

# English Language Education in Indonesia: A Literature Review of Teaching Methods, Curriculum, and Challenges

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## ABSTRACT

English language education in Indonesia has developed rapidly, in line with globalization and the increasing need to communicate in an international language. This article aims to examine the various English language teaching methods used in Indonesia, identify the implemented curriculum, and review the challenges faced in teaching English at the formal education level. This article uses a literature review approach to analyze relevant literature on methods, curriculum, and the challenges faced by teachers and students in English language education. The review results indicate that despite the implementation of modern teaching methods, significant challenges related to curriculum implementation and the use of technology remain, affecting the quality of English language teaching in Indonesia. Therefore, this article recommends the need for improved teacher training and strengthening technical support and resources throughout Indonesia.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English language education in Indonesia plays a crucial role in opening up global opportunities for the younger generation. As an international language, English is widely used in communication across various fields, including education, business, diplomacy, technology, and popular culture. Mastery of English is becoming an increasingly necessary skill in an increasingly connected world, not only in English-speaking countries but also in countries where English is a second or foreign language, including Indonesia (Crystal, 2003). In response to this need, English is taught as a compulsory subject at almost all levels of education in Indonesia, from elementary school to university.

Over time, English language teaching in Indonesia has undergone significant changes. It is no longer limited to teaching grammar and reading skills, but also focuses on developing speaking, listening, and writing skills in real-life contexts. Effective English teaching is essential to preparing students to face global challenges. However, despite numerous efforts to improve the quality of English language education, various obstacles remain that affect its effectiveness in Indonesia. This is primarily due to factors such as limited facilities, uneven teacher training, and inequities in curriculum implementation.

According to Wijayanto (2017), one of the major challenges in teaching English in Indonesia is the difference in education quality between urban and remote areas. In certain areas, educational facilities

that support English learning, such as computer rooms and internet access, are still limited. Furthermore, the large number of students in one class also limits interaction between teachers and students, which results in low learning quality, particularly in speaking and listening skills. The lack of adequate teacher training in modern teaching methods is also a significant obstacle. English teachers in Indonesia often do not receive sufficient training in communication-based teaching methods, which are essential in this era of globalization (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The English language teaching methods used in Indonesia also play a significant role in the quality of learning. In the past, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) dominated English teaching in Indonesia. This method focused more on text translation and theoretical grammar instruction, but tended to underemphasize practical communication skills such as speaking and listening (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Over time, more communicative methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) began to be implemented, focusing on developing speaking and listening skills in real-world contexts. CLT, for example, emphasizes interaction in English to improve students' speaking skills in more natural communication situations (Harmer, 2007). Although these methods are more relevant to students' communication needs, their implementation still faces several practical challenges.

The curriculum also plays a significant role in shaping the way English is taught in Indonesia. The Indonesian curriculum has undergone several changes, with the 2013 Curriculum focusing more on developing student competencies, both in terms of knowledge and practical skills. In this curriculum, English is taught not only as an academic subject but also as a tool for real-world communication. However, implementation challenges remain, particularly in regions with limited educational resources. In 2020, Indonesia launched the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), which offers greater flexibility in teaching and allows teachers to better tailor their approach to students' needs. However, despite this more flexible curriculum, its implementation still requires adequate support in terms of facilities and teacher training (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

Furthermore, student motivation in learning English is also an important factor influencing the effectiveness of teaching. Students who lack motivation to learn English often struggle to master the language, even if they have received good instruction. According to Littlewood (2004), social and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping student motivation. In some areas, English is perceived as less relevant to everyday life, which discourages students from learning it. Therefore, a more contextual and experiential approach is needed to increase student interest and motivation in learning English. Furthermore, research by Nunan (2003) states that English language teaching must consider various aspects of culture and social context to make it relevant to students' needs. Nunan (2003) stated, "Effective language learning occurs when students are engaged in content that is meaningful to them and relevant to their lives."

