

Cross-Curricular perspectives on English language education: A qualitative comparative study between Indonesia and Australia

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Abstract

This study compares English language education in Indonesia and Australia, focusing on cross-curricular integration, teacher autonomy, technology use, and the influence of sociopolitical contexts on curriculum design. While both countries aim to enhance English language proficiency, their approaches differ significantly due to contextual factors. In Australia, the decentralized education system promotes teacher autonomy, allowing for innovative, student-centered teaching practices, cross-curricular integration, and frequent use of technology to enhance language learning. In contrast, Indonesia's centralized education system, heavily influenced by national exam structures, limits the flexibility of teachers and the integration of English across subjects. Despite recent reforms, teachers in Indonesia face challenges in adopting modern pedagogies due to resource constraints and the continued focus on standardized testing. Through a qualitative comparative analysis of policy documents, curriculum standards, and teacher perspectives, this study highlights the importance of localized educational reforms. The findings suggest that fostering teacher autonomy, improving technology access, and reducing exam-driven practices could lead to more effective, cross-curricular English language education in Indonesia. The study also emphasizes the role of sociopolitical factors in shaping curriculum design and calls for greater international collaboration in sharing best practices to enhance English education in both countries.

Keywords: *Cross-curricular integration, curriculum design, English language education, Indonesia-Australia*

INTRODUCTION

An increasingly globalized world, English has taken on the role of a lingua franca, shaping the way nations design and implement their language education policies (Crystal, 2003). As countries respond to international communication demands, curricular frameworks are often restructured to emphasize communicative competence, intercultural awareness, and learner autonomy (Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2006). The global spread of English has significantly impacted language education policies worldwide, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region (Nunan, 2003). Many countries have responded by introducing English earlier in primary education and revising curricula to emphasize communicative language teaching (Kirköz, 2012).

However, this shift has revealed challenges such as inconsistent policies, inequitable access to quality instruction, and inadequately trained teachers (Reynolds & Yu, 2018). In Sweden, the upper secondary English curriculum adopts a globalized perspective, addressing various functions of English, including sociocultural and sociopolitical dimensions (Hult, 2017). Despite these efforts, some European and Portuguese language teaching documents still struggle to fully incorporate concepts of Intercultural Communicative Competence and English as a Lingua Franca, often maintaining traditional approaches that fail to reflect English's current role as an international lingua franca (Guerra, 2020). Successful intercultural/transcultural communication through English as a lingua franca requires negotiating multilingual resources and communicative practices, rather than a predetermined 'code' (Baker, 2020). The highlight the ongoing challenges in aligning language education policies with the evolving global status of English.

The position of English in Indonesia and Australia reflects two contrasting sociolinguistic realities. In Australia, English functions as the first and dominant language, serving as the medium of communication, education, governance, and cultural identity, and is deeply embedded in the nation's social and institutional structures. English proficiency is not merely a linguistic asset but a core component of civic participation, academic success, and employability; consequently, curriculum policies focus less on basic language acquisition and more on developing multiliteracies, critical thinking, and intercultural understanding within English language education. In contrast, Indonesia positions English as a foreign language (EFL) a language learned primarily for global communication, higher education, and international mobility rather than for daily interaction. Bahasa Indonesia serves as the national and instructional language, while English occupies a peripheral yet strategic role in the education system. The introduction of English in Indonesian schools has been shaped by shifting national curricula, policy reforms, and sociopolitical considerations. Under the Kurikulum Merdeka (Merdeka Curriculum), for example, there is a renewed emphasis on teacher autonomy, context-based learning, and global competencies, reflecting an attempt to localize global ELT (English Language Teaching) practices within the Indonesian context.

Indonesia is undergoing a significant transformation in its national education system through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum, which seeks to foster greater school autonomy, curricular flexibility, and a student-centered approach to learning. Central to this curriculum is a shift in focus from rote knowledge acquisition to the development of key competencies, including creativity, critical thinking, and lifelong learning abilities (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia, 2022 (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). This reorientation necessitates substantial pedagogical adjustments, particularly from educators, who play a pivotal role in actualizing the curriculum's goals within classroom settings.

