



INSIGHTS INTO ELT CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN INDONESIA: CHALLENGES, TRENDS, AND IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract

The implementation of the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum in Indonesia continues to face challenges despite numerous reforms, including the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum. This systematic literature review examines 37 studies published between 2013 and 2024 to identify trends and challenges in ELT curriculum implementation. Findings reveal that qualitative research methodologies, especially case studies and descriptive approaches, dominate the field. The primary challenges identified include limited teacher competence and proficiency, pedagogical and practical issues, and student-related challenges. Teachers often lack sufficient English proficiency and pedagogical skills to implement innovative approaches like Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the Scientific Approach, and Genre-Based Approaches (GBA). Additionally, low student motivation and passive learning behaviours persist, further hindering curriculum effectiveness. The study suggests enhancing professional development to equip teachers with practical skills and curriculum familiarity. Practical and contextualized curriculum guidelines and comprehensive evaluation mechanisms are also needed to bridge the gap between policy and classroom practice. Addressing these challenges is essential for improving ELT outcomes in Indonesia.

Keywords: *ELT curriculum; Merdeka Curriculum; pedagogical challenges*

Introduction

English has become a global language that plays a crucial role in 21st-century education due to several reasons. Firstly, English is the primary language of international communication, business, and diplomacy, making it essential for individuals to effectively engage in a globalized world. Proficiency in English opens up opportunities for collaboration, networking, and accessing a wealth of information available in English. Secondly, English is the language of technology and innovation, with a significant portion of online resources, research publications, and technological advancements being in English. Therefore, proficiency in English is vital for individuals to stay updated with the latest developments in various fields. Lastly, English proficiency enhances individuals' employability and career projections, as many multinational companies and organizations seek employees who can communicate effectively in English (Aziza, 2020; Nishanthi, 2018).

However, even with ELT's lengthy history of curriculum changes in Indonesia, numerous studies have revealed that the Indonesian English language teaching is still far from being successful (Lie et al., 2019). The latest English Proficiency Index among non-English speaking

country released by English first in 2023- one of the most well-known and reputable provider for English- showed that Indonesia is ranked no.79 out of 113. It was categorized “very low”. This Index could be a general reference that the number of curriculum changes within years have not showed significant progress. Several findings also say the same thing. Indonesian senior high school students’ English proficiency was low (Suryani & Amalia, 2018). That fact shows that the implementation of our English language teaching needs to be questioned and evaluated.

According to Souriyavongsa et al. (2013), low English proficiency could be due to several factors such as the lack of exposure, the teachers use national or local language for classroom instruction, students lack a strong foundation in English, the curriculum is not conducive to improving their English proficiency. Moreover, students lack motivation, encouragement, and effective learning strategies. They also do not have opportunities to practice speaking with native English speakers. To add, the classroom environment is often crowded and noisy, which does not support effective teaching practices. On the other hand, there are also several factors contribute to this situation, including limited exposure to English outside the classroom, a shortage of qualified English teachers, inadequate resources for language learning, and the focus on exam-oriented teaching methods.

Efforts have been made at the national and local levels to improve English language education in Indonesia. To answer and adapt with the current needs in the 21st century, currently, Indonesia has changed its curriculum from 2013 curriculum to Merdeka curriculum. As a matter of a fact, in total, Indonesia has changed its curriculum several times since it gained independence: in 1947, 1968, 1973, 1975, 1984, 1994, 1997, 2004, 2006, 2013, and now the Merdeka curriculum. The changes have been made to respond to the challenge in each situation and condition. For example, Merdeka curriculum exists because the results of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2019 showed that Indonesian students are below standard in literacy and numeracy; Indonesia was ranked 72 out of 77 countries, far beyond Malaysia (ranked 56) and Singapore (top two rankings). Regarding to the English proficiency, Indonesian level of English proficiency is still low, as reported by EF in 2022, where Indonesia was ranked 13 out of 23 Asian countries (EF, 2024).