Based on the description above, the purpose of this study is to conduct an in-depth study of teaching methods, curriculum, and challenges faced in teaching English in Indonesia. This study aims to identify the most effective teaching methods, understand the dynamics of existing curriculum implementation, and explore the challenges that affect the quality of English teaching in Indonesia. Therefore, the results of this study are expected to provide useful recommendations for improving the quality of English teaching in Indonesia, particularly in addressing the challenges faced at the elementary school through university levels.

## 2. METHODS

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach. The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth description of teaching methods, curricula, and challenges in teaching English in Indonesia based on a literature review. The data used in this study were obtained from various secondary sources, such as scientific articles, journals, books, and related reports discussing these topics. The primary data source in this study is literature published between 2000 and 2023, which includes theoretical studies, previous research, and applicable educational policies in Indonesia.

The data collection technique was conducted through a literature review, which involved searching and analyzing various relevant references to obtain information related to English language teaching, the methods used, and the challenges faced. The collected data was then analyzed using content analysis techniques by categorizing and interpreting findings from various sources to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation of English language education in Indonesia. The results of this analysis are expected to provide clearer insights into the effectiveness of English language teaching in Indonesia and the challenges faced by teachers and students.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### English Teaching Methods in Indonesia

English language teaching methods in Indonesia reflect a significant shift from traditional methods to more communicative ones. Most schools in Indonesia still use the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), especially at the primary and secondary levels. This method focuses on teaching grammatical structures and translation, allowing students to learn the language more theoretically. However, while this method helps students master grammar rules, it is often ineffective in developing their speaking and listening skills. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), GTM relies heavily on the passive aspect of language learning and does not provide many opportunities for students to use the language in real-life communication contexts.

Over time, several schools in Indonesia have begun to shift to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which places greater emphasis on the use of language in everyday communication. CLT considers speaking and listening skills to be two essential aspects of language learning that students must master. In practice, CLT allows students to interact directly using English in social and academic situations relevant to their lives. Harmer (2007) states that CLT enables students to be more active in conversations, which in turn helps improve their communication skills.

However, although CLT is recognized as a more modern and relevant method to the needs of the global world, its implementation in Indonesia remains limited. Several factors, such as limited time available in class schedules, large student numbers in one class, and limited teacher training, often become obstacles to the maximum implementation of CLT (Wijayanto, 2017). In some cases, even though teachers are familiar with the theory of CLT, they still find it difficult to implement it in large classes with varying student abilities (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

In response to the limitations of traditional methods and to improve the quality of teaching, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) is increasingly being implemented in certain schools. TBLT focuses on the use of practical tasks that enable students to learn language by solving problems or achieving specific goals through language. Ellis (2003) states that this task-based approach is very effective in improving students' speaking and listening skills, because they are encouraged to interact and work together to solve problems in English. However, TBLT requires more intensive guidance from teachers and sufficient time for each task given, which sometimes becomes an obstacle in its implementation in Indonesia (Harmer, 2007).

#### English Language Education Curriculum in Indonesia

The English language curriculum in Indonesia has undergone several changes since the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, which is more focused on developing student competencies, rather than just mastering theory. This curriculum requires students to not only understand English grammar and vocabulary, but also be able to use English to communicate in broader contexts. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2013) stated that the 2013 Curriculum aims to produce students who are competent in various aspects, including practical language skills. It focuses on speaking, listening, writing, and reading competencies, which students are expected to use in their daily lives.

However, although the 2013 Curriculum was designed to be more contextual and competency-based, its implementation in the field still faces several challenges. One major issue is the disparity in education quality between urban and remote areas. In more developed areas, such as Jakarta and Surabaya, the implementation of this curriculum has been successful due to the support of adequate

educational facilities and more intensive teacher training. On the other hand, remote areas with limited resources often struggle to implement this curriculum effectively, resulting in uneven distribution of English language education quality across Indonesia (Wijayanto, 2017).

