Communicative Practices and Cultural Challenges in Kurikulum Merdeka: The District Teachers' Voice

Muji Budi Lestari, Dahrul Ahmad Ahyarudin, Risa Feriyanti, Pahlan Tanjung, Lela Awaliyah, Rihatmi, Margana

Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Culture - Yogyakarta State University (Indonesia)
Email: mujibudi.2022@student.uny.ac.id

Abstract

Kurikulum Merdeka, implemented across schools in Indonesia, emphasizes the development of students' communicative competence through a more flexible and contextual approach. However, its implementation faces significant challenges, particularly due to cultural differences across regions. This study aims to explore the cultural challenges faced by district teachers and to what extend fostering students' communicative practices in line with the new curriculum demands. It includes 50 English teachers from the Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP) Bahasa Inggris kabupaten Gowa, or English Teachers Assembly of Gowa District, representing diverse backgrounds and experiences. Data collection included surveys (n=50) using a Likert scale questionnaire and semi-structured interviews (n=6) constructed according to Han (2022) and Lei & Medwell (2022).

The study reveals communicative practices show moderate implementation with meaningful communicative practices (mean=3.37), humanistic values and learner autonomy (mean=3.66), and cooperative learning (mean=3.48). The highest approval is in adopting a task-based approach (mean=4.00). Cultural challenges in contextual alignment is strongly emphasized (mean=4.18), highlighting the importance of aligning educational practices with local contexts. Recommendations include targeted professional development, promoting collaborative learning, establishing clear assessment frameworks, leveraging technology for resource sharing, and strengthening local community partnerships.

Keywords: communicative competence, cultural challenges, curriculum challenges, curriculum changes, Kurikulum Merdeka, P5.

The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka signifies a major development in Indonesia's education system. As noted by Kemdikbud [1], this curriculum is designed to enhance adaptability and relevance in addressing global challenges, evolving from the previous Kurikulum 2013. It places a strong emphasis on fostering self-reliance and creativity in the classroom, aligning with international benchmarks like the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) at the B1 level [2]. This shift prioritizes the development of practical communicative skills over traditional grammar instruction, equipping students to effectively navigate real-world scenarios.

However, transitioning to this modern curriculum presents challenges for English teachers trained in traditional methods, moreover in the diverse cultural background. The

effectiveness of teaching techniques and overall success in English language instruction are closely connected to the cultural and social environments of students, significantly impacting their learning processes and outcomes [3]. Besides, emotions, attitudes, and motivation play a crucial role in shaping learning outcomes [4]. Understanding these influences is vital for implementing strategies that respect linguistic diversity, accommodate various learning styles, and honor cultural sensitivities. By acknowledging these factors, educators can foster inclusive practices that improve student engagement and achievement.

The progression of English language teaching is deeply intertwined with sociocultural contexts [5] . there are three main new curriculum challenges: clarity, complexity, and context [6]. Clarity involves understanding the essential aspects of changes. Complexity encompasses the difficulty and scope of implementing new methods. Context refers to the surrounding conditions shaping teachers' responses to reforms, including cultural norms and institutional procedures. These challenges highlight the need for clear communication, shared purpose, and support for teachers adapting to new roles and methods.

Curriculum changes require English teachers to enhance their professional skills continuously, adapting to new roles and methodologies [7]. This dynamic nature of teaching emphasizes lifelong learning and professional growth. Teachers' approaches are most effective when they integrate new and traditional beliefs, adjusting methods to fit evolving curriculum requirements while considering local teaching realities [6] by embracing innovative strategies, catering to diverse learning styles and needs, fostering continuous improvement [8].

Communicative teaching has shifted from traditional methods to a revolutionary approach, with communicative curriculum design at its core, integrating linguistic theories, language acquisition, and communicative practices [9]. There are six principles of nurturing

communicative practices through communicative language teaching [10]: prioritizing meaningful communicative competence, emphasizing humanistic values and learner autonomy, encouraging cooperative learning, adopting a task-based approach, integrating content-based learning, and dispelling misconceptions. These principles collectively enhance language acquisition and application across educational settings. It emphasizes practical application in real-world contexts, focusing on communicative competence, which includes social, cultural, strategic, discourse, and grammatical aspects [11].

However, sustaining communicative competence consistency across different educational settings presents challenges. Teacher preparedness varies, affecting adoption quality. Resource availability and institutional support are critical; schools with limited access to materials and technological tools may struggle ([12]–[14]. Teachers must analyze students' circumstances and needs to find appropriate activities for enhancing English skills[15]–[17]. Curriculum changes necessitate exploring how teachers can effectively adapt, particularly integrating innovative approaches. This research supports teachers in navigating curriculum reforms, bridging gaps between curriculum ideals and classroom realities. Considering the problem outlined previously, the researchers formulate the following research questions:

1. To what extent are communicative practices nurtured within district classrooms?

2. To what extent do the cultural challenges of curriculum changes are recognized by the district educators?

Literature Review

Communicative competence, initially theorized by Habermas [18] as the ability to achieve mutual understanding through universal conversation principles, affiliated to linguistic competence. Savignon [9] extends this idea,

emphasizing that understanding grammar alone is insufficient for effective language use, thus highlighting communicative competence's role in practical language application. Brown describes it as a complex network of psychological, sociocultural, and linguistic elements[19], while Cloudia Ho [20] underscores its link to cultural values and societal roles, viewing it as a comprehensive language proficiency enabling meaningful interactions across various contexts. Richard [21] further underscores its importance by identifying communicative competence as a set of essential learning goals for effective language use, including navigating diverse purposes, mastering various text types, and sustaining interaction despite linguistic challenges.