In addition, recent developments in the ELT curriculum in Indonesia have aimed to align English language teaching with 21st -century skills, such as critical thinking, creativity, and digital literacy. Efforts have also been made to address challenges such as teacher training, resource availability, and assessment practices to improve the quality of English language education in the country. Still, our education especially English teaching and learning remains unsatisfactory. In the implementation of the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum in Indonesia, several aspects need to be evaluated to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. Some key aspects that require evaluation include: Curriculum Alignment, Teaching Methods and Approaches, Teacher Training and Professional Development, Assessment and Evaluation, Resources and Materials, Student Engagement and Motivation. This systematic literature review seeks the answers for three questions; (1) what are the major challenges faced in implementing ELT curricula in Indonesia?

Method

This systematic literature review employs a structured approach to identify, analyse, and synthesize relevant studies on the implementation of ELT curricula in Indonesia. There were three stages in conducting this research; literature search, selection of studies, and data synthesis.

Literature search

A comprehensive search was conducted across major databases including Google Scholar and Scopus. To guide in seeking for the answers, predefined keywords such as “ELT curriculum in Indonesia,” “Challenges in English teaching Indonesia,” and “Curriculum reform and ELT.” to ensure a broad yet focused dataset, Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine searches and eliminate irrelevant results.

Selection of Studies

There were two phases in selection process: screening and eligibility assessment. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected studies.

Table 1 Selection Process

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication type	Peer-reviewed journal articles	Non-peer-reviewed articles, opinion pieces, anecdotal report
Publication year	Studies published 2013 onwards	Studies published before 2013
Study focus	ELT curriculum changes, teacher practices, student learning outcomes	Research focused exclusively on tertiary-level ELT
Methodology	Empirical research, systematic reviews on ELT curriculum implementation	Studies unrelated to English language teaching in Indonesia

Data extraction and Synthesis

The selected studies were analysed systematically to extract key information regarding the curriculum reform, implementation challenges, and effective strategies. Data extraction involved categorizing studies based on the following themes: (1) historical curriculum evolution and policy changes, (2) challenges in curriculum implementation and teacher readiness, (3) pedagogical approaches and teaching methods, and (4) policy recommendation and best practices.

In order to interpret the findings, a narrative synthesis was employed, stressing on recurring patterns and discrepancies across the reviewed studies. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing ELT curriculum success in Indonesia.

Results And Discussion

Findings

After doing selection, there were 34 studies which were taken and reviewed from journals articles published in 2013-2024 as main data in this research. The research findings are displayed in a table consisting Year, author, objectives, research design and key findings.

Table 2 37 Studies After Selection process

Study	Author	Questions/objectives	Design	Key finding
1	Darsih	to determine teachers' perceptions and comprehension of the 2013 English	qualitative design	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack of understanding• Difficult in applying

		Curriculum's implementation and to pinpoint its issues		teaching approach, developing assessment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shortage of English time
2	Yulia (2013)	to outline the primary difficulties faced by English language instructors in Indonesia.	qualitative design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of L1 and local language was still dominated • Students' low motivation
3	Mubarok & Sofiana (2022)	To assess how well the English Language Teaching 2013 Curriculum is being implemented	cross-sectional survey	The teaching and learning process of the 2013 curriculum in English subject was well implemented
4	Gunawan & Daud (2018)	to learn (1) how the scientific method has been applied in the classroom and (2) what issues the instructors encounter when doing so.	qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • insufficient time for English class • the gap of students level is high
5	Paramesthi & Suwartono (2023)	to investigate the difficulties junior high school English teachers face and the methods they employ to overcome those difficulties.	qualitative study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lack of understanding of the curriculum concept • lack of preparation • big class size • adjustment of a simultaneous summative test
6	Huda & Lubis (2019)	To examine teachers' views on SCL, preferences of using SCL strategies and challenges	Descriptive qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Passive students • Limited time • Self confidence • Lack of training
7	Wirawan (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To find out the teacher's challenges • to study how the English teacher overcomes with the challenges 	qualitative method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher had difficulty in classroom management • The teacher used inappropriate media

