

EFL Curriculum Reform in Indonesia: From KTSP to Kurikulum 2013 to Kurikulum Merdeka

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the trajectory of EFL curriculum reform in Indonesia from the decentralized KTSP model through the competency-based Kurikulum 2013 to the recent, more flexible Kurikulum Merdeka, highlighting shifts in curriculum aims, assessment practices, teacher roles, and classroom implementation; it synthesizes empirical and policy literature that reports a move from locally adaptable syllabuses (KTSP) to nationally standardized competency frameworks (Kurikulum 2013) and then toward learner-centered autonomy and contextualization under Kurikulum Merdeka, identifies persistent challenges including uneven teacher readiness, infrastructure and resource gaps, and assessment misalignment, and recommends sustained teacher professional development, clearer assessment-design alignment, and stakeholder engagement to ensure intended EFL learning outcomes.

Keywords: *EFL curriculum reform, KTSP, Kurikulum 2013, Kurikulum Merdeka, teacher readiness, assessment alignment*

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Indonesia reflects broader educational reforms responding to globalization, technological advancement, and shifting pedagogical paradigms. Over the past two decades, Indonesian policy-makers have introduced successive curriculum models, each attempting to address perceived shortcomings of its predecessor while adapting to contemporary educational theories and international best practices. The journey from Kurikulum Tingkat Satuan Pendidikan (KTSP) through Kurikulum 2013 to the most recent Kurikulum Merdeka represents not merely administrative adjustments but fundamental reconceptualizations of what English language teaching should accomplish and how it should be delivered in the Indonesian context.

KTSP, implemented in 2006, emerged from a desire to decentralize educational decision-making and empower local schools to develop curricula suited to their specific contexts. This represented a significant departure from earlier top-down approaches. However, implementation revealed considerable variation in quality and consistency across institutions, prompting questions about whether such flexibility might compromise national educational standards.

The subsequent introduction of Kurikulum 2013 sought to establish more

uniform competency-based frameworks while maintaining some degree of contextual adaptation. Yet this curriculum too faced implementation hurdles, particularly concerning teacher preparedness and the alignment between ambitious learning objectives and actual classroom realities.

Most recently, Kurikulum Merdeka has attempted to synthesize insights from both previous models, emphasizing learner autonomy, differentiated instruction, and contextually relevant pedagogy. The term "Merdeka" itself—meaning "freedom" or "independence"—signals a philosophical shift toward liberating both teachers and students from overly prescriptive frameworks, allowing greater space for creativity and responsiveness to local needs. Nevertheless, early implementation data suggests that realizing this vision requires more than policy pronouncements; it demands systemic support structures that many Indonesian schools still lack.

This article undertakes a comprehensive examination of these three curriculum models, analyzing their theoretical foundations, practical implementations, and outcomes. By synthesizing empirical research, policy documents, and practitioner accounts, it identifies persistent challenges that have survived multiple reform cycles and offers evidence-based recommendations for

strengthening EFL instruction in Indonesia. The analysis proceeds chronologically, examining each curriculum's distinctive features, implementation experiences, and contributions to ongoing debates about effective language education.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The evolution of EFL curriculum in Indonesia is grounded in several key theoretical shifts that have influenced global language pedagogy. The literature identifies four major frameworks that characterize these reforms.

First, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been a central influence, particularly since the inception of KTSP. Literature suggests that while policy documents increasingly prioritized functional language use over grammatical rote learning, classroom implementation often lagged due to entrenched traditional habits (Musthafa, 2001). Second, Competency-Based Education (CBE) became the cornerstone of Kurikulum 2013. CBE shifts the focus from content coverage to demonstrable competencies—comprising attitudes, knowledge, and skills. However, scholars have noted the difficulty in operationalizing abstract competencies into measurable assessment indicators in EFL contexts (Supardi & Zulela, 2021).

Third, the shift toward Constructivism and Learner-Centeredness is most evident in the recent Kurikulum Merdeka. This paradigm emphasizes learner agency, where students actively construct knowledge rather than passively receiving it. Consequently, the literature highlights a necessary reconceptualization of the teacher's role from a sole authority to a facilitator of learning. Finally, the concept of Contextualization remains a recurring theme. The literature reflects an ongoing tension between the need for national standardization (as seen in Kurikulum 2013) and the necessity for local adaptation and cultural responsiveness (emphasized in KTSP and reintroduced in Kurikulum Merdeka).