Han [10] outlines key pedagogic principles of nurturing communicative competence that emphasize interactive and meaningful language learning. These principles include prioritizing meaningful communicative competence, emphasizing humanistic values and learner autonomy, encouraging cooperative learning, adopting a task-based approach, integrating content-based learning, and dispelling misconceptions. Activities under these principles aim to develop comprehensive communicative skills, foster student independence, promote collaboration, and connect language learning with relevant content, all within a supportive and stress-free environment. These approaches ensure that learners are equipped to use English effectively in real-world contexts while accommodating diverse learning needs.

Curriculum is a dynamic process that involves adapting and translating knowledge to suit specific educational contexts, requiring collaboration among educators to re-contextualize and effectively convey content [22]. This ongoing evolution necessitates continuous professional development, as teachers integrate new and traditional approaches to meet evolving curriculum demands while considering local contexts [7]. However, curriculum changes present challenges

categorized by Lei and Medwell into clarity, complexity, and context [6]. Clarity often hindered by vague objectives, complexity shaped by political, social, economic, and moral factors [8]. Complexity relates to the difficulty and degree of responsibility practitioners face during implementation [23]. Context influenced by cultural norms and institutional procedures [24]. These challenges highlight the difficulty for teachers, especially those trained in traditional methods, to adapt to new roles and innovative educational practices.

The shift from the Kurikulum 2013 to the Kurikulum Merdeka in Indonesia, driven by the need for learning recovery post-COVID-19, aligns with educational policies from the Ministry of Education and Culture [25]. This new curriculum introduces significant changes in teaching hours, assessment methods, and the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project or P5 as a cultural fundamental philosophy of education, alongside flexible options for local content and subject choices [26]. P5 allows students to "experience knowledge" while building character and learning from their environment exploring key themes like climate change, anti-radicalism, mental health, culture, entrepreneurship, technology, and democracy, enabling them to take meaningful actions based on their learning needs [27]. Schools can implement the curriculum gradually through three pathways: Mandiri Belajar, Mandiri Berubah, and Mandiri Berbagi, or independent learning, independent change, independent sharing depend on their readiness [2], [26].

Methodology

This is a quantitative study aims to quantify data and uncover patterns, relationships, or trends [28], [29]. This study utilizes a structured survey to collect data from 50 English teachers who are members of the Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran Bahasa Inggris (MGMP) or English Teachers Assembly of Gowa district, Indonesia.

Gowa is a unique district due to its geographical diversity, with mountainous highlands and rural and urban areas. The participating English teachers represent a diverse group, encompassing various educational backgrounds, teaching areas (remote, rural, and urban), ages, genders, and years of teaching experience.

The primary data collection instrument is a Likert scale questionnaire, designed based on Han (2022) [10] and Lei & Medwell (2022) [6] theories to capture teachers' perspectives on communicative practices and their cultural challenges of curriculum changes. The questionnaire consists of 25 questions rated on a scale from 1 (very unsuitable) to 5 (very suitable). The survey is distributed via Google Forms, allowing for efficient data collection and management. Supplementing the survey, interviews provide qualitative data to enrich the quantitative findings. The interviews are conducted with a targeted group of participants to explore specific themes and issues in-depth.

To ensure data validity, content validation techniques are employed [30]. The questionnaire undergoes scrutiny and feedback from experts at Yogyakarta State University. Reliability tests using Cronbach's alpha are conducted, and items are revised to enhance reliability and validity. This iterative process ensures that the final instrument accurately reflects the research objectives. Quantitative data from the survey are analysed using SPSS, focusing on descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations.

Findings

From the survey responses, researcher identified distinct demographics of teachers before analysing the extent of communicative practices nurtured within district classrooms and cultural challenges of new curriculum.

