



Teachers' Perspective on the Implementation of Merdeka and K-12 English Curricula

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Info Article

Received: 13 June 2026

Revised: 4 July 2026

Accepted: 6 July 2026

Online Version: 10 July 2026

Abstract

English language curriculum reform has become increasingly important in Southeast Asia as countries seek to enhance learners' communicative competence and global competitiveness. Although studies have been done on Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum and the K to 12 Curriculum of the Philippines, most studies have examined these curricula separately, and the focus has mostly been on policy formulation rather than curriculum implementation. This article attempts to fill this gap by exploring the implementation of these two curricula particularly in terms of learning objectives, content, pedagogy, and assessment from the teachers' perspectives. Using a qualitative comparative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 secondary English teachers from the Philippines and Indonesia (five teachers from each country), questionnaires, and document analysis. Thematic analysis indicated that both curricula promote communicative competence and develop learners' macro language skills. Indonesian participants perceived the Merdeka Curriculum as emphasizing flexibility, learner autonomy, and real-world communication. On the other hand, the K to 12 Curriculum highlights academic literacy, competencies, and preparation for higher education. In addition, both contexts had similar issues in implementing curricula, including challenges with mixed-ability classrooms, lack of time, and assessment. The study also contributes to curriculum implementation literature by proposing a comparative Curriculum Implementation Framework that explains how curriculum policy orientation shapes teacher agency and curriculum enactment across different educational contexts. In conclusion, the findings suggest that a balance between curriculum flexibility and clear standards may support effective English language teaching in these contexts.

Keywords: Merdeka curriculum; K-12 curriculum; ELT; Implementation; Teacher perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

English functions as a global medium of communication and plays an important role in international interactions across education, business, diplomacy, and scientific collaboration. Within Southeast Asia, increasing regional integration through ASEAN has further underscored the importance of English-language education. Therefore, member states are forced to take another look and update their models of English language education to meet the needs of students in the 21st century (Reza et al., 2023). As a result, more extensive and more profound curricular changes in English have occurred in this part of

the world, including an increased focus on communicative competence, critical literacy, and global citizenship.

From a regional perspective, the Philippines and Indonesia are important contexts for English language education in Southeast Asia. English is both a subject and a medium of instruction in the Philippines and has been institutionalized in the K to 12 English Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum. The curriculum, which is grounded in the concept of spiral progression, provides for the progressive development of the language learning macro-skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, moving from one grade level to the next, in relation to the national standards for content and performance for each grade (DepEd, 2016). The learning outcomes focus on communicative competence, multiliteracies, and critical thinking in the global context of education.

In contrast, the Indonesian government has placed great emphasis on English as a foreign language (EFL) and has recently introduced the *Kurikulum Merdeka* as part of wider reforms in the Indonesian education system. It is a curriculum introduced nationally in 2022, based on the principles of learner autonomy and competency-based learning, with its content presented flexibly. The curriculum does not prescribe attainment of any specific grades; it specifies the learning outcomes for English in each phase (*Capaian Pembelajaran* or learning outcomes), which will enable each school and teacher to elaborate further on learning and teaching based on the specific needs of learners. To support this, the *Profil Pelajar Pancasila* was incorporated into the curriculum to make sure that character is integrated in language. The curriculum recommends using project-based and differentiated learning approaches (Kemendikbudristek, 2022; Reza et al., 2023).

Many aspects of the implementation of the English curriculum have been studied in both countries in recent years. Studies on the Philippine K to 12 curriculum have focused on issues related to spiral progression, teacher preparedness, and assessment, among others, and have identified challenges such as high class sizes, inadequate resources, and the use of standardized assessments (Barrot, 2023). Likewise, research on the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia has examined teacher agency, curriculum flexibility, differentiated instruction, and formative assessment opportunities, all of which pose challenges in planning and implementing the curriculum (Reza et al., 2023). Therefore, the comparative curriculum study in Southeast Asia has focused on the standardization and flexibility aspects of the reforms in national education (Young & Muller, 2016; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

Although a growing body of research has examined the implementation of Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum and the Philippine K–12 Curriculum, several important limitations remain in the existing literature. Studies on the Merdeka Curriculum have primarily focused on teacher agency, curriculum flexibility, differentiated instruction, and implementation challenges within the Indonesian context (Reza et al., 2023; Rachmawati et al., 2024). Similarly, research on the Philippine K–12 Curriculum has largely examined issues related to teacher preparedness, competency-based education, assessment practices, and curriculum reform outcomes within the national setting (Barrot, 2023).

