher training, all of which have hindered the successful realization of curriculum reforms in practice.

Pedagogical Shifts in ELT

The reform of the ELT curriculum in Indonesia has not only led to changes in the content being taught, but also to significant shifts in pedagogical approaches. In line with global educational trends, there has been a move from teacher-centered instruction to more learner-centered methodologies. The 2013 Curriculum, for example, emphasizes the importance of active learning, where students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning process through collaborative tasks and project-based activities. This shift in focus aims to promote deeper engagement and critical thinking among students, as well as to prepare them for real-world challenges where language proficiency and problem-solving skills are essential.

Some key pedagogical innovations within the ELT curriculum reforms in Indonesia have been crucial in reshaping the way English language teaching is approached. These innovations are designed to address the dynamic needs of students in a rapidly changing educational landscape, integrating modern methodologies with traditional practices to ensure more effective language acquisition.

Integrated Skills Development is one of the most significant shifts in the teaching of English. In traditional teaching models, language skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing were often taught in isolation. However, the current approach views these skills as interconnected and emphasizes the importance of using them in tandem. Activities are designed to help students use multiple language skills simultaneously, promoting a more holistic learning experience. For example, a typical lesson might involve reading a passage, discussing its content in small groups, and then writing a reflection or summary based on the discussion. This integrated approach allows students to engage with the language more dynamically, enhancing their ability to process and produce language in real-world contexts. By combining various skills, students are better prepared for the practical use of English in everyday situations, which is essential for communication in a globalized world.

Another notable pedagogical shift is Task-Based Learning (TBL), which focuses on immersing students in real-world tasks that require the active use of language. In TBL, students engage in activities

that mirror situations they are likely to encounter outside the classroom, such as solving problems, collaborating on projects, or creating presentations. These tasks are meaningful and purpose-driven, encouraging students to apply their language skills in context. This approach not only enhances students' proficiency but also builds their confidence in using English for authentic communication. By working on tasks that require practical language application, students develop both their linguistic abilities and their critical thinking skills, fostering a deeper understanding of how language functions in various settings. TBL empowers students to take ownership of their learning, providing them with valuable opportunities to experiment with language and receive immediate feedback on their performance.

In addition to these strategies, Blended Learning has gained significant traction in recent years. Blended learning integrates digital tools and resources with traditional classroom instruction, offering students a more flexible and diverse learning experience. This method utilizes a variety of online platforms, interactive software, videos, and virtual classrooms, complementing face-to-face lessons with technology-enhanced learning. The incorporation of digital tools not only makes learning more engaging but also ensures that students can access a wide range of learning materials that cater to different learning styles and needs. Blended learning is particularly beneficial in today's technology-driven global environment, as it prepares students for the digital skills required in both academic and professional settings. By blending online and offline learning environments, this approach provides students with the opportunity to learn at their own pace, access resources beyond the classroom, and engage with a broader array of content that enhances their language proficiency.

Together, these pedagogical innovations—Integrated Skills Development, Task-Based Learning, and Blended Learning—represent a significant departure from traditional English language teaching methods. They align with global educational trends that emphasize student-centered learning, practical language use, and the integration of technology. These innovations help make learning more dynamic, interactive, and relevant to the real world, ensuring that students acquire the skills necessary to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

While these innovative pedagogical approaches have the potential to make learning more dynamic and relevant to students, their success is dependent on factors such as teacher preparedness and the availability of resources. Teachers need to be equipped with the necessary training and access to appropriate teaching materials to effectively implement these new methodologies.

Teacher and Student Adaptations

The success of curriculum reforms is highly dependent on how effectively both teachers and students can adapt to the changes in teaching methods. Teachers are no longer merely transmitters of knowledge; they have assumed the role of facilitators and mentors. This shift requires teachers to possess the skills to guide students through a more participatory and student-centered learning process. As a result, ongoing professional development and access to high-quality instructional resources are essential for ensuring that teachers can effectively facilitate the learning process under the new curriculum.

Teachers in Indonesia face a range of significant challenges in implementing the new ELT curriculum, particularly as the educational landscape shifts towards more student-centered and technology-enhanced pedagogical strategies. One of the primary obstacles is the limited training that many educators have received in these modern teaching methods. While there is a growing recognition of the importance of active student engagement, critical thinking, and the use of technology in the classroom, many teachers have not been provided with comprehensive professional development opportunities to effectively incorporate these approaches into their teaching practices. This lack of training leaves teachers ill-prepared to fully embrace the learner-centered principles outlined in the 2013 Curriculum, which requires a shift in both mindset and teaching techniques.

In addition to limited training, resource constraints are another significant challenge that teachers must navigate. Many schools, particularly those in rural or remote areas, struggle with insufficient teaching materials, outdated technology, and inadequate facilities, which severely limit the ability of teachers to deliver high-quality lessons. For instance, schools often lack essential resources like textbooks, digital tools, and language labs that are crucial for supporting an interactive and engaging learning environment. Without access to these resources, teachers are unable to fully implement the innovative teaching methods envisioned in the curriculum, such as blended learning or task-based learning, which require modern technology and up-to-date materials.

