



Bridging Policy and Practice: English Language Teaching and Teacher Readiness under Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract. Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum expands flexibility, teacher autonomy, learner responsiveness, and assessment reform in English language teaching (ELT), yet evidence of how these expectations become classroom practice remains fragmented. This critical systematic review aims to explain how policy expectations are enacted in ELT, how teacher readiness shapes implementation, and how institutional conditions mediate policy–practice relations. An audited corpus of 50 policy, empirical, and conceptual sources was analyzed through quality appraisal, full-text extraction, thematic coding, cross-study comparison, contradictory-evidence analysis, and claim–source traceability. The findings show that implementation is neither uniform nor adequately explained by a binary distinction between ready and unready teachers. Teacher readiness operates through interacting cognitive, pedagogical, assessment, digital, and psychological capacities, while institutional conditions determine whether these capacities become sustainable practice. Classroom enactment consequently ranges across alignment, adaptive enactment, partial enactment, and implementation gap. The study proposes the Policy–Readiness–Enactment Framework, which conceptualizes curriculum implementation as a mediated process linking policy expectations, teacher interpretation, multidimensional readiness, institutional conditions, classroom enactment, and outcomes. The framework implies that professional development and curriculum evaluation should address readiness configurations and institutional capacity rather than individual teacher deficits alone.

Keywords: Adaptive Enactment; Merdeka Curriculum; Policy Enactment; Policy–Readiness; Teacher Readiness.

1. BACKGROUND

Curriculum reform is often initiated through centrally formulated regulations, standards, and learning outcomes, but its educational consequences are ultimately produced in schools and classrooms. The existence of a new curriculum therefore does not guarantee corresponding changes in teaching. Between policy formulation and classroom practice lies a complex process through which teachers interpret expectations, negotiate competing demands, mobilize professional knowledge, and adapt reform to particular learners and institutional conditions. From a policy-enactment perspective, teachers and schools are not passive recipients of externally designed change; they interpret and reconstruct policy within situated professional contexts (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). Similarly, curriculum-making perspectives locate teachers within the process through which formal curriculum intentions acquire practical meaning, rather than treating implementation as the mechanical delivery of centrally prescribed content (Priestley, Philippou, Alvunger, & Soini, 2020). The analytical problem in curriculum reform is therefore not simply whether policy has been implemented, but how policy is transformed as it moves into practice.

This problem is particularly relevant to Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, which represents a significant reorientation of national curriculum policy. Official regulations and implementation guidance position curriculum enactment less as adherence to a uniform

instructional sequence and more as the translation of broader learning expectations into contextually appropriate teaching and assessment (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2024; Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024; Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2025). For English language teaching (ELT), subject-specific guidance further requires teachers to work with phase-based learning outcomes and to organize instruction around developing language competence across diverse learner profiles (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2026). The reform consequently creates a productive but demanding tension: greater flexibility may expand teacher agency, yet it also transfers substantial interpretive responsibility to teachers and schools.

English language education provides a particularly revealing context in which to examine this tension. The same formal curriculum may therefore generate substantially different classroom practices depending on teachers' curriculum understanding, pedagogical repertoire, assessment literacy, confidence, access to resources, and institutional support. Studies of English teachers implementing the Merdeka Curriculum already indicate that familiarity with reform terminology does not automatically translate into enactment capacity. Teachers may understand broad policy directions while remaining uncertain about planning, differentiation, assessment, or the practical use of curriculum flexibility (Dirwan, Bani, & Yuniarti, 2023; Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023; Kaluge & Usmi, 2024; Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024). ELT thus makes visible the professional work required to convert policy aspirations into teachable and learnable experiences.

