

## Innovative Approaches to English Language Teaching in Indonesian Public Islamic Schools: Insights and Challenges

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### Abstract

**Background:**

In Indonesia's public Islamic secondary schools, English Language Policy and Planning (ELPP) faces challenges such as resource limitations, a lack of qualified educators, and a non-standardized curriculum. However, despite these challenges, compared to ASEAN peers like the Philippines, Indonesia's approach lacks focus on student-centered learning, underscoring the need for enhanced ELPP strategies.

**Methodology:**

Four English language teachers and one headmaster participated as respondents in this study to provide comprehensive data findings. Data were collected through interviews conducted over the course of one month, employing guided questions. Subsequently, descriptive analysis was utilized to analyze the data.

**Findings:**

English's mandatory integration in secondary education, especially in Madrasah Tsanawiyah, highlights its crucial academic role. Analyzing educational policies and curricular shifts, from competency-based to the Merdeka curriculum, showcases Indonesia's deliberate push for English proficiency. Interviews stress the Merdeka Curriculum's CEFR alignment, prioritizing student empowerment through learner-centered methods and technology. Despite efforts, challenges remain in public Islamic schools, with teachers advocating for supportive environments due to limited exposure and resources.

**Conclusion:**

The complex nature of these challenges necessitates the cooperation of politicians, educators, and administrators to establish an atmosphere that promotes successful English language acquisition while also honoring Indonesia's distinct cultural and linguistic diversity.

**Originality:**

This study uniquely explores ELPP in Indonesia's public Islamic secondary schools, highlighting the balance between English proficiency and cultural preservation, offering fresh insights into the ELPP discourse in a multicultural and multilingual context.

**Keywords** : Islamic EFL Pedagogy; Innovative Techniques; Indonesian Context

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language Policy and Planning (LPP) embodies the strategic endeavors of governments to influence and transform linguistic and literacy practices within society, reflecting the underlying language ideologies of those in authority (Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018). This concept is crucial globally, evident in how different regions, like Indonesia, with its vast linguistic diversity, grapple with implementing unified language policies, especially concerning English language education, acknowledging its global importance and its role in personal and professional advancement (Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018). The peaceful coexistence of Kazakh, Russian, and English in Kazakhstan demonstrates the impact of governmental and individual actions on language policy (Tlepbergen et al., 2023), while the evolving Malay-English dynamics in Malaysia signify the critical debates and shifts in language policy amidst globalization (Rahman & Singh, 2021). Similarly, the exploration of language policies in Russia, the USA, and China by Yudina et al. (2020) underlines the influence of contemporary political dynamics.

The language policy landscape is further complicated by the contrast between ASEAN's monolingual approach and the multilingual strategies of the UN and EU, with ASEAN's stance illustrating a pragmatic adaptation to linguistic realities (Lee et al., 2022). In Bangladesh, the inconsistencies in English language policy post-independence highlight the challenges of educational language planning (Rahman & Pandian, 2018), mirroring the difficulties in Sheffield, UK, where schools integrate migrant students into an established multilingual system (Payne, 2017). Latin American universities face their challenges, contending with neoliberal internationalization in language planning (Hamel et al., 2016). Studies in Puebla, Mexico, and China delve into the nuanced effects of language policy on teacher agency and the complexities of policy implementation shaped by native-speaker discourse and administrative actions (Liu et al., 2020; Martínez-Prieto & Lindahl, 2020). These instances underscore the multifaceted nature of language policy and planning, highlighting the global interplay of linguistic, educational, and political factors in shaping language use and education.

The position of English subjects in Indonesian education has been written in the policy of language education in Indonesia by the Minister of National Education Number 23 of 2006 (Isadaud et al., 2022). The Ministry of Education and Culture mandated the inclusion of English as a mandatory subject in secondary schools. English was compulsory at Sekolah Menengah Pertama (junior high school) (SMP), Sekolah Menengah Atas (senior high school)

(SMA), and Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan (vocational high school) (SMK). Additionally, English became a required subject in secondary schools run by Madrasah Tsanawiyah and Madrasah Aliyah under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. As a result, English became the third language for most Indonesians who spoke both Indonesian and an indigenous language or the second language for those who spoke only Indonesian (Zein, 2022; Zein et al., 2020).

