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FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: COMMUNICATIVE TEACHING AND TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION IN INDONESIAN SCHOOLS

Yuyun Yulia*	Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia	yuyunyulia@uny.ac.id
Margana	Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia	margana@uny.ac.id
A. Nur Inayatul Aini	Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Yogyakarta, Indonesia	anur.2024@student.uny.ac.id

* Corresponding author

ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose	Across EFL contexts, curriculum reforms increasingly promote communicative competence and technology-enhanced learning, yet translating these policy aspirations into everyday classroom practice remains challenging. Against this backdrop, this study investigates how communicative language teaching (CLT) and technology integration are enacted in Indonesian junior high schools implementing *Kurikulum Merdeka* (the Emancipated Curriculum), with particular attention to how communicative and digital reform principles are mediated in classroom practice.
Background	Recent curriculum reform in Indonesia promotes communicative competence and technology integration as central principles of English language teaching. However, classroom implementation often reflects tensions between policy expectations, examination demands, and classroom realities. This study addresses the gap between curriculum policy and classroom enactment by examining how teachers interpret and adapt communicative and technology-oriented practices within diverse school contexts.
Methodology	This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design involving four junior high schools in Indonesia, representing urban and rural contexts. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with Eng-

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	lish teachers, document analysis, and responses to questionnaires from 363 students. Qualitative data were analysed thematically to identify recurring pedagogical patterns, contextual influences, and teachers' instructional adaptations across schools.
Contribution	This study contributes to scholarship on curriculum enactment and communicative pedagogy in ASEAN EFL contexts by demonstrating how communicative and digital reform principles are adapted within examination-oriented and resource-variable educational settings.
Findings	The findings reveal a pattern of negotiated curriculum enactment shaped by examination orientation, developmental considerations, and institutional conditions. Instructional practices prioritised grammar and vocabulary aligned with assessment requirements, while communicative activities were implemented in structured, teacher-directed forms. Even in urban schools with greater digital access, technology integration remained largely presentation-oriented rather than interactional. Rural schools faced additional infrastructural constraints; however, similar pedagogical patterns emerged across contexts. These findings suggest that teachers strategically adapted curriculum expectations to balance communicative goals with institutional realities and assessment demands.
Recommendations for Practitioners	English teachers and curriculum developers are encouraged to design communicative activities that remain adaptable to assessment-oriented environments while promoting greater student interaction and language use. Professional development programs should also support teachers in implementing more interactive and pedagogically meaningful forms of technology integration beyond presentation-based practices.
Recommendations for Researchers	Future researchers are encouraged to investigate further classroom-level curriculum mediation across different educational levels and regional contexts. Additional studies may also explore students' perspectives on communicative learning experiences and examine the long-term impact of technology-supported communicative practices in EFL classrooms.
Impact on Society	This study contributes to broader discussions on the implementation of educational reform in developing EFL contexts by highlighting how teachers negotiate curriculum expectations amid diverse institutional and infrastructural conditions. Understanding these contextual realities may support more responsive and sustainable language education policies and teacher support initiatives.
Future Research	Further studies should examine communicative language teaching and technology integration through longitudinal designs involving a wider range of schools and participants. Future research may also investigate how assessment reform, teacher beliefs, and digital literacy influence the sustainability of communicative and technology-oriented pedagogical practices.

Keywords	communicative language teaching, curriculum enactment, technology integration, *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Emancipated Curriculum), Indonesian EFL, junior high schools

INTRODUCTION

English language education in Indonesia is increasingly expected to develop learners who can communicate effectively, think critically, learn autonomously, and participate in digitally mediated environments. These expectations have become particularly salient under recent curriculum reforms,

which seek to move classroom practice beyond the transmission of linguistic knowledge toward competency development and more active forms of learning. In this context, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) remains highly relevant because it emphasises meaningful language use, interaction, learner participation, and the development of communicative competence. However, the enactment of communicative pedagogy cannot be understood solely in terms of teachers' adoption of communicative techniques. It is shaped by curriculum expectations, assessment practices, teachers' professional agency, students' readiness to participate, and the material and technological conditions in which teaching takes place. Recent research in Indonesia demonstrates that these factors can either expand or constrain students' opportunities to engage in communicative and higher-order learning activities. For example, studies of secondary classrooms have found that examination and assessment pressures can encourage reproductive forms of learning even when teachers recognise the importance of developing students' higher-order and communicative abilities (Lie, 2007).

Indonesia represents a particularly significant case within this regional landscape. As one of the largest education systems in Southeast Asia, Indonesia has undergone successive curriculum reforms that emphasise competence-based learning and student-centred pedagogy. Most recently, the introduction of *Kurikulum Merdeka* (Emancipated Curriculum - EC) reflects a renewed commitment to flexibility, project-based learning, and the development of learners' communicative and socio-emotional competencies (Ministry of Education, Culture, Research & Technology, 2022). Within English language teaching (ELT), these reforms position communicative competence as a central learning outcome, aligning national policy with broader global trends in applied linguistics. Unlike an interpretation that equates the EC primarily with project-based learning, the curriculum represents a broader pedagogical orientation that emphasises essential competencies, student development according to learners' stages and needs, differentiated and meaningful learning, learner participation, and greater autonomy for teachers and schools.

Project-based learning is one mechanism through which students may actively explore real-world issues, but it is not the sole learning concept underlying the curriculum (Zhang & Ma, 2023). Official policy descriptions emphasise that learning should focus on essential content and competency development while allowing teachers to adapt instruction to students' developmental levels and schools' characteristics. Recent empirical research similarly characterises the Emancipated Curriculum as promoting student-centred learning, critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving, collaboration, and learner independence rather than prescribing a single instructional method. Rohmah et al. (2024), for instance, found that implementation in Indonesian secondary schools required substantial school support as teachers adjusted to new expectations concerning student-centred pedagogy and curriculum enactment. Thus, the relationship between EC and CLT is best understood as complementary: the curriculum establishes a broader competency-oriented and learner-centred policy environment, while CLT provides pedagogical principles that enable English learners to develop communicative competence through meaningful interaction.

Nevertheless, translating these curriculum principles into communicative English instruction remains challenging. One important influence is assessment pressure. Although the current curriculum places greater emphasis on formative and authentic assessment, teachers continue to work within institutional cultures in which measurable achievement, examinations, and conventional forms of testing may influence instructional priorities. Recent Indonesian studies indicate that assessment reform itself presents difficulties for English teachers. Nafisah et al. (2024), for example, found that secondary English teachers experienced challenges in implementing authentic assessment, while Puspitasari and Pelawi (2024) reported difficulties in implementing technology-supported formative assessment. More broadly, recent classroom research in Indonesia has shown that examination and test pressures can encourage teachers to rely on reproductive learning activities even when policy requires students to engage in critical thinking and more active language use. Assessment pressure, therefore, affects CLT not simply by determining what is tested but by influencing what teachers consider worthwhile

classroom time: when assessment rewards discrete linguistic knowledge more strongly than interaction, teachers may reduce communicative activities, prioritise accuracy-oriented exercises, or modify communicative tasks to accommodate examination expectations.

Teacher agency constitutes a second important factor. The flexibility promoted by EC gives teachers greater responsibility for interpreting curriculum objectives, selecting materials, designing activities, adapting assessment, and responding to learners' needs. Consequently, teachers are not passive recipients of curriculum policy but active mediators who decide how policy principles are translated into classroom practice. Recent Indonesian research has shown that the successful implementation of EC depends partly on the support available to teachers and schools, including professional development and institutional assistance (Rohmah et al., 2024). Teacher agency is particularly important for CLT because communicative pedagogy requires teachers to make context-sensitive decisions about grouping, interaction, task design, feedback, materials, and the balance between fluency and accuracy. Where teachers have sufficient pedagogical knowledge, confidence, resources, and institutional support, curriculum flexibility can create opportunities for more communicative and learner-centred instruction. Conversely, limited professional support, heavy workloads, uncertainty about new curriculum expectations, or strong institutional constraints may lead teachers to retain familiar teacher-centred practices. Recent research on English instruction under EC has likewise identified teachers' challenges in interpreting and implementing student-centred approaches, suggesting that curriculum flexibility does not automatically lead to pedagogical change.