Table 1. demographics of the questionnaire respondents (n=50)

Category	Kurikulum 2013 (Count & Percentage)	Kurikulum Merdeka (Count & Percentage)
Total Respondents	22 (44%)	28 (56%)
Area Type		
Urban	4 (8%)	6 (12%)
Rural	13 (26%)	14 (28%)
Remote	5 (10%)	8 (16%)
Gender		
Male	3 (6%)	3 (6%)
Female	19 (38%)	25 (50%)
Age		
25-34	4 (8%)	8 (16%)
35-44	12 (24%)	14 (28%)
45-54	5 (10%)	4 (8%)
55-65	1 (2%)	2 (4%)
Educational Background		
Bachelor's in English Education	17 (34%)	24 (48%)
Master's in English Education	3 (6%)	4 (8%)
English Language and Literature	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Doctorate	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Years of Teaching Experience		
3-5 years	3 (6%)	2 (4%)
6-10 years	6 (12%)	5 (10%)
11-15 years	8 (16%)	13 (26%)
16-20 years	5 (10%)	5 (10%)

21 years or more	0 (0%)	3 (6%)

Table 2. communicative practices and cultural challenges

Domain	Questions	Mean	SD
Focusing on meaningful communicative competence	1. Learning English to communicate	3.28	0.83397
	2. Focus on meaning	3.44	0.86094
	3. Practical, functional, and universal method	3.4	0.85714
Emphasizing Humanistic Values and Learner Autonomy	4. Student-centered approach	3.3	0.88641
	5. Independence of learners	3.74	0.72309
	6. Close, positive, and relaxed teacher-student relationships	3.94	0.93481
Encouraging Cooperative Learning	7. Teachers as facilitators and community creators	3.82	0.74751
	8. Participation and interaction through cooperative learning	3.52	0.70682
	9. Cognitive development through peer interaction	3.12	0.68928
Adopting a Task-Based Approach	10. Real-world communication for task completion	3.82	0.56025
	11. Enhanced cooperation, and negotiation among students	4.14	0.49528
	12. Teachers as managers and guides	4.04	0.60474
Integrating Content-Based Learning	13. Boosting students' motivation with relevant content	3.74	0.63278
	14. Stress-free learning environment	3.82	0.59556
	15. Understandable input	3.44	0.90711
Dispelling Misconceptions	16. Balancing oral and written communication skills	3.12	0.74615
	17. Teaching English inclusively in English	3.1	0.81441
	18. Using not only audio-lingual method	3	0.92582
Cultural challenges in new curriculum			
Clarity	19. Identifying essential features of the curriculum change	3.94	0.93481
	20. Enrol seminars, workshops for curriculum updates	3.38	1.00793
	21. Retrieve online resources for continuous learning	2.12	1.09991
Complexity	22. Attain peer learning communities for sharing solutions	4.36	0.52528
	23. Conduct assessments to identify areas needing support	2.46	1.01439
Context	24. Collaborate with communities to align educational practices	4.22	0.64807
	25. Affiliate with schools for sharing effective teaching strategies	4.14	0.72871

Table 3. demographics of the interview respondents

ID	Age	Gender	Location	Educational Background	Years of Teaching Experience
T1	35-44	F	Remote Area	Master's in English Education	12 years
T2	55-65	M	Remote Area	Bachelor's in English Education	32 years
T3	35-44	M	Rural Area	Master's in English Education	12 years
T4	45-54	F	Rural Area	Bachelor's in English Education	23 years
T5	35-44	M	Urban Area	Bachelor's in English Education	10 years
T6	35-44	F	Urban Area	Bachelor's in English Education	19 years

There are several similarities regarding the communicative practices among the interviewed teachers. Across all areas, teachers prioritize meaningful communicative competence as a fundamental goal of their instruction. This focus is evident in their widespread use of role-playing and practical activities, which they believe are crucial for helping students develop the ability to respond appropriately in various communicative scenarios. Teachers such as T1 highlight the importance of students understanding the meaning behind their communication efforts, aiming to boost confidence and effectiveness in real-life conversations. As explained by teacher 1.

"Siswa di sini menggunakan bahasa daerah asli mereka yaitu Bahasa Makassar, saya harus bekerja ekstra keras. Saya perlu menerjemahkan dari bahasa Indonesia ke bahasa daerah mereka, kemudian ke bahasa Inggris. Yang penting adalah agar siswa memahami makna komunikasi dan percaya diri merespons dengan tepat untuk komunikasi yang efektif".

"The students here use their native local language from the Makassarnese language, I have to work extra hard. I need to translate from Indonesian to their local language, and then to

English. The key is for the students to understand the meaning of communication and to respond confidently for effective communication".

Additionally, the use of practical, functional methods, such as video-based conversations and audiovisual aids, is commonly reported by teachers like T3 and T4 as instrumental in enhancing student engagement and comprehension. As mentioned by teacher 3.

"Kami menggunakan berbagai media pembelajaran audio-visual seperti percakapan bahasa Inggris, role-playing, LCD, dan laboratorium komputer. Namun, semua itu masih terbatas, dan banyak kendala dari berbagai sisi. Sebagai antisipasinya, kami para guru sering belajar di luar kelas, seperti di musalla atau tempat lain yang memungkinkan".

"We use various audio-visual learning media such as English conversation, role-playing, LCD, and computer labs. However, all of these resources are still limited, and there are many challenges from different aspects. To address this, we teachers often conduct learning outside the classroom, such as in a prayer room or other available spaces".

Another common theme is the student-centered approach adopted by all teachers, whether they are in remote, rural, or urban areas. Teachers consistently emphasize self-directed learning, personalized tasks, and active student engagement as essential components of their teaching strategies. Teacher 5 described their classroom relationship as follows.