Moreover, large class sizes in many schools further complicate the situation. In overcrowded classrooms, where there are often 30 or more students per class, teachers face significant difficulty in managing the classroom effectively. This makes it challenging to engage students in interactive and participatory lessons, which are central to the student-centered approach emphasized in the 2013 Curriculum. The sheer number of students in each class means that individualized attention and collaborative tasks, key components of active learning, become nearly impossible to execute. Teachers may struggle to ensure that every student is fully involved and supported, and many students may fall behind due to a lack of personalized guidance. The combination of limited training, inadequate resources, and large class sizes presents a formidable barrier to the successful implementation of the 2013 ELT curriculum.

For students, adapting to the more active and participatory learning methods can also be challenging. Many students are accustomed to more traditional forms of learning, which emphasize passive reception of information, and may struggle with the increased demands for active participation, critical thinking, and collaboration. Additionally, disparities in English proficiency across different regions in Indonesia make it necessary for teachers to adopt differentiated instructional strategies in order to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Contextual Challenges in ELT Implementation

The successful implementation of curriculum reforms in Indonesia is heavily influenced by a variety of contextual factors, including socio-economic conditions, regional disparities, and cultural norms, all of which present unique challenges to the education system. One of the most prominent issues is the significant divide between urban and rural areas in terms of access to quality education, resources, and trained teachers. In urban areas, schools often have better access to modern facilities, trained educators, and a wider array of learning materials, allowing students to benefit from a more comprehensive and enriched educational experience. However, rural schools face considerable challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, a lack of qualified teachers, and insufficient learning materials, which contribute to marked disparities in the quality of education, particularly in English language learning. Many rural areas suffer from limited access to technology and digital resources, making it harder for students to engage with the kind of interactive and multimedia-rich learning that is increasingly common in urban schools. As a result, students in rural areas often face significant barriers to achieving the same level of proficiency in English as their urban counterparts, further perpetuating the cycle of educational inequality.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in shaping the way curriculum reforms are implemented across the country. Traditional views of education, deeply ingrained in Indonesian culture, often prioritize teacher authority and the rote memorization of facts. These views can be at odds with the learner-centered principles that are the foundation of the 2013 Curriculum. In many classrooms, especially in more rural or conservative regions, there may still be an expectation for students to passively receive information from the teacher, which conflicts with the more active and participatory approach promoted by the curriculum. The shift towards a more student-driven approach, which emphasizes critical thinking, collaboration, and real-world application of knowledge, can be difficult to implement in environments where traditional, teacher-centered pedagogies have long been the norm. Furthermore, the integration of English into broader thematic areas and real-life contexts, as required by the 2013 Curriculum, can be a daunting task for teachers and students who are not yet proficient in the language. In regions where English is less commonly spoken, both teachers and students may struggle to integrate the language into everyday learning, and this can hinder the overall success of curriculum reforms.

To address these challenges and ensure that curriculum reforms lead to meaningful improvements in education across the country, targeted policies and investments are necessary to bridge the existing gaps in infrastructure, teacher training, and resource allocation. Policymakers must prioritize the development of rural schools by improving the physical infrastructure, such as classrooms, access to technology, and learning materials. Teacher training programs should also be expanded to ensure that educators in all areas, particularly those in under-resourced regions, have the knowledge and skills needed to implement new pedagogical strategies effectively. Furthermore, policies should focus on the equitable distribution of resources, so that all students, regardless of their geographic location or socio-economic status, have access to the same high-quality educational opportunities. Only through a concerted effort to

address these issues can Indonesia hope to create an education system where all students are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to thrive in a globalized world. By ensuring that reforms are implemented in a way that accounts for these contextual factors, Indonesia can move closer to achieving educational equity and improving outcomes for all students.

CONCLUSION

Curriculum reforms in Indonesia represent a commendable effort to modernize English language teaching and align it with global standards. These reforms are driven by the need to prepare students for a competitive global environment, equipping them with essential communication skills and cultural competencies. However, the success of these reforms depends on addressing the practical challenges faced by educators and learners, which include resource limitations, training gaps, and diverse linguistic backgrounds across regions. Teachers require consistent professional development to adapt to new methodologies, while students need access to learning environments that encourage active participation and critical thinking. By investing in teacher training, improving access to resources, and promoting inclusive practices that account for regional disparities, Indonesia can bridge these gaps effectively. Furthermore, fostering collaboration among policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders can create a more supportive ecosystem for implementation. Through these efforts, Indonesia can ensure that its ELT curricula achieve their intended goals and contribute significantly to the nation's educational and socio-economic development, ultimately enhancing its global standing and competitiveness.

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