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teacher had problems assessing students • The teacher used ineffective method.
8	C. A. Malaikosa & Taopan (2020)	to scrutinize the implementation of scientific approach in Junior High School in Indonesian rural areas	Qualitative method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time consuming • large class • limited time • lack of teaching sources.
9	Laksono et al. (2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To study the teachers' challenges • To explore the strategies for implementing Directed instruction 	qualitative	teachers view DI as important for addressing student diversity, enhancing engagement, and improving academic outcomes. However, significant challenges include adapting learning materials, managing time constraints, and varying readiness levels among teachers and students.
10	Arif Rachman (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to find out how English language teaching is implemented • to identify the variables that influence the various ways in which it is being done. public schools 	Qualitative	The concept of ELT misunderstood by teachers, even though the fact that the goal of English teaching is not only to improve student's reading skills and use grammar-translation methods but also to cover all of the student's language skills and be able to develop students' communicative competence in using English.
11	Ekawati (2018)	To find out how the implementation of the 2013 curriculum was implemented	Qualitative	Teachers did not emply the steps of scientific approach and the basic concept of 2013 curriculum effectively due to passive students

12	Yabie et al. (2021)	To look into what teaching methods used in English learning process in 2013 curriculum	qualitative descriptive	project-based learning, scientific approach with ICT-based media, and conventional learning model
13	Misbah et al. (2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> to investigate the problems in applying 2013 Curriculum to reveal the hampering factors to showcase how teachers solve those problems. 	case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> implementing suggested method students' lack of motivation
14	Apsari (2018)	to find out the issues faced by the English teacher in implementing Curriculum 2013	qualitative approach	creating lesson plan, and problems related with teaching resources
15	Rahmawati (2019)	to find out the Indonesian teachers' perspectives on the challenges in the implementation of communicative approach	case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students' low motivations, the teachers' role, the class size, the teachers' income, and the availability of English materials.
16	Adiantika et al. (2021)	to examine teachers' techniques, challenges, and their voices regarding the assessment in the implementation of 2013 Curriculum.	descriptive qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> observations and peer-assessment lack of training time constraint in conducting assessment process
17	Meldia & Kardena (2022)	To see how the ELT curriculum is implemented at Islamic Junior High School.	qualitative method	Difficulty in implementation and assessment
18	Ridwan & Samanhudi (2024)	To portray the implementation of the CLT approach in the classroom	qualitative method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> it had effect on students' communication skills. the lack of understanding of the importance of CLT

19	M. B. Lestari & Margana (2024)	To examine the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the Merdeka curriculum	qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited vocabulary, • uneven proficiency level
20	Setyaningrum (2018)	investigating the alignment between beliefs and classroom practices about communicative language teaching (CLT).	qualitative	The highest discrepancy is on the aspect of fluency-accuracy.
21	Shinta & Tedjaatmadja (2014)	to know the principles of CLT implemented and problems encountered by a teacher in an English conversation class of eighth grades in Secondary School.	qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • students' low English proficiency • passive • lack of motivation
22	Daar & Ndorang (2020)	To find out how CLT and classroom interaction to increase learners' speaking skill at private senior high schools	Mix method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using games • initiation was mostly in the category of low level.
23	Intansari (2013)	To investigate teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices	cross-sectional survey study	there are mismatch between the mandated curriculum and the classroom practices
24	Nugraha & Suherdi (2017)	to investigate how the teachers implemented scientific approach	descriptive-qualitative	Scientific approach implemented successfully developed students' critical thinking and fostering high-thinking level of students' learning behavior. The difficulties encountered by the teacher during implementing scientific approach are the problem on students, time allotment, and the teaching management.

25	Ratnaningsih (2017)	To scrutinize the implementation of scientific approach in English Language Teaching	Case study	The teaching and learning were still lack of critical thinking (HOTS).
26	Wahyudin & Sukyadi (2015)	to see how the teacher implement the scientific approach in senior high school level.	Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> scientific approach was ineffectively applied but it somehow gave Scientific-based the results were still not satisfying
27	Suparman & Prakoso (2024)	To know the teachers' perceptions of Scientific Approach, text-based language learning, and their beliefs in communicative language teaching.	Qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The majority of teachers implements Scientific Approach five phases of this approach are not necessarily performed sequentially and sometimes, not all of them are applicable for such reasons as a lack of time, a need for flexibility, and ineffective and inefficient English learning resulting from certain phases. Most of them also teach English based on Text Genres As regards communicative learning, they believed that communicative language teaching (CLT) is essential in ELT.
28	C. Malaikosa & Sahayu (2019)	finding out the challenges met by the	Qualitative	making lesson plan, implemented scientific approach in