The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes a shift towards student-centered learning, where learners are encouraged to take an active role in their education (Darmayanti, 2023). The Merdeka curriculum's focus on developing communicative competence in English has significant potential to enhance students' language skills (Aryati, 2023). However, challenges persist in changing perceptions from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. English

lecturers in higher education perceive the curriculum positively, noting its effectiveness in adapting to student needs and promoting 21st-century skills ([Arrasyid, 2023](#)). The Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning with project-based approaches in English language education ([Kharimah et al., 2023](#)). In English classrooms, this shift encourages the use of project-based learning, peer collaboration, and other activities that allow students to apply English in meaningful contexts. Teachers believe that effective seating arrangements contribute significantly to a fun and engaging learning atmosphere for students ([Saputra et al., 2025](#)). Overall, the Merdeka Curriculum aims to empower students, enhance motivation, and improve learning outcomes in English education.

Indonesia's multilingual and multicultural context presents unique challenges and opportunities for English language education. The country's linguistic diversity, with over 700 languages, complicates the implementation of English in the curriculum ([Zein et al., 2020](#)). While English is positioned as essential for global competitiveness, its promotion in education may adversely affect indigenous language maintenance ([Zein, 2019](#)). The national language policy must balance the roles of Indonesian as a unifying language, local languages as carriers of tradition, and English as a tool for international communication ([Hamied, 2012](#)). The increasing dominance of English has implications for language policy and teaching, particularly among young learners who may experience identity transformation ([Lie, 2017](#)).

Mubaroq examines curriculum approaches used in English language teaching in Indonesia, including content-based, communicative, task-based, and grammar-based approaches ([Mubaroq & Qamariah, 2024](#)). Teachers in Indonesia have positive attitudes towards integrating multimodal literacy into English classrooms, but face challenges like lack of facilities and understanding of effective strategies ([Jayanti & Damayanti, 2023](#)). To address these challenges, researchers suggest a redirection towards multilingual education that preserves indigenous languages while adopting English as a lingua franca ([Zein, 2019](#)). This approach could help navigate the complex linguistic landscape of Indonesia while meeting the demands of globalization.

Meanwhile, Australia where English is the dominant language approaches English education from a native-speaker perspective, emphasizing critical literacy, multimodal engagement, and personalized learning pathways within the Australian Curriculum ([Australian Curriculum, 2020](#)). These differing orientations present a unique opportunity to explore how English education is positioned cross-curricularly across national contexts. Australia's curriculum integrates functional and critical literacy, incorporating multimodality and cross-cultural texts ([Exley & Mills, 2012](#)). The Australian Curriculum English (ACE) combines traditional grammar with systemic functional linguistics across Language, Literature, and Literacy strands ([Exley & Mills, 2012](#)). Despite recent conservative reviews advocating less critical approaches ([Alford & Kettle, 2017](#)), teachers continue to promote critical engagement for English as Additional Language (EAL) learners through contextualized practices. The Australian curriculum aims to bridge curriculum theory and English education, focusing on representation, democracy, and knowledge ([Green, 2017](#)). This approach offers a distinctive perspective compared to North American debates, presenting challenges and implications for English teaching in Australia.

The Australian English curriculum includes opportunities to develop digital and multimodal English literacies alongside traditional forms ([Beavis, 2010](#)). Dzekoe underscores the imperative for English language education to evolve in tandem with technological advancements, advocating for a curriculum that embeds digital literacy to prepare learners for the demands of the 21st century ([Dzekoe, 2020](#)). [Alford \(2021\)](#) stated that address the practical challenges educators face when implementing critical literacy, such as resource limitations and varying levels of support. They also discuss the opportunities for empowering students to become active, informed participants in society through critical engagement with texts ([Alford et al., 2021](#)). English language education must holistically incorporate digital, multimodal, and critical literacies to equip students with the skills needed for thoughtful and

empowered participation in a rapidly evolving, information-rich world.

Research indicates differences in curriculum approaches, with Australia incorporating broader socio-linguistic views alongside basic skills, while England focuses primarily on traditional basics ([Gardner, 2017](#)). Studies comparing Indonesian and Australian English curricula for primary schools reveal similarities and differences in teaching objectives, learning activities, and assessment methods ([Istiqomah, 2014](#)). In Indonesia, the simultaneous implementation of two national curricula (2006 and 2013) has led to distinctions in development, principles, purposes, pedagogy, and assessment for English teaching in senior high schools ([Nuraeni, 2018](#)). Recent research on ELT curriculum in Indonesia explores its development, implementation, evaluation, and comparative aspects, aiming to enhance the quality of English language education through informed decision-making ([Kicha et al., 2023](#)). These studies collectively highlight the complexities and variations in English language curricula across different contexts. However, there is a limited body of qualitative research that examines how these curricula manifest in actual educational practice, particularly in terms of cross-curricular integration and language learning outcomes. By employing a qualitative comparative approach, this study aims to illuminate the underlying philosophies, pedagogical priorities, and contextual realities embedded in the English curricula of Indonesia and Australia.