In an effort to address this issue, the Indonesian government introduced the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in 2020, which provides teachers with greater flexibility in developing and adapting teaching materials to meet students' needs. The Independent Curriculum allows for a more individualized, experience-based approach to student learning in contexts that are more relevant to them (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Despite its greater flexibility, major challenges in implementing this curriculum are limited teacher training and a lack of access to educational technology that supports digital-based teaching. This leaves some schools struggling to incorporate more technology-based methods into their curricula.

### **Challenges in Teaching English in Indonesia**

English language teaching in Indonesia faces various challenges that must be overcome to improve the quality of learning. One of the biggest challenges is limited educational facilities, particularly in more remote areas. Many schools in Indonesia still struggle to provide adequate facilities to support English teaching, such as computer rooms, internet access, and the multimedia devices needed for technology-based learning. Suherdi (2014) revealed that in some areas, even quality English textbooks are still limited, making it difficult for teachers to implement more modern, technology-based teaching methods.

Furthermore, the quality of teacher training is a key factor in the success of English language teaching in Indonesia. English teachers who have not received adequate training in modern teaching methods, the use of technology in teaching, and effective classroom management tend to struggle to deliver optimal instruction. This results in English language teaching being less effective in developing students' speaking and listening skills. Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that developing teachers' abilities in using more active communication methods is crucial to improving the quality of English language teaching in Indonesia.

Another equally important challenge is student motivation in learning English. According to Littlewood (2004), social and cultural factors often influence students' motivation to learn English. In some areas, students feel that English is irrelevant to their daily lives, resulting in a lack of enthusiasm for learning the language. Therefore, a teaching approach that is more based on students' experiences and local contexts is essential to increase their motivation to learn English.

### **Discussion**

#### **English Language Teaching Methods: Development and Implementation**

English language teaching methods in Indonesia have undergone significant changes in recent decades. In the past, the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) was the primary method of English instruction in many Indonesian schools. Although this method is widely used in various countries, including Indonesia, research shows that it is limited in helping students develop speaking and listening skills. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), GTM places greater emphasis on understanding grammatical structures and translating texts, making it highly rigid and less relevant to the practical needs of everyday communication. This explains why many students graduate from teaching programs with limited speaking skills despite having mastered aspects of language theory.

As awareness of the importance of speaking and listening skills in international communication deepened, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method was introduced in Indonesia at the beginning of the 21st century. CLT aims to develop students' communication skills by emphasizing the use of language in real-life social contexts, which are much more relevant to their lives. Harmer (2007) explains that CLT allows students to interact directly using English, providing real-life experiences in speaking, listening, and understanding the social nuances of communication. However, despite CLT's widespread adoption, its implementation in Indonesia faces many challenges, primarily due to limited infrastructure and the number of students in one class. Over time, a number of Indonesian authors have also begun to develop approaches more suited to the local context. For example, Supriyanto (2012)

suggests the importance of integrating English teaching methods with local cultural characteristics to further enhance the relevance of teaching materials to the conditions and needs of students in Indonesia. According to him, "A successful teaching method is one that can combine global communication needs with students' local wisdom." Therefore, integrating communication approaches with Indonesian cultural values can create a more meaningful learning experience for students.

As explained by Wijayanto (2017), limited facilities such as computer rooms, internet access, and adequate teaching materials make CLT teaching in Indonesia less than fully effective. Many schools in remote areas still struggle to access the educational technology needed to implement this method optimally. Furthermore, the lack of teacher training is also a major obstacle to implementing this method. Many English teachers in Indonesia have not been trained in using communication-based teaching techniques, which makes it difficult to implement CLT effectively (Suherdi, 2014).

Furthermore, the Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) method has begun to gain more attention in English language teaching in Indonesia. TBLT focuses on providing challenging tasks for students to use English in practical situations that resemble real-life situations. Ellis (2003) revealed that TBLT is very effective in improving speaking and listening skills because students must interact and collaborate in completing tasks. However, although many schools have begun to try TBLT, difficulties remain in managing large classes and intensive guidance from teachers. In addition, TBLT also requires more time for assignments and reflection, which is often not available in limited class hours (Harmer, 2007).