Despite these contributions, most previous studies have investigated the two curricula independently and have rarely undertaken direct comparisons between them. Existing research also tends to emphasize curriculum policy design and intended learning outcomes rather than how teachers interpret and enact curriculum expectations in actual classroom settings. Consequently, there remains a limited understanding of how differing curriculum philosophies, particularly curriculum flexibility in Indonesia and curriculum standardization in the Philippines, influence classroom implementation.

Furthermore, comparative curriculum studies in Southeast Asia have generally focused on policy structures and reform agendas rather than teachers' lived experiences of implementation. As teachers play a central role in translating curriculum policy into classroom practice, their perspectives offer valuable insights into how curriculum objectives, content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices are realized in different educational contexts.

Addressing these gaps is important because it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of curriculum implementation beyond policy intentions. By comparing English teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the K–12 Curriculum, this study provides insights into how different curriculum governance models shape instructional decision-making, assessment practices,

and classroom experiences. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing body of research on curriculum implementation in Southeast Asian English-language education and advances understanding of the relationship among curriculum policy, teacher agency, and classroom practice.

Accordingly, this study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do teachers perceive the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the K–12 Curriculum in terms of learning objectives, content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices?
2. What similarities and differences exist between the implementation of the two curricula?
3. What contextual factors influence curriculum implementation in the Indonesian and Philippine contexts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework: Integrating Curriculum Implementation Theory

Implementation of the curriculum is the way in which curriculum policies and plans are put into practice. Curriculum documents provide a framework of intended learning outcomes, but success largely depends on how teachers interpret and apply them in the learning situation (Fullan, 2016). Consequently, curriculum implementation is no longer merely the transmission of the prescribed curriculum but rather a process shaped by the teacher's decision-making, classroom environment, and institutional support.

Ornstein & Hunkins (2018) noted that multiple dimensions interrelate with curriculum implementation, including learning goals, content structure, instructional methods, and evaluation procedures. These dimensions impact students' learning experience and can influence the successful attainment of curriculum objectives. But in reality, classroom practice and the intended curriculum do not always align due to several contextual factors and teachers' interpretations of the curriculum requirements (Priestley et al., 2021).

This theoretical approach is appropriate for the current study because it can be used to investigate the implementation of the Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia and K–12 Curriculum in the Philippines by the English teachers. This study focuses on objectives, content, pedagogy, and assessment to examine how curriculum policies are realized in practice and how teachers perceive their enactment across various educational contexts.

Curriculum Reform in EFL Contexts

The need to build learners' communicative competence and 21st-century skills has led to curriculum reform in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. Globalization and the need for English use in education and the workplace in Southeast Asia have impacted reforms (Reza et al., 2023). These goals are evident in both Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum and the Philippines' K–12 Curriculum, but in different ways. The K–12 Curriculum has a more structured design, with competencies and learning standards more clearly defined (DepEd, 2016). However, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes flexibility, contextual learning, and teachers' autonomy (Kemendikbudristek, 2022).

Both reforms share the same intention of helping students learn English as a second language; however, the effectiveness of their implementation is believed to depend heavily on teachers' competence in achieving the curriculum's intended goals in the classroom (Reza et al., 2023). In the Philippine context, recent evaluations of the K to 12 Curriculum emphasize its continued focus on academic literacy, competency-based learning, and preparation for higher education and employment (Barrot, 2023). However, despite its structured design, teachers still report implementation challenges, such as large class sizes and high assessment demands, that affect instructional delivery.

Teacher Agency in Curriculum Implementation

Teacher agency is an important consideration in curriculum implementation, where teachers are crucial in translating curriculum policy into classroom practice through the interpretation of the

curriculum (Priestley et al., 2015; Fullan, 2016). Unlike adherence to the curriculum, teachers translate and interpret it to meet learners' varied needs in the classroom.

Previous studies have shown that teacher agency is affected by the flexibility of the curriculum system. The structured curriculum ensures consistency and guidance for the teacher but hinders the adaptation of instructional procedures to learners' diverse needs (Barrot, 2023). Flexible curricula offer teacher autonomy and creativity but depend heavily on the teacher's high professional skills and knowledge of the curriculum (Reza et al., 2023).

The K–12 Curriculum emphasizes competency-based education and assessment, while the Merdeka Curriculum allows teachers greater flexibility in designing assessments (DepEd, 2016; Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Therefore, it is critical to understand teachers' perceptions and roles in implementing English language education curricula. Recent studies on the Merdeka Curriculum highlight that teacher agency is strongly promoted but unevenly realized in practice, as it depends on teachers' understanding of the curriculum, pedagogical skills, and institutional support (Rachmawati Nur & Maulida, 2024). This suggests that flexibility in curriculum design must be supported by adequate professional development to be effective.