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, utilizing a library research design to examine the trajectory of EFL curriculum reform in Indonesia. The

research relies on a comprehensive analysis of documents and existing literature to trace the evolution from KTSP to Kurikulum 2013 and, subsequently, to Kurikulum Merdeka.

Data were collected from three primary sources: (1) official government policy documents outlining curriculum frameworks and standards; (2) empirical research articles evaluating the implementation and outcomes of these curricula in various Indonesian contexts; and (3) practitioner accounts that highlight the ground-level realities of teaching and learning. The data analysis proceeds chronologically and comparatively, synthesizing information to identify shifts in pedagogical aims, assessment practices, and teacher roles, while also highlighting persistent structural challenges that span across all three reform eras.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theoretical Frameworks Underpinning Curriculum Reform

Before examining specific curriculum iterations, it proves useful to situate Indonesian EFL reforms within broader theoretical developments in language pedagogy and curriculum design. Each successive curriculum has drawn—sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly—on different theoretical orientations that shape everything from learning objectives to assessment practices.

Communicative Language Teaching and Its Influence

The communicative approach to language teaching, which gained prominence internationally during the 1970s and 1980s, emphasized functional language use over grammatical accuracy alone. This perspective influenced Indonesian curriculum development, particularly from KTSP onward, by foregrounding the importance of enabling learners to communicate effectively in real-world contexts. Rather than treating language as an abstract system to be mastered through rote memorization and structural drills, communicative approaches view language as a tool for expressing meanings, negotiating social relationships, and accomplishing practical goals.

Indonesian curriculum documents increasingly reflected this orientation, though the degree to

which classroom practice actually embodied communicative principles varied considerably. The gap between official policy and actual implementation became a recurring theme across all three curriculum models, suggesting that theoretical commitments alone prove insufficient without corresponding changes in teacher education, assessment systems, and educational infrastructure.

Competency-Based Education

Competency-based education (CBE) represents another significant theoretical influence, particularly evident in Kurikulum 2013. CBE defines learning outcomes in terms of demonstrable competencies—specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes that learners should acquire—rather than simply covering prescribed content. This approach aims to make educational objectives more concrete and measurable, facilitating both instruction and assessment.

However, CBE implementation in language education raises particular challenges. While some competencies (such as producing grammatically correct sentences or identifying main ideas in written texts) lend themselves to straightforward assessment, others (like developing intercultural communicative competence or using language creatively) resist easy measurement. Indonesian educators implementing Kurikulum 2013 often struggled with this tension, sometimes defaulting to more easily assessable but pedagogically limited objectives.

Constructivism and Learner-Centeredness

More recent curriculum reforms, culminating in Kurikulum Merdeka, draw heavily on constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through experience rather than passively receiving information. This perspective privileges learner agency, collaborative learning, and the integration of new knowledge with existing understanding. The shift toward learner-centered pedagogy represents a significant departure from traditional Indonesian educational practices, which often emphasized teacher authority, standardized content delivery, and student compliance.

Implementing genuinely learner-centered

instruction requires substantial changes in classroom culture, teacher-student relationships, and assessment practices. Many Indonesian teachers, educated themselves within more traditional frameworks, have found this transition challenging. The success of Kurikulum Merdeka will likely depend significantly on whether adequate support systems can help teachers develop both the pedagogical skills and the professional confidence necessary to facilitate rather than simply direct learning.

Contextualization and Cultural Responsiveness

Increasingly, language education theorists have emphasized the importance of contextualization—adapting curricula to reflect local cultures, needs, and realities rather than simply importing models developed elsewhere. This perspective acknowledges that effective pedagogy must be culturally responsive, building on learners' existing knowledge and experiences while preparing them for meaningful engagement with global contexts.

Indonesian curriculum reforms have grappled with this tension between local relevance and international standards. KTSP's decentralized approach prioritized local adaptation, while Kurikulum 2013 emphasized national standards. Kurikulum Merdeka attempts a synthesis, maintaining national frameworks while encouraging contextual flexibility. How well this balance is achieved in practice remains an ongoing question.