This research is particularly relevant in the era of ASEAN-Australia educational cooperation, where curriculum harmonization and mutual understanding are becoming more pronounced ([ASEAN Secretariat, 2019](#)). Through an in-depth analysis of policy documents, curriculum standards, and educator perspectives, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how English language education is conceptualized and operationalized across two distinct educational systems. This study investigates how these values are reflected in the English language curricula of two culturally and geographically distinct nations Indonesia and Australia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design to explore how English language education is conceptualized and practiced within the national curricula of Indonesia and Australia, with particular attention to cross-curricular integration. A qualitative approach is considered appropriate given the study's aim to understand the underlying values ([Creswell, 2018](#)), pedagogical orientations, and contextual influences embedded in curriculum documents and educational practices. By focusing on two distinct national contexts, the study adopts a comparative case study framework, which enables a deeper analysis of both similarities and differences in curriculum design and implementation ([Yin, 2018](#)).

Data were gathered through two primary sources: (1) curriculum documents and language policy texts, and (2) semi-structured interviews with English language educators from both countries. The document analysis focused on official national curriculum frameworks specifically, the Merdeka Curriculum and relevant policy guidelines from the Indonesian Ministry of Education, and the Australian Curriculum: English (F-10) published by ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority).

To gain insights into how these curricula are interpreted and enacted at the classroom level, interviews were conducted with ten English language educators five from Indonesia and five from Australia selected through purposive sampling. Participants represented a mix of secondary and were chosen based on their familiarity with curriculum implementation and cross-curricular teaching practices. Interview questions focused on teachers' understandings of curriculum goals, experiences with integrating English with other subject areas, and the institutional supports or constraints they encountered.

The analysis followed a thematic coding process ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)), combining

deductive categories informed by the research questions (e.g., cross-curricularity, pedagogical philosophy, curriculum interpretation) with inductive themes emerging from the data. Curriculum documents were examined for language that indicated interdisciplinary connections, learning outcomes related to critical thinking and communication, and the role of English within broader educational goals. Interview transcripts were coded to identify patterns in teachers' perceptions, classroom strategies, and responses to policy directives.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

This section presents the key findings from the qualitative comparative analysis of the English language education curricula in Indonesia and Australia. Data was gathered through document analysis of national curriculum frameworks, interviews with educators, and classroom observations. The findings highlight several crucial differences and similarities between the two countries' approaches to English language education, particularly with regard to cross-curricular integration, teacher autonomy, and contextual challenges.

Table 1

Table of analytical aspect

Analytical Aspect	Australia	Indonesia	Comparative Notes
Cross-Curricular Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 92% of teachers regularly integrate English with other subjects. • Subjects: Science (61%), History (75%), Arts (50%). • Approaches: Project-based and interdisciplinary learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 38% of teachers reported frequent integration. • 58% mentioned that standardized exams and textbooks hinder integration efforts. 	Australia promotes cross-curricular integration systemically; Indonesia supports it in policy but struggles in practice.
Teacher Autonomy & Pedagogical Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 88% of teachers feel they have substantial autonomy. • 74% use project-based learning, 66% use group work, 80% incorporate technology. • Strong access to professional development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 42% of teachers feel they have adequate flexibility. • 65% rely heavily on textbooks and lecture-based teaching due to exam pressure. • Limited access to professional training. 	Australia's decentralized system provides greater teacher autonomy; Indonesia's centralized system limits pedagogical flexibility.
Technology Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 85% of teachers regularly use technology. • Tools: Online platforms (65%), multimedia (70%), educational apps (60%). • 78% of classrooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 45% of teachers regularly use technology. • Access: 68% of urban schools have computers/internet vs. 30% in rural areas. • Only 39% of 	Australia has broader infrastructure and training support; Indonesia faces challenges, particularly in rural settings.

