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ELT policy in Indonesia's national curriculum and educational inequality: A systematic literature review

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ABSTRACT
This systematic literature review examines English language learning policy in Indonesia's national curriculum and its relationship with inequality of access and educational quality at the secondary school level. Guided by questions on curriculum implementation, unequal access and quality, and the roles of teacher competence, technology integration, and Global Englishes, the review synthesized scholarship published between 2016 and 2026. A systematic search was conducted in January 2026 using Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. From 1,162 initially identified records, duplicates were removed, titles and abstracts were screened, and full texts were assessed using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The final corpus comprised 27 articles. Data were extracted using a structured form and analyzed thematically. The synthesis shows that inequality in English language learning is produced through the interaction of curriculum policy implementation, school resources, teacher competence and distribution, technology access, students' socioeconomic backgrounds, and dominant language ideologies. Although national curriculum reforms promote communicative, contextual, and inclusive English learning, implementation remains uneven across regions and school contexts. Technology integration and Global Englishes may support more inclusive English learning, but they can also reproduce inequality when infrastructure, teacher digital competence, and locally responsive pedagogies are limited. The review concludes that improving English language learning quality requires equity-oriented policy implementation, sustained teacher professional development, inclusive digital integration, and recognition of Indonesia's linguistic diversity.

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Introduction

English has become a global lingua franca central to education, technology, economic participation, and international communication. While earlier scholarship positioned English within national curricula as part of human resource development and global competitiveness agendas (Crystal, 2003), recent English-in-education discussions emphasize its pedagogical, policy, and equity implications in multilingual societies (UNESCO, 2025). In Indonesia, recent curriculum reforms position English as a means to strengthen communicative competence, literacy, access to knowledge, and future academic and professional mobility (OECD, 2024). However, students' access to meaningful English learning remains uneven, shaped by school resources, teacher availability, technology access, socioeconomic background, and local learning environments.

English language learning policy in Indonesia has shifted from the 2013 Curriculum to the Merdeka Curriculum, reflecting changes in structure, learning targets, and classroom flexibility. The 2013 Curriculum positioned secondary-level English through core and basic competencies integrating knowledge, skills, and attitudes, with instruction organized around text types, language functions, and the four macro skills (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013a, 2013b). In contrast, the Merdeka Curriculum uses learning outcomes and developmental phases, allowing teachers greater flexibility to adapt instruction to students' needs and local contexts (Badan Standar, Kurikulum, dan Asesmen Pendidikan., 2024). Recent ELT studies similarly note a shift toward differentiated, student-centered English learning (Rohimajaya & Hamer, 2023; Sari & Muamaroh, 2024).

The Merdeka Curriculum provides a more flexible orientation through phase-based learning outcomes. At the secondary level, English learning emphasizes integrated language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting, as well as literacy, critical reasoning, creativity, and intercultural communication. The curriculum also gives schools and teachers greater autonomy to adapt materials, learning activities, and assessments to students' needs and local contexts (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Thus, while the 2013 Curriculum was more competency-based and structured through prescribed basic competencies, the Merdeka Curriculum is more outcome-based, flexible, and oriented toward differentiated and contextual learning. However, this curricular shift also raises important equity concerns. Greater flexibility does not automatically lead to equal learning opportunities when schools differ in teacher readiness, instructional resources, digital infrastructure, and access to quality English learning. Existing studies have discussed curriculum implementation, teacher competence, technology integration, educational inequality, and Global Englishes, but these issues are often examined separately. This review therefore addresses this gap by offering an integrated synthesis of how ELT policy in Indonesia's national curriculum intersects with educational inequality, teacher competence, technology integration, and Global Englishes. By bringing these dimensions together, the study highlights that equitable English language learning requires not only curriculum reform, but also context-sensitive implementation, sustained teacher

professional development, inclusive digital access, and recognition of Indonesia's linguistic diversity.

Educational inequality in Indonesia's education system represents a structural condition in which disparities are not limited to access to schooling, but also involve students' unequal substantive opportunities to develop valued educational capabilities. From the Capability Approach, equity refers to students' substantive freedom to participate in and benefit from learning, including linguistic, communicative, and digital capabilities in English language education (MacKenzie & Chiang, 2023; Unterhalter & Brighouse, 2007). This issue is evident in differences between urban and rural schools and between developed and disadvantaged regions, where students do not always receive comparable access to qualified teachers, learning facilities, English exposure, and educational technology. Cultural Capital Theory and social reproduction further explain how socioeconomic background, family support, and access to linguistic resources shape learning trajectories and reproduce unequal outcomes (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; MacKenzie et al., 2022). Therefore, equitable curriculum implementation requires the fair distribution of competent English teachers, facilities, and technology so all students can benefit from national curriculum reform (Richards, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2017).