KTSP: Decentralization and Local Autonomy

Policy Background and Rationale

The introduction of KTSP in 2006 occurred within a broader national movement toward regional autonomy following Indonesia's democratic transition in the late 1990s. Educational decentralization aimed to empower local communities, acknowledge Indonesia's tremendous diversity, and allow schools to develop curricula responsive to specific contexts. Rather than implementing a single national curriculum, KTSP provided frameworks and standards that schools would adapt to create their own curricula.

For EFL education specifically, this meant

schools could theoretically adjust English programs to reflect local needs, student populations, and available resources. A vocational school in a tourist area might emphasize hospitality English, while a school in an agricultural region might focus on different practical applications. This flexibility represented a significant philosophical shift from earlier centralized models that assumed uniform approaches would suit all contexts equally well.

EFL Implementation Under KTSP

In practice, KTSP implementation revealed both the potential and the pitfalls of decentralized curriculum development. Schools with strong leadership, well-prepared teachers, and adequate resources often created innovative, contextually appropriate English programs. These success stories demonstrated that local autonomy could indeed foster creativity and relevance.

However, many schools lacked the capacity to develop effective curricula. Teachers accustomed to following prescribed syllabi suddenly faced expectations to design their own programs with limited guidance or support. The quality of resulting curricula varied dramatically. Some schools produced well-designed, coherent programs; others cobbled together materials haphazardly. This inconsistency raised concerns about educational equity—whether students' English learning opportunities should depend so heavily on the particular school they attended.

Teacher Roles and Challenges

KTSP reconceptualized teachers as curriculum developers rather than mere implementers. This potentially empowering shift also proved overwhelming for many educators who lacked training in curriculum design. Survey research from this period documented teachers struggling to translate broad national standards into specific learning objectives, select appropriate materials, design effective assessments, and balance competing demands on their time and expertise.

Professional development opportunities varied widely by region and school type. Urban schools often accessed more training resources than rural institutions. Private schools sometimes provided better support than public

ones, though this pattern was not universal. These disparities meant that the quality of KTSP implementation often reflected existing educational inequalities rather than reducing them.

Assessment Practices

Assessment under KTSP similarly reflected both possibilities and problems. The curriculum encouraged authentic assessment that evaluated communicative competence through performance tasks rather than only multiple-choice tests. Some teachers embraced this approach, developing creative assessment methods that genuinely measured language use. Others, however, continued relying primarily on traditional tests, either because they lacked confidence in alternative approaches or because institutional pressures (including standardized examinations) incentivized conventional assessment.

The tension between formative and summative assessment emerged as particularly problematic. While KTSP policy documents emphasized ongoing formative assessment to guide instruction, practical realities—large class sizes, time constraints, administrative requirements—often pushed teachers toward more manageable but less informative summative testing.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Research examining KTSP outcomes presents a mixed picture. Some studies documented improvements in student engagement and communicative abilities, particularly in schools that implemented the curriculum thoughtfully. Other research highlighted persistent problems: students graduating with limited functional English proficiency, wide disparities in achievement across schools and regions, and teacher frustration with inadequate support.

Perhaps the most important lesson from KTSP concerned the prerequisites for successful decentralization. Granting local autonomy proves productive only when accompanied by adequate capacity building, resources, and accountability mechanisms. Without these supports, flexibility can devolve into inconsistency and inequality. These insights would shape subsequent reform efforts.

Kurikulum 2013: Standardization and

Competency Frameworks

Rationale for Reform

By the early 2010s, concerns about KTSP's uneven implementation prompted calls for reform. International assessments like PISA revealed Indonesian students performing below regional averages, fueling debates about educational quality. Policy-makers concluded that KTSP's flexibility, while valuable, required supplementing with clearer national standards and more structured guidance. Kurikulum 2013 emerged from these deliberations, attempting to maintain some contextual responsiveness while establishing more consistent competency expectations across the nation.

