

## Perceptions of Primary English Teachers in Indonesia on Shifting Curriculum from Compulsory to Extracurricular

Viona Lorenza<sup>1\*</sup>, Jianhui Huang<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Jiangxi Normal University, China

### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received August 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Revised August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Accepted September 16<sup>th</sup>, 2025

#### Keywords:

Bilingual Education

Curriculum Development

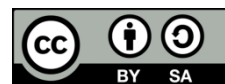
Primary School

Teacher Perceptions

### Abstract

This study explores Indonesian primary English teachers' perceptions of policy shifts that repositioned English in the curriculum: from local content in KTSP (2006), to a compulsory subject under early drafts of Curriculum 2013, and later to an extracurricular subject under Curriculum 2013 and the Merdeka Curriculum. Using online qualitative interviews with four teachers, the study found that the policy change reduced instructional time, limited structured exposure to speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and created inequities between schools that could or could not offer extracurricular English. Teachers also highlighted practical challenges, including lack of resources, irregular student participation, and uncertainty over national policy. Perceptions were further shaped by teachers' own English qualifications and training backgrounds, which influenced their confidence in navigating the policy shift. The findings suggest that without clear national guidance, disparities in access to English learning will persist. The study recommends that English be reintegrated as a core or clearly guided local-content subject, and calls for LPTKs (teacher training colleges) to better prepare teachers for policy fluctuations in primary English education.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license.



### Corresponding Author:

Jianhui Huang

Jiangxi Normal University, China

Email Author: [hzyokay@163.com](mailto:hzyokay@163.com)

## INTRODUCTION

English is vital for creating opportunities worldwide. It provides access to valuable information for learning and connects individuals to essential networks. As a common language, English facilitates the sharing of knowledge and ideas, fostering relationships that go beyond business (Tan, 2024). It encourages appreciation of cultural differences and builds the trust necessary for effective collaboration. In this way, English serves as a passport that opens doors to new possibilities and experiences around the globe.

In Indonesia, the 2013 Curriculum (K13) classified English as an optional subject rather than a core subject at every primary school level. This policy continues with the current Merdeka

Curriculum, where English remains an extracurricular subject (Agustiana et al., 2024). As a result, not all students across different grade levels or primary schools in Indonesia are required to study English as part of their mandatory curriculum. While introducing English is crucial for language proficiency, its inclusion depends on the school and grade level, as it is not a required core subject in all primary schools. This raises concerns about its potential impact on students' overall learning experiences.

The removal of English as a core subject in primary schools is crucial because it has significant implications for the quality of language education in Indonesia (Jazuly & Prystiananta, 2019). English plays a vital role in shaping students' academic growth and career opportunities, and its absence at the primary level may limit students' access to higher education and reduce their competitiveness in the workforce.

In contrast, the Indonesian government's decision diverges from the policies of other Asian countries, which treat primary schools as a foundational stage for advancing English language learning in later years. This policy comparison highlights the unique trajectory Indonesia is taking in relation to regional educational trends.

Exploring the reasons behind removing English as a core subject and its impact on students is crucial for guiding informed decisions on language instruction. Interviewing English teachers is key, as they have firsthand experience of how curriculum changes affect classroom dynamics, student engagement, and learning outcomes. English teachers can offer valuable insights into the challenges and benefits of teaching English, drawing on their direct classroom experiences. They are well-placed to assess how removing English from the curriculum affects students' language skills and academic performance (Herlambang & Adri, 2024).

This paper examines the shift of English from a core subject to an extracurricular activity, beginning with the 2013 Curriculum (K-13) and continuing under the Merdeka Curriculum. Such curricular reforms are crucial to examine because empirical studies show that introducing English at the primary level significantly improves students' linguistic competence, confidence, and long-term academic outcomes. Conversely, late exposure to English often results in lower proficiency and reduced readiness for secondary education. In the Indonesian context, research has documented how teachers and students struggle to adapt when English is excluded from the primary curriculum, leading to gaps in learning opportunities and unequal access across regions.

These findings highlight the urgency of exploring how policy shifts, such as relegating English to an extracurricular subject, affect language learning in primary schools. In contrast to neighboring countries like Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam, which emphasize English early as a foundational skill, Indonesia's approach diverges from regional trends and may have long-term consequences for students' competitiveness in higher education and the global workforce.

Against this backdrop, this paper reviews data to support the curricular changes and explores their impact on primary-level language learning. It also aims to serve as a key resource in fostering collaboration among educators, policymakers, and school leaders. The ultimate goal is to improve the quality of education and ensure that curriculum reforms benefit students, addressing challenges posed by the reclassification of English in the curriculum.

The curriculum in Indonesia has evolved significantly over the years, adapting to the changing needs of the education sector and the demands of a globalized world (Oktavia et al., 2023). Evolution goes beyond just updating content; it involves rethinking how education is delivered by incorporating new teaching methods, like project-based learning and technology use, which encourage students to engage more actively. Including English subject has been part of every educational curriculum since the country's independence.