Although English has a place in education in Indonesia, the implementation and evaluation of English Language Policy and Planning (ELPP) in Indonesia presents various challenges and issues. These include insufficient resources, a shortage of qualified teachers, and the absence of a standardized curriculum. Additionally, the general population has a low English proficiency level and limited language exposure. Also, unequal access and opportunities to learn English exist across different regions and social groups. Moreover, there is apprehension regarding the potential of English to threaten indigenous languages and cultures in Indonesia. The purpose of English language learning in school is unclear, and English has not been taught effectively, making it challenging to acquire even with intensive efforts. English learners in Indonesia, despite spending numerous years studying English from early childhood to university, are unable to attain English proficiency (Hult, 2017; Mendis, 2021). Compared to Philippines and other countries in ASEAN regulation, they have already implemented good regulation on English language teaching that focuses on the students.

Before initiating this scholarly investigation, it is critical to redirect the attention to the context of public Islamic secondary education. Previous studies indicate that Islamic schools conducted different plans for English language teaching, although they used the same policy. The complex interplay between policymaking and its practical implementation continues to influence the structure and functioning of these institutions (Authar, 2017; Purba, 2021; Sofiyah, 2020).

This study focuses on the unique setting of an Islamic secondary school, evaluating how policies and practices interconnect to contribute to the wider discussion on educational effectiveness. This study focuses on analyzing the policy framework and institutional responses to understand the issues faced and their impact on students, assessing the existing situation, and provide valuable perspectives to enhance the ongoing discussion on improving English Language Teaching (ELT) policies in Islamic secondary schools. Investigating the execution of governmental regulations for English Language Teaching (ELT) in a public Islamic secondary school and examining the opinions of teachers and students regarding these policies, closely analyze the influence of leadership and management as well as the obstacles

that prevent the successful implementation of ELT policies within the educational system. Thus, the problems for this study are: (1) How could government education policy support the implementation of English language teaching? (2) How did teachers practice the implementation of the policy in their English language teaching?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

This study utilized a qualitative case study methodology to thoroughly investigate the experiences of teachers dealing with English Language Teaching (ELT) policies. This approach is consistent with Creswell's argument that it enables a comprehensive comprehension of these experiences (Chu, PH. and Chang, 2017). According to Creswell, the case study method enables detailed examinations of complex issues inside their authentic environments (Chu, PH. and Chang, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study methodology is highly suitable for exploring the complex dynamics of English Language Teaching (ELT) policies within the educational context of Indonesia. The case study explicitly examines the English language policy and planning in Indonesian education, considering it a unique and distinct case or phenomenon (Weyant, 2022). This study was conducted in an Indonesian public Islamic secondary school, specifically a Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) N 1 Purbalingga. This school has already applied the current curriculum, and some teachers have a new plan for teaching English. The primary technique of data gathering is semi-structured interviews, which are used to gather perspectives from four English language educators and one headmaster, the interview was using open ended questions with five main topics. The interviews are conducted relaxed and conversational, ensuring that participants feel at ease sharing their perspectives and providing valuable qualitative data for the study.

Moreover, the study utilizes document analysis to thoroughly examine government regulations on English Language Teaching (ELT) and educational resources used in schools. The inclusion of this supplementary investigation helps to establish the accuracy and credibility of the results by cross-referencing the data from other sources. The study aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contextual elements that affect the implementation of English Language Teaching (ELT) policies at the selected school by using interviews and document analysis. In this qualitative exploration, the authors aim to capture the complex reality of ELT, going beyond the impersonal declarations of official policies. The study aims to clarify the dynamic space in which teachers incorporate policy goals into practical classroom

strategies. By employing a qualitative approach, this study attempts to enhance our understanding of the difficulties, achievements, and complexities associated with implementing English Language Teaching (ELT) policies at a public Islamic secondary school in Indonesia.

### 3. FINDINGS

#### 3.1 *The governmental support of the implementation of English Language Teaching*

Every decade, the Indonesian government's policy evolves. Multiple factors contribute to this phenomenon, including changing cultural expectations, innovative approaches to education, political considerations, and progress in the fields of business and technology. English was adopted as a mandatory foreign language or academic subject shortly after Indonesia's independence, and it was extensively taught in secondary schools and universities. According to [Widodo \(2016\)](#), the decision was based on the fact that English was more widely acceptable as a tool for international communication, so English was seen as an instrumental language. The prominence of English as a subject in schools has been well-established, and it has acquired significant authority and prestige in Indonesian culture. English has become an essential cultural capital in an information-driven global world.