A third factor is learner readiness. Communicative pedagogy assumes that students are willing and able to participate in interaction, negotiate meaning, express ideas, and use English with varying degrees of independence. In junior high school contexts, however, students differ considerably in linguistic proficiency, confidence, motivation, prior learning experiences, and willingness to speak English. Recent Indonesian research on junior high school learners has shown that speaking performance is associated with learner-level factors such as speaking self-efficacy, motivation, and anxiety, indicating that communicative participation cannot be assumed simply because communicative activities are provided (Alim & Pratiwi, 2026). Similarly, research on Indonesian secondary EFL classrooms has identified limited linguistic resources, insufficient authentic materials, and difficulties in designing appropriate assessment tasks as constraints on students' engagement in higher-order listening and speaking activities. Learner readiness, therefore, directly affects the enactment of CLT: students with limited proficiency or confidence may participate minimally in open-ended interaction, prompting teachers to provide more scaffolding, controlled practice, or explicit language instruction. Such adaptations should not necessarily be interpreted as failures of CLT; rather, they demonstrate how communicative pedagogy is negotiated according to students' actual readiness.

Access to technology is a fourth factor that increasingly intersects with communicative language learning. Digital technologies can expand students' access to authentic materials, enable multimodal communication, facilitate collaboration, and provide opportunities for language production beyond the physical classroom (Bui, 2022). Recent research suggests that digital technology can support learner engagement, autonomy, collaboration, and English language development when integrated purposefully into learning activities. Hidayat et al. (2022) and Salim et al. (2023), for example, found that students' online activities, digital skills, and perceived usefulness of digital technologies were positively associated with their experiences of learning English. However, access to technology is not evenly distributed across Indonesian educational settings. National and international reports have repeatedly identified disparities in connectivity and device access between urban and rural communities, while recent Indonesian research continues to document differences in digital infrastructure and technological participation. Thus, the pedagogical potential of technology depends not only on whether a school possesses digital devices or internet connectivity but also on the reliability of infrastructure, teachers' technological and pedagogical competence, students' digital literacy, and opportunities to use technology for meaningful communication.

These four factors (assessment pressure, teacher agency, learner readiness, and technology access) are particularly important when considering the differences between urban and rural schools. The urban–rural dimension is not simply a geographical distinction; it represents potentially different ecological conditions for curriculum enactment. Urban schools may have greater access to reliable internet connectivity, digital devices, professional development, and external learning resources, whereas rural schools may encounter greater infrastructural limitations and fewer opportunities for teacher professional learning. Recent research involving rural EFL teachers in Indonesia has highlighted ongoing concerns regarding professional development, motivation, performance recognition, and institutional support. At the same time, research on rural English classrooms demonstrates that limited technological resources and unstable internet connectivity can restrict opportunities for digital and communicative learning. However, context-sensitive digital practices can also increase students' autonomy, collaboration, and confidence when appropriately implemented. Consequently, comparing rural and urban schools can reveal whether the principles promoted by EC are enacted similarly across contexts or whether differences in resources, teacher agency, learner characteristics, and institutional conditions produce different forms of CLT and technology integration.

Recent empirical studies provide important evidence about these challenges, but they also reveal several limitations in the existing literature. Research on EC has increasingly examined teachers' perceptions, school support, implementation challenges, and instructional strategies. For example, Rohmah et al. (2024) examined school support for English teachers across Indonesian secondary schools. However, their study focused primarily on the support structures surrounding curriculum implementation rather than on the detailed classroom enactment of CLT. In a multi-site study in Palopo, Husnaini (2025) examined challenges and strategies in implementing the Independent Curriculum across junior and senior high schools, providing valuable contextual evidence but focusing broadly on curriculum implementation rather than the intersection of CLT, technology, assessment, and rural–urban variation. Other recent studies have examined technology integration, authentic assessment, or particular language skills independently. For instance, research on technology-based assessment has identified teachers' difficulties in implementing assessment for and as learning. In contrast, research on technology-enhanced English instruction has demonstrated potential benefits for language learning but has generally focused on particular technologies, skills, or relatively limited samples. Research on rural English education has also documented infrastructural and professional constraints, but rural–urban comparisons within the specific context of EC and CLT remain underexplored.

More importantly, much of the existing research tends to examine these dimensions separately. Studies of assessment focus on teachers' assessment practices; studies of technology investigate digital tools and learning outcomes; studies of curriculum reform examine teachers' perceptions or implementation challenges; and studies of rural education often emphasise resource limitations. This fragmentation makes it difficult to understand how these factors interact during actual classroom instruction. A teacher may, for example, recognise the value of communicative learning but reduce interaction due to assessment demands; possess considerable pedagogical agency but be constrained by unreliable internet access; or attempt to implement student-centred activities but modify them because students lack the linguistic confidence to participate independently. Therefore, a more comprehensive investigation is needed to examine curriculum enactment at the classroom level while also considering pedagogical practices, technology use, assessment conditions, teacher decision-making, learner readiness, and school context.

This gap is especially significant at the junior high school level. Compared with senior high and tertiary education, junior high school learners are still developing their linguistic resources, learning strategies, confidence, and capacity for independent learning. At this stage, the successful enactment of CLT requires teachers to balance meaningful communication with explicit language support and appropriate scaffolding. It also requires learning environments in which students have sufficient opportunities to interact and access relevant materials. Investigating junior high classrooms is therefore

important for understanding whether the learner-centred and competency-oriented aspirations of EC are translated into actual communicative opportunities for students, and whether those opportunities differ by school location and available resources.

Accordingly, the present study investigates the enactment of Communicative Language Teaching and technology integration in four Indonesian junior high schools implementing EC, with particular attention to differences between rural and urban educational contexts. By combining qualitative classroom observations, teacher interviews, document analysis, and quantitative questionnaire data from 363 students, the study examines not only what teachers do in the classroom but also the contextual conditions that shape their pedagogical decisions and students' learning opportunities. The study is therefore designed to move beyond a simple assessment of whether the EC has been implemented and instead examine how its principles are interpreted, negotiated, and enacted under different contextual conditions.

Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How are Communicative Language Teaching principles enacted in Indonesian junior high school English classrooms implementing EC?
2. How is technology integrated into English instruction across rural and urban school contexts?
3. What contextual factors, including assessment pressure, teacher agency, learner readiness, and technology access, influence the implementation of communicative and technology-oriented pedagogy across these contexts?

By examining classroom enactment across rural and urban settings, this study contributes to current discussions of curriculum reform, communicative pedagogy, and educational technology in Indonesian EFL education. It conceptualizes curriculum implementation not as a uniform process but as a context-dependent negotiation among policy expectations, teacher decision-making, learner characteristics, assessment demands, and available resources. In doing so, the study provides a more nuanced account of how EC translates into communicative English learning opportunities across diverse Indonesian junior high school settings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING AND ITS CONTEXTUAL ENACTMENT

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) conceptualises language learning as the development of learners' ability to use language meaningfully and appropriately rather than simply mastering isolated grammatical forms. Its theoretical development from communicative competence has emphasised the interconnectedness of linguistic, discourse, sociocultural, and strategic resources (Celce-Murcia, 2007; Hymes, 1972). Accordingly, CLT gives prominence to interaction, negotiation of meaning, purposeful language use, and learner participation, while positioning teachers as facilitators who create opportunities for meaningful communication (Richards, 2006).

However, the implementation of CLT is not uniform across educational contexts. Research in Asian EFL settings has shown that teachers frequently adapt communicative principles to accommodate examination requirements, class size, curriculum expectations, and students' proficiency. Rather than representing a simple opposition between communicative and traditional teaching, CLT is often enacted through hybrid practices that combine explicit language instruction with guided communicative activities (Butler, 2011; Littlewood, 2007). This suggests that the effectiveness or presence of CLT should not be judged solely by whether teachers use ostensibly communicative activities. More importantly, attention should be given to how teachers interpret communicative principles and adapt them to learners, assessment demands, and classroom conditions.