Flexibility and Standardization in English Language Education

The concepts of flexibility and standardization are two vital curriculum models in terms of their development and implementation. A standardized curriculum ensures the provision of certain learning skills for students, as well as provides instructions and evaluation criteria to promote consistent and accountable education (Young & Muller, 2016). At the same time, excessive standardization can hinder teachers' abilities to adjust to students' needs.

A flexible curriculum, in turn, enables teachers to make independent decisions about selecting teaching and learning materials and assessment methods. This approach allows promoting context-based and personalized education; however, it requires high levels of expertise and knowledge from teachers themselves (Tomlinson, 2017).

Assessment Practices in Reformed English Curricula

Curriculum reform has been accompanied by assessment reforms in both Indonesia and the Philippines. The Philippine K to 12 Curriculum uses systematic assessment methods, including formative assessments, summative tests, and standardized performance criteria, to promote accountability and fairness (DepEd, 2015). However, previous studies indicate that the emphasis on high-stakes testing and large class sizes may limit opportunities for effective formative assessment practices (Broadbent et al., 2018).

The Merdeka curriculum in Indonesia promotes authentic assessment through portfolios and projects, as well as ongoing assessment that supports competency-based learning (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Although teachers recognize the importance of such strategies, issues with workloads, assessment literacy, and documentation persist (Reza et al., 2023). Recent literature also suggests that modern curriculum reforms in EFL education continue to face challenges in balancing authentic assessment with practical classroom constraints. Teachers often experience difficulties in managing workload and ensuring fair evaluation when using performance-based assessment systems alongside traditional testing methods (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODS

This section describes the methodology of this study. A qualitative comparative case study design was used to examine English teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia and the K–12 Curriculum in the Philippines. Using purposive sampling, ten English teachers (five from each country) were selected based on their experience with the respective curricula. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) guided by Tyler's Rationale (2013). Data triangulation was used to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Research Design

A qualitative Comparative Case Study (CCS) research design was employed to analyze perspectives of English teachers towards the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum of Indonesia and the K to 12 Curriculum of the Philippines. The qualitative research method allows for a detailed analysis of teachers' perspectives on their experiences with curriculum implementation, including its objectives, content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices. Moreover, a comparative design enabled the identification of differences and similarities in these curricula and their implementation.

Research Target/Subject

Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide rich, relevant information on curriculum implementation. According to Creswell (2013), purposive sampling enables researchers to identify participants with direct experience relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, the study involved 10 English teachers, 5 from Indonesia and 5 from the Philippines.

To be eligible for participation, teachers were required to: (1) be currently teaching English at the junior or senior secondary level, (2) have direct experience implementing either the Merdeka Curriculum or the K–12 Curriculum, and (3) possess a minimum of two years of teaching direct experience with the curriculum. These criteria ensured that participants had direct experience to provide informed reflections on curriculum implementation.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

Participant code	Country	Gender	School Level	Teaching experience	Teaching Experience using the curriculum
T1	The Philippines	Male	High School	4 years	4 years
T2	The Philippines	Female	High School	2 years	2 years
T3	The Philippines	Female	High School	2 years	2 years
T4	The Philippines	Female	Senior High School	5 years	5 years
T5	The Philippines	Female	Senior High School	5 years	5 years
T6	Indonesia	Male	Middle High School	4 years	2 years
T7	Indonesia	Male	Middle High School	4 years	3 years
T8	Indonesia	Female	Middle High School	4 years	3 years
T9	Indonesia	Female	High School	3 years	2 years
T10	Indonesia	Female	High School	3 years	2 years

Research Procedure

The study was conducted in four stages. First, official curriculum documents issued by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and the Philippine Department of Education were examined to identify the intended goals, content structures, pedagogical principles, and assessment policies of each curriculum. This document analysis provided an important policy context for interpreting teachers' perspectives. Second, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires administered to English teachers from both countries. The interviews explored participants' experiences regarding curriculum goals, content coverage, instructional approaches, assessment practices, and implementation challenges. Third, interview transcripts and questionnaire responses were analyzed separately within each national case using thematic analysis. Themes emerging from Indonesian participants were first examined independently from those emerging from Philippine participants. Finally, a cross-case comparative analysis was conducted. Following Creswell's comparative case study approach, themes identified within each case were systematically compared across four curriculum dimensions: learning objectives, content scope,