The emerging empirical literature also shows that this conversion is uneven. At the same time, these developments coexist with established teaching routines, uncertainty about curriculum interpretation, uneven assessment practices, and substantial contextual constraints (Ferdaus & Novita, 2023; Fabela, Zasrianita, & Febriani, 2024; Ramli, Jawan, Ridwan, Kusmaryani, & Rosmayanti, 2025; Wiranegara, Badriyah, & Jayanti, 2025; Nurlaili, Marsevani, Tetti, Raswita, & Christ, 2026). The resulting picture is not one of uniform adoption or straightforward resistance. Such variation is especially visible across institutional contexts. Evidence from rural and remote settings, for example, indicates that implementation difficulties may be intensified by limited resources, uneven professional support, and the practical demands of curriculum change (Marinda, Upa, Siboro, & Hertanto, 2026). The literature therefore documents substantial variation in enactment, but the existence of variation alone does not explain why it occurs. Teacher readiness has become one of the principal concepts used to explain this problem. Yet readiness is frequently treated as if it were a single attribute

that teachers either possess or lack. Readiness may involve understanding curriculum concepts and learning outcomes; designing contextually appropriate instruction; implementing learner-centred or differentiated pedagogy; using assessment evidence; integrating digital resources; maintaining confidence during change; and working within institutional arrangements that provide or fail to provide time, guidance, collaboration, infrastructure, and professional development. Studies focusing directly on English teachers show that these capacities do not necessarily develop at the same rate (Kaluge & Usmi, 2024; Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024). Evidence from broader readiness studies similarly suggests that professional preparedness is shaped by psychological and institutional conditions as well as knowledge of policy (Nurzen, 2022; Rosmita et al., 2025). A teacher may therefore be cognitively familiar with the curriculum while remaining pedagogically or institutionally constrained. Conversely, teachers with strong pedagogical capacity may adapt reform productively even when implementation conditions are imperfect.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This multidimensionality makes a teacher-deficit explanation of implementation inadequate. Institutional conditions can therefore influence both the development of readiness and the extent to which existing professional capacity becomes visible in classroom practice. Recent ELT evidence illustrates how infrastructure, media access, local conditions, and implementation support shape what teachers are able to do with curriculum flexibility (Elfiyanto, Nasihah, Romadhon, & Umeki, 2025; Marinda et al., 2026). The relationship between teacher capacity and practice is consequently relational rather than individual. The same level of curriculum understanding may generate different enactment outcomes under different institutional conditions, while apparently similar classroom adaptations may reflect different combinations of professional judgment, contextual necessity, and constraint.

Despite the rapid growth of research on the Merdeka Curriculum, the relevant evidence remains analytically fragmented. A second documents localized English teaching practices, including planning, material adaptation, classroom activity, technology use, and assessment. A third examines teacher readiness through selected competencies, perceptions, attitudes, or implementation challenges. These strands have generated important findings, but they are often analyzed separately. Consequently, the literature provides more evidence about individual components of implementation than about the relationships among them. What remains insufficiently explained is how policy expectations are interpreted through different configurations of teacher readiness, how institutional conditions mediate the expression of

those configurations, and how these interactions produce different forms of English classroom enactment. Without such integration, the policy–practice gap risks becoming a descriptive label rather than an explanation.

This critical systematic review addresses that gap by synthesizing policy and empirical evidence on ELT under Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum. It asks: (1) How is English language teaching conceptualized and expected to be implemented under Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum policy framework? (2) How has English language teaching been enacted in classroom practice under the Merdeka Curriculum? (3) What dimensions of teacher readiness facilitate or constrain implementation? and (4) What alignments, tensions, and gaps emerge between curriculum policy, teacher readiness, and actual English language teaching practices? Together, these questions move analytically from policy expectation to classroom enactment, then to the readiness mechanisms and institutional conditions through which variation can be explained.