"Pertama-tama, kami membangun hubungan antara guru dan siswa seperti sahabat untuk menghilangkan jarak dan menciptakan suasana yang akrab. Kami memberikan bimbingan dan motivasi, serta dukungan untuk meyakinkan mereka bahwa sebenarnya mereka mampu. Kami juga memotivasi dan membimbing siswa dalam pemberian tugas mandiri, serta memberikan reward kepada siswa yang sudah mampu berbicara lancar dalam bahasa Inggris dengan teman-temannya."

"First, we build a relationship between teachers and students as if they were friends to eliminate any gap and create a close-knit environment. We provide guidance and motivation, along with support to reassure them of their capabilities. We also motivate and guide students in completing independent assignments and offer rewards to those who speak English fluently with their peers".

Cooperative learning is another area of strong alignment among the teachers. Group discussions, peer activities, and collaborative learning environments are universally valued for their role in enhancing participation and interaction. Despite these similarities, there are notable contrasts in how teachers address the challenges, largely influenced by their teaching environments. Teachers in remote and rural areas, such as T3, often face significant resource limitations and emphasize the critical role of community collaboration and teacher training programs. They rely heavily on initiatives like the Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran (MGMP) or English teacher assembly to share solutions and align educational practices with local needs. As teacher 3 explained:

"Karena keterbatasan yang ada, kami mengandalkan informasi dari MGMP dan pelatihan dari pemerintah. Situasinya berbeda dengan di kota yang memiliki banyak akses dan sumber daya. Di sini, akses kami lebih terbatas, jadi kami memanfaatkan semua informasi dan pelatihan yang tersedia untuk meningkatkan kualitas pembelajaran."

"Due to the limitations we face, we rely on information from MGMP and government training. The situation is different from cities, which have more access and resources. Here, our access is more restricted, so we make the most of the available information and training to improve the quality of education."

Conversely, urban teachers like T6 benefit from better access to technological tools and online resources. Teacher 6 mentioned:

"Kami sering mengadakan upgrading untuk intern guru dan mempelajari materi secara mandiri melalui berbagai platform untuk guru, seperti Plaform Merdeka Mengajar. Dengan cara

ini, kami dapat mengatasi keterbatasan yang ada dan tetap mengikuti perkembangan terbaru dalam pendidikan."

"We frequently organize internal teacher upgrading sessions and study materials independently through various platforms for teachers, such as Plaform Merdeka Mengajar. This approach helps us overcome existing limitations and stay updated with the latest developments in education."

Furthermore, the complexity of adapting to new curriculum changes is a common challenge, but the strategies vary. Remote and rural teachers often focus on gradual implementation. Teacher 3 clarified:

"Kami tidak terlalu memikirkan Kurikulum Merdeka secara berlebihan. Jadi, kami sebagai guru merancang kurikulum Merdeka secara bertahap sesuai dengan kebutuhan. Projek P5 dan elemen lainnya dapat disesuaikan dengan kolaborasi dan pendekatan budaya lokal. Kami harus benar-benar memahami pedagogi dan psikologi agar bisa menyesuaikan pembelajaran dengan baik. Evaluasi rutin dilakukan di setiap sekolah untuk menilai perkembangan kelas, pelajaran, dan kondisi siswa. Selain itu, kepala sekolah atau pengawas sering datang untuk memberikan pemahaman baru, sehingga pembelajaran bisa disesuaikan dengan kurikulum yang baru secara bertahap."

"We don't overemphasize Kurikulum Merdeka. Instead, we, as teachers, design Kurikulum Merdeka gradually according to needs. Projects like P5 and other elements can be adjusted by collaboration and local culture approach. We must thoroughly understand pedagogy and psychology to adapt our teaching effectively. Regular evaluations are conducted at each school to assess class progress, lessons, and student conditions. Additionally, principals or supervisors frequently visit to provide new insights, allowing us to gradually align our teaching with the new curriculum."

Despite varying contextual factors, all teachers emphasize the need for flexibility, ongoing professional development, and

alignment with the evolving educational landscape. Flexibility allows educators to adapt their methods to changing conditions and diverse student needs. As described by teacher 4:

"Sejauh ini, karena kami belum menggunakan Kurikulum Merdeka, tapi kami sudah memiliki gambaran umum mengenai penerapannya. Semua informasi, baik dari atas maupun usulan dari para guru, dibahas bersama kepala sekolah atau pengawas untuk persiapan pelaksanaan Kurikulum Merdeka, meskipun saat ini masih dalam tahap perkembangan dan belum final."

"So far, although we haven't implemented Kurikulum Merdeka yet, we already have a general understanding of its application. All the information, both from higher authorities and suggestions from teachers, is discussed together with the principal or supervisor to prepare for the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka, even though it is still in the development stage and not yet final."