This perspective is particularly relevant to junior high school EFL classrooms. Adolescent learners are still developing linguistic resources, confidence, and capacity for independent communication. Consequently, communicative activities may require scaffolding through guided dialogue, structured role-play, vocabulary support, and controlled-to-free practice rather than immediate open-ended interaction (Pinter, 2017; Rohmah et al., 2024). Thus, learner readiness is an important condition for CLT enactment: teachers may adjust the degree of communicative openness based on students' proficiency, confidence, and participation. The literature, therefore, positions CLT not as a fixed method but as a set of principles whose classroom enactment is mediated by teacher decisions and learner characteristics. This directly informs the first research question concerning how CLT principles are enacted in junior high school English classrooms.

The Emancipated Curriculum and Teacher Agency in Curriculum Enactment

The contextual enactment of CLT also needs to be understood within Indonesia's current curriculum reform. The EC promotes competency development, contextualised learning, student participation, and greater flexibility for teachers and schools. Its orientation does not reduce learning to project-based learning; rather, project-based activities represent one component within a broader emphasis on meaningful, differentiated, and student-centred learning. Consequently, the curriculum provides space for teachers to interpret learning objectives and select pedagogical strategies according to students' needs and school contexts.

Curriculum enactment theory provides a useful lens for understanding this process. Teachers are not passive recipients of policy but interpret, negotiate, and translate curriculum expectations into classroom practice (Priestley et al., 2015; Spillane, 2004). Teacher agency is particularly important under a flexible curriculum because greater autonomy also requires teachers to make more pedagogical decisions. These include deciding how much interaction students can manage, how to scaffold communicative activities, which materials to use, and how to assess learning.

Recent Indonesian research supports this interpretation but also reveals limitations in existing evidence. Latifah and Suwandi (2024), for example, found that junior high school English teachers prepared assessment plans, teaching devices, learning-objective sequences, and teaching modules for EC, while also identifying the need for further teacher professional development. Similarly, Haan and Margana (2024), in a case study of three junior high school English teachers in Kupang, found that teachers exercised autonomy in lesson planning and used varied teaching strategies and assessment methods. However, they also reported time constraints, professional-development needs, and limited technology integration. These studies demonstrate that teacher autonomy is present in the new curriculum, but they primarily examine planning, perceptions, and overall implementation. They provide less evidence of how teacher agency is exercised during actual communicative classroom interaction and how it interacts with technology and assessment.

Thus, teacher agency should be viewed as a mediating factor between curriculum policy and classroom pedagogy. This relationship is central to the present study because observing classroom practice alongside teacher accounts allows it to examine not only whether the Emancipated Curriculum principles are present, but also how teachers interpret and enact those principles through CLT and technology-supported instruction.

Assessment and Its Influence on Communicative Pedagogy

Assessment constitutes another important condition influencing curriculum enactment. Washback theory explains that assessment can influence what teachers teach, how they teach it, and how students approach learning (Cheng, 2005). When assessment emphasises discrete knowledge such as grammar, vocabulary, or reading comprehension, teachers may devote greater instructional time to these areas, even when curriculum documents emphasise broader communicative competence.

Recent scholars suggest that this issue remains relevant despite changes in Indonesian curriculum policy. Lie (2007) and Cheng (2005), for example, found that summative assessment, performance tests, and examinations continued to be perceived as predominant in secondary education, while traditional conceptions of assessment constrained the implementation of formative assessment. This finding is important for CLT because communicative competence is more difficult to capture through conventional discrete-point assessment than grammatical or lexical knowledge. When teachers perceive that communicative performance is less consequential for formal assessment, communicative activities may receive less classroom time or may be adapted into more easily measurable forms.

Recent Indonesian research on the Emancipated Curriculum also suggests that assessment remains an area requiring teacher adjustment. Haan and Margana (2024) found that teachers used varied assessment methods yet continued to experience implementation challenges, whereas Latifah and Suwandi (2024) identified assessment planning as a central component of teachers' curriculum preparation. The limitation of these studies is that they primarily describe what assessment practices teachers adopt, rather than examining how assessment expectations influence the amount and type of communicative interaction occurring in English classrooms.

Assessment pressure should therefore be considered not as an isolated administrative issue but as a potential mediating mechanism between curriculum objectives and CLT enactment. This perspective is directly relevant to the first and third research questions because it enables the study to examine whether teachers' communicative practices are supported, modified, or constrained by prevailing assessment expectations.

Technology Integration and Its Contribution to English Language Learning

Technology can expand the pedagogical possibilities of English language learning by providing access to authentic input, multimodal resources, opportunities for language production, and interaction beyond the physical classroom. Its contribution, however, depends on the relationship between the technological affordance and the language-learning activity. Digital video and audio, for example, can increase exposure to spoken English and support listening comprehension; collaborative platforms can create opportunities for written interaction; multimedia and presentation tools can support vocabulary and reading development; and communication platforms can provide opportunities for speaking and interaction. Thus, technology contributes to language development when it is used to create meaningful opportunities to receive, produce, and negotiate language, rather than merely to deliver instructional content.

Recent Indonesian research supports this distinction. Hidayat et al. (2022) found that students' online activities, digital skills, and perceived usefulness of digital technology were positively associated with their experiences of learning English. Bui (2022), however, showed through a systematic review of 20 empirical studies that digital technologies in English classrooms were predominantly used for teacher-centred purposes. These findings suggest that the presence of technology does not necessarily transform pedagogy: the same digital tool may support active language use in one classroom but replace a conventional presentation in another.

Recent Indonesian teacher-focused research reinforces this argument. Gumartifa et al. (2023), studying 34 English teachers across educational levels, found a gap between teachers' positive perceptions of technology and their actual classroom implementation. Their analysis identified teachers' digital competence, institutional support, pedagogical beliefs, and infrastructure accessibility as significant influences on technology integration.

The limitation of this literature is therefore not a lack of evidence that technology is useful, but a limited understanding of how technology is actually transformed into language-learning opportunities in specific junior high school contexts. Existing studies have tended to examine teacher perceptions,

technology practices, or curriculum implementation separately. Fewer studies have connected the type of technology use with the communicative opportunities it creates for junior high school learners and with the pedagogical decisions teachers make in response to learner readiness and curriculum demands. This issue directly addresses the second research question concerning how technology is integrated into English instruction.

Interrelationship of Pedagogical, Assessment, and Technological Factors

The literature indicates that CLT, curriculum enactment, assessment, and technology should not be treated as independent dimensions. Their effects are interconnected. A teacher may have considerable freedom under the EC but still limit communicative tasks if students have insufficient linguistic readiness or if assessment emphasises discrete knowledge. Similarly, a school may provide digital devices and internet access. However, technology may remain teacher-centred if teachers lack digital pedagogical competence or if classroom activities do not require students to communicate.

Recent Indonesian studies illustrate these interactions but generally investigate them separately. Studies of the Emancipated Curriculum in junior high schools have identified teacher autonomy, planning demands, professional-development needs, and implementation constraints (Haan & Margana, 2024; Latifah & Suwandi, 2024). Studies of technology integration have highlighted the importance of digital competence, pedagogical beliefs, institutional support, and infrastructure (Gumartifa et al., 2023). Research on assessment has demonstrated the continuing influence of traditional and summative assessment practices (Cheng, 2005; Lie, 2007). These studies are valuable, but their separate emphases make it difficult to determine how these conditions jointly shape communicative classroom practice.

The literature consequently suggests a contextual rather than linear model of CLT implementation. Curriculum flexibility provides opportunities for teachers to exercise agency; teacher agency influences pedagogical choices; learner readiness determines the degree of communicative scaffolding required; assessment shapes instructional priorities; and access to technology and digital pedagogical competence determine whether digital resources can extend meaningful language interaction. These factors operate within particular school environments, including differences between rural and urban settings. The present study, therefore, treats CLT and technology integration as interrelated classroom practices shaped by multiple contextual conditions, rather than as separate outcomes.