Since Indonesia gained independence in 1945, English has been taught as the first foreign language in secondary schools, following a policy set by the government to help students develop skills for global communication. This focus on English reflects the country's understanding of its importance in areas like business, science, and diplomacy. Many people believe English would be the language of the future. As a result, it is prioritized over other foreign languages like French, Arabic, and Chinese. The evolution of Indonesia's English curriculum reflects the country's adaptation to global changes and local needs. Initially focused on international communication and modernization, it has since expanded to include critical thinking, communication, and cultural awareness.

In the 1947 Curriculum, English became an official subject through Presidential Decree No. 28/1990. This policy required English to be taught in all secondary schools under the Ministry of Education and Culture, including junior high schools (SMP), senior high schools (SMA), and vocational schools (SMK). English was also made compulsory in religious schools, specifically Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah. The curriculum aimed to equip students with basic English skills, focusing on reading and translation.

During the 1952 Curriculum in Indonesia, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was the primary approach to teaching English. GTM was suitable for Indonesia's large classrooms, where teachers did not necessarily need to be highly proficient in English. However, the method became less popular when the Ford Foundation established Standard Training Centers, which introduced new teaching approaches. This led to a shift toward the Oral Approach, which emphasized developing students' listening and speaking skills (Nukhbatunisa et al., 2024). The Oral Approach aimed to make language learning more interactive and practical, focusing on real-life communication. This transition marked a significant change in English language teaching in Indonesia.

The 1968 Curriculum marked a significant shift in English education in Indonesia, with a stronger focus on practical language use. This curriculum aimed to prepare students for effective global communication in a modernized world. It emphasized improving English proficiency to help students engage more confidently in international settings. The changes reflected Indonesia's growing recognition of English as essential for global trade, diplomacy, and access to knowledge. Rather than just teaching grammar and translation, the curriculum stressed the importance of real-world language skills. As a result, English education became more communicative, focusing on listening, speaking, reading, and writing in everyday contexts.

In the 1975 Curriculum, the Structural Approach was introduced as a method for language learning. This approach focused on acquiring language through repetitive practice, emphasizing the learning of sounds, words, and phrases. The key principle was that language skills could be built by reinforcing specific linguistic structures through repetition. The method placed a strong emphasis on spoken language, particularly pronunciation and fluency. English phonetics were

taught in detail to help learners pronounce words correctly. Ultimately, the goal was to enable students to use language naturally through consistent practice and reinforcement (Febrianto et al., 2020).

The Structural Approach remained in place until 1984 when the Ministry of Education and Culture introduced the 1984 Curriculum. This new curriculum was influenced by Dell Hymes' Communicative Approach, which viewed language as a tool for communication rather than just a set of grammatical rules. (Hermanto & Pamungkas, 2023; Sumintono et al., 2012). It shifted the focus toward meaning and language use in context while still retaining some traditional grammar instruction. Despite its emphasis on communication, the curriculum was not fully communicative and continued to rely on some formal structures. Scholars (Oktavia et al., 2023). The 1984 Curriculum lacked clear guidelines on teaching pragmatics or the practical use of language in real-life situations. As a result, many felt the curriculum did not fully address how language functions in social contexts.

As a result, the 1994 Curriculum shifted its focus to communicative language teaching, promoting a more interactive and practical approach to learning English. (Irsyad et al., 2024) noted the "meaning" in this curriculum emphasized the importance of meaningful communication in real-world contexts. This focus allowed themes and practical topics to be more prominent than traditional linguistic elements. The curriculum encouraged active language use, fostering skills needed for effective communication. By prioritizing communication over formal grammar instruction, the 1994 Curriculum made English learning more relevant to students' needs. Ultimately, it sought to better prepare students for global communication and engagement in an interconnected world.

In the 2004 Curriculum, known as the Competence-Based Curriculum (KBK), the Ministry of National Education renewed the curriculum in line with the National Education System Act No. 20/2003. English learning in this curriculum aimed to (1) develop communicative skills in listening, speaking, reading, and writing; (2) raise awareness of English as a foreign language for communication and learning; and (3) promote an understanding of the connection between language and culture, fostering intercultural awareness. This shift marked a move away from the previous communicative language teaching approach and introduced a focus on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and a genre-based approach (GBA). The change was met with mixed reactions from teachers, educators, researchers, and policymakers. Many felt the transition was abrupt and challenging, as it shifted the focus from communicative competence to more formal linguistic structures. Despite the initial resistance, the curriculum aimed to provide a more comprehensive framework for understanding language in context and its role in communication.