The new curriculum embraced a scientific approach to learning, organized around observing, questioning, exploring, associating, and communicating. For EFL instruction, this meant students should actively discover language patterns rather than receiving explicit grammar instruction, engage authentic texts rather than simplified textbooks, and use English for meaningful communication rather than completing decontextualized exercises.

Competency-Based Framework

Kurikulum 2013 organized learning outcomes around four competency domains: spiritual, social, knowledge, and skills. This holistic framework aimed to develop well-rounded individuals, not merely transmit subject matter. For English teachers, this meant considering not just linguistic competencies but also character development, cultural awareness, and critical thinking.

The curriculum specified competencies students should achieve at each grade level, providing much clearer direction than KTSP's broader standards. Detailed teacher guidebooks explained pedagogical approaches, suggested activities, and provided assessment rubrics. This structured support addressed teacher concerns about insufficient guidance while theoretically allowing some contextual adaptation.

Teaching Methods and Materials

The scientific approach mandated active, discovery-based learning. English lessons should begin with students observing authentic language use—perhaps reading genuine texts or watching videos. Teachers would facilitate

questioning, helping students notice patterns and formulate hypotheses about language structure and use. Through exploration and experimentation, learners would construct their own understanding, which teachers would then help refine and systematize.

This pedagogical vision represented a significant departure from traditional grammar-translation or audio-lingual methods still prevalent in many Indonesian classrooms. Textbooks were redesigned around authentic texts and communicative tasks. Teacher training programs attempted to prepare educators for these new approaches.

Implementation Challenges

Despite careful planning, Kurikulum 2013 encountered substantial implementation obstacles. Many teachers found the scientific approach confusing or impractical. The discovery-based pedagogy assumed students entering with certain prerequisites—curiosity, confidence, learning strategies—that could not be taken for granted in all contexts. Large class sizes made the facilitative teaching role difficult to enact effectively.

The competency framework itself proved unwieldy. Teachers struggled to address spiritual and social competencies alongside linguistic ones, particularly given time constraints and assessment pressures. The detailed specifications that some educators welcomed felt prescriptive to others, limiting the creativity and contextual responsiveness that KTSP had encouraged.

Assessment and Evaluation

Kurikulum 2013 introduced more sophisticated assessment requirements, including authentic assessments of spoken and written performance. Teachers were expected to evaluate not just language knowledge but also applied skills and even attitudes. While theoretically sound, these expectations proved demanding given teachers' existing workloads.

Assessment literacy emerged as a critical concern. Many teachers lacked training in designing valid performance assessments, developing appropriate rubrics, or providing meaningful feedback. The gap between policy expectations and teacher capabilities created stress and sometimes led to superficial compliance—teachers going through

assessment motions without the assessments genuinely informing instruction or learning.

Revisions and Refinements

In response to implementation difficulties, the government repeatedly revised Kurikulum 2013, adjusting competency specifications, simplifying administrative requirements, and clarifying pedagogical expectations. Some schools reverted temporarily to the previous curriculum while others piloted revised versions. This somewhat chaotic rollout created confusion and fatigue among educators who felt whipsawed by constantly changing requirements.

Research during this period revealed that successful implementation depended heavily on school leadership, teacher collaboration, and ongoing professional development. Schools that established supportive professional learning communities navigated the transitions more successfully than those where teachers worked in isolation. These findings would inform subsequent policy decisions.

Kurikulum Merdeka: Freedom, Flexibility, and Student-Centered Learning

Philosophical Foundations

Kurikulum Merdeka, introduced in 2022, represents the most recent attempt to address persistent challenges in Indonesian education. The curriculum's name signals its philosophical orientation:

"merdeka" (freedom/independence) suggests liberation from overly rigid structures and a commitment to nurturing student autonomy and teacher professionalism. Education Minister Nadiem Makarim articulated a vision of "freedom to learn," positioning students as active agents in their education rather than passive recipients.

For EFL education, this philosophy emphasizes communicative competence grounded in authentic contexts, differentiated instruction responsive to diverse learner needs, and integration of language learning with broader educational goals. The curriculum explicitly acknowledges that one-size-fits-all approaches serve neither students nor teachers well.