However, the implementation of nationally uniform English curriculum policies may not fully capture Indonesia's diverse local conditions. While national curriculum reform is designed to improve the quality and relevance of English education, its effects are mediated by school-level resources, students' socioeconomic backgrounds, access to media and technology, and family support. Students from more privileged contexts often benefit from private courses, digital resources, English-rich environments, and additional learning support, whereas students in under-resourced schools may rely almost entirely on classroom instruction (Sayer, 2012). This uneven implementation creates a gap between national policy aspirations and students' actual learning opportunities. Therefore, this review contributes to the literature by examining English curriculum policy not only as a pedagogical reform, but also as an equity issue that shapes the distribution of English learning opportunities in Indonesian secondary education.

Literature Review

English Language Learning Policy in the National Curriculum

Recent scholarship on educational policy emphasizes that curriculum should not be viewed solely as a formal policy document but as a dynamic process of interpretation and implementation. From Ball's policy enactment perspective, policy operates simultaneously as text, discourse, and practice. As text, curriculum provides official learning objectives and standards; as discourse, it reflects broader educational ideologies and policy priorities; and as practice, it is interpreted and enacted differently by teachers and schools according to their local contexts, institutional capacities, and available resources (Ball et al., 2011). Complementing this perspective, curriculum enactment theory argues that curriculum implementation is an active process in which teachers exercise professional judgment while

responding to contextual factors such as school resources, student characteristics, leadership, and community expectations (Priestley et al., 2021). Consequently, variations in English language learning across Indonesian secondary schools should be understood not simply as differences in policy compliance but as the result of diverse curriculum enactment processes shaped by local educational conditions.

Educational Inequality in English Language Learning

Recent scholarship on educational policy emphasizes that curriculum should not be viewed solely as a formal policy document, but as a dynamic process of interpretation and enactment within unequal educational conditions. From Ball's policy enactment perspective, curriculum operates as text, discourse, and practice: it provides official learning objectives and standards, reflects broader educational ideologies, and is translated differently by teachers and schools according to their local contexts, institutional capacities, and available resources (Ball et al., 2011; Braun et al., 2011). Curriculum enactment theory similarly argues that implementation is not a linear process of policy compliance, but an active process in which teachers exercise professional judgment in response to school resources, student characteristics, leadership, and community expectations (Priestley et al., 2021).

However, these enactment processes are also shaped by structural inequalities. From the Capability Approach, students' access to English learning should be understood in terms of their substantive opportunities to develop valued linguistic, communicative, and digital capabilities, not merely their formal participation in a national curriculum (Unterhalter & Brighouse, 2007; MacKenzie & Chiang, 2023). A Bourdieusian perspective further explains how unequal cultural and linguistic capital, family support, and socioeconomic conditions can reproduce unequal English learning opportunities across schools and regions (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; MacKenzie et al., 2022). Therefore, variations in English language learning across Indonesian secondary schools should be understood not simply as differences in policy implementation, but as unequal curriculum enactment processes shaped by both local institutional conditions and broader structures of educational inequality.

Policy Implementation and the Policy Practice Gap

The implementation of education policy is not a linear process in which national curriculum documents are uniformly translated into classroom practice. Instead, policy implementation involves a process of policy enactment, whereby teachers, school leaders, and other educational actors interpret, negotiate, and adapt policy according to their institutional contexts, available resources, and students' needs (Ball et al., 2011). From this perspective, curriculum policy functions not only as a formal regulatory document but also as a set of ideas that are continuously reinterpreted during implementation. Similarly, curriculum enactment theory emphasizes that teachers exercise professional agency in transforming curriculum intentions into classroom practices while responding to contextual factors such

as school culture, leadership, student characteristics, and resource availability (Priestley et al., 2021). Consequently, variations in English language teaching across Indonesian secondary schools should not be viewed merely as differences in policy compliance but as the outcome of diverse enactment processes shaped by structural conditions and local educational contexts. These contextual differences help explain why the same national curriculum may produce unequal learning opportunities and outcomes across regions.

Global Englishes and Linguistic Identity

The implementation of English language policy is not a linear process in which national curriculum documents are uniformly translated into classroom practice. Instead, it involves policy enactment, whereby teachers, school leaders, and educational actors interpret, negotiate, and adapt policy according to institutional contexts, available resources, and students' needs (Ball et al., 2011; Braun et al., 2011).