The 2006 Curriculum, known as KTSP, maintained a focus on developing student competencies while giving schools more autonomy in designing their curricula. Like the previous Competence-Based Curriculum (KBK), KTSP emphasized the development of communicative skills and competencies in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. (Oktavia et al., 2023) Although KTSP was still based on systemic functional linguistics (SFL) and a genre-based approach (GBA), it allowed schools to develop their syllabi, lesson plans, learning materials, and assessments. The central government only sets the standard and basic competencies, leaving flexibility for teachers to adapt the curriculum to local contexts. This decentralized approach was intended to better address the diverse social, economic, cultural, and educational needs of each

school. By utilizing local resources effectively, KTSP aimed to make education more relevant and responsive to the specific needs of different communities. However, after seven years, the Ministry of Education began shifting toward a new direction for English education, indicating further changes in curriculum design.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education introduced the K13 Curriculum. It has become the hottest issue in Indonesia. Like previous curricula, the 2013 Curriculum also adopted Core Competencies and Basic Competencies as its guiding principles, which SFL and GBA maintained to develop students' communicative competence. What made it unique was the decision of the government to reduce hours for English instruction in junior high school (i.e., SMP, Madrasah Tsanawiyah) and senior high school (i.e., SMA, SMK, Madrasah Aliyah) and reduce the contents materials, limit the discussion topics, add grammar points, integration of language skills, and reduce teachers' duties in material and curriculum development (Harits et al., 2016). Furthermore, The government has decided to remove the English subject from primary school. This undoubtedly sparked a lot of debate among various groups, particularly parents who anticipated greater support from the government towards English language learning.

Recently, Indonesia just introduced the Merdeka Curriculum (2022). The new curriculum discussion has entered a new phase, with English still being removed from primary schools, particularly for grades 1 to 3. It offers teachers the flexibility to tailor English instruction to meet their students' needs and interests, making learning more engaging and personalized. The curriculum emphasizes a student-centered approach, and teachers play as facilitators and guides, helping students navigate their learning journeys. Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to create a more relevant, engaging, and adaptable English language education for students (Irsyad et al., 2024).

The changes in the English curriculum in Indonesian schools have not led to better learning outcomes. Many students struggle to learn English because teachers often focus more on theory than on practical skills, especially speaking and writing. The implementation of the ELT process and the position of the teachers as the most responsible for the failure (Marthawati & Setyo, 2024). As a result, students find English difficult and lose motivation. Some teachers also lack the skills or training needed to teach English effectively. This gap in teacher competence makes it harder for students to learn the language. English has been taught in primary schools since 1994, but due to limited effectiveness, the policy is set to be discontinued (Suwarni, 2023).

In response to concerns about the impact of foreign language instruction on primary school students, the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia (KEMDIKBUD-RI) decided to remove English from the primary school curriculum starting in the 2013/2014 academic year, aiming to prioritize strengthening Bahasa Indonesia before introducing foreign languages. The ministry, along with educational experts, views English as an added burden during the early stages of learning. Musliar Kasim, the Deputy Minister of Education and Culture, explained that this move aims to give students more time to strengthen their proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia as a national language before introducing foreign languages. Sulistiyo, Chairman of the Central Board of the Indonesian Teachers Association (PB PGRI), also supported this decision, emphasizing the importance of Bahasa Indonesia in shaping national identity and ensuring effective communication across the country.

One reason the Indonesian government seeks to limit English instruction is concern over its harmful cultural impact on primary students. Since language and culture are deeply intertwined (Oyeronke & Adeoye, 2024) (Hamdi et al., 2020). The government is concerned that English-speaking cultures may overshadow local traditions, which has led to discussions about removing English from the elementary school curriculum. This is based on the belief that learning English may distract students from focusing on Indonesian and could impact their sense of nationalism (Efendi et al., 2024). Intensive English teaching in primary schools could also lead to the erosion of indigenous languages, as students may prioritize English over their native tongues (Suryahadi et al., 2010). English should be taught as a secondary subject, with greater emphasis placed on Bahasa Indonesia and local languages (Kirkpatrick, 2012).

In Indonesia, the primary competencies emphasized for students, especially in primary school, are reading, writing, and arithmetic. These foundational skills are essential for further learning and are prioritized in the National Curriculum to ensure students develop strong literacy and numeracy abilities (Ainissyifa et al., 2024). Musliar Kasim stated that children do not require an excessive focus on advanced knowledge in their early educational experiences. A limited amount of stress can have a positive impact on the motivation and creativity of teachers, while excessive pressure can hurt them. Therefore, the ministry believes the absence of the English subject is still relevant to the aims of the primary school curriculum.

Indonesia is the only government in Southeast Asia that excludes English as a core subject in primary schools. All ASEAN countries have compulsory classes in English at the primary level, except Indonesia. (Efendi et al., 2024) ASEAN state members share the same interest in introducing English as a subject in primary education level. ASEAN member states share the same interest in introducing English as a subject at the primary education level. (Kirkpatrick, Andy, 2012; Zhao et al., 2008)

In addition, (Zhao et al., 2008) noted that the Chinese government prioritized improving English proficiency nationwide by introducing English at the primary school level. Similarly, in Vietnam, policymakers have decided to make English a compulsory subject in the primary curriculum (Hieu & Thuy, 2021). In Thailand, English is more prestigious than other foreign languages and vital for education, business, and social status (Stewart & Strathern, 2017).