The review makes four interconnected contributions. First, it reconceptualizes teacher readiness as a multidimensional configuration of cognitive, pedagogical, assessment, digital, and psychological capacities rather than as a binary individual condition. Second, it positions institutional conditions as active mediators that shape whether professional capacity can be translated into sustained practice. Third, it develops the concept of adaptive enactment to distinguish contextually informed professional modification from either straightforward policy fidelity or implementation failure. Fourth, it integrates these arguments into a Policy–Readiness–Enactment Framework in which policy expectations are interpreted by teachers, translated through configurations of readiness, mediated by institutional conditions, and expressed through outcomes ranging from alignment and adaptive enactment to partial enactment and implementation gaps. Although developed from the Indonesian Merdeka Curriculum, the framework addresses a broader problem in ELT reform: how centrally articulated curriculum aspirations are reconstructed through teacher capacity and institutional context.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a critical systematic literature review that combined policy-document analysis with thematic synthesis, following PRISMA 2020 for transparent reporting and drawing on the Braun & Clarke and Thomas & Harden approaches to thematic synthesis for the analysis. The search covered Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, GARUDA, DOAJ, and Crossref, along with official Indonesian government repositories, using bilingual

(English and Indonesian) search terms grouped into four concept blocks: curriculum, ELT, implementation, and teacher readiness. Screening moved through identification, deduplication, title-abstract assessment, full-text assessment, and corpus freezing; eight records were excluded for weak relevance, poor verification, duplication, or insufficient analytical contribution, leaving a final corpus of 50 sources, while five remaining candidates were held back as an unused watchlist. Before synthesis, every record went through an integrity audit and quality appraisal, then data were extracted into a full-text matrix covering elements like policy focus, ELT practice, teacher-readiness dimensions, and contribution to RQ1–RQ4, with a strict separation kept between reported evidence and reviewer interpretation. Analysis proceeded through iterative descriptive and analytical coding, mapping teacher-readiness evidence into six dimensions cognitive, pedagogical, assessment, digital, psychological, and institutional then comparing these across studies for convergence, contextual variation, and contradiction until five higher-order themes emerged. To strengthen trustworthiness, the review relied on broad search coverage, bilingual terms, staged and documented screening, and a corpus frozen before manuscript drafting, and deliberately avoided turning recurring patterns into claims of national prevalence, since much of the underlying literature consisted of small-scale, context-specific studies.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policy Aspirations and the Reconfiguration of English Language Teaching

The policy corpus indicates that the Merdeka Curriculum reconfigures English language teaching (ELT) through a combination of greater curriculum flexibility, phase-based learning outcomes, learner-centred pedagogy, differentiation, more responsive assessment, and expanded teacher discretion. Taken together, these elements represent more than a change in curriculum content. Rather than following a single prescribed sequence of material, teachers are expected to interpret broader curriculum expectations and translate them into learning objectives, instructional sequences, teaching modules, classroom activities, and assessment practices appropriate to particular learners and contexts (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2026). The policy corpus therefore positions curriculum enactment as an interpretive process. However, this finding concerns the architecture of policy expectation; the policy documents themselves do not demonstrate whether such expectations are consistently realized in classrooms. A first defining feature of this reconfiguration is the relationship between curriculum flexibility and teacher autonomy. For ELT, such flexibility potentially allows teachers to adapt materials, sequence language experiences, select resources,

and respond to variation in learners rather than reproducing a uniform instructional script. Subject-specific guidance similarly places substantial responsibility on teachers to connect broad curriculum expectations with practical classroom decisions (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2025, 2026). Flexibility, however, also changes the locus of implementation responsibility. The policy shift therefore expands professional space while simultaneously increasing the need for curriculum interpretation, pedagogical judgment, and context-sensitive planning.

This dual character of flexibility was one of the clearest cross-corpus patterns. Studies of English teachers report variation in understanding curriculum concepts, translating policy into planning, and determining how new expectations should alter existing practice (Dirwan et al., 2023; Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023; Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024; Wiranegara et al., 2025; Nety, Widyastuti, Santoso, & Baharuddin, 2026). Consequently, flexibility cannot be treated as synonymous with empowerment. Where guidance, confidence, or institutional support is weaker, the same discretion may be experienced as ambiguity. At the level of policy aspiration, then, autonomy is accompanied by an implicit readiness demand: teachers must be able to interpret the space that the curriculum makes available.