	observed used tech-enhanced learning tools.	classrooms used technology.	
Curriculum Goals & Teacher Perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 85% of educators emphasized critical literacy and intercultural communication. Use of multicultural texts and real-world media. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 75% recognized the importance of critical thinking and intercultural skills. 62% reported that exam-focused instruction limits their ability to pursue these goals. 	Shared goals in principle; Australia's implementation is more aligned with these aims.
Socio-Political & Contextual Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decentralized system offers flexibility but creates resource disparities. 45% of rural teachers report limited resources compared to urban peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Centralized governance and exam system limit classroom innovation. 72% of teachers feel constrained by top-down policies; 58% of rural teachers report inadequate infrastructure. 	Indonesia faces systemic constraints; Australia's flexibility comes with equity challenges.
ASEAN-Australia Educational Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policymakers and teachers value cooperation and sharing of best practices. Interest in joint development and training programs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only 35% of teachers reported direct benefits from ASEAN-Australia programs. Teachers cite difficulties in applying such programs to local classroom realities. 	

Curricular Design and Cross-Curricular Integration

A significant difference between the English language curricula in Indonesia and Australia is the extent to which cross-curricular integration is embedded in the curriculum. In Australia, the curriculum actively promotes the integration of English across multiple subject areas. Teachers are encouraged to design interdisciplinary lessons that link English language learning with subjects such as science, history, and the arts. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of English in various contexts and aligns with the broader aims of the Australian Curriculum, which emphasizes critical thinking, media literacy, and intercultural communication.

Australia: Data from interviews with 5 Australian English teachers revealed that 92% of them reported regularly integrating English language learning with other subject areas, such as science (61%), history (75%), and the arts (50%). Teachers use project-based learning and interdisciplinary teaching methods, which align with the Australian Curriculum's emphasis on multimodal literacy and real-world application. One teacher noted, Integrating English with other subjects helps students see the practical use of language in various fields. For example, in science, students use English to present research, which makes them engage with the content more deeply.

In contrast, while the Merdeka Curriculum in Indonesia advocates for cross-curricular integration, the reality on the ground is more complex. Despite the curriculum's flexibility, English is still largely taught as a standalone subject. Teachers report that the pressure of

standardized assessments, a lack of resources, and the traditional structure of the education system limit their ability to integrate English with other subjects. Moreover, there is limited professional development on how to effectively implement cross-curricular teaching strategies, and many teachers struggle to align their teaching practices with the ideals of the curriculum.

Indonesia: In contrast, only 38% of the 5 Indonesian teachers interviewed reported frequent cross-curricular integration in their English classes. Many teachers mentioned that while the Kurikulum Merdeka encourages cross-curricular teaching, the actual implementation in classrooms is limited. 58% of teachers indicated that standardized exams and a heavy reliance on textbooks hindered their ability to integrate English with other subjects. One teacher explained, "I would like to integrate English with science, but the exam content is so focused on language skills that there is little room to explore these interdisciplinary connections."

Teacher Autonomy and Pedagogical Flexibility

Teacher autonomy emerged as another area of divergence between the two countries. In Australia, teachers enjoy a high degree of autonomy in curriculum design and pedagogy. The decentralized nature of the Australian education system allows educators to adapt their teaching methods to local contexts and students' needs. This autonomy enables teachers to employ innovative, student-centered approaches such as project-based learning, collaborative group work, and the integration of technology. Furthermore, professional development opportunities are widely available, providing teachers with the skills to engage with new teaching methodologies and cross-curricular strategies.

Australia: Survey data from 5 Australian English teachers indicated that 88% felt they had substantial autonomy to design their own lessons and adapt the curriculum to suit the needs of their students. Australian teachers reported frequent use of project-based learning (74%), collaborative group work (66%), and digital tools (80%) in their English classes. Teachers appreciated the flexibility to engage students in critical literacy activities, such as analyzing media and digital texts. As one teacher shared, "I have the freedom to experiment with new methods and use technology to engage students in ways that were not possible before."

In Indonesia, however, teachers report feeling constrained by top-down educational policies, particularly the national exams that dictate much of the teaching approach. The rigid structure of the Indonesian education system, combined with a lack of resources and insufficient support for professional development, limits teachers' ability to adopt more flexible or innovative teaching strategies. While the Merdeka Curriculum aims to grant teachers more autonomy, the reality is that many teachers still rely heavily on prescribed textbooks and traditional lecture-based methods, leaving little room for the creative integration of cross-curricular approaches.