Effective communication is crucial in today's globalized world, where English is widely used across various systems. Mastering English presents a challenge, but it is essential for improving the international readiness of human resources and enhancing participation in the global community. According to a report by VOI in November 2023, Indonesia ranks 79th out of 113 countries on the English Proficiency Index (EPI), with a score of 469, placing it in the "low" proficiency category. English language skills are recognized as a key factor for a brighter, more competitive future. Indonesia needs to actively improve these skills across its population to enhance its global competitiveness. By strengthening English proficiency, Indonesia aims to better engage in international trade, develop its workforce, and improve its standing in the global arena.

As of the most recent EF English Proficiency Index, Indonesia ranked below Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam in the Southeast Asia region. Indonesia's position reflects low proficiency levels, alongside several other Asian countries such as China, Myanmar, and Japan. With the growth of Indonesia's English proficiency level progressing very slowly, the University of Indonesia's international law expert, (Sulamsi, 2025; Ennis, 2016), warned that the country could

face problems once the AEC was in place. The AEC, created from the ASEAN Vision 2020, aimed for a single market with free movement of goods, services, capital, and skilled labor. However, he is also concerned that without strong English skills, Indonesia's workforce will struggle to compete with other countries, both regionally and globally. The government will be key to improving Indonesia's English language skills.

Head of Academic Affairs EF Education First David Bish stated that the development of English language proficiency often occurs not in the classroom but rather when individuals enter the workforce. English is a significant long-term investment, beneficial for both children and adults. Early English language education is essential, as it equips children with greater opportunities to compete professionally and helps them pursue their ambitious dreams. Following the release of the report, it is hoped that the government will take action to enhance English language proficiency in preparation for Indonesia's Golden Era in 2045 (Schleicher, 2018).

Since education is the most effective way for the government to save the demographic bonus of the Indonesian nation, English should be an essential component of our curriculum education, as it supports the development of Indonesia's future generation (Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). Indonesians must recognize the urgency of English education to prepare them to compete in the global arena. Considering the rapid advancements in globalization, science, and technology. Individuals need to have a good understanding of English to effectively access these fields (Irsyad et al., 2024). It is important to highlight that Mastering English is not colonialism or a decline in nationalism; the incorporation of English in Indonesia's education curriculum aims to enhance mastery in science, technology, and economics for Indonesia's Golden Era in 2045.

## METHOD

The demographic profile of the respondents reveals several important characteristics. In terms of gender, the sample is dominated by female participants (75%), while only 25% are male. With respect to age, the majority of respondents are above 30 years old (75%), whereas a smaller proportion are above 50 years old (25%). Regarding educational background, most participants hold a master's degree (75%), while a quarter of them possess a bachelor's degree (25%). In terms of teaching experience, the group is evenly split, with half of the respondents having more than 5 years of teaching experience and the other half having more than 10 years of experience. Overall, the demographic data indicate that the respondents are generally mature, well-educated, and experienced in their profession, with a strong representation of female educators.

Table 1. Demographic Respondent

| Demographic         |                 | N | Percentage (%) |
|---------------------|-----------------|---|----------------|
| Gender              | Male            | 1 | 25%            |
|                     | Female          | 3 | 75%            |
| Age                 | Above30         | 3 | 75%            |
|                     | Above50         | 1 | 25%            |
| Level education     | Bachelor degree | 3 | 25%            |
|                     | Master degree   | 1 | 75%            |
| Teaching experience | above 5 years   | 2 | 50%            |
|                     | above 10 years  | 2 | 50%            |

## Interview Questions

To investigate the impact of curriculum changes on English education in Indonesian primary schools, a comprehensive set of interview questions was developed. These questions are designed to elicit detailed responses from primary school teachers regarding their perceptions and experiences with the English curriculum shift from a compulsory to an extracurricular subject in 2013. The interview instrument is divided into several thematic sections, each aimed at exploring different facets of the curriculum change and its effects on teaching and learning.

The Introduction section of the interview begins with a general question asking teachers to introduce themselves and describe their experience with teaching English. This not only sets the tone for a conversational interview but also helps contextualize their responses based on their professional background.

The section on Perception of the Curriculum Change includes questions designed to gauge teachers' initial awareness and reactions to the curriculum shift. Questions probe their first impressions, whether they were surprised, concerned, skeptical, or excited about the change. This part aims to uncover the subjective interpretations that may influence their acceptance and implementation of the curriculum changes.

Under Impact on Teaching and Learning, the questions focus on the practical implications of the shift. Teachers are asked about the alterations in their teaching methods and materials, as well as observable differences in student engagement and interest in learning English since the curriculum became extracurricular. This section seeks to identify the direct outcomes of the curriculum policy on educational practices and student interactions.

The Challenges in Implementation section queries teachers about the obstacles they have encountered in adapting to the new curriculum format. It also explores the level of support and resources provided by school administrations for teaching English as an extracurricular activity, highlighting the infrastructural and administrative challenges in educational reform.

Finally, the section on Teacher Suggestions and Future Outlook invites teachers to propose improvements and express their opinions on whether English should be a core subject or remain extracurricular. This section aims to gather insights on potential future directions for policy and practice in English language education in Indonesia, including the broader role English should play within the national educational framework.