Consequently, numerous attempts have been made to assist Indonesian students in acquiring proficiency in the English language. Since 2004, there have been modifications in language policy and curricula to achieve this goal. The curriculum ought to foster a global perspective in students by exposing them to a wide range of knowledge that will enable them to become competent individuals and responsible members of society with a strong sense of empathy, collaborative skills, and an understanding of the importance of harmonious interdependence ([Mappiasse & Bin Sihes, 2014](#); [Pajarwati et al., 2021](#)). The government of RI plays a crucial role in these reforms at the national level. In order to comprehend these alterations, it is crucial to examine them briefly.

Table 1 History of curriculum development after reformation in Indonesia

Curriculum Name	Period	Approach	Issues
Curriculum 2004	1999 - 2004	Competency-based curriculum.	The curriculum emphasized performance-based instruction, as students were expected to integrate language skills and competencies in various communication scenarios.

KTSP Curriculum	2006	School-based Curriculum	Each school could develop, administer, and assess its curriculum utilizing local resources, socio-cultural factors, and student needs. Curriculum development utilized competency-based, communicative competence, and systemic functional frameworks.
2013 Curriculum	2013	Scientific Approach	Encourage Indonesians to evolve into religious, industrious, innovative, and passionate individuals. Foster critical thinking/reasoning, independent learning, and learner empowerment.
<i>Merdeka</i> Curriculum	2022 present	- Student autonomy and interest-based learning approach	Influenced by CEFR. Prioritizes the enhancement of students' knowledge and emphasizes the cultivation of their abilities (Student Centered Learning)

Modifying the national curriculum or policy in Indonesia presents English teachers with a novel challenge within English language teaching (ELT). They must consider implementing effective lesson planning, a meaningful and innovative teaching and learning process, and evaluating learning outcomes. Besides, the policy has an enormous effect on education, and policymakers across the globe have enacted a wide range of initiatives to improve the outcomes of foreign language acquisition (Isadaud et al., 2022; Nuraeni, 2021). Aligned with the educational context in China, regulations have been implemented to improve the quality of foreign language education by clarifying teacher and school responsibilities, developing resources, and optimizing conditions for teaching and learning process management (Higgins & Brady, 2016; Lee, 2020). Similarly, policymakers in Saudi Arabia have acknowledged the critical nature of English education and have taken steps to enhance the caliber of English instruction (Hussien, 2023; Lachkar, 2021; Van den Hoven & Carroll, 2021).

The implementation of English teaching in Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) follows the framework of the government's policy and the national curriculum, namely the Merdeka Curriculum. The Merdeka Belajar curriculum allows schools, instructors, and students to engage in innovation, independent learning, and creative pursuits (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2019; Zein, 2022; Zein et al., 2020). The Merdeka Belajar curriculum serves as a solution to the challenges encountered in the learning process. Educators are provided administrative support and granted autonomy in designing and evaluating student learning. This approach

encourages educators to address any obstacles they may face, such as creating lesson plans (Febriyatko et al., 2023; Pattipawaej et al., 2023; Supriyoko et al., 2022).

### ***3.2 Teachers' Practical Responses to English Educational Reform Initiatives***

The teachers recognized the significance of English language proficiency for students' global engagement. This evidence suggests a conversation or argument over global citizenship. This instructor might see the advantages of English since, in the current economic and cultural globalization environment, it functions as a worldwide language. The interviewees emphasized that proficiency in English is necessary for pursuing higher education. This demonstrates that English is taught in the curricula of secondary and postsecondary education as well as in these educational levels.

*"In my opinion, the goal of learning English is not just to pass tests or exams, but also to prepare students to communicate and connect with worldwide communities."* - Teacher A' interview

*"I strongly endorse the government's program for teaching English as an international language, and it should begin as early as possible, at the MI primary school or kindergarten level. because English language abilities are very vital in the modern era."* -Headmaster's interview

This acknowledgment corresponds to the growing interconnectivity of the world, where English functions as a common language in global communication, business, and scholarly discussions. The recognition of English as an opportunity to access global engagement underscores the teachers' understanding of the wider socio-cultural and economic consequences related to language learning.

*"While the curriculum remains ineffective in enhancing practical skills, it has successfully increased motivation and mastery of knowledge."*

- Teacher C's interview

The teacher's response during the interview provides a more detailed picture of the curriculum's effectiveness. Positively, the teacher emphasizes enhancing the students' motivation and knowledge comprehension. Nevertheless, it is recognized that the curriculum falls short of fully improving practical skills, indicating a discrepancy between the desired results and the actual use of knowledge in real-life situations. These findings from this study

align with [Ornellas et al. \(2019\)](#) discussion about the necessity of having a curriculum that skillfully combines theoretical ideas with real-world applications. It generates concerns about the present teaching approaches and the alignment of teaching strategies with the targeted skill development outcomes.