pedagogical approaches, and assessment practices. Similarities and differences between the two contexts were then identified and interpreted in relation to their respective curriculum policies. This procedure enabled a deeper understanding of how curriculum flexibility and curriculum standardization influenced implementation practices across the two educational systems.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed throughout the research process. First, data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and official curriculum documents. According to Suwartono (2014), triangulation strengthens research validity by enabling researchers to cross-check information across multiple sources and identify consistent patterns across datasets. Second, all interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly during the coding process to ensure consistency and accuracy in interpreting participants' responses. Third, themes and sub-themes were continuously compared across the Indonesian and Philippine cases to verify their relevance and coherence. Finally, an audit trail was maintained to document coding decisions, theme development, and analytical reflections throughout the study. These procedures contributed to the credibility, dependability, and transparency of the research findings.

Instruments and Data Collection Techniques

The triangulation approach was used to establish credibility, with data collected through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, and participants from both Indonesia and the Philippines. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via video conferencing to understand teachers' experiences with curriculum goals, the presentation of curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, and assessment strategies. All interviews were audio-taped with participants' permission, transcribed, and analyzed.

The study also ensured ethical standards were met. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to conducting the research, and the objectives of the study and participants' rights were clearly outlined. This included participants' right to withdraw from the study at will. Confidentiality was maintained because participants were given identity codes, and recorded responses and transcriptions were stored on a password-protected computer accessible only to the researcher.

Data analysis technique

The study employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The analysis was guided by Tyler's Rationale (2013), which emphasizes four key curriculum dimensions: objectives, learning experiences, organization of learning experiences, and evaluation. These dimensions served as the analytical lens for examining teachers' perspectives on the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the K-12 Curriculum.

Table 2. Analytical Themes, Sub-Themes, and Guiding Questions based on Tyler's Rationale

Tyler's Curriculum Dimension	Analytical Themes	Sub-Themes identified from the data	Questions
Objectives	Curriculum and Learning Objectives	Communicative competence, critical thinking, learner autonomy, appropriateness of objectives, teacher flexibility	What are the main learning goals and objectives of the English curriculum? Do you think these objectives are appropriate for your students' English level and needs?

Tyler's Curriculum Dimension	Analytical Themes	Sub-Themes identified from the data	Questions
Learning Experiences	Learning Content (Content Scope)	Language skills, grammar and vocabulary, academic literacy, communication, real-life content relevance	How much freedom do you have in prioritizing or adjusting learning objectives when planning your English lessons?
			What English content and skills are included in the curriculum? Which areas do you focus on most in your teaching, and which are more difficult to cover?
Organization of Learning Experiences	Pedagogical Approaches (Teaching Methodologies)	Student-centered learning, teacher-centered instruction, teaching strategies, instructional flexibility, classroom challenges	How relevant is the content to students' real-life communication and academic needs?
			How is English usually taught in your classroom under the current curriculum? What teaching strategies or classroom practices do you commonly use?
Evaluation	Assessment Practices	Formative assessment, summative assessment, performance-based assessment, accuracy, challenges	How much freedom do you have in choosing teaching materials and activities? What challenges or forms of support affect how you implement these teaching methods?
			How are students' English skills assessed under the current curriculum?
			What formative and summative assessment methods do you use in practice?
			Do you think these methods accurately reflect students' English proficiency?
			What challenges do you experience when assessing students' English skills?

Table 2 presents the analytical framework used in this study. Guided by Tyler's Rationale (2013), the interview data, questionnaire responses, and curriculum documents were analyzed through four major themes: Curriculum Goals and Learning Objectives, Learning Content, Pedagogical Approaches, and Assessment Practices. These themes served as the basis for examining and comparing the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the K–12 Curriculum.

The qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. In the first phase, the interview transcripts, questionnaire responses, and curriculum documents were read repeatedly to become familiar with the data and identify preliminary patterns in curriculum implementation. During this stage, initial observations regarding curriculum goals, content emphasis, pedagogical practices, assessment approaches, and implementation challenges were recorded.

In the second phase, meaningful segments of data were assigned initial codes. The coding process was guided by Tyler's (2013) curriculum dimensions—objectives, learning experiences, organization of learning experiences, and evaluation, while remaining open to additional themes emerging from the data. Examples of initial codes included communicative competence, learner autonomy, academic literacy, teacher flexibility, student-centered learning, performance-based assessment, mixed-ability classrooms, and time constraints.