Overall, the structured interview questions are meticulously crafted to elicit comprehensive, informative, and reflective responses from teachers, providing a robust qualitative data set for analyzing the impact of the 2013 curriculum change on English education in Indonesian primary schools.

## Research Focus

The research primarily focuses on understanding how English subject is carried out at the school. The qualitative approach is used to investigate this topic, which is more valuable for gaining a deeper and more nuanced understanding of this complex phenomenon. It can inform policy-making and practical interventions to help design more effective programs that are aligned with students' needs and interests. The purpose of qualitative research is to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences.



Qualitative research is not just about gathering data but about understanding it within its context (Bowen, 2009). This research used a qualitative research study approach that typically focuses on an individual's experience in a specific setting. The data were collected through an interview via online by Google Meet with Primary teachers in Indonesia. The researcher uses the interview method because it enables exploration of the interactions between various factors, including students, teachers, and the curriculum. Furthermore, interviewing primary school teachers about the implementation of the new English curriculum in Indonesia can provide valuable insights into several critical aspects of education.

First, teachers, being directly involved with students, can offer important perspectives on how the new curriculum influences student learning outcomes and engagement in English language acquisition. Through these interviews, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how students interact with the curriculum, their level of motivation, and how effectively they are learning. This response can help identify strengths and areas for improvement in student engagement and performance.

Second, interviews with teachers help researchers see how well the curriculum policy matches what happens in the classroom. In many cases, the curriculum created by policymakers may not fully work in the classroom due to various factors. Teachers often find themselves adapting and innovating within the framework of the new curriculum to meet the diverse needs of their students. By talking to teachers, researchers can uncover these creative adjustments and discover strategies that work well in the real classroom context, providing a clearer picture of what is effective and what might need further adjustments.

Third, these interviews give researchers a chance to see if teachers feel ready to use the new curriculum. This involves checking if teachers understand the changes, have enough resources, and feel the training programs are helpful. By looking at teachers' readiness, researchers can better understand how the curriculum works in real classrooms and find areas where extra support, training, or resources might be needed to improve teaching and learning. Overall, talking to teachers gives a clear picture of how the new curriculum is being used and highlights the challenges and successes for both teachers and students.

The data collection methods in this study include interviews and document review, both of which are primary methods. In qualitative research, interviews are the most common data collection method used to explore the lived experiences of individuals, while document review complements this by providing objective evidence about the context, policies, and practices under study.

### 1. Interview

The interview method is a way of collecting detailed information by asking questions, helping the interviewer focus on important topics, and adjusting based on answers (Fetters et al., 2013). It's useful when researchers want to explore personal experiences or views in detail, especially early in a study, to identify key issues. Interviews help get deep insights from a small group of people, which might not be possible with surveys or large studies. Trustworthiness in qualitative research means ensuring the study is honest and reliable. As Othman et al., (2024) explains, a researcher's background and beliefs can influence how they understand and report their finding

## 2. Document review

Document review is a way of collecting information in research by looking at existing written or recorded materials. These materials can include things like school reports, online articles, official papers, and teaching guides. For example, in educational research, a researcher might read through curriculum guides, school policies, or online content to learn how a curriculum is being used in schools. This helps the researcher to understand how the curriculum is being implemented in schools, identify patterns or gaps in its use, and gather context for their study. By reviewing these materials, the researcher can see if the curriculum is being followed as intended and how it might be affecting teaching practices and student learning.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The decision to remove English as a core subject from primary schools in Indonesia has sparked significant concern among educators, many of whom view this shift as a potentially detrimental step in the overall development of students. While the reform intends to prioritize local content and more relevant subjects in the curriculum, it is becoming increasingly clear that this change poses significant challenges. Teachers' feedback highlights both the immediate disadvantages and the potential long-term consequences for students, especially in terms of their global competitiveness, educational opportunities, and future career prospects. Below, this analysis will examine the primary issues raised in the interviews, explore the potential benefits of the policy revision, and examine the broader implications for educational equity and the preparation of students for an increasingly interconnected world.

#### 1. Teacher Concerns: The Risks of Reduced English Proficiency

A concern expressed by educators (T1) is the long-term academic and professional consequences of diminishing English language instruction. English is widely regarded as the lingua franca of academia, business, technology, and international relations in today's globalized world. The teachers in the study emphasized that proficiency in English is often a prerequisite for accessing higher education, job opportunities, and even networking at a global level. As T1 pointed out, the removal of English as a core subject is concerning because it could reduce students' chances of competing effectively in both the higher education system and the job market.

The concern here is not merely about learning the language for the sake of communication but about its practical role as a tool for accessing a wealth of academic resources, research, and professional opportunities, many of which are only available in English. The lack of sufficient English proficiency could restrict students' ability to pursue academic fields, particularly those in science, technology, and business, which rely heavily on English-language textbooks, journals, and scholarly discourse. Furthermore, the absence of English in the curriculum during the critical "golden age" for language learning (ages 7–12) may have serious implications. Teachers emphasized that young learners are highly receptive to new languages during these years, and learning English at this stage can enhance cognitive flexibility, improve problem-solving skills, and increase students' overall academic performance. If English is removed or reduced in schools, students may face significant difficulties when learning the language later in life, a challenge that is widely documented in educational research (Amran et al., 2019; Agustina et al., 2022).