A second major shift concerns the organization of English learning around phase-based outcomes. The English learning outcomes specify expected development across phases rather than reducing curriculum implementation to the completion of a uniform sequence of textbook units. They also frame English learning through multiple language skills and communicative and text-oriented development (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2026). Teachers must interpret the expected outcomes for a phase, identify appropriate learning objectives, organize a progression of instruction, select or adapt learning materials, and determine how evidence of learner development will be collected.

The importance of this translation process is visible across both policy and empirical evidence. Studies of English teacher readiness and implementation repeatedly locate planning at the intersection between understanding the curriculum and enacting it (Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023; Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024; Sari & Fatmawati, 2024; Ramli et al., 2025). The challenge is therefore not simply whether teachers have read the official outcomes. Phase-based outcomes provide a common direction, but the curriculum relies on teachers to construct much of the pathway between intended outcomes and actual learning experiences.

The third policy aspiration is a movement toward learner-centred and differentiated pedagogy. For ELT, this orientation has particular significance because classrooms may contain substantial variation in vocabulary, language exposure, confidence, participation, and

communicative proficiency. Differentiation, contextualization, and active learner participation are consequently embedded in the pedagogical demands of reform rather than functioning as optional additions.

Yet the policy corpus also reveals how demanding these aspirations are. The policy expectation thus depends on pedagogical readiness: teachers must possess a sufficiently broad repertoire to respond to diversity without fragmenting the curriculum. In this respect, the Merdeka Curriculum redistributes pedagogical decision-making toward teachers at the same time that it raises the complexity of those decisions.

Assessment constitutes a fourth area of reconfiguration. The policy and subject-guidance corpus positions assessment as part of the instructional process rather than as a separate end-stage measurement activity. Teachers are expected to use evidence of learning to understand learner progress, inform instructional decisions, and align assessment with curriculum outcomes (Kementerian Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah Republik Indonesia, 2025; Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan, 2024).

The cross-corpus evidence identifies assessment as a particularly consequential implementation demand. Empirical studies report attention to planning and assessment under the new curriculum, but they also indicate variation in teachers' capacity to operationalize flexible and formative assessment expectations (Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024; Sari & Fatmawati, 2024; Ramli et al., 2025). The evidence base for assessment is less extensive than that for general pedagogy, so the corpus does not support claims about national patterns. It is one of the points at which curriculum interpretation must become concrete professional action: teachers need to decide what counts as evidence of English learning, how that evidence should be collected, and how it should shape subsequent instruction. The policy corpus also contains evidence that implementation capacity is recognized as a policy concern. However, the existence of a programme or policy response cannot be treated as evidence of its reach, quality, or impact. The corpus therefore supports a narrower conclusion: the policy system itself acknowledges that curriculum change generates capacity demands. Overall, Theme 1 establishes a policy baseline against which subsequent classroom evidence can be assessed. The Merdeka Curriculum reorients ELT toward flexible and outcomes-oriented curriculum making, phase-based language development, learner responsiveness, differentiated pedagogy, and more instructionally connected assessment. The central finding is that these aspirations increase rather than reduce the professional work of teachers. Flexibility requires interpretation; outcomes require translation into instructional sequences; differentiation requires pedagogical judgment; and responsive assessment requires assessment literacy. The

reconfiguration of ELT is therefore simultaneously a reform of curriculum expectations and a redistribution of implementation responsibility.

Teacher Readiness as a Multidimensional Capacity

Across the empirical corpus, teacher readiness emerged not as a single condition but as a configuration of interacting capacities. These individual capacities were, in turn, shaped by institutional conditions that could enable, restrict, or destabilize their expression in practice (Dirwan et al., 2023; Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023; Kaluge & Usmi, 2024; Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024; Nety et al., 2026). The corpus therefore does not support a binary distinction between “ready” and “unready” teachers.