### **English Language Education Curriculum: Transformation and Challenges**

The development of the English language education curriculum in Indonesia has also undergone significant changes with the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum, which focuses more on developing student competencies. This curriculum aims to improve the quality of education by ensuring that students not only understand theory but also can apply their knowledge in real life. The Ministry of Education and Culture (2013) states that the 2013 Curriculum emphasizes four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, which students must master in a balanced manner.

However, the implementation of the 2013 Curriculum in English teaching in Indonesia faces various challenges. One of the biggest challenges is the gap between urban and remote areas in terms of educational facilities and access to resources. In areas with limited infrastructure, the implementation of this curriculum is often limited, as many schools lack language laboratory space, internet access, or the multimedia devices necessary for technology-based teaching (Wijayanto, 2017). Furthermore, teaching English using a competency-based approach requires trained teachers to support the implementation of this curriculum. However, not all teachers in Indonesia have sufficient training to implement this curriculum effectively, resulting in significant variation in the quality of teaching (Suherdi, 2014).

In line with this, the Indonesian government launched the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in 2020, which offers teachers greater flexibility in developing teaching materials tailored to students' needs and characteristics. The Independent Curriculum allows teachers to focus more on developing students' practical skills, while also providing space for students to develop their critical and creative skills (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). Despite this greater flexibility, the main challenges in implementing this curriculum are limited teacher training and limited access to educational technology. Significant disparities in education quality persist in many regions, particularly in less developed areas (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

### **Challenges in Teaching English in Indonesia**

One of the biggest challenges in teaching English in Indonesia is limited resources. As Suherdi (2014) explains, many schools in remote areas lack adequate access to modern educational facilities such as computer rooms and the internet. Without these facilities, technology-based English instruction will be difficult to implement, which can limit students' ability to learn independently and improve their speaking skills.

Furthermore, student motivation is a crucial factor influencing the success of English language teaching. Littlewood (2004) explains that social and cultural factors play a significant role in motivating

students to learn English. Students in certain regions may feel that English is irrelevant to their lives, leading to low motivation to learn. Therefore, English instruction based on the local context and students' personal experiences will be more engaging and can increase their motivation to learn the language (Harmer, 2007).

The quality of teacher training is also a major issue in English language teaching. Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that teacher professional development is crucial to ensure that more communicative and skills-based teaching methods are used effectively in the classroom. Without adequate training, even a good curriculum and more modern methods cannot be implemented to their full potential.

### **Implications for English Language Teaching in Indonesia**

Based on the findings above, English language teaching in Indonesia needs to continue to evolve and adapt to the challenges of the times. Therefore, it is crucial for education policies to focus more on technology-based approaches that can address the issue of limited facilities. Furthermore, more teacher training is needed to improve the quality of English language teaching, with an emphasis on the use of more communicative methods such as CLT and TBLT, as well as the use of technology that can help students learn independently and more effectively.

Furthermore, it's crucial to adapt the curriculum to local needs and student characteristics, as well as to increase student motivation in ways that are more relevant to their lives. Contextualized English instruction based on students' experiences will have a more positive impact on the learning process.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

This research has revealed that English language teaching in Indonesia has evolved along with changes in classroom methods. While the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is still implemented in many schools, more communicative methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) are gaining popularity. However, while these two methods are more relevant to students' communication needs, the main challenges in their implementation are limited facilities in many schools, especially in remote areas, and the uneven quality of teacher training. Furthermore, English language teaching in Indonesia is also influenced by evolving curricula, such as the 2013 Curriculum and the Merdeka Curriculum, which focus on developing students' language competencies, although there are still inequalities in their implementation.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that to improve the quality of English teaching in Indonesia, developing teacher competencies through more intensive training and equalizing access to educational facilities is crucial. For future research, it is recommended to conduct more in-depth empirical studies on the implementation of English teaching methods, especially those based on technology and more suited to students' local needs. Further research could also explore the impact of student motivation in the context of more experiential and interactive English learning.

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