These findings also point to important implications for teacher preparation and professional development. LPTKs (teacher training colleges) must equip pre-service and in-service teachers with strategies to navigate the uncertain policy landscape surrounding primary English education. This includes preparing teachers to advocate for equitable access to English, adapt instructional practices when English is positioned as extracurricular, and support students' long-term language development despite curricular fluctuations. Strengthening teacher confidence and professional agency in this context is critical for mitigating the negative effects of policy shifts.

## 2. Potential Impact on Social Equity and Educational Inequality

The policy shift is also likely to exacerbate existing educational inequalities. As noted by T3, public and private schools in Indonesia already experience a significant disparity in the quality of education they provide, particularly in the realm of English language learning. Private schools often have access to specialized English teachers and well-developed extracurricular language programs, while many public schools, particularly those in rural and underfunded areas, lack qualified teachers and adequate resources to teach English effectively. This inequality could be further intensified by the removal of English as a core subject. Students from wealthier backgrounds, who can afford private tutoring, additional language classes, or access to international schools, will likely continue to learn English and maintain their competitive edge.

In contrast, students from lower-income backgrounds, who often have limited access to additional educational resources, may fall further behind. The result could be an even greater divide between the educational outcomes of students based on socioeconomic status. Moreover, T4 raised concerns about the demotivation students might experience if English is no longer emphasized in the curriculum. Without the formal structure of English as a core subject, students may begin to perceive it as non-essential for their future success, leading to a decrease in interest and engagement in the language. This shift could reinforce the notion that English is not a necessary skill for success in Indonesia's local context, even though it remains crucial for global competitiveness. Over time, this could reduce the motivation of students from underserved areas to pursue language learning, deepening the educational gap between them and their peers who receive more robust language instruction (Amin, 2024; Emilda Sulasmi, 2025).

These findings underscore the need for policy clarity and equitable resource allocation to ensure that access to English instruction does not become another marker of social inequality in Indonesian education.

## 3. Curriculum Flexibility: Opportunities and Risks

While the curriculum reform has been framed as an effort to offer greater flexibility and tailor education to the interests of students, this flexibility introduces both opportunities and risks. On the one hand, the reduction of English as a core subject may allow teachers to allocate more time to subjects students find directly relevant to their future careers, such as mathematics, science, and vocational training. As T1 noted, this could allow for a deeper exploration of subjects that students feel are more aligned with their personal goals and career aspirations. Additionally, the reform could create room for schools to offer more diverse extracurricular activities, such as competitive sports teams, music, arts clubs, or drama groups, which are often not prioritized in the traditional curriculum. For students with a particular interest in these areas, this shift could provide more meaningful and engaging learning opportunities that can be pursued more freely and

explored in more depth. As highlighted by T3's example of students who prefer arts and sports to language.

However, the downside of this increased flexibility lies in the potential for imbalanced educational development. As teachers pointed out, schools may prioritize subjects that are more directly linked to standardized tests and measurable outcomes, such as math and science. In doing so, they may neglect subjects like language learning, critical thinking, and the arts—fields that are essential for developing well-rounded individuals and global citizens. This narrowing of focus could diminish the overall quality of education, especially when students are not given opportunities to develop language skills that are critical for success in an interconnected world.

T1's reference to Mandarin and Arabic as extracurricular activities highlights an important point: while such languages might be highly valuable in specific global contexts, their inclusion as central elements of the curriculum could be seen as an advantage in preparing students for future opportunities. By prioritizing regional languages alongside core subjects, the school creates a more specialized learning environment, which can deepen students' understanding of key international markets and cultures. However, this focus on localized content may come with challenges, particularly in ensuring a balanced approach to other areas of study. In a rapidly changing and interconnected world, the flexibility in the curriculum must be carefully managed to ensure students are well-rounded, with the skills needed to thrive across diverse fields and industries.

#### 4. Challenges for Teachers: Readiness and Expertise

A significant challenge highlighted by teachers is the lack of specialized English instructors, which directly impacts the quality of English education. In many public schools, English is taught by generalist teachers who may lack the necessary language proficiency and pedagogical expertise. As T1 and T4 pointed out, primary school teachers often teach multiple subjects, leaving limited time or space for specialization in English language instruction. This lack of subject-specific expertise can lead to ineffective teaching methods and a lack of student engagement, particularly in a complex subject like language acquisition.