In the third phase, related codes were grouped into broader categories and reviewed to identify recurring patterns across participants and data sources. Through an iterative process of comparison and refinement, the codes were organized into four major themes: (1) Curriculum Goals and Learning Objectives, (2) Learning Content, (3) Pedagogical Approaches, and (4) Assessment Practices. Additional contextual factors affecting curriculum implementation, such as resource limitations, classroom diversity, and institutional support, were also identified.

In the fourth and fifth phases, the themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure that they accurately represented participants' experiences and perspectives. Similarities and differences between the Indonesian and Philippine cases were examined through cross-case analysis, allowing the researcher to compare how each curriculum was interpreted and implemented in practice.

Finally, in the sixth phase, the themes were interpreted in relation to the curriculum policies of both countries and presented as findings. Supporting quotations from participants were selected to illustrate the identified themes and strengthen the credibility of the analysis. The resulting thematic framework served as the basis for the comparative discussion of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the K–12 Curriculum.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results and discussion obtained from the interview data collected from English language teachers and from analyses of official curriculum documents from Indonesia and the Philippines. The results will be discussed in terms of four curriculum components that constitute the analytical frame of this research study.

Table 3. Comparison of the two curricula across the four curriculum components

Curriculum component	Merdeka Curriculum	K to 12 Curriculum	Comparative Analysis
Learning goals and Objectives	Focuses on communicative competence, learner autonomy, and real-life language use.	Focuses on communicative competence, academic literacy, and college/career readiness.	Both curricula promote communicative competence; however, Merdeka prioritizes functional language use, whereas K to 12 places greater emphasis on academic language proficiency.
Content Scope	Contextualized and practical language learning.	Academic literacy, text analysis, and formal writing.	The difference reflects distinct educational priorities: practical communication versus academic preparation.

Curriculum component	Merdeka Curriculum	K to 12 Curriculum	Comparative Analysis
Implementation	Highly flexible and student-centered.	Balanced between teacher-centered and student-centered instruction.	Participants implementing the Merdeka Curriculum reported greater instructional autonomy.
Assessment/Evaluation	Continuous and performance-based assessment.	Combination of performance tasks and traditional assessments.	Both value authentic assessment, but K to 12 retains a stronger emphasis on standardized evaluation methods.

Comparative Analysis of the Merdeka Curriculum and the K to 12 Curriculum

Table 3 presents a concise comparison of the Merdeka Curriculum and the K to 12 Curriculum across four curriculum components: learning goals and objectives, content scope, implementation, and assessment and evaluation. The findings indicate that while both curricula share the common objective of developing students' communicative competence in English, they differ in their emphasis, instructional approaches, and assessment practices. These similarities and differences reflect the distinct educational priorities and contexts of Indonesia and the Philippines.

The differences in teachers' perceptions appear to reflect the broader policy orientations underlying each curriculum. Indonesian teachers' emphasis on learner autonomy and meaningful communication is consistent with the Merdeka Curriculum's focus on flexible learning pathways and the development of the Profil Pelajar Pancasila (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This orientation was evident in how teachers described adapting their instruction to accommodate learners' diverse needs and contexts. T8 (Indonesia) stated, "I often modify lessons based on students' needs because students have different learning abilities and levels of understanding," suggesting that flexibility is not only a curricular principle but also a practical approach used in classroom implementation. Respondent T6 (Indonesia) also emphasized that "English learning should help students use English in real-life situations," reflecting the curriculum's emphasis on contextualized learning and the development of practical communication skills beyond the classroom.

In the Philippine context, Philippine teachers tend to emphasize academic literacy and students' preparation for future educational and professional demands, which aligns with the K–12 Curriculum's focus on competency development, higher education readiness, and workforce preparation (DepEd, 2016). As quoted by T2 (Philippines), "The curriculum aims to prepare students for higher education and future careers," indicating that teachers perceive English language learning not only as a means of developing communicative competence but also as preparation for academic and professional success. While teachers shared the goal of developing communicative competence, they also emphasized the importance of ensuring that students systematically achieve specific language competencies. Respondent T4 (Philippines) also stated that "students have different English proficiency levels," highlighting the challenges of addressing learner diversity while meeting prescribed learning standards.