*“The primary challenge is that the environment does not encourage kids to acquire English as a foreign language.”* - Teacher B’ interview

*“One of the obstacles that I face in improving students’ English proficiency is the insufficient exposure to the language among secondary school students. They do not utilize English in their day-to-day communication or within their environment. This lack of exposure can potentially impede their ability to acquire the language effectively.”* - Teacher D’s interview

*“In teaching English, sometimes I encounter obstacles from outside, for example, the lack of infrastructure that can support students’ language acquisition optimally.”* -Teacher C’s interview

Furthermore, after examining the interview data, the teacher identified a comparable substantial problem in enhancing students’ English proficiency: a lack of a favorable environment for language acquisition. The acknowledgment that the environment does not promote students’ learning of English as a foreign language refers to a larger socio-cultural barrier. This issue derives from the students’ limited exposure to English in their environment, which impedes their natural language assimilation.

Additionally, Teacher D emphasized external problems, claiming a lack of infrastructure as a barrier to optimal language development. This external limitation throws insight into the larger systemic concerns influencing the successful implementation of ELT policy. It provokes thought about pedagogical practices in the classroom and the necessity for comprehensive support structures and resources that enhance language learning ([Davari et al., 2020](#)). These findings emphasize the need to take a comprehensive approach to addressing the issues of ELT. Strategies for improving the language-learning environment, increasing exposure to English, and addressing external infrastructure constraints should be examined concurrently ([Jon et al., 2021](#)). Because of the multifaceted nature of these issues, educators, administrators, and legislators must work together to establish a favorable environment for effective English language acquisition in the public Islamic secondary school context.



*“Teaching English should be fun, such as singing a song, playing games, and practicing speaking. These activities are good lessons for students.”*

-Teacher A’s interview

*“...So that they don't get bored or overwhelmed, I try to encourage student engagement in their learning by providing them with a wide range of learning strategies and utilising digital technology.”* -Teacher D’s interview

Considering the insufficiency of practical materials for instruction, the teachers further emphasized that their creativity is required to address the problem. According to the interview, the teacher supports a teaching strategy in English that is both pleasant and engaging. This approach includes activities such as singing, gaming, and speaking practice.

These strategies are considered efficacious instruments for augmenting the overall learning experience. In addition, the instructor recognizes the significance of avoiding student boredom and stress by utilizing various instructional methods and digital tools. Positive student attitudes regarding the engaging and interactive nature of the courses support this proactive approach, which aligns with contemporary educational ideas. The teacher's dedication to establishing a dynamic English learning atmosphere is noticeable in both their teaching philosophy and the methods designed to maintain student engagement (Rizal et al., 2022; Sofiyah, 2020). Teachers are responsible for creating engaging lesson plans that meet the needs of their students, which includes taking into account the student's prior knowledge and the values the local community carries. Moreover, The competence of educators, accompanied by their creative and innovative teaching methods, is essential in establishing a favorable educational environment and effectively handling a large class to ensure high-quality learning outcomes (Manara, 2014; Pajarwati et al., 2021; Suwarno et al., 2018).

The headmaster in this public Islamic school also further provides a stance on the necessity of continuous professional training and development for teachers in the field of English language learning is of utmost importance. This acknowledgment emphasizes the constantly shifting environment of language instruction and the necessity for instructors to keep up with developing methodology and practical approaches. The suggestion to offer professional training through methods such as MGMP technical guidance, Grand block training, and independent training in partnership with other organizations demonstrates a comprehensive approach to teacher development. MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran)

provides technical guidance and is an excellent venue for educators to share experiences and obtain current pedagogical insights specifically geared to English language education. It is commonly paired with subject-specific teacher forums.

*“Professional training/development needs to be provided to teachers continuously regarding English language learning, for example through MGMP technical guidance or technical guidance, Grand block training and independent training in collaboration with other institutions.”* -interview with Headmaster.

The authors could use this useful information to push for a comprehensive professional development framework inside public Islamic secondary schools. This could involve implementing recurring training programs, workshops, and collaboration projects with external educational institutions. These activities would increase the skills of individual teachers and enhance the overall quality of English language teaching methods in the school. Understanding the significance of ongoing professional development is following the constant evolution of language education. It highlights the dedication to providing educators with the required resources and expertise for successful English language teaching.