Structural Features

Kurikulum Merdeka introduces several structural innovations distinguishing it from predecessors. Schools can choose from three

implementation tracks depending on their readiness: fully independent, partially independent, or following established guidelines. This flexibility acknowledges institutional capacity differences while encouraging gradual movement toward greater autonomy.

The curriculum reduces prescribed content by roughly 30%, freeing time for deeper exploration and contextualized learning. Rather than rushing to cover extensive material superficially, teachers can focus on essential competencies while adapting instruction to student needs and interests. For English classes, this might mean fewer grammar topics but more opportunities for meaningful communication and authentic language use.

Project-Based Learning

A distinctive feature of Kurikulum Merdeka involves *Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila (P5)*—projects strengthening the Pancasila student profile. These interdisciplinary projects, addressing themes like sustainability, local wisdom, or technological innovation, provide contexts for integrating English with other subjects. Students might, for example, conduct environmental research requiring English sources, interview community members practicing traditional crafts, or create multilingual presentations about local culture.

Such projects potentially make English learning more meaningful by connecting language use to substantive content and real purposes. However, designing and facilitating effective projects requires considerable teacher expertise and often involves logistical challenges around scheduling, coordination, and assessment.

Differentiated Instruction

Kurikulum Merdeka strongly emphasizes differentiated instruction—tailoring teaching to accommodate diverse student readiness levels, interests, and learning preferences. Rather than teaching to the middle and leaving some students bored while others struggle, teachers should provide multiple pathways to learning objectives.

For EFL contexts, this might involve offering texts at various difficulty levels, allowing students to choose topics matching their interests, providing options for demonstrating

learning (written reports, oral presentations, creative projects), or forming flexible groups that change based on specific learning needs.

Implementing genuinely differentiated instruction represents perhaps the greatest challenge Kurikulum Merdeka poses for Indonesian teachers. It requires not just new techniques but a fundamental shift in mindset—from viewing the class as a homogeneous group to recognizing and responding to individual differences. Without substantial professional development and ongoing support, many teachers will likely struggle to move beyond superficial differentiation.

Teacher Autonomy and Professionalism

Kurikulum Merdeka positions teachers as trusted professionals capable of making sound pedagogical decisions rather than technicians implementing prescribed procedures. This reconceptualization potentially enhances teacher satisfaction and effectiveness by respecting professional judgment and encouraging innovation.

However, this autonomy also brings responsibility. Teachers must make defensible decisions about learning objectives, instructional strategies, materials, and assessments—choices requiring both pedagogical knowledge and professional confidence. The curriculum's success depends significantly on whether teachers feel adequately prepared and supported to exercise this autonomy productively.

Early Implementation Experiences

Given Kurikulum Merdeka's recent introduction, comprehensive implementation data remains limited. Early reports suggest mixed experiences. Some schools, particularly those with strong preparation and resources, have embraced the flexibility enthusiastically, developing innovative English programs that students find engaging. Teachers in these contexts report feeling more creative and responsive to student needs.

Other schools struggle with the transition. Teachers accustomed to following detailed guidelines find the openness anxiety-provoking rather than liberating. Questions arise: How much freedom is appropriate? What if my choices prove ineffective? How can I be certain I'm meeting necessary standards? Without

adequate support structures, such anxieties can undermine implementation.

Infrastructure and resource challenges persist. Many schools lack materials suitable for differentiated, project-based instruction. English teachers, often working alone or in small departments, sometimes feel isolated in developing new approaches. Professional development opportunities vary widely, with teachers in remote areas particularly underserved.

Persistent Challenges Across Curriculum Reforms

Despite multiple reform efforts, certain challenges have proven remarkably persistent, suggesting they reflect deeper structural issues rather than merely curriculum design problems.

Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Every curriculum reform has exposed gaps between policy expectations and teacher capabilities. While pre-service teacher education has gradually improved, many current teachers were prepared under different paradigms and face steep learning curves when paradigms shift. Professional development has expanded but remains uneven in quality and accessibility.

Effective professional development requires more than occasional workshops. Teachers need sustained opportunities to study new approaches, try them in their classrooms, reflect on results, and refine their practice—all with collegial and expert support. Creating such learning opportunities at scale represents a significant challenge for a nation as large and diverse as Indonesia.