Content Scope

Differences in content scope were clearly reflected in the teachers' responses. Indonesian teachers generally described the Merdeka Curriculum as emphasizing practical, context-based language learning. Rather than focusing primarily on formal language knowledge, teachers highlighted the importance of helping students use English for meaningful communication. As T7 (Indonesia) stated, "speaking and listening are prioritized for communication," indicating that classroom activities are often designed to encourage students to interact, express ideas, and use English in authentic situations. At the same time, Indonesian teachers acknowledged that some language skills remain challenging for learners. T9 (Indonesia) noted that "grammar and writing remain difficult for students," highlighting the continuing difficulties learners face in mastering more complex language structures and producing accurate written work. This suggests that teachers must continuously adapt their instructional strategies to support students in developing both communicative competence and linguistic accuracy.

By contrast, the participating Filipino teachers generally perceived the K–12 Curriculum as placing stronger emphasis on academic literacy skills while maintaining balanced development across the four macro language skills. As quoted by T2 (Philippines), “The curriculum covers listening, speaking, reading, and writing,” indicating that the curriculum aims to develop learners’ comprehensive language proficiency through integrated skill instruction. T2 further explained that “Reading comprehension and academic writing are emphasized,” reflecting the curriculum’s focus on developing learners’ ability to understand, analyze, and produce academic texts. Such an emphasis is consistent with the curriculum’s broader objective of preparing students for higher education and future professional opportunities, where advanced literacy skills are important.

These findings are consistent with Richards’ (2006) discussion of communicative language teaching, which emphasizes the use of language for meaningful communication in real-life contexts. They also support the work of DepEd (2016) and Barrot (2023), which describe the K–12 Curriculum as strongly oriented toward literacy development and academic preparedness. In summary, the analysis shows that while both curricula aim to develop students’ English proficiency, they differ in the language-learning aspects they prioritize. The Merdeka Curriculum places greater emphasis on communicative and contextualized language use, whereas the K–12 Curriculum focuses more on academic literacy and the development of higher-level reading and writing skills.

Implementation

A key difference between the two curricula lies in the level of teacher autonomy during implementation. Indonesian teachers generally reported having greater flexibility in selecting instructional materials, adapting lessons, and designing learning activities that respond to students’ needs and local contexts. T7 (Indonesia) explicitly stated, “I have freedom in choosing teaching materials,” illustrating how the Merdeka Curriculum encourages teachers to make instructional decisions based on classroom realities rather than relying solely on predetermined resources. However, teachers also emphasized that flexibility does not eliminate the need for teacher guidance. As T10 (Indonesia) noted, “Sometimes direct instruction is necessary,” suggesting that teachers balance student-centered learning with more structured instructional approaches when learners require additional support or clarification. These responses indicate that although the Merdeka Curriculum promotes instructional flexibility, teachers continue to exercise professional judgment in selecting pedagogical approaches that best suit their students’ needs.

Differing from this perspective, Filipino teachers described curriculum implementation as being guided more closely by prescribed standards and structured lesson planning. While teachers still exercised professional judgment in their classrooms, their instructional practices were generally aligned with clearly defined learning competencies and curriculum expectations. T1 (Philippines) explained, “I use discussions, group work, and presentations,” indicating that classroom activities are selected to help students achieve specific learning outcomes outlined in the curriculum. Likewise, T5 (Philippines) noted, “I conduct role plays and project-based activities,” suggesting that teachers continue to employ interactive, student-centered learning strategies within the prescribed curriculum. These responses suggest that while both groups of teachers employ active learning approaches, the degree of flexibility available in designing and adapting instruction differs between the two educational contexts.

The findings suggest that teachers implementing the Merdeka Curriculum experience greater instructional autonomy, whereas K–12 teachers operate within a more structured curricular framework. This reflects the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum, which emphasize flexibility, contextualization, and responsiveness to learners’ needs (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The findings also align with recent research suggesting that the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum depends largely on teachers’ ability to translate curricular flexibility into meaningful classroom practices, a process influenced by professional readiness and contextual constraints (Rachmawati Nur & Maulida, 2024).

At the same time, recent studies suggest that successful curriculum implementation is not determined solely by flexibility. Rather, it also depends on the extent to which teachers receive adequate support in interpreting and enacting curriculum expectations. Professional development opportunities, clear curriculum guidance, and institutional support systems play important roles in helping teachers effectively

address diverse classroom needs. This perspective is consistent with Fullan (2016) and Priestley et al. (2015), who emphasize teacher agency as a central factor in curriculum enactment. Meanwhile, the structured nature of the K–12 Curriculum can provide consistency in learning experiences across different educational settings, helping ensure that students work toward common learning standards (Barrot, 2023).