Cognitive readiness provided an important foundation because teachers had to understand curriculum principles, phase-based outcomes, planning structures, and the professional discretion embedded in the reform. Teachers could recognize major policy concepts while remaining uncertain about how to translate them into differentiated activities, coherent learning sequences, or assessment decisions (Tricahyati & Zaim, 2023; Karimatunisa & Sartika, 2024). Cognitive readiness was therefore necessary but not self-sufficient. Its practical value depended on whether conceptual understanding could interact with pedagogical and assessment capacities.

This interaction was particularly visible in instructional planning and classroom adaptation. Yet the corpus also showed that pedagogical repertoire alone did not resolve all implementation demands. Such decisions depended partly on assessment readiness. Where teachers were uncertain about how to generate, interpret, or use evidence of learner progress, the capacity to adapt instruction remained limited. The relationship between pedagogy and assessment was therefore reciprocal: pedagogical decisions generated evidence of learning, while assessment evidence was expected to inform subsequent pedagogical choices.

Digital readiness displayed a similar dependence on other capacities. However, technology did not function as an independent indicator of readiness. A teacher could possess relevant technical skills but remain unable to use them consistently because of connectivity, equipment, or institutional limitations. Digital readiness therefore emerged from the interaction between competence, pedagogical purpose, and material conditions rather than from technology use alone.

Psychological readiness further shaped how these capacities were mobilized. Evidence across readiness and implementation studies indicated that confidence, perceived competence, openness to change, and professional self-efficacy influenced teachers’ willingness to exercise the autonomy offered by the curriculum (Kaluge & Usmi, 2024; Karimatunisa & Sartika,

2024). However, psychological readiness should not be interpreted as a stable personal attitude detached from context. Confidence could be strengthened through professional learning, collegial support, successful classroom experience, and clearer guidance, while repeated difficulty or weak institutional support could reinforce uncertainty.

Institutional readiness was therefore not simply a sixth capacity operating alongside the other five. It functioned as a cross-cutting condition affecting whether cognitive, pedagogical, assessment, digital, and psychological capacities could develop and become visible in classroom practice. Evidence from resource-constrained, rural, and remote settings made this interaction particularly visible, but institutional mediation was not limited to those contexts (Nety et al., 2026; Marinda et al., 2026; Rosmita et al., 2025).

Contradictory evidence reinforced this multidimensional interpretation. Some teachers demonstrated confidence and positive attitudes while reporting practical difficulty with planning or assessment. Others showed strong pedagogical adaptation despite incomplete policy understanding or constrained resources. These patterns indicate that readiness dimensions can develop unevenly and may partly compensate for, but not fully replace, one another.

Taken together, the corpus characterizes teacher readiness as configurational, developmental, and situated. Cognitive understanding may remain inert without pedagogical translation; pedagogical competence may be weakened by limited assessment literacy; digital skill may remain unrealized without infrastructure; and professional confidence may be difficult to sustain without institutional support. This finding shifts the analytical question from whether teachers are ready to which configurations of readiness enable particular forms of curriculum enactment. It also makes institutional conditions central to explanation, because the capacities teachers possess do not automatically become the practices classrooms receive.

Implementation Gap of Policy Alignment

The integrated evidence for RQ4 showed that the relationship between curriculum policy and English classroom practice was best represented as a continuum of enactment outcomes rather than a binary distinction between successful implementation and failure. Across the corpus, four recurring forms were identified: alignment, adaptive enactment, partial enactment, and implementation gap. The same teacher or institution could display relatively strong alignment in one domain, purposeful adaptation in another, and partial enactment or a more substantial gap elsewhere. Implementation outcomes therefore varied across curriculum components, contexts, and stages of reform.

Alignment was evident where classroom practices corresponded relatively closely with policy aspirations and were supported by the capacities required to sustain them. Such alignment was most plausible where teachers could interpret curriculum expectations and translate them through appropriate pedagogical decisions, while institutional conditions provided sufficient resources, guidance, or professional support. However, the corpus did not indicate that alignment occurred comprehensively across all dimensions of practice. A classroom could demonstrate substantial pedagogical alignment while assessment remained closer to established routines.