This process is particularly important when English curriculum policy is viewed through the lens of Global Englishes. Global Englishes conceptualizes English as a pluricentric and multilingual communicative resource rather than a fixed linguistic system owned by so-called native speakers (Rose & Galloway, 2019; Rose et al., 2021). From this perspective, curriculum enactment is not only a matter of translating policy into pedagogy, but also of deciding which forms of English, accents, speakers, and communicative norms are legitimized in classroom practice. If English learning continues to privilege native-speaker norms as the ideal model, curriculum implementation may reproduce native-speakerism, an ideology that positions native speakers and Western varieties of English as more authoritative in ELT (Holliday, 2006; Galloway & Rose, 2018). This may create symbolic inequality, particularly when local teachers' linguistic legitimacy and students' diverse English repertoires are undervalued (Wright, 2022). Therefore, variations in English language teaching across Indonesian secondary schools should not be understood merely as differences in policy compliance, but as enactment processes shaped by institutional resources, local contexts, and unequal symbolic recognition of English varieties. Addressing the policy-practice gap thus requires not only better implementation, but also a linguistically just curriculum orientation that recognizes diverse English users, accents, and communicative practices (Piller, 2016; Soler & Morales-Gálvez, 2022).

Methods

Research design

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) design to examine the relationship between English language teaching (ELT) policy in Indonesia's national curriculum and educational inequality in secondary education. The review was conducted following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines to ensure a transparent, rigorous, and reproducible review process (Page et al., 2021). In addition, the review design was informed by established SLR methodology, which emphasizes systematic identification, critical appraisal, and synthesis of existing evidence

to generate comprehensive and reliable conclusions (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019). Rather than reviewing studies narratively, this approach enabled the researchers to organize prior scholarship systematically and identify patterns, research gaps, and conceptual relationships among curriculum policy, educational inequality, teacher competence, technology integration, and Global Englishes. This review did not have a formally registered review protocol, as protocol registration is not commonly required for systematic literature reviews in educational research. Nevertheless, the review followed a predefined review procedure, including explicit search strategies, eligibility criteria, study selection, data extraction, and thematic synthesis, to enhance methodological transparency and replicability.

The review was guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses 2020 (PRISMA 2020) framework to ensure transparency in the processes of literature identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. This framework was considered appropriate because the study aimed to synthesize a broad body of literature across interconnected domains of ELT policy and educational equity. The analysis was informed by perspectives from educational policy analysis and educational inequality, which helped frame curriculum implementation not only as a pedagogical issue, but also as an issue of access, quality, resources, and social justice.

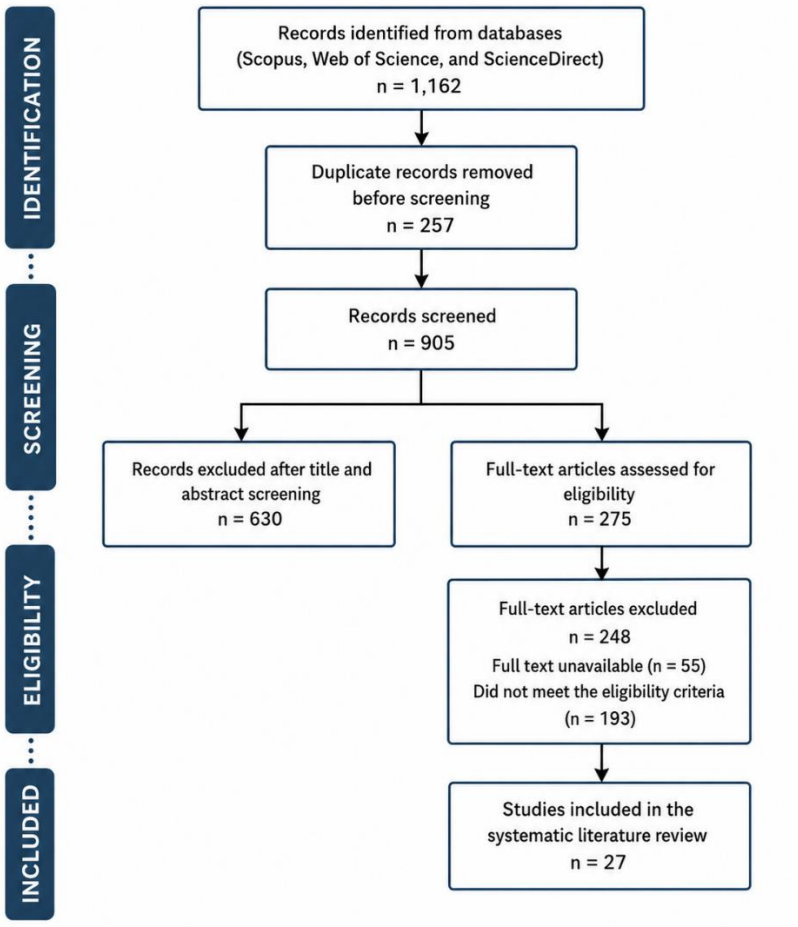


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram of the Literature Selection Process

Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted systematically in January 2026 using three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. These databases were selected because they provide broad coverage of peer-reviewed publications in education, English language teaching, curriculum studies, and language policy. The search was performed in the Title, Abstract, and Keywords fields whenever supported by the database to maximize the retrieval of relevant studies while maintaining search precision. Search strings were adapted to the syntax and search functionalities of each database. For example, Scopus used the TITLE-ABS-KEY field, Web of Science used the Topic (TS) field, and ScienceDirect searched within title, abstract, and author-defined keywords. Boolean operators (AND, OR) and quotation marks were used to combine search terms and improve retrieval accuracy. The search strategy included combinations of keywords such as "English language policy" AND "curriculum implementation," "English learning" AND "educational inequality," "secondary education" AND "English language teaching," "teacher competence" AND "English curriculum," "digital divide" AND "English language learning," and "Global Englishes" AND "language education." The search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2016 and 2026 in English and relevant to secondary education or issues transferable to secondary English language learning contexts. A manual search of the reference lists of the included studies was subsequently conducted to identify any additional relevant publications that were not retrieved through the database searches.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were established to ensure the relevance, quality, and comparability of the selected publications. This review included publications published between 2016 and 2026, written in English, and directly related to English language policy, curriculum implementation, educational inequality, teacher competence, technology integration, or Global Englishes. The primary sources consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles. However, selected review papers, scholarly book chapters, and conference proceedings were included when they provided strong theoretical, conceptual, or contextual contributions that were directly relevant to the review focus. To maintain quality across different source types, each publication was assessed based on its academic credibility, peer-review status or reputable publisher, methodological transparency, clarity of argument, and relevance to English language learning, curriculum policy, secondary education, or educational inequality. Comparability was maintained by applying the same extraction categories to all sources, including research focus, context, theoretical framework, key findings, and implications for curriculum policy. Sources were excluded if they were non-academic blogs, opinion pieces, incomplete manuscripts, inaccessible full texts, or publications with limited relevance to the scope of the review.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Aspect	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Publication period	Studies published from 2016 to 2026.	Studies outside the publication period.
Publication type	Peer-reviewed empirical journal articles.	Review papers, book chapters, conference proceedings, non-academic blogs, opinion pieces, incomplete manuscripts, and sources without sufficient bibliographic information.
Language	Articles published in English.	Studies in other languages when full English information was unavailable.
Education level/context	Studies addressing secondary education or issues transferable to secondary English language learning policy and practice.	Studies unrelated to English language learning, curriculum policy, or educational inequality.
Geographical scope	Indonesia and comparable international contexts involving English language policy, bilingual/EMI policy, equity, or Global Englishes.	Studies with no relevance to policy, access, quality, teacher competence, technology, or language inequality.
Quality threshold	Clear focus, identifiable method or conceptual basis, and explicit relevance to at least one review question.	Studies with unclear design, weak relevance, inaccessible full text, or insufficient data for synthesis.

Study Selection Procedures

The study selection process followed the principles of PRISMA and was documented consistently across the screening log, PRISMA flow diagram, Methods, Results, and Abstract. Records were first identified through database searching and manual searching. Duplicate records were then removed before title and abstract screening was conducted to exclude studies that were not related to English language policy, curriculum implementation, secondary education, or educational inequality. The full texts of potentially relevant studies were subsequently assessed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Based on the final screening log, the initial search identified 1,162 records from databases. After duplicate removal, title and abstract screening, and full-text eligibility assessment, 27 publications were included in the final synthesis.

Table 2. PRISMA 2020 – Literature Selection Flow

PRISMA 2020 Stage	Selection Process	Number of Records
Identification	Records identified from databases (Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect)	1,162
	Duplicate records removed before screening	257
Screening	Records screened (title and abstract)	905
	Records excluded during title and abstract screening	630
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	275
	Full-text articles excluded because the full text was unavailable	55
	Full-text articles excluded because they did not meet the eligibility criteria	193
Included	Studies included in the final systematic literature review	27

Data Extraction and Analysis

Data from each selected publication were extracted using a structured extraction form developed in accordance with the review questions. The extracted information included author and year, country or research context, research focus, methodological design, key findings, and relevance to the review questions. The initial extraction was conducted by the first author, who systematically recorded the required information from each publication. To enhance reliability and transparency, a second reviewer independently checked the extracted data for completeness, accuracy, and consistency against the original sources. Any discrepancies, including differences in the interpretation of study focus, findings, or thematic relevance, were discussed between the reviewers and resolved through consensus. After the extraction process was completed, the data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Each study was initially coded according to its main focus and findings. Similar codes were then grouped into broader themes, including access inequality, policy implementation, teacher competence, technology integration, and Global Englishes and linguistic identity. Cross-study thematic comparisons were conducted to identify recurring patterns, contradictory findings, and research gaps. This process enabled the review to synthesize how English language learning policy relates to educational inequality and learning quality in secondary education.