Infrastructure and Resources

Educational infrastructure varies dramatically across Indonesia. Some schools boast modern facilities, technology, and abundant materials; others lack basic resources. English learning particularly suffers in under-resourced contexts given the importance of authentic materials, audio-visual resources, and opportunities for interactive communication.

Digital technology offers potential solutions but also creates new inequities. Schools with good internet connections and adequate devices can access vast English learning resources online;

those without such access fall further behind. The COVID-19 pandemic starkly revealed these digital divides, which remain largely unaddressed.

Large Class Sizes

Many Indonesian English classes contain 30-40 students, sometimes more. Such numbers severely constrain pedagogical possibilities. Communicative approaches, differentiated instruction, and authentic assessment all become exponentially more difficult as class sizes increase. Teachers often resort to more manageable but less effective methods simply to survive.

Reducing class sizes would require substantial investment in hiring more teachers and building more classrooms—resources often unavailable. In the absence of such investments, curriculum reforms risk remaining largely aspirational for teachers facing challenging classroom realities.

Assessment System Misalignment

National examinations have traditionally emphasized grammar knowledge and reading comprehension, assessed through multiple-choice questions. While more recent reforms have attempted to include productive skills, the assessment system often remains misaligned with curriculum goals emphasizing communicative competence.

This misalignment creates perverse incentives. Teachers and students rationally focus on what gets tested, even when they recognize that examinations don't measure what matters most. Until assessment systems fully align with curriculum goals, implementation will likely remain partial and inconsistent.

English Proficiency of Teachers

While Indonesian English teachers generally possess reasonable language proficiency, research repeatedly identifies room for improvement, particularly in speaking and listening skills. Teachers with limited communicative abilities themselves naturally struggle to model and facilitate communicative language use in their classrooms.

Addressing this challenge requires both improving pre-service preparation and providing ongoing language development opportunities for current teachers. Some teachers need linguistic refreshment; others need exposure to different varieties of English

and practice with the informal, colloquial language their students will likely encounter.

Cultural and Pedagogical Tradition

Indonesian educational culture has traditionally emphasized respect for authority, adherence to established knowledge, and examination success. These values sometimes conflict with contemporary pedagogical approaches emphasizing questioning, discovery, creativity, and process over product. Shifting deeply rooted cultural patterns proves difficult, requiring more than policy pronouncements.

Students themselves, socialized into traditional educational roles, sometimes resist more active learning approaches, preferring the certainty of teacher-directed instruction. Parents, concerned about examination success, may question pedagogical innovations that seem to stray from test preparation. Navigating these cultural tensions requires sensitivity and gradual change supported by community engagement.

Recommendations for Strengthening EFL Curriculum Implementation

Based on the analysis presented, several evidence-based recommendations emerge for improving EFL curriculum implementation in Indonesia.

Sustained, Contextualized Professional Development

Rather than one-off workshops, teachers need ongoing professional development that includes studying pedagogical approaches, practicing them in supported environments, receiving coaching in their own classrooms, and participating in professional learning communities. Such development should be contextualized, addressing challenges specific to teachers' actual working conditions rather than assuming idealized circumstances.

Mentor teacher programs, where experienced practitioners support colleagues implementing new approaches, show particular promise. Similarly, video-based professional development allowing teachers to observe exemplary practice and reflect collaboratively has proven effective. Both approaches require investment but yield substantial returns.

Improved Pre-Service Teacher Education

While supporting current teachers remains crucial, strengthening pre-service preparation

will gradually improve the overall teaching force. Teacher education programs should provide extensive practice with the pedagogical approaches emphasized in current curricula, including communicative language teaching, differentiated instruction, authentic assessment, and technology integration.

Practicum experiences deserve particular attention. Prospective teachers need extended opportunities to practice teaching under skilled mentorship in real school contexts. Simply completing practicum hours proves insufficient; the quality of supervision and feedback determines whether student teachers develop professional capabilities or merely confirm existing assumptions.

Infrastructure Investment

While professional development addresses human capacity, infrastructure investment addresses material conditions. Schools need adequate classrooms, appropriate class sizes, technological resources, and diverse learning materials. These investments pay dividends not only in English learning but across all subjects. Given limited resources, strategic prioritization proves necessary. Some technological investments (particularly those enabling internet connectivity and basic digital literacy) offer especially high returns. Similarly, libraries stocked with varied English texts at multiple difficulty levels support both curriculum goals and broader literacy development.