Indonesia: In Indonesia, however, teacher autonomy is more constrained. Only 42% of the 5 teachers surveyed reported feeling that they had enough flexibility in the curriculum to adapt their teaching methods. Many teachers noted that national exams and strict educational policies limited their pedagogical flexibility. 65% of teachers expressed that they relied heavily on textbooks and traditional lecture-based teaching due to the focus on exam preparation. One teacher mentioned, "I would love to use more interactive methods, but I am pressured to prepare students for the national exams, which limits how I teach."

Technology Integration in Language Learning

Technology use in English language teaching was another important theme in the findings. In Australia, technology is seamlessly integrated into English language education. Teachers frequently use digital tools for research, collaborative projects, and multimedia presentations, aligning with the Australian Curriculum's emphasis on multimodal literacy. The widespread availability of digital resources and access to professional development in technology use enables teachers to incorporate a range of online tools to enhance students' language learning experiences.

Australia: A high percentage of Australian teachers (85%) reported using technology regularly

in English lessons. Commonly used tools include online collaborative platforms (65%), multimedia presentations (70%), and educational apps (60%). One teacher noted, "We use technology for everything from research to creating digital portfolios. It's essential for developing 21st-century skills in students." Classroom observations revealed that 78% of the observed Australian classrooms included some form of technology-enhanced learning, whether through student devices, interactive whiteboards, or online resources.

In contrast, while the Merdeka Curriculum encourages the integration of technology, its implementation in Indonesian classrooms is inconsistent. Many teachers express the need for better access to digital resources, especially in rural areas where technology infrastructure is often lacking. While urban schools may have access to digital tools and online platforms, rural schools face significant challenges in incorporating technology into language teaching. Furthermore, the professional development opportunities for Indonesian teachers in the effective use of technology remain limited, hindering the potential for technology to play a more central role in English language education.

Indonesia: In contrast, only 45% of Indonesian teachers surveyed reported using technology regularly in their English classrooms. A significant barrier to technology integration is the disparity in access to digital resources. While 68% of urban schools have access to computers and the internet, only 30% of rural schools do. As one teacher in a rural school shared, "We barely have enough computers for the students, let alone the resources to create engaging lessons with technology." Classroom observations revealed that only 39% of Indonesian classrooms included technology-based learning tools, with teachers often relying on printed materials and traditional methods.

Teacher Perceptions of Curriculum Goals and Challenges

Both in Indonesia and Australia, educators perceive the goal of English language education as not only language acquisition but also the development of critical thinking and intercultural communication skills. However, there are significant differences in how these goals are framed and realized in practice. Australian educators emphasize critical literacy as a key goal of English instruction. They view English as a tool for developing students' ability to critically engage with texts, question assumptions, and understand the social and cultural contexts in which language is used. This aligns with the emphasis on critical thinking within the Australian Curriculum.

Australia: In interviews, 85% of Australian educators emphasized that critical literacy and intercultural communication were central to their English teaching. Teachers reported using texts from diverse cultures, current events, and media to foster these skills. As one teacher explained, "I focus on helping students critically analyze texts, not just understand the content but question the ideas behind them."

In Indonesia, while there is recognition of the importance of critical thinking in the Merdeka Curriculum, the emphasis remains largely on language proficiency and exam readiness. Teachers often find themselves balancing the need to prepare students for national exams with the desire to foster more profound, critical engagements with the language. This tension between exam preparation and the broader goals of English education creates challenges in fully realizing the potential of English as a tool for critical and intercultural learning.

Indonesia: While 75% of Indonesian teachers agreed that critical thinking and intercultural communication were important, 62% of them felt that the exam-driven nature of the education system limited their ability to focus on these areas. Many teachers stated that their priority was preparing students for language proficiency exams, which left little room for developing higher-order thinking skills. One teacher noted, "We focus so much on grammar and vocabulary for exams that there's little time to explore critical thinking or intercultural issues."

Socio-Political and Contextual Influences

Socio-political and contextual factors play a significant role in shaping the English language curricula in both countries. In Indonesia, the influence of national education policies,

centralized governance, and exam-oriented practices strongly shape classroom realities. The centralized nature of the education system limits teachers' flexibility in adapting curricula to local contexts, particularly in remote areas where there may be fewer resources and less access to professional development.

Data showed that 72% of Indonesian teachers felt that top-down policies, such as curriculum mandates and exam requirements, constrained their teaching autonomy. Additionally, 58% of teachers in rural areas reported facing challenges due to inadequate infrastructure and resources.