Research Gap & Conceptual Framework

Recent Indonesian scholarship has established that the EC is being implemented in English classrooms and has documented challenges involving teacher planning, professional development, assessment, and technology integration. However, the existing studies have important limitations. Studies of junior high school implementation have generally focused on individual schools or small numbers of teachers and have emphasised planning, perceptions, or general curriculum implementation rather than systematic analysis of CLT classroom practices (Haan & Margana, 2024; Latifah & Suwandi, 2024).

Technology research has identified differences between teachers' perceptions and their actual practices. It has highlighted digital competence, pedagogical beliefs, institutional support, and infrastructure. Still, it has generally involved broader educational levels rather than comparing the use of communicative technology specifically across rural and urban junior high schools (Gumartifa et al., 2023). Assessment research has documented the continuing dominance of summative and traditional assessment but has not sufficiently examined how assessment expectations shape communicative classroom interaction in Indonesian junior high schools (Lie, 2007).

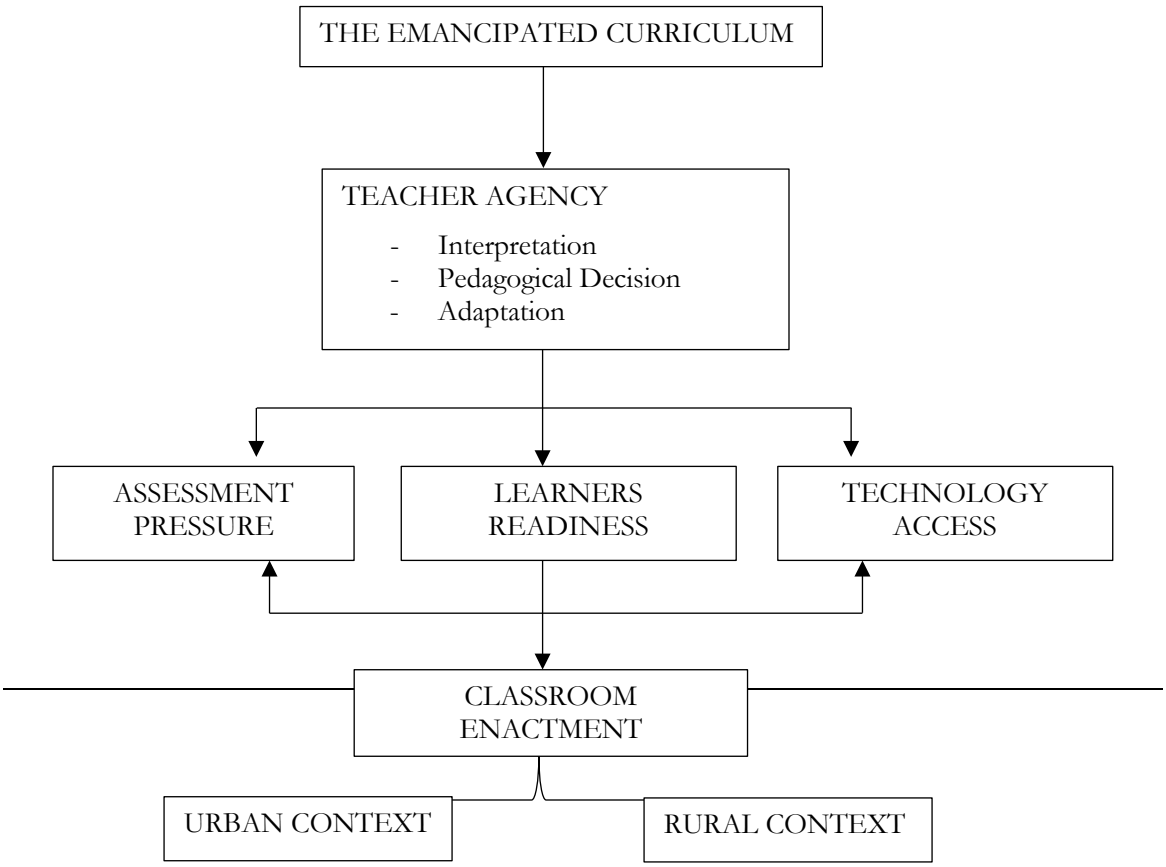


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of factors shaping CLT and technology integration under the Emancipated Curriculum

The gap, therefore, is not simply that CLT, technology, or the EC have been insufficiently studied. Rather, their intersection has not been sufficiently examined at the classroom level and across contrasting school contexts. In particular, limited research has triangulated classroom observations, teacher perspectives, curriculum documents, and student data to examine how teacher agency, learner readiness, assessment pressure, and technology access jointly shape communicative and technology-supported English instruction. The rural–urban dimension is also insufficiently integrated into this line of inquiry, despite its potential relevance to differences in resources, professional support, and opportunities for technology-mediated learning.

Based on this synthesis, the present study conceptualises CLT enactment and technology integration as outcomes of the interaction among curriculum conditions, teacher agency, assessment pressure, learner readiness, and technology access, with school context functioning as an important contextual condition. As shown in Figure 1, the EC is positioned as the macro-level frame that reframes CLT and technology integration, whereas teacher agency is put forward as a meso-level mediator that brings this policy into classroom practice. This framework directly corresponds to the three research questions by examining: (1) how CLT principles are enacted; (2) how technology is integrated; and (3) how contextual factors shape both forms of pedagogy.

RESEARCH METHOD

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a multiple-case qualitative design, supported by descriptive questionnaire data. The qualitative component was the primary component of the study because the research aimed to examine how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and technology integration were enacted in naturally occurring junior high school English classrooms and how teachers interpreted and responded to curriculum and contextual conditions. A multiple-case design was appropriate because the study examined four schools with differing institutional and geographical characteristics, enabling comparison of classroom practices across cases (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The questionnaire provided complementary descriptive evidence concerning students' access to and use of English learning resources. It was not intended to test causal relationships or generate population-level statistical generalisations. Instead, questionnaire findings were integrated with qualitative evidence to contextualise patterns identified through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and document analysis. Thus, the study used methodological triangulation rather than treating the qualitative and quantitative components as independent strands.

The study focused on three interconnected dimensions: (1) the enactment of CLT; (2) technology integration; and (3) contextual factors influencing these practices, particularly assessment pressure, teacher agency, learner readiness, technology access, and differences between rural and urban school contexts.

RESEARCH SITES AND SAMPLING

The study was conducted in four junior high schools in Yogyakarta Special Province, Indonesia. Purposive sampling was used to select the schools because the study required cases that could provide variation in the contextual conditions relevant to curriculum enactment. The selection criteria included: (a) urban or rural location; (b) public or private status; and (c) differences in technological infrastructure and learning resources.

The four schools were therefore selected to provide contrasting cases rather than to represent all junior high schools in Indonesia statistically. The variation was particularly relevant to the third research question because differences in school context may influence teachers' opportunities to implement communicative and technology-supported pedagogy.

At the time of data collection, the participating schools were implementing either the 2013 Curriculum or transitioning to EC. This variation was taken into account when interpreting teachers' instructional practices and curriculum documents. Rather than assuming the two curricula were implemented identically, the analysis examined how teachers interpreted and enacted the curriculum expectations within their respective school contexts. Data collection took place from April to December 2025.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants consisted of 10 English teachers and 363 junior high school students from the four participating schools. Teachers were purposively selected because they were responsible for English instruction in the observed classes and could provide information on curriculum interpretation, instructional decision-making, assessment, and technology use. Students participated only in the questionnaire component.