		teachers and their effort to answer that obstacle		the classroom, using authentic assessment and insufficient learning resources.
29	Boy Jon et al. (2021)	To discuss some problems about ELT such as Teachers' Strategies, Problems of English Language Teaching, and Students' Perceptions towards English Language Teaching	SLR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasizing curriculum shifts from the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to Scientific Approach. • Challenges persist: including inadequate teacher training, large class sizes, limited resources, and low student motivation.
30	Nadjib & Triastuti (2023)	To explore EFL teachers' perceptions of GBA and its implementation and the challenges when implementing GBA	case study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teachers were aware of GBA and perceived it positively • the implementation of GBA was inaccurate, • the challenges: Students' low vocabulary mastery, time constraints, and teachers' abilities in selecting texts.
31	N. B. Lestari et al. (2023)	To investigate the teaching approaches used under Merdeka Curriculum	qualitative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher used GBA • one crucial stage known as the Joint Construction of the Text (JCoT) was missing, and the teacher did not provide feedback to students.

32	Ni'mah et al. (2024)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To clarify the implementation of Merdeka Curriculum • To get the problems faced by teachers in the implementation of Merdeka curriculum at high school 	qualitative descriptive method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teachers' lack of understanding to implement Merdeka curriculum • teacher had problem in using digital technology
33	Sari & Fatmawati (2023)	To describe the implementation of the <i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum and the teacher's problems while implementing in English teaching learning	qualitative descriptive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the limited time to design teaching instruction • the teacher got difficulty in maintaining student enthusiasm.
34	Zuhro et al. (2023)	to recognize and portay teachers' pedagogical competence in relation to Merdeka Belajar Curriculum	qualitative	only one out of two teachers showed sufficient pedagogical competence to implement the Indonesian new curriculum.

Discussion

Research Design Trends

Based on the data above, it could be revealed that the research trends in ELT curriculum implementation mostly dominated with qualitative research methodologies, highlighting on case studies and descriptive qualitative designs. This trend shows a preference for examining subjective experiences and contextual factors rather than numerical generalizations. Compared to quantitative and mixed methods research, only a few studies employed surveys or statistical analysis. This suggests a lack of comprehensive integration between qualitative insights and numerical data that could gain a more balanced and holistic understanding of the issues.

The research trends within the last decade (2013-2024) focuses on contemporary issues, particularly highlighting the transition from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum. This indicates a growing concern on the current changes and challenges in the curriculum landscape.

Speaking of the research objectives, most of the studies explored or identified challenges in curriculum implementation, teacher readiness and competence and evaluate pedagogical approaches such as the Scientific Approach, Genre-Based Approach, and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Other studies also explore teachers' views and struggles in implementing the curriculum effectively. Based on those studies, it was found out that

inadequate training, limited pedagogical competence, and low student motivation were the issues that emerged as recurring themes.

In short, the research trends within the last decades emphasised on qualitative insights, focus on recent curriculum changes and highlight challenges faced by teachers in translating curriculum concepts into classroom practice.

Challenges in implementing curriculum in Indonesia

There are three prominent factors that hinder the curriculum implementation; (1) teacher competence and proficiency, (2) pedagogical and practical issues, (3) student-related challenges.

The first issue is about the teachers' competence and proficiency. Renandya et al. (2018) conducted research regarding the Indonesian English teachers' English teachers in Indonesia. The results were varied but most likely, they fall into the lower intermediate range, which could include the CEFR levels B1–B2. Second study conducted by Lie et al. (2019) examined English teachers' proficiency in five cities (Surabaya, Maluku, Palembang, Yogyakarta-Sleman, and Ambon). The findings showed that majority of the participants did not meet expected level. Another agreement was shown by Budiharso (2019) who figured out that English teachers had insufficient proficiency in speaking due to lack of practice. Proficiency in English among teachers is essential as they are the ones who impart knowledge and skills to the students. A high level of proficiency enables teachers to effectively communicate with students, provide clear instructions, and facilitate meaningful interactions in the classroom. It also allows teachers to provide accurate and comprehensive feedback to students, helping them improve their language skills.