Discussion

Communicative practices

The table 2 reveals key insights into different domains of communicative practices, with varying levels of emphasis and consistency. Moderate emphasis can be seen on communication and meaning-focused teaching, with average scores 3.28 to 3.44 and consistent responses in standard deviations (around 0.83 to 0.86). Emphasizing humanistic values and learner autonomy is notably strong, especially in fostering positive teacher-student relationships (Mean = 3.94), though with some variability. Encouraging cooperative learning is generally well-supported, with teachers as facilitators scoring high (Mean = 3.82), but less emphasis on cognitive development through peer interaction (Mean = 3.12). The Task-Based Approach is highly rated, particularly in enhancing student cooperation and negotiation (Mean = 4.14), with strong agreement. Integrating Content-Based

Learning also shows high and consistent emphasis (Mean = 3.74 to 3.82).

However, dispelling misconceptions has the lowest scores, especially in moving beyond traditional methods (Mean = 3.0), indicating challenges in diversifying teaching strategies. In general, the data suggests solid implementation of communicative practices, with strengths in cooperative learning and task-based approaches, but some areas, like peer interaction and methodological diversity, need improvement. The communicative practices across various dimension reveal both strengths and areas for improvement.

1. Focusing on Meaningful Communicative Competence.

English is not just a subject but as a tool for effective communication [21]. Teachers like T1 and T2 from the interviews underscored the importance of using language in real-life contexts, such as discussing natural conditions and observing the environment around the school. The approach prioritizes the meaningful use of language over rote memorization [9]. This is evident in practices observed by T3 and T4, who integrate practical and functional language activities into their lessons to enhance students' understanding and engagement. Communicative practices advocates for methods that prepare learners to use language in a variety of situation [11]. Teachers such as T5 and T6 apply universal methods like role-playing and peer discussions to foster practical language skills that are applicable beyond the classroom.

2. Emphasizing Humanistic Values and Learner Autonomy.

Communicative practices promote a student-centered approach where learners actively participate in their own learning process [21]. This approach is supported by teachers like T2 and T5, who encourage self-directed learning and personalized tasks tailored to individual student needs. Learner autonomy is a core principle in CLT, empowering students to take responsibility for their learning [19]. Teachers such as T3 and T4 reported integrating technology and contextual teaching to foster independence and engagement among learners. CLT emphasizes creating a supportive learning environment through positive teacher-student relationships [9]. Teachers like T1 and T6 highlighted the importance of a friendly atmosphere and nurturing students' diverse characteristics to enhance learning outcomes.

3. Encouraging Cooperative Learning

In communicative practices, teachers play a crucial role in facilitating learning and building a sense of community in the classroom [10], [21]. This is exemplified by practices observed among teachers such as T1 and T2, who actively guide collaborative activities and discussions. Cooperative learning strategies promote active student participation and interaction, enhancing both communicative competence and social skills [11]. Teachers like T3 and T6 emphasized the benefits of peer feedback and group activities in fostering cognitive development and real-world communication tasks. Peer interaction was noted by teachers such as T4 and T5, who integrate peer discussions and collaborative tasks to promote cognitive growth among students.

4. Adopting a Task-Based Approach.

Task-based learning emphasizes using language authentically to accomplish real-world tasks [11], [21]This approach was supported by findings among teachers like T2 and T3, who integrate tasks that require students to communicate effectively in practical scenarios. T4 and T5 reported using group activities and peer discussions to promote these skills among their students. In CLT, teachers act as facilitators and guides who oversee task-based activities and support students in their learning processes [21]. This role was exemplified by teachers like T1 and T6, who structure lessons to ensure students achieve learning objectives through meaningful tasks.

5. Integrating Content-Based Learning.

It enhances student motivation by integrating topics that are meaningful and relevant to students' lives [19]. This approach was reflected in practices observed by teachers such as T1 and

T4, who incorporate local environmental issues and community observations into their lessons. Creating a stress-free environment is crucial to facilitate effective language learning [21]. Teachers like T3 and T6 utilize audio-visual presentations and positive reinforcement strategies to maintain a supportive classroom atmosphere. This principle was supported by practices reported by teachers such as T2 and T5, who use affirmations and simple language to ensure students understand and engage with the content.

6. Dispelling Misconceptions.

Achieving a balance between oral and written communication skills is essential to develop comprehensive communicative competence [9]. Teachers like T1 and T3 integrate activities that require both spoken and written expression to enhance communicative competence. Using English as the medium of instruction supports immersive language learning experiences [21]. Practices by T4 and T6 that emphasize creating an English-speaking environment to maximize language acquisition opportunities encourage the use of diverse teaching methods beyond traditional approaches like audio-lingual methods [11] Teachers like T2 and T5 incorporate task-based learning, interactive activities, and technology-enhanced strategies to engage learners and promote communicative competence.

Briefly, from the findings teachers seem moderately nurturing students' communicative practices to foster language learning effectively. By focusing on meaningful communicative competence, emphasizing humanistic values and learner autonomy, encouraging cooperative learning, adopting a task-based approach, integrating content-based learning, and dispelling common misconceptions, they create dynamic and supportive learning environments that promote language proficiency and student engagement. These practices not only support theoretical principles of communicative language teaching but also cater to diverse learner needs and enhance language learning

outcomes [9]–[11], [21]. Based on the principles and practices observed in the classroom settings, teachers can strengthen their communicative practices by aligning them with theoretical insights that emphasize student-centered learning, meaningful interaction, and the integration of authentic tasks and content in language education. This approach not only enhances language acquisition but also supports the broader goals of fostering communicative competence and empowering learners to become proficient and confident users of the language [10].