Teacher participants

A total of ten English teachers participated in this study (Table 1). Participants varied in:

1. Gender
2. Teaching experience (junior and senior teachers)

3. Educational background
4. Professional training exposure

Teachers were responsible for delivering English instruction at the junior high school level. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect confidentiality. The inclusion of both senior and junior teachers allowed exploration of whether teaching experience influenced pedagogical interpretation and curriculum enactment.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of teacher participants

School	Gender	Status	Context
1	M	Senior	Urban
1	F	Junior	Urban
2	F	Senior	Rural
2	M	Senior	Rural
2	M	Junior	Rural
3	F	Senior	Urban
3	F	Senior	Urban
4	F	Senior	Rural
4	M	Senior	Rural
4	M	Junior	Rural

Student participants

A total of 363 students completed the questionnaire. The students were enrolled in the observed schools and were selected by the teachers who participated in the study. Students were not interviewed individually. Consequently, students' questionnaire responses are interpreted as descriptive evidence of access to and use of learning resources, rather than as direct accounts of their perceptions of CLT or teacher practice.

Data Collection

Four data sources were used: classroom observations; semi-structured teacher interviews; document analysis; and student questionnaires (Table 2). The sources were collected from different participant groups and served complementary purposes.

Table 2. Data sources, participants, purposes, and research questions

Data source	Participants	Purpose	Main dimensions	RQ
Classroom observation	10 teachers	Examine enacted classroom practices	CLT, interaction, scaffolding, technology, assessment	RQ1–RQ3
Teacher interview	10 teachers	Examine teachers' interpretations and decision-making	CLT, curriculum, assessment, technology, learner readiness	RQ1–RQ3
Document analysis	Lesson plans, teaching modules, syllabi, assessment documents	Examine intended curriculum and instructional planning	Learning objectives, CLT, technology, assessment	RQ1–RQ3
Student questionnaire	363 students	Describe access to and use of English learning resources	Textbooks, computers, games, mobile devices, digital resources	RQ2–RQ3

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

Four instruments were used: an observation guide, a semi-structured interview protocol, a document-analysis protocol, and a student questionnaire (Table 3). The instruments were developed in accordance with the study's conceptual framework and research questions.

Table 3. Research instruments and assessment indicators

Instrument	Element assessed	Indicators
Observation guide	CLT Enactment	Meaningful interaction; pair/group work; negotiation of meaning; student participation; communicative tasks; balance between fluency and accuracy; scaffolding
Observation guide	Teacher agency	Adaptation of activities; instructional decision-making; response to learner needs; modification of materials/tasks
Observation guide	Technology integration	Type of technology; purpose of use; teacher-centred vs. student-centred use; student interaction; language production; digital resources
Observation guide	Assessment	Formative feedback; questioning; correction; assessment activities; examination-oriented practices
Observation guide	Learner readiness	Participation; confidence; linguistic resources; need for scaffolding; responsiveness to communicative tasks
Interview protocol	Curriculum enactment	Understanding of the Emancipated Curriculum; curriculum interpretation; instructional adaptation
Interview protocol	CLT	Understanding of communicative competence; perceived benefits/challenges; classroom implementation
Interview protocol	Assessment	Examination pressure; assessment expectations; influence on instructional choices
Interview protocol	Technology	Access; competence; pedagogical purposes; barriers; professional development
Interview protocol	Learner readiness	Proficiency; motivation; confidence; participation
Document protocol	Curriculum alignment	Learning objectives; competencies; communicative orientation
Document protocol	Pedagogy	Instructional stages; student-centred activities; communicative tasks
Document protocol	Technology	Planned digital tools; learning purposes
Document protocol	Assessment	Assessment types; criteria; alignment with learning objectives
Questionnaire	English learning resources	Textbooks; computers; mobile devices; games; online resources; other learning materials

Classroom Observations

Classroom observations constituted the primary source of evidence concerning enacted pedagogy. Observations were non-participant, meaning that the researcher did not intervene in teaching activities. The observation guide focused on instructional structure, teacher–student interaction, student participation, communicative activities, scaffolding, assessment practices, and technology use.

A total of 3 classroom sessions were observed across the four schools. Each observation lasted approximately 120 minutes, resulting in approximately 2 hours of classroom observation. During each session, the researcher recorded field notes concerning instructional sequences, teacher and student activities, interaction patterns, use of learning materials, technology use, and notable contextual events. Additional analytic notes were written immediately after each observation to record emerging interpretations and questions for subsequent analysis.

The observation guide was designed to distinguish between the presence of a teaching activity and its pedagogical function. For example, the use of a digital presentation was not automatically coded as technology-supported communicative learning; the analysis considered whether the technology created opportunities for students to interact, produce language, collaborate, or engage with authentic language resources.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 10 participating teachers. Each teacher participated in one interview lasting approximately 45-60 minutes. Interviews were conducted before classroom observations and in both English and Indonesian, according to participants' preference.

The interview protocol addressed six areas: (1) teachers' understanding of CLT and communicative competence; (2) interpretation of the Emancipated Curriculum; (3) instructional decision-making and teacher agency; (4) assessment expectations and examination pressure; (5) technology integration and access; and (6) perceptions of students' readiness to participate in communicative learning.

The semi-structured format provided consistency across interviews while allowing participants to explain unexpected issues arising from classroom observations. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. Where interviews were conducted in Indonesian, relevant excerpts were translated into English for reporting, while the original transcripts were retained for analysis.

Interview data were used not as independent evidence of classroom practice but to interpret and contextualise observed practices, particularly where teachers stated intentions differed from what occurred during classroom observations.

Document Analysis

Instructional documents were lesson plans, teaching modules, assessment instruments, and student worksheets. Documents were examined for four dimensions: (1) stated learning objectives and competencies; (2) planned communicative activities; (3) planned technology integration; and (4) assessment strategies and criteria. The analysis compared the intended curriculum represented in documents with the enacted curriculum observed in classrooms. Discrepancies were not automatically interpreted as implementation failure; instead, they were examined in relation to teachers' explanations, learner characteristics, assessment expectations, and contextual constraints.

Student Questionnaire

The student questionnaire included structured items that measured exposure to English learning. A structured questionnaire was administered to 363 students to obtain descriptive information about their access to and use of English learning resources. The questionnaire included items concerning textbooks, computers, mobile devices, computer games, online resources, and other sources of English exposure.

Responses were recorded using a three-point response scale: Agree, So-so, and Disagree. The questionnaire was intended as a complementary contextual measure rather than as a psychometric scale for measuring CLT competence.

Instrument Validity and Reliability

Before the questionnaire was administered, the instrument underwent content validation. Specifically, three experts with expertise in English language teaching/educational measurement reviewed the items for relevance, clarity, language appropriateness, and alignment with the study objectives. Items identified as unclear or insufficiently aligned were revised before administration.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

Observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis was informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach and by more recent methodological guidance emphasising systematic documentation of coding, theme development, and researcher interpretation (Naeem et al., 2023). Naeem et al. (2023) provide a six-step systematic process that explicitly distinguishes coding, theme development, refinement, and conceptualisation.

The analysis proceeded through six iterative stages:

1. **Familiarisation:** The researcher repeatedly read interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents while recording initial analytic observations.
2. **Initial coding:** Relevant segments were coded according to their relevance to classroom practices, CLT, technology use, assessment, learner readiness, teacher decision-making, and contextual conditions.
3. **Searching for themes:** Related codes were grouped into candidate categories and broader patterns.
4. **Reviewing themes:** Candidate themes were compared across individual data sources and across schools to assess their coherence and explanatory value.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** Themes were refined and defined according to their relationship to the research questions.
6. **Producing the analysis:** Final themes were interpreted across cases and supported with evidence from observations, interviews, and documents.

Cross-case analysis

Following within-case analysis, the four schools were compared systematically. For each case, the analysis first established a profile of CLT practices, technology integration, assessment conditions, teacher decision-making, and learner characteristics. These profiles were then compared across urban and rural schools.

The cross-case analysis focused on three questions:

1. Which CLT practices were common across the four schools?
2. Which technology-integration patterns varied across school contexts?
3. How did assessment pressure, teacher agency, learner readiness, and technology access help explain similarities and differences?