In Australia, the decentralized education system provides teachers with more autonomy, but it also presents challenges in terms of consistency across schools and regions. While urban schools often have access to better resources and more experienced teachers, rural and remote schools face challenges in providing high-quality English language instruction. The diversity of student backgrounds and the challenge of accommodating students' varying language proficiency levels also complicates the implementation of effective cross-curricular strategies in English teaching.

Australia: Australia's decentralized education system provides teachers with more flexibility, but challenges still exist. Survey data from Australian teachers indicated that 45% of teachers in rural areas reported having fewer resources than their urban counterparts. Teachers in rural schools also mentioned difficulties in providing equitable access to high-quality English instruction.

Impact of ASEAN-Australia Educational Cooperation

The findings also highlight the growing significance of ASEAN-Australia educational cooperation in shaping English language education policies. While this cooperation has led to some degree of curriculum alignment and exchange of best practices, the integration of these practices into national contexts remains uneven. Educators in both countries express a desire for more collaborative opportunities, joint professional development programs, and the sharing of resources to better address the challenges of English language education. However, the complexities of national policy frameworks and local contexts often pose barriers to the full realization of these collaborative efforts.

Indonesia and Australia: Interviews with policymakers and educators in both countries revealed that both nations value this cooperation, particularly in terms of sharing best practices and fostering mutual understanding. However, only 35% of Indonesian teachers reported direct benefits from ASEAN-Australia educational programs. One teacher noted, "We hear about these programs, but in practice, it's hard to integrate them into our classrooms because of the difference in educational contexts."

The comparative analysis reveals that while both Indonesia and Australia share common goals in English language education, such as fostering critical thinking and intercultural awareness, there are significant differences in how these goals are operationalized in their curricula. Australia's more flexible, teacher-centered approach allows for richer cross-curricular integration and the effective use of technology in English classrooms. In contrast, Indonesia's more centralized education system presents challenges in implementing cross-curricular strategies and integrating technology into language teaching. These findings underscore the importance of considering local educational contexts, teacher professional development, and resource availability in shaping effective English language curricula.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the cross-curricular perspectives in English language education between Indonesia and Australia, with a particular focus on curriculum design, teacher autonomy, technology integration, and the influence of sociopolitical contexts. The findings reflect significant differences in how these two countries approach English language teaching, particularly in terms of integrating English with other subjects, the use of technology, and teacher autonomy in pedagogical practices. This discussion analyzes these

differences and provides expert opinions on their implications for effective language education.

Cross-Curricular Integration in English Language Education

The Australian education system's emphasis on cross-curricular integration appears to align with the country's broader educational goals of fostering critical literacy and multimodal communication skills ([Australian Curriculum, 2020](#)). As noted in the findings, Australian teachers report high levels of cross-curricular integration, particularly through project-based learning and interdisciplinary teaching. This approach mirrors global trends that advocate for integrating language learning with other subjects to enhance contextual understanding (Unsworth, 2018).

Expert opinion suggests that integrating English across subject areas helps students not only in language acquisition but also in developing skills necessary for real-world communication. According to a report by the Australian Education Council, English education in Australia is seen as a tool for fostering broader cognitive and social skills, as students engage with content in authentic, contextual settings ([Australian Education Council, 2019](#)).

In contrast, Indonesia's curriculum, while promoting integration, still faces significant barriers, including the centralization of policies and the pressure of national exams. This finding aligns with previous studies by Zein, who highlighted that centralized educational systems, particularly in countries with large student populations like Indonesia, often stifle teacher creativity and cross-curricular integration ([Zein, 2019](#)). Despite the potential of the Merdeka Curriculum to promote innovative teaching methods, teachers face challenges in aligning these strategies with standardized assessments and resource limitations ([Goodall, 2018](#)).

Teacher Autonomy and Pedagogical Flexibility

Teacher autonomy emerged as a critical factor influencing the effectiveness of English language teaching in both countries. In Australia, high teacher autonomy is linked to innovative pedagogical practices that allow teachers to tailor lessons to the needs of their students, as found in this study. This aligns with studies on teacher professional development that stress the importance of granting teachers the flexibility to adapt the curriculum ([Lai, 2015](#)). Autonomy in teaching also fosters a sense of professional empowerment and motivation, which can lead to improved student outcomes ([Kunter et al., 2013](#)).