In schools where English is not a core subject, teachers face further difficulties in maintaining students' interest and ensuring that foundational language skills are effectively developed. As noted by T2 and T3, insufficient resources, such as textbooks and teaching materials, are especially problematic in rural or underfunded areas. The curriculum shift has only exacerbated this issue, leaving teachers without adequate guidance or updated resources to support English instruction. Moreover, the lack of professional development opportunities for teachers further hinders their ability to adapt to the new curriculum and improve their teaching practices. Without access to continuous training in English language instruction, many teachers struggle to refine their language proficiency and pedagogical strategies, which directly impacts students' learning outcomes. These findings suggest that teacher readiness and expertise must be prioritized in both pre-service and in-service training, with LPTKs and education policymakers providing targeted support, updated resources, and continuous professional development to strengthen English instruction at the primary level.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, while Curriculum Merdeka presents promising opportunities for reform, its long-term effects on English language instruction require careful consideration. English is not only a tool for communication but a vital skill for academic success, professional growth, and global engagement. Reducing its role in the curriculum could exacerbate educational inequalities, particularly among disadvantaged students, and limit their ability to compete in the global economy. The key challenge is ensuring that English remains a core subject across all regions, especially in underfunded schools where barriers such as insufficiently trained teachers, limited resources, and overcrowded curricula persist. Teacher proficiency remains a critical concern, as many educators lack the advanced language skills needed for effective teaching. To address these issues, policymakers must prioritize investment in professional development and resource allocation, while encouraging collaboration between urban and rural schools to share expertise. Schools should also provide extracurricular opportunities, such as language clubs or digital platforms, to complement classroom learning and offer students real-world language practice. By maintaining English as a core component of Curriculum Merdeka, Indonesia can equip students with the skills needed to succeed in a globalized world, ensuring they are prepared for the demands of the future workforce.

## REFERENCES

- Agustiana, V., Thamrin, N., & Oktoma, E. (2024). The Role of English Language Proficiency in the Global Economy and Business Communication. *International Journal Administration, Business & Organization*, 5(4), 82–90. <https://doi.org/10.61242/ijabo.24.423>
- Agustina, A., Saputra, A., Indranika, D., Suryoto, Kusumaningsih, O., Mamuri, J., & Pazqara, E. (2022). Increasing Digital Literacy in Realizing Golden Indonesia. *East Asian Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 1(10), 2091–2108. <https://doi.org/10.55927/eajmr.v1i10.1920>
- Ainissyifa, H., Nasrullah, Y. M., & Fatonah, N. (2024). Empowering Educational Autonomy to Implement Kurikulum Merdeka in Madrasah. *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 10(1), 25–40. <https://doi.org/10.15575/jpi.v10i1.35133>
- Amin, F. (2024). Innovative approaches to addressing educational inequities lessons from indonesia's remote learning programs. *Indonesian Journal of Studies on Humanities, Social Sciences, and Education (IJHSED)*, 1(2), 93-109. <https://doi.org/10.54783/k9rkz045>
- Amran, A., Jasin, I., Irwansyah, M., Perkasa, M. & Satriawan, M. (2019). Developing Education for Sustainable Development-Oriented-Character Learning Model for Indonesian Golden Generation. *Asian Social Science*, 15(12), 87-93. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v15n12p87>
- Baharuddin, B. & Burhan, B. (2024). Navigating Educational Reforms: Urban-Rural Divergence in Indonesian Teachers' Experiences. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4885503> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4885503>

- Bowen, G. A. (2009). *Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method*. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9, 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Efendi, T. A., Prihantini, A. F., & Nurhidayah, S. (2024). Optimizing English Language Teaching in Elementary School Based on Merdeka Curriculum. *JURNAL NUANSA AKADEMIK Jurnal Pembangunan Masyarakat*, 9(2), 561–572. <https://doi.org/10.47200/jnajpm.v9i2.2638>
- Ennis, R.H. (2016). Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum: A Vision. *Topoi*, 37, 165-184. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11245-016-9401-4>
- Febrianto, P. T., Mas'udah, S., & Megasari, L. A. (2020). Implementation of online learning during the covid-19 pandemic on Madura Island, Indonesia. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 19(8), 233–254. <https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.19.8.13>
- Fetters, M.D., Curry, L.A. & Creswell, J. W. (2013). Achieving Integration in Mixed Methods Designs—Principles and Practices. *Health Services Research*, 48(6pt2), 2134–2156. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6773.12117>
- Hamdi, S., Setiawan, R., & Musyadad, F. (2020). Evaluation of the implementation of Indonesia Pintar program in vocational school. *Jurnal Penelitian dan Evaluasi Pendidikan*, 24(1). 102-115. <https://doi.org/10.21831/pep.v24i1.32603>
- Harits, I., Chudy, S., Juvova, A., & Pavla, A. (2016). Indonesia Education Today: Dating Back Its History of Islam and Imparting European Education System. *Asian Social Science*, 12, 179-184. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v12n5p179>
- Hayes, S. D., Flowers, J., & Williams, S. M. (2021). “Constant Communication”: Rural Principals’ Leadership Practices During a Global Pandemic. *Frontiers in Education*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2020.618067>
- Herlambang, I., & Adri, A. H. (2024). Should We Teach English to Our Kids in Indonesia? *PAEDAGOGIA*, 27(2), 224-237. <https://doi.org/10.20961/paedagogia.v27i2.84394>
- Hermanto, H., & Pamungkas, B. (2023). School and Parents Collaboration in Home Learning Service for Students with Sensory Impairments. *Jurnal Prima Edukasia*, 11(1), 9–15. <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpe.v11i1.51614>
- Hieu, N. C., & Thuy, C. T. (2021). Challenges in Speaking English in ASEAN. *Journal of Positive Psychology & Wellbeing*, 6(2), 1622–1630. <https://journalppw.com/index.php/jppw/article/view/11654>
- Howley, A., Wood, L., & Hough, B. (2011). Rural elementary school teachers’ technology integration. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, 26(9), 1-13. <http://jrre.psu.edu/>