The analysis, therefore, moved from within-case description to cross-case explanation, allowing contextual differences to be interpreted rather than simply reported.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were addressed before and throughout data collection. Participants were informed about the study's purpose and procedures and were told that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw without negative consequences. Teachers provided informed consent before participating in observations and interviews. For the 363 student participants, as junior high

school learners and minors, written parental consent and student assent were obtained in accordance with school procedures and institutional ethics requirements. Teachers were informed that the data would be used for research purposes and would not be used for performance evaluation or supervision. Student questionnaires were anonymous and did not request personally identifying information. School and participant names were replaced with codes or pseudonyms in the research records and manuscript. The study received ethical approval from Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta under Ethical Approval No. T/6.32/UN34.9/KP.06.07/2024.

Methodological Limitations

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted in four schools within Yogyakarta Special Province; therefore, the findings should be interpreted as contextually transferable rather than statistically generalisable to all Indonesian junior high schools.

Second, classroom observations covered selected instructional sessions rather than extended ethnographic observation, meaning that the findings represent the practices observed during the data-collection period and may not capture all aspects of teachers' instructional practice.

Third, student questionnaire data were self-reported and therefore may not correspond exactly to students' actual use of learning resources.

Fourth, because students did not participate in interviews, their perspectives are represented primarily through questionnaire responses rather than in-depth accounts.

Finally, qualitative interpretation was necessarily influenced by the researcher's positionality and analytic decisions. Reflexive memoing, triangulation, systematic coding, and cross-case comparison were therefore used to make these interpretive processes more transparent.

FINDINGS

This section presents findings derived from classroom observations, semi-structured teacher interviews, document analysis, and student questionnaire data. The findings are organised into five interrelated themes. These include teaching aims and examination orientation, enacted instructional structure, implementation of communicative activity, technology access and utilisation patterns, and urban–rural resource disparities.

Teaching Aims and Examination Orientation

Interview data revealed a strong and consistent emphasis on examination performance as a central objective of English instruction. Although communicative competence was mentioned by several teachers, examination success emerged as the dominant instructional priority across all four schools.

As shown in Table 4, nearly all teachers explicitly prioritised examination achievement. Even when communicative goals were acknowledged, they were frequently framed as secondary to assessment outcomes. One teacher explained:

> "Teaching English is to communicate. However, the school and parents ask teachers to teach students to get a good score, so I teach them words and grammar because the examination focuses more on lexical items and grammar."

This statement illustrates the perceived alignment between examination format and structural linguistic competence. Teachers indicated that grammar and vocabulary were the primary focus of written examinations. Consequently, instructional time was allocated predominantly to these components. Classroom observations confirmed this orientation. Lessons commonly began with an explanation of grammatical rules, followed by a presentation of vocabulary and written exercises. Speaking activities were limited and rarely extended beyond short, scripted exchanges.

Table 4. **Teaching aims reported by English teachers**

School	Gender	Status	Reported aim of teaching English
1	M	Senior	To gain a good score in the examination
1	F	Junior	To communicate, however, is more about obtaining good grades
2	F	Senior	To communicate and prepare for the examination
2	M	Senior	To prepare students for the examination
2	M	Junior	To succeed in the examination
3	F	Senior	Emphasis on reading and writing for a good exam score
3	F	Senior	To have a good score in the examination
4	F	Senior	To communicate and succeed in the examination
4	M	Senior	Communicate, but school and parents demand exam scores
4	M	Junior	To pass the examination

Enacted Instructional Structure and Lesson Planning Practices

Document analysis revealed that lesson plans adhered to official formats prescribed by curriculum guidelines. Teachers reported using instructional models such as:

1. Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP)
2. BKOF-MOT-JCOT-ICOT (genre-based approach)
3. EEK (Exploration-Elaboration-Confirmation)

However, observed classroom practice demonstrated limited variation in instructional sequencing regardless of the model named in the documentation.

One junior teacher remarked:

> "I completed my lesson plan five minutes before you arrived in the classroom."

Another teacher stated:

> "We replace PPP with EEK, but the content remains the same. We modify lesson plans during classroom observations so supervisors are satisfied."

These statements indicate that lesson-planning documentation sometimes served as an administrative requirement rather than as a guiding pedagogical framework.

In classroom observations, instructional structure typically followed a consistent pattern, which included:

1. The teacher's explanation of vocabulary or grammar
2. Whole-class repetition or choral response
3. Individual written exercises from textbooks
4. Correction and review

Although the lesson plans referenced communicative objectives, the enacted practice remained predominantly teacher-centred.

Implementation of Communicative Activities

While communicative language teaching principles were mentioned in interviews, communicative activities were generally brief and highly structured. In one observed lesson, students practised a short dialogue about daily routines. The teacher modelled the dialogue, students repeated it chorally, and

selected pairs performed it in front of the class. No spontaneous extension or variation was introduced. Another lesson involved question-answer practice in which the teacher asked individual students to respond using pre-taught sentence patterns. Interaction remained tightly controlled.

Teachers explained that students' limited vocabulary and confidence constrained the feasibility of extended communicative tasks. One senior teacher commented:

> "Students still lack vocabulary. If we ask them to speak freely, they become silent."

In rural schools, communicative activities were even more limited. Teachers reported prioritising grammatical accuracy before encouraging oral interaction. Pair work was rarely observed. Despite these constraints, communicative elements were not fully absent. Short role-play segments and guided dialogues were occasionally implemented. However, these activities remained structured and teacher-directed.

Technology Access and Learning Resources

Student questionnaire data provided insight into sources of exposure to English (Table 5).

Table 5. Ways students learn English (N = 363)

Source of learning	Agree (%)	So-so (%)	Disagree (%)	Mean
Computer at home	27	31	42	1.86
Computer at school	25	38	37	1.89
Computer games	48	23	29	2.19
Mobile phone	44	22	34	2.10
Textbooks	73	22	5	2.69

Textbooks emerged as the dominant learning source (73% agreement, M = 2.69). Digital learning through computer games (48%) and mobile phones (44%) was moderately reported, though primarily outside formal classroom instruction. Observation data indicated limited integration of digital tools into English lessons. In urban schools, multimedia laboratories and LCD projectors were available. However, their use was largely restricted to displaying PowerPoint slides or textbook pages. One teacher explained:

> "Using computers in class requires preparation time, and we must finish the syllabus."

In rural schools, technological limitations were more pronounced. Internet connectivity was unreliable, and computer laboratories were either absent or minimally equipped. Students reported using available computers mainly for games or social networking rather than structured learning.

Urban–Rural Resource Disparities

Significant variation in infrastructure was observed across schools. Urban schools possessed:

1. Multimedia laboratories
2. Internet access
3. Projectors
4. Computer facilities

However, despite the availability of technology, technology integration into English instruction remained limited. Rural schools faced:

1. Limited computer access
2. Inadequate internet connectivity
3. Fewer professional development opportunities
4. Classroom maintenance challenges

One rural classroom was described as poorly lit and equipped with outdated equipment. Teachers reported minimal exposure to technology-focused professional development.

Despite these infrastructural differences, grammar-focused instruction was prevalent in both urban and rural settings. Thus, while resource disparities were significant, pedagogical orientation showed notable continuity across contexts.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate a substantial gap between the intended orientation of the Emancipated Curriculum and its enactment in English classrooms across the four participating schools. Although teachers demonstrated awareness of communicative competence, student-centred learning, and varied instructional models, classroom practices remained largely examination-oriented, teacher-centred, and focused on grammar, vocabulary, and textbook-based activities. This gap was evident across both urban and rural schools. The findings, therefore, suggest that curriculum implementation cannot be evaluated solely from lesson-plan documents or teachers' stated awareness of the curriculum. Rather, implementation needs to be examined through the interaction between policy expectations, assessment demands, teacher preparedness, students' linguistic resources, and the material conditions of schools.

EXAMINATION ORIENTATION AND THE STRUCTURAL PRIORITISATION OF LANGUAGE

Table 4 demonstrates that examination success was either the primary or co-primary aim across all participating teachers. Even where communicative objectives were acknowledged, they were consistently subordinated to assessment performance. This pattern aligns strongly with washback theory, which posits that assessment formats exert a powerful influence on instructional priorities (Cheng, 2005).