Cultural challenges

1. Clarity in curriculum changes

As a new curriculum, the implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka faces significant challenges, especially amidst curriculum changes that often necessitate adjustments in teaching methodologies, content delivery, and assessment practices. Understanding these challenges is crucial for educators and policymakers striving to optimize within evolving educational landscapes, ensuring that its benefits are maximized while addressing the practical hurdles encountered in its application. Within evolving curriculum frameworks, teachers need a clear understanding of essential features to integrate curriculum changes effectively. Data on challenges amidst these changes shows teachers generally have a solid grasp of new curriculum implementations (mean 3.94, SD 0.935), reflecting a strong understanding of core educational standards essential for adapting teaching practices [22]. However, variability in interpretation and application across different contexts can impact consistency in implementation [6].

Professional development participation, specifically in seminars and workshops related to curriculum updates, is moderate (mean 3.38, SD 1.008), indicating room for improvement to ensure widespread and consistent engagement among educators[8]. The variability in participation rates underscores the need for targeted support to facilitate continuous learning

[24]. Accessing online resources for continuous learning presents a significant challenge (mean 2.12, SD 1.099). This suggests difficulties in effectively utilizing digital platforms for professional development, indicating disparities in digital literacy and access to resources within the teaching community [1]. The high standard deviation highlights varying levels of technological readiness and institutional support across different educational settings.

Interview data supports these findings. Teachers like T1 and T3 emphasize the importance of identifying key elements of the Kurikulum Merdeka, focusing on competency-based learning[1] as curriculum adaptation for specific educational contexts [22]. Teachers in urban settings (e.g., T5 and T6) show proactive engagement with professional development opportunities and use platforms like Platform Merdeka Mengajar for continuous learning and updating their teaching practices [25]. Urban educators leverage technological tools for resource sharing and professional development [26]. It is aligning with Fullan's perspective on the importance of technological integration in professional growth [23]. In contrast, remote and rural teachers (T1 and T3), facing resource limitations, emphasize community collaboration and local teacher assembly for sharing solutions and adapting CLT strategies effectively [8].

The findings reveal that teachers generally recognize the fundamental aspects of curriculum changes. Communicative practices and cultural alignment benefit from teachers' clarity in understanding essential curriculum features, proactive engagement in professional development, and leveraging online resources for continuous learning. These practices are crucial for aligning teaching strategies with educational reforms and addressing diverse learner needs across urban and rural settings [24]. By integrating these insights, teachers can enhance their capacity, ensuring curriculum changes support the development of communicative competence and meet evolving language education demands in Indonesia.

However, challenges persist in accessing and leveraging professional development opportunities and online resources effectively. Addressing these challenges is crucial to ensure consistent and effective implementation of new curriculum frameworks, enhancing educational outcomes for students across diverse learning environments.

2. Complexities in curriculum changes

It significantly impacts educational practices. Establishing peer learning communities for sharing solutions is a notable challenge, reflected by a high mean score of 4.36 (SD 0.525). This indicates widespread recognition among educators of the invaluable role collaborative peer networks play in navigating curriculum reforms [22]. The minimal standard deviation suggests strong consensus on fostering supportive professional communities to exchange insights and best practices [7]. Conversely, conducting assessments to identify areas needing support scores lower (mean 2.46), reflecting varied perceptions among teachers on its significance [6]. The higher standard deviation (1.014) indicates a broader spectrum of opinions, with some educators viewing systematic assessment as essential for addressing curriculum challenges, while others may prioritize different strategies or see assessment as less immediate compared to other concerns [8], [24].

These findings highlight the complexity inherent in implementing curriculum changes. Establishing robust peer networks is crucial in overcoming challenges, allowing educators to leverage collective expertise to navigate uncertainties and adapt teaching practices to meet evolving educational standards [23]. However, addressing variability in perceptions regarding assessment practices is pivotal to ensuring comprehensive support for educators and optimizing curriculum implementation strategies across diverse educational settings [1], [26].

3. Context in Curriculum Changes

Examining challenges related to context amidst curriculum changes, particularly collaborating with communities to align educational practices and affiliating with schools to share effective teaching strategies, reveals significant findings. Collaborating with communities receives a high mean score of 4.22 (SD 0.648), indicating widespread recognition among educators of its critical importance [22]. This underscores the role of community involvement in tailoring educational approaches to local needs, crucial for enhancing curriculum implementation relevance and effectiveness [7].