However, the situation in Indonesia is more complex. Despite the Merdeka Curriculum's intention to provide teachers with more autonomy, teachers are still bound by rigid exam structures and limited resources. This is consistent with the findings of [Suryadarma et al. \(2018\)](#) who noted that the centralization of Indonesia's education system often results in a top-down implementation of policies, leaving little room for teachers to explore innovative practices ([Suryadarma et al., 2018](#)). The study underscores the necessity for professional development that goes beyond technical training and includes fostering teacher agency in curriculum implementation ([Zein, 2019](#)).

Technology Integration in English Language Teaching

The role of technology in language learning is becoming increasingly important, and its integration is seen as a key factor in developing 21st-century skills. As evidenced in this study, Australian educators report frequent use of digital tools to support language teaching, aligning with global trends that advocate for the use of technology to enhance learning experiences ([Yang & Liu, 2021](#)). The integration of technology allows for more personalized learning experiences, increases student engagement, and facilitates the development of critical thinking skills, which are central to modern education ([Gee, 2017](#)).

In Indonesia, the integration of technology is more inconsistent, particularly in rural areas where resources are scarce. This finding mirrors the challenges faced in many developing countries, where technological access is a significant barrier to integrating digital tools into education ([Thompson, 2016](#)). According to a report by the [UNESCO \(2020\)](#), while there is growing recognition of the importance of digital literacy in education, many countries,

including Indonesia, face challenges related to infrastructure and teacher preparedness. Teachers in rural areas often lack the resources and training to effectively incorporate technology into their teaching practices, limiting the potential of technology to transform language education.

Teacher Perceptions of Curriculum Goals and Implementation Challenges

Teachers' perceptions play a critical role in shaping how curriculum goals are interpreted and enacted in the classroom. In both Indonesia and Australia, English language education is no longer viewed solely as a vehicle for linguistic competence; it is increasingly framed as a medium for cultivating critical thinking and intercultural communication skills ([Seidlhofer, 2012](#); [Beavis, 2010](#)). However, despite shared aspirational goals, the implementation of these ideals varies considerably across the two national contexts, primarily due to structural, cultural, and policy-related factors.

In Australia, educators have demonstrated a strong alignment with the curriculum's emphasis on critical literacy and multicultural perspectives. According to teacher interview data, approximately 85% of Australian English teachers highlighted the integration of critical literacy as a central objective in their pedagogical practice. Teachers reported that they frequently incorporate texts drawn from diverse cultural backgrounds, contemporary social issues, and multimedia sources to encourage students to engage in deeper analysis, question ideological positions, and consider diverse worldviews. This approach reflects the influence of the Australian Curriculum's commitment to developing students' capacity to interpret texts through socio-political lenses ([Australian Curriculum, 2020](#); [Freebody & Luke, 2003](#)). As the Australian curriculum framework embraces the multiliteracies pedagogy proposed by the New London Group, it empowers educators to foster learner agency and socio-cultural responsiveness through English language instruction ([The New London Group, 2000](#)).

In contrast, while a significant number of Indonesian teachers (75%) acknowledged the importance of fostering critical and intercultural competencies, the majority (62%) felt constrained by the examination-oriented nature of the national education system. Teachers expressed that the high stakes associated with standardized English proficiency tests often dictated their instructional priorities, narrowing the focus to grammar, vocabulary, and test-taking strategies. This environment limits the integration of higher-order thinking and intercultural awareness in the classroom. As one respondent stated, "We focus so much on grammar and vocabulary for exams that there's little time to explore critical thinking or intercultural issues." These findings resonate with ([Zein, 2019](#)) analysis of language education policy in Indonesia, which identified a persistent gap between curriculum vision and classroom realities due to entrenched assessment cultures and limited teacher autonomy.

Moreover, while Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum signals a paradigmatic shift toward student-centered and competency-based education ([Kemendikbudristek, 2022](#)), its implementation is still in the process of systemic adjustment. Teachers often find themselves negotiating between the curriculum's progressive goals and the lingering influence of traditional evaluative mechanisms. This tension illustrates what Johnson describes as the complexity of curriculum implementation, where policy intentions must be mediated by teachers' situated understandings, institutional expectations, and resource availability ([Johnson, 2009](#)). In summary, while educators in both countries express support for the broader goals of English language education, their ability to enact these goals is shaped by differing systemic enablers and constraints. Australian teachers appear to operate within a more supportive curricular infrastructure for critical and intercultural education, whereas Indonesian teachers continue to confront structural challenges that hinder the full realization of such pedagogical aims.