Teachers' explicit statements, particularly the emphasis on vocabulary and grammar, given that "the examination focuses more on lexical items and grammar," indicate awareness of the alignment between test structure and classroom instruction. This finding echoes Hu's (2002) observation that institutional accountability mechanisms reshape communicative reform in examination-driven systems. Similarly, Lie (2007) argues that Indonesian EFL classrooms often prioritise structural competence due to high-stakes evaluation frameworks.

The present study extends these findings to junior high education. Even in classrooms implementing the Emancipated Curriculum, which promotes competence-based and flexible learning, structural linguistic elements remained central. Observations consistently documented teachers' explanations of grammatical forms, followed by written exercises, reinforcing the primacy of micro-level linguistic accuracy.

However, this structural prioritisation should not be interpreted as simple resistance to communicative pedagogy. Rather, it reflects what Littlewood (2007) terms "context-sensitive CLT," where explicit form-focused instruction coexists with communicative aspirations. Teachers appeared to conceptualise grammatical mastery as foundational to communication rather than opposed to it. In this sense, structural instruction functioned as a perceived prerequisite for communicative participation. Teachers' instructional choices were therefore shaped not only by examination demands but also by pedagogical beliefs regarding language development.

THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP: FROM CURRICULUM DOCUMENTS TO ENACTED PEDAGOGY

The second finding concerns the discrepancy between documented lesson plans and observed classroom practices. Teachers reported using PPP, genre-based approaches such as BKOF-MOT-JCOT-

ICOT, and EEK, while observations revealed relatively similar instructional routines across classrooms: teacher explanation, vocabulary or grammar presentation, choral repetition, individual written exercises, and correction.

This pattern resonates with curriculum enactment theory. Wedell (2009) argues that policy implementation depends on teachers' interpretive engagement rather than direct adoption. Spillane (2004) further conceptualises implementation as a process of sense-making, in which teachers filter reform expectations through existing knowledge and classroom realities. The statements that lesson plans were completed shortly before teaching and modified during supervision provide particularly important evidence of this implementation gap.

The finding is consistent with research showing that the Emancipated Curriculum provides teachers with greater flexibility, but that this flexibility does not automatically lead to changes in classroom practice. Sari and Fatmawati (2024), for example, reported that teachers had implemented curriculum components such as learning objectives, teaching materials, methods, and assessment, but still experienced difficulties related to limited time and sustaining student engagement. Similarly, research on teachers' readiness has identified teacher preparedness and attitudes toward curriculum change as important factors affecting implementation.

However, the present findings provide a more critical interpretation. The issue is not simply whether teachers understand the new curriculum. Rather, there appears to be a distinction between formal compliance and pedagogical enactment. Teachers may successfully adopt the terminology, formats, and administrative requirements of a new curriculum while retaining familiar teaching routines. Such continuity may be understandable when teachers face limited preparation time, pressure to complete the syllabus, examination expectations, and students with uneven levels of English proficiency.

The finding, therefore, challenges a policy assumption that curriculum reform can produce classroom transformation primarily through changes in curriculum documents and planning formats. Meaningful implementation requires sustained professional learning, opportunities for teachers to experiment with new pedagogies, and assessment practices that reinforce rather than contradict the intended curriculum.

Communicative Activities: Awareness Without Sustained Enactment

The third finding concerns the limited implementation of communicative activities. Although teachers expressed support for communication and occasionally incorporated dialogues, role plays, and question-and-answer activities, these activities were predominantly controlled, scripted, and teacher-directed. This pattern aligns with research on young learner pedagogy. Cameron (2001) emphasises that children require substantial scaffolding before engaging in extended spontaneous interaction. Pinter (2017) similarly argues that communicative competence at the junior high school level develops gradually through formulaic and guided practice.

Teachers' remarks that students "lack vocabulary" and "become silent" when asked to speak freely suggest concern for linguistic readiness. Rather than dismissing communicative teaching, teachers appeared to calibrate task complexity according to perceived student capacity.

Butler (2011) documents similar adaptation across Asian contexts, where communicative activities are often modified to align with learners' proficiency and classroom management realities. The structured dialogues observed in this study may therefore represent developmental pragmatism rather than methodological inadequacy.

It is important to distinguish between the absence of communication and controlled communication. The findings indicate that communicative elements were present but limited in scope. Teachers retained strong control over interactional flow, reflecting a belief that structured practice better supports foundational language development.

Technology Integration: Between Availability and Alignment

Table 5 reveals that textbooks remain the dominant source of English exposure (73% agreement), while digital learning through games and mobile phones occurs primarily outside formal classroom contexts. This suggests that digital engagement is not systematically integrated into structured English instruction. Urban schools possessed multimedia laboratories and internet access, yet technology use was largely restricted to presentation functions. Rural schools faced infrastructural constraints, further limiting digital integration.

These findings align with Ertmer's (1999) distinction between first-order and second-order barriers. Infrastructure alone does not ensure pedagogical transformation. Hew and Brush (2007) similarly emphasise the role of teacher beliefs, training, and institutional support in shaping digital adoption. In the observed classrooms, technology appeared to supplement rather than reshape instruction. PowerPoint slides replaced blackboard writing, but interaction patterns remained unchanged. Digital tools did not facilitate collaborative tasks, online communication, or extended language practice. Kessler (2018) argues that meaningful technology integration in ELT requires intentional task design leveraging digital affordances. The absence of such a design in the observed classrooms suggests that the encouragement of technology policy under the Emancipated Curriculum may outpace pedagogical preparation.

Urban-Rural Disparities and Structural Continuities

The urban–rural comparison provides one of the more important contributions of this study. The findings show a clear disparity in infrastructure and professional development opportunities, but a relatively similar pedagogical orientation across the two contexts. This pattern challenges the simplistic assumption that rural schools necessarily have fundamentally different teaching practices from those of urban schools. Instead, the findings suggest that both contexts operate within a broader educational environment in which examination achievement, syllabus completion, and conventional teacher-centred practices remain influential.

At the same time, the resource gap has consequences for the range of pedagogical choices available to teachers. Rural teachers may have fewer opportunities to use digital resources, access professional development, or engage in technology-supported communication activities. Consequently, although urban and rural teachers may share similar pedagogical orientations, the constraints through which those orientations are enacted are not identical.

Recent research in Kolaka provides a useful comparison. Marlianti et al. (2026) found that urban and rural English teachers implemented the Emancipated Curriculum differently: urban teachers tended to rely on material adaptation and internal school collaboration, while rural teachers relied more heavily on external professional networks and demonstrated creative responses to limited infrastructure. This comparison suggests that contextual conditions shape teachers' strategies even when they work within the same curriculum framework.

Accordingly, curriculum implementation should be understood as context-sensitive rather than uniform. A policy that provides the same curriculum expectations to urban and rural schools may produce different practical possibilities because schools do not possess the same infrastructure, professional learning opportunities, student backgrounds, or access to English outside the classroom.

Is the Emancipated Curriculum Being Implemented Effectively?

The findings provide a nuanced answer to this question. At the formal level, the Emancipated Curriculum appears to have been adopted: teachers prepared lesson plans using curriculum-related formats, referred to contemporary instructional models, and acknowledged communicative and student-centred objectives. The government has also progressively expanded implementation of the curriculum, with more than 300,000 schools reported to have implemented the Emancipated Curriculum by the

2023/2024 academic year. Permendikbudristek No. 12/2024 subsequently provided a clearer policy basis for curriculum implementation.

However, the present findings indicate that formal adoption does not necessarily equal full pedagogical implementation. The principles of the curriculum emphasise learning that responds to students' needs and abilities, begins with diagnostic assessment, and supports active, meaningful, and student-centred learning. Yet the observed lessons were dominated by teacher explanation, repetition, written exercises, and correction.

The most plausible explanation is therefore not that the curriculum policy itself is unsuccessful, but that the conditions required for successful implementation are unevenly distributed. These conditions include teacher understanding and confidence, preparation time, professional development, assessment alignment, student proficiency, infrastructure, and school-level support.