Adaptive enactment captured a different relationship between policy and practice. The evidence suggests that adaptation should not automatically be interpreted as reduced fidelity. Because the Merdeka Curriculum itself emphasizes flexibility and contextual responsiveness, some modification constituted the practical realization of policy rather than departure from it. The corpus therefore distinguished adaptive enactment by the coherence between the modification, the contextual condition to which it responded, and the curriculum principle that remained visible in practice.

Partial enactment was the most recurrent pattern across the empirical evidence. Partial enactment reflected uneven configurations of readiness and the differing practical demands associated with particular curriculum components.

Implementation gaps became more substantial when policy expectations could not be translated into corresponding practice because interpretive, professional, institutional, or contextual constraints accumulated. These gaps were visible where teachers remained uncertain about curriculum concepts, lacked the pedagogical or assessment capacity required for enactment, or worked under conditions that restricted time, resources, infrastructure, collaboration, or access to sustained professional learning. Rather, they emerged through combinations of readiness limitations and organizational conditions. The contradictory evidence across the corpus reinforces the continuum interpretation. Professional learning, clearer policy communication, collaborative interpretation, accumulated classroom experience, or improved resources could shift enactment toward stronger alignment. Conversely, workload, changing conditions, weak support, or unresolved assessment demands could destabilize previously established practices.

Taken together, the findings indicate that policy–practice relations in ELT are dynamic, multidimensional, and domain-specific. Alignment, adaptive enactment, partial enactment, and implementation gap describe forms of relationship between policy intention and situated practice, not stable identities assigned to teachers or schools. The central synthesis across RQ1–

RQ4 is therefore that Merdeka Curriculum implementation is mediated rather than transferred: policy expectations are interpreted by teachers, translated through configurations of readiness, shaped by institutional conditions, and expressed through variable enactment outcomes.

Institutional Mediation and the Limits of Teacher-Deficit Explanations

The second contribution concerns the explanatory status of institutional conditions. Implementation problems are frequently narrated through a teacher-deficit vocabulary: teachers lack understanding, competence, confidence, innovation, or willingness to change. The synthesis indicates that teacher capacity is enacted through organizational environments that distribute time, resources, information, professional learning, collaboration, and authority. Institutional conditions therefore do not merely surround implementation; they mediate it.

This distinction between context as background and context as mediation is important. A mediation model asks how those conditions alter the relationship between capacity and practice. Planning time, for example, affects whether curriculum understanding can be converted into carefully sequenced lessons. Collaboration affects whether individual uncertainty remains private or becomes a shared problem that can be addressed collectively. Infrastructure affects whether digital competence can become digital pedagogy. Leadership and policy communication affect whether curriculum flexibility is experienced as legitimate professional autonomy or as uncertainty about what teachers are expected to do.

Institutional mediation also helps explain why apparently similar teachers may produce different enactment outcomes. A teacher may understand differentiated instruction but lack manageable class conditions, preparation time, assessment information, or suitable resources for sustained implementation. The relationship between capacity and practice is therefore conditional rather than automatic. This argument does not imply that institutions determine classroom practice or that individual agency is irrelevant. The contradictory evidence showed that teachers sometimes innovate under constrained conditions and sometimes enact reform only partially despite relatively favourable environments. However, relying on exceptional individual effort is not equivalent to building sustainable implementation capacity. When reform depends on teachers continually compensating for weak systems through personal time, informal resources, or extraordinary commitment, visible innovation may conceal institutional fragility.

The concept of mediation consequently offers an alternative to both teacher blame and institutional determinism. Institutional support can expand feasible action, while institutional constraints can narrow it. This interaction is especially consequential in a curriculum that explicitly increases teacher discretion. The more a reform depends on contextual interpretation,

the more important the institutional conditions become through which interpretation is supported, discussed, and translated into coordinated practice. For policy and professional development, this means that implementation support should not stop at improving individual competence. Similarly, providing infrastructure without pedagogical development may create unused capacity. Reform support therefore needs to align professional learning with organizational conditions. Teacher development and institutional development should be treated as interconnected components of implementation rather than separate interventions.