Assessment System Realignment

Assessment systems must align with curriculum goals. If curricula emphasize communicative competence, examinations should assess speaking, listening, reading, and writing in integrated, authentic tasks. The current movement toward computer-based testing offers opportunities to include multimedia materials and interactive tasks impossible with paper-and-pencil tests.

Teachers also need assessment literacy development. Professional development should address designing valid assessments, developing rubrics, using assessment data to inform instruction, and providing effective feedback. Assessment should serve learning, not merely sort students.

Stakeholder Engagement and Communication
Curriculum success requires support from

multiple stakeholders: school administrators, parents, communities, and students themselves. Clear communication about curriculum rationales, goals, and expectations helps build this support. When stakeholders understand why pedagogical approaches have changed and how new methods benefit students, resistance diminishes.

Parent education programs can help families support their children's English learning. Community partnerships can provide authentic contexts for language use. Student voice in curriculum development—asking students about their interests, goals, and learning preferences—increases engagement and provides valuable feedback for teachers.

Research and Evidence Gathering

Ongoing research should document implementation experiences, identify effective practices, and reveal persistent challenges. Both quantitative data (student achievement, teacher capacity, resource distribution) and qualitative insights (teacher experiences, student perspectives, contextual factors) prove valuable. This research should be accessible to practitioners, not confined to academic journals. Policy-makers, teacher educators, and classroom teachers all need evidence about what works, what doesn't, and why. Creating feedback loops where research actually informs practice and policy represents an important goal.

Flexibility and Gradual Implementation

Past reforms have sometimes suffered from rushed implementation timelines and insufficient flexibility. Acknowledging that schools possess different readiness levels and providing multiple implementation pathways—as Kurikulum Merdeka attempts—makes sense. Forcing all schools to implement complex reforms simultaneously before adequate preparation often produces superficial compliance rather than meaningful change.

Pilot programs allowing schools to test approaches before wider dissemination help identify practical challenges and refine implementation strategies. Gradual rollouts with ongoing support prove more effective than abrupt universal implementation.

CONCLUSION

Indonesia's EFL curriculum reforms over the past two decades reflect serious efforts to improve English language education and adapt to evolving pedagogical understanding. Each successive curriculum—KTSP, Kurikulum 2013, and Kurikulum Merdeka—has contributed insights while also revealing persistent implementation challenges.

The trajectory shows movement from decentralized flexibility toward standardized competency frameworks and then toward a synthesis attempting to balance local autonomy with national coherence. Philosophically, the evolution reflects increasing emphasis on communicative competence, learner centeredness, and contextual responsiveness. These shifts align with international best practices and contemporary learning theory.

However, translating policy vision into classroom reality remains challenging. Teacher preparation, infrastructure limitations, assessment misalignment, and cultural factors continue constraining implementation. These challenges suggest that curriculum reform alone proves insufficient; systemic support structures must accompany new curricula.

Looking forward, Kurikulum Merdeka's emphasis on flexibility, differentiation, and teacher professionalism offers promise if accompanied by adequate support. Success will require sustained investment in teacher development, infrastructure improvement, assessment realignment, and stakeholder engagement. Without such commitments, even well-designed curricula risk becoming merely aspirational documents disconnected from educational realities.

The Indonesian EFL reform experience offers lessons relevant beyond national borders. Many countries grapple with similar challenges: translating pedagogical ideals into practice, supporting teachers through transitions, addressing educational inequities, and balancing national standards with local responsiveness. Indonesia's experiences—both successes and struggles—contribute to global conversations about effective curriculum reform.

Ultimately, curriculum reform represents not a destination but an ongoing process requiring

continuous learning, adaptation, and refinement. As Indonesian educators, policy-makers, and researchers continue this work, maintaining focus on the fundamental goal—enabling students to use English effectively for meaningful purposes—will prove essential. The path forward requires patience, investment, and commitment from all stakeholders, but the potential benefits for Indonesian students and society make the effort worthwhile.

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