Quality Appraisal

To ensure the quality of the selected studies, a quality appraisal process was conducted using criteria adapted from systematic review practice. Each study was evaluated against five criteria: (1) clarity of research objectives, (2) relevance to the review questions, (3) methodological transparency, (4) credibility of the findings, and (5) contribution to understanding English language learning policy and educational inequality. Each criterion was rated using a three-point scale (0 = not met, 0.5 = partially met, and 1 = fully met), resulting in a maximum quality score of 5. Studies with a total score of 4.0–5.0 were classified as high quality, 3.0–3.5 as moderate quality, and below 3.0 as low quality. Only studies rated as high or moderate quality were included in the final thematic synthesis. This appraisal process enhanced the transparency and methodological rigor of the review by ensuring that only relevant and sufficiently robust evidence informed the synthesis.

Results

The systematic literature review synthesized 27 selected publications published between 2016 and 2026. The themes were generated through thematic coding by identifying recurring issues, concepts, and findings across the selected studies. Each publication was first coded according to its primary focus, including access to English learning, language policy implementation, teacher competence, technology use, and linguistic diversity. Similar codes were then grouped into broader analytical themes. This process resulted in five major themes: access inequality and educational resources, language policy

implementation and the policy-practice gap, teacher competence and professional development, technology integration and the digital divide, and Global Englishes and linguistic identity. To enhance transparency in theme generation, Table 1 maps each theme to the supporting studies, the number of studies, and the key synthesis points derived from the review.

Table 3. Results of Systematic Literature Review (SLR)

Theme	Supporting Studies	No. of Studies	Key Synthesis
Access inequality and educational resources	Cardona-Escobar et al. (2023); Channa (2017); Hamaniuk et al. (2026); Low (2017); Liu et al. (2024); Tandika & Ndijuye (2020); Yeleussiz & Qanay (2025)	7	Educational inequality is shaped by unequal access to qualified teachers, learning resources, technology, and supportive learning environments. National curriculum policies often fail to accommodate socioeconomic and regional disparities.
Language policy implementation and the policy–practice gap	Dervin & Hahl (2025); Ipatov et al., (2021); Van Nguyen et al. (2024); Nguyen & Nguyen (2025); Cardona-Escobar et al. (2023); Low (2017)	6	English language policies are frequently reinterpreted during implementation because of contextual constraints, resulting in inconsistencies between policy intentions and classroom practice.
Teacher competence and professional development	Darling-Hammond (2021);Richards (2017); Van Canh & Renandya (2017); Tleuzhanova et al. (2025); Lamb (2020)	5	Teacher competence depends not only on individual knowledge and pedagogical skills but also on continuous professional development, institutional support, and adequate educational resources.
Technology integration and the digital divide	Belda-Medina (2022); Lee & Wallace (2018); Sa-ngiamwibool & Mounggam (2025); Tandika & Ndijuye (2020); Van Huy et al. (2024)	5	Technology enhances English language learning when infrastructure and digital literacy are available; however, unequal access to digital resources reinforces educational disparities across schools and regions.
Global Englishes and linguistic identity	Benson (2021); Galloway & Rose (2018); Rose et al. (2021); Mendoza et al. (2025)	4	The Global Englishes perspective promotes linguistic diversity, intercultural communication, and inclusivity by challenging native-speaker norms and recognizing learners' multilingual identities.

Overall, the synthesis indicates that inequality in English language learning is shaped by the interaction of policy enactment, school resources, teacher readiness, technology access, socioeconomic background, and language ideology. Across the reviewed studies, several tensions were identified. English is often positioned as a resource for social mobility, academic development, and global participation; however, the reviewed evidence also

suggests that unequal access to quality English learning may be associated with the reproduction of social stratification. A similar tension appears in relation to technology integration. While digital tools are frequently presented as a means of expanding learning access and engagement, their benefits appear to be unevenly distributed, particularly in contexts where infrastructure, internet connectivity, and teachers' digital competence remain limited. These findings suggest that English language policy should not be understood only as a curriculum or pedagogical matter, but also as an equity issue. Rather than presenting the selected publications as separate findings, this synthesis highlights how English language policy, classroom enactment, and educational inequality intersect across diverse educational contexts.