Assessment and Evaluation

Both curricula promote authentic assessment by combining formative and summative methods. Filipino teachers reported using projects, presentations, and other performance-based tasks to monitor students' learning progress. T5 (Philippines) explained, "Students are assessed through projects and presentations," showing that assessment is often based on students' ability to apply their knowledge and skills in meaningful tasks. This reflects the K–12 Curriculum's emphasis on performance-based assessment as part of competency development.

Similarly, Indonesian teachers reported using a combination of traditional and authentic assessment methods. Respondent T10 (Indonesia) stated, "I use quizzes and written examinations in assessing my students," indicating that formal tests remain an important way of measuring students' achievement. Indonesian teachers also emphasized the continuous nature of assessment. As T9 (Indonesia) also explained, "assessment occurs throughout the learning process," suggesting that assessment is integrated into daily classroom activities rather than being limited to end-of-unit evaluations. This reflects the Merdeka Curriculum's emphasis on ongoing monitoring of student progress and the use of assessment to support learning. Along with other assessment activities, these methods help teachers evaluate students' understanding of the intended learning outcomes.

The findings suggest that both curricula value authentic assessment and encourage teachers to employ a variety of assessment approaches to address different learning objectives and classroom needs. These findings support Brown and Abeywickrama's (2019) view that authentic assessment allows students to demonstrate their language abilities through meaningful tasks. They are also consistent with DepEd (2015, 2016), which encourages the use of both performance-based and standardized assessments to provide a balanced evaluation of student learning.

Despite these benefits, teachers also reported several challenges in assessment practices. One respondent from the Philippines, T3, noted that "grading performance tasks can be subjective," highlighting the difficulty of ensuring fairness and consistency when evaluating projects, presentations, and other performance-based activities. This concern suggests that although authentic assessment provides valuable opportunities for students to demonstrate their language abilities, teachers may face challenges in maintaining reliable and objective evaluation standards. Teachers also mentioned the heavy workload and limited time required to assess students, especially in large classes.

These challenges are consistent with recent studies showing that curriculum reforms often increase teachers' assessment responsibilities, particularly when performance-based assessment requires continuous observation, scoring, and documentation alongside regular teaching duties (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). Taken together, the findings highlight that both curricula recognize the importance of authentic assessment, although teachers continue to face practical challenges in implementing these assessment approaches effectively.

Summary of Findings

Both curricula aim to develop communicatively competent learners, but they differ in terms of flexibility, content emphasis, and assessment orientation. The Merdeka Curriculum prioritizes flexibility, contextual learning, and learner autonomy, while the K–12 Curriculum emphasizes structured guidance, academic literacy, and standardized competency progression. These differences reflect the broader tension between curriculum flexibility and standardization in educational policy (Young & Muller, 2016; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Comparative studies also suggest that both flexible and standardized curriculum models can be effective; however, their success is largely determined by implementation factors, such as teacher capacity, institutional support, and classroom conditions, rather than by curriculum design alone (Barrot, 2021).