Recent research reinforces this interpretation. Studies of rural English teachers have reported positive perceptions of the flexibility offered by the Emancipated Curriculum while simultaneously identifying inadequate professional development, resources, and facilities, as well as difficulties in implementing differentiated learning. Other research has similarly found that teachers recognise the potential of the curriculum but require stronger support to translate policy principles into classroom practice.

Thus, the findings suggest that the central implementation problem is an enactment gap: policy intentions have moved faster than the transformation of everyday teaching practices. Curriculum reform may therefore require a longer period of institutional and professional adaptation than policy implementation timelines alone imply.

Assessment Alignment and Systemic Coherence

The prominence of examination orientation across all participating schools underscores the systemic influence of assessment on instructional decision-making. Washback theory suggests that teachers align classroom practice with perceived assessment demands to maximise student performance (Cheng, 2005). In this study, the explanation of grammar and vocabulary memorisation was frequently justified as necessary for examination preparation. This alignment indicates that curriculum reform efforts promoting communicative competence may remain constrained unless assessment frameworks reflect broader communicative constructs.

The findings, therefore, suggest that communicative reform cannot be evaluated independently of assessment policy. Where tests emphasise discrete linguistic knowledge, communicative tasks may be perceived as supplementary rather than central. Reform coherence requires that curriculum objectives, instructional practice, and evaluation criteria operate in mutual reinforcement rather than tension.

Teacher Agency And Professional Mediation

While structural orientation was prevalent, teachers did not appear passive or resistant. Instead, they exercised professional judgement within contextual constraints. Curriculum enactment theory conceptualises teachers as agents who interpret policy through the lens of experience and classroom realities (Priestley et al., 2015). The teachers in this study actively mediated reform expectations by sequencing grammar before communication and limiting open-ended interaction until students demonstrated readiness.

This mediation reflects what Spillane (2004) describes as policy sense-making. Teachers drew upon prior knowledge, professional norms, and contextual awareness to shape instructional practice. The adaptation of communicative principles into guided dialogues and controlled interactions can therefore be understood as an exercise of agency rather than as a failure of compliance.

Recognising teacher agency reframes reform discourse away from deficit narratives. Rather than attributing limited implementation to inadequacy, it is more productive to consider how professional

development and assessment reform might support teachers in incrementally extending communicative practice.

Technology as Cultural Practice

Technology integration in the observed classrooms functioned primarily as an instructional enhancement rather than a pedagogical transformation. This finding aligns with research suggesting that digital tools are embedded within existing instructional cultures (Hew & Brush, 2007). Even where infrastructure was available, teachers incorporated technology in ways consistent with established teacher-centred patterns.

This continuity suggests that digital reform initiatives must engage not only with hardware provision but also with pedagogical culture. As Ertmer (1999) notes, second-order barriers, which are the beliefs and instructional orientations, often exert greater influence than access itself. The present findings indicate that digital tools were assimilated into prevailing grammar-focused routines rather than being used to restructure communicative practice.

Thus, technology integration is shaped by the same structural and developmental considerations that influence communicative teaching. Without systemic alignment across training, assessment, and classroom design, digital tools may remain supplementary.

Regional Implications Within ASEAN Contexts

The patterns observed in this study resonate with broader ASEAN scholarship documenting hybridised communicative pedagogy. Butler (2011) and Littlewood (2007) both note that communicative language teaching across Asia often reflects contextual adaptation rather than wholesale transformation. Examination pressures, large classes, and limited exposure contribute to cautious implementation.

By situating Indonesian junior high classrooms within this broader regional conversation, the study underscores the shared challenges facing EFL reform across Southeast Asia. However, it also highlights the importance of examining reform at the micro-level. Classroom-level evidence reveals nuanced negotiation rather than simple resistance or compliance.

This regional perspective reinforces the study's contribution. Communicative reform in ASEAN contexts is best understood as a process of localisation shaped by assessment regimes, developmental constraints, and professional judgement.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted across four schools and therefore does not represent all English classrooms implementing the Emancipated Curriculum in Indonesia. The urban–rural comparison should consequently be interpreted as context-specific rather than as a generalisation about all urban and rural schools.

Second, classroom observations were conducted within a limited period. The observed practices may therefore reflect particular teaching schedules, examination periods, or temporary classroom conditions rather than teachers' practices throughout the academic year. Longer-term observations would provide a stronger basis for determining whether the patterns identified in this study are stable over time.

Third, although teacher interviews provided important explanations of classroom practices, self-reported data may be influenced by social desirability or teachers' perceptions of what constitutes appropriate curriculum implementation. The study attempted to address this limitation through triangulation using classroom observations, lesson-plan analysis, and student questionnaires, but future studies could incorporate additional evidence, such as student achievement data, assessment instruments, or recordings of classroom interactions.

Fourth, curriculum transition may have influenced the findings. Teachers and schools may still have been adapting to the expectations and practices associated with the Emancipated Curriculum. Future longitudinal research should therefore examine implementation across several academic years to determine whether the observed gap between curriculum intentions and classroom enactment decreases as teachers gain experience.

Future studies could also compare schools with different levels of curriculum implementation readiness, investigate the relationship between school-level assessment practices and communicative teaching, and examine how teacher professional learning influences classroom enactment. Quantitative or mixed-methods research involving larger numbers of schools could further investigate whether the patterns identified here are associated with school location, teacher experience, professional development, student proficiency, or access to educational technology.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that communicative language teaching and technology integration in Indonesian junior high classrooms are neither fully implemented nor entirely absent. Instead, these reform principles are continually mediated by teachers' professional judgement within assessment-driven and resource-variable environments. Recognising this negotiated enactment is essential for developing realistic, context-sensitive, and sustainable educational reform strategies. By documenting classroom-level practice under the Emancipated Curriculum, this study provides empirical insight into how global pedagogical frameworks are localised in Indonesian junior high education. The findings highlight the importance of systemic coherence across curriculum, assessment, teacher development, and technological support in shaping the sustainability of communicative and digital innovation. Several limitations should be acknowledged. This study was conducted within a single Indonesian province, limiting the transferability of findings to regions with different socio-economic and institutional conditions. Although classroom observations were conducted in depth, they did not constitute long-term ethnographic immersion. In addition, questionnaire data relied on students' self-reported experiences rather than direct measures of communicative proficiency. Future longitudinal studies incorporating interaction analysis and assessment data may provide deeper insight into communicative development over time.

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AUTHORS



Yuyun Yulia is a lecturer and researcher in the English Education Department, Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Culture, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), Indonesia. She earned her doctoral degree in English Language Education and has extensive experience in teaching, research, and academic services. Her areas of expertise include English Language Teaching (ELT) Pedagogy, curriculum development, discourse analysis, language assessment, and teacher professional development. She has actively contributed to national and international research projects, scholarly publications, and academic conferences. She has accordingly supervised bachelor's, master's, and doctoral students, served as a reviewer for reputable journals, and participated in various educational development initiatives. She can be reached at yuyunyulia@uny.ac.id.



Margana is a Professor of Linguistics and English Education at Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), Indonesia. He holds a doctorate in Linguistics and has extensive experience in teaching, research, and academic leadership. His expertise includes Linguistics, Bilingualism, Code-Switching, Second Language Acquisition, and ELT. He has contributed to numerous national and international research projects, conferences, and publications, and has supervised postgraduate students and served as a reviewer and editor for reputable journals. His current research focuses on multilingualism, language acquisition, classroom discourse, and innovations in English language education. He can be reached at margana@uny.ac.id



A. Nur Inayatul Aini holds a Master's degree in English Language Education from the Faculty of Languages, Arts, and Culture, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY), Indonesia. She has experience teaching English at secondary and tertiary levels. Her research interests include English Language Teaching (ELT), linguistics, materials development, and educational technology, particularly the integration of digital technologies to enhance language learning and teaching practices. She has been involved in various national and international research projects and academic publications. She can be contacted at anur.2024@student.uny.ac.id.