- Irsyad, S., Syarif, H., & Zainil, Y. (2024). Flexible Approach In English Language Learning Curriculum Design: Optimizing Teaching In Merdeka Curriculum. *Eduvest - Journal of Universal Studies*, 4, 9843–9852. <https://doi.org/10.59188/eduvest.v4i11.43675>
- Jazuly, A., & Prystiananta, N. (2019). The Teaching of English in Indonesian Primary Schools: a Response to the New Policy. *Linguistic, English Education and Art (LEEAA) Journal*, 3, 17–25. <https://doi.org/10.31539/leea.v3i1.609>
- Kirkpatrick A. (2012). English as an Asian Lingua Franca: the ‘Lingua Franca Approach’ and implications for language education policy. *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*, 1(1), 121–139. <https://doi.org/doi:10.1515/jelf-2012-0006>
- Marthawati, C., & Setyo, B. (2024). Learning Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum. *Jurnal Penelitian Pendidikan IPA*, 10, 4342–4348. <https://doi.org/10.29303/jppipa.v10i7.7247>
- Nukhbatunisa, N., Lubis, M. R., Zamhari, A., Khoiri, A., Triana, W., & Palejwala, I. Y. (2024). Educational model in Tzu Chi school in terms of multicultural education dimensions. In Religion, Education, Science and Technology towards a More Inclusive and Sustainable Future: *Proceedings of the 5th International Colloquium on Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (ICIIS 2022), Lombok, Indonesia, 19-20 October 2022* (pp. 128–132). CRC Press. <https://doi.org/10.1201/9781003322054-21>
- Oktavia, R., Mirza, A.A., & Qamariah, Z. (2023). The History of Curriculum in Indonesia: A Literature Study. *PUSTAKA Jurnal Bahasa dan Pendidikan*, 3(4), 105-117. <https://doi.org/10.56910/pustaka.v3i.701>
- Othman, A., Osman, K., & Othman, N. (2024). Assessment Value: A Systematic Literature Review on Assessment As, For and of Learning in School. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 13 (1), 995-1013. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARPED/v13-i1/20725>
- Paramole, O.C. & Adeoye, M.A. (2024). Reassessing standardized tests: Evaluating their effectiveness in school performance measurement. *Curricula Journal of Curriculum Development*, 3(2), 217–234. <https://doi.org/10.17509/curricula.v3i2.74535>
- Schleicher, A. (2018). *World Class: How to Build a 21st-Century School System*. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264300002-en>
- Stewart, P. J., & Strathern, A. J. (2017). Language and Culture. In P. J. Stewart & A. J. Strathern (Eds.), *Breaking the Frames: Anthropological Conundrums* (pp. 69–78). Springer International Publishing. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-47127-3\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-47127-3_8)
- Sulamsi, N. E. (2025). Can Deep Learning Provide Solutions to The Challenges of 21st-Century Education in Indonesia?. *International Journal of Computational and Experimental Science and Engineering*, 11(2). <https://doi.org/10.22399/ijcesen.2636>

- 
- Sumintono, B., Said, H., & Mislana, N. (2012). Constraints and Improvement: A case Study of the Indonesia's International Standard School in Improving its Capacity Building. In *Journal of Education and Learning*, 6(1), 22-31. <https://doi.org/10.11591/edulearn.v6i1.187>
- Suryahadi, A., Yumna, A., Raya, U. R. & Marbun, D. (2010). Review of Government's Poverty Reduction Strategies, Policies, and Programs in Indonesia. Jakarta: The SMERU Research Institute
- Suwarni, S. (2023). Curriculum Development Management: Challenges and Opportunities in the Era of Global Education. *Al-Fikrah: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan*, 10(2), 297. <https://doi.org/10.31958/jaf.v11i2.11861>
- Tan, J. (2024). English as a Lingua Franca in Global Business: Balancing Efficiency and Cultural Sensitivity. *Research Studies in English Language Teaching and Learning*, 2, 96–105. <https://doi.org/10.62583/rseltl.v2i2.42>
- Widiati, U., & Cahyono, B. Y. (2006). The Teaching of EFL Writing in the Indonesian Context: the State of the Art. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan Universitas Negeri Malang*, 13(3). <https://doi.org/10.17977/jip.v13i3.40>
- Zein, S. (2022). *English as a subject in basic education in ASEAN - A comparative study*. British Council
- Zhao, Y., Zhang, G., Yang, W. (Eric), Kirkland, D., Han, X., & Zhang, J. (2008). A comparative study of educational research in China and the United States. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 28(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188790701849826>