Discussion

The synthesis suggests that English language learning policy cannot be evaluated only by the presence of curriculum reform, but by the extent to which such reform expands equitable learning opportunities for students across diverse educational contexts. For ELT policy, this means that curriculum change should be understood as an equity-oriented process that depends on the interaction between institutional capacity, teacher competence, technological access, and learners' sociocultural conditions. National curriculum reforms may provide a common policy direction, yet their potential to improve English learning remains uneven when schools differ substantially in resources, teacher support, and students' access to English beyond the classroom. Therefore, the central implication of this review is that improving English language learning requires more than revising curriculum documents. It requires context-sensitive policy implementation, sustained teacher development, and fairer distribution of educational resources so that students from different regions and socioeconomic backgrounds have more comparable opportunities to benefit from English language education.

Access Inequality and Educational Resources

The first theme indicates that unequal access to English learning resources should be interpreted as a form of capability deprivation rather than merely a shortage of facilities. Studies on English and bilingual education policy show that curriculum goals may not translate into equitable learning opportunities when schools differ substantially in qualified teachers, learning materials, infrastructure, and institutional capacity (Barahona, 2016; Channa, 2017; Cardona-Escobar et al., 2023). Although several reviewed studies were conducted outside Indonesia, their relevance is analytical rather than directly generalizable. They illuminate mechanisms also visible in Indonesian secondary education, especially the way English-in-education policies operate within unequal school systems, multilingual societies, and uneven distributions of educational resources. In this sense, evidence from comparable international contexts helps explain why national curriculum reform may produce different learning opportunities across urban, rural, remote, and disadvantaged schools.

This interpretation is consistent with the Capability Approach and Bourdieusian accounts of cultural capital and social reproduction. Students from more privileged families and better-resourced schools are more likely to access private courses, digital materials, English-rich environments, family support, and extracurricular exposure to English. These forms of cultural and linguistic capital may be associated with stronger participation in English learning, while students in under-resourced schools may depend almost entirely on limited classroom instruction (Lamb, 2017, 2019; MacKenzie et al., 2022). Thus, English can function both as a resource for social mobility and as a mechanism through which social stratification is reproduced. For Indonesian ELT policy, the implication is that curriculum reform must be accompanied by redistributive support, including targeted provision of learning resources, stronger teacher deployment, and additional assistance for schools serving disadvantaged communities.

Language Policy Implementation and the Policy–Practice Gap

The second theme indicates that the policy-practice gap in English language education should be understood not simply as a failure of policy compliance, but as an enactment issue shaped by school-level implementation capacity. From the perspective of policy enactment, curriculum policy does not move unchanged from national documents into classroom practice. Rather, it is interpreted, negotiated, and adapted by teachers, school leaders, and other educational actors within specific institutional, material, and sociocultural contexts (Ball et al., 2011; Braun et al., 2011). Curriculum enactment theory similarly emphasizes that teachers are not passive implementers of curriculum reform; they exercise professional judgment in transforming curriculum intentions into classroom practices while responding to school resources, student characteristics, leadership support, assessment demands, and community expectations (Priestley et al., 2021). Therefore, variation in English teaching across Indonesian secondary schools should not be viewed merely as inconsistent implementation. It reflects different levels of school capacity to mobilize teachers, learning materials, assessment practices, leadership, digital resources, and community support in relation to national curriculum expectations.

This interpretation also strengthens the equity dimension of the policy-practice gap. From the Capability Approach, curriculum reform becomes meaningful only when students have substantive opportunities to develop valued linguistic, communicative, and digital capabilities, rather than merely being formally exposed to the same national curriculum (MacKenzie & Chiang, 2023; Unterhalter & Brighouse, 2007). However, these opportunities are unevenly shaped by school-level conditions. Schools with stronger institutional capacity are more likely to enact progressive curriculum goals such as communicative competence, differentiated instruction, intercultural awareness, and contextualized learning. In contrast, under-resourced schools may enact the same policy more narrowly when teachers face large classes, limited professional development, restricted access to English learning materials, weak digital infrastructure, or insufficient pedagogical support. A Bourdieusian perspective further explains that students' access to cultural and linguistic capital, including family

support, exposure to English, and learning resources outside school, can influence how they benefit from curriculum implementation (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; MacKenzie et al., 2022). Thus, the policy-practice gap is also a structural equity issue: the same curriculum may generate different learning opportunities when schools and students have unequal resources for converting policy intentions into meaningful English learning.

Reducing the policy-practice gap therefore requires more than disseminating curriculum documents or requiring teachers to comply with national standards. It requires strengthening school-level implementation capacity through sustained teacher mentoring, context-sensitive curriculum guidance, adequate learning resources, supportive leadership, and equitable digital infrastructure. In line with the principle of distributive justice, policy support should be directed more strongly toward schools that face greater structural constraints, particularly those in rural, remote, or socioeconomically disadvantaged contexts (Unterhalter & Brighouse, 2007). Such an approach allows national curriculum reform to remain coherent while giving schools sufficient flexibility to respond to local realities. In this sense, effective ELT policy is not only a matter of curriculum design, but also of building the institutional and professional conditions that enable all schools to enact English learning in equitable and meaningful ways.