The broader theoretical implication is that implementation gaps should not be read automatically as evidence of deficient teachers. A gap may emerge because a necessary readiness dimension is underdeveloped, because institutional conditions prevent existing capacity from being exercised, or because multiple constraints accumulate. Explaining implementation therefore requires identifying the mechanism through which capacity and context interact. This is more analytically useful than attributing incomplete reform to generalized teacher resistance or lack of readiness.

The synthesis of those problems identified a continuum comprising alignment, adaptive enactment, partial enactment, and implementation gap. These outcomes are domain-specific and dynamic rather than permanent labels. A teacher may occupy different positions on the continuum across pedagogy, assessment, or digital practice, and those positions may change as readiness and institutional conditions develop. The framework therefore makes three explanatory claims. Second, readiness operates configurationally rather than as a binary attribute. Third, implementation outcomes emerge relationally from the interaction among policy interpretation, professional capacity, and institutional conditions. These claims distinguish the framework from models that explain reform primarily through policy fidelity or individual teacher preparedness.

The framework should nevertheless be treated as review-derived and explanatory rather than as a statistically tested causal model. The existing evidence base is dominated by localized and often small-scale studies, which limits claims about national prevalence and causal direction. The framework therefore generates propositions for future research. Studies could examine whether particular readiness configurations predict different forms of enactment; whether institutional conditions moderate the relationship between individual capacity and classroom practice; whether adaptive enactment produces stronger or more sustainable outcomes than formal compliance; and how teachers and schools move along the enactment continuum over time.

Although developed from evidence on Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, the framework has broader relevance to ELT reform. Such reforms create a common implementation problem: policy grants professional space while simultaneously demanding the capacity and institutional conditions required to use that space. The Policy–Readiness–Enactment Framework offers a way to analyse this problem without reducing variation either to policy failure or teacher deficiency. Its central proposition is that curriculum reform becomes educational practice through the interaction of policy meaning, professional capacity, institutional mediation, and situated agency.

Table 1. Policy–Readiness–Enactment Framework For ELT Curriculum Reform.

Policy Expectation / Intention	ELT Implication	Required Readiness Dimension(s)	Definition of Readiness	Implementation Role	Observed Implementation Pattern	Implementation Outcome
Curriculum flexibility	Context-sensitive planning and adaptation	Cognitive; Pedagogical; Institutional	Cognitive: Understanding policy concepts, learning outcomes, and planning structures. Pedagogical: Planning, differentiation, interaction, and material adaptation. Institutional: Leadership, resources, training, time, and collaboration.	Enables policy interpretation, classroom adaptation, and institutional support.	Contextual adaptation with variable coherence.	Alignment or adaptive enactment.
Phase-based outcomes	Translating learning outcomes into instructional sequences and classroom tasks	Cognitive; Pedagogical	Cognitive: Understanding curriculum outcomes and planning structures. Pedagogical: Designing coherent learning activities and instructional sequences.	Connects curriculum expectations with classroom practice.	Varies according to teachers' conceptual understanding and instructional planning skills.	Alignment or partial enactment.
Learner-centredness	Responsive interaction and differentiated instruction	Pedagogical; Psychological	Pedagogical: Planning differentiated instruction and facilitating interaction. Psychological:	Encourages responsive teaching and sustained instructional innovation.	Uneven implementation across classrooms depending on teacher	Adaptive or partial enactment.