Similarly, affiliating with schools for sharing effective teaching strategies scores high (mean 4.14, SD 0.729), highlighting its perceived significance in fostering a collaborative educational environment [6]. This approach enables schools to leverage each other's strengths and experiences, promoting continuous improvement in teaching practices [23]. Moderate standard deviations for both challenges suggest varying levels of agreement and implementation success among educators. While there is consensus on the importance of these initiatives, differences in local contexts, resources, and institutional support can influence collaboration and affiliation efforts [8], [24]

In cultural context, the implementation of P5 or Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Project, teachers in remote and rural areas (e.g., T1, T3) face significant resource constraints. They emphasize community collaboration and local culture approach in adapting educational practices to local needs. In contrast, urban teachers (e.g., T5, T6) benefit from greater access to technological resources, like Platform Merdeka Mengajar [1]. They are proactively in accessing professional development opportunities and leveraging technology for continuous learning [25]. In contrast, rural educators (e.g., T1, T3) emphasize community collaboration and local initiatives for adapting curriculum effectively[8]. Addressing these challenges is critical to ensuring consistent and effective implementation of new curriculum frameworks. Strengthening collaborative efforts and providing targeted support will be essential in navigating these challenges amidst ongoing curriculum reforms in Indonesia and beyond.

Conclusions

1. Communicative practices

Teachers are moderately successful in fostering communicative practices. They achieve this by focusing on meaningful communicative competence, emphasizing humanistic values and learner autonomy, encouraging cooperative learning, adopting a task-based approach, integrating content-based learning, and dispelling common misconceptions. These practices align with the theoretical principles of communicative language teaching, catering to diverse learner needs and improving language proficiency. To further strengthen their approach, teachers should continue to emphasize student-centered learning, meaningful interaction, and the integration of authentic tasks and content in their language education strategies. This will not only enhance language acquisition but also empower learners to become proficient and confident communicators.

2. Cultural challenges

The implementation of Kurikulum Merdeka faces cultural challenges, particularly in aligning educational practices with diverse local contexts. Teachers encounter difficulties in navigating curriculum changes, accessing professional development, and utilizing digital resources, with these challenges varying significantly between urban and rural settings. Establishing peer learning communities and fostering school affiliations are recognized as critical, yet inconsistently applied across different regions. Emphasizing local cultural awareness is crucial to addressing these challenges, ensuring that curriculum adaptations are relevant and effective within each unique community, ultimately enhancing the consistency and effectiveness of educational reforms.

The moderate implementation of communicative practices implies opportunity for enhancement. Cultural challenges in the Kurikulum Merdeka implementation reveal disparities between urban and rural settings, particularly in accessing professional development and digital resources. Emphasizing local cultural awareness and creating tailored approaches are crucial to ensuring that curriculum adaptations are both relevant and effective across diverse contexts. To strengthen communicative practices, teachers should prioritize student-centered, task-based strategies, supported by targeted professional development. Addressing cultural challenges requires enhanced support for educators, stronger peer learning communities, and the integration of local cultural elements into the curriculum to ensure meaningful and consistent educational reforms.

Acknowledgments

WORKS CITED

Kemdikbud, "Kebijakan Pemerintah Terkait Kurikulum Merdeka," 2023. https://pusatinformasi.guru.kemdikbud.go.id/hc/en-us/articles/6824815789465-Kebijakan-Pemerintah-Terkait-Kurikulum-Merdeka

Kemendikbudristek BSKAP, "Salinan Keputusan Kepala Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Nomor 008/H/KR/2022 Tentang Capaian Pembelajaran Pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar dan Jenjang Pendid," Kemendikbudristek, no. 021. pp. 205-210, 2022. [Online]. Available: https://kurikulum.kemdikbud.go.id/wp-content/unduhan/CP_2022.pdf

D. Poedjiastutie, V. Mayaputri, and Y. Arifani, "Socio-cultural challenges of english teaching in remote areas of Indonesia," Teflin J., vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 97–116, 2021, doi: 10.15639/teflinjournal.v32i1/97-116.

M. M. HOSSAIN, "Exploring Students' Problems to Interact in English Language in the Classroom at Tertiary Level Education in Rural Areas of Bangladesh," Int. J. Lang. Lit. Transl., vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 12-27, 2022, doi: 10.36777/ijollt2022.5.2.055.

A. Mason and C. Payant, "Experienced teachers' beliefs and practices toward communicative approaches in teaching English as a foreign language in rural Ukraine," TESOL J., vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 1–15, 2019, doi: 10.1002/tesj.377.

M. Lei and J. Medwell, "The Changing Role of Chinese English-as-Foreign-Language Teachers in the Context of Curriculum Reform: Teachers' Understanding of Their New Role," Front. Psychol., vol. 13, Jul. 2022, doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.904071.

A. L. Jiang and L. J. Zhang, "Teacher Learning as Identity Change: The Case of EFL Teachers in the Context of Curriculum Reform," TESOL Q., vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 271–284, 2021, doi: 10.1002/tesq.3017.

K. Vähäsantanen and A. Eteläpelto, "Vocational teachers in the face of a major educational reform: individual ways of negotiating professional identities," J. Educ. Work, vol. 22, no. 1, pp. 15–33, Feb. 2009, doi: 10.1080/13639080802709620.