Teacher Competence and Professional Development

Teacher competence was identified as a central factor in shaping the quality and equity of English language learning. Darling-Hammond (2017, 2021) emphasizes that teacher quality plays a decisive role in the effectiveness of education systems, while Van Canh & Renandya (2017) show that teachers' English proficiency influences classroom interaction, language input, and instructional quality. Similarly, Richards (2017) argues that effective English language teachers require an integrated set of competencies, including pedagogical knowledge, language proficiency, instructional decision-making, assessment literacy, and the ability to adapt teaching strategies to diverse learner needs. Teachers are therefore not merely implementers of curriculum policy, but professional agents who interpret, negotiate, and adapt policy into classroom practice (Ball et al., 2011; Priestley et al., 2021). This aligns with curriculum enactment theory, which views teaching quality as shaped by teachers' professional agency and by the institutional conditions in which they work.

However, the review also suggests that teacher competence should not be understood only as an individual professional attribute. Teachers work within structural conditions that may either enable or constrain their capacity to implement communicative, technology-supported, and inclusive English learning. Even competent teachers may struggle to enact curriculum expectations when they lack access to professional development, teaching materials, digital infrastructure, mentoring, or institutional support. From the Capability Approach, this issue is important because students' opportunities to develop linguistic, communicative, and digital capabilities depend not only on the existence of a national curriculum, but also on whether teachers and schools have the resources to convert curriculum intentions into meaningful learning opportunities (MacKenzie &

Chiang, 2023; Unterhalter & Brighouse, 2007). A Bourdieusian perspective further explains that unequal access to qualified teachers, English exposure, learning resources, and family support can reproduce unequal educational outcomes across schools and socioeconomic groups (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; MacKenzie et al., 2022).

The policy implication is therefore more specific than improving teacher competence in general. Teacher professional development should be continuous, contextual, and targeted toward the real constraints faced by schools, especially those in rural, remote, and under-resourced areas. First, infrastructure provision should be prioritized so that schools have reliable internet connectivity, electricity, ICT facilities, and access to appropriate English learning materials. Second, teacher digital training should be systematically integrated into professional development programs, focusing not only on technical skills but also on digital pedagogy, online assessment, multimodal materials, and technology-supported communicative language teaching. Third, students' device access should be addressed through school-based ICT provision, device-sharing schemes, learning resource centers, or partnerships with local governments and private sectors. Fourth, rural and remote schools require stronger implementation support, including mentoring systems, professional learning communities, mobile teacher support, and differentiated funding mechanisms. In line with distributive justice, policy support should be directed more strongly to schools with greater structural constraints so that teacher competence can function as an equity mechanism rather than a source of further disparity (Unterhalter & Brighouse, 2007). Thus, strengthening English teacher competence requires not only individual upskilling, but also school-level capacity building and fairer resource distribution to ensure that all students have comparable opportunities to access high-quality English language learning.

Technology Integration and the Digital Divide

Technology integration offers important possibilities for expanding access to English language learning, but the reviewed studies suggest that its contribution to equity depends on the conditions under which it is enacted. Digital tools, online materials, augmented reality, and multimedia resources may support interaction, collaboration, and student engagement in English learning (Belda-Medina, 2022; Sa-ngiamwibool & Mounggam, 2025). However, technology should not be treated as an automatically inclusive solution. Its educational value is mediated by infrastructure readiness, teacher digital competence, students' access to devices, internet connectivity, and sustained technical support. From the perspective of policy enactment and curriculum enactment theory, digital learning policies are not simply implemented as written in curriculum documents; they are interpreted and enacted differently by schools according to their institutional capacity, available resources, and teachers' professional judgment (Ball et al., 2011; Priestley et al., 2021). Thus, variations in technology-supported English learning across schools should be understood as differences in implementation capacity rather than merely as differences in teachers' willingness to use technology.

This issue is closely related to educational inequality. From the Capability Approach, access to educational technology matters because it can expand or restrict students' substantive opportunities to develop valued linguistic, communicative, and digital capabilities (MacKenzie & Chiang, 2023; Unterhalter & Brighouse, 2007). Students in well-resourced schools may benefit from stable internet access, digital platforms, multimedia materials, and teachers who are trained in digital pedagogy. In contrast, students in rural, remote, or under-resourced schools may experience limited device access, unstable connectivity, insufficient ICT facilities, and minimal technical support. A Bourdieusian perspective also helps explain how digital inequality can interact with differences in cultural and linguistic capital. Students from more privileged backgrounds often have greater access to English learning beyond school through private courses, digital media, family support, and English-rich environments, whereas students from disadvantaged contexts may rely heavily on classroom instruction and school-provided resources (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; MacKenzie et al., 2022). In this sense, technology integration may be associated with wider learning opportunities for some students while leaving others with fewer chances to participate meaningfully in digital English learning.