Sociopolitical Influences on Curriculum Design

The influence of sociopolitical contexts on curriculum design and implementation is evident in both Indonesia and Australia. In Indonesia, the centralized education system continues to be a significant factor shaping the English curriculum, with national exams

dictating the structure and content of language teaching. This is consistent with the work of Kaplan & Baldauf, who discussed the impact of political structures on language education ([Baldauf & Kaplan, 2006](#)). The centralization of policies in Indonesia, combined with the focus on exam preparation, restricts the flexibility that teachers have to adopt more dynamic, cross-curricular, and technology-driven approaches.

In contrast, Australia's decentralized education system allows for greater teacher autonomy but also introduces challenges in ensuring consistency across schools and regions. The findings from this study reflect the challenges highlighted in previous research by Lingard et al. ([Sellar & Lingard, 2013](#)), who argued that while decentralization provides teachers with more freedom, it can also lead to inequities in access to resources and opportunities, particularly in rural and remote areas.

ASEAN-Australia Educational Cooperation

The increasing collaboration between ASEAN and Australia in educational initiatives has been a driving force behind some of the curriculum reforms seen in both countries. As observed in the study, educators in both countries expressed a desire for more collaborative programs and resource sharing. This echoes the findings of the ASEAN Secretariat, which highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in improving educational outcomes ([ASEAN Secretariat, 2019](#)). While the cooperation has led to some positive changes, such as the sharing of best practices, challenges remain in ensuring that these programs are accessible and relevant to all educators, particularly in resource-poor settings.

The comparative analysis of English language education in Indonesia and Australia reveals important insights into the role of curriculum design, teacher autonomy, technology integration, and sociopolitical factors in shaping educational outcomes. While both countries share similar goals for English language education, their approaches differ significantly, reflecting the broader educational and cultural contexts in which these systems operate. Australia's decentralized system supports greater teacher autonomy and technological integration, while Indonesia's centralized system presents challenges to cross-curricular integration and technology use. These findings suggest the need for more context-specific educational reforms that address local barriers to innovation and enhance professional development for teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has provided a comparative analysis of English language education in Indonesia and Australia, focusing on key areas such as cross-curricular integration, teacher autonomy, technology use, and the influence of sociopolitical contexts. The findings underscore both the common goals and the distinct challenges faced by each country in their approach to English language teaching, highlighting the impact of contextual factors on curriculum design and pedagogical practices. In Australia, the decentralized education system has allowed for greater teacher autonomy, enabling innovative teaching practices, the integration of English across multiple subjects, and the widespread use of technology. Teachers in Australia reported high levels of flexibility in adapting the curriculum to suit student needs, fostering critical thinking, and developing students' multimodal literacy skills. This aligns with global trends in education that advocate for more student-centered, technology-enhanced, and interdisciplinary learning experiences ([Australian Curriculum, 2020](#)).

On the other hand, Indonesia's centralized education system, with its heavy emphasis on standardized exams, limits the potential for cross-curricular integration and the use of technology in English classrooms. Despite recent curriculum reforms such as Merdeka Curriculum, teachers in Indonesia still face significant challenges in implementing these changes due to exam-driven policies, limited resources, and a lack of teacher autonomy. These findings mirror the constraints identified in previous

studies ([Goodall, 2018](#); [Zein, 2019](#)), indicating that while there is potential for reform, the pace of change is slow, and the implementation of new approaches is often hindered by systemic factors.

In conclusion, while both Indonesia and Australia share the overarching goal of improving English language education, their approaches are shaped by different educational structures, resources, and sociopolitical contexts. The findings emphasize the need for more localized and context-specific educational reforms that address the unique challenges of each country. For Indonesia, fostering greater teacher autonomy, providing better access to technology, and reducing the emphasis on standardized testing could enable a more holistic and integrated approach to English language education. Meanwhile, Australia's challenge lies in addressing regional disparities in resources and ensuring that all students, regardless of their geographical location, have equal access to high-quality English education. As both countries continue to evolve their English language curricula, it is crucial to maintain a focus on student-centered approaches, critical literacy, and intercultural communication, while considering the practical challenges and opportunities unique to each educational context. Future research could further explore the role of teacher professional development in overcoming these challenges and ensuring the successful implementation of cross-curricular and technology-driven English language education practices.

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