S. J. Savignon, Communicative Language Teaching. Theory Into Practice, vol. 26, no. 4. 1987. doi: 10.1080/00405848709543281.

I. Han, "Contextualization of Communicative Language Teaching in Confucian Heritage Culture: Challenging Pedagogic Dichotomization," SAGE Open, vol. 12, no. 1, 2022, doi: 10.1177/21582440221079895.

D. Nunan, DESIGNING TASKS FOR THE COMMUNICATIVE CLASSROOM, 15th ed. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 1989. doi: 10.1017/S0272263100009578.

Muji Budi Lestari, Dahrul Ahmad Ahyarudin, Risa Feriyanti, Pahlan Tanjung, Lela Awaliyah, Rihatmi, Margana

P. M. I. Seraj, H. Habil, and M. K. Hasan, "Investigating the Problems of Teaching Oral English Communication Skills in an EFL context at the Tertiary Level," Int. J. Instr., vol. 14, no. 2, 2021, doi: 10.29333/iji.2021.14228a.

M. A. Tadesse, "Factors that Affect Students Interpersonal Communication Skills in English Language and Literature Regular Students at Kabridahar University," Indian J. Lang. Linguist., 2021, doi: 10.34256/ijll2114.

H. Adem and M. Berkessa, "A case study of EFL teachers' practice of teaching speaking skills vis-à-vis the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)," Cogent Educ., vol. 9, no. 1, 2022, doi: 10.1080/2331186X.2022.2087458.

A. Thomas, C. Piquette, and D. McMaster, "English communication skills for employability: the perspectives of employers in Bahrain," Learn. Teach. High. Educ. Gulf Perspect., vol. 13, no. 1, 2016, doi: 10.18538/lthe.v13.n1.227.

R. Al-Mahrooqi and C. J. Denman, "Omani graduates' English-language communication skills in the workforce: Employees' perspectives," Int. J. Appl. Linguist. English Lit., vol. 5, no. 4, 2016, doi: 10.7575/aiac.ijalel.v.5n.4p.172.

T. K. Al Riyami, "Omani graduates' English communication skills: employers' perspectives," Learn. Teach. High. Educ. Gulf Perspect., vol. 17, no. 2, 2021, doi: 10.1108/LTHE-01-2021-0007.

J. Habermas, "Towards a theory of communicative competence," Inq. An Interdiscip. J. Philos., vol. 13, no. 1–4, pp. 360–375, 1970, doi: 10.1080/00201749108602248.

H. D. Brown, Principles of Language Learning and Teaching, Fifth. New York: Pearson Education, 2007.

Y.-Y. Cloudia Ho, "Communicative language teaching and English as a foreign language undergraduates' communicative competence in Tourism English," J. Hosp. Leis. Sport Tour. Educ., vol. 27, p. 100271, Nov. 2020, doi: 10.1016/j.jhlste.2020.100271.

J. C. Richards, Communicative Language Teaching Today, vol. 1, no. 1. 2006. [Online]. Available: https://www.professorjackrichards.com/wp-content/uploads/Richards-Communicative-Language.pdf

J. Annala, "Disciplinary knowledge practices and powerful knowledge: a study on knowledge and curriculum structures in regions," Teach. High. Educ., vol. 27, no. 8, pp. 1084–1102, 2022, doi: 10.1080/13562517.2022.2114340.

M. Fullan, Change Forces: Probing the Depths of Educational Reform, vol. 14, no. 5. London: Routledge, 2012. doi: 10.4324/9780203059005.

Y. Zhu, Language Curriculum Innovation in a Chinese Secondary School. Singapore: Springer Singapore, 2018. doi: 10.1007/978-981-10-7239-0.

dan T. R. I. Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, "Opsi Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Bagi Satuan Pendidikan," Merdeka Mengajar. 2022. [Online]. Available: https://pusatinformasi.guru.kemdikbud.go.id/hc/en-us/articles/8403555497497-Opsi-Implementasi-Kurikulum-Merdeka-Bagi-Satuan-Pendidikan

Pengelola Web Direktorat SMP, "Kenali 3 Opsi Ini Sebelum Mendaftar Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Jalur Mandiri," Https://Ditsmp.Kemdikbud.Go.Id/Author/Adminweb/. p. 1, 2022. [Online]. Available: https://ditsmp.kemdikbud.go.id/kenali-3-opsi-ini-sebelum-mendaftar-implementasi-kurikulum-merdeka-jalur-mandiri/

Kemendikbud Ristek, Panduan Pengembangan Projek Penguatan Profil Pelajar Pancasila Jenjang Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah (SD/MI, SMP/MTs, SMA/MA). Jakarta, 2021. [Online]. Available: http://ditpsd.kemdikbud.go.id/hal/profil-pelajar-pancasila

L. Cohen, L. Manion, and K. Morrison, Research Methods in Education, 8 edition. New York: Routledge 2011., 2018.

J. W. Cresswell and J. D. Creswell, Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches Fifth Edition. London: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018.

R. K. Yin, Case Study Research and Applications Sixth Edition. London: SAGE Publications, 2018.