Conceptual Contribution

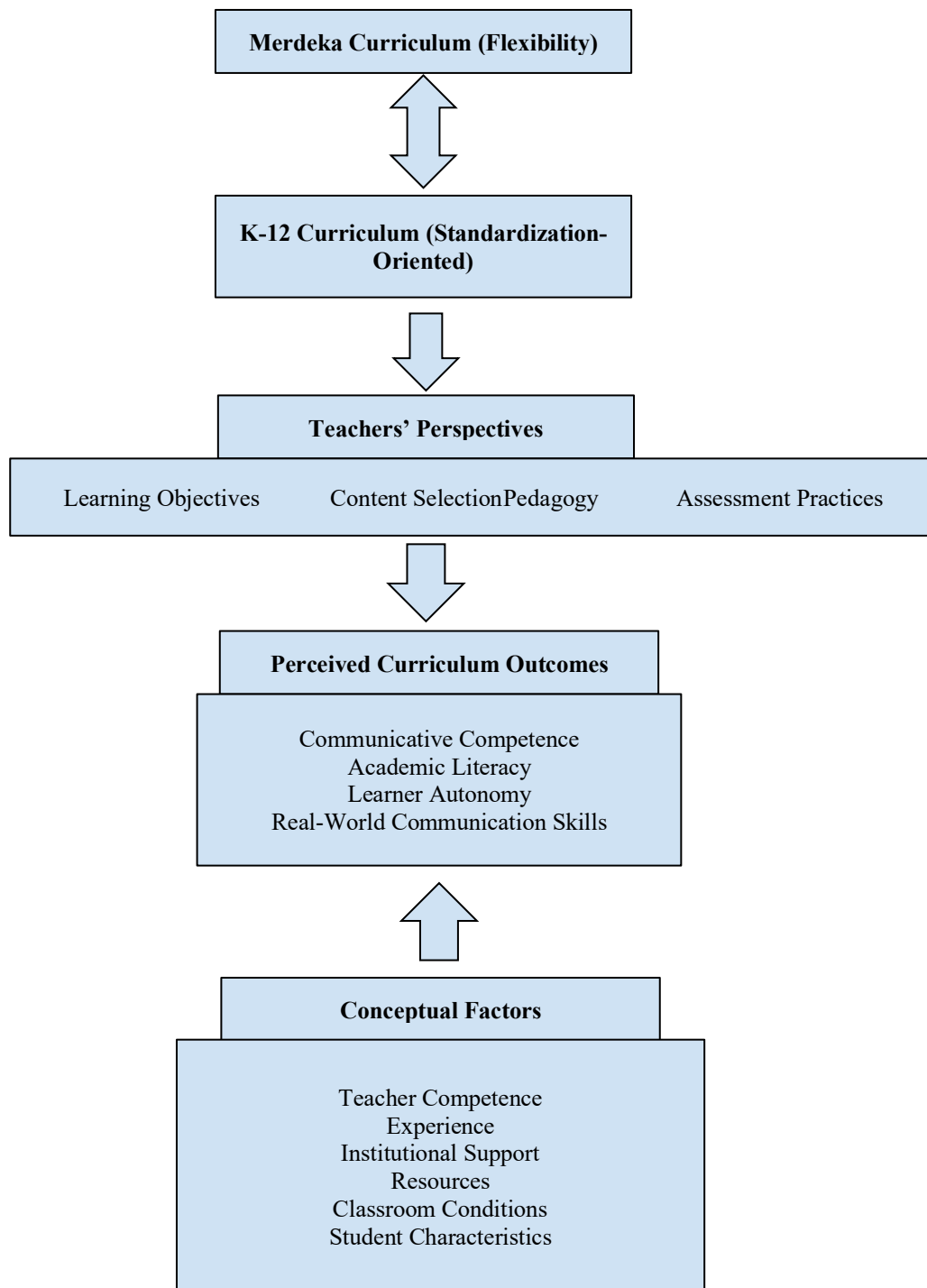


Figure 1. Comparative Curriculum Implementation Framework (Curriculum Policy Orientation)

Figure 1 presents the Comparative Curriculum Implementation Framework developed from the findings of this study. The framework illustrates how curriculum policy orientation, represented by flexibility-oriented and standardization-oriented approaches, influences teacher agency and interpretation during curriculum enactment. Through teacher agency, curriculum policies are translated into instructional decisions concerning learning objectives, content selection, pedagogical approaches, and assessment

practices. These decisions subsequently contribute to implementation outcomes, including communicative competence, academic literacy, learner autonomy, and real-world communication skills. The framework further recognizes the moderating influence of contextual factors, such as teacher competence, teaching experience, institutional support, resource availability, classroom conditions, and student characteristics, which shape the effectiveness of curriculum implementation across educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

Recent studies emphasize that curriculum reform involves not only policy design but also its enactment in classroom settings through teachers' instructional decisions. In this sense, the implementation of both Merdeka and K to 12 curricula is shaped by how teachers adapt official guidelines within their specific classroom contexts. Additionally, findings from the Indonesian context suggest that although the Merdeka Curriculum promotes flexibility and learner autonomy, its classroom implementation is influenced by differences in teacher readiness and available institutional support.

The study also proposes a Comparative Curriculum Implementation Framework, which illustrates how curriculum policy orientation influences teacher agency, curriculum interpretation, and implementation outcomes within specific contextual conditions. This framework contributes to curriculum implementation research by demonstrating that curriculum flexibility and standardization should be viewed as complementary rather than opposing dimensions of curriculum enactment.

The findings suggest that neither flexibility nor standardization alone guarantees effective curriculum implementation. Rather, successful implementation depends on how teachers interpret curriculum policies within their local contexts and the extent to which they receive institutional and professional support. This highlights the central role of teacher agency in translating curriculum intentions into meaningful classroom practices.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to the English teachers from Indonesia and the Philippines who generously shared their time, experiences, and insights for this study. Their willingness to participate and openly discuss their experiences played a vital role in making this research possible. The authors are also deeply thankful to the lecturers, colleagues, and friends whose guidance, encouragement, and thoughtful feedback provided valuable support throughout this research.

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