Nevertheless, difficulties arise when trying to balance prioritizing the development of one's character and the acquisition of linguistic proficiency. Thoughtful preparation and collaboration among educators are necessary to integrate English into a traditionally emphasized religious subjects' curriculum. Furthermore, resource shortages, particularly in rural MTs, may make it more difficult to implement the Merdeka Curriculum for English education. To tackle these problems effectively, it is imperative to provide comprehensive training and appropriate teaching materials for English teachers and assist in integrating technology into their teaching practices.

#### **4. DISCUSSION**

English is a mandatory course of study in secondary education and is incorporated into the national assessment. Besides, English instruction in elementary schools is restricted in Indonesia due to the government's preoccupation with religious matters and Indonesian culture. On the other hand, however, the typical emphasis in English education in Indonesia is on writing, potentially limiting students' development of speaking skills (Mali & Salsbury, 2021; Purba, 2021). Two factors affected the implementation of the 2013 curriculum: first, the National Examination (NE), which only evaluated students' reading and listening comprehension skills, and second, the instructors' poor communication skills. These factors

compelled the teachers to prioritize teaching abilities that did not necessitate them developing spoken language (Raja et al., 2022; Sofiyah, 2020; Zein, 2022). They devoted their time to teaching reading in a focused and concentrated manner, prioritizing grammar and vocabulary while emphasizing speaking, listening, and writing.

Furthermore, Curriculum Merdeka Belajar was introduced as the latest English curriculum in Indonesia in 2022. The Merdeka Belajar Concept is not limited to the conventional classroom setting and is a constant challenge for educators. Nevertheless, unlimited education represents great aspirations for achieving the nation's objectives without exceeding global boundaries. In addition, Learner-Centered Curriculum Design/Curriculum Merdeka Belajar is dedicated to addressing the challenges and learning gaps caused by the Covid-19 pandemic as well as enhancing the educational standards in Indonesia. Its primary objective is to offer students an opportunity to excel in the field of technology through an innovative learning approach (Astuti et al., 2022; Mappiasse & Bin Sihes, 2014).

To successfully implement the language policy, highly skilled English teachers in secondary educational institutions are required to a critical responsibility for enhancing students' English proficiency by maintaining an equitable distribution of written and spoken English teaching benchmarks. Besides, teaching English in secondary institutions in Indonesia is quite challenging, given that students often lack adequate English proficiency, and few opportunities exist to be exposed to the language. Policies endorsing the study of foreign languages are essential for enhancing the overall standard of education (Channa & Panezai, 2019; Kamaşak & Sahan, 2023; Mali & Salsbury, 2021). However, the effectiveness of these policies is contingent upon their execution and the assistance extended to educators and students. As a result, policymakers ought to assess the importance of maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between spoken and written English instruction and provide sufficient resources to educators to improve students' English proficiency.

Regarding English language acquisition, adequate exposure is important in increasing students' success in learning the language. However, outside of the classroom, English language practices are frequently absent from secondary institutions in Indonesia, which might impede students' ability to acquire the language proficiently (Davari et al., 2020; Mubarak & Sofiana, 2022). Furthermore, this lack of exposure to the English language has been recognized as a difficulty for non-native English instructors, who must exert more effort to improve their students' speaking and written English proficiency. The subsequent non-native English instructors have noted the absence of English language instruction among students.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

The authors has explored the complex issues of language policy and planning (LPP) in the English Language Teaching (ELT) setting in Indonesia's public Islamic secondary school. The exploration was initiated by providing a framework for the historical progression of language policies in Indonesia, highlighting the changing importance of English language competency in the worldwide sphere. Implementing English as a compulsory subject in secondary schools, especially Madrasah Tsanawiyah, signifies the acknowledgment of English as a vital instrument for academic, diplomatic, and economic growth. By systematically analyzing the educational policies and curricular revisions, starting with the competency-based curriculum and progressing to the current Merdeka curriculum, it became evident that Indonesia's dedication to improving English language competency has experienced purposeful transformations throughout the years. The Merdeka Curriculum draws inspiration from the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and seeks to empower students by employing learner-centered methodologies and incorporating technology.

Nevertheless, implementing these strategies in the examined public Islamic secondary school poses numerous obstacles. Teachers stressed the importance of creating an encouraging environment for language learning, expressing concerns about the insufficient opportunities for exposure and the lack of necessary resources. Ultimately, this study enhances the comprehension of English Language Teaching (ELT) policy and planning in a particular public Islamic secondary school and serves as a small-scale illustration of the wider difficulties and possibilities inside the Indonesian educational system. The complex nature of these challenges necessitates the cooperation of politicians, educators, and administrators to establish an atmosphere promoting successful English language acquisition while also honoring Indonesia's distinct cultural and linguistic diversity.

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