Policy Expectation / Intention	ELT Implication	Required Readiness Dimension(s)	Definition of Readiness	Implementation Role	Observed Implementation Pattern	Implementation Outcome
Assessment reform	Diagnostic and formative use of learning evidence	Assessment; Cognitive	Confidence, self-efficacy, and openness to change. Assessment: Designing and using evidence of student learning. Cognitive: Understanding assessment principles and curriculum expectations. Digital: Using technology pedagogically within available conditions.	Supports responsive teaching and informed instructional decisions.	confidence and experience. Mixed implementation, with conventional assessment practices still prevalent.	Partial enactment or implementation gap.
Digital integration	Technology-supported teaching and learning	Digital; Pedagogical; Institutional	Pedagogical: Integrating digital resources into instruction. Institutional: Infrastructure and technical support. Cognitive: Policy understanding. Pedagogical: Instructional decision-making.	Expands feasible instructional practices under varying school conditions.	Highly dependent on teacher competence and technological infrastructure.	Context-dependent implementation.
Teacher autonomy	Professional judgment and accountable decision-making	Cognitive; Pedagogical; Psychological; Institutional	Psychological: Self-efficacy and adaptability. Institutional: Leadership, collaboration, and professional support.	Enables teachers to exercise professional agency while maintaining curriculum accountability.	Teacher agency increases when guidance, leadership, and institutional support are strong.	Continuum from alignment to implementation gap.

Source: the synthesis based on analytical research corpus.

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This review examined how English language teaching is conceptualized under Indonesia's Merdeka Curriculum, how curriculum expectations have been enacted in

classrooms, what dimensions of teacher readiness shape implementation, and what relationships emerge among policy, readiness, and practice. The synthesis shows that curriculum implementation is not a direct transfer of centrally formulated expectations into classroom activity. Policy aspirations are interpreted by teachers, translated through different configurations of professional capacity, mediated by institutional conditions, and reconstructed through situated pedagogical decisions. Consequently, variation in implementation should not be reduced to a binary distinction between successful adoption and failure. English classroom practice emerges across a dynamic continuum of alignment, adaptive enactment, partial enactment, and implementation gap, with different positions possible across curriculum domains and over time.

The principal conceptual contribution of the review is the Policy–Readiness–Enactment Framework. The framework explains implementation through the relationship among policy expectation, teacher interpretation, multidimensional readiness, institutional mediation, classroom enactment, and implementation outcome. It reconceptualizes teacher readiness as a configuration of cognitive, pedagogical, assessment, digital, and psychological capacities rather than as a fixed individual attribute. It also positions institutional conditions as active mediators that shape whether those capacities can develop, be exercised, and become sustainable practice. Within this model, adaptive enactment provides an alternative to the conventional opposition between policy fidelity and implementation failure. Contextual modification may constitute legitimate curriculum enactment when it preserves a recognizable policy intention, responds to a defensible contextual condition, and produces pedagogically coherent practice.

These conclusions have three focused implications. First, professional development should move beyond general policy familiarization toward differentiated, enactment-focused support. Support should respond to different readiness configurations rather than assume a uniform deficit across teachers. Second, implementation policy must address institutional capacity alongside individual competence. Leadership, collaborative planning, workload, professional learning, policy communication, infrastructure, and access to resources shape whether teacher capacity can become sustained classroom practice. Investment in teacher development without attention to organizational feasibility is therefore unlikely to produce consistent reform. Third, curriculum evaluation should examine the quality and logic of enactment rather than rely exclusively on visible compliance. Evaluation should distinguish principled contextual adaptation from partial enactment and more substantial implementation gaps.

The review has several limitations. The evidence base remains recent and is dominated by localized, often small-scale studies, limiting claims about national prevalence and causal relationships. Evidence was also uneven across readiness dimensions, with assessment and longitudinal change less extensively documented than general pedagogy and teacher perceptions. Although the review combined policy and empirical evidence through a structured, audited corpus, the resulting framework remains an explanatory synthesis rather than a statistically tested causal model.

Future research should therefore examine the framework empirically through longitudinal, multi-site, and mixed-method designs. Research should also test whether adaptive enactment produces more coherent or sustainable outcomes than formal compliance without contextual responsiveness. Such work would strengthen understanding not only of the Merdeka Curriculum but of a broader challenge in ELT reform: how centrally articulated aspirations become educational practice through the interaction of professional capacity, institutional conditions, and situated teacher agency.

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