The policy implication is that technology integration in ELT should be approached as an equity issue, not merely as a curriculum innovation. Policymakers need to support digital curriculum expectations with targeted investment in reliable internet connectivity, adequate ICT facilities, and accessible English learning platforms, particularly for rural, remote, and disadvantaged schools. Teacher professional development should also include sustained digital pedagogy training, focusing not only on technical skills but also on how to use technology for communicative language teaching, formative assessment, collaborative learning, and inclusive classroom interaction. In addition, students' access to devices should be addressed through school-based ICT provision, device-sharing schemes, learning resource centers, or partnerships with local governments and private sectors. Sustainable technical assistance and maintenance are also necessary so that digital resources remain usable over time. In line with distributive justice, greater support should be directed to schools with greater structural constraints so that technology integration does not reproduce existing disparities but contributes to more equitable English learning opportunities across Indonesian secondary education.

Global Englishes and Linguistic Identity

The fifth theme highlights Global Englishes as an important theoretical and pedagogical lens for rethinking equity in English language education. Global Englishes views English not as a single language owned by native speakers, but as a pluricentric and multilingual communicative resource used by diverse speakers across contexts (Galloway & Rose, 2018; Rose et al., 2021). This perspective is relevant to Indonesian secondary ELT because students' exposure to English differs across regions, school types, socioeconomic backgrounds, and access to out-of-school learning resources. When curricula privilege native-speaker norms, students with limited access to native-speaker input may be

positioned as deficient, reflecting native-speakerism and symbolic inequality in ELT (Holliday, 2006; Wright, 2022).

A Global Englishes orientation has practical implications for curriculum content, assessment, pronunciation goals, and classroom materials. Curriculum content should include global, regional, and local uses of English, including Indonesian and ASEAN contexts, so that students develop linguistic, communicative, intercultural, and digital capabilities (MacKenzie & Chiang, 2023; Unterhalter & Brighouse, 2007). Assessment should prioritize communicative effectiveness, intelligibility, intercultural awareness, and the ability to negotiate meaning rather than strict conformity to native-speaker norms (Piller, 2016; Soler & Morales-Gálvez, 2022). Pronunciation teaching should emphasize comprehensibility, confidence, and communicative clarity instead of accent imitation. Classroom materials should also represent diverse English speakers, accents, cultures, and locally meaningful themes. From a Bourdieusian perspective, such materials can reduce symbolic inequality by validating students' cultural and linguistic capital while expanding their participation in wider communicative communities (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; MacKenzie et al., 2022). Thus, Global Englishes strengthens the novelty of this review by showing that equity in ELT concerns not only access to resources, but also whose English is recognized as legitimate.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review of 27 selected publications published between 2016 and 2026 shows that English language teaching (ELT) policy in the national curriculum should be understood not only as a curriculum issue, but also as an educational equity issue. The synthesis indicates that inequality in English learning is shaped by the interaction of curriculum implementation, teacher competence, school resources, technology access, students' socioeconomic backgrounds, and the recognition of linguistic diversity. Although national curriculum reforms aim to improve communicative competence and global competitiveness, their implementation remains uneven across school contexts. Therefore, curriculum reform alone is insufficient without equity-oriented implementation, adequate school-level support, and fair distribution of educational resources.

The main contribution of this review lies in its integrated framework for understanding how ELT policy relates to learning opportunities in secondary education. Equitable English learning requires attention not only to curriculum content and learning outcomes, but also to the structural conditions that enable students to access quality instruction, digital resources, competent teachers, and inclusive language practices. The findings imply that policymakers should design more contextual and flexible ELT policies, especially for rural, remote, and disadvantaged schools. School leaders should strengthen teacher support, facilities, and digital infrastructure, while teacher educators and English teachers should promote pedagogical competence, digital literacy, Global Englishes awareness, and inclusive communicative practices.

This review is limited to selected literature published between 2016 and 2026 and relies on available published studies, which may create publication bias. In addition, some included studies come from international contexts, so the findings may not fully represent the specific realities of Indonesian secondary schools. Future empirical studies are therefore needed to examine how ELT policies are enacted across diverse regional, socioeconomic, institutional, and linguistic contexts in Indonesia.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Tata Regita Sherfaty Irawan: Literature Search, Data Extraction, Visualization.
Dewi Sriwahyuni: Validation, Writing – Review & Editing.
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