Another challenge in implementing the curriculum is related to pedagogical and practical issues. Pedagogical skill is another key aspect that contributes to the effectiveness of English teachers. Pedagogical skill refers to the ability of teachers to design and deliver effective lessons, engage students in meaningful learning activities, and assess their progress (Friesen & Su, 2022). Teachers with strong pedagogical skills can create a positive and supportive learning environment, where students feel motivated and inspired to learn. Furthermore, pedagogical skill also involves the ability to use a variety of teaching strategies and techniques to cater to the diverse learning needs of students. Effective teachers are able to adapt their teaching methods based on the individual needs and abilities of their students, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed in learning English. Unfortunately, there are still many English teachers in Indonesia who lack an ample understanding of curriculum concepts and effective approaches such as CLT, scientific approach (Darsih, 2014; M. B. Lestari & Margana, 2024; Paramesthi & Suwartono, 2023). Lack of training and inadequate support leads to inconsistent implementation of teaching method (Ridwan & Samanhudi, 2024).

Teachers face difficulty in implementing teaching cutting edge methods like Scientific-Approach, Genre-Based Approach and CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) which are supposed to impractical or time-consuming (Gunawan & Daud, 2018; Malaikosa & Taopan, 2020; Wirawan, 2020). Furthermore, teachers struggle to choose suitable methods, media, and

assessment techniques, affecting the effectiveness of curriculum delivery (Nadjib & Triastuti, 2023; Wirawan, 2020).

Next issue is from student side. Indonesian students perceived low motivation when it comes to learn English. To add, students are passive in the classroom. This lack of enthusiasm not only affects their academic progress but also hinders their overall language development. This passivity not only indicates a lack of engagement but also points towards a potential need for more interactive and stimulating teaching methods to foster a more dynamic learning environment. Furthermore, various students' proficiency levels make it difficult to overcome diverse needs, particularly with Indonesian typical large class. Those facts have hindered in fostering communicative competence and active participation.

Implication

At least there are four main implications regarding the findings of the studies on ELT curriculum implementation in Indonesia within the last decades; the teacher competence and proficiency, the low student motivation and passive learner behaviour, more practical and contextualized curriculum guidelines that bridge the gap between curriculum and classroom realities, comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism.

The first issue regarding the persistent challenges related to teacher competence and proficiency. the findings suggest that there is an urgent matter for continuous professional development programs that emphasize on practical teaching strategies aligned with the curriculum. Training should be carefully designed to boost three aspects; proficiency, pedagogical skills, and familiarity with cutting edge teaching approaches or methods such as the Scientific Approach, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Genre-Based Approach (GBA). Besides, the inadequate support and guidance in implementing curriculum highlights the importance of providing practical frameworks and hands-on workshops to help teachers translate curriculum concepts into daily teaching practices effectively.

Secondly, most of Indonesian students depicted in the findings showed low motivation and no interest in learning English. Consequently, they become passive learners. One of the reasons for this behaviour might be due to the teachers who still dominantly used teacher-centred. Teachers should be motivated to conduct their teaching practice in more dynamic and student-centered teaching methods which incorporated with interactive and real-world communication tasks to stimulate students' enthusiasm and promote communicative competence. Employing more student-centered could help teachers to teach English effectively in Indonesia typical classroom; large class size and diverse proficiency levels.

Thirdly, based on the findings above there is always gap between the curriculum and classroom practices every time the curriculum changes. Therefore, policymakers should consider designing more practical and contextualized curriculum guidelines that account for the disparity realities of classroom across the country. The gap could be minimized unless teachers are involved in curriculum development processes, giving them a chance to share insights from their practical experiences.

Lastly, the implementation of any program or curriculum needs a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism, it will help to trace the impact of curriculum reforms on

teaching practices and student outcomes. Though collecting data systematically and reflecting on the challenges faced, teachers and policymakers can have comprehensive data and information to improve the curriculum and support systems. Addressing these issues is essential for achieving the objectives of curriculum reforms and creating a more effective and engaging ELT in Indonesia.

Conclusion

ELT in Indonesia has always tried to aid students to attain English mastery and be able to use it as a means of communication. However, the fact that it has not met the expectation should be a concern among governments and ELT practitioners due to, one of them, teacher's resistance to change resulting in misinterpreting the curriculum. Teachers as the forefront should have been able to translate the curriculum in their teaching practice since no matter how sophisticated the curriculum is, if teachers still use the same traditional teaching method, there will be no different result. Teachers have to equip themselves with sufficient English proficiency and knowledge of the concepts of contemporary learning theories or alternative learning theories such as